

NOTE FOR SECOND BOOK OF WISDOM, READING FIVE

There is a distinction in all our knowledge between what we know and how we know it. I know the music of Mozart through my ears and the paintings of Titian through my eyes. And I can know the shape of a ball both through my eyes and through my hands. How something is known can also be called the way that it is known.

But in this Reading, Aristotle is thinking about the way of knowing in reasoned out knowledge or reasoned out understanding.

In logic, we consider the way of knowing common to all reasoned out knowledge. But in addition to this is the way of knowing which is private to each form of reasoned out knowledge. To some extent, each form of reasoned out knowledge (such as natural philosophy, geometry, wisdom etc.) has its own way of knowing its subject. Aristotle is considering how these private ways of knowing should or should not be determined. (For there is the same knowledge of opposites.)

He sees the great influence of custom on how we think about something. Custom has a strong influence upon both *what* we think and *how* we think. But here, Aristotle is concerned with the latter, how we think about something. But this is not how we should determine the way of thinking about any subject. We should not take up the way of thinking to which we are accustomed or the way to which we are individually inclined (as Thomas adds). Rather we should find the way of thinking and knowing that fits the matter or subject of each reasoned out knowledge.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle compares the distinction of the private or particular ways of knowing in the forms of reasoned out knowledge by their fitting the subject or matter of each reasoned out knowledge to the distinction of the ways of making out of matter in the servile or mechanical arts to the kind of matter out of which one is making. Iron and wood and cloth are not worked in the same way or with the same tools. And the way of knowing different subjects or matters must also fit those matters. In the following text Thomas compares this to the way the moral virtues fit their matter:

Sicut enim in scientiis modum oportet secundum materiam inquirere, ut dicitur in I Eth., ita et in virtutibus. Materia autem virtutum moralium actiones et passiones humanae sunt. In passionibus autem quaedam sunt in quibus passionem inferens de sui ratione natum est in prosecutionem movere, sicut delectabile quod concupiscibili passionem infert; et in his difficile est retrahi a prosecutione et facili est prosequi. Unde temperantia quae circa principalia delectabilia est, modum habet in retrahendo. Et propter hoc temperatus plus assimilatur insensibili qui superabundat in fuga, quam intemperato qui superabundat in prosecutione talium delectabilium.

In passionibus autem in quibus passionem inferentia nata sunt ad fugam movere, sicut sunt timores et audaciae, difficile est prosequi vel sustinere, facile autem fugere. Unde modus fortitudinis quae circa timores et audacias maximorum terribilium est, modus est in aggrediendo. Et ideo fortis magis similatur audaci qui superabundat in aggrediendo, quam timido qui superabundat in fugiendo.

In actionibus autem non consideratur inclinatio affectus magis ad unum quam ad aliud nisi per accidens, inquantum convincitur passionibus. Et ideo iustitiae quae circa actiones est, modus est aequalitas, sicut fortitudinis superextensio, et temperantiae refrenatio et diminutio.¹

The word *modus* in Latin is connected in meaning with measure. The *modus* of a thing is determined by its measure:

modus a mensura causatur²

The *modus operandi* in a servile art is measured by its matter or it must fit its matter. Likewise, the *modus* of a moral virtue must fit its matter. And the *modus* of a reasoned out knowledge must fit its matter or subject. The word *fit* suggests that what must fit another is measured by that other.

¹ *Scriptum Super Lib. III Sententiarum*, Dist XXXIII, Quaest III, Art II, Sol I, nn 306-308

² Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum Super Lib. III Sententiarum*, Q. II, Art I, Sol. III, n. 203

Aristotle's first example of the influence of custom (and individual inclination) is well chosen: those who want to proceed mathematically everywhere. We think of the Pythagoreans and the Platonists in ancient times and the rationalists like Descartes, and Spinoza and Leibniz and the mathematical or symbolic logicians in modern times.

Aristotle's example of those who want to hear a poet quoted in authority reminds one of the custom derived from theology in the Middle Ages. Since the argument from authority is the strongest in theology, those accustomed to theology might look elsewhere for something like the authority of the Bible or the Church Fathers.

