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A Criticism of Elder Olson's Poetic Method

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Socrates: Now call to mind that this is not what I asked you, to tell me one or two of the many holy acts but to tell the essential aspect, by which all holy acts are holy; for you said that all unholy acts were unholy and all holy ones holy by one aspect. Or don't you remember?

Formulation of the Method

In The Poetic Method of Aristotle, Elder Olson begins his interpretation of Aristotle's Poetics by quoting a passage from A. E. Taylor's Aristotle:

> No especial recognition . . . is given in Aristotle's own classification to the Philosophy of Art. Modern students of Aristotle have tried to fill in the omission by adding artistic creation to contemplation as a third fundamental form of mental activity, and thus making a threefold division of Philosophy into Theoretical, Practical, and Productive. The object of this is to find a place in the classification for Aristotle's famous Poetics and his Rhetoric. But the admission of the third division of Science has no warrant in the text of Aristotle, nor are the Poetics and Rhetoric, properly speaking, a contribution to Philosophy. They are intended as collections of practical rules for the composition of a pamphlet or a tragedy, not as a critical examination of the canons of literary taste.[2]

By revealing the Poetics to be a treatise of Aristotelian productive science, Elder Olson intends to refute most, if not all, of the above claims. Presumably, he thinks he can reveal this by showing the method, implicit in the composition, of the Poetics to be basically the same as that of productive science and of science in general. This is to say, by revealing the method of the Poetics to be a specific application of Aristotle's general scientific method: a causal elucidation of the nature of a subject and the demonstration of attributes which inhere in this subject primarily. If one sees that the Poetics is a specific application of Aristotle's general scientific method, the conclusion follows that the Poetics must be viewed as having

the same philosophical stature as Aristotle's theoretical and practical writings.

Elder Olson claims, and this is the primary point around which his interpretation turns, that the Poetics must be viewed in the light of the whole body of the Aristotelian philosophy, that the correct interpretation follows from seeing it in this way. Therefore, his procedure is to interpret passages from various works where Aristotle speaks of things allegedly necessary to an understanding of the Poetics, its method of composition and purpose for being written. These things, variously found in the text of Aristotle, are:

1. what knowledge, especially scientific knowledge, meant for Aristotle
2. what constitutes science
3. the general method and aim of science
4. the division of science into theoretical, practical, and productive
5. the "subject" of productive science
6. the method and aim of productive science

These considerations form the first part of his essay. Next, he considers the Poetics itself as a treatise of productive science. And last, he draws conclusions concerning the powers and limitations of Aristotle's poetic method for present - day writers and critics.

As Elder Olson relates it, for Aristotle there are three basic kinds of knowledge - knowledge of facts, knowledge of individuals, and knowledge of universals - which vary "according to the object of knowledge, the nature of what is known, the faculties involved, and the end of the knowledge."[3] Knowledge

of universals, however, is much more complicated than the other two kinds, for this knowledge enables one to have knowledge of a subject plus knowledge of attributes which inhere in the subject primarily (of necessity).[4]

Knowledge of facts is gained through the senses, and all animals, since all possess the sense of touch, are able to know some facts. Also, those animals, such as man, "with more senses have additional channels of information." But knowledge of facts, which is "provided by sensation," is by itself "instantial only" - "knowledge . . . that this particular flame is hot" (as Olson puts it).[5] So, at this level of knowledge an animal may know such things as red, hot, loud, etc., but these may be one time occurrences, if unremembered - that is, if the animal hasn't a faculty of memory or this faculty is insufficiently developed. The capacity for knowledge at this level might properly be termed sentience, and creatures fixed at this level called sentient creatures.[6]

Knowledge of individuals is gained through the memory. Some animals have the capacity to recall that something, say, is hot,

> and man, moreover, is capable not merely of supplementing present sensation by past (remembering) but also of so unifying memory that several memories of the same thing have a single effect; this capacity Aristotle calls empeiria, experience.

Where sentience is knowledge of facts, "experience is knowledge of individuals": "That flame generally is hot" (as Olson puts it).[7] Individuals are made up of repeatedly remembered and associated (unified) facts. And animals fixed at this level of knowledge might properly be called creatures of experience: They know enough to come in out of the rain, though they don't know what rain is.[8]

Knowledge of universals is gained through the intuitive faculty. This is knowledge "of the cause of the fact" - "why flame is hot" (as Olson puts it). Science, part of it, is knowledge of universals and their causes. This part of science Olson calls "induction," for it proceeds from knowledge of facts to knowledge of individuals to the intuitive perception of the common causes of individuals which fall under a single universal. This part of science proceeds, then, through induction to a causal definition of various individuals called by the same name ("falling under a single universal"). This definition, in turn, is the first principle of the science of that universal, but the formulation of this principle is only part of this science, since

> scientific knowledge is not constituted simply by knowledge of universal and cause. Sensation, which gives particular information, is not scientific, but neither is intuition; if reference of individual to universal were all, intuition would be scientific knowledge, induction would be the solitary scientific process, and science would consist of scientific principles only. We moderns tend to classify the sciences as inductive or deductive; Aristotle thought that all sciences are both, in the sense that principles achieved through induction are utilized to demonstrate, through causal reasoning, the inherence of attributes in a subject.

Thus, any science is both knowledge of a universal and its cause, achieved through induction and intuition, and "knowledge of (its) cause(s) as appropriate to . . . the inherence of attribute in subject," achieved through deduction (demonstration or proof).[9]

Sciences will differ according as inherent attributes, subjects, and causes differ, and different "sciences must necessarily differ in their principles": the causal definition of

the universal. But the method of different sciences, in virtue of their being science, will in general be the same, since science consists of

> principles intuitively derived from experience of particulars, and all will be concerned with proof, via cause, of the inherence of attributes in a subject . . .

