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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RECOVERY OF HELLENISTIC  
PHILOSOPHY FOR MODERN SELF-UNDERSTANDING\*

**Abstract.** The Renaissance defined itself as a rebirth of Antiquity and has until today been frequently described by scholars in this way. Looking more closely at the actual transformation processes in the Renaissance, one can see that not Antiquity as such was discovered but a kind of Antiquity different to the one known to the Middle Ages. Many Humanists, among which Petrarch may be named as a prime example, have criticised the excrescences of 14<sup>th</sup> century Late Scholasticism. To justify their own new position, they referred back to the classical authors of Rome, putting aside the time in between. Primarily because of this the impression arose that the entire time which had elapsed between Antiquity and the Renaissance had been nothing but a process of decay of the arts and sciences. A closer analysis of the transformation processes that took place in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, as attempted in this paper, will show that the Renaissance should above all be understood as the result of a change of reception strategies, namely a reevaluation of Hellenistic and Roman philosophy, a shift that was connected with abandoning the Aristotelian tradition moulded by Neo-Platonism.

**Key-words:** Plato, Aristotle, Stoa, Neo-Platonism, renaissance of Platonism and Aristotelianism in Modernity, interpretation of Platonism and Aristotelianism, Hellenistic philosophy.

**On the ambivalence of the consciousness of a break in tradition in early modernity**

In early modernity there is a widespread consciousness, encompassing all cultural fields, of a break with an epoch of decline in the sciences and arts and

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of the dawn of a new age. This consciousness of a break refers to the immediate past, whereas the consciousness of a dawn is founded upon the (alleged) rediscovery of *the* antiquity. This rediscovery of antiquity thereby becomes an important factor for widening the notion of the direct past to include the entire Middle Ages. Although many traditions continue in modernity (making it impossible to locate the exact historical moment when this break occurred and demonstrating a widespread continuity between the Middle Ages and modernity), this consciousness of a radical change and a new dawn can be documented in many texts since the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. These texts explicitly voice the conviction of living in a period of a radical new beginning. Further, this conviction dominates all cultural fields. It can be demonstrated both in texts on philosophy, aesthetics, and literature theory and in artistic and literary praxis. It determines the *new* concepts of political theory, economics, the natural sciences and medicine. Indeed, it is even dominant in theological texts.

Notwithstanding important qualifications, one can observe the after-effects of this consciousness of a revolution and of a new age even in current research. Varied and extensive investigations have adequately demonstrated that this consciousness of a radical new beginning obscures the actual continuity with the Middle Ages. Seen from this perspective, the consciousness of a break is actually a false notion. Further, there is no research tradition today that retains the conviction that the Middle Ages was a time of complete decline in the sciences and arts. In many fields, e.g. architecture and painting, it is scarcely defensible any longer to treat the Middle Ages as a mere precursor of the Renaissance or modernity. That gothic architecture has its own validity beside the architectural styles of the Renaissance no longer needs justification. Nonetheless, many continue to understand the consciousness of a new dawn in modernity as a correct representation of a historically necessary advance toward modernity. Thus, one speaks of a development from authoritarianism to plurality and of philosophy's journey from a position of subordination to one of mastery over theology. One believes that direct observation of empirical data replaces deduction from abstract general concepts, that reason undergoes a clarification about itself, that thought now orients itself toward its own rational acts rather than a pre-given ontological order. Political theory now seeks to justify the neutrality of the state rather than seeking values that would be binding for society as a whole, the sciences undergo mechanization, and so on. In all these and many other analogous developments modernity claims to have introduced, e.g. the discovery of subjectivity, individuality, historicity, and self-determination we see the same consciousness at work. There is a widespread tendency, not only in the mind of the general public, but also in relevant academic disciplines, to describe these processes, developments, and discoveries in terms that hardly differ from those modernity itself employed for them.

This also holds true for the most important elements from which early modernity drew its consciousness of a new dawn. These elements arise, for the most part, from early modernity's ambivalent relationship to the later Middle Ages and, above all, to Scotism and Ockhamism. Two factors lay the grounds

for the turn toward experience and its methodological ascertainment through thought's reflection upon its spontaneous acts: 1. the elevation of *cognitio intuitiva* to the genuine faculty of knowledge, i.e., the one that grasps all reality (a development already observable in Duns Scotus), 2. the associated revaluation of the individual object to a *well-determined (omnimode determinatum)* object that can only be fragmentarily represented in conceptual abstraction<sup>1</sup>. However, that this experience of the reality of individuals still required deduction from ultimate epistemological principles (of the *entity qua entity*) appeared to many a load inherited from the Middle Ages, hindering rather than advancing knowledge. Thus, a contradictory relationship toward the Aristotelianism of the late Middle Ages arose. On the one hand, it provided the foundations of the consciousness of a new age (above all through so-called nominalism), on the other hand, it became emblematic of a Scholasticism based merely upon conceptual distinctions and faith in authority.

This internal tension leads from the 14<sup>th</sup> century till (at least) the 17<sup>th</sup> century to a varied, often ambiguous reception of Aristotle. On the one hand, Aristotle is taken to be the spokesperson of a new respect for empirical method, as spokesperson of the immanence of the ideal in individual empirical objects. Furthermore, in his *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* he offers philosophical justification for and evidence of aesthetic beauty in art and poetry. On the other hand, he is criticized as the embodiment of abstruse and inelegant conceptual distinctions (this attitude is dominant in humanism), (one) reason why thinking lost its independence in the Middle Ages. This criticism (of which Petrarch's *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* is an early and important example), directed primarily against the Aristotelianism of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, also includes the Neo-Platonic Aristotelianism of the high and early Middle Ages. This criticism of an entire epoch is one of the main reasons for the later distinction of the *Middle Ages* from antiquity and modernity.

### **The rediscovery of Plato – one reason for the epochal break?**

Both older and contemporary scholarship holds that the reacquaintance with Plato and Neoplatonism through Greek scholars from Plethon to Besarion was an important factor, alongside a multitude of social, political, and economic reasons, for the turn away from scholastic Aristotelianism. The reference to this tradition is without question correct and important. However, it does not adequately answer a series of fundamental questions, above all the question why this new focus on Plato and Neoplatonism should have given rise to a consciousness of a break with the Middle Ages.

The presupposition for this belief is the conviction that there is a fundamental contrast between Plato and Aristotle and that the contrast lies in Plato's turn to a transcendental world, whereas Aristotle turns to the empirical world. However, this view of the distinction between Plato and Aristotle exists in antiquity (almost) only in Hellenistic schools of philosophy, above all in Stoicism (e.g. in Antiochos of Askalon, Cicero, or Seneca). In contrast, almost

<sup>1</sup> See A. Schmitt, *Anschauung und Denken bei Duns Scotus ...*

the entire tradition of Greek and Arabic Aristotle–commentaries follows the Neoplatonic interpretation. According to this interpretation, Aristotle focuses on the physical and empirical world as an object of inquiry, while Plato goes back to the theological presuppositions for an explication of the world. However, both of them do so on the basis of the same systematic hypothesis. According to this tradition, Aristotle does not deny transcendental being, even though he discusses whether Ideas are cognizable<sup>1</sup> (see above all *Parmenides*, Part I and Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII, 13–15). Since the interpretation of Aristotle was strongly influenced by Neoplatonic and Arabic commentators even in the high Middle Ages and did not differ fundamentally from their interpretive strategies, the heightened acquaintance with Plato and Neoplatonism in the Renaissance can only be understood as strengthening the consciousness of continuity with the Middle Ages and not as a break with it.

That such forms of continuity exist, e.g. in Nicholas of Cusa, is beyond question<sup>2</sup>. However, one also sees Plato being appealed to as spokesperson against the Aristotelianism of the Middle Ages. The latter is more common by far. This appeal to Plato becomes possible because there is already a return at the beginning of early modernity, e.g. in Gemistos Plethon, to the Hellenistic view of a contrast between Aristotelian empiricism and Platonic metaphysics. Depending upon the author's position, this contrast leads to the one being played off against the other<sup>3</sup>.

### The new Plato of modernity and the Stoa

The *rediscovered* Plato is not the Plato of an otherworldly, self-existent transcendence but one of an *immanent transcendence*. Ideas are the thoughts of a God who devises geometry, who arranges everything in the world according to size, number, and weight. The world is therefore the pure expression of a universal mathematical order. It is *composed* of number, rules, and symmetry; it is not merely the shadow and reflection of the intelligible, but every new, pure realization of God's infinite creative potential. This potential manifests itself directly to the senses as beauty.

Plato thereby acquires, already in Plethon, Stoic characteristics, since the notion of God as a transcendent power in relation to all individual things that

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<sup>1</sup> Naturally, there are significant differences among the Neoplatonists as well regarding their opinion on the relationship between Plato and Aristotle. However, the questions that they discuss (e.g. concerning the relationship of the soul to the intellect, of intellect and the one, the logical and ontological significance of the categories) have little or nothing to do with the alleged fundamental distinction between Plato, the transcendentalist, and Aristotle, the empiricist. See now the study by G. E. Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement?* Karamanolis' otherwise reliable discussion of the texts has certain weaknesses in relation to Antiochus, since it is unclear how he can be treated as a Platonist, and in relation to Plotinus, whose criticism of Aristotle Karamanolis overemphasizes. However, in general this is a good treatment of the problem. In a detailed historical study I. Hadot, *Athenian and Alexandrian ...* has now convincingly shown that the so-called harmonization of Aristotle and Plato was in the time from Porphyry to Simplicius common to all schools and their leaders without any exception. Perhaps we should give more trust to these experts of Platonism and Aristotelianism.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, *Idiota de mente* XIV, where Cusanus (in perfect accord with Neoplatonism) has the layman say that the distinction between Plato and Aristotle lies merely *in modo considerationis* in the manner of contemplation (*sc.* of the universal, divine cause of the world).

<sup>3</sup> See T. S. Hoffmann, *Immanentisierung der Transzendenz ...*.

is nonetheless immanent to the world as a whole is characteristic of Stoic philosophy rather than Plato or Neoplatonism. According to this view, God is responsible for the order visible in all individual things because it is God himself who becomes visible and manifests himself in them. Histories of philosophy up to the present claim that modernity (or, at best, the late Middle Ages) is the first age to give up a *fundamental faith in the objective logicity of the world, a logicity founded in God*. This claim is challenged by many texts in modernity, in which the new, modern empirical sciences are founded upon the premise that the whole world (specifically, the empirical world) is determined according to *number, measure, and weight*. In contrast, Plato and Aristotle repeatedly demonstrate that individual things accessible to experience are synthetic in character: they do not form a uniformly determined unit and are not, as proximate manifestations of an ideal, *well-determined*. In a circle (the standard Platonic–Aristotelian example), taken as a pure, intellectual determination, only the conceptual elements are related to a concept. This uniform relationship of all elements to an objective unity is the criterion for determining whether an object is adequately determined and distinguished (*distinctly* thought).

In contrast, every existing circle – in the mind, in bronze, sand, of chalk, etc. – has other characteristics that go beyond the concept *circle* and which do not belong to it *qua* circle, but to other objective unities, e.g. to sand. This other object is not determined by the form of a circle and thus enables the unique realization of a definite circle. That is why Plato grants individual circles only a share in the form of a circle: they are merely copies and not a direct expression or realization of the form of a circle. Aristotle analogously shows that not every element of perceptible substances can be included in the definition of an individual thing (*Metaphysics* VII, 10–12 & VIII, 2).

### The change in the interpretation of Aristotle in the late Middle Ages

However, Duns Scotus ascribes this very doctrine to Aristotle<sup>1</sup>, viz. that the individual thing forms a uniform and completely determined objective unity and that conceptual thought must correspond to this unity if it is to be *real*. He bases this *new* Aristotle–interpretation above all on the description of the so-called *first substance* in *The Categories*, especially on the fact that Aristotle describes the individual thing there as the bearer or subject of all the qualities or predicates that apply to or can be predicated of it. Aristotle–commentators from Alexander of Aphrodisias to Duns Scotus had universally interpreted this doctrine as a didactic and inductive description of linguistic usage in its orientation toward perception prior to the conceptual analysis of the synthetic character of individual things which Aristotle demonstrates in the *Metaphysics* (VII)<sup>2</sup>.

Duns Scotus criticizes this analysis of the individual thing. He engages Avicenna above all, but with the intention of disproving the traditional

<sup>1</sup> For evidence and citations of the source, see A. Schmitt, *Anschauung und Denken bei Duns Scotus ...*. See also A. Schmitt, *Die Moderne und Platon*, pp. 23–63.

<sup>2</sup> See R. Thiel, *Aristoteles' Kategorienschrift in ihrer antiken Kommentierung*, pp. 11–29.

interpretation of Aristotle. He believes he can show, through combining various Aristotelian doctrines, that Aristotle himself (in contrast to his later interpreters) considered immediate sensory knowledge of an individual thing the foundation of all further conceptual knowledge and that this foundation could not be further analyzed for Aristotle. Scotus is convinced that he can cast new light upon the oft-commented-on passage from the beginning of the *Physics* (184a16–b5), where Aristotle claims that the intuition of objects (i.e. a knowledge of individual things that is simultaneously activated along with perception) is confused (*synkechyménoos*) and abstract/general (*kathólou*), by linking it to the claim from *De Anima* that the intellect is already accidentally co-present in the intuition of objects (418a20–24).

The traditional interpretation, which had remained unchanged from Alexander of Aphrodisias through late antiquity to Arabic and Scholastic commentators, was that Aristotle calls the intuition of objects confused because perception always perceives a composite of multiple units as a uniform whole. The characteristics of such a unity cannot therefore be related to a specific fact. The form of the grains of sand of a circle drawn in sand have nothing to do with its being a circle and may not be confused with the characteristics of a circle, as one would then form a confused concept out of the concepts *circle* and *non-circle*.

Further, the abstract character of the intuition of objects is, as earlier commentators were aware, a function of its undifferentiated character. Perception has an object before it in a unified manner. Thought which orients itself toward this unity does not distinguish between what perception and what the concept contribute to the constitution of this unity (*sc.* as the subjective content of intuition), since the object appears to the faculty of perception as that very unity which thought can and must bring to a concept if it is to correspond to reality.

However, according to Aristotle, knowledge of an empirical object is dependent not on recognizing the totality of its appearance, but on understanding what it does. We recognize something as a pair of scissors by understanding whether the object is capable of cutting. Further, we do not see something as human from its white skin, but from its rational capacities.

The Aristotelian phrase [e]verything is defined in terms of its capacity [*dýnamis*] and its actuality [*enérgeia, érgon*] (*Politics* I, 3, 1253a23) precisely expresses the specific accomplishment that distinguishes thought from mere perception. Plato emphasized that one cannot perceive the capacity and actuality of something, but must understand it (*Republic* 477c–d). The doctrine that what a thing is cannot be recognized from its sensory appearance, but only from its *actuality* can be found in all commentators of Aristotle up to Thomas Aquinas. The methodological disclosure of the objectivity of an object has different criteria than the uniform representation of a sensory manifold. *Sensus communis* also accomplishes the combination of multiple sensory data to an intuitable unity. However, what this unity is must be understood on the basis of the possibilities it realizes.

At least ostensibly, Duns Scotus holds on to this distinction in a certain respect (*substantiam panis sensus non cognoscit*). However, he believes that

the accomplishment of the senses and of thought, which Thomas or Avicenna had still clearly distinguished, coincide: the senses disclose a multiplicity of sensory appearances, the intellect simultaneously discloses them as the unity of an object.

To legitimize this thesis, Scotus invokes Aristotle himself: he refers to his thesis that the intellect is accidentally co-present in the intuition of objects. However, Duns Scotus considers Avicenna mistaken, when the latter interprets this accidental co-presence of the intellect as a sign of a deficit in the intuition of objects. Aristotle does not call perception confused because it misleads us into considering two things that ought to be distinguished as one and the same. The confusion lies merely in the manner, in the *mode*, in which an object of intuition is given: it is still completely undifferentiated, we have not represented the different parts of the object distinctly in themselves, they still *dissolve* into one another (as Schiller later describes it). According to Duns Scotus, the abstractness does not arise, as the old tradition claimed, from the fact that one wants to determine directly from the sensory appearances what sort of object one has before one and therefore believes that the specific object embodies in its totality a self-subsistent objective unity (with the consequence that one identifies being a man with *having a white skin*). Objects of intuition are only abstract when the senses cannot optimally unfold their function: from a distance, all men are simply men (in general), all cats are grey in the dark, etc.

In a momentous new interpretation of a standard example from the old Aristotle-commentators, Duns Scotus lays the foundation for an interpretation of the cognitive process that endures (word for word) in Enlightenment-philosophy and (for all practical purposes) even in the different forms of the philosophy of consciousness. When one sees a man from a distance, one cannot distinguish him from his surroundings: he blends into them, one can only perceive him *indistinctly and hazily* [*obscure et confuse*]. At a certain distance, one can distinguish a man as a man, but not in his individual appearance: one recognizes him *hazily, but (already) clearly* [*confuse et clare*], i.e. as a specific object or a specific melody. Even the ancient Stoics thought this first impression sufficed for the indefinite disclosure of the fullness of a painting, even a complete opera<sup>1</sup>. Only from a specific distance, in the right position, in the right light can one recognize the man, not just as a man, but as a specific individual because one can now see his individual qualities distinctly. One does not recognize him merely clearly, but *clearly and distinctly* [*clare et distincte*].

The progression of methodical steps leading to knowledge of the object described here also implies a distinction between the cognitive faculties, which, if one takes into account the change in terminology in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, remains paradigmatic even for the present. The indistinct and hazy perceptions become the unconscious, the clear and distinct become consciousness.

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<sup>1</sup> See S. Büttner, *Antike Aesthetik*, pp. 118 ff.

At any rate, from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries one assigned mere perception (sensibility, sensation) of a sensory manifold to the indistinct and hazy perceptions. The hazy but clear perceptions are the object of common sense, of taste, and of the faculty of judgement and, later, of emotion. The clear and distinct perceptions are the result of *operationes intellectus*, the methodological differentiation and recombination through intellect of what is *given* through perception.

### The new Aristotle and Stoicism

That Duns Scotus and his school already became emblematic in early modernity of literary inelegance, of a tendency to resolve problems through generating new conceptual distinctions and that they were considered universal realists distracted from the fact that this fundamentally new interpretation of the cognitive process, which Duns Scotus claimed to have accomplished, represents a paradigm shift in relation to the traditional Aristotelianism of the high Middle Ages. Duns Scotus did not think through the consequences of this new approach in every respect. Above all, he held on to the thesis that the universal categories of thought founded in the concept of the *entity qua entity* could (in another respect) also be understood as a *natura communis* in the things themselves<sup>1</sup>. He thereby became the archetype of Scholastic Aristotelianism. However, he had, in this characteristic formulation, argumentatively legitimated a fundamentally new understanding of rationality in contrast to Platonism and Aristotelianism. Even though he may not have been the first to do so, he thereby became possibly the most important forerunner of the *rise of modernity* and the turn away from the Aristotle of the Scholastics.

This new understanding of rationality was not new in every respect. Hellenistic schools of philosophy and especially the Stoa had already developed similar concepts, a fact early modernity discovered and evaluated ever anew.

However, a new Aristotle–interpretation arose through Scotism that claimed to be a new, correct interpretation. The foundation of this interpretation was the division of knowledge in sensory reception of the totality of an object and the reconstruction and arrangement of this unity in the universality of knowledge through the intellect's *spontaneous* functions. Since then, among the many variations this interpretation permits, Aristotelianism has been equated with universal realism.

That Duns Scotus develops his position through directly engaging the commentaries on Aristotle before him creates a favourable hermeneutic situation for evaluating the two forms of Aristotelianism through directly

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<sup>1</sup> It is this interpretation of Aristotle, which has greatly hindered an accurate interpretation of the *enhylon Eidos*. The complex problem of a *universale in re* cannot be dealt with here, but the thesis of the synthetic nature of individual objects alone invalidates the interpretation that the species embodied in the individual thing is to Aristotle, what the transcendental Idea is to Plato. That matter is the *principle of individuation* does not mean, as it is often interpreted, that matter is the reason for a person or thing having a unique definite character (this is accomplished by the *to ti en einai*). Rather, it is the reason for the distinctions contained in the matter (*eidos, species*) being *limited* (a term even Kant makes use of): a triangle in sand realizes only a specific possible triangle, limited with respect to its size, definiteness, etc.

contrasting them. Duns Scotus displaces the specific function of the intellect in Aristotle, viz. the capacity to grant unity to the multiplicity of forms of appearance through disclosing the *energeia*, the activity of a thing, from the intellect to intuition. Consequently, the faculty of representation gains a completely new and fundamental significance for him. It is already given an object through intuition. Through this, it already has knowledge (of the object), though in an unclear and pre-theoretical sense. It also has, in a sense, a conceptual framework of what this object is: tree, weaver's shuttle, circle, Socrates, waves, etc. Intellect's task lies in transforming this unclear (but rich) knowledge into a clear and distinct (although fragmented and reduced) representation. This transformation occurs through the most universal determinations of the objectivity of an object, which reason reflexively discloses. These so-called transcendentalia exceed the specific being of every individual object and are derived from the most universal determination of all: every entity is one entity. Through applying these categories of objectivity to the undifferentiated multiplicity of the intuited object, thought can, after clarifying individual characteristics, recreate the original unity more or less adequately and completely. Thought thus ends – and we will only pursue this aspect here – in an exceptional form of representation, viz. in clear and distinct perceptions or at least in an unambiguous representation of the intuited object, which it symbolically indicates.

Thereby, two distinct means or modi of representation (these differ from the Aristotelian differentiation) arise: sensory and *rational*. Both these now belong to the same dimension of representation. Duns Scotus repeatedly emphasizes that intellect with its capacities to separate, combine, and compare, etc. must be active within this dimension in extracting the common essence. Above all, he clarifies there can be no cognition that is not gained from the original phantasm, which consequently has a primordial function and cannot ever be overtaken in respect of its completeness by any of the clear and distinct perceptions gained through the operations of thought.

Duns Scotus attains a typically Stoic position with this claim as well, albeit via a putative interpretation of Aristotle. According to the Stoa, one attains rational knowledge of an object through so-called cataleptic, i.e. clear and distinct, perceptions. This view *subjectivizes* the criterion of the truth of knowledge, i.e. its correspondence to the object: it is inner evidence in consciousness. Duns Scotus describes the conditions of this evidence in terms surprisingly similar to analogous Stoic claims (e.g. SVF II, Nr. 65)<sup>1</sup> when he says that this evidence is only possible in an actually existent object present (*obiectum praesens ut praesens, actualiter existens ut existens*) here and now (*hic et nunc*).

One specific point of commonality (whose neglect has caused much confusion) between the Stoic and Scotist (*Aristotelian*) concept of rationality is that thought is itself interpreted as an exceptional form of representation,

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<sup>1</sup> This conviction, congenial to the Stoics, that complete internal evidence is only possible when there is complete correspondence to an actually existing object is the factual reason for Scotism's *universal realism* – and not the Aristotelian doctrine of the supposed immanence of the (Platonic) Idea in individual things.

namely, as a clear and evident form of representation. The Stoics term this representation *logos*, often also *nous*, *intellectus*, *ratio*, but also *noema*, *ennoia*, *cogitatio*, *mens*, among others and distinguish it from immediate perceptions which they consider a direct impression of the perceived object on the soul. The latter are thought *natural*, they occur in animals as well. The same holds for the capacity to arbitrarily combine or separate these natural perceptions in representation and thus bring forth random fantasies or new complexes<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, the concept of imagination (*imaginatio*, *phantasia*, *phantasma*) comes to be limited to these *irrational* perceptions, with the consequence that intellect or reason is no longer referred to in its imaginative character.

There is a tendency in many texts from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onward to free the imagination from the strictures of *ratio* or, conversely, a demand that the arbitrariness of fantasy be restrained through the intellect. *Intellect* here means a compulsion to attain clear and distinct perceptions; these claims are incompatible with the Aristotelian concept of the intellect.

### **On the emergence of the appearance of naive realism in Aristotle**

The initial question needs to be posed again from this perspective, viz. the conviction that intellect's task lies in the *elucidation* of the perceptions that are unclearly given it. What is the source of the persuasiveness of modernity's consciousness that it discovered the independence, autonomy, and maturity of reason (in contrast to the dogmatism, naiveté, and faith in authority of the Middle Ages) for the very first time and thereby ushered in an epochal transformation?

To answer this question it is instructive to direct our gaze to the revolution in philosophy around 300 years before Christ. Here too, an elevation of fantasy to the *dominant* faculty of knowledge had the consequence that Platonic and Aristotelian doctrines, said to be beholden to theoretical positions inimicable to reality, no longer appeared convincing. Evidently, from the perspective of the concept of knowledge implicit in a philosophy of representation, Platonic and Aristotelian analyses of the spirit and the soul cannot be understood as a reflection of thought upon itself. As a matter of fact, one does not find a reflection upon the modi of consciousness or other forms of representation in Plato and Aristotle that would clarify through which independent acts thought forms the unity of a *conceptual* representation from the multiplicity of sensory impressions. Instead, Aristotle (above all) appears to have divided the world through a multitude of distinctions into genus and species, without ever having investigated the intellect as the instrument by means of which we make such distinctions.

The Aristotelians of the Renaissance already criticized their teacher on this point. In their opinion, Aristotle did not precisely explain how thought attains a clear concept from a subnotionally represented object through its own

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<sup>1</sup> Hume's reception of this distinction between a natural and rational side to the faculty of representation was influential in effective history. See D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* I, 4, 7.

acts of differentiation and combination<sup>1</sup>. Even contemporary interpreters, such as Klaus Oehler, whose explicit goal is to investigate precursors of the modern analysis of consciousness in Plato and Aristotle have ultimately come to the conclusion that a reflection upon the *modi* of consciousness cannot *as yet* be demonstrated in their work<sup>2</sup>.

The precise import of this criticism only becomes evident through recalling the explicit reinterpretation the intuition of objects undergoes through Duns Scotus. For Duns Scotus, a specific cognitive act (in which according to Aristotle several distinct cognitive functions or faculties work in concert), constitutes the irreducible foundation for all further knowledge<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, the task of epistemology is displaced to inquiring into the way thinking appropriates this foundation to itself.

If one goes through the epistemological positions that were developed after the 14<sup>th</sup> century, one can note that in spite of many divergent approaches, this beginning of knowledge was itself rarely subjected to analysis even in later times. One saw early on that one cannot find a beginning to knowledge that would simply and directly apprehend its object without transforming it through some form of reflective activity (this become a central theme above all in the 20<sup>th</sup> century). Even the regress from perception to sensation, from the sense of sight to the sense of touch, from intuition, emotion, etc. to synaesthesia, etc. did not bring a form of experience to light that could really be held to be pre-semiotic. In spite of this, epistemological reflections explicitly focused most often on two issues: 1. the question of how (and whether at all) the totality received at the beginning of the cognitive process is accessible to thought in its functions of clarification and distinction, 2. the question of whether there could be a form of *intellectual intuition* in which the original unity, fullness, and reality of a supposedly immediate experience could be reconstituted.

Epistemological attention was thereby focused on the acts following immediate acquaintance with the object: is there a critical reflection of thought upon its own acts in which it assures itself of its object? Does this ascertainment and clarification take place in a methodical fashion or is it arbitrary and a function of the pre-given qualities of objects? These problems are related above all either to the question of whether the knowledge (unconsciously) given in immediate acquaintance is retained in the act of rational cognition or to the question: under what conditions (e.g. in ordinary language) is such a direct acquaintance (*still*) possible?

From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the analysis of forms of experience, which appear to enable a *harmony between reason and intellect* in some manner (taste, common sense, *bon sens*, criticism, *cognitio sensitiva qua talis*, faculty of judgement, and other similar instances) unquestionably constitutes

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<sup>1</sup> Already in 1555 Fracastoro expresses himself thus (*non plane dixit*), see T. S. Hoffmann, *Dimensionen des Erkennens bei Girolamo Fracastoro*.

<sup>2</sup> See K. Oehler, *Die Lehre vom noetischen und dianoetischen Denken bei Platon und Aristoteles*, pp. 250 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Seen from the perspective of Aristotle and Aristotelianism, the *cognitio sensitiva intuitiva* constitutes an unclarified *dark* element in Scotian and post-Scotian epistemology.

the central focus of attempts to combine (allegedly) immediate and mediated forms of experience.

### **On the axiomatic foundation of epistemology in Aristotle and Plato**

This focus upon possibilities of immediate acquaintance with things and their (re)–constructive recreation is an important reason why even an explicit turn of thought upon itself and its own acts, which Thomas of Aquinas describes as the task of the theory of science founded by Aristotle<sup>1</sup>, is no longer considered a *genuine* reflection of thought upon itself. Aristotle himself never developed an epistemological analysis with this specific goal.

This does not by any means mean that an epistemological reflection worthy of the name (even in the modern sense of the claim) is absent in Aristotle. Aristotle refers to *idia aisthetá*, the objects of a particular sense (color, tone, smell, etc.), and to *koiná aisthetá*, the objects of multiple senses, etc. However, what Aristotle thereby means is, as in the case of accidental perception, not external objects that were already given to perception or thought. What appears to many interpreters an orientation toward distinctions derived from an *ontological order* is unambiguously described in textual passages as the internal products of distinctive cognitive activities.

In the case of the intuition of objects, Aristotle himself explicitly underscores the distinction between its inner and outer object. Although perception indeed relates to an individual (external) object, its inner object is universal (and confused) (*Posterior Analytics* 100a16–100b). The old commentators too underscore this distinction. Philoponus emphatically clarifies that thought creates its objects differently from nature. Thus, thought alone begins with abstract, generic concepts; nature does not first produce a generically human thing in order to then form a human, etc.<sup>2</sup>

The distinctions in the certainty of knowledge necessitate the question whether and which criteria exist for the potential certainty of knowledge. Aristotle seeks this certainty neither in the unity of the sensorily given object nor in the *simplicity* of the (as yet undivided, not yet *riven apart* by reflection) act of reception, but in a fundamental criterion of rationality. As is well-known, he says that the *axiom* that transcends every doubt and which underlies every cognition a priori and to which all proofs must ultimately be reduced is the law of (non)–contradiction (*Metaphysics* 1005b8–34).

This way of securing knowledge was repeatedly criticized since the beginning of modernity; it was made risible. If thought already has a uniform, *simple* (i.e. not composed out of a multiplicity) object through intuition or sensation, then the law of contradiction does not have any function in securing or expanding knowledge. When thought is given a plant, for example, through intuition, then it can confirm through applying this axiom, that the plant is a plant. The fundamental principle of thought only serves to confirm what it in

<sup>1</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Prolog zum Kommentar der 2. Analytiken*, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> See Philoponus in: *Aristotelis physicorum libros tres priores commentaria*, pp. 9–20, esp. p. 14, line 4 ff. See also Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII, 5, 1071a19–24.

any case already knows and knows with greater certainty than everything it could ever discover through proofs based upon the law of contradiction.

The situation is completely different when the subject cannot be certain whether the color, motion, form, object of intuition, etc. he sees is a *simple thing* (*res simplex*). In this case, the axiom that nothing can simultaneously be both itself and not itself is not only an elementary foundation the constitution of an object may not infringe, it is also simultaneously the origin for investigating the criteria something must fulfil if it is to be recognized as a single object.

Aristotle restricts himself in his theory of science to an explication of the abstract criteria. For him, only those definitions which always apply to a state of affairs in and by itself and which do so in a primary sense constitute an objective unity (*Posterior Analytics* I, 4 & 5). These abstract criteria already have great heuristic value, since they demonstrate, for example, that the properties one always finds in something do not suffice for an adequate definition of the object. To take the standard Aristotelian example, the external angles of every triangle add up *four right angles*, i.e. 360 degrees. However, this sum applies to every straight plane figure and is actually *primary* in relation to these figures, i.e. it constitutes the objective unity of *straight plane figure*. It does not constitute the objective unity *triangle*, for which the internal angle sum of 180 degrees is constitutive.

However, it was above all in the tradition of the *communis mathematica scientia* [*koiné mathematiké epistémē*], which Plato first presented in the 7<sup>th</sup> book of the *Republic* (522a–534d) and which later developed in a differentiated form in late antiquity and in the Middle Ages within the framework of the Quadrivium of the *artes liberales*, that varied and concrete criteria were *generated* and analysed. These criteria specified the manner in which the most varied objective unities could be formed. In introducing this theory, Plato makes the important observation that every person makes (and must make) constant use of these criteria in every form of theoretical as well as practical activity. However, we can only speak of a scientific use of these criteria when they have been (reflectively) recognized in themselves as the conditions of every rational activity<sup>1</sup>.

In fact, through a reflective turn to the conditions of possibility of any random act, e.g. hearing a sound or a movement of the hand, one can see that one (more or less) unconsciously makes use of rational criteria in performing these acts and that their quality depends upon the way these criteria are applied. If one wants to hear a sound for even a short span of time, one has to try to hear this *single* sound. Thus, one has to pay attention to the fact that the sound is *identical* with itself, that it does not drift into *another* sound, but remains the *same* for a specific period and thus has a *beginning, middle, and end*, that it is a *whole composed of parts* (*belonging to it*), that it unfolds *continuously* and not *discretely*, etc. The situation is analogous in the case of a

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<sup>1</sup> See G. Radke, *Die Theorie der Zahl im Platonismus*.

hand movement, whether it is a definite, simple, or complex movement, when it began, ended, etc.

The fact that even the quality of perception already depends upon the application of these criteria demonstrates that their application is an active, controllable act. There is a difference between focusing on the pitch, the sweetness, or the constancy of a sound. Further, there can be no question that only someone who focuses on the constancy also *hears* the duration of a sound. Indeed, he hears this all the more reliably, the more knowledgeable he is about what he should focus on in order to note the constancy of a sound. From this perspective, even a simple perception is not a mere act of physiological reception, but an active concentration upon recognizable distinctions and their relationship to one another.

Of course, these forms of application of specific criteria of cognition are not only usually implicit, they are also distinct for each object. Constancy of pitch or of the volume of a sound are different forms of constancy than the constancy of a hand movement or of speed, etc. Beyond question, such distinctions between possible forms of constancy can only be reliably recognized if one is in a position to determine constancy as such correctly and to distinguish it, not only from clearly distinct concepts such as justice, but also from easily confused related concepts such as identity or similarity.

