344 To Know (*Scire*)

Knowledge comes to the notice of consideration by three ways. Either by its own discovery, just as the first philosophers did, or by another’s erudition, as did the disciples of the philosophers, or by divine revelation, just as happened for the apostles. But among these, note what Jerome says in his *Epistola* to Nepotianum.[[1]](#endnote-1) Therefore, neither should a rustic think himself holy, if he knows nothing. Nor should he estimate himself experienced and eloquent in the holy language. For of two imperfections, it is better to have a holy rusticity, than the eloquence of a prostitute.

Again, says the *Glossa* of Bernard upon the whole *Homilia* 36 [Rom. 12:3]:[[2]](#endnote-2) “To be wise unto sobriety.” It is most vigilant to observe what should be known more or before it is necessary. For the time is brief. Certainly, it is every good knowledge that is based on the truth, however. The Apostle says [1 Cor. 8:2]: “If any man think that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know.”

¶ Behold what kind of fruit he placed in the manner of knowing. For it is required that you know in what order, what study, what end, and what it is necessary to know.

¶ In what order as that first which is more mature for salvation. In what study as that more avidly by which more vehemently for love. In what end as not to the morning glory, or curiosity, or anything similar, but only for the edification of yourself or your neighbor. For there are those who wish to know so that they might be known, according to that of Persius,[[3]](#endnote-3) is your knowledge so worthless unless someone else knows that you know it. But this is shameful vanity and those who want to know so that they may sell their knowledge, as for money, for honors, for favors, and it is a shameful quest.

¶ And there are those who wish to know so that they may edify, and it is charity. And there are those who wish to know so that they may be edified, and it is prudence. The last two of these lack the abuse of knowledge. For the good of the intellect is for all so doing. For all the rest hear that good of knowledge and they are not doers.

It is a sin for that one and by the similitude it may be said to one taking food and not dwelling which is very absurd for that one. For food undigested engenders evil humors, corrupts the body, and does not nourish. For knowledge undigested by the fire of charity, not cooked by the customs and touches in the same way by acts for others, poured forth it engenders a bad example on the outside and bad customs in the same way evil humors on the inside. However, inflations and heartburns are sustained in the conscience. Wherefore Gregory in the *Pastorale*,[[4]](#endnote-4) they are to be warned who accuse wicked things, nor however do they deviate in order that they may see the evil better, so that they may not deviate to a worse thing. For they perish who neglect accepted knowledge for their aid. It directs this against themselves as a witness at the last judgment. Because of the aforesaid, Bernard deplores the abuse of scientific knowledge at the beginning of his *Meditationes [de] cognitione*,[[5]](#endnote-5) so he says many know many things, but these do not know themselves.

To these things Seneca adds many examples, *Epistula* 126,[[6]](#endnote-6) so saying you know what a straight line is. What good does it do you, if you do not know what is straight in this life? And it follows, the liberal studies contribute many things to our welfare, but they hinder virtue. Wherefore Augustine, to the inquisitions of Januarius, chapter 50,[[7]](#endnote-7) so knowledge is prevented just as some machine by ascending the structure of charity. And Isidore, *De summo bono*, c. 1,[[8]](#endnote-8) it is useful to know many things and to live well. But if we are not able to do both, the study of living well is better than if we pursue to know many things. For nothing profits to know every prudent things with the ignorance of God, and nothing hinders those knowing God like the ignorance of the world. However, he knows perfectly, who knows God more and these things not for himself, but for God. Augustine, 8 *Confessiones,* c. 8,[[9]](#endnote-9) says that he had said in his Alypium section by having read the life of Anthony the hermit. The unlearned rise and seize heaven; and we with our learnings without a heart, we are wound about in flesh and even in blood. Therefore says Prov. 19[:2]: “Where there is no knowledge of the soul, there is no good.” Augustine, book 9, *De civitate*,[[10]](#endnote-10) says demons in Greek take their name from knowledge. Wherefore demons are called as if knowing, but because they do not have the knowledge of the soul, there is no good in them which would profit them for salvation. Because the Apostle says, 1 Cor. 13[:2]: “If I should have all knowledge,” etc. ... and have not charity, I am nothing.” Chrysostom, *Super Mattheum,* 15, of the *Imperfectum* homily 10,[[11]](#endnote-11) first a man must live well, then to teach. For by good association he ascends without doubt to knowledge. By knowledge in truth I do not know if he ascends to good association. Wherefore some arrive knowing God, without knowledge we see no one. Wherefore Jerome, *Epistola* 87,[[12]](#endnote-12) may the highest knowledge be for you, to distinguish the virtues and the vices, which however are contrary. However, some of them are joined only by similitude, they can hardly be discerned, Wis. 9[:4]: “Give me wisdom,” Lord, “that sits by your throne.” So that knowledge may accept that, thus [2 Paral. 9:7]: “who stand always before thee all the time.”