In specific cases, however, methods will differ - again: "according as subjects differ, attributes and proofs of their inherence will differ . . . "[10]

Having established the nature of science in its inductive - deductive method and the purpose of science in its end, knowledge both of what something is and of why it is what it is, Olson next claims that "Aristotle divides the sciences into three groups, the theoretical, the practical, and the productive, or 'poetic,' sciences."[11] For the most part these groups are distinguished by their ends.[12] The end of theoretical science is knowledge; of practical science, action; and of productive science, "the product to be produced." Also, in his works Aristotle

> makes many correlative distinctions, such as the numerous ones between "knowing," "doing," and "making". . . [13]

Particular sciences under the heading of theoretical are metaphysics, mathematics, and physics. And those under the heading of practical are ethics and politics, while those under the heading of productive "are the arts, whether useful or fine . . ." These distinctions made, the next consideration is what the scope and structure of productive science must be.

Olson begins this consideration by asking, "In the first place, is scientific knowledge of poetry possible?" He replies,

> Not . . . if it is a matter of the accidental or the incidental. There is no science of the accidental for Aristotle . . . hence, to ask whether a science is possible is to ask whether some subject can be found in which attributes inhere, and that not accidentally.[14]

Through some rather involved reasoning, Olson concludes that "poetic science cannot center in the artist" or in the activity of production (the making of the product), so "we are left with the product itself as a possible subject." The product, then, determines the scope of productive science. Also, it determines the structure (method), since "all art is concerned with coming into being" (making), where

> a form in the mind of the artist is imposed upon his medium to produce the artistic composite . . .[15]

of form and matter. Olson illustrates this by citing as an example a sculptor who imposes a human form in his mind upon marble to create a statue of a human. So, in creating, the artist must first reason "from the form to be produced to the first thing which can be produced"; then, he must make the product according to this reasoning, by starting from the first thing and proceeding to the form. Only the reasoning part, however, is "in a sense scientific knowledge of the productive kind." And since an artist wants to make not only productions but "productions excellent of their kind . . . such reasoning will have to include not merely the 'nature' of the thing intended but its 'excellence' as well."[16]

In the conclusion to the first part of his essay, Olson gives a summary of the scope of any productive science: It

> is the rational part of production centering in, and indeed based upon, the nature of the product; and the structure of such science may be described as hypothetical

> regressive reasoning, taking for its starting point, or principle, the artistic whole which is to be produced and proceeding through the various parts of the various kinds to be assembled . . . Since the reasoning is based upon a definition of a certain whole as its principle and since that definition must be arrived at in some fashion, any productive science must consist of two main parts: inductive reasoning toward its principle, and deductive reasoning from its principle . . .

He next states that "the Poetics clearly follows this general pattern" (is a treatise of Aristotle's productive science):

> Chapters i - v are concerned with establishing the definition of tragedy (induction), which is given in chapter vi; chapters vi - xxii resolve tragedy into its proper parts (deduction) . . .

Moreover, Olson thinks the conclusion necessarily follows that

> the definition on which everything centers is no mere statement of the meaning of a term or name, as we ordinarily think of definition nowadays; it is a statement of the nature of a whole produced by a certain art; and it is introduced, not merely to clarify meanings a little but much more importantly, to serve as the principle of the art and hence as the basis of all reasoning.[17, 18]

Criticism

If the point of Olson's interpretation were only to refute the claims of A. E. Taylor, given the cogency of his account of Aristotle's method, this reader thinks that the point has been achieved. With good assurance of being correct, one could claim that Aristotle's intention in writing the Poetics was to give a rational account of the art of writing tragedy, not merely to provide a book of practical rules, and that this account is comparable in philosophical stature, in virtue of common method and intention, to Aristotle's theoretical and practical writings. However, Olson claims much more; refutation is merely the springboard. Not only does he claim to have interpreted correctly what Aristotle said, but also he claims, both implicitly and explicitly in his presentation, that what Aristotle said is correct, or true. Olson is a modern day proponent of Aristotle's method and doctrine. This means, I take it, that he would proceed in much the same way as Aristotle in answering the question, What is tragedy? - or the question, a corollary determination, whether an individual play - let us say, The Father, by August Strindberg - is a tragedy. For myself at least, this procedure and the doctrine upon which it is based present three kinds of difficulties, those concerning

1. the coherence of Olson's account of the general inductive - deductive method of science, as presented
2. the relation of the purported inductive - deductive

method of the Poetics to the general method of science, as presented

3. the conclusions believed to follow from the presentation.

Problems of the sort in two and three stem from those in one.[19]

To begin, though Olson fails to mention this, kinds of knowledge are differentiated in Aristotle according to their causes - material, efficient, formal, and final - as follows:[20]

Purpose?	Material	Efficient	Formal	Final
1. K. of facts	facts	senses	sensations	movement?
2. K. of individuals	individuals	memory	perceptions?	action?
3. K. of universals	universals	intuition	conceptions?	theory?
Knowledge	Object of K.	Faculty	Nature of what is known	End

But this table is misleading because what is being characterized is dynamic in man, rather than static. Though animals, including individual men, get stuck at any one of these levels - one, two, or three - some men have the capacity to function on all three levels. This is to say that some men have the potential to acquire knowledge at one level and move on to the next, until they have acquired universal knowledge and the truths derivable from the knowledge of universals. Since the means of acquiring knowledge and of moving from one level to the next are certain faculties, this account of how men acquire knowledge is psychological. Also, in the dynamic account, knowledge of individuals may be plugged in as the material cause of knowledge of universals; likewise knowledge of facts may be plugged in as the material cause of knowledge of individuals. This means that knowledge of universals is acquired through knowledge of individuals, "in some fashion," this knowledge reflecting (corresponding to) the relation of individual to universal in reality; likewise for knowledge of

individuals acquired through knowledge of facts, this knowledge reflects the relation of fact to individual in reality. This is to say that knowledge of facts, individuals, and universals comes from sense-experience, is effected through certain faculties, and contains certain ends.