Plato has Socrates say that in order to go from an uncontrolled to a controlled use of epistemological criteria, one only has to learn to do *this small thing, distinguish between one, two, and three (Republic 522c)*. What is meant, as is clear from the context, are the epistemological criteria of possible unity. Someone who wants to recognize anything in any way must know in what way this thing is one thing.

One can rightly call it one of the most momentous discoveries of European intellectual history when Plato recognizes that when one does not merely ask when a sound, a movement, a tree forms a recognizable unit in itself, but asks what must be thought in general for something to be recognized as a unit, a comprehensive and infinitely extensible system of sciences can be disclosed reflectively. Plato termed it a *koiné mathematiké epistéme* [*communis mathematica scientia*], i.e. a knowledge gained not through a turn outward, but toward one's own cognitive acts that is not limited to specific disciplines, but includes everything that can be known.

If reflection upon any random cognitive act shows that we can only speak of knowledge where we recognize the object as one, as identical, as whole, etc., then the genuine task of epistemology is the investigation of these criteria which are applied in every cognitive act. Epistemology must seek out their significance and their – potential – connection. With this intention, Plato demonstrates in his dialogue *Parmenides* that the attempt to understand what must be thought under the concept of unity as such and in itself presupposes a highly complex exclusion of every form of multiplicity. In contrast, if one wants to think of unity as the unity of some thing, i.e. as the unity of a multiplicity, then this unity must in every case be thought of as something in which unity and multiplicity are each some one thing and are distinct from one another. However, they must together form a unit such that this unit is a

whole, i.e. a whole composed of parts. These parts are, as parts of the whole, identical to each other, although they differ from each other and are thus simultaneously non-identical, etc. Plato goes through these stages minutely, beginning with the simplest and most universal conditions of the concept of a specific unity, and thereby discovers that after just a few steps the conditions for the concept of number are *generated*. These are namely the conditions that must be thought in order that something can be thought as the concept, not of unity in general, but of these specific units. In this way, a theory of mathematics emerges or – in today's terminology – a meta-theory of mathematics. The first to arise is a theory of arithmetic, which is developed, not from identical, homogenous units, but from discrete, distinctly constituted units. If one analyses these units in relation to one another, rather than to their individual constitutive conditions, a theory of music, i.e. a theory of rational relationships between distinct units, emerges. If one observes these units as continuous wholes, rather than as discrete parts, a theory of geometry emerges. If one investigates the potential (determinable) relationships between these magnitudes to one another, one discovers the fundamental criteria of order of moving bodies, i.e., astronomy.

Through this progressive discovery of the conceptual differentiations necessary to explicitly understand what one has to distinguish in the cognition of definite units, a system of mathematical sciences is synthetically generated. This provides both confirmation and a potential means of critical verification of the process. Ancient theoreticians of mathematics regarded the fact that the product of this reflection demonstrated an intrinsically consistent order, the order of a mathematical science a sign of its scientificity. Many in modernity, e.g. Descartes and Husserl (in spite of a fundamentally different understanding of mathematics), return to this confirmation as an ideal. The soundness of this knowledge of synthetically created *products* can, moreover, be critically verified inasmuch as one can analytically examine each of these products down to its conceptual conditions. Thus, one can show of a spiral, that it must scientifically be understood as the product of a circle and a straight line. Circle and straight line can, in turn, be examined down to their arithmetic and *dialectical* conceptual presuppositions: for example, a circle presupposes the concept of a whole in which all parts stand in one and the same relationship, etc.

The significance of this system of science for effective history has, till today, been inadequately investigated. Its significance extends from the Platonists to late antiquity through Arabic philosophers to the Latin Middle Ages. Because the *common mathematical science* was not just a part of the system of *liberal arts*, but through it also served to ground technology, i.e. the *mechanical arts*, as well as ethics and aesthetics, this system was able to pervade and influence all cultural fields. It thus became the foundation for a school-system that formed a surprisingly elastic bridge between cultures that were, both regionally and epochally, very different from each other. Early modernity's devastating verdict on this school-system does not, in truth, refer to this system in its classical form, but to the transformation it underwent in the late Middle Ages. This transformation was accompanied by an uncontrolled systematization with ever more conceptual distinctions and was thus

one occasion for the break with the Aristotelianism of the Middle Ages. This transformation simultaneously gave rise to a fundamentally new concept of rationality, from whose perspective the entire philosophical tradition prior to modernity had to appear as an epoch of epistemological naiveté. This contribution sought to show from a few important aspects that there are important reasons for not making this perspective the decisive criterion in determining the *new* epoch's relation to the Middle Ages and antiquity.

### **Characteristic differences between the Platonic–Aristotelian and the Hellenistic conceptions of rationality**

The distinct conceptions of rationality developed and passed on by Plato and Aristotle, on the one hand, and by Hellenistic schools of philosophy, on the other, give rise to several concrete consequences. In this addendum, I will point out some important consequences and briefly elucidate the reasons for these differences.

Knowledge, in the Platonic–Aristotelian sense of the term, is a process of distinguishing between definite individual units. The conditions that determine the constitution of distinct forms of unity and of distinct relationships between these unities are, in relation to concrete objects or processes in nature or art, conditions of possibility. They determine the possible forms of arrangement that let the elements combine in such a way as to form an intrinsic whole. They are thus a precondition for what Plato and Aristotle term *function*. Someone who conceives of a plane figure in which all points on its circumference are equidistant from its centre can potentially apply this knowledge to something else, e.g. some material that can be brought into this arrangement. Through this application, the material, e.g. pliable wood, gains a definite potential such as the potential for rolling. This is the *function* of this material, which is now recognized and linguistically denoted in terms of this function. We no longer refer to the object as a piece of wood but as a wheel and we focus on those properties that make this wooden object a wheel. The following brief overview limits itself to the distinctions arising from the functional and representative epistemological perspectives.

#### **(i) *Thinking is abstract – thinking is concrete***

The primary consequence of interpreting representation as the genuine faculty by means of which human cognition discloses the world is that the contents of thought appear abstract. According to Stoic thinkers, external objects imprint themselves on the imagination through perception. Such an *impression on imagination* is not yet thought, it is simply an immediate possession. Only when this impression is represented clearly and distinctly (through the *clear evidence arising in the soul*<sup>1</sup>) does it first become the content of thought, more precisely: of *consciousness*<sup>2</sup>. Thought assents to clear

<sup>1</sup> See K. Hülser, *Die Fragmente zur Dialektik der Stoiker*, vol. 1, frag. 330, p. 342.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of consciousness was introduced by Christian Wolff as a philosophical term to designate *clear and distinct perceptions*, see Ch. Wolff, *Vernünfftige Gedanken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt* [1751] in: Ch. Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, (ed.) Ch. A. Corr, [reprint.] Hildesheim 2004, § 735. Although the Stoa does not use the concept *consciousness*, they grasp and

and distinct perceptions of its own accord; its assenting to perceptions whose evidence is as yet inadequate is the source of error. Perceptions represented through thinking's assent (*synkatáthesis*, *adsensio*) are thoughts, concepts (*ennoēmata*). These thoughts are not identical with the pure impression (*sc.* of the object as a whole), but that internal content of thought to which it assented on account of its evidence. Thought can operate on these contents according to its own laws (of association): it can compare, combine, or separate them. It can synthesize similar cases to form a *concept*, it can infer a smaller thing from a larger thing (for example, a dwarf from a man) or an original from a copy (the depicted object from its image), etc.<sup>1</sup> All these *concepts* are subjective *compositions* that apply to a multiplicity. They are general, abstract.