Again, Hugh in the book *De consciencia*,[[13]](#endnote-13)blessed is the man who can recognize himself and displease himself. For he who displeased himself, pleases God. And he who is vile to himself, is dear to God. Many things are known to man, but nothing is better than these, by which a man knows himself.

Again, no healthful knowledge ought to be scorned. Wherefore Anselm, in the book *De similitudinibus*,[[14]](#endnote-14) there is the likeness between the foolish poor people and the obtuse scholar. For the foolish poor man when he acquires a little something, says for what good will I keep something so small. Not because of this will I be richer. Therefore, I will spend this on nuts and apples like a foolish man. Meanwhile the scholars put off the least things because they do not lead to greater. But the wise poor man the less he has, the more attentively he observes, therefore he tends to retain more things, wherefore from a collection of many little things he seeks to arrive at greater things. So, ought the poor scholar do. For just as grains make a mass and drops make a river, and many coins make riches; so many particles of knowledge make wisdom. There are those who have beautiful books, but they study little in them. Therefore, by Herod is designated that one who is interpreted as the glory of his skin. But such ones fear that of Job 2[:4]: “Skin for skin” like goats. For Rom. 1[:18] it is said “they detain the truth of God in injustice.” But such ones seem never to have produced anything. They ornament their books, when however, they have an empty mind. Wherefore it happens that such a one sometimes has lost his books so ornamented by the ink of his accountant. To a certain poor scholar his companion wrote in this manner:[[15]](#endnote-15) You should believe in the heart not in the paper, you who know the art. For, if the paper perishes the knowledge goes away and you with it.

¶ Wherefore in the *Epistula* to Lucilum,[[16]](#endnote-16) it does not matter how many books you have, but rather the good ones you have committed to memory.

But in all these things knowledge of God is best, just as it is said below, in chapter [380] To see (*Videre*).

What is the measure of the earth or its circuit which the geometers think they can understand with certain measurements? Freely I profess I do not know what I do not know. Rather I profess what I know profits me nothing.

¶ Again, Augustine, book 5 of his *Confessiones*,[[17]](#endnote-17) unhappy is the man who knows all these things, however, does not know you. Blessed truly he who knows you, even if he does not know those things, not because of those things is he more blessed, but because of you alone.

¶ Again, I know as if it were the stars shining, however they would not willingly scorn to learn. For 3 Kings 10[:1] it is said, “The queen of Saba, came to try Solomon with hard questions.”

¶ The foolish do the contrary because they often do not know what they do not know, Prov. 26[:16]: “The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit.” According to that which is passed over there, [Prov. 26:12]: “Have you seen a man wise in his own conceit? there shall be more hope of a fool than of him.” Wherefore note here that some men know that they do not know, and however they do not want to learn. Some freely learn terrestrial matters, but not heavenly. Some learn and teach celestial matters.

See more concerning these materials above in the chapter [259] Eye (*Oculus*).

1. Jerome, *Epistola* 52 (PL 22:535): Nec rusticus tamen et simplex frater ideo se sanctum putet, si nihil noverit: nec peritus et eloquens, lingua aestimet sanctitatem. MULTOQUE MELIUS EST e duobus imperfectis, rusticitatem habere sanctam, quam eloquentiam peccatricem. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Bernard, *Sermo* 36.2 (PL 183:968): Vigilantissime observare quid scire magis priusve oporteat. Tempus enim breve est. Est autem, quod in se est, omnis scientia bona, quae tamen veritate subnixa sit. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Persius, *Satire* 1.25 (LCL 91:50-51): scire tuum nihil est nisi te scire hoc sciat alter?

Is your knowledge so worthless unless someone else knows that you know it? [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Gregory, *Regulae Pastoralis* 3.1. (PL 77:51): Aliter qui illicita quae faciunt, etiam laudant; aliter qui accusant prava, nec tamen devitant. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Bernard, *Meditationes Piissimae de cognitione humanae conditionis* 1.1 (PL 184:485): Multi multa sciunt, et se ipsos nesciunt. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Seneca, *Epistula* 88.13, 20 (LCL 76:356-357, 360-361): Scis, quae recta sit linea; quid tibi prodest, si quid in vita rectum sit ignoras? … “Quid ergo? Nihil nobis liberalia conferunt studia?” Ad alia multum, ad virtutem nihil.