The trouble with the above account, whether one sees the account as static or dynamic, is that a clear account of causes is not given. How does one acquire knowledge of causes? Are they induced through experience, deduced in a theory, or intuited? If induced, then there must be four primary kinds of knowledge: of facts, individuals, universals, and causes. But we are told that scientific knowledge is knowledge of the cause of the fact. Therefore, having scientific knowledge of causes - where causes have a status comparable to that of facts, individuals, and universals - would entail giving the causes of the cause, but this would lead to an infinite regress. Possibly, one may get around this by saying that knowledge of universals is knowledge of the cause of the fact, as above, but meaning by this that causes are "seen" at the level of intuition only, and thereby preserving the three primary kinds of knowledge. But even saying this, the status of causes remains mysterious. Moreover, if causality makes its appearance only at the intuitive level, knowledge of facts will be a fact and knowledge of individuals an individual, since these are respectively distinguished as kinds of knowledge through their causes. At this point, it becomes extremely difficult to distinguish knowledge of universals from knowledge of facts or knowledge of individuals. The concepts get confused.

In the foregoing I have intended to point out that the psychological account of how we acquire knowledge breaks down when it comes to accounting for knowledge of universals. As related, the way we acquire knowledge is a kind of natural process, natural in virtue of our being men rather than a lower form of animal: sensations give rise to perceptions which give rise to intuitions (conceptions?). But, the way it is told, the passage from sensation to perception (or experience or knowledge of individuals) takes place as a matter of course; whereas that from perception to intuition does not - a question must be asked, Why? - why not? Further, this whole account of how we acquire knowledge becomes confused when Olson states that a man may "have theory without experience" or experience without theory.

The reason for his saying this is obvious enough. Often, when a man is asked to give an account of how he did something, how he wrote a tragedy for instance, he is unable to do so; on the other hand, another man may be able to account for why a play is a tragedy, but be unable to write a tragedy.[21] The first man would be a man of experience without theory; the second, a man of science without experience. But, to recognize that men differ in these respects is one thing; to account for these differences through the presentation of a psychological account of how we acquire knowledge quite another - especially if the coherence of such an account depends upon such differences not occurring. Olson contradicts himself when he tries to account for differences between men, while, at the same time, he tries to be consistent in his account of how men acquire knowledge:

> art and science are, strictly speaking, produced out of experience, rather than identical with it. For experience is knowledge of individuals, while art and science are knowledge of universals, and although in reference to action and production . . . men of experience alone succeed better than those who have theory without experience, experience provides knowledge of the fact, but not of the cause of the fact, whereas artistic and scientific knowledge is of the cause. (Italics mine)[22]

In one breath Olson says that theory (art and science) is produced out of experience; in the next he says that a man may have theory without experience. This contradiction is both a manifestation of a confusion which persists throughout Olson's interpretation and an index to seeing the interpretation aright.[23] For instance, it will not do to tag the process from sensation to perception to intuition, "induction," when part of the process may drop out: A man may "have theory without experience." Since "to have experience" means that one thinks he is able to do certain things (write tragedies for instance), to say that "science (is) . . . produced out of experience" should mean that the scientist is able to do these same things and more, to tell why he is able to do them. The same goes for the artist: He doesn't make mistakes. However, this is not the case, either as Olson relates it or as one's experience of scientists and artists would indicate. Why not? If Aristotelian science is not based upon experience, upon what is it based?

Nor, as another instance, will it do to base the rationale of productive science upon what takes place in the mind of the artist in the process of production, since this begs the question whether the artist is a man of experience without theory (and he

shouldn't be) or a man of science with experience (who happens also to be possessed of experience). One does not say, therefore, that the rationale of productive science is the same as what takes place (the reasoning) in the mind of the artist during creation (can one see, or experience, what is taking place there?); but, given this rationale, one says that certain things, conscious or unconscious, must take place in the mind of the artist if he is to produce works of art. Again, upon what is productive science based, if not upon experience?

The question is: given that men are basically the same, in virtue of possessing the same faculties and having access to the same facts, individuals, and universals, how is it that they come to differ? - some men, so the account goes, being

1. men of experience without theory
2. others, men of experience with theory
3. still others, men of science without experience
4. and yet others, men neither of science nor experience

One may say, "Well some men have bad memories, or they count some things to be facts which aren't facts at all, or their intuitions are mistaken; and this accounts for the differences among men." But then, what sense is there in giving a psychological account of how we acquire knowledge, since something more must be added to ensure that one is indeed acquiring knowledge and not the illusion of knowledge.

The way Olson relates it, men acquire knowledge more or less as a matter of course, naturally, in virtue of being men rather than some lower form of animal; and he dubs this natural process "induction." The next step is to base the general

inductive method of science, the induction of universals from particulars, upon what happens naturally anyway. But by reminding oneself of the differences among men, one sees that, rather than being psychological, this account is conceptual. In the account the scientific method is already at work. Which is to say that Olson contradicts himself because of conceptual confusion; science arises not out of experience, as he relates it, for a man of experience seemingly would feel no need of science, but for other reasons and in virtue of a method.

