HAMLET'S EXHORTATION TO USE REASON

Proemium

In an age as unreasonable as our own, the twentieth century, where mad men and fools have so often misled nations (it is the plague of the times, says Shakespeare, when "mad men lead the blind") and where individuals prefer to follow their own fantasies and feelings rather than reason, and where even scientists are willing to admit contradictions in things and where the irrational followers of Nietzsche and others run amuck, we surely have need of an exhortation to use reason.

And the philosopher has a special concern with such an exhortation. For the true philosopher is a lover of wisdom and wisdom is the chief and greatest perfection of reason. Therefore, the philosopher most of all should love reason and the use of it. Hence, it belongs most of all to the philosopher to exhort or urge men to use reason.

And like the saying "physician heal thyself", the philosopher also needs an exhortation to use reason, especially one that tells us what reason is and what it is to use reason. It is laughable to pursue wisdom which requires a long and most difficult use of reason without seeing first what it is to use reason and why we should use reason.

The Best Short Exhortation to Use Reason

Perhaps the best short exhortation to use reason is that found in just forty-nine words of Hamlet written on seven lines of blank verse in Act IV, Sc. 4 of *Hamlet:*

.....What is a man,
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed: a beast, no more.
Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not

That capability and god-like reason
To fust in us un'used.

The Exhortation is Written in Blank Verse

Blank verse, for those not versed in these matters, is unrhymed iambic pentameter. Since the thought of the exhortation begins with the seventh syllable of the first line and ends on the sixth syllable of the seventh line, the exhortation amounts in quantity to six lines of blank verse.

Why is the exhortation written in verse?

First, verse is more pleasant than prose. The use of verse occasionally is not below the dignity of the philosopher. Boethius wrote verse alternating with prose in each part of his great work *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Hamlet, however, has chosen the meter closest to daily speech.

But a second and far more important reason is that verse is more easily memorized and remembered. It is necessary to always remember this exhortation since it is a permanent and universal beginning of the whole use of our reason. And one must think of these words carefully and frequently before one begins to understand them fully. And one cannot think often of these words if one cannot remember them. William J. Rolfe has preserved a general observation on the attention which has been given to the words of Hamlet in his edition of *Hamlet:*

> The play is one of the longest...and the amount that has been written about it far exceeds that on any other of Shakespeare's works. Furness does not exaggerate when he says:
>
> "No one of mortal mould (save Him 'whose blessed feet were nailed for our advantage to the bitter cross') ever trod this earth, commanding such absorbing interest as this Hamlet, this mere creation of a poet's brain.

> No syllable that he whispers, no word let fall by anyone near him, but is caught and pondered as no words ever have been, except of Holy Writ.
>
> Upon no throne built by mortal hands has ever "beat so fierce a light" as upon that airy fabric reared at Elsinore."[1]

A third reason why the exhortation is written in verse or meter is to call our attention to the likeness between what is said in the exhortation and numbers and what is found in numbers. Shakespeare often calls what is written in verse "numbers." And Hamlet himself in his letter to Ophelia, after some verses addressed to her, calls them *numbers:*

> O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers. I have not art to reckon my groans.[2]

Numbers and what is found in them are like what is in the exhortation first as regards definitions. There are many definitions in the exhortation and Aristotle notes the likeness of definitions to numbers in the eighth book of the *Metaphysics*.[3] Hence, Hamlet speaks of man without reason or the use of reason as being "no more" than a beast.

Proportion, or the likeness of ratios, is first seen in numbers and the exhortation rests upon many proportions as can be seen especially in the first part (the first three lines).

Moreover, although thoughts are like numbers rather than continuous quantities (as we learn in the first book *About The Soul*), nevertheless as ratios of numbers are said to be in continuous proportion by a certain likeness to the continuous, so too, definitions and syllogisms can be said to be continuous by the same likeness. In Hamlet's Exhortation, for example, the definitions of order, of the act of reason, of reason, and of man are continuous and it is necessary to see this. Hamlet syllogizes and syllogizing is like reckoning (see Greek) and especially when one syllogizes from a proportion like one does in mathematics.

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[1] *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, Preface, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1894, p. 5
[2] *Hamlet* , Act II, Sc. 2
[3] 1043b 32-1044a 14

There is also the symbolism of the numbers to exercise the minds of the Pythagoreans and Platonists and Straussians amongst us who will, of course, note that Hamlet writes his *wise* exhortation on seven lines beginning on the seventh syllable of the first line. Seven is an old symbol of wisdom and seven is also the age of reason. Further, there are exactly forty-nine words in the exhortation and forty-nine is the square of seven and the age in which Aristotle said reason is best. Further, Hamlet *completes* the exhortation using the equivalent of six lines of blank verse by ending on the sixth syllable of the last line. Six is the first perfect number with parts perfectly ordered. And this signifies then the perfection and order of his exhortation. There can also be seen deep significance in his writing ten syllable lines of iambic pentameter. Ten, the number of syllables on a line of iambic pentameter, is a symbol of the law which is something of reason. And the five and two in iambic pentameter is also deeply significant. Five is the number of the virtues of reason in Book Six of the Nicomachean Ethics which perfects the two parts of reason - looking and practical. Two is also a symbol of reasoned out knowledge for Plato, as we learn in the first book *About the Soul*. But perhaps this way madness lies.

The Division of Hamlet's Exhortation

Hamlet's exhortation has two parts.

In the first part (the first three lines), Hamlet asks a question and answers it on the basis of a proportion between man and beast and the chief goods of each. The question is: "What is a man if his chief good and market of his time be but to sleep and feed?" and the answer is: "a beast, no more".

In the second part (lines four through seven), Hamlet brings out what man has, or what God has given him, in addition to what the beast has and also what is found in man's chief good that is not found in the chief good of the beast. In this second part, Hamlet also defines order, the act and use of reason, and reason (the ability) itself and (with the help of the first part) enables us to complete the first definitions of man and beast.

In the two parts together, Hamlet touches upon at least five general reasons why we should use reason, or use it more than we do. We can see these five reasons after we have examined the two parts in some detail.

The First Part of the Exhortation

The proportion and implicit syllogism of the first part

When we examine more carefully the first part of Hamlet's exhortation, we can see that the question and answer in it are based on a proportion or likeness of ratios among four things. And that this proportion involves implicitly if-then statements from which if-then syllogisms arise. Each of these should be unfolded.

The four things in the proportion are man and his chief good and the beast and his chief good. Aiming at clarity and avoiding the pedantry of teaching, Hamlet speaks *exemplariter* of the beast's chief good as "to sleep and feed". This fits our cat Tabitha who purrs when she's fed and when she sleeps.

The proportion could be first stated thus: the chief good of man is to man as the chief good of the beast is to the beast. Then, alternating the proportion, as the chief good of man is to the chief good of the beast, so is man to the beast.

From this proportion, we could form if-then statements something like what the mathematician does. If the mathematician sees that A is to B as X is to Y, he can form any of three if-then statements. If X is more than y, then A is more than B; If equal, equal; if less, less. Hamlet's question and answer differ only in form from this if-then statement: if man's chief good is no more than the good of the beast, then man is no more than a beast.

And this if-then statement is the beginning of a powerful hypothetical or if-then syllogism which can be stated thus: If man's chief good is no more than the chief good of a beast, then man is no more than a beast. But man is surely more than a beast. Hence, it cