**Quotation – What Aristotle Got Wrong**

*“Hence the generous person will also aim at the fine in his giving, and will give correctly; for he will give to the right people, the right amounts, at the right time, and all the other things that are implied by correct giving. Moreover, he will do this with pleasure, or at any rate without pain; for action in accord with virtue is pleasant or at any rate painless, and least of all is it painful. If someone gives to the wrong people, or does not aim at the fine, but gives for some other reason, he will not be called generous, but some other sort of person. Nor will he be called generous if he finds it painful to give; for such a person would choose wealth over fine action, and that is not how the generous person chooses.”* (Nichomachean Ethics, Book IV Chapter 1, pg 50)

I generally view Aristotle’s ideas as correct, most of the time. In this passage, however, I feel that he has done a horrendous job of understanding and describing what it means to be a generous person. Aristotle talks about how in order for one to be generous, that he must give to the right kinds of people, give because giving is a good thing to do (aim at the fine), and that he will be happy about giving and feel no pain, hurt, confliction, or any negative emotions. This is on all accounts a completely incorrect definition of generosity.

I feel that Generosity is defined by ones wanting to give to help another person or cause *sacrificially*. It is with this that I have a problem with aristotle’s point of being happy about giving all the time. I believe that what defines ones really being generous is that they are giving even though they don’t necessarily want to give. Let us assume a situation in which I have $500 and my friend walks up to me and asks if he can have $10 to buy some lunch. If I have $500, this $10 is no problem, it costs me little to nothing. Now, let us imagine the same situation, but instead of $500 in my back pocket I only have $30. Between these two situations, which person is more generous? Is it the person who had a lot and gave a little, or is it the one who had little to give but gave a large portion of it anyways? I submit to you that It was the second person who was more generous. In fact, there is even a story in the bible where Jesus himself commends a woman who walks up and gives 2 small coins to the temple. Jesus said that this women was more generous because even though she wasn’t giving as much as some of the rich priests that had given before her, she gave all that she had.

Another problem I have is with aristotle’s idea that to be generous one has to be ’aiming at virtue’ or giving for giving’s sake. This is, once again, completely wrong. Let us imagine the same situation as before. Now, if I choose to give my $10, but I choose to do it because I care about my friend and want to help him, does that make me less generous? Aristotle would say yes. One must give for giving’s sake, otherwise he is not generous as he is not truly giving. This is complete Hypos Scata. The fact that I care about my friend is what *causes* me to want to be generous and to give *sacrificially* part of what I have to help him. It doesn’t matter if I didn’t give what I had because I think giving itself is so great. It doesn’t matter if you give for givings sake or give to help other people, you are still generous. Although beside the point I would still argue that most people nowadays would agree that the spirit of generosity aligns more with helping others in need and less with giving because giving is a good thing. So on either account Aristotle is incorrect.

The last and probably my largest problem with Aristotle is that one has to give to the *right people* in order to be deemed generous. That the person one gives to must be good people that intend to use that money for good, and if they do not use your money for good then you are not being generous. Once again this idea is absurd. Let us revisit our common situation, but this time let me replace my good friend asking for lunch money with a homeless stranger who is just asking for some cash. Now, I don’t know if this person is a good person, or if they will use this money for good or if they will buy drugs and alcohol with it, and I have no benefits whatsoever from helping this person. If I help my friend that I have the right to call in a favor later, or have him look up to me in the future, or at the very least enjoy his company. But if I give my money to a dirty stranger, there is nothing in it for me, and I don’t know where that money will go, and I don’t know what kind of person I am giving to. It is for all of these reasons that Aristotle says one is not generous that I say MAKE a person generous. The very fact that I don’t know what this person is like, what it will be used for, and have nothing to gain from it is what makes my desire to help a fellow human being in need sacrificially giving up part of what I have generous. Generosity is all about giving what you have (not what’s leftover) because you care about others (not about getting something in return), and it has little to nothing to do with what kind of person you are giving to. So, my good friend Aristotle, you have it wrong. Generosity is defined by a caring, sacrificial, and helpful heart; it is not defined by recipients, happiness, or the pursuit of virtue.