What are the reasons for, and method of, science? Science, Olson tells us, is concerned, not with "the accidental or the incidental," but

> . . . with what happens always or for the most part, with what is necessary or probable; hence, to ask whether a science is possible is to ask whether some subject can be found in which attributes inhere, and that not accidentally.[24]

He goes on to say that such a subject, where productive science is concerned, is "the product to be produced."[25] But how does this "fact" about science relate to the psychological (in reality, conceptual) account of how we acquire knowledge? The way I see it is this: Men of experience, possessed of knowledge of individuals, are able to do certain things, but they may make mistakes because they place too much emphasis on the wrong things. For instance, a man of experience who knows what tragedy is in terms of its individuality will be able to write a tragedy, perhaps a good one, but he will also be capable of writing a bad tragedy or what he thinks will be a tragedy which, when written, turns out to be no tragedy at all. A man of experience alone is unable to distinguish attributes necessary to, from those

incidental to, a play's being a tragedy. Science, through its method, seeks to ensure that the man of experience will not make such mistakes. In this respect, science seeks to augment experience; it is involved in a quest for certainty; and it proceeds by distinguishing the necessary in experience from the accidental.[26]

The conclusion follows that science, or the quest for scientific knowledge (certainty), arose for this reason: Men began to doubt that experience provided an adequate basis for a man's saying that he knows what something is and for his being correct in saying this. The question is, Why did men begin so to doubt experience?[27]

So experience, so far from being a part of science, in the sense that science is produced out of it through some kind of psychological inductive process, is opposed to science. This is another way of saying that causes are not induced; if they were, the man of experience would have universal knowledge; but the man of science, concerned with the causes of things, is in opposition (so far as claims to knowledge go) to the man of experience, whose concern is doing (making) things. Crucial, then, to an understanding of how scientists distinguish necessary from accidental attributes - supposing this can be done - is an understanding of the method by which they seek to do this; and crucial to an understanding of this method is a grasp both of the question the scientist asks, the reason for his asking it, and of the social context in which it is asked.

As Olson relates it, the scientific method consists in determining the causes of what a thing is; and this method is preceded

by asking, "Why is this thing what it is?" Where an elucidation of the nature of tragedy is the concern, the correlative question and method of productive science are to ask "Why is this tragedy a tragedy?" and to ascertain the causes of tragedy. Giving the causes of tragedy, it is claimed, definitively answers the question, and from this definition, or principle, one may demonstrate by reasoning from the causes the adherence of necessary attributes in tragedy. From this it is clear that when Olson says "subject" or "product," in this instance, he means to say "tragedy"; tragedy, he believes, is a proper subject of productive science. This is to say that tragedy is "found" by the scientist to be a subject of the required sort for scientific interest - a "whole," that is, possessed of necessary attributes causally related, but distinct from individual tragedies. These partake of the tragic nature, essentially, and so are distinguished as tragedy, but each is possessed also of accidental attributes which make it the individual tragedy that it is.

Indeed, when one inspects the "inductive" part of the Poetics, one sees that it consists of Aristotle's differentiating tragedy from epic and comedy through the method of the four causes. Here there is no extensive comparison and contrast of individual tragedies, with the view of determining common cause, that would warrant the phrase, "inducing from particulars"; rather, such an extensive procedure, which might be comparable to modern science's inductive method, is totally neglected. We are given instead a technical procedure characterized by "the answers we give to the question, Why is this tragedy, a tragedy?" - "because it imitates a certain object, in a certain manner, through a

certain medium"[28] - because, that is, it has a certain formal, a certain efficient, and a certain material cause. These three causes, we are told, are enough to differentiate tragedy from epic and comedy, but tragedy is distinguished as a form of art by its final cause which has historically undergone a series of progressive changes. So, having distinguished tragedy from other forms of art by its serious action, dramatic manner, and poetic medium, Aristotle then gives an account of the successive final causes through which tragedy has gone, these being: to give pleasure, to instruct morally, and to be written as an end in itself. These Olson calls, respectively, the hedonistic, ethical, and artistic final causes of tragedy. Having distinguished tragedy from other forms of art and as a form of art itself, Aristotle then collects the four causes in the form of a definition of tragedy.

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From what has been said, the following elucidations may be made:

1. The scientific method is already at work in Olson's psychological account of how we acquire knowledge. This is to say that the account is conceptual, rather than psychological. To say, by giving the four causes of knowledge of facts, that one has knowledge of facts is to define, through the method of the four causes, what is to count as a fact. A fact is something in the external world (material cause), grasped by the senses (efficient cause) in the form of a sensation (formal cause), and effecting certain movements (final cause) of a physical

nature. The same goes for individuals and universals. An individual is something in the external world, grasped by the memory in the form of a perception, and effecting certain activities of a physical - intellectual nature; whereas, a universal is something in the external world, grasped by intuition in the form of a conception, and effecting certain reasonings (mental activities) of a theoretical nature. Thus, to have knowledge of facts, individuals, and universals is to define them in the same way that tragedy is defined: through the method of the four causes. Clearly, to say that knowledge of universals is knowledge of the cause of the fact is not only confusing, but redundant. One should say: Knowledge of the universal, hotness, which is clearly a fact as facts are defined, is knowledge of the causes of hotness. However, from the above it is not clear, as yet, upon what considerations this defining activity is based.

2. It will not do to say that sensation provides knowledge of facts, since creatures at the sentient level have no knowledge of the causes of facts. Scientists have knowledge of causes. One must say that sensations correspond to facts, but only the scientist knows what the fact is; likewise, for men of experience, perceptions correspond to individuals, but only the scientist knows what the individual is.

3. The point of saying that men of experience have knowledge of individuals is to provide a foil for men of science who seek knowledge of universals. The point is the same as that of the following dialogue:

> Scientist: Tell me, tragedian, What is tragedy? Tell me this, if you will, that I might know when I see a play whether it is a tragedy or not.

> Tragedian: Why gladly, man of science, what you ask of me is easy. The Agamemnon, King Lear, and, let us say, The Oedipus of Seneca are all tragedies.

When asked what something is, the man of experience points to individuals; that is what it means to say that he has knowledge of individuals.