But one could change the example and point to those who want to proceed poetically everywhere because they are accustomed to poetical studies. Thus Novalis said:

Poetry is what is absolutely and genuinely true. That is the kernel of my philosophy, the more poetic the more true.³

And Matthew Arnold:

We should conceive of poetry worthily, and more highly than it has been the custom to conceive it. We should conceive of it as capable of higher uses, and called to higher destinies, than those which in general men have assigned to it hitherto. More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry.⁴

As Descartes and Spinoza wanted to proceed with the rigor or certitude of geometry everywhere (even where it is not possible), so the existentialists want to proceed poetically (even in matters that admit more rigor or certitude).

³ Novalis, Fr. 31, in "Schriften", ed. Jacob Minor (Jena, E. Diederichs, 1907). III, 11

⁴ Matthew Arnold, 1822-1888, *The Study of Poetry*

The following text is useful for seeing a connection between the first and fifth readings of the *Second Book of Wisdom*:

Cum unumquodque quod est ad finem determinetur secundum exigentiam finis, potentiae et habitus qui ordinantur ad actus sicut ad ultimam perfectionem oportet quod secundum actus diversos distinguantur, sicut etiam potentiae materiae distinguuntur per relationem ad diversas formas.

Non autem quaelibet diversitas actuum facit differentiam potentiarum et habituum, sed illa tantum quae est ex diversitate objectorum, a quibus actus specificantur, sicut motus a terminis. Solum autem illa differentia terminorum facit diversam speciem motus quae attenditur secundum illam rationem secundum quam terminat motum. Unde quod descensus terminetur ad aquam vel ad terram, non facit diversam speciem motus localis; quia motus localis non erat ad terram vel aquam inquantum huiusmodi, sed inquantum deorsum sunt. Generationes autem differunt secundum speciem quae terminantur ad formas aquae et terrae.

Et similiter objecta diversa non diversificant actus secundum speciem, nisi sit diversitas secundum illam rationem secundum quam est objectum. Videre enim album et nigrum non sunt diversi actus secundum speciem; quia utrumque est objectum visus secundum unam rationem, inquantum sunt colorata visibilia actu per lucem. Et inde contingit quod quanto aliqui habitus vel potentiae sunt immaterialiores, tanto sunt universaliores et minus distinguuntur, quia attendunt universaliorum rationem objecti; sicut quinque sensibus propriis respondet unus sensus communis et una imaginatio.

Sciendum tamen quod cum plures habitus quandoque sunt in una potentia, aliqua diversitas sufficit ad distinguendum habitus quae non sufficit ad distinguendum potentiam; quia potentia alio modo comparatur ad actum quam habitus; unde et secundum alteram rationem objectum utrique respondet. Potentia enim est principium agendi absolute, sed habitus est principium agendi prompte et faciliter; et ideo objectum secundum illam rationem qua se habet ad

actum simpliciter respondet potentiae, sed secundum quod se habet ad facilitatem actus respondet habitui. Et ideo diversitas materiae vel objecti in ordine ad ea quae faciunt facilitatem in actu, facit diversitatem habitus et non potentiae

Et inde est quod in speculativis diversitas materiae, secundum quod est determinabilis per diversa media et principia ex quibus est facilitas considerationis, facit diversa scientias, sicut naturalis quae ex effectibus et his quae apparent in sensu demonstrat, a mathematica differt quae circa suam materiam ex eisdem principiis et mediis procedere non potest.⁵

The above words *habitus est principium agendi prompte et faciliter* and *objectum... secundum quod se habet ad facilitatem actus respondet habitui* makes us realize that the distinction of the two kinds of difficulty in knowing pointed out in the First Reading of this book, one of which makes natural philosophy more difficult than geometry and the other, wisdom, makes us understand how different must be these three habits and their ways of knowing.

A knowledge of the road and way of going forward in any reasoned out knowledge is a *foundation* in that reasoned out knowledge. This somewhat metaphorical use of the word *foundation* is based on two likenesses:

fundamentum dicitur in spiritualibus metaphorice ad similitudinem fundamenti materialis. Potest autem ista similitudo attendi quantum ad duo: scilicet quantum ad ordinem, quia fundamentum praecedit alias partes et etiam quantum ad virtutem fundamenti, quia fundamentum totum aedificium sustentat.⁶

Since reasoned out knowledge is knowledge over a road or knowledge that follows a road, knowledge of the road to follow is obviously a beginning of that knowledge and a support of it.

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum Super Lib. III Sententiarum*, Dist XXXVIII, Q. I, Art. I, Sol. I, nn. 117-21

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum Super Lib. III Sententiarum*, Dist. XXIII, Q. II, Art. V, Ad 2

Aristotle sometimes calls this knowledge a *paideia*.

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