

Topic number: 1 Author's name: Aristotle (*De Interpretatione*)

### **Desires, Affections and Communication**

***“ Spoken sounds are symbols of affections in the soul and written marks symbols of spoken sounds. And just as written marks are not the same for all men, neither are spoken sounds. But what these are in the first place signs of- affections of the soul- are the same for all; and what these affections are likenesses of- actual things- are also the same.”***

#### **1. Introduction**

The quote essentially speaks much about communication and its relation with the soul, simultaneously posing a question about its collectiveness amongst men. However, must the lines in the quote, Aristotle has spoken much more than is visible, in an implied form. We can extract some assumptions from the quote, on which the entirety of the quote is based. The assumptions, seen or intricate are as follows-

- 1.1 Both, spoken sounds and written marks are symbols.
- 1.2 Spoken sounds are symbols of affections in the soul.
- 1.3 Written marks are symbols of spoken sound.

This means- Written marks are symbols of symbols of affections in the soul

- 1.4 Written marks and spoken sounds are not the same for all men.
- 1.5 Affections of the soul are same for all.
- 1.6 The last line of the quote can have two following interpretations-
  - a. 'Actual things' are the same for all.

- b. 'Resemblances of actual things' formed by the soul are the same for all.

Throughout this essay, I shall attempt to interpret each of these assumptions made by Aristotle, and thusly attempt to understand the quote- and thereby support or oppose it accordingly.

To understand the quote better, I shall first attempt to define the various terms used by Aristotle and understand the context to which they have been used.

## **2. Defining terms used in the quote and understanding their context**

Aristotle has used various terms in this quote, such as "spoken sounds", "affections in the soul" and "affections of the soul". In this part of my essay, I shall be defining these terms and further understanding them.

### **2.1 The various symbols**

The quote speaks of two types of symbols, "spoken sounds" and "written marks". These may be symbols of different things, representing different things or entities, but they are nevertheless symbols of communication. Aristotle seems to have recognised only these two forms of communication and fails to acknowledge the existence of other symbols of communication such as the "**heard word**" and the "**read word**". I shall be talking about the relevance of the heard word and the read word further, however I shall first define spoken sounds and written marks.

**Spoken sounds-** Aristotle defines spoken sounds as symbols of affections in the soul. A further understanding of affections in the soul is required. In a very crude form, a spoken sound can be defined by saying that it is the sounds produced by the vibrations in the larynx and pharynx in order to represent something or to 'mean' something. Here three questions arise. Firstly whether every spoken sound is also a heard sound? Does the spoken sound lose its quality of being a symbol if it is not heard? The third question is- Does a spoken sound always represent or symbolise the affection in the soul? We shall consider these questions, once we fully understand affections in the soul which I shall be explaining ahead.

**Written marks** are defined by Aristotle as symbols of spoken sounds, therefore implying that they are symbols of the symbols of the affections in the soul. Similar questions as of the spoken sounds arise which we shall look into ahead. It is important to recognise the different kinds of written marks, which I would majorly classify in the following manner-

a. Language

This will further have two classifications, mainly- words and sentences.

b. Mathematical expressions

These can be considered similar to the sentences in language. Note that I have only include mathematical expressions and not mathematical figures like numbers. This is because I consider these figures abstract and hypothetical. They do not make sense unless grouped together in a sensible meaningful manner.

Why I have spoken about these forms of written marks is because I would like to further discuss in the next part of my essay, language formation and comprehension. It is important to do because only then can we understand the true meaning of affections in the soul and whether or not language is even a symbolism of these affections.

Written marks, as well as spoken sounds- however are not necessarily only language, they can be a song sung or even the musical notes on a paper. However, there is one thing common in all these symbols- they all hold some “meaning”. We shall have to inquire more about meaning in order to understand how it is connected with the affections in the soul.

## **2.2 “Affections in the soul” and “Affections of the soul”**

Before moving ahead to define these affections, it is important to note that Aristotle uses two different terms- first he states spoken sounds as symbols of affections **in** the soul and later he states that the affections **of** the soul are same for all. I shall try to establish a relationship between the two and whether or not they mean the same thing.

**Affection** can be defined as a feeling of liking towards something. The question that arises, is whether it is the same thing as desire or does it hold a relationship with desire.

