

DISPOSITIONS OF DESIRE NEEDED IN THE PURSUIT OF WISDOM

REMOTE DISPOSITION: LOVE OF THE BEAUTIFUL

One should not choose every pleasure, but only that concerned with the beautiful. (Democritus, DK 207)

Philosophy begins in wonder as Socrates (or Plato) teaches us in the *Theaetetus* and Aristotle, in the Proemium to Wisdom in the beginning of Book One of the *Metaphysics*. This wonder is the natural desire to know for its own sake the cause. Since the beautiful is also naturally desired to be seen (or heard) for its own sake, the desire and delight in the beautiful is a remote preparation for philosophy.

The things that can be seen, heard, and learned are what I prize the most. (Heraclitus, DK 55)

There is more than one reason why these two senses of sight and hearing are singled out among the five. One thing they have in common which distinguishes them from the other five is that the beautiful is an object of these two senses. In the case of the other senses, touch, taste and smell, we speak of the good, but not the beautiful.

What a poet writes when possessed and inspired by the gods is most beautiful. (Democritus, DK 18)

Homer, obtaining by fate a divine nature, built an ordered world of all kinds of verse. (Democritus, DK 21)

The beautiful which is closest to philosophy is not that of painting or even of music, but that of great fiction. In ancient times, this is especially true of the works of Homer. In modern times, it is even more true of the works of Shakespeare. Albert the Great observes that (great) fiction gives one the way of wondering. Even if the wonder aroused by great fiction is not the wonder of the philosopher, it is nevertheless a stepping-stone to that wonder.

It belongs to a divine mind to think always of something beautiful. (Democritus, DK 112)

Socrates (or Plato) in the *Theaetetus* says that philosophy is becoming like God so far as possible. The consideration of the beautiful makes our understanding like God in some way. For God knows all that he knows by knowing Himself and He is most beautiful, indeed He is beauty itself. Hence, God is always understanding what is most beautiful.

WONDER AND HOPE OF COMING TO KNOW AND FEAR OF MISTAKE

THE DESIRE IN WONDER

I would rather discover one cause than be master of the kingdom of the Persians. (Democritus, DK 118)

As we have said above, wonder is the beginning of philosophy. And this wonder is a desire which is natural or inborn like hunger and thirst. But we distinguish these natural desires by their objects or what is desired. Wonder is the natural desire to know. But it is necessary to see that in wonder to know is not desired for anything beside itself. When the police want to know "who done it", it is for the sake of punishing who done it. But wonder is a desire to know for its own sake. And when this desire is strong, one wants to know not only the way things are, but also why they are the way they are. The question why asks for the cause. Hence, the wonder of the philosopher is *the natural desire to know for its own sake the cause*. We see the strength of this desire in Democritus. He would rather discover one cause than be master of the kingdom of the Persians. Now this kingdom was the greatest in his day known to the Greeks. And the man who was master of that kingdom would be the wealthiest man in the world, the most powerful man, the most honored man, being worshipped like a god, and to him would be offered the pleasures of the table and the bed beyond that of all other men. But Democritus would rather discover one cause than have all these goods. This desire is found in all the first philosophers for they sought the causes of things and most of all their first cause(s).

THE HOPE IN WONDER

Good things hardly come to those seeking while bad things come even to those not seeking. (Democritus, DK 108)

To discover a cause is not only good, but also difficult. Hence, in or with his wonder, the philosopher must have hope of overcoming the difficulties standing in the way of these discoveries. We can make a mistake without effort, but much effort is necessary to find and know the truth about anything.

THE FEAR OF MISTAKE IN WONDER

Let us not guess at random about the greatest things. (Heraclitus, DK 47)

Man guesses the truth before he knows it. When we guess, we can be mistaken. This is especially true when we guess at random. It is the fear of being mistaken or making a mistake, which leads us not to guess at random, but to guess by reason or by art.

But gods, turn away from my tongue the madness of those men, and from pious mouths guide forth a pure stream. And you, much wooed, white-armed, virgin Muse, I pray to hear such things as are lawful for creatures of a day to hear; send me from piety driving the obedient chariot. Nor shall the flowers of honor from mortals force you to say rashly more than is pious and to move quickly to the heights of wisdom...(Empedocles, DK 3)

Men make mistakes when they *jump* to conclusions. The excessive love of honor or excellence leads men to say rashly more than is true and to try to move quickly to the heights of wisdom. But as Friar Lawrence says to Romeo: *Wisely and slow: they stumble that run fast*. The fear of mistake restrains our pride and helps us to go forward slowly and carefully, avoiding many mistakes.

THE LOVE OF WISDOM AND HUMILITY

LOVE OF WISDOM

Men who love wisdom must inquire into very many things. (Heraclitus, DK 35)

Although wonder is the beginning of philosophy, the philosopher is named from the love of wisdom. We name a thing by its end more than by its beginning. And *wisdom* names the end of the philosopher. Since wonder is a desire and desire is for something one does not have, wonder is diminished as one comes to know what one desired to know. But one can love wisdom both before and after one has acquired some wisdom. Hence, wonder (in the sense of the desire defined above) pertains to the beginning of philosophy rather than to its end.

In this fragment, Heraclitus says that it is necessary for philosophers to investigate many things. But does this mean that the lover of wisdom is a lover of the knowledge of many things? Is wisdom a knowledge of many things?

Pythagoras, the son of Mnesarchus, practiced enquiry beyond all men; and selecting these writings he called them his own wisdom; which was only a knowledge of many things, and bad art. (Heraclitus, DK 129)

Here Heraclitus denies that the love of wisdom is the love of a knowledge of many things. If a man investigates many things well, he will end up, it seems, with many kinds of knowledge. Is wisdom then this heap or pile of many different forms of knowledge in the mind of a man? If so wisdom would be private since each man's heap would be different. Heraclitus also speaks of this as bad art. Since art is always an ordering by reason, there seems to be an opposition between art and a heap or pile which lacks order.

Those who seek for gold dig up much earth and find a little. (Heraclitus, DK 22)

Wisdom is often called *gold*, metaphorically speaking. Here Heraclitus seems to be saying that, in investigating many things, the philosopher is not uncovering many bits or parts of wisdom, but rather most of what he goes through is not part of wisdom, but only a very little part.

Wisdom is one thing. It is to understand the mind by which all things are steered through all things. (DK 41)

Here, Heraclitus is saying that wisdom is chiefly one knowledge. It is mainly a knowledge of the first cause which Heraclitus guesses here is a "mind by which all things are steered through all things". If philosophy begins in wonder and

wonder is the natural desire to know the cause, the end of philosophy, or wisdom, must be a knowledge of the first cause.

Imperturbable wisdom is worth everything. (Democritus, DK 216)

This one knowledge that is wisdom is worth everything else. If the philosopher like Democritus would rather discover one cause than be master of the kingdom of the Persians, then how much more would he desire a knowledge of the first cause. This wisdom is called *athambos* which word can be carried over in general to mean free from the passions or in particular as the negation of *thambos* which means wonder or stupor (the excess of wonder). No one can become wise without his passions quieting down. And we have seen that wonder (a desire to know) is diminished as one comes to know. Desire is for a good one lacks. Hence, it is not by chance that the same word *wanting* is sometimes used as a synonym for *desire* and also to mean *lacking*.

To a wise man, the whole earth is open; for the fatherland of a good soul is the whole universe. (Democritus, DK 247)

Einstein spent the last years of his life, especially after the general theory of relativity, trying to understand the universe as a whole. Since the whole is greater than a part, this would seem to be the best object, the most beautiful object that reason could consider. However, Einstein was a pantheist. There was nothing better than the universe. But if the universe and its order is for the sake of a good outside the universe or the universe has a maker or both of these is true, then there is something better than the universe (which is not a part of the universe). Then the fatherland of a good soul and the goal of the philosopher would be something other than the universe. But even those who think that the beginning and the end of the universe is not a part of the universe, regard the order of the universe as best after this separated good. But Democritus' thinking here seems to be the same as Einstein's.

