

Notes and Questions: Chapter 1, Modes of Holding and Apprehending Propositions

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The 3 Modes of Holding Propositions

- 1) **Interrogatives** (questions are expressions of **doubts**). Yes or No. Doubt. “Does free trade benefit the poorer classes?”
- 2) **Conditionals**. (conclusions are expressions of act of **inferences**). Arguments. Persuasion. Inference. May must or should. “Free trade therefore benefits the poorer classes.”
- 3) **Categorical**. (assertions are the expressions of an act of **assent**). Commands. Without conditions. Assent. “Free trade does benefit.”

These 3 modes of proposition follow a natural sequence:

1. Question → 2. Conclusion → 3. Assertion

These 3 modes of propositions are distinct from each other, but can co-exist in regard to the same subject.

The 3 Modes of Enunciating Propositions

- 1) **Doubt** (expressed as a **question**). The *skeptic*
- 2) **Inference** (expressed as a **conclusion**). Conditional. The *philosopher* - one who inquires
- 3) **Assent** (expressed as an **assertion**). Unconditional. The *believer* - one who has faith

These 3 modes of enunciating propositions are also distinct, but can co-exist.

These 3 modes of enunciating propositions are all natural and we fulfill our nature in doubting, inferring, and assenting.

The 2 Modes of Apprehending Propositions

- 1) **Notional Propositions** (common nouns, associated with **inferences**) “Man is an animal.”
- 2) **Real Propositions** (singular nouns, associated with **assents**) “Phillip is the father of Alexander.”

The same proposition can have at the same time, both a notional and real sense. Of these, the real is stronger, more vivid. Assents are stronger or more forceful than inferences.

Some questions that came to mind as I was studying chapter 1

1) Newman says that without a proposition there is no question and nothing to doubt, because without the mental act of holding a proposition there is no object in the mind for the mind to act on.

This sounds like logical positivism, or close to it. One idea that might follow from this is that “truth” can only have meaning with reference to propositions and that only a proposition can be true. This opens up some interesting questions about language and what it does and how it operates. There are those who might ask if a picture can be true, for example, or if an intelligent animal can question or infer. When such an animal looks to his master for a command, and obeys this command, does the animal ask a question and make an inference?

But more to the point, Catholic existential philosophers might be quick to ask if we have not reduced truth too far by this move and thus taken away the meaning of Jesus himself, who said “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (Jn 14:6)

Surely the truth Jesus brings is more than a set of propositions. Christianity is more than a code of ethics, more than a philosophy. This truth, one might say, is a person.

Can we still make sense of the idea of this sort of (existential?) truth?

And since we are discussing the meaning of truth and how to score propositions, we eventually have to deal with propositions such as “This sentence is not true.” If this assertion is true, then the inference is that the assertion is in fact false. What does this mean? Is the assertion both true and false at the same time as our inferences would seem to indicate?

2) I am not sure exactly what he says about dismissing doubt. Earlier he says that a question is the expression of a doubt and now that doubt (in some other sense) is nothing else than an assent. I suppose he is dismissing doubt “in this other sense” but I am still unclear what he means when he says that doubt is “a suspense of mind.” I am surprised that his treatment of doubt is so quickly dispatched.