All human actions happen because of desire that a man holds- as famously said “Desire is the essence of human being”. I come to believe that affection is what precedes desire, which can prove to be the root cause to us creating a spoken sound or a written mark. It is desire that makes us react to any stimulus in a particular manner, and since desire comes from affection- it is safe to say that our actions involving spoken sound derive from our affections.

Having established this, we must consider three questions-

- a. Eventhough spoken sounds derive from affection. What makes them symbols of affections in the soul?
- b. Written marks are also derived from affection, so why is it that spoken words are symbols of the affections in the soul which written marks form an indirect relationship with these affections?
- c. What makes us say that these affections are **in the soul** or **of the soul**? {The mind body problem, is there even a soul, or are these desires purely physical and physiological?}

**To address these questions, we shall first understand language formation and comprehension (as one form of the symbolic representations).**

### **3. Language formation and language comprehension**

Earlier in my essay I spoke about the various forms of symbols, language being one of them. Therefore, I shall be discussing language, for the sake of convenience and the same logic and analogy can be applied for other forms of symbols.

To understand how and whether spoken and written words/sentences are symbols of affections in the soul, we will understand how we learn language and form these words as a means to convey a person its ‘meaning’.

In the quote, Aristotle refers the “affections in the soul” as the ‘meaning’ of the spoken symbols. To understand and question this further we will also have to understand the meaning of ‘meaning’.

From an objectivist point of view, one can call acquiring language as knowledge itself. As according to Bertrand Russell, one can say that you have knowledge only if the following four stages take place:

First, a physical stimulus acting independent of you. Second, the interaction between you and the physical environment (through your sense data). Third, what happens in your brain. And fourth, what interaction happens between your brain and the physical body and senses, which mean, a response generated by you.

It is this response that confirms knowledge. This however is a behaviourist point of view where we consider the observer and the observed as different and entities. The observer can know that the observed has knowledge only by means of his behaviour and actions.

Now, we shall look into how this connects to language.

Consider the example of an infant at birth, who knows no language at all. He makes random voices which are also spoken sounds- but hold no meaning yet. It is when the child says something desired by the parents like “Mom”, that he sees a response of satisfaction, in his parents. Say, his parents treat him better now, so the child realises what actions cause a desired result and what doesn't. Soon he learns that repeating sounds that his parents say, get him the desired result and thus he continues to do so.

A similar case can be seen in the way a dog is trained to sit. The dog accidentally sits when his owner says “sit” and is then given a treat, He thereafter sits everytime his owner says sit because of his desire or ultimately his affection. {This example does not however include the usage of language but nevertheless is an analogy to explain how a child learns language}

These examples can be best explained by Thorndike's Law of Effect which states that one repeats the actions with a desirable result and avoids repetition of the the action which causes an undesirable result. This is the way a person acquires language, and so it is safe to say that if not all, at least during the time a person learns language, his spoken sounds are symbols of the affections in his soul. For example, a hungry child who does not have a very elaborate vocabulary may say “hungry” or “plate” indicating that he wants food.

Even when a person grows up and acquires language, he only speaks what he “desires” to convey to the other person/group.

One might argue that it is not always that we say things that we desire, for example when we talk in our sleep, or things like “I need to get an injection”.

The point regarding talking in our sleep stands true to a certain extent but it can be counterargued that some of our desires can be stored in the subconscious while we sleep. And even if we by mistake speak during our sleep and do not desire to speak it- we still have the desire for the 'thing' and either want to share this thought with someone but cannot and do not in our conscious state because of some physical restrictions.

When a person says "I need to get an injection" to treat some illness- he may not like to go to the doctor however he does intend to get his point across to the listener. Also, getting an injection is something he physically requires to do, it is a desire of a larger degree or a want- as that person wants to survive and thus desires to get healthy soon.

Aristotle says that written marks are symbols of spoken sounds. This can be supported because of the evidence of the chronology in which verbal and written language came into existence. In the earlier times, even cave men used sounds primarily, and cave art is said to have come into existence later.

