

ARISTOTLE'S METAPHYSICS

BOOK A, CHAPTER 1

TRANSLATED BY G. SALMIERI

All men naturally desire to know. A sign is our love of the senses; for even apart from use, we love them because of themselves—vision most of all. For we choose sight above all the others not only so that we can act, but also when we're not intending to act. This is because, of all the senses, it is the one that gives us the most knowledge and reveals many differences. 980a21
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Now, animals have perception at birth by nature; but, in some of them, memory does not come about from it, whereas it does come about in others. Because of this, the latter animals are more intelligent and better learners than those that are not able to remember. (Those that are unable to hear voice are intelligent without learning {by instruction}—bees, for example, and any other such animal that there may be; those that have both memory and this sense do learn.) 980b21
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Whereas the other animals live by imaginings and memories but have little experience, mankind lives by art and reasoning as well. Experience comes about for men from memories; for many memories of the same object culminate in a single capacity for experience. 981a

And experience is quite like science and art, but science and art come about through experience for men; for “experience made art,” as Polus aptly put it, “but inexperience luck”. Art comes about when a single universal view about similar things comes about from many notions of experience. For, while it is the role of experience to have the view that this benefited Callias when afflicted with this illness, and Socrates too and many such particulars, it is the role of art to have the view that it benefited all such people, defined according to a single form when afflicted with this illness (e.g. phlegmatic or choleric people when burning with fever). 10

In fact, relative to acting, experience seems no different from art. On the contrary, the experienced succeed more than those without experience who have a doctrine. The cause is that, while experience is knowledge of the particulars, art is {knowledge} of the universals; and actions and occurrences are all about the particulars. For one doesn't heal man when doctoring (or else one does so incidentally); rather one heals Callias or Socrates or someone else spoken of in this way, who happens to be a man. So, if someone without experience has a doctrine and knows the universal, but is ignorant of the particular under it, he will often mistake the treatment; since treatment is particular. 15
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Nevertheless we think *knowing* and comprehending belong more to art than
to experience, and we suppose the artist to be wiser than the experienced person. (In 25
every case of being more knowing, wisdom is implied.) This is because the former
know the cause and the latter do not. For, while experienced people know the “that”,
they don’t know the “why”, whereas the others know the “why” and the cause.
That’s why we consider the master of each art more honorable and more knowing 30
and wiser than the handymen, since he knows the cause of the products, whereas
{the handymen} produce just as some of the inanimate things do, without knowing 981b
what they’re producing—in the way that fire burns. (Whereas the inanimate things
produce each of these things by nature, the handymen do so by habit.) We consider
the master of the art wiser, not in virtue of his action, but in virtue of having the 5
doctrine and knowing the causes. Also, in general, the ability to teach is an
indication of who knows and who does not. It’s because of this that we hold art to be
more scientific than experience; for artists are able to teach but the others are not. 10

Further, we hold that no perception is wisdom, although perception is in fact
the most authoritative knowledge of particulars. However, it doesn’t tell us the
“why” of anything—for example, it doesn’t tell us why fire is hot, but only that it’s
hot.

So, although, at first, the people who discovered any art besides the common
perceptions were marveled at not only because there was some use for the 15
discoveries but because they were wise and as different from the others, later when
more arts had been discovered and some were aimed at necessities and others at
recreation, the people who discovered the latter were always supposed to be wiser
than the ones who discovered the former, because their sciences were not aimed at 20
use. When all of these things had been established, those of the sciences that aim
neither at pleasure nor at necessities were discovered. This happened first in those
places in which people first had leisure; that’s why the mathematical arts were
established first in Egypt; for there the priestly class was allowed to be at leisure. 25

The difference between art and science and the other similar kinds has been
discussed in the *Ethics*, the purpose of bringing it up here is to establish the point
that everyone supposes that what’s called wisdom aims at the first causes and the
principles; so that, just as was said earlier, while the experienced person seems to be
wiser than the possessor of any perception whatever, the possessor of art seems to be 30
wiser than the possessor of experiences, the masters seem to be wiser than the
handyman, and the theoretical disciplines seem to be wiser than the productive. So
it’s clear, then, that wisdom is scientific knowledge of certain principles and causes. 982a