The National Philosophy Test—IV

Our National Philosophy Tests might convey the notion that we are committing against philosophy what sacrilege is to religion. On the contrary, we are in the mainstream of true philosophy through these tests: “To ridicule philosophy: that is to be a real philosopher.” The words are those of Blaise Pascal, a philosopher of respectable achievements. We were about to base this test on Descartes when we realized that we hadn’t yet covered Aristotle; that would have been putting Descartes before the horse!

Aristotle was born in 384 B.C., studied at Plato’s Academy for about 20 years, tutored Alexander the Great, and devoted 12 years in Athens to the establishment of the Lyceum, a school of his own design.

His advocacy of certain views led him to flee Athens soon after Socrates was executed for philosophizing. He died in Chalcis in 322 B.C. from acute indigestion brought on by overwork.

Aristotle’s works are monuments of empirical investigation and rational insight: he studied everything from ornithology to logic, and was more scientist than practical man when it came to politics. It is ironic that such a giant of cerebral accomplishments should have been bald, spindle-legged, beady-eyed, and cursed with a lisp.

It is perhaps a greater irony that in English translation some of Aristotle’s lucid Greek reads like gobbledygook.

That brings us to the fourth National Philosophy Test. Below are 22 quotations. Fifteen of them are genuine Aristotle. Seven are purposely contrived nonsense. Can you distinguish the real from the fake? You will find the answers on page 253 of this issue of WORD WAYS.

1

Temperance and courage, then, are destroyed by sufficiency, and preserved by the challenges of excess and defect.
That which is other in species is other than something in something, and this must belong to both; e.g. if it is an animal other in species, both are animals.

It is clear, then, that some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and that for these latter slavery is both expedient and right.

The fact is, the nature of man is the most rounded off and complete, and consequently in man the qualities and capacities above referred to are found in their perfection. Hence woman is more compassionate than man, more easily moved to tears, at the same time is more jealous, more querulous, more apt to scold and to strike. She is, furthermore, more prone to despondency and less hopeful than the man, more void of shame or self-respect, more false of speech, more deceptive, and of more retentive memory. She is also more wakeful, more thinking, more difficult to rouse to action, and requires a smaller quantity of nutriment.

The sense and its organ are different in fact, but their essence is the same. What perceives is, of course, a temporal magnitude, quas temporal, but we must not admit that either the loss of the power to perceive or the sense itself is in essence a magnitude; what they are is a particular ratio or sense in a magnitude.

This is that part which is potentially such as its object is actually; for all sense-perception is a process of being so affected; so that that which makes something such as it itself actually is makes the other such because the other is already potentially such.

But the same method of discussion must not be used with all opponents; for some need persuasion, and others compulsion.

Since every motion is continuous, a motion that is multiple in a qualified sense must (since every motion is divisible) be continuous, and a continuous motion must be multiple.
Since contraries may be the same in form, and the perishable and imperishable may be alike (for abundance is a determinate incapacity), the perishable and the imperishable must be alike in kind.

For of contraries, one is a privation no less than it is a contrary—and a privation of the essential nature; and privation is the denial of a predicate to a determinate genus.

Let C be cloud, A thunder, B the quenching of fire. Then B is attributable to C, cloud, since fire is quenched in it; and A, noise, is attributable to B; and B is assuredly the definition of the major term A. If there be a further mediating cause of B, it will be one of the remaining partial definitions of A.

Clearly, then, each primary and self-subsistent thing is one and the same as its essence.

And thought thinks on itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same. For that which is capable of receiving the object of thought, i.e., the essence, is thought. But it is active when it possesses this object.

Some things are painful by nature, and of these (a) some are so without qualification, and (b) others are so in respect of their relationship to particular classes either of matter or of men.

The causes concerned in the generation of the works of nature are, as we see, more than one. There is the final cause and there is the motor cause. Now we must decide which of these two causes comes first, which second. Plainly, however, that cause is the first which we call the final one.

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16

Therefore, the activity of God, which surpasses all others in blessedness, must
be contemplative; and of human activities, therefore, that which is most akin
to this must be most of the nature of happiness.

17

This is why God always enjoys a single and simple pleasure; for there is not
only activity of movement but an activity of immobility, and pleasure is found
more in rest than in movement.

18

It is easier to fight with pleasure than with anger, to use Heraclitus' phrase, but
both art and virtue are always concerned with what is harder; for even the good
is worse when it is harder. Thus, for this reason also the partial concern of both
vice and political science is with ease and difficulty; for the man who uses these
with delight will be good, and the man who uses them with difficulty will be
bad.

19

For in pursuing the truth one must start from the things that are always in the
same state and suffer no change: such are the heavenly bodies; these do not
appear to be now of one nature and again of another, but are manifestly always
the same and share in no change.

20

And if certain pleasures are bad, that does not prevent the chief good from
being some pleasure, just as the chief good may be some form of knowledge
though certain kinds of knowledge are bad.

21

The secondary objects of desire and thought are different. For the real good is
the object of appetite, and the apparent good is the object (secondary) of
rational wish. But opinion is consequent on desire rather than desire on
opinion; for the appetite is the starting-point.

22

For that which can foresee by the exercise of mind is by nature intended to be
lord and master, and that which can with its body give effect to such foresight
is a subject, and by nature a slave; hence master and slave have the same
interest.