In contrast to this concept of thought, which is oriented toward *logical* conditions of representation, the Platonic–Aristotelian conception leads to a concept of thought as concrete. What is distinguishable and identical in an object is its *function* – the functional act, with respect to which all its (material) parts are arranged. A pair of scissors is something that can and does cut, an ear something that hears sound, i.e. the effect of a specifically modulated movement in specific media, etc. If one focuses on the way individual objects, e.g. specific organs, fulfil this function, then one widens one's concept of the organ of hearing with each new cognitive act. Thus, the organ of hearing can be made of this or that material, it can have this or that structure, etc. By differentiating between the *function* of an organ and its individual material *realization* (this is an act of *dihairesis*), one gains an ever more varied concept of the possibilities of such realization (these are acts of *synagogé* or *synthesis*). The concept becomes richer, not poorer, the more varied the objects to which it is applied.

**(ii) *Thinking does not have an intrinsic emotional and intentional aspect – thinking is itself emotive***

One of the most conspicuous consequences that results from the elevation of representation to the primary faculty that discloses the world is that thought, emotion, and will then appear as separate and independent psychological processes. This is especially evident, if we, like the Stoics, consider only clear and distinct perceptions (i.e. what is later termed consciousness) to be thought in a logical sense. One can have a clear and distinct awareness that one injures oneself by drinking too much wine or by enraging oneself at a misjudgement. However, this awareness has nothing to do with the question of whether the wine tastes good to one or whether one suffers intensely from the unjust setback. This is a question of emotion, whereas the question of whether one can resist the craving for wine or overcome feelings of injury appears to be a question of will. Desire and will are therefore held to be fundamentally different from thought. The older Stoic tradition explains their emergence as an overturning, as a relinquishment and alienation of reason itself. Reason

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explicitly describe what is meant in this concept (clear and distinct perceptions as the genuine conceptual forms of thought. See M. Frede, *Stoics and Sceptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions*.

<sup>1</sup> See K. Hülser, *Die Fragmente zur Dialektik der Stoiker*, frag. 279–281, pp. 292–295.

ceases to be reason and itself becomes an emotion. The middle Stoa refined this relationship through a supposed return to Plato's parts of the soul, which it takes to be faculties having their own individual origin<sup>1</sup>.

If one does not understand thought as a representation of something that is (allegedly) *naturally* given it, but rather as the act of discrimination itself that originally creates an object (that can be represented in the imagination or in consciousness), then thought is itself linked to emotion. Representation or consciousness of a sweet object is not itself sweet. In contrast, the perception of sweetness lies in tasting the sweet object and is therefore immediately either pleasant or unpleasant. One can enjoy the representation of a threat in images (or nowadays in a movie). In contrast, one only has the feeling of being threatened here and now when one (subjectively) sees oneself exposed to danger. This thought is itself linked to aversion, etc.

The differentiation the middle Stoa and many modern approaches effect by distinguishing between reason and emotion is attained through considering the different forms of cognition together with the feelings that belong to them respectively. The additional contribution emotion is thought to bring to reason (for example, when an actor is famous for acting not just with his head but with heart and soul) must be explained in terms of these different forms of cognition. Abstract general representation must be complemented by a concrete understanding of individual acts in which intrinsic tendencies are realized. Someone who contemplates the injustice suffered by Medea will himself get into a rage.

Since the sense of taste or hearing have other forms of pleasure or aversion than the feeling of being treated unfairly, inner, psychological conflicts can be explained in terms of how these different forms of pleasure or aversion work either with or against each other.

**(iii) *Thought gains its contents via intuition – thought has its own contents and provides intuitive meaning through these***

If thought is initially an act of representation it gains its contents from the outside and is itself empty. Its functions are limited to the clarification and reconstruction of the *given* and to processing it logically. As the Stoics have shown in detail, its functions are generalization (that something always appears this way in experience), comparison, contrast, etc. The act of thought is one that proceeds methodically according to rules.

The reflective discovery that thought is originally an act of discrimination leads to distinguishability becoming the basic criterion toward which thought orients itself. A thing is distinguishable when it can be understood as an identifiable unit by itself. The criteria of potential forms of unity are systematically generated in the *communis mathematica scientia*. The synthesization proceeds from the most universal concepts such as unity, plurality, totality, part, etc. to ever more complex forms of unity: these forms are increasingly more specific and therefore more knowable. The distinguishable forms of

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<sup>1</sup> See I. G. Kidd, *Posidonius on Emotions*, A. Schmitt, *Das Bewusste und das Unbewusste ...*, A. Schmitt, *Die Moderne und Platon*, pp. 286–293.

potential unity form the criteria for recognizing a theoretical arrangement of physical objects. Neither perceptible qualities nor what is common to several eyes determine an eye as such. Rather, one understands this when one examines its perceptible qualities from the perspective of the specific *function* they fulfil. The function is the criterion for recognizing that different appearances and structures realize one and the same potential. Only conceptual thought can understand the function.

**(iv) Thought's concepts must correspond to the definiteness of things – the measure of the definiteness of a thing is its conformity to conceptual criteria**

The reduction of thought to formal functions in philosophies of representation leads to a logification or conceptualization of the world. Although rarely noted, it is a necessary consequence of this approach and explains how Stoic thinkers came to regard the entire world as the expression of a *logos* that pervades it. A representation is correct if it corresponds to the external object; the representation must be measured against the object to determine if its contents and combinations are commensurate, if they are *verifiable*. The concept may only contain what has been abstracted from the things themselves. This presupposes that each thing is a (conceptually) determinate thing (an *omnimode determinatum*, a term Enlightenment philosophy applies to individuals). A thing, taken as the sum of its individual properties, always contains more than could ever be determined of it in abstract-general concepts<sup>1</sup>.

If, like the Stoic thinkers, we suppose that clear and distinct perceptions are true because they correspond to extant objects, then these objects are the reason for thought being true. This is a consequence of the Stoa's Anti-Platonism. Not table-ness but individual tables, not humanity but individual humans embody what is really a table or really a man. Stoic philosophers only assent to clear and distinct perceptions and only when these have been *scientifically* cognized, i.e. repeatedly cognized in the same spatio-temporal location. Further, this spatio-temporal location causally determines perceptions in every respect. Thus, the world as cognized in Stoic philosophers' perceptions of it is rational, i.e. causally determined through and through<sup>2</sup>.

