Felsefe Açısından

SAVAŞ ve TOPLUM

(Öotto Dix : Sturmtruppe gehr unter Gas vor, 1924.)

EDİTÖRLER
M. Ertan Kardeş - Ö zgü ç Güven
Hiperyayın: 300
Araştırma - İnceleme

Genel Yayın Yönetmeni
Hatice Bahtiyar

Dizi Editörü
Ali Şükru Çoruk

Editörler
M. Ertağ Kardeş – Özgüz Güven

Yayın Sertifika No: 16680


1. Baskı: İstanbul, 2018


Baskı-Cilt: Yalın Yayıncılık - Sertifika no: 16116

332s. : skl., tbl., 24 sm. – (Hiperyayın; 300)

Kaynakça bölüm sonundaadır.
1. Savaş (Felçefe) 2. Savaş (Felçefe) – Tarih 3. Savaş – Ahlaki ve etik açısından
4. Kardeş, M. Ertağ II. Güven, Özgüz III. Eser Adı IV. Dizi

105 .W3/F45 2018 172.42 FEL 2018

Genel Satış Pazarlama ve Yayınevi
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No: 27 Kat: 6 D: 21 Merter- Güngören / İstanbul
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Editörler Hakkında


İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi
Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Kongresi (CONGIS'T18)
Katkılaryla
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War, Teleology And Kinetic Mimesis
In Aristotle’s Philosophy

Doç. Dr. Geoff Bove*

While this paper is primarily interested in contextualizing Aristotle’s teleological understanding of war, it is best to locate that understanding in relation to Plato’s remarks on war in the second book of the Republic. I would argue that the Republic itself is more a work of human psychology that political philosophy, that the political model there espoused is an analogical device employed to understand the psychology of a just person. Plato’s utopia is not the Republic itself, but there is a utopia summarized in one paragraph in Republic II:

They’ll produce bread, wine, clothes, and shoes, won’t they? They’ll build houses, work naked and barefoot in the summer, and wear adequate clothing and shoes in the winter. For food, they’ll knead and cook the flour and meal they’ve made from wheat and barley. They’ll put their honest cakes and loaves on reeds or clean leaves, and, reclining on beds strewn with yew and myrtle, they’ll feast with their children, drink their wine, and, crowned with wreaths, hymn the gods. They’ll enjoy sex with one another but bear no more children than their resources allow, lest they fall into either poverty or war. Republic 372a–c1

When Glaucon objects that there are no delicacies in the city, Socrates offers up zeytinyağlı sebzeler and aşure:

True enough, I said, I was forgetting that they’ll obviously need salt, olives, cheese, boiled roots, and vegetables of the sort they cook in the country. We’ll give them desserts, too, of course, consisting of figs, chickpeas, and

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beans, and they’ll roast myrtle and acorns before the fire, drinking moderately. *Republic* 372c

This utopian account of a healthy city, as Socrates calls it, is again rejected by Plato’s brother Glaucon, who notoriously calls it a city for pigs at *Republic* 372d. Socrates’ bucolic paradise of *deniz börülcesi* and *aşure* lacks modern luxuries. Glaucon’s complaint instigates the expansion of the city in order to acquire the necessary resources and production methods to satisfy his desire for luxury, and results in what Socrates calls a city with a fever, which is indeed what the rest of the *Republic* investigates:

All right, I understand. It isn’t merely the origin of a city that we’re considering, it seems, but the origin of a luxurious city. And that may not be a bad idea, for by examining it, we might very well see how justice and injustice grow up in cities. Yet the true city (ἀληθινῆ πόλις), in my opinion, is the one we’ve described, the healthy (ὑγιῆς) one, as it were. But let’s study a city with a fever, if that’s what you want. *Republic* 372e

For this reason alone, I maintain that it is wrong to regard the *Republic* as a whole as Plato’s utopic vision, although it has some good in it, and Plato reminds of his true purpose in constructing the *kallipolis* at *Republic* V:

We thought that, if we first tried to observe justice in some larger thing that possessed it, this would make it easier to observe in a single individual. We agreed that this larger thing is a city, and so we established the best city we could, knowing well that justice would be in one that was good. So, let’s apply what has come to light in the city to an individual, and if it is accepted there, all will be well. *Republic* 434d-e