You know what a straight line is; but how does it benefit you if you do not know what is straight in this life of ours? … “What then,” you say, “do the liberal studies contribute nothing to our welfare? [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Augustine, *Ad Inquisitiones Januarii* 2.31.39 (PL 33:233): Sic itaque adhibeatur scientia tanquam machina quaedam, per quam structura charitatis assurgat. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Isidore, *Sententiarum* 2.1.11, 13 (PL 83:601): Utile est multa scire et recte vivere. Quod si utrumque non valemus, melius est ut bene vivendi studium quam multa sciendi sequamur. … Nihil prodesse omnem scire prudentiam cum ignorantia Dei, et nihil obesse scientibus Deum ignorantiam mundi. Perfecte autem scit, qui potius Deum et ista non pro se, sed pro Deo scit. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Augustine, *Confessiones* 8.8.19 (PL 32:757): Tum in illa grandi rixa interioris domus meae, quam fortiter excitaveram cum anima mea in cubiculo nostro corde meo, tam vultu quam mente turbatus, invado Alypium, et exclamo: Quid patimur? quid est hoc? quid audisti? Surgunt indocti et coelum rapiunt; et nos cum doctrinis nostris sine corde, ecce ubi volutamur in carne et sanguine? [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 9.19 (PL 41:273): sed ubicumque illarum Litterarum hoc nomen positum reperitur, sive daemones, sive daemonia dicantur, nonnisi maligni significantur spiritus. Et hanc loquendi consuetudinem in tantum populi usquequaque secuti sunt, ut eorum etiam qui Pagani appellantur, et deos multos ac daemones colendos esse contendunt, nullus fere sit tam litteratus et doctus, qui audeat in laude vel servo suo dicere, Daemonem habes: sed cuilibet hoc dicere voluerit, non se aliter accipi, quam maledicere voluisse, dubitare non possit. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. (Pseudo-)Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum in Mattheum* Hom. 10 ex cap. 5 (PG 56:685): Aut quia prius est bene vivere, secundum autem bene docere. Nam per bonam conversationem ascenditur sine dubio ad scientiam: a scientia autem nescio si ad bonam conversationem omnimodo veniatur. Propterea scientes quidem sine timore Dei multos videmus. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Jerome, *Epistola* 1 Pelagii ad Demetriadem cap. 20 (PL 30:34): Summa tibi scientia sit, notitia summa, vitia, virtutesque distinguere, quae quamquam semper contraria sibi sint, aliqua tamen ex eis tanta junguntur similitudine, ut discerni omnino vix possint. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Hugh cf. Bernard, *De conscientia aedificanda* 15.24 (PL 184:520): Beatus homo, qui se potest cognoscere et despicere, probare et improbare. Nam qui sibi displicet, Deo placet: et qui sibi vilis est, Deo charus est. Multae sunt scientiae hominum, sed nulla melior est illa, qua cognoscit homo seipsum. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Anselm cf. Eadmer, *Liber de Sancti Anselmi Similitudinis* 156 (PL 159:689): Siquidem pauper insipiens, cum obolum acquirit, aut aliud quid parvi munusculi, dicit: «Ad quid illud tantillum servarem? Non propter hoc dives ero. Expendam itaque hoc in pomis, aut nucibus, aut qualibet alia re mihi delectabili. Non enim istud custodiendo sollicitus volo haberi.» Sic stolidus, dum parvipendit modica, nunquam proficit ad majora. Sapiens autem pauper parva quae nanciscitur, custodit, et quo minus se habere considerat, eo magis nacta retinere desiderat, quatenus ex parvulorum congerie ad majora queat quandoque pertingere. Sic nimirum is qui se pauperem scientiae ac bonitatis sentit debet facere, si ad aliquem effectum [Col.0689C] scientiae ac bonitatis velit pervenire. Nam sicut plura grana massam, et guttae flumen, et multi nummi divitem faciunt; sic multae scientiarum sententiae sapientem, et plures bonitatis actiones, bonum quemlibet efficiunt. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Cf. *Florilegium Gottingense* 306 ed. Ernst Voigt in *Romanische Forschungen* 3, ed. Karl Vollmöller (Erlangen: vorlag von Andreas Deichert, 1887:281-314), (p. 309): Cordi, non carte, credas, que noueris arte, Quod, si carta cadat, tecum sapientia vadat.

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16. Seneca, *Epistula* 45.1 (LCL 75:290-291): Non refert, quam multos, sed quam bonos habeas;

But it is quality, rather than quantity, that matters; [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Augustine, *Confessiones* 5.4.7 (PL 32:708): Infelix enim homo qui scit illa omnia, te autem nescit: beatus autem qui te scit, etiamsi illa nesciat. Qui vero et te ut illa novit, non propter illa beatior, sed propter te solum beatus est. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)