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Essay 1

Episteme: Reevaluated and Defined

The Aristotelian theory of knowledge complies all of human thought into five categories: techne, phronesis, nous, sophia, and episteme. These five categories are anything but straightforward, having many different interpretations currently debated in our modern world, especially the meaning of episteme. Episteme, despite clear qualifiers found within the Nichochean Ethics and the Posterior Analytics, has suffered greatly from modern interpretations that have skewed its original meaning given to us by Aristotle. The concept is either understood as knowledge, or scientific knowledge, both of which over simply the concept, which stands apart from all knowledge, and therefore the field of epistemology, as well as theoretical scientific disciplines that lack a true footing in reality.

Let us first look to define episteme in the simplest of ways, which is also completely accurate to the way in which Aristotle has laid out its conditions. To do so we are led of course to the sixth book of Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, where his five virtues are brought up and is where our first candidate for episteme's definition will be found. Depending on a certain translation of Aristotle's Ethics, episteme might simply be translated as knowledge, and although this may be a convenient way to define the idea of episteme, it is far too simple given the precise examples given by Aristotle. The meaning of knowledge by itself can be read as the understanding of anything, or in more academic terms epistemology. Epistemology, with its vastness as the inquiry into

knowledge, can be the understanding of anything, including technical skills (identified as techne by Aristotle) such as carpentry, or of the hindsight to determine which actions shall lead to a morally correct outcome (identified as phronesis). However, episteme as described by Aristotle does not represent the understanding of all things, rather a very specific set of things. It is not of technical skills, because these skills are concerned with the creation of structures that are of man's design, not what is found within the natural state of the world, "All art is concerned with coming into being, i.e. with contriving and considering how something may come into being which is capable of either being or not being"[1]. As in carpenters, tailors, and architects are interested in the creation of bookshelves, clothing, and houses, things that will not be found naturally occurring within the world, and are thus brought about by man alone, an aspect that is completely absent within episteme. Nor does it deal with morality that concerns right and wrong, for episteme deals with that which can be reproduced or redemonstrated[2], and as Aristotle finds the same actions that create morally correct outcomes in one situation may intern create morally wrong outcomes in another[3]. However, these two caveats are not enough to define episteme, for an understanding of its process, from beginning to end, is required. Suppose for example that a man observes that during some rain storms he can hear loud clapping and bolts of light shoot across the sky, he then concludes that during some rainstorms a large man in the sky is using an anvil to straighten metal bars, which would then explain the loud noise and large sparks. This situation follows the above two requirements of episteme, it does not deal with the creation of unnatural bodies, thunder and lightning occur naturally within the world, and it also can be

[1] Aristotle, *Ethics* 6-4
[2] Aristotle, *Ethics* 6-3
[3] Aristotle, *Ethics* 6-5

demonstrated, this man could of course wait for another large storm and conclude it is not a one-off oddity. Yet, this hypothetical understanding can not be considered episteme, because it is wrong, or at least half wrong. Aristotle finds that episteme only occurs when one understands the premise of what he is trying to understand. Since the hypothetical man is ignorant of the fact that rapid change of heat and moisture cause thunderclaps and lightning strikes not through the banging of a giant anvil, he is unable to find a sound conclusion through the method of logical deduction shown in Aristotle's Posterior Analytics, wherein A must equal to B, B must equal to C, and C to A[4]. Detailing another requirement for episteme, that it can undergo, and is the product of inductive reasoning. Showing that episteme in with its exactness to its definition from the three rules discussed above, can not be considered epistemology, which professes to be of knowledge of everything with little to no segregation amongst the different types of knowledge.