A major reason to support Aristotle here is also because written language does nothing but imitates the sounds produced by spoken words. However a major difference to notice is that written words depend on spatial organisation while spoken, on the sounds and its technicalities like tone. The same word "Oh" can mean several different things according to how it is pronounced, and this is where the relevance of read words comes in. The meanings of symbol words depends on how we read them. Whilst we read, we speak the words in a certain way, either in our minds or out aloud. Written words, thus depending indirectly upon spoken words must thus be symbols of spoken words. Therefore, written words must also be physically written or perceived in the way they are spoken. A person who says a longer pronounced "Oh" must write it in such symbolic representations that the pronunciation is clear to the reader, say maybe writing "Ohhh" or "a long sign of 'Oh' was produced".

This answers our first two questions that we encountered in the previous section of the essay. However, the following argument can be questioned by a subjectivist who considers the observer and observed as the same person. A subjectivist could say that when a man writes something on a piece of paper, the 'meaning' of the written marks coincides with the 'meaning' of the spoken sounds. In such a case both spoken words and written words would be direct symbols of affections in the soul.

In addition to this, to understand affection in the soul, we must understand what 'meaning' means. As in the famous book, "The Meaning of Meaning", the book speaks only of the spoken words and not that of heard words. We must understand that the meaning of any statement, for a speaker depends on his own experience. A better way

to say this is that the meaning of a word or a sentence for the speaker, is the stimuli that cause him to speak those words. However, when we talk about the heard meaning, the meaning must be the most likely or most usual one, used in that context. The law of the conditioned reflexes can be applied here for the same. If a particular phrase is repeated everytime a certain action takes place, we associate the meaning of that statement to that action. And therefore, if that statement, is heard the most likely 'meaning' of is considered. For a person hearing the words the speaker says might not be the speaker's affection in the soul, because of reasons like misinterpretation or mishearing something.

Throughout this part of the essay we have now understood and countered the concept of spoken words and written marks from the objectivist and subjectivist point of view.

#### **4. "Written marks and spoken sounds are not same for all men"**

Now after understanding what the possible meanings and relevances can be of the written marks and spoken sounds, we come to the statement made by Aristotle that written marks and spoken sounds are not same for all men.

A possible agreement to this is simply because of the technicalities in language. Two words may mean the same, and speaker can choose which word to speak, thus the 'meaning' remains the same but the spoken sound changes. Similarly in the form of music, two musicians can play different music pieces on different notes, yet expressing the emotion of sadness through their art (it was their desire to express this emotion, but how they chose to do it differs).

One might argue that, in a smaller language with a very restricted vocabulary, it is possible that to depict something only a certain word can be used and that there is no other way to represent that 'thing' or to 'mean' that thing.

However to such an argument, we must then consider the example of sentences- since no language works only with words. A systemic arrangement is required. While languages do have their fixed form for example, Subject-Object-Verb or Subject-Verb-Object, however a person can still use two different statements to 'mean' the same thing. For example, "Max is taller than Ron" and "Ron is shorter than Max" mean the same thing however, use different symbols. The affection in the soul remains the same however, how to represent a 'thing' may change.

#### **5. "Affections are the same for all"**

To consider this statement of the quote, we shall look at it from two different points of view, one supporting it and one opposing it.

One way to look at this statement is to consider that the ultimate affection is something that is common to all men. All men have the ultimate desire to live. In order to achieve this desire, a man can discover a variety of desires. These affections might not be the same for all men, however the ultimate affection in the soul is and thus the statement will stand correct. For example, if I sing a song about loneliness, my motive is to tell others how lonely I am, therefore causing something to make me feel less lonely. If I am less lonely, I can be a happier person and happier people are healthier and thus live longer.

Another ultimate affection in the mind can be that man wants to make everything around him a part of him. Humans want to make everything human. In this was all actions of industrialisation and development, done by man- can be explained. If the actions can be explained in this way, then so can the desires be and even therefore the affection in the soul.

Another way to look at the affections in the soul is like that of an artist. If we consider this as a problem of aesthetics, the intention of an artist to convey a particular message can remain the same while the art can be different. It is similar to the way we spoke about the musician. Two poets might write two different poems and can still have the same intention of portraying love. However a counter argument to this may still remain that not all poets in the world want to depict the concept of love through their poems, and therefore each man has a different affection in the soul.