What is important for our purposes is that the expansion that Glaucon’s desire for luxury requires leads inevitably to war, as the need to expand territory in the insatiable quest for more and more resources requires us to fight with our neighbours in order to secure them:

Then we’ll have to seize some of our neighbors’ land if we’re to have enough pasture and ploughland. And won’t our neighbors want to seize part of ours as well, if they too have surrendered themselves to the endless acquisition of money and have overstepped the limit of their necessities? ...
Then our next step will be war, Glaucon, won’t it?... we’ve now found the origins of war. It comes from those same desires that are most of all responsible for the bad things that happen to cities and the individuals in them. *Republic* 373d-e

If the *kallipolis* is a political analogy of psychological fever, the message is quite clear. We fight because our material desires and appetites overwhelm our healthy psychological dispositions; war and belligerence, political or interpersonal, is symptomatic of a form of insanity, a broken psyche. The warring mind, overwhelmed with appetite, is a privative instantiation of the form of a healthy soul, a shadow of a healthy psychology that is unstable and does not fully represent what humans can be. This of course presumes Plato’s theory of mimesis, a static mimesis which, as I shall attempt to demonstrate, stands in significant and telling contrast to Aristotle’s much understudied and under-appreciated theory of kinetic mimesis.2

Consider how Plato analogizes static mimesis of forms by physical objects in his famous myth of the cave:

[Picture] above them a road along which a low wall has been built, as the exhibitors of puppet-shows [τοῖς θαυματοποιοῖς] have partitions [τὰ παραφράγματα] before the men themselves, above which they show the puppets [τὰ θαύματα]’... ‘See also, then, men carrying past the wall implements of all kinds that rise above the wall, and human images and shapes of animals as well, wrought in stone and wood and every material [ζώα λιθίνα τε καὶ ξύλινα καὶ παντοτικά]...’ (*Republic* 514a-515a)

The *thaumata* that cast the shadows are fixed objects made of wood and stone which are carried by others. Knowing the thaumata is akin to knowing the forms, and education is equivalent to knowing the relationship between the thaumata and their shadows. The shadows wave and move as the fire that reflects their source flickers and moves, resulting in the presentation of unstable and incomplete objects that are mistaken for truth. For Plato, metaphysical inquiry begins when we engage with the stable causes of moving appearances, when we engage with the thaumata.

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Aristotle also has something to say about how our metaphysical understanding begins with encountering thaumata, but his account contains a striking difference—it is a difference of the highest significance. Unlike Plato’s fixed thaumata of stone and wood, Aristotle’s thaumata are moving, purpose built machines, the cause of whose motion is hidden. Here is how Aristotle accounts for metaphysical enquiry, *pace* Plato:

Yet the acquisition of [metaphysical knowledge] must in a sense end in something which is the opposite of our original inquiries. For all men begin, as we said, by wondering [ἀπὸ τοῦ θαυμάξειν] that the matter is so (as in the case of automatic marionettes [τῶν θαυμάτων ταυτόματα] or the solstices or the incommensurability of the diagonal of a square with the side; for it seems wonderful to all men who have not yet perceived the explanation that there is a thing which cannot be measured even by the smallest unit). But we must end in the contrary and, according to the proverb, the better state, as is the case in these instances when men learn the cause; for there is nothing which would surprise a geometer so much as if the diagonal turned out to be commensurable. *Metaph.* 983a11-21

For Aristotle, metaphysical understanding has less to do with imitating principles above, and more to do with grasping teleological principles hidden within. The phrase thaumata t’automata is obscure – thaumata are puppets, but also anything that inspires wonder – writers like Herodotus (5th Century B.C.), Callimachus (3rd Century B.C.), Antipater of Thessaloniki (1st Century B.C.), Gregory the Theologian (4th Century A.D.) Pseudo-Philo of Byzantium all created lists of hepta thaumata, or seven wonders of the ancient world. The word “automata” in ancient Greek most often refers

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to things that occur spontaneously or by chance. When medical writers like Hippocrates and Galen talk about diseases that go into remission on their own, such cures occur *apo tou thaumatou*. Aristotle and Lucretius talk about spontaneous generation in nature, or chance occurrences as happening *apo tou thaumatou*. In the *Metaphysics* however, Aristotle’s use of the phrase τῶν θαυμάτων ταυτόματα is the same as his use of them in the *Motion of Animals* and and *Generation of Animals*, where thaumata are moving puppets.

