

Topic 1 Aristotle

“Images belong to the rational soul in the manner of perceptions, and whenever it affirms or denies that something is good or bad, it pursues or avoids. Consequently, the soul never thinks without an image.”

The discussion made by Aristotle provokes a couple of interesting tips for a philosophical investigation. First of all, the introduction of the concept of “image” to us is somewhat new, at least for me, and the fact that he reduces our individual thought and determination to the faculty of image is going to determine the topic’s most prominent characteristics: the limitation of our judgement because of the possession of image, which could be to some extent associated with mind-set. Especially his saying that “the soul never thinks without an image” is controversial and it has to be clearly examined. During the course of the investigation, the main focus of this essay is to examine the significance and the origin of the image in our perception and cognitive ability of the individual. I will firstly examine some of the important underlying concept of the topic by Aristotle, and we shall follow by introducing some of the criticisms of Aristotle’s argument, and finally we will try to understand how to capture such image and whether such trial is given possible to us.

The definition of the image in this essay is, following what Aristotle has argued, as such; “Image” is the standard that we set for the sake of the judgement/discrimination of the certain experience.

The topic by Aristotle is composed by three different yet connected arguments.

- A. Rational soul has an image as a consequence of the perception
- B. Reason determines the quality of substances or events through image i.e. good or bad, and our attitude to the world is determined by the image
- C. Soul can never think without an image

The utmost importance to capture the characteristics of image could be seen in A, saying that the image is created through perception, which has an explicit reference to the experience. On the other hand, the crucial point in Aristotle’s argument is that he assumes that the rational soul, which I understand as reason, possesses such image acquired through experience, and we can think only through such image. It seems to the reader that this may hold the support to the empiricism, which says that the knowledge or truth is only acquired through empirical methods, and simply experience will teach us what exists in the world. As opposed to the rationalism, which puts its foundation on the logical and a priori proposition like that of Descartes’ cogito, empiricism argues that we are born as a blank and polished board onto which experience will input the information in the form of knowledge. This connotation between Aristotle’s image and empiricism seems quite natural to us, but we can find a contradiction in Aristotle’s argument which, as a consequence, differentiate image from empirical knowledge.

The image that we possess in our soul is, as Aristotle holds, a selective faculty. From the argument B, we can understand that the soul use image as the measurement for the discrimination between good and bad, and that will affect our action as well. If we simply follow the argument A, saying that the image is a

consequence of perception, we can find another assumption in Aristotle's remark: perception is to receive the external stimuli through sensory organs by its definition, but the consequence of such general and passive perception is the selective faculty of image. It is contradictory in itself, and what we can derive from this analysis is that we should have a step between the mere perception and the possession of the image, which is the creation of the image.

In fact, if we try to analyse the origin of the creation of the image, we can also induce the origin of the image as well, which is one of the purpose of our philosophical investigation. Although different types of the creation of the image should exist, I would like to now classify it into three different categories: educational/cultural input, pragmatic selection, and the basic human nature.

The first one is the process of the input of the value system into the individual through the participation into certain cultural/educational community. It goes without saying that the aesthetic standard differs among cultures, for example Chinese considers symmetry as beauty while Japanese perceive non-symmetrical objects as beauty. Those cultural standard is the consequence of the exposure to such cultural events, which is described by French sociologist Bourdieu as the Cultural Capital; the amount of cultural experience. He argued that the experience of culture will determine how you would perceive a certain object. For example, through the fieldwork project Bourdieu has discovered that the manual workers will perceive a modern art indifferently not recognizing any value in the artwork itself, although office workers, full of educational background, will see even some beauty. What is significant in Bourdieu's argumentation is that the exposure to the cultural phenomenon will determine the perspective and action, and the accumulation of the Cultural Capital will select certain objects or events as the individual's preferences. In this theory, the transformation from the mere perception into the selective faculty is safely protected, because we can now consider the amount of perception as the origin of the judgement and it seems that this theory would significantly revise Aristotle's image. Overall, it is an external input that we internalize as our image, and in this sense, it is a heteronomous discrimination.

The second category is the pragmatic view, particularly that of William James. James' pragmatism holds that we can voluntarily determine the value of the experience. It is indeed hard to define what will determine such value, but I would argue that it is the consciousness that will decide what matters to the individual. The value of the event will be measured by the measurement that one sets to himself, and the action or behaviour of the individual will simply reflect how the individual values certain type of the events. This is a voluntary and individual trial to determine how individual should act, and if he determines that the religious dogma makes the best sense to him, his preferences or its following activity will reflect his own value system. The good in James' argument is the polar opposite to the depression, and James argues that the remedy to depression should be the pragmatism. Although there would be some criticisms to this idea by pointing out the fact that such somewhat autonomous determination of life could be the simple application of the theory by Bourdieu, I would disagree with it because Bourdieu has tried to understand the similarity in our unconscious determination of the value of the objects among people with the same cultural background, and if one desires to put himself in the culturally-upper-class, such motivation, although the consequence should be the accumulation of the cultural capital, is voluntary and pragmatic.