From these three rules our initial definition of episteme as knowledge can be further increased and to be made more specific with the addition of the concept of science. Scientific knowledge is the most common translation of episteme found within our modern world, and for good reason, for the definition of scientific knowledge would include that which is both naturally occurring within the world, which can be demonstrated again and again, and follows from inductive reasoning. Let's for example apply geometry to the above-mentioned ideas: the perfection of a square with its weight distribution was not created by man but rather the shape exists from discovered mathematical formulas that exist outside of human creation, making it not a part of techne. It can also be redemonstrated by creating a shape with four equal sides, making

[4] Aristotle, *Posterior Analtics 2-11*

it not a part of phronesis, and it can also survive deductive reasoning, a=what shape has four equal sides, b=the addition of the four sides of a square is equal to one side multiplied by four, c=squares have four equal sides. These three rules can be applied to most forms of science and the results will in fact show that the particular scientific area of inquiry will prove itself to be under the virtue of episteme. However, thousands of years have gone by since the day of Aristotle, and with it has come much progress in the field of science, and now there are plenty of theoretical scientific fields that deal with theoretical abstractions that exist outside of this world. Take for example theoretical physics which deals with planes of existence that exist (or do not) outside of this world, having impossible qualities to them, such as not having friction. Or theoretical geometry that deals with shapes that come from dimensions that cannot be found in our world, and that we can not fully picture their shape with our own eyes. Although these two fields, and the many others like them, are scientific they can be considered under episteme. Despite the change in the scientific fields that occurred over the millennia that have passed after Aristotle's death, Aristotle still included another rule that keeps episteme grounded within the perceivable reality that is within the necessity of inductive reasoning. As Aristotle writes in his Posterior Analytics, in order for one to understand fully that which is sought to be proven, one must acknowledge the existence of that very same thing, "When we are aware of a fact we seek its reason, and though sometimes the fact and the reason dawn on us simultaneously, yet we cannot apprehend the reason a moment sooner than the fact; and clearly in just the same way we cannot apprehend a thing's definable form without apprehending that it exists, since while we are ignorant whether it exists we cannot know its essential nature."[5]. One can not prove

[5] Aristotle, *Posterior Analtics* 2-8

that a square has four equal sides, without understanding that squares exist, or one can not prove the reason behind a solar eclipse without perceiving and acknowledging the existence of solar eclipses. In order for one to truthfully engage in the deductive reasoning required of episteme, some aspect of its components (the A, the B, and the C) must be known prior, one can not inquire with complete blindness. Infact Aristotle finds that the premises (symbolized by the variable A), as well as the conclusion (symbolized by C), must be known prior to the inquiry, and the true reason for this deduction is to find the middle (symbolized by B), “Now when we ask whether a connexion is a fact, or whether a thing without qualification is, we are really asking whether the connexion or the thing has a 'middle'; and when we have ascertained either that the connexion is a fact or that the thing is-i.e. ascertained either the partial or the unqualified being of the thing-and are proceeding to ask the reason of the connexion or the nature of the thing, then we are asking what the 'middle' is,”[6]. That when searching for the answer to the premise, “what shape has four equal sides,” we must first theorize a conclustion, “squares have four equal sides,” which will then lead us to reason and find that “the addition of the sides of a square equals to the mulilication of one side by four”. Yet, as established theoretical science deals with things that do not occur in the natural world and are thus unknowable, meaning one cannot both hold the premise and the conclusion to find the middle. Therefore, fields of modern scientific evaluation that deal with theoretical concepts can not be classified under episteme.

Know that we have laid out every rule dealing with episteme we can give an accurate definition of its meaning. Episteme deals with the understanding of the natural, perceivable elements of the natural world. It does not include all knowledge, for it does

[6] Aristotle, *Posterior Analtics* 2-2

not inquire into the skills created by men (techne), nor does it deal with that which can not be redemonstrated (phronesis). It must also come from deduction, and aspects of this deduction, namely the premise, and conclusion, must be known and exist within the natural world, ruling out theoretical sciences. Therefore, episteme can not be considered epistemology, from its clear standout from all knowledge.

If we were to take the modern interpretations of episteme at face value, and not engage in a thorough analysis of the text, we would be misunderstanding Aristotle's core philosophical ideas. Even if we were to accept the almost complete scientific knowledge interpretation, we would be walking a very thin line, and misappropriating the idea could happen very easily. Proving that a thorough analysis of philosophical work is crucially important to understand the work of a philosopher.