4. The conceptual difference (so far as claims to knowledge go) between the man of experience and the man of science may be seen if the dialogue is continued:

> Scientist: But this is not what I meant in asking you what tragedy is: to give me a list of plays which, in your opinion, are tragedies. Rather, I want you to tell me what the essential form of tragedy is which makes all tragic plays tragic. Do you agree, or not, that all tragic plays, the ones you mentioned included, if they are tragedies, are tragic in virtue of a common form.
>
> Tragedian: I see. Yes, I agree that it must be so.
>
> Scientist: Well, then, tell me what precisely, this ideal is, so that, with my eye on it, and using it as a standard, I can say that any play written by you or anybody else is tragic if it resembles this ideal, or, if it does not, can deny that it is tragic.

It does not occur to the man of experience that he should first discover (find, define) the common form of all tragic plays in order to ensure that, when he says some individual play is a tragedy, he will be correct in saying this. Yet, when the scientist points this out to him, he agrees - it occurs to him that this must be the case - and he may even say, "Now I see that all the plays which I have heretofore called 'tragedies' must have a common form." Probably, at this time, it also occurs to him that he must already know what the common form is. Why? - because he has been speaking a language for some time prior to these occurrences.

5. Knowing what the common form of tragedy is cannot be based on knowing that an individual play, or a collection of plays, is a tragedy. It is the other way around. This is to say that the form which the enquiry takes throws into doubt the correctness (truth) of all previous assertions regarding individuals. Therefore, the correctness of the assertion, "all the plays which I have heretofore called 'tragedies' have a common form," cannot be based on the correctness of the assertion, "This play, or this collection of plays, is a tragedy". Science cannot be based upon experience since, if it were, it would be subject to the same doubt (whatever the nature of this doubt might be) that experience is subject to.

6. Between the man of experience and the man of science exists an unbridgeable gap, characterized by doubt, a quest for certainty, and a questioning attitude. One may say of the former that his pointing to individual plays and calling them "tragedies" indicates that he recognizes what the common form is, though he hasn't had occasion to doubt and want to know what this common form is, and that, given such an occasion and the consequent articulation (envisioning) of the form, he (as a man of science) will be able to say (tell) which of his previous assertions were correct. While of the latter, the scientist or man in doubt, one may say . . . ?

7. Supposedly, the correct procedure, as I understand it, is this: One first defines what tragedy is, notices that a play conforms to or closely resembles this definition, and then makes the correct assertion, "This play is a tragedy." Also, from the definition one may deduce necessary attributes. Still, it is

difficult to see on what such a definition will be based, if not on a collection of plays known (recognized) to be tragedies.

8. The scientist must make a distinction between knowing and recognizing a form (essence, necessary qualities or features). If his activity is to make sense, this distinction must be meaningful: Recognition of a form means that it is seen but not understood, while knowledge of a form means that it is both seen and understood. Further, to say that a form is seen but not understood is to say that it is understandable; to say that a form is both seen and understood is to say that it is intelligible. Granted these distinctions, one may say of the man of experience that he confuses the feeling that a form is understandable with an understanding of it. He recognizes the common forms of things - his usage of the same word to refer to many things is evidence of this - but, when asked to do so, he is unable to pick out what the common form is. He lacks a method of doing this. Rather, when asked, "What is tragedy?", the man of experience points to an individual. His pointing to an individual in answer to this question indicates that he has confused the recognition of a form with an understanding of it.

9. The method of the four causes is employed by the scientist to pick out the common forms of things. It is clear that this method is based upon an assumption about how language gets its meaning, rather than upon some psychological inductive process. This assumption is that the meaning of a word is the object to which the word refers; and, where many things (individuals) are called by the same name (general word), they are called so in virtue of a common form to which the name refers.

When one wants to pick out the common form, however, one needs a method to do this - a method of distinguishing the common form both from attributes peculiar to the individuals and from other forms. Unless the common form of many things called by the same name is distinguished, one may make mistakes either in referring to individuals or in trying to make, do, or know individual things. With reference to tragedy, then, the need of a method of definition arises when one recognizes that "tragedy" is a word, as opposed to mere babble, but is unable to pick out that to which the word "tragedy" refers - the assumption being that the meaning of a word is the object to which the word refers.

10. It is clear that the method of the four causes, as Olson describes it in relation to tragedy, is based in part, not upon an induction from particulars, but upon the recognition of "tragedy" as a word.[29] This recognition is enough to ensure that tragedy is a subject, or product, of the desired sort for scientific interest, i. e. a subject "in which attributes inhere, and that not accidentally." One may mistakenly use this word - say that a particular play is a tragedy, where it is not - but usage of the word, whether correct or mistaken, is irrelevant to the method of definition. Rather, since "tragedy" is recognizably a word, there must be (or have been) correct usages of the word - plays of which it is correct to say that they are tragedies - and one of the purposes of the method is to obviate mistaken usages by showing which will be correct. The method of definition does not rest then on a collection of (one or many) plays <u>known</u> to be tragedies, but the defining activity presupposes that such a collection might be known.

11. The method of definition must rest on a collection of plays recognized to be tragedies, but does not preclude the possibility that members of the collection might not belong to it. If this is not the case, the defining activity is absurd. As described, this method consists in causally distinguishing tragedy from epic and comedy, and as a form of art itself.

12. The question persists: Upon what considerations is this causal determination based? And further, what makes it definitive? And furthermore, why not call it the method of the four Whys, Reasons, Answers, or Responses we give to the question, "Why is this thing the thing that it is, if it is this thing?"

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This "poetic method," mysterious as it is, Olson claims to be the true one so far as "mimetic" art is concerned. And the method becomes even more mysterious when he claims:

> Aristotle was not concerned with everything which we should call poetry, and also he was concerned with some things that we should no longer call poetry. It will not do even to say that he was concerned with tragedy, epic, or comedy, for the significance of these terms has altered since his day. He thought . . . of tragedy as poetry similar to the Oedipus of Sophocles, not to the Oedipus of Seneca or The White Devil.[30]

When the method is the true one, but the definition "on which everything centers" changes, this reader wonders at the intelligibility of what is being said.