HUMILITY WHICH SHOULD GO WITH THE LOVE OF WISDOM

The most beautiful ape is ugly compared to the genus of men.
(Heraclitus, DK 82)

The wisest of men towards God appears an ape, in wisdom and beauty and all other things. (Heraclitus, DK 83)

A man is called childish [foolish] compared to God [a daimon]; just as a boy, in comparison to a man. (Heraclitus, DK 79)

Heraclitus helps us to understand how our wisdom is to God's wisdom by these two proportions. As the ape is to man, so is man to God. The ape seems wise in comparison to the other animals, but not in comparison to man. Man seems wise in comparison to the ape, but not in comparison to God. Likewise, in the proportion: as the child is to a man, so is man towards God. So too to a little child, his daddy seems to know everything. But compared to God, man seems to know almost nothing. In a beautiful predication *per causam*, St. Teresa of Avila says that humility is the truth. By humility, man places his wisdom under that of God and also to a lesser extent under that of godlike men. These proportions express the humility of Heraclitus, but also help us to understand the truth which is the cause of true humility.

Human nature does not have judgment, but the divine has.
(Heraclitus, DK 78)

This is another truth which underlies true humility. Man does not have judgment by nature; that is, he is not able to separate truth from falsity by his nature. Rather he must use his senses whereby he comes to know through the works of God. But God through his very nature has judgment between the true and the false.

But gods, turn away from my tongue the madness of those men,
and from pious mouths guide forth a pure stream. And you, much
wooded, white-armed, virgin Muse, I pray to hear such things as are
lawful for creatures of a day to hear; send me from piety driving
the obedient chariot. Nor shall the flowers of honor from mortals
force you to say boldly more than is pious and to move quickly to
the heights of wisdom... (Empedocles, DK 3)

Here Empedocles expresses his humility and the knowledge which creatures of a day, ephemeral beings as ourselves, must be content to acquire. This humility prevents one from pride (an excessive or immoderate desire for honor and excellence) and the boldness which leads men to say more than is pious; that is, more than the truth (especially about God). Bold imagination is the chief cause of error in men. It also prevents one from trying to move quickly to the heights of wisdom when it is most necessary in one who loves wisdom to move slowly and carefully to wisdom. The *heights* of wisdom signify both that it is the

highest knowledge and the difficulty of reaching this knowledge. As Aristotle was to show in the second book of the *Metaphysics*, wisdom is most of all the knowledge of truth.

For narrow are the means spread throughout the limbs and many are the miseries that burst in and blunt the thoughts. And having seen only a small part of life during their lives, and doomed to early death, they are lifted up and carried off like smoke, and believing only that which each one meets with as he is driven every way, they boast of having found the whole. But things are not thus seen or heard by men or grasped by their minds. You, however, since you have withdrawn to here, shall not learn more than mortal wisdom can attain. (Empedocles, DK 2)

Here again Empedocles places mortal or human wisdom under immortal or divine wisdom. He gives many reasons why men are apt see only a part of the truth starting from the limitations of their senses to the shortness of their lives and warns us against that form of pride, boasting, whereby the man who has only a part of the truth is apt to think that he has the whole.

DISPOSITIONS NECESSARY FOR LEARNING FROM OTHERS

NECESSITY OF BELIEF AND LEARNING FROM OTHERS

Most of what belongs to the gods escapes being known through lack of belief. (Heraclitus, DK 86)

Neither art nor wisdom is easy to reach if one does not learn. (Democritus, DK 59)

It is necessary to learn from others if one is going to get very far in any art or in wisdom. For what a man can discover by himself is very small in comparison to what he can learn from others. But to learn from others, one must be willing to believe them until one has made their knowledge one's own. Men go forward in the arts and sciences by believing those who have discovered something before

them, eventually making this their own, and then adding their own discoveries to the body of knowledge.