The movements of animals may be compared with those of automatic puppets [τὰ αὐτόματα], which are set going on the occasion of a tiny movement (the strings are released, and the pegs strike against one another); or with the toy wagon (for the child mounts on it and moves it straight forward, and yet it is moved in a circle owing to its wheels being of unequal diameter—the smaller acts like a centre on the same principle as the cylinders). Animals have parts of a similar kind... the bones are like the pegs and the iron; the tendons are like the strings; for when these are slackened or released movement begins. However, in the puppets [τοῖς αὐτομάτοις] and the toy wagon there is no change of quality, since if the inner wheels became smaller and greater by turns there would be the same circular movement set up. (*De Motu Anamalium* 701b2-13)

In *de Generatione Animalium*, Aristotle compares τὰ αὐτόματα τῶν θαυμάτων with the sequence of development in animals and plants which further clarifies his meaning in the *Metaphysics* passage:

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It is possible, then, that A should move B, and B move C; that, in fact, the case should be the same as with the automatic puppets [τὰ αὐτόματα τῶν θαυμάτων]. For the parts of such puppets while at rest have a sort of potentiality of motion in them, and when any external force puts the first of them in motion, immediately the next is moved in actuality. As, then, in these automatic puppets [τοῖς αὐτομάτοις] the external force moves the parts in a certain sense... (de Generatione Animalium 734b10-16)

Despite these concordances, the thaumata reference in the Metaphysics is obscure enough to have confused medieval scholars like Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, who assumed that Aristotle’s claim in the thaumata passage was about rationally explaining demonic portents or strange natural occurrences, leading them to miss the sense of Aristotle’s understanding of metaphysical curiosity. Aristotle’s thaumata are not chance occurrences, but rather purposefully constructed devices that exhort the metaphysically curious to grasp the principles behind their motion. That same metaphysical curiosity seeks to understand and explain the motion of all things, from the Unmoved Mover, to planetary motion, to biological life cycles, which in the case of human life cycles, sometimes entails war.

The kind of mechanical knowledge that Aristotle mentions in the opening of the Metaphysics had three primary applications. Ancient mechanics, employing the principles of levers, diagonals (that other thing that Aristotle says we wonder about in the thaumata passage), and the principle of the moving radius were essential in creating self moving machines that shocked audiences because the mechanisms which caused their motion

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were hidden.\textsuperscript{8} Hence one significant application of mechanical knowledge was to engage, surprise or shock, in short, to entertain audiences in times of leisure. A second application of mechanical devices was to imitate the movement of the stars in the service of navigation and timekeeping, as is the case with moving Ptolemaic spheres or the Antikythera device which dates to the 1\textsuperscript{st} Century B.C. According to Schiefsky, “the idea that mechanics imitates nature is associated with two branches of ancient mechanics in particular: the building of automata and of armillary spheres to represent the motions of the heavenly bodies.”\textsuperscript{9} Such devices do what even modern time pieces do – they imitate the movement of the planets and stars – just look at how my wrist watch goes around and around, imitating and marking the earth’s rotation around the sun. The third application of mechanical principles was in the construction of many devices for warfare, including crossbows and catapults.

If we are to place these employments of mechanics in a teleological hierarchy, the first is time, the second is war, and the third is leisure. Aristotle famously says near the end of the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} that we seek war for peace, peace for leisure, and leisure for contemplation.

