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Chapter 6: Men's Knowledge of That Law Which They Are to Observe

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"Men's First Beginning to Grow to the Knowledge of That Law Which They Are to Observe"

Chapter 6 of Book 1 in

Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity

By Richard Hooker

1594

[Hooker, Richard. "Concerning Laws and Their Several Kinds in General." Book 1 in *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. In Richard Hooker, *The Works of that Learned and Judicious Divine Mr. Richard Hooker with an Account of His Life and Death by Isaac Walton*. Arranged by the Rev. John Keble MA. 7th edition revised by the Very Rev. R.W. Church and the Rev. F. Paget (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888). 3 vols. Vol. 1. The Online Library of Liberty. <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/921>. In the public domain. Some modernized vocabulary and constructions have been substituted in the text by the Witherspoon Institute.]

Within the text, numbers within brackets indicate the page divisions of the 1888 edition from which this text was taken; prose within text are insertions of the Witherspoon Institute to supply words required by modern English usage. In places the Witherspoon Institute has modernized archaic or obsolete vocabulary or constructions in Hooker's text. In cases where the changes are very basic and risk no alteration to the original meaning of the text (such as changing "whereof" to "of which" and "saith" to "says") there is no notation in the text; changes to more substantive vocabulary are noted with footnotes that show the original word that Hooker used.

Within the footnotes, text not within brackets are Hooker's original notes; text within single brackets is supplied by the Witherspoon Institute; text within double brackets (that is, [[]]) is supplied by the editors of the 1888 edition.

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Chapter 6: Men's first beginning to grow to the knowledge of that law which they are to observe.

[1.] In the matter of knowledge, there is between the angels of God and the children of men this

difference: angels already have full and complete knowledge in the highest degree that can be imparted to them; men, if we view them [when they are newborns]^[1], are at the first without understanding or knowledge at all.^[2] Nevertheless from this utter vacuity they grow by degrees, till they come at length to be even as the angels themselves are. That which agrees to the one now, the other shall attain to in the end; they are not so far disjoined and severed, but that they come at length to meet. The soul of man being therefore at the first as a book, wherein nothing is and yet all things may be imprinted; we are to search by what steps and degrees it rises to perfection of knowledge.

[2.] To that which has been already set down concerning natural agents this we must add, that although therein we have comprised as well creatures living as void of life, if they be in degree of nature beneath men; nevertheless a difference we must observe between those natural agents that work altogether unwittingly, and those which have though weak yet some understanding what they do, as fishes, fowls, and beasts have. Beasts are in sensible capacity as developed^[3] even as men themselves, perhaps more developed. For as stones, though in dignity of nature inferior to plants, yet exceed them in firmness of strength or durability of being; and plants, though beneath the excellency of creatures endowed with sense, yet exceed them in the faculty of vegetation and of fertility: so beasts, though otherwise behind men, may notwithstanding in actions of sense and phantasy^[4] go beyond them; because the endeavours of nature, when it has a higher perfection to seek, are in lower the more remiss, not esteeming thereof so much as those things do, which have no better proposed to them.

[3.] The soul of man therefore being capable of a more divine perfection, has (besides the faculties of growing to sensible knowledge which is common to us with beasts) a further ability, of which in them there is no show at all, the ability of reaching higher than to sensible things.^[5] Till [218] we grow to some ripeness of years, the soul of man does only store itself with concepts^[6] of things of inferior and more open quality, which afterwards do serve as instruments to that which is greater; in the meanwhile above the reach of meaner creatures it ascends not. When once it comprehends anything above this, as the differences of time, affirmations, negations, and contradictions in speech, we then count it to have some use of natural reason. To which if afterwards there might be added the right helps of true art and learning (which helps, I must plainly confess, this age of the world, carrying the name of a learned age, does neither much know nor greatly regard), there would undoubtedly be almost as great difference in maturity of judgment between men inured with them, and that which now men are, as between men that are now and innocents. Which speech if any condemn, as being over hyperbolical, let them consider but this one thing. No art is at the first finding out so perfect as industry may after make it. Yet the very first man that to any purpose knew the way we speak of^[7] and followed it, has alone thereby performed more very near in all parts of natural knowledge, than since then in any one part thereof the whole world besides has done.

[4.] In the poverty of that other new devised aid^[8] two [219] things there are notwithstanding singular. Of marvellous quick dispatch it is, and does show them that have it as much almost in three days, as if it dwell threescore years with them. Again, because the curiosity of man's mind^[9] does many times with peril wade farther in the search of things than would be convenient; the same is thereby restrained to such generalities as everywhere offering themselves are apparent to men of the weakest intelligence^[10] that need be. So as following the rules and precepts thereof, we may define it to be, an Art which teaches the way of speedy discourse, and restrains the mind of man that it may not wax over-wise.

[5.] Education and instruction are the means, the one by use, the other by precept, to make our natural faculty of reason both the better and the sooner able to judge rightly between truth and error, good and evil. But at what time a man may be said to have attained so far forth the use of reason, as suffices to make him capable of those Laws, whereby he is then bound to guide his actions; this is a great deal more easy for common sense to discern, than for any man by skill and learning to determine; even as it is not in philosophers, who best know the nature both of fire and of gold, to teach what degree of the one will serve to purify the other, so well as the artisan, who does this by fire, discerns by sense when the fire has that degree of heat which suffices for his purpose.

[1] [Hooker: in their spring]

[2] See Isa. 7:16.

[3] [Hooker: ripe]

[4] [Hooker: fancy. A term of medieval scholastic psychology that refers to the mental apprehension of an object of one's sense perception, hence it can be attributed to animals. It is closely linked to imagination, and sometimes is simply a synonym for imagination.]

[5] Ὁ δὲ ἄνθρωπος εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀναβαίνει, καὶ μετρεῖ αὐτὸν, καὶ οἶδε ποῖα μὲν ἐστὶν αὐτῷ [[leg. αὐτοῦ]] ὑψηλὰ, ποῖα δὲ ταπεινὰ, καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα ἀκριβῶς μανθάνει. Καὶ τὸ πάντων μείζον, οὐδὲ τὴν γῆν καταλιπὼν ἄνω γίνεται. ["Man ascends to heaven, and measures it, and learns what is highest in it, and what is lowest, and all other things accurately. And greatest of all, though he does not leave earth behind, he goes up." Mercurius Trismegistus, 4.90-92.]

[6] [Hooker: conceits]

[7] Aristotelical Demonstration.

[8] Ramistry. [[Peter Ramus was born in Picardy, 1515. He was a kind of self-taught person, who rose to eminence in the university of Paris. In 1543, he published "Institutiones Dialecticæ," and about the same time "Animadversiones Aristotelicæ." He was silenced after disputation, but allowed the next year to lecture in Rhetoric, and in 1552 was made Professor of Eloquence and Philosophy. . . . (Brucker, Hist. Phil. v. 548-585. Lips. 1766.) . . . He seems to have fallen into the common error of confounding rhetorical arrangement with logic. . . . Zouch's Walton, II. 134.]]

[9] [Hooker: wit]

[10] [Hooker: conceit]

Original Author Sort: Hooker, Richard

Publication Date: 11594.06

Topic: [Classical & Medieval Sources of Natural Law](#)

Subtopic: [Richard Hooker](#)

Publication Date Range: 1594

Source URL: <http://nlrac.org/node/267>