WHOM TO BELIEVE

It is necessary, not only to be willing to believe, but also to consider whom one should believe.

What mind or reason is in them? They believe the poets and take the crowd as their teacher, not knowing that the many are bad while few are good. (Heraclitus, DK 104) (quote is attributed to Bias)

In this fragment, we are told not to take as our teacher the poets or the crowd. The reason for not taking the crowd as one's teacher is given here by Heraclitus, perhaps from Bias, one of the seven wise men of Greece. This reason is that the many are bad while few are good. One is also told not to take the poets as teachers. As Heraclitus says elsewhere, we should not be like those who dream. The one who dreams lives in his imagination which is the cause of deception. But the poet is a dreamer. Indeed, Shakespeare called one of his plays a dream. But we should not believe the mere imagination of another. Thus Horatio is at first unwilling to believe Marcellus and Bernardo about the ghost of Hamlet's father (*Hamlet*, Act I, Sc. 1):

Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,
And will not let belief take hold of him.

So the poets or others who speak more out of imagination than out of their senses and reason are not to be believed.

No one is able to be a great poet without madness. (Democritus, DK 17)

One should not believe a madman. But the poet insofar as he speaks out of imagination is like the madman as Shakespeare says (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act V, Sc. 1):

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies that apprehend

More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.

There may of course be other reasons for sometimes believing the poets, but not insofar as they are *only* speaking out of imagination.

One man is ten thousand to me if he be the best. (Heraclitus, DK 49)

In Priene was born Bias, son of Teutamos, who is of more account than the rest. (Heraclitus, DK 39)

Whom should one believe if not the poets or the crowd? We should believe that man who is the best and worth ten thousand men, the wise man. Such a man was Bias who is traditionally called one of the seven wise men of Greece. (The earliest list of seven is that given given by Plato in the *Protagoras*, 343A-B. He gives as the seven wise men: Thales of Miletus, Pittacus of Mytilene, Bias of Priene, Solon of Athens, Cleobulus of Lindus, Myson of Chen, and Chilon of Sparta.)

Remember the man who forgets which way the road leads
(Heraclitus, DK 71)

But how do we know who is the wise man? The wise man is honored and famous for his wisdom. But some, often called *sophists*, are honored for the appearance of wisdom. How do we separate the wise man from the sophists among those honored? Perhaps in this fragment, Heraclitus anticipates Plato's criterion in the *Protagoras*. Does the man honored know how to proceed, the road to follow, or does he not?

DIFFICULTY AND IMPEDIMENTS TO BELIEVING THOSE WHOM WE SHOULD BELIEVE (THE NECESSITY OF HUMILITY AND DOCILITY IN THE GOOD STUDENT)

There are impediments to believing the wise man.

The one advising him who thinks he has understanding labours in vain. (Democritus, DK 52)

The one who is not aware of his own ignorance is not ready to learn from one who knows. So long as the slave-boy in the *Meno* thinks he knows how to double a square, he will not be willing to learn from Socrates how to do so.

Dogs bark at everyone they do not know. (Heraclitus, DK 97)

The wise man and his thoughts and ways are often unfamiliar to us. Hence, like the dog, we may bark at him as if he were an enemy. We may reject what he says because it is unfamiliar.

It would be right for all the Ephesians above age to strangle themselves and leave the city to those below age; for they cast out Hermodorus, the best man among them, saying "Let no man among us be the best; if there is one, let it be elsewhere and among others." (Heraclitus, DK 121)

Friends, I know the truth is in the words which I shall speak; but it is very hard for men and they are exceedingly jealous of the force of belief on their minds. (Empedocles, DK 114)

Out of pride and envy, men are reluctant to believe the best or wise man. When the Ephesians cast out the best man among them, Hermodorus, because he was better; to be consistent, they should have cast themselves out of the city as well for the same reason since they are better than the beardless lads.

[Reproving some who did not believe] Knowing neither how to listen, nor how to speak. (Heraclitus, DK 19)

He who contradicts and chatters much is naturally unfit for learning what he should. (Democritus, DK 85)

A fourth impediment is not knowing how to listen or speak. Heraclitus' order is significant. He places listening before speaking. Silence becomes the learner. The ear is the organ or tool of learning from another, not the tongue. The tongue is the tool of the teacher. Some are quick to contradict before they understand and talk too much when they should listen.

HOW WE SHOULD LEARN BY BELIEVING AND THE GOOD STUDENT

HOW TO LISTEN

To say all, but wish to hear nothing, is greediness [arrogance].
(Democritus, DK 86)

Those who wish to do all the talking and not listen are not going to learn from others.

Those without understanding when they hear are like deaf men; of them does the saying bear witness that they are absent when present. (Heraclitus, DK 34)

But those who listen without understanding are like those deaf. They might as well not be listening at all.

A stupid man is excited by every word. (Heraclitus, DK 87)

We cannot listen carefully and frequently to the words of the wise if we are excited by every word. The wise say much in a few words and we must pay special attention to such words. But this is impossible if we get excited by every word spoken by anyone.

Knowing the arrangement, they listen. (Antiphon, DK 63)

It is a great help to listening carefully to see the order in the words of the wise man. Hence, Thomas says in explaining the second part of Aristotle's *Proemium* to the three books *About the Soul* that he renders the student teachable by showing him the order in which he is going to proceed. It is reason, however, and not the will that sees this order.

Come, I will speak and you listen and carry away my word...
(Parmenides, DK 2)

One must carry away the words of the wise man so that one can think about them. We never penetrate them fully the first or even second time we hear them.

STABILITY - SOUND SENSE

Although this quality of a good student is more on the side of his reason than his will, it is considered here because it pertains to what a good student is. We do not want someone to think that it is enough for a good student to be willing to believe.

The dry soul is wisest and best. (Heraclitus, DK 118)

Believe not everything, but rather the examined: the former is silly, the latter of one in his sound senses. (Democritus, DK 67)

Be not suspicious towards all, but be cautious and stable [not liable to fall]. (Democritus, DK 91)

Water quickly takes on the shape of another, but easily loses it as well. The good student should have a dry soul which is slower to take on a form, but more apt to retain it. One must not believe everything he hears, but only the examined (by reason). But likewise, one should not distrust and reject everything he hears.

It is wise, listening not to me but to reason, to agree that all things are one. (Heraclitus, DK 50)

But it is of great concern to the lower orders to mistrust the powerful; however, as the trustworthy evidence of my Muse commands, grasp (*these things*) when my reasoned argument has been sifted in your innermost heart. (Empedocles, DK 4, Freeman trans.)

One must examine by reason what is said before giving full assent to it. The young man in the *Protagoras* is too quick to accept Protagoras and Socrates shows him how to examine by reason what Protagoras says. One should listen more to reason than to the speaker or to oneself.

FRUITFULNESS

If you press these things deep into your firm mind with a friendly disposition and a watchful attention that is pure, certainly all these things will remain with you throughout your life; and you will gain many other things from them; for the former things cause these things to grow into their own character according to the nature of each. But if you reach out for other things, such as the countless miserable things that usually occupy men and blunt their thoughts, surely these things will quickly forsake you as time rolls on for they desire to return to their own kind; for know that all things have wisdom and a share of thought. (Empedocles, DK 110)

This third attribute of the good student is to gain other things from what he has learned. Thomas Aquinas explains the metaphor of Sacred Scripture for a good student: he is like the earth. The earth is lowly or humble; it is stable; and it is fruitful.

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