ARISTOTLE: PROEMIUM TO WISDOM

FIRST READING

All men by nature desire to know. A sign is the love of the senses. For apart from their usefulness, they are loved for themselves; and especially among the others, that through the eyes. For we choose to see before all the others, not only in order that we might do something, but also when not aiming to do anything. The cause is that this one among the senses especially makes us know something and shows many differences.

Now animals are born having sensation by nature; from this, memory does not arise in some of them while it does arise in others. And because of this, these are more prudent and more easily taught than those unable to remember; those unable to hear sounds are more prudent without learning, as the bees and whatever other kind of animal is such. Whatever has this sense in addition to memory, is able to learn.

The other animals live by images and memories, but they share little in experience; the race of men however, lives by art and reasonings.

Experience comes to be from memory in men. For many memories of the same thing perfect the power of one experience. And experience seems to be very much like science and art. For science and art come to men through experience. For experience makes art, as Polus says, speaking rightly, but inexperience, chance. Art comes to be whenever one universal understanding about like things comes to be from the many things kept in mind by experience. For to have in mind that this benefited Callias when suffering this disease and Socrates and in each case thus to many, belongs to experience. But that it benefits all such as are marked by one condition and suffer this disease, such as the phlegmatic or choleric suffering the burning fever, belongs to art.

As far as doing is concerned, experience does not seem to differ at all from art, but we see the experienced succeeding more than those having reason without experience. The cause is that experience is knowledge of singulars while art, of universals; but all doings and makings are about singulars. For the doctor does not cure man, except accidentally, but Callias or Socrates or someone of the others so named who happens to be a man. If someone has

reason without experience and knows the universal, but does not know the singular in this, he many times makes a mistake in medical treatment - for it is more the singular that is treated.

Nevertheless, we think that knowing and understanding belong more to art than experience, and we hold that the artists are wiser than the experienced, so that wisdom follows knowledge in all. This is because they know the cause while the others do not. The experienced know that it is so, but do not know why it is so. But these know why it is so and the cause.

Whence also we think that the chief artists about each thing are more honorable and know more and are wiser than the handicraftsman, because they know the causes of the things made. For the latter are like inanimate things: they make, but they do not know what they make, as fire burns. Inanimate things make each of these by a certain nature while the handicraftsmen, through custom. Hence, the chief artists are wiser, not by doing, but by having a reason and knowing the causes.

On the whole, the sign of knowing is the ability to teach, and because of this we think that art is more reasoned out knowledge than experience. For the artists are able to teach while the others are not able.

Further, we think that no one of the senses is wisdom although they are the chief ways of knowing singulars. But they do not say the why it so about anything, such as why fire is hot, but only that it is hot.

It is probable that the first one finding any art beyond the senses common to all was admired by men, not only because some of the things found were useful, but also as wise and distinguished from others. Many arts having been found, some being for necessities and some for passing the time pleasantly, always the finders of the latter were considered wiser because their sciences were not for practical use. Whence all these sciences having been built up, those sciences were found that are neither for pleasure nor for necessities; and first in those places where men had leisure. Hence, the mathematical sciences first began around Egypt for there the priestly class was allowed leisure.

What the difference is between art and science and other things of the same kind has been said in the ethics.

But that for the sake of which we have now made a discourse is this, that all hold what is called wisdom to be about the first causes and beginnings; so that as has been said before, the experienced man seems to be wiser than any of those having sensation; the artist than the experienced, the chief artist than the handicraftsman, the looking sciences more than the making. Thus it is clear that wisdom is about beginnings and causes.

SECOND READING

Since we seek such knowledge, this ought to be considered: about what sort of causes and about what sort of beginnings is wisdom the knowledge? Perhaps it would become clearer if one took the thoughts we have about the wise man.

We think first that the wise man knows all things so far as possible, not having a knowledge of these in particular.

Then we think wise the one who is able to know things difficult and not easy for man to know. To sense is common to all; hence, it is easy and nothing wise.

Further, we think wiser in every science, the man more certain and more able to teach the causes.

And of sciences, the one for itself and for the sake of knowing is more wisdom than that for the sake of its results.

And the one ruling is more wisdom than the one obeying. For the wise man ought not to receive orders, but to give orders; and he ought not to be persuaded by another, but the less wise, by him.

Such and so many are the thoughts we have about wise men and wisdom.

Of these, to know all things necessarily belongs to the man most of all having a knowledge of the universal; for he knows in some way all things placed under the universal.

And perhaps the most universal are the most difficult for men to know - for they are furthest from the senses.

And the most certain of sciences are those most of all about what comes first. Those from fewer things are more certain than those from addition, as arithmetic than geometry.

And the science which considers causes is more fit for teaching. For those teach who give the causes of each thing.

Understanding and knowledge for the sake of themselves especially belong to the knowledge of the most knowable. For the man who desires to know for itself will most desire what is most knowledge; and such is that of the most knowable; and most knowable are the first things and the causes - for other things are known through these and from them, but not these through what comes under them.

And that is the chief science, and more ruling than the subordinate, which knows that for the sake of which each thing ought to be done. This, however, is the good of each; and as a whole, the best in all nature.

From all the foresaid, the name sought falls in the same science. For it is necessary that this looks at the first beginnings and causes. For one of the causes is the good and that for the sake of which.

THIRD READING

That it is not a making science is clear also from those first philosophizing. For men both now and at first began to philosophize through wonder - in the beginning, wondering about the strange things close at hand, then little by little thus going forward raising questions about the greater things, as about the changes of the moon and of the sun and stars, and about the origin of the universe. But the man in doubt and wondering thinks himself to be ignorant. So the philomuthos is in some way a philosopher for the myth is put together from wonders. Hence, if men philosophized to escape ignorance, it is clear that they sought knowledge for the sake of understanding and not for any use.

What happened witnesses this. When almost all necessary things and those for recreation and amusement existed, such knowledge began to be sought. So it is clear that we seek this knowledge through no other need.

But as we call a man free that is for himself and not for another, so this alone is free among the sciences. For this alone is for the sake of itself.

Hence, it might justly be thought that it is not a human possession. For in many ways the nature of man is enslaved.

Thus, according to Simonides, God alone can have this honor; man, however, is not worthy to seek knowledge for itself. If the poets are saying something and the divine is able to envy, it is likely especially to happen about this; and unfortunate are all those who excel in knowledge.

But the divine is not able to be envious and, according to the proverb, poets say many false things.

Nor must any other knowledge be thought to be more honorable. For the most divine is most honorable.

But most divine is only in two ways. For that which God most of all would have is the most divine of sciences; and if it were of divine things. But this alone has both of these. For God seems to all to be among the causes and a beginning, and such knowledge God alone or most of all would have.

All other kinds of knowledge are more necessary than this, but none is better.

It is necessary, however, to place the possession of this in the opposite for us of the searches in the beginning. For all began, as we have said, from wondering if things are thus; as about things that happen wonderfully by chance or about the turnings of the sun or the incommensurability of the diagonal - for it seems wonderful to all who have not seen the cause that something is not measured by the smallest. It is necessary therefore to finish in the contrary and the better, according to the proverb, just as in these when they have learned (for the geometer would wonder at nothing so much as if the diagonal were to become measurable).

What is the nature of the knowledge sought then has been said, and what is the goal that the investigation and the whole knowledge over a road must reach.