

Aristotle



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Of what procedure are nous and epagōgē parts? What is the function of that procedure? What is the role of nous and epagōgē within that process? What is nous? What is epagōgē? (You do not have to answer the last two questions in that order.) How does epagōgē work—that is, what is the process by which it produces its results? What are its results? What is distinctive and problematic in what Aristotle has to say about nous?

Aristotle introduced nous and epagoge as parts of the scientific procedure and, thus vital components in obtaining scientific knowledge. Particularly, they figured in area of rhetorical reasoning and inquiry. Epagoge, in Aristotle's theoretical inquiry, is the inductive procedure, which leads to the establishment of explanatory first principles as well as a demonstrative procedure that solves problems encountered on the way toward principles by deducing their correct answers from these principles once they are found. 1 On the other hand, Aristotle treated nous as actually nothing but potentially all the things we can know. 2 Its significance in the scientific procedure and relationship with epagoge is anchored on its intuitive role. Nous can compare or operate through judgments by the combination or separation of concepts. Specifically, we can illustrate the relationship of epagoge and nous and their significance in knowledge acquisition in this analogy by John Anton (1991): The acquisition of practical first principles - moral as well as technical - is the work of reason, but not of discursive reason; it is the work of nous... Nous is simply that human faculty that enables us to cognize universals on the basis of our sense-perceptions and experience; epagoge is the functioning of that faculty. (204)

It is helpful, in understanding how nous and epagoge work and function, to remember that for Aristotle, all knowledge comes from pre-existing

knowledge. He drew a distinction between knowledge and the preexisting knowledge – those that are knowable without qualification. Pre-existing knowledge is the outcome of sense perception while knowledge is acquired from the first principles that were borne out of induction (epagoge). (50) And so, Aristotle enlightened us that the process starts from our sensory encounters with individual material things and these encounters provide the basis of our intellectual judgments, which is the epagoge. The upshot of this process is that we are taken beyond the mere contingent empirical generalization of facts. This Aristotelian procedure, writes Newton-Smith, results in the transmission of “ the natural necessity of the premises to the conclusions, thereby assuring that the entire body of scientific truths, fundamental and derived, is an expression not of contingent juxtaposition but of essential truth.” (424)

One of the problems that scholars find in Aristotle’s concept of the nous is that it is treated as a pure intellect that is separable from the body. He even distinguished it from the soul. The problem here is that this aspect becomes abstract and somehow goes against most of the Aristotelian philosophies. Particularly, scholars are frustrated with Aristotle’s view that the nous represents God as pure intellect and as an expression of human cognitive powers on the one hand. For example, when an individual thinks through the nous, who is actually thinking?

Of course, one can just invoke the fact that this Aristotelian thinking about the nous is all about potentialities and that the human intellect is potentially everything, it is an actuality that creates everything. But then again, this is beyond the realm of what is being put forward by the procedure involving epagoge and the nous and the resulting first principles and truths.

Bibliography

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