

Aristotle's epistemology (AN4083)

Lecturer: Dr. Han Baltussen (KCL)

lecture 1 (Jan. 10, 2001)

Outline

- introductory remarks (achievements)
- where to look for Aristotle's epistemology
- the legacy of Plato (Meno, Theaetetus, Republic 5)
- kinds of knowledge (terminology; 5 cognitive states)
- place of perception (perception as gnôsis; induction and nous)
 - scientific knowledge: the *Posterior Analytics* (some central concepts: principles, definition and demonstration)

Sources (selection):

Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* 6; *On the soul* 2.4-8; 3.1-5; *Metaphysics* 1.1; 6.1-2; 7.1-6; *Topics* 1.2; 6.4; *Posterior Analytics* 1.2; 1.24-25; 2.16; 2.19

Reading:

J. Barnes, 'Aristotle's Theory of Demonstration', *Phronesis* 14 (1969)

D. Hamlyn, 'Aristotelian Epagoge', *Phronesis* 21 (1976) 167-80 (on induction)

C.C.W. Taylor, 'Aristotle's epistemology', in S. Everson (ed) *Epistemology* (Cambridge 1990) 116-142 (general account)

E. Berti (ed) *Aristotle on Science: the Posterior Analytics* (Padua 1981) (good papers by Barnes, Burnyeat, Ackrill, Sorabji, Kahn)

M. Burnyeat, 'Aristotle on Understanding Knowledge', in E. Berti (1981), 97-139

Some texts to Aristotle's Epistemology

1. *Metaph. A.1, 980a – 981b (selections):* "All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves [...] we prefer sight ... this, most of all the senses, make us know and brings to light many differences between things"

"... from sensation memory is produced in some <animals>, not in others. therefore the former are more intelligent and apt at learning than those which cannot remember. [...] the human race lives by art and experience: and from memory experience is produced in men: for many memories of the same thing produce finally the capacity for a single experience [...] and art arises, when from many notions gained by experience one universal judgement about similar objects is produced ... with a view to action experience seems in no respect inferior to art"

"... knowledge and understanding belong to art rather than to experience, and we suppose artists to be wiser than men of experience"

2. *Nicomachean Ethics 6.3*

"for episteme is a dispositional capacity able to produce a causal explanation"

3. *An. Post. A.1*

" All teaching and intellectual learning come about from already existing knowledge. This is evident if we consider it in every case; for the mathematical sciences are acquired in this fashion, and so is each of the other arts. [...] it is necessary to be already aware of things in two ways: of some things it is necessary to believe already that they are, of some one must grasp what the thing said is, and of others both ..."

4. *An. Post. A.2*

"we think we understand a thing without qualification whenever we think we are aware both that the explanation through which an object is is its explanation, and that it cannot be otherwise"

5. *An. Post A.6*

"Now if demonstrative understanding depends on necessary principles ... and what belongs to the objects"

in themselves ... it is evident that demonstrative *deduction* will depend on things of this sort"

6. *An. Post* A.10

"I call principles in each kind [=discipline] those which it is not possible to prove to be."

7. *An. Post* B.1 ('4 because')

"The things we seek are equal in number to those we understand. We seek four things: the fact, the reason why, if it is, what it is."

8. *An. Post* B.19 (nous, insight, intuition?)

"as for the principles how they come to be known and what is the *hexis* (cognitive state) by virtue of which we know them, will be clear from what follows. [...] Since of the intellectual states by which we grasp truth some are always true and some admit falsehood ... no kind other than nous is more certain than understanding, and the principles of demonstration are more familiar, and all understanding involves an account—there will not be understanding (episteme) of principles; and since it is not possible for anything to be truer than understanding, except nous, there will be nous of the principles"

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lecture 2 (Jan. 17, 2001)

Outline

recap of last week's account

1. tying up some loose ends (induction; response to Plato's *Meno*)
2. applying the method (does Aristotle practice what he preaches?)
3. major aim scientific knowledge? sciences as kinds; proof cannot cross-over B.6-7
4. two important problems (knowledge and understanding; nous 'intuition' B.19)

Summing up

Sources

Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* ; *On the soul* B.4-8; 3.1-5; *Topics* A.2; *Posterior Analytics* A.2; A.24-25; B.16; B.19

Reading

J. Barnes, *Aristotle's Posterior Analytics*. Intr.-transl.-notes. (Oxford, 1975) 248-60

Ch. Kahn, 'The Role of <<Nous>> in the cognition of first principles in *An.Post.* II 19', in in E. Berti (ed) *Aristotle on Science: the Posterior Analytics* (Padua 1981), 385-414

L.A. Kosman, 'Understanding, Explanation and Insight in the *Posterior Analytics*', in E.N. Lee/ A.P.D. Mourelatos/ R.M. Rorty (eds) *Exegesis and Argument* (Assen 1973), 374-92

J. Lesher, 'The Meaning of Nous in the *Posterior Analytics*', *Phronesis* 18 (1973) 44-68

A. O'Hear, *An Introduction to the philosophy of science* (Oxford 1991) chapters 1-2, 5

Some texts

Part 1. Tying up some loose ends

(a) induction: three kinds

(b) An. Post. A.1 Meno's paradox answered?

Part 2. Applying the method

3. Top. A.2

2. *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.3

"for episteme is a dispositional capacity able to produce a causal explanation"

3. *An. Post.* A.1

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. *An. Post.* B.19 (nous, insight, intuition?)

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