If Aristotle's method only enabled him to define Greek tragedy, not the tragedy of Senaca, how will his definition help me to see whether any particular play (let us say, The Father)

is a tragedy? Am I to employ the method only, and ignore the definition? But the employment of the method is contingent upon my recognizing not only a collection of plays as tragedies - if asked, I would be inclined to say, "Yes, that play is a tragedy" - but also a collection of plays as comedies, etc. The problem is: What if I were inclined to say that the Oedipus of Seneca, the Agamemnon, and say King Lear are all tragedies? How am I to restrict my recognition to collections of plays, for each of which the significance of the corresponding term is the same? Of course, the definition tells me this.

The question is: Is to say that there are such things as forms of art to say that all art works called by the same name have the same form? Olson wants to say "yes" and "no" to this question. He answers "no," since he says that the Oedipus of Seneca and the Oedipus of Sophocles are both called "tragedies," but are different forms of tragedy. He answers "yes," since he claims that,

> as new forms of mimetic art emerge, the theory can be extended to cover them as well - provided that the extension is by one who has sufficient knowledge of and skill in Aristotle's method.[31]

So, tragedy is a form of art, but the significance of "tragedy" may change; that is, tragedy may "emerge" as a new form of art (in different periods or cultures, I suppose, since Olson contrasts the tragedy of Seneca with that of Sophocles). But, this description of the state of affairs leads inevitably to the question: How is one to distinguish a form of art from specific works of art?

The very basis of the method is the assumption that all things called by the same name have something in common (be it nature, form, common attributes or features) in virtue of which they are so called. When this correspondence of name and significance is undermined, the subject matter of productive science is threatened with disappearance. For instance, one may consider both the Agamemnon of Aeschylus and the Oedipus of Sophocles to be tragedies, and yet question whether they have a common form. (As presented, Aristotle would not have raised this question. He would have said, "If they are called 'tragedy,' then they must have a common form.") Such questioning leads inevitably to the consideration that Aristotle, rather than defining tragedy or, for that matter, Greek tragedy, may have only defined the tragic nature of a specific work (let us say, the Oedipus of Sophocles). This "definition" was seen by Aristotle to be the norm or paradigm of good tragedy, or, as we may see it, of Greek tragedy alone.

In conclusion, the picture I get here of Aristotle is that of a man pointing - at something?

Summary

Olson's account of a true poetic method is incoherent for the following reasons.

1. His psychological account of how men acquire knowledge is marred by an equivocal, if not contradictory, usage of the word "knowledge." Olson says that all sentient creatures possess knowledge of at least some facts, and that men of experience possess knowledge of individuals. By definition, however, the scientist is the only person who might possess knowledge, since he is concerned with the causes of things. According to Olson himself, "to possess knowledge of a thing" means to articulate the four causes of a thing.

2. The suggestion that the man of experience already knows, prior to the intuition of causes, what an individual is leads one to think that the inductive method of science is a merely routine procedure of gathering together individuals already known through sense-experience, and of intuiting the four causes (the form which these individuals have in common) from this collection of individuals. However, if such a procedure does characterize the inductive part of science, there is no evidence of the procedure in what Olson claims to be the inductive part of the Poetics. Of course, one might claim that Aristotle merely failed to mention, an oversight on his part, the collection of plays from which he drew his definitions of tragedy, comedy, and epic. In any event,

since the procedure presupposes that one already knows what the individuals are - that The Father is a tragedy, that The Agamemnon is a tragedy, etc. - it is difficult to see how the procedure and the resultant definition are to be of any use in coming to know whether any play fresh off the press is a tragedy. Even if Olson's account of a true poetic method were coherent, the definition arrived at would lack the flexibility required to handle borderline cases, those instances where the question arises: Is this play a tragedy? Indeed, that this question might be asked at all strikes right at the foundation of Olson's method of definition, the notion that a definition of tragedy might be drawn or intuited from a collection of plays, since the plays of which the question is asked, the borderline cases, are ones where men have failed to find agreement. This is to say that the notion of a collection of plays from which the definition of tragedy is to be drawn presupposes a consensus of opinion as to what plays are to be included in the collection. It is not a matter of one man's choice.

3. Though it will not do for Olson to say that experience provides knowledge of individuals, he uses the word "experience" in quite another sense in his account. In this usage "experience" means capacity to do or to make. The man of experience has the capacity to write a tragedy. Of course, since he lacks precise knowledge of what it is that he is writing, the man of experience sometimes realizes his capacities and sometimes does not. So, apart from Olson's shaky usage of the word "knowledge," he suggests that the intuition of causes is the end result of a causal chain of sense-experience, where "experience" is to be

understood in the above sense. The scientist should be able not only to define tragedy, but to write one as well.

4. Olson's account of how men acquire knowledge through some kind of psychological - inductive process is doomed inherently to self-destruction precisely because of the presuppositions underlying his method of defining universals. That causes are seen at the level of intuition and that only scientists are concerned with causes are presuppositions of Olson's method of definition, yet facts, individuals, and universals are all defined according to their causes. This means that both facts and individuals are universals, since by definition universals are conceived at the level of intuition - the same level at which causes are intuited. Clearly, to say that one gains knowledge of facts through the senses or knowledge of individuals through the memory contradicts the fact that facts and individuals are conceived through the intuitive faculty. Olson's psychological account, therefore, has no bearing at all on his method of definition.

In this paper my concern has been to lead the investigation out of the back alleyways of faculty psychology into a world where men talk, some of them poetically, to one another. In claiming that Olson's account is conceptual, my intention has been to show both where the notion of forms first entered into human discourse and what the picture of language, underlying the notion, is: the picture of language as a naming activity. This picture dictates two assumptions about language:

1. When many things are called by the same name, they are called so in virtue of a common form to which the name refers.

2. The meaning of a word is the object (form) to which the word refers.

The method of the four causes is presented as a means of picking out these forms, of defining the meanings of words.

