

## The Consequences of Ideas

### Lesson 10: Aristotle

How do you distinguish between faith and knowledge?

#### I. Introduction

- a. Aristotle was the student of Plato in Athens, where he remained until Plato's death in 347. Over time he developed critical reasoning against the ideas of Plato and thus became Plato's **antithesis**.
- b. He rejected outright Plato's views on dualism. Aristotle attempted to formulate a more satisfactory and systematic view of the **unity** of physical and metaphysical reality. Plato taught dualism and Aristotle taught unity.
- c. Many agree that Greek thought reached its **climax** with Aristotle whose writings brought a new depth and profundity to the study of logic, psychology, natural history, physics, metaphysics and ethics.
- d. Philip II of Macedonia made Aristotle the tutor of his thirteen-year-old son, the future **Alexander the Great** for a period of three years.
- e. Thomas **Aquinas**, the premier theologian of the Roman Catholic tradition was a strong subscriber to the Aristotelian school and relied heavily on the ideas of Aristotle in composing his own theological works.

#### II. Aristotle (384 B.C. - 322 B.C.) VS Plato

- a. Aristotle opened the **Lyceum**, which became a rival to the Academy, emphasizing the unity behind biology and scientific research.
- b. Aristotle's basic method of approach was to make observations and to work **backwards** by means of rational reflection.
- c. He was primarily concerned with the nature of **substances**. By thinking critically about experience, he arrived at conclusions about what lies behind experience.
- d. In contrast with modern thinking which focuses on the subjective individual, and which fails to see any overall structure or purpose in the world, Aristotle was concerned with the discovery of **objective** truth and purpose.
- e. He differed from Plato in some significant ways. For example, Plato's Form of the Good seemed to Aristotle to be an **empty** metaphor.
- f. Neither did he share Plato's view of the transmigration of souls. To Aristotle the soul (*psyché*) "is in some sense the principle of all animal **life**." This is one of the shades of meaning in present-day theological dictionaries.
- g. He even took the view that every living thing had some kind of a soul (*psyché*). What distinguishes the human soul from all other kinds of souls is its **rational** capacity. Humanity is both a rational animal and a political animal.
- h. Aristotle also differed from Plato on the matter of how we know what we know (epistemology). Plato said we know "apriori" (before hand; all truth is within and is recalled). Aristotle said we know through sense **perception**.
- i. He theorized that the five senses produce an **image** on the brain (mind) and out of these images come ideas. His idea was that the mind has the ability to work with sensation to abstract and synthesize data.

#### III. Major Ideas of Aristotle

- a. Plato had his Theory of Ideas and Aristotle had his Theory of **Substances**. This theory states that anything that exists, exists as a substance and it is real. Every substance is comprised of two things: Matter; and Form.
- b. Both being and becoming are found in each individual substance. **Form** gives the substance its being and Matter gives it its potential of becoming. Form remains constant while Matter may change.
- c. For example, man is comprised of body and soul. The **body** is Form or being. The body will never be other than a human body. The soul is Matter with a potential of becoming. The soul is in the state of constant change.
- d. Aristotle's understanding of *potentiality* and *actuality* made a significant advance on previous Greek ideas about the **nature** of things.
- e. The distinction he made is between the substance (essence) of an object (atomic makeup) and its external perceivable **accidens**. Accidens are the attributes of an object like color, shape, texture, etc; which describe the object.
- f. For Aristotle it was impossible to have pure Matter with no accidens because pure Matter would be in a perpetual state of **becoming**. However, it is possible to have pure Form or pure being. God is pure being.
- g. One of the consequences of Aristotle's idea of the distinction between Form and Matter was that it was used by theologians in creating the formula for **Transubstantiation**. *Matt 26:26-28 Jesus took bread, and blessed it,*

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*and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. KJV*

- a. In this case, theologians reasoned that the **elements** of the Eucharist changed in Form into the literal Body and Blood of Christ. The accidents (bread and wine; the Matter) remain constant but the substance (atomic level) changed.
- h. Aristotle would have **rejected** this reasoning because he believed that the logical connection between the accidents and the substance of a thing always define an object. If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck it is a duck.
- i. Logically, he believed that for science to take place there must be certain **rules** that we follow in order to determine that conformity exists between the idea and its external reality.
- j. The first principle of knowing is the presence of logic in the knowing process. Logic is not an independent subject in science; rather it is the **necessary** instrument of all knowledge.
- k. Aristotle also taught that objective truth results when there is logical conformity between the idea and its external object. **Error** is when there is a lack of conformity between the idea and its external object.
- l. For example, A can not be A and non-A at the **same time** and in the same relationship. This would be Aristotle's argument against the theory of evolution, and the debate over when human life begins.

#### IV. Aristotle's View of God

- a. Aristotle has no concept of the Biblical God of providence; God is not active in the lives of his creation. In his view, God reigns but He does **not rule**.
- b. The idea of a unique **personal** Creator who is both the agent and goal of creation is lacking in Aristotle. Nevertheless, aspects of his thought are compatible with Christian thought, as Thomas Aquinas showed.
- c. Aristotle was a polytheist and thought that the gods were self-sufficient. He would have had no trouble accepting the notion of the God of the Bible being the **self-existent** One. *Ex 3:14 And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: KJV*
- d. His idea of God was that He was pure Form; being but not becoming; **changeless**. *Mal 3:6 For I am the LORD, I change not; KJV*
- e. Aristotle's views of potentiality, actuality and causation led him to his doctrine of the Prime, or **Unmoved, Mover**. He thought of God as the formal first cause of everything; and the mover of all things. Form moves potentiality.
- f. He reasoned that in order for something to change from a state of potentiality to a state of actuality there has to be an agent or agents of **change**. A tree has a potential to become lumber but it requires an agent to produce it.
- g. Nothing that we see or know of this world is its **own cause**. There has to be a cause or causes which set any given change in motion. This, Aristotle attributes to God/gods.
- h. Further, he thought that the mover of things is absolute Form; not a personal Being, but is eternal and must be by necessity and it moves things by **attraction**. This is distinctly parallel to the words of Jesus. *John 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: KJV*
- i. In terms of ethics, Aristotle believed that highest form of activity was contemplation. Although the wisdom literature of the Bible can praise the wise person, wisdom there is more than the **contemplative life**. *Ps 111:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever. KJV*

#### V. Application

- a. In the final analysis, Aristotle's views have much in common with the revelation of God in the Bible. His ideas of logic and the use of scientific reasoning are fitting tools for any Bible student.
- b. What Aristotle failed to grasp however, and what Aquinas recognized, is that Biblical faith is of a higher order than mere human reasoning and knowledge.
- c. Biblical faith is first, the fruit of the Holy Spirit and secondly, it is the product of continuous and disciplined study of the Word. *Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, KJV*
- d. As Biblical knowledge increases and spiritual transformation takes place, the depth of our faith is increased but, knowledge by itself is not sufficient to warrant the approbation of God. *James 2:19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. KJV*
- e. If true faith is evidenced by transformation, it is possible to distinguish between mere knowledge and Biblical faith by the degree of transformation we experience. Are you being transformed?
- f. In what ways are you being transformed?