The third category is the basic human condition. It holds that our basic human condition, especially biological condition, will determine the image. For example, the reason why we tend to escape from fire is not because we do not see the beauty of the fire but because it is physically dangerous. At the same time we tend to avoid putting ourselves in extreme cold environment because it may lead us to death. The comfortableness of the environment, like Aristotle's virtue theory based on moderation, is going to be the image or ideal to the individual and it is based on our biological condition. People may argue that it contradicts with the argument A, saying that the image, according to Aristotle, should be the consequence of the perception and therefore should not be an innate quality. I would rather argue that the image, a metaphysical entity, is the consequence of the experience of such innate reaction that we possess, and therefore the formulation of the image through such biological instinct is possible.

However, still, it is doubtful whether we can properly adopt this third category as our third category has the root in the reductionism. Reductionism, especially in this case, argues that we can deduce the origin of the metaphysical entity, thus including image, to the physical cause. For example, we can reduce the origin of certain emotion to the increase in certain chemical substance in our brain, and it is certainly scientifically proved. If we apply this theory to the image, we can argue that, for example, beauty is the reflection of the survival instinct, etc. My argument is that, although in many cases our image or ideal is dependent on our biological instinct i.e. survival instinct as in the discussion of the moderation, our image is not identical to the instinct, and rather we can possess different image from the request from the instinct. For example, people with eating disorder possess totally different image from the image that promotes the health, and such image is to lead to the disorder, which takes individuals far from the life. Our own will will create some image voluntary and not based on our human condition, and in that sense, our image is said to be always reproduced in the process of new experiences. The static idea of image, as we can see in some reductionists' argument, should be therefore refuted.

With this argument, we can say that by saying "the soul never thinks without an image", our thought is going to be determined and even changed by the content of the image itself. Now the question is whether we can actually be independent of the image itself in our thought. Here I would like to introduce a criticism to the Aristotle's argument. Aristotle says that the thought is totally dependent on the image, but it is not certain if he included the reflective thought as well. I mean reflective thought by a realization of the cognitive framework that limits and determines our thought, by analysing the theory of knowledge. For example, by studying anthropology, we can realize that in fact our attitude is, like in the theory by Bourdieu, determined by the culture. It is conducted from a perspective, which needs to be independent of the previous image that we set to ourselves. Such critical thought might lead us to a higher and more independent thought, and may lead us to capture what kind of image we unconsciously possess. The problem is whether such critical and reflective possesses any image in itself, as Aristotle notes that we cannot think without image.

Take an example. Empirically speaking, it is impossible to realize what is wrong with my eye unless you have experienced another situation: I can never be sure if my colour perception is correct (if there could be any correct colour perception) because I have never seen from others' eyes. Like this, we can never understand what sort of image we possess unless our images are to be taken away. Without the possibility of seeing from others' eyes, I can be conscious and be reflective to how I see the world from

my own eyes. It is like a phenomenological investigation, in a sense that you can realize what it is like to see your world from your own view. However, capturing the actual framework, including what is distinct and unique to your vision is never understood, unless you travel to other people's body and see the world, which is impossible. From this analysis, we can say that the mere critical attitude to the existing framework of the thought, which is image, is not sufficient to capture the actual figure of the image, and still such thought is based on the image that we have possessed. In other words, the figure of the image is only perceivable if you undergo certain change of your image as promised in the previous argument; the image is not static but always transforming, and such change is through your experience. Still we do think with our image.

As a conclusion, image itself is the representation of the subjective and individual point of view, which includes the internal sensation of what it is like to be such individual, since the thought is based on the image. Such experience forms the consciousness of the humans, by implementing the images to our cognitive faculty. Thought – I exclude a priori proposition because thought is a process while a priori is a factual knowledge – is situated in somewhere, not in nowhere. By nowhere I mean the objective approach excluding the existence of image in our mind, and by somewhere I mean the individual perspective admitting the limitation and framework of the image. Postmodernists may argue that we can deconstruct, and its possible value I can now suggest is that after the implementation of deconstruction we can situate ourselves in a totally different perspective, with different image from the original one. Deconstruction is therefore not a simple observation of the content of the image but an actual trial, therefore activity, to create new things in order to reflect the existing framework, because we can never know the figure of image by the thought itself. We need to stand somewhere different.