NOTES

[1]Plato Greek Philosophy: Thales to Aristotle, The Free Press (New York, 1966), p. 64.

[2]A. E. Taylor, Aristotle, p. 19, cited by Elder Olson, Aristotle's Poetics and English Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 175.

[3]Elder Olson, "The Poetic Method of Aristotle: Its Powers and Limitations." in Aristotle's Poetics and English Literature, ed. by Elder Olson (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 176.

[4]It is not clear whether a subject is the same as a universal.

[5]Olson, Aristotle's Poetics, p. 176.

[6]Is the flame a fact? or its hotness? or both? Does it make sense to say that knowledge of facts is, for example, knowledge that this particular hotness is a flame or that this hotness is a particular flame? Olson's way of talking here is confusing to say the least. On the analogy of tragedy, which he gives later, the questions one may ask are:

(a) Why is this flame hot?: Why is this tragedy tragic?

(b) Why is this flame a flame?: Why is this tragedy a tragedy?

(c) Why is this hotness hot?: Why is this tragic(ness) tragic?

But (a) does not fit, since giving the four causes of hotness does not define the essential nature of flame, but of hotness (or heat). Is the question, Why is this flame hot?, at all comparable to the question, Why is this tragedy tragic?, or to the question, Why is this pot-bellied stove hot? I think that Olson should say here, in order to be consistent, that our senses give us certain kinds of information about the world (not, surely, that there are flames out there) on the analogy of amoebas, snails, and dogfishes. For instance, information about hotness, loudness,

redness. A dogfish, for example, placed in close proximity to a flame might feel the heat. This would be evidenced by its flip-flopping to get away from it. But would it see a flame, or a brightness? At this level of knowledge, the ability to tell (say) what is out there does not enter in; rather, one reacts in certain ways. Sensation, then, provides knowledge of facts, or qualities. At the sentient level, to say that one has knowledge of facts is to say that one reacts in certain ways.

[7]Olson, Aristotle's Poetics, p. 176.

[8]It is difficult to understand what is being said here, in the equation of knowledge of individuals with knowledge that flame generally is hot (as an example). It is not clear how facts are to be distinguished from individuals. Why does it sound funny to say that the knowledge that hotness generally is flame is knowledge of an individual (hotness)? On the analogy of an ape: Where does the notion of a banana enter in when all the ape sees is yellowness with black stripes in a field of green? He is able to pick it out, peel it, and eat it. Through memory he has associated these doings with the yellowness. But does an ape see a banana, or yellowness in a field of green which may be picked, peeled, and eaten? Let us say the ape does not associate the gutteral sounds he makes with the yellowness. To say that "several memories of the same thing have a single effect" is to say that several memories of the same associated facts are associated with the sounds we make in the presence of those facts. The single effect is a name, and language originates in custom, habit, or convention and in a social context.

In the following discussion of universals, however, Olson reveals another way of looking at how we come to possess knowledge of the world. He equates knowledge of universals with knowledge of "why flame (in general) is hot" - or, knowledge "of the cause of the fact." In this scheme of things to explain why flame in general is hot is to explain why a particular flame is hot. So, the account is:

(a) that-a-particular-flame-is-hot is a fact of sentience

(b) that-flame-in-general-is-hot is a fact (individual) of experience.

(c) why-flame-is-hot is a fact (universal) of science

He wants to say that a snail, say, does in the presence of a flame see the flame and feel its hotness, though it doesn't know (have any idea) what the flame or hotness is; that an ape does see bananas, has repeated remembrances of particular bananas being yellow, though he cannot say "banana" or tell why they are yellow; and that men can both say "that flame is hot" and know why it is hot.

[9]Olson, Aristotle's Poetics, p. 176-177.

[10]Ibid., p. 177.

[11]Ibid., p. 178.

[12]Olson doesn't give the other causes, though I gather that they must in general be the same for each of the three branches of science.

[13]Olson, Aristotle's Poetics, p. 178.

[14]Ibid., p. 179.

[15]Ibid., p. 180.

[16]Ibid., p. 180-181.

[17]Ibid., p. 181.

[18]Aristotle's definition of tragedy, therefore, fulfills three functions:

(a) It captures in words the nature of tragedy.

(b) It clarifies meanings.

(c) It provides the principle whereby an artist is to make, and a critic is to judge, a tragedy.

It is a "real" definition, the first principle of a theory of tragedy, and a definition for the purpose of criticism all rolled into one.

An interpretation of Olson's account of how we acquire knowledge, consistent with the "powers" of this definition, might run something like the following: As he relates it, Aristotle's definition of tragedy is arrived at through induction from particulars, and this inductive method of definition is in turn based upon a psychological account of how men acquire knowledge.

Our senses give us information about the world. They are "channels" through which information passes from the world to us. This information takes the form of sensations (or sensible forms) which correspond to facts (factual forms) of objects in the world; "the knowledge provided by sensation is of the fact alone" ("that a particular flame is hot"). At this level of knowledge sensations correspond to facts in the world, and both flame and hotness are instances, as yet unrelated, of facts. Sense perception is innate in all animals, but in some sense-impressions come to persist because these animals possess the faculty of memory. Through the memory, past sensations (facts) are associated with present ones, and "man is capable . . . of so unifying memory that several memories of the same things have a single effect." This means that one eventually, through the memory, comes to associate hotness with flame; and this association, regularly repeated, comes to be a "oneness." When one sees a flame, one knows that it will be hot, without having to touch it. The knowledge that flame is regularly accompanied by hotness produces the knowledge "that flame generally is hot." This capacity to relate and individualize sensations (facts) "Aristotle calls empieria, experience." "Experience is knowledge of individuals."