## 6. “Actual things are the same for all”

Aristotle in the last line of the quote, says-

*“...and what these affections are likenesses of- actual things- are also the same”*

Aristotle says that the affections are likenesses of actual things or resemblances of actual things. This can be interpreted as our desires and affection being influenced by the outside world and thus resembling it.

There are two questions or perspectives that must be considered in this respect-

### 6.1 ‘Actual things’ are the same for all.

To consider this statement, we will first have to define what ‘actual things’ are. According to a realist, actual things are those objects which exist independent of our existence, the existence of our minds. Aristotle himself having drawn the Law of Existence and Law of Identity, provides here to prove this realist approach right.

According to the Law of Existence- existence exists. And according to the Law of Identity, the fundamental property of a thing is what tells about its identity. So, assuming that every 'thing' exists independent to us and has its own fundamental quality( a table has its tableness, this chair I sitting on has its chair-ness, which all chairs have)- we can see no reason for which actual things will be different for different people, because they don't seem to depend on people. This realist approach can be argued my an idealist as we'll see in the next subtopic.

The relation that these actual things have with our desire and affection of the sould, is that since we humans interact with the outer world, it only makes sense that our affections and desires derive from it.

## 6.2 'Resemblances of actual things' formed by the soul are the same for all.

Here comes in the idealist poiunt of view. To understand this better we can take into account, Plato's example of the Allory of the cave. The men trapped inside a cave for there whole lives do not see the actual things across the wall, but rather shadows which resemble the actual 'ideal forms' as called by Plato.

If the last line is interpreted as to say that the resemblances made of the actual things are same for all, idealism would oppose this. The shadow form is perceived by our mind and depends on us. All the shadows will resemble the ideal form in a way but will not be exactly the same and cannot be the same for all. The Ideal Forms can however be called same for all, butu since the Ideal Forms of things are not accessible to us, our desires do come from them.

My affections in the sould might be because of my thinking of a table, aof how I perceive a table, but not the ideal form.

## 7. The Mind, Body, Soul problem

This question had come up in the second part of the essay and we shall now look at it closely.

We must notice that the quote specifies "affections in the soul" and "affections of the soul". IN both cases, Aritstotle pressumes that these affections are of the soul. This arises the big question of whether the sould exists or not.

An empiricist would directly say that there is no such thing as a sould, and that the desires we have a purely because of physical and physiological reasons. However, we must realise that some of our desires are psychological, such as our longing for company. And for such desires, either in an empirist point of view, these must also be created by the brain.

However through a dualist point of view, one might assume that desires are created by the mind, however other wants which work by accessing pain against pleasure, and done by the brain. A monist might also present something similar however denying the fact that the mind and the body are separate and independent of each other. This makes sense because if there are some parallel actions in the brain and mind, there must be some sort of causal relationship or dependency upon each other. The monist would say that this combination of the mind and body has affections and forms desires.

If we assume that the soul is separate from the body, and leaves the body after death to go into another body, another question will arise of whether the desires of the soul remain the same or will develop again with exposure to the outside world and accidentally carrying out actions soon realizing what is desired and what is not. This question cannot be empirically answered, nor is there any proof to believe that this does not happen. These questions are worth considering and if a better technology is developed in the future to study this, the answers can be found. However, for now we cannot go any further.

## **8. Conclusion**

Throughout this essay I have attempted to break down the quote into various parts and understand them intriguingly. I cannot say that I completely agree to what Aristotle says. I do agree that spoken words are symbols of affections, however where these affections exist is very questionable. I do agree to some extent that written marks can be symbols of spoken sounds, but yet in some cases they might not be. I have further then questioned whether the affections are same for all or not, which I again found to be debatable. However, I do agree that spoken sounds and written marks are not the same for all men, even though their 'meaning' might be the same. I looked a bit into the aesthetic of the matter and how the intention of the artist is the affection in the soul.

Regarding the problem of 'in the soul' and 'of the soul', throughout the whole essay I have come to understand both of them referring to the same affections of the soul. This statement itself provides to be a proof that spoken sounds and written marks are not same for all men.

Finally I also considered the metaphysical question regarding the existence of the actual things and whether they are universal and collective.