...happiness is thought to depend on leisure; for we are busy that we may have leisure, and make war that we may live in peace...no one chooses to be at war, or provokes war, for the sake of being at war; any one would seem absolutely murderous if he were to make enemies of his friends in order to bring about battle and slaughter...political and military actions are distinguished by nobility and greatness, and these are un leisurely and aim at an end and are not desirable for their own sake, but the activity of intellect, which is contemplative, seems both to be superior in worth and to aim at

\textsuperscript{8} On the uses of the principle of the moving radius in the ancient world, see pp. Jan De Groot, \textit{Aristotle’s Empiricism}, Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing 2105, pp. 9-10. De Solla Price observes that the technological skill needed to represent living humans and animals (motion) emerges in relation to the development of mechanical astronomical models, emphasizing an unexplained urge to represent the biological and cosmological mechanically. Derek De Solla Price, ‘Automata and the origins of mechanism and mechanistic philosophy’ \textit{Technology and Culture} 5.1, 1964, pp. 9-23.

no end beyond itself... If intellect is divine, then, in comparison with man, the life according to it is divine in comparison with human life. *Eth. Nic.* 1177B

All things in fact seek, as far as they can, in all activities – including war – to attain the final purpose of participation in the divine. In Aristotle, both an automata’s internal mechanisms and the eternal motion of the planets manifest principles of circular motion. Thus in the *thaumata* passage, both the automata he explicitly mentions and celestial motion he implicitly mentions (solstices) are ultimately explained in terms of a ‘mimetic’ appeal to the Unmoved Mover as the guarantor of all motion in the cosmos. The planets move in circles in a desire to express or imitate, so far as they can, the perfection of the self-reflecting circular thought of the Unmoved Mover – circular because it begins and ends with itself. The circular motion of Aristotle’s planets allows for sub-lunar life – plant, animal, and human. The nutritive soul of all living things manifests teleologically in life cycles or reproductive cycles:

[Reproduction] is the most natural of all functions among living creatures... to reproduce one’s kind, an animal producing an animal, and a plant a plant, *in order that they may have a share in the immortal and the divine [τοῦ ἀεί καὶ τοῦ θείου μετέχωσιν]* in the only way they can; for every creature strives for this, and for the sake of this performs all its natural functions. (*De Anima* 415a26-b2, my emphasis)

The word *μετέχωσιν* in the passage above indicates a kind of ‘participation,’ which, unlike Plato’s static mimesis, is kinetic. At the same time, the human rational soul is capable of more closely imitating the Unmoved Mover by engaging in the ‘circular’ activity of self-thinking.

War, like household activity, political activity, activities of leisure or invention are all teleologically instrumental in the fulfilling of our entelechiae or final flourishing. Any activity enterprise or organization within the

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kinetically mimetic cosmos, aims ultimately at obtaining the conditions necessary to imitate the divine. War and war mechanisms, like leisure and leisure mechanisms are built into the fabric and structure of the cosmos; mechanics, like biology and metaphysics express the principles of the cosmos because they stand in a kinetically mimetic relation to the divine. We are at our best, at our most human, when we reach peace to avail of the leisure for divine contemplation. War for any other purpose is an aberration and an injustice.

In Plato’s Republic, war is simply an imperfect shadow of a place where the light of justice and harmony cannot reach, the result of appetitive psychological dysfunction and illness. For Aristotle, in a kinetically mimetic cosmos, war is a step towards peace. When Aristotle says at Politics 1253a2 that man is by nature a political animal, he means that the telos of the polis pre-exists in the rational animal. Man is a rational animal by nature, and in virtue of this a political animal. The city is a seed in the biology of man that needs to flourish. It starts its genesis in family and household associations, then in inter-household village co-operations, culminating in inter-village co-operations resulting in the polis, whereby wealth and co-operation allow for the leisure to become fully human, and leisure sometimes requires war. On this account, war too is embedded in the process of biological flourishing as a means to remove the impediments of human flourishing. We wage war when something threatens or prevents our peace, because the biological need for leisure is implicit in the biological need for peace, and the biological need for contemplation – literally the kinetic imitation of the reflective thought of god, is built into the need for leisure. War for Aristotle, is a biological removal of impediments to the peace required to be fully human. Whereas for Plato, the model is that war is the result of the illness of excessive consumption, the desire for opulence. For Aristotle, war is akin to a necessary aggressive treatment of cancer aimed at returning us to health. From this point of view we can find guidance, perhaps, in that we know how and why war is justified and conducted, namely in the interest of peace and humanity; should it result from any other purpose or reason, it remains the condition of psychological malfunction that Plato describes in the Republic.
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