But knowledge of an individual is only knowledge of attributes. It is conceivably, pre-linguistic knowledge. In the presence of a flame, through experience, one could know that it is hot without being able to say that it is hot. (With the invention of language, one would eventually be able to point to a flame and say, "That is a flame, don't touch it! It is hot!" - to a child perhaps.) Scientific knowledge, however, is discursive and

"demonstrative"; it arises out of experience, from knowledge of the common attributes of individuals of the same class.

Scientific knowledge comes about because man is able intuitively to see the common forms of individuals in his sensible experience. Intuition, however, precedes articulation, either articulation of the forms (universals or names) or of knowledge of the forms. Intuitive cognition (recognition) is required for the invention of language; intuitive knowledge is prior to the possession of scientific knowledge, which is gained through demonstration and discourse. This means that one's cognitive intuition of a common form entails recognition of an individual's being in a form common to other individuals, but does not necessarily entail (though such cognition is a requirement for) one's being able to articulate either the form (name) or what the form is. (One may think the cow-form without being able to say "cow.") Intuitive knowledge, however, is knowledge of the form common to individuals of the same class (name); and possession of this knowledge enables one to articulate what the form is. Such articulation presupposes the invention of language (names). The articulation of this knowledge answers the question: What do individuals called by the same name (word) have in common? The general, concise form of this question is: What is X? The answer will take the form of a definition which links the name (class or word) to the knowledge - something of the form, X is so-and-so - and will serve to distinguish attributes common to individuals of the same class from those attributes peculiar to the individual. This knowledge of the common form makes scientific knowledge possible. (In order to discouse on a subject and to make true statements about it, one must know what it is he is talking about.)

[19]Because the problems involved in Parts two and three of Olson's essay stem from those involved with the presentation of the general scientific method, I have chosen not to give separate accounts of what Olson says in these Parts but to include these accounts in my criticism.

[20]I have inserted "Purpose" as that which may be substituted for the material cause of knowledge of facts; to complete the picture, as it were, though I don't know if this completion makes any sense. Call it an intuition: In Aristotle's (Olson's) scheme of things a rational purposive universe manifests itself in the facts (monads).

[21]I don't mean to beg the question here. I just mean to point out that when one asks a man who claims to be an artist why he is able to do what he does - to articulate his rationale - one doesn't always get a coherent account; sometimes the artist is unable to give an account at all.

[22]Olson, Aristotle's Poetics, p. 176.

[23]If Olson were consistent, in saying "experience provides knowledge of the fact" he would be saying that the man of experience possesses scientific knowledge of facts. Possession of knowledge means that a person has intuited the causes. This is to say that the man of experience would be able to say, "Hotness, which is clearly a fact as facts are defined, is . . . (the four causes)." But only scientists are concerned with the causes of things. Therefore, it is either a contradiction in terms or an equivocation to say that experience (something prior to science) provides knowledge of facts, but not of the cause of the fact.

[24]Olson, Aristotle's Poetics, p. 179.

[25]This is question begging. Is the subject an individual play or several plays, or is it tragedy in general? What does it mean to be concerned "with what happens always or for the most part" where the subject is an individual play? That Othello always kills Desdemona? No, unless the play is subject to the director's interpretation; in which case the play ceases to be an individual. One must see that to speak of individuals is to contrast these with universals, that "individual" gets its meaning here in contrast to "universal" which is the subject, or product, produced and the concern of productive science. But upon seeing this, the inductive part of science disappears.

[26]This makes inappropriate Olson's illustration of the rationale of productive science through analogy with shoe making. Olson says that the rationale of productive science is analogous to that involved in making a shoe: A form in the mind of the maker is imposed upon his medium. This is done, in the case of a shoe, by reasoning from the form (shoe-form) to be produced to the first thing or part which can be produced, then making the shoe in reverse of this reasoning, cutting the necessary parts and stitching them together, until the composite of form and matter is produced. Here, to have scientific knowledge of shoe making is to be possessed of a pattern, but there is no talk of necessary versus accidental attributes.

Compare a pair of penny loafers to a pair of white bucks. Both are pairs of shoes. Is the penny-hole of the penny loafer a necessary attribute of its being a shoe? What do all individual kinds of shoes have in common? When, for what reason(s), would such a question be asked? When would one become involved in the quest for an essential pattern of shoe making? When would one ask any of the following questions:

(a) Why is this shoe a shoe?

(b) What is a shoe?

(c) What do all shoes have in common which makes them shoes?

[27]The fact that men oftentimes make mistakes, or err, is not a sufficient reason for doubting experience - at least not according to Olson's account of how we acquire knowledge - rather, a man must first entertain the doubt, then point to this fact to support his doubt.

The man of experience would not doubt that he knows what something is because he makes mistakes or errs. He would be inclined to try to correct his mistakes; for instance, he would be inclined to rewrite a tragedy which didn't quite come off. Repeated failures would indicate a lack of experience. This is to say that he would equate a lack of experience with a lack of knowledge.

One might observe here that we are now leaving the psychological, and entering the social, context.

[28]Olson, Aristotle's Poetics, p. 183.

[29]The recognition of "tragedy" as a word implies, from the preceding analysis, the following questions:

(a) Why is this word "tragedy" a word?

(b) What is a word?

(c) What do all words have in common which makes them words?

The corresponding questions concerning the recognition of a play as a tragedy are:

(a') Why is this tragedy a tragedy?

(b') What is (a) tragedy?

(c') What do all tragedies have in common which makes them tragedies.

The corresponding questions concerning the recognition of a thing as a thing are:

(a") Why is this thing a thing?

(b") What is a thing

(c") What do all things have in common which makes them things?

Etc.

[30]Olson, Aristotle's Poetics, p. 188.

[31]Ibid., p. 188.

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