Conversely, the Sceptics' uncertainty whether *cataleptic* (grasping), *clear and distinct* perceptions are faithful to reality leads them to doubt the rationality of the world itself. For Sextus Empiricus a science of poetry or music cannot exist, not merely because beauty in general can only be judged in terms of its subjective effect, but because the elements of such a science – in music: sounds, pitch, time, and rhythm – cannot be determined from our perception of them. Therefore, they do not exist at all (*sc.* as something definite rather than relative)<sup>3</sup>. Just as in the Stoa, the clarity and distinctiveness

<sup>1</sup> On the transformation of this idea into a post-Hegelian philosophical position, see now M. Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing*.

<sup>2</sup> On the affinity between this approach and the doctrinal positions held in the Enlightenment, e.g. Christian von Wolff, see A. Schmitt, *Einheit des Mannigfaltigen ...*.

<sup>3</sup> See now S. Büttner, *Antike Aesthetik*, pp. 142–147.

of our *grasping* perceptions gives rise to faith in a thoroughly rational world, so too in Skepticism, the inconsistency of our perceptions of the world becomes grounds for the inexplicability or irrationality of the world itself; Skepticism too endows the world with the logical habitus of our thought.

From the perspective of Platonic–Aristotelian epistemology, Skepticism is no less naïve than Stoic philosophy because it too does not critically reflect how we recognize the definite nature of a thing. Although every existent object is exactly what it is, this does not mean that it is a definite object. Every existing circle is not an exactly determined circle that demonstrates what a circle is. We orient ourselves according to the definite concept of a circle in determining whether a specific object – of water, chalk, or sand – is a circle and to what degree of exactness it is a circle.

**(v) *Only conscious acts are thought – consciousness is an epiphenomenon of thought***

If man recognizes the world through his representation of it, then the capacity to represent along with its unique spontaneity (in its commerce with the individual perceptions that are given it through sensation) appears to be a uniquely human activity. Man is only freely himself and determines himself in the activity of representation. From this perspective, all other psychical acts such as perception, experiencing pleasure or aversion, pursuit or flight have the status of *natural* acts. They are merely – mostly unconscious – *mechanical* processes in us which we cannot dispose over. The man who wants to determine himself (Stoa), or who does not want to be disturbed by influences that are not in his power (Epicureanism, Skepticism), must therefore free himself from these emotions and motivations. A life in accord with reason (i.e. with self-determined, distinct perceptions) is incommensurate with feelings and passions, even if they are measured, i.e. controlled by reason, a position the Stoics ascribe to Aristotle. Man attains his authentic self and best condition only through complete freedom from them<sup>1</sup>.

For Plato and Aristotle consciousness in the sense of representation of something *given* cannot be a consciousness of external objects. One can only represent something if it has already been recognized in some way. In every object, what is recognizable is that through which the object is the realization of a possibility – this applies to sensible objects as well as to intelligible objects. Possibility, however, can only be conceptually understood and not perceived. Consequently, what consciousness represents is the product of an antecedent cognitive act. A representation or consciousness of something red is only possible if perception has already distinguished something red. Similarly, only someone who has already recognized a threat can be conscious of danger. Consciousness can deal according to its rules of association with

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<sup>1</sup> The idea that man's self-determined morality can only be attained *through conditions that should be completely independent of nature and from its correspondence with our faculty of desire (as drive)* (see, the entire 2<sup>nd</sup> Part of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* A 101–118), has not only had an effect in much of modernity, but till today hinders an appropriate interpretation of the Aristotelian theory of catharsis. Many are convinced that catharsis can only mean a complete – physical or psychical – emancipation from feelings and passions.

the contents it has thus cognized, but it does not itself create these contents. Here, it is dependent and can only subsequently take a stance to these contents. Consciousness' contents are epiphenomena of other cognitive acts.

Since these cognitive acts which originally make consciousness possible can be either acts of perception or of conceptual knowledge, it is illogical to regard the products of these cognitive acts as *natural* in contrast to thought and to interpret the autonomy of the human as independence from the nature in him. Independence from what is *given* and from the emotion connected with it is not necessary. Instead, what is called for is a critical analysis of the cognitive acts that create the *given*.

**(vi) Only intuition and emotion are real – anything that can be recognized as *res* or a factual unity is real**

Despite excluding intuition and emotion from the *logos* of man, pre-logical *processes* gain especial significance for all three Hellenistic schools (particularly the Stoa). Since acts of *logos* (as representation) are acts of presentation and confirmation (of judgements), *reason* is dependent upon the *natural* faculties that precede it. They alone provide *reason* a link to reality. Since these immediate forms of experience are (ideally) as yet untransformed by thought, the *things in themselves* are still retained in them. If thought is to avoid losing itself in its own constructions, it must constantly return to perception, emotion, and intuition to check if its concepts measure up to reality. This gives rise to the (paradoxical) situation that the product of purely subjective forms of experience (*Erfahrung*, *empeiria*), forms that still have the character of mere *experiences* (*Erlebnis*, *pathos*, *pathema*), simultaneously encompass the objective reality of external objects (even if unconsciously and therefore not accessible to thought).

In a philosophy of discrimination, the methodological clarification of the conditions under which something is a definite fact in itself, a *res*, replaces this faith in the *reality* of the forms of experience that precede thought. Something is *real*, when it is a fact. Thought derives the criteria for the conditions of factual unity through reflection upon its cognitive acts, rather than through accepting supposedly unfalsified objective unities.

The brief hints in the last few sections about some important points of distinction between these two basic forms of European rationality clearly show that their consequences are not just epistemologically relevant. Thus, questions such as: is thought concrete or abstract, is it itself associated with forms of feeling and willing or are these independent faculties that work in concert with thought, impinge on almost all possible human cultural and scientific activities. Further, questions such as: does thought gain its contents from perception or does perception originally become a meaningful content through thought, should the mind's concepts be verified in terms of perception or should perception be judged in terms of conceptual criteria, also impinge on every possible scientific and cultural discipline. Finally, the questions: should the mind's concepts be derived from *well-defined* things or is the definiteness

of the concept the measure of the definiteness of things, are only conscious acts thought or is consciousness originally a product of cognitive acts, are also culturally relevant.

A critical survey of European intellectual history from this and related perspectives suggest a completely different picture than that found in most contemporary histories of philosophy, which view history as a progressive development. After the death of Plato and Aristotle, the philosophical schools of the Skeptics, the Stoics, and the Epicureans become dominant. Their views permeate almost all cultural discussions. They revert to the views of the Pre-Socratics and Sophists, views Plato and Aristotle and their followers had criticized and marginalized. After the rediscovery of the *esoteric* writings of Aristotle, a renaissance of Platonism and Aristotelianism slowly sets in and has a growing influence from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE onward. The Roman Empire, Christian Syria, and finally, even Arabic thinkers were receptive to this tradition, which was influenced above all by Neoplatonism. Arabic thinkers brought these traditions back to the Latin West, where they complemented the interpretations of Aristotle influenced by Boethius and Augustine.

In the late Middle Ages a new interpretation of Aristotle comes to the fore and leads, of its own accord, to positions congenial to Hellenistic philosophies. The intensive reception of these schools leads in early modernity to a diffusion of this *new* spirit in all cultural areas; the genuine forms of Platonic–Aristotelian rationality that had been dominant till the high Middle Ages in east and west are thereby marginalized.

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