

# The artes liberales as Remedies : Their Order of Study in Hugh of St. Victor's Didascalicon

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## The *artes liberales* as Remedies: Their Order of Study in Hugh of St. Victor's *Didascalicon*

In Book II of the *Didascalicon* Hugh of St. Victor offers a fourfold division of philosophy which includes 21 disparate arts: 1) The six theoretical arts are divided into theology, which studies *intellectibilia*, or the incorporeal and imperceptible; mathematics, or the four arts of the *Quadrivium*, with *intelligibilia*, or likenesses to sensible things as its subject matter; and physics, which studies natural causes. These three divisions of the theoretical arts, which are speculative and conjectural, are rightly called wisdom (*sapientia*) because they address subjects which subsist beyond the temporal.<sup>2</sup> They seek out understanding (*intelligentia*) of God, souls, and non-temporal bodies, respectively. The remaining three divisions of philosophy, on the other hand, are more rightly called *prudentia* or *scientia* because their subject matter is not the incorporeal or nature itself, but the transitory works of nature (*temporalia*).<sup>3</sup> These disciplines, which arose by chance and became habits by use, were later refined into arts.<sup>4</sup> They include: 2) The three practical arts which Hugh calls <active,><sup>5</sup> concerned with morality and the private and public trust; 3) the seven mechanical, or adulterate arts,<sup>6</sup> which treat human necessities. Their subject matter is diverse: fabric making, armaments, commerce, agriculture, hunting, medicine, and even theatrics; and 4) the five logical arts, which include the linguistic arts of grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric, together called the *Trivium*, as well as demonstrative and sophistic argument.

Book III of the *Didascalicon* offers a very general discussion of the order and method of studying the arts. Principally, the *Trivium* and *Quadrivium* must be mastered *eo quod ii quasi quibusdam viis vivax animus ad secreta sophiae introeat*.<sup>7</sup> Without mastery of these rudiments or instruments of

<sup>1</sup> A short review of the direct influences on Hugh is given in, L. Baur (ed), *Dominicus Gundissalinus, De diuisione philosophiae*. Herausgegeben und philosophiegeschichtlich untersucht, BGPMA IV, 2–3, Münster, 1906, 358–63.

<sup>2</sup> Theology is speculative whereas mathematics is *doctrinalis scientia* (*Didasc.* II, 3–4, PL 176, 752d–53a); *Didasc.* I, 9, 747b–c.

<sup>3</sup> II, 19, 759b–c; I, 7, 746b.

<sup>4</sup> I, 12, 750b.

<sup>5</sup> I, 9, 747c.

<sup>6</sup> I, 10, 747d. For a general view of Hugh and the mechanical arts see, L. Alessio, *La filosofia e le <artes mechanicae> nel secolo XII*, *Studi medievali*, 3rd ser., 6, Spoleto, 1965, 71–155.

<sup>7</sup> *Didasc.* III, 3, 768a.

knowledge, one cannot commit one's self to philosophical studies without the aid of the lecture hall.<sup>8</sup> While much of the remainder of Book III acts as an introduction to the second half of the text – namely, a discussion of the exegetical aim of the arts in interpreting Scripture – a less general statement on the order in which the divisions of philosophy should be studied is presented succinctly in the *Didasc.* VI,14:<sup>9</sup>

*In his quatuor partibus philosophiae talis ordo in doctrina servari debet, ut prima ponatur logica, secunda ethica, tertia theorica, quarta mechanica. Primum enim comparanda est eloquentia deinde, ut ait Socrates in Ethica, per studium virtutis oculus cordis mundandus est, ut deinde in theorica ad investigationem veritatis perspicax esse possit. Novissime mechanica sequitur, quae per se omni modo inefficax est, nisi ratione praecedentium fulciatur.*<sup>10</sup>

Logic, though the last division of philosophy to be discovered, must be learned first for the sake of eloquence.<sup>11</sup> It is both an instrument and a part of philosophy. The other three divisions serve a further purpose. Incorporated into a biblo-historical program developed in Hugh's *De sacramentis*, they act as aids to remedy in man the weaknesses which resulted from the Fall: Ethics was discovered for the sake of virtue against vice (*contra vitium*). The theoretical arts arose so that wisdom might remedy ignorance. The mechanical arts were discovered for the sake of human needs against life's weaknesses (*contra infirmitatem*).<sup>12</sup> All of these arts were instituted to accomplish God's divine purpose of the restoration of the *imago Dei* which man lost as a result of the Fall.<sup>13</sup> Their study (*lectio*) effects the first stage of restoration.<sup>14</sup>

In the above quote it is quite surprising that the mechanical arts are the last to be studied. It appears that, in order even to begin the study of the sciences of fabric making or hunting, one must gain skills not only in logic and mathematics, but also in ethics, physics, and even in theology. In fact,

<sup>8</sup> . . . *ut quisquis harum disciplinam firmiter percepisset, ad aliarum notitiam postea inquirendo magis et exercendo, quam audiendo perveniret (Ibid.).*

<sup>9</sup> The *Didasc.* VI, 14–5 were Hugh's additions to several excellent manuscripts. See, C. H. Buttmer (ed.), *Hugonis de Sancto Victore Didascalicon de studio legendi*. A critical text. SMRL X, Washington 1939, pp. XV–XVI.

<sup>10</sup> *Didasc.* VI, 14, 810b.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 809c–d.

<sup>12</sup> 809c.

<sup>13</sup> I, 9, 747a; cf. I, 6, 745b–c.

<sup>14</sup> The five steps to future perfection are study, meditation, prayer, performance, and contemplation. See, V, 9, 797a.

Hugh states, the mechanical arts are ineffective (*inefficax*) without considerable previous training. Are they then placed last in the order of study as a mere afterthought because they are less worthy disciplines? Is Hugh, even unintentionally, following in a tradition not unlike that of William of Conches where certain of the arts are less respected than others?<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, should the *Trivium* and *Quadrivium* be held in less regard because they are preliminary studies? To answer these questions it is necessary to examine Hugh's notion of the purpose of the arts aface his neoPlatonic cosmology, his epistemology, his Socratic ethic, and his theme of restoration. First, however, a clearer definition of his use of the terms <philosophy> and <art> must be arrived at.

Using farming as an example, the *Didasc.* I,5 offers a definition of philosophy by distinguishing ideas from execution, or theory from practice: *Potest namque idem actus et ad philosophiam pertinere secundum rationem suam, et ab ea excludi secundum administrationem. Verbi gratia . . . agriculturae ratio philosophi est, administratio rustici.*<sup>16</sup> Philosophy is the pursuit and love of Wisdom Itself, identified with the Second Person of the Trinity, Who moderates over all human actions. It guides the rational soul towards an understanding of the nature of things and, through the regulation of morals, it leads the soul to put this understanding into action with moral earnestness.<sup>17</sup> Hugh's Platonism is fully apparent here. He calls Wisdom the sole primordial Pattern of things (*sola rerum primaeva ratio*).<sup>18</sup> This Wisdom is distinguished from that wisdom, such as farming, which deploys tools. All sciences were matters of use before they became arts. Through defined rules and precepts, the superfluous was eliminated and improper use and chance habits were corrected. The sciences participate in divine Wisdom insofar as the artificer imitates the exemplary Form which exists only in nature.<sup>19</sup> What, then, is Hugh's view of nature and in what way do the works of nature act as remedies for man's Fallen state?

In the second half of Book I of the *Didascalicon* Hugh discusses man's place and function in the order of nature by placing him in a neoPlatonic

<sup>15</sup> See, C. Ottaviano (ed.), *Un brano inedito della <Philosophia> di Guglielmo di Conches*, Naples 1935.

<sup>16</sup> *Didasc.* I, 5, 745 a.

<sup>17</sup> I, 4, 744 c. This chapter is taken from Boethius, *Commentaria in Porphyrium* I, 1.

<sup>18</sup> I, 3, 743 a. This section of the chapter is taken from Boethius. *In Porphyrium dialogi* I, 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Didasc.* I, 10, 747 d.

cosmological system based on a distinction between nature and the works of nature. In this context he sets the foundation of an epistemology, immediately based on Boethius and more fully delineated in his *De unione corporis et spiritus*, which accounts for ascending and descending degrees of human knowledge according to man's spiritual and corporeal natures. He begins his discussion by citing three modes by which all things subsist:<sup>20</sup> 1) the eternal, in which cause and effect or *<esse>* and *<id quod est>* are undifferentiated. This belongs alone to the *genitor* or artificer of nature and may be identified with the immutable divine Will. 2) the perpetual, identified with nature or the superlunary world where all things are fixed by primordial law. Here, *<esse>* and *<id quod est>* are differentiated. Being flows into actuality (*in actum profluxit*)<sup>21</sup> as *primaevae rationes*, associated with the divine Mind or Will, move upon *ousiai*, or the substances of things. From this immutable, indestructible substance emanates *formae nativae* which infuse all incorporeal and corporeal animate beings of the superlunary world. All of nature has a primordial cause and a perpetual existence.<sup>22</sup> It includes the heavenly bodies and their course of movement, which is called *<time,>* and the angels as well. The term *<nature,>* Hugh concludes, has three significations:<sup>23</sup> It refers to the archetypal Exemplar in the divine Mind – that is, to the eternal; it may signify a thing's particular being (*proprium esse*) *qua* perpetual, apart from its *esse*; or, drawing on a motif advanced both by Cicero and Victorinus, it may refer to the artificer fire (*ignis artifex*) which forms a cosmological link between nature and the works of nature.<sup>24</sup> Emanating from the sun, it begets or procreates 3) all sensible, transitory objects in the sublunary, temporal world (*temporalia*). These objects, all of which have a beginning and an end, are also referred to as the works of nature.

Man participates both in the temporal changing world where knowledge is arrived at through the senses and, through his reason, in the changeless ordered world of nature where understanding is attained by an internal

<sup>20</sup> I, 7, 745 a–46 c.

<sup>21</sup> 476 a.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> I, 11, 478 c–79 a.

<sup>24</sup> From Cicero, *De natura deorum* II, 22; Victorinus, *Expositio in librum De inventione* I, 24. cf. Hugh of St. Victor, *De unione corporis et spiritus* (PL 177, 286 a–c).

apprehension through contemplation. Always speaking of man in terms of his soul, Hugh generally<sup>25</sup> follows the Aristotelian classifications of its three powers or faculties: The vegetative for growth and nourishment; the sensitive, concerned with sense impressions and their retained images in the memory; and the rational, which understands things absent and investigates things unknown. The latter, unique to man, explains and confirms *pleno actu intelligentiae* that which is merely suggested by the imagination.<sup>26</sup> Through the theoretical arts the faculty of reason searches out the nature of things, their properties, and the <why> of their existence. Through the practical arts reason instructs in morals. Before further comment on this close link between reason and ethics, however, more detailed comparison of the powers of the soul in relation to sense and the intellect is necessary.

Cursory comments on sense perception in the *Didasc.* I, 4 are supplemented at II, 6. A thorough and very refined theory of the imagination and intellection, surprisingly not excluding physiology, is advanced by Hugh in the *De unione corporis et spiritus*. In the *Didasc.* II, 6, Hugh distinguishes the intellectible, which involves understanding (*intelligentia*), from the intelligible, which relies on the imagination. In the understanding certain knowledge (*cognitio*) has the sole principles of things (*de solis rerum principiis*) – namely, of God, ideas, and prime matter (*hyle*) – as its objects of intellection. In contrast, the imagination experiences sensations upon the soul from without (*ex qualitatibus extra accidentibus*).<sup>27</sup> Corporeal impressions (*passiones*) inhere in the sensuous memory, but, since that which is acted upon from without first must be touched by reason, they are not a certain source of knowledge. For Hugh, the mystic, knowledge (*scientia*) occurs only when matter is purified by spirit. The epistemological and even physiological link between these two is the imagination. In order for sense impressions, common to man and beast alike, to lead to *scientia*, they must be clarified or cleansed by the rational element of the soul. In the imagination corporeal images are progressively refined by a *spiritus corporeus* which is associated

<sup>25</sup> In the *Didasc.* II, 4 Hugh uses the divisions *concupiscentia*, *ira*, and *ratio* (PL 176, 754 a) and in the *Didasc.* II, 13 the divisions *justitia*, *pietas*, and *temperantia* (756 d). While these may be taken from Macrobius or Chalcidius, more likely they come from St. Gregory: *Est enim rationalis ad discernendum, concupiscibilis ad virtutes appetendum, irascibilis ad vitia adversandum* (Gregorius Magnus, *In septem Psalmos Penitentiales Expositio*, PL 79, (551 c–d)).

<sup>26</sup> *Haec humano tantum generi praesto est, quae non solum sensus imaginationesque perfectas, et non inconditas capit, sed etiam pleno actu intelligentiae quod imaginatio suggessit, explicat atque confirmat* (*Didasc.* I, 4, 744 a.).

<sup>27</sup> II, 6, 755 a–b.

with air or fire.<sup>28</sup> The less material a sense impression becomes, the closer it is aligned to spirit. While the imagination itself never loses its material nature entirely, it remains that which is closest to the spiritual element of the soul in the process of intellection. It is there that the form impressed upon the senses is purified as it touches the soul.

This dualistic psychology, where the corporeal and spiritual natures of man stand in opposition, parallels Hugh's pseudoDionysian cosmological theories. Man is a microcosm where matter meets spirit.<sup>29</sup> Grounded in the temporal world, he participates in the unchanging world of nature through the rational soul. The internal psychology is summarized thusly in the *De unione*: *Sic itaque ab infirmis et extremis corporibus sursum usque spiritum incorporeum, queadam progressio est per sensum et imaginationem . . . Postea . . . est affectio imaginaria . . . Deinde ratio pura supra imaginationem in qua ratione supremum est animae a corpore sursum.*<sup>30</sup> As the soul progresses upwardly towards God, reason is formed from within. While the imagination merely informs reason from below through the senses to produce knowledge (*scientia*), the presence of God informs or illuminates reason from above to produce wisdom (*sapientia*).<sup>31</sup> Here, the objects of reason's attentions are primary. Stated in terms of the hierarchy of the temporal, perpetual, and eternal subsistencies found in Hugh's cosmological system, knowledge is attained when the soul directs itself downwards to the works of nature by means of the corporeal senses and the imagination; conversely, wisdom or understanding results from an internal operation in which purely spiritual reason turns itself upwards toward the perpetual and eternal.

The fourfold division of philosophy, likewise, can be fitted into Hugh's cosmological dualism: *Scientia's* human concern is with the works of nature; *intelligentia's* divine concern is with the perpetual and eternal. All of man's actions, and the arts as well, may be divided into those human ones which treat the necessities of this life and those divine ones which accomplish man's restoration. In Hugh's fourfold division of philosophy, it is clearly the mechanical arts which most directly govern human necessities. Of all the works of nature, man alone came into the world naked and unarmed.<sup>32</sup> Yet nature

<sup>28</sup> *De unione* . . . PL 177, 286b; 287b.

<sup>29</sup> This is not stated directly in the *Didasc.* See, however, VII, 19, 828b–c. cf. Hugh of St. Victor, *In Salomonis Ecclesiasten Homoliae*, PL 175, 191c.

<sup>30</sup> *De unione* . . . PL 177, 288d–9a.

<sup>31</sup> cf. Augustine, *De trinitate* XII, 15, 25 (PL 42, 1012).

<sup>32</sup> *Didasc.* I, 11 (PL 176, 748b).

offered counsel through its own example. With his reason shining forth, man, the artificer and imitator of nature, invented more brilliantly that which was naturally provided to other animals, *ut iam cum natura ipsum miremur artificem*.<sup>33</sup> The lofty position which Hugh appropriates to man as the artificer of nature, paralleled to nature itself, rests heavily on the fact that *enitet ratio*.<sup>34</sup> Reason shining forth in the adulterate arts offers a significant clue about the order of their placement in the *lectio*. Before commenting further on this point, however, the logical and practical arts need to be looked at in slightly greater detail.

Following Boethius, in the *Didasc.* II, 30–1, grammar and logic are defended both as parts and instruments of philosophy. Grammar is the *scientia loquendi sine vitio*. Dialectic is *disputatio acuta* which distinguishes the true argument from the false one. Rhetoric is *disciplina ad persuadendum*.<sup>35</sup> Though the last division of philosophy to be discovered, the invention of the logical arts was essential because, as Boethius noted, the ancients, unskilled in argument and lacking discernment in their use of words and concepts (*intellectuum*), often had erred in their discussions of the nature of things and the essentials of morality. Quite simply, Hugh places grammar and logic first in the order of study because without a proper knowledge of words and concepts, it is impossible to deal with philosophical treatises. It is called *prudentia* or *scientia* because it deals with human language and reasoning.

In his discussion of the classification of the arts in the *Didasc.* II, 19, Hugh groups the practical arts with the mechanical and logical ones as *prudentia* or *scientia*. As all of the works of man and nature are guided by Wisdom, Hugh notes that each of the arts might justly be referred to as *sapientia*. The term, however, is most properly applied to the theoretical arts because they alone are concerned with the truth of things – namely, the apprehension of God, souls, and natural bodies. The practical arts address themselves to the ways in which actions should be performed. The word <ethics> is properly reserved for the moral conduct of the individual. Quoting Boethius, the science of ethics, also called *solitaria*, *is quae sui curam gerens cunctis sese erigit, exornat augetque virtutibus* . . .<sup>36</sup> It is distinguished from both the private art, or the management of domestic affairs, and the science of public affairs, or politics.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 748 c.

<sup>34</sup> 748 b.

<sup>35</sup> II, 31, 765 a–66 a.

<sup>36</sup> II, 20, 759 d.



Since the practical arts address themselves to human actions, it is fitting that Hugh classifies them as *scientia*. This stands in contradistinction, however, to a number of comments in Book I where they are grouped along with the theoretical arts as understanding (*intelligentia*). In the *Didasc.* I, 9 Hugh states:

*Rursus intelligentia, quoniam et in investigatione veritatis et in morum consideratione laborat, eam in duas species dividimus; in theoreticam, id est speculativam, et practicam, id est activam; quae etiam ethica, id est moralis appellatur. Scientia vero, quia opera humana prosequitur, congrue mechanica, id est adulterina vocatur.*<sup>37</sup>

The parallelism found here between the investigation of truth and the delineation of morals rests at the end of a discussion of the restoration of the divine likeness in man. The aim of the *lectio* is the restoration of this divine image. Of what then, does it consist? The similarity of man to God is twofold: Man is both wise and just, but only changeably so.<sup>38</sup> The restoration of his true nature as it was before the Fall must consist in the contemplation of truth and the exercise of virtue. This association between knowledge and virtue, which may be traced back to Socrates, finds its immediate origin in Boethius. Quoting him directly in the *Didasc.* I, 3, Hugh states that, through Wisdom, there is a drawing back (*retractatio*) or a calling back (*advocatio*) of the human soul to the proper power and purity of its original nature. *Hinc nascitur speculationum cogitationumque veritas, et sancta puraque actuum castimonia.*<sup>39</sup> Here Hugh is more interested in discussing the manner by which the divine likeness is restored in man than he is with the nature of the likeness itself. One must look outside of the text for more specific comments.

In the *De sacramentis*, the *De arca Noe morali*, and the *De arca Noe mystica* Hugh offers a sacramental, biblo-historical, and oftentimes allegorical account of man's Fall from grace and the means of his restoration. Prior to the Fall, man was naturally good. Contemplation of God was also natural. His reflective experience of God, unhindered by the senses or by reason, was immediate and inward. In the *De arca Noe morali* Hugh states that divine

<sup>37</sup> I, 9, 747c.

<sup>38</sup> 747a.

<sup>39</sup> I, 3, 743b.

Wisdom reflected Its image onto the heart of man.<sup>40</sup> This reflection was free from the doubt which is associated with man's knowledge and understanding in the sublunary world. It was a direct vision of God and an immediate apprehension of His constant presence. Man was wise and just insofar as he was aware of God's reflection upon his own heart. Thus it would certainly be a mistake to assume that, prior to the Fall, virtue implied certain knowledge whereas, thereafter, ethics should be aligned with *scientia*. Both *sapientia/intelligentia* and *scientia* are epistemological forms which were necessary only as a result of man's Fall from grace. To this extent, they simply serve the arts. In the *De sacramentis*, in fact, Hugh holds that *prudentia* functions to regulate the sensual appetites.<sup>41</sup> Both forms are substitutes for man's lost natural apprehension.

It is surely the case that the preliminary grouping of the practical arts with *sapientia/intelligentia* rested on the Socratic/Augustinian association between knowledge and virtue. In line with Hugh's Augustinianism, wisdom and knowledge accord with the objects of reason's attentions. There is always either an upward or a downward movement associated with them. According to Augustine, the knowledge of this world leads to action while wisdom leads to contemplation.<sup>42</sup> J. Maritain notes that, for Augustine, the wisdom which issues from the divine order is the wisdom of grace. As a result, worldly knowledge is subordinate to it.<sup>43</sup> Hence, it might not be surprising to find Hugh following the same line of thought in his classification of the arts. He holds the mechanical arts in high regard, for example, because reason shines forth in the works of the artificer. They would be ineffective otherwise. This certainly reflects his Augustinian origins. Yet for Hugh all of the arts are primary in God's plan for the restoration of man's wisdom and virtue. While Hugh would agree that wisdom is the wisdom of grace, his view is much broader than this. M.-D. Chenu notes that for Hugh, as well as for the twelfth century theologian in general, grace was more

<sup>40</sup> *Quoniam ita conditum est cor hominis, ut in eo tanquam in speculo quodam suo divina sapientia reluceret, et quae in se videri non potuit, in sua imagine visibilis appareret. Magna prorsus dignitas hominis portare imaginem Dei, et illius in se jugiter vultum aspicere, atque eum semper per contemplationem praesentem habere* (Hugh of St. Victor, *De arca Noe morali* IV, 6 (PL 176, 651 d-52 a)).

<sup>41</sup> *Idem, De sacramentis* I, 9, 13 (PL 176, 316 a). Hugh is speaking allegorically here.

<sup>42</sup> Augustine, *De Trin.*, XIII, 1, 1 (PL 42, 1013).

<sup>43</sup> J. Maritain, *Science and Wisdom*, New York 1940, 18.

clearly recognized as the restoration of nature.<sup>44</sup> What needed to be restored was the image of God reflected on man's heart. While all reason must be touched by spirit in the sublunary world, the upward/downward movement of understanding and knowledge, which for Augustine implied a certain value judgment, is viewed by Hugh under the tegument of interiority. All of the arts are preliminary steps on the way to contemplation and humility. This inward movement aims not simply at beatitude in the world to come,<sup>45</sup> but moreover, at a restoration or re-creation of that which must once again become natural to man – namely, his constant and immediate inner apprehension of God's image reflected in his heart. It is to this end, this calling back of man to his true nature, that all of the arts serve equally.

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<sup>44</sup> M.-D. Chenu, *La théologie au douzième siècle*, Paris 1966, 293–97.

<sup>45</sup> Augustine, *De Trin.* XIV, 17 (PL 42, 1054–55).

BGPMA    Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters  
PL        Patrologia Latina, Migne (ed.)  
SMRL     Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Latin