

Aristotle on Act

Mohammad Bagher Ghomi

mbqomi@gmail.com

Aristotle's rare hints to act and to be acted upon are as follows:

1. Senses of 'to be acted upon.' Aristotle distinguishes between two senses of 'to be acted upon' (So.,¹ B, 5, 417b2-5):
 - a) The extinction of one of two contraries by the other
 - b) The maintenance of what is potential by the agency of what is actual and already like what is acted upon
2. Possessing knowledge is 'to become' an actual knower. This becoming, Aristotle asserts, must be a transition and this transition either is not alteration or if it is alteration, it must be so in a quite different sense. Thus, 'it is wrong to speak of a wise man as being 'altered' when he uses his wisdom.' (So., B, 5, 417b5-9)
3. 'That which starting with the power to know learns or acquires knowledge through the agency of one who actually knows and has the power of teaching either ought not be said 'to be acted upon' at all- or else we must recognize two senses of alteration:
 - a) Change to conditions of privation, and
 - b) Change to a thing's disposition and to its nature.' (So., B, 5, 417b9-16)
4. Feeling versus thinking. Aristotle resembles feeling to affirmation and negation and in contrast with thinking: 'To perceive then is like bare asserting or thinking; but when the object is pleasant or painful, the soul makes a sort of affirmation or

¹ Abbreviations used in this paper:

So.

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negation, and pursues or avoids the object. To feel pleasure or pain is to act with the sensitive mean towards what is good or bad as such.' (So., Γ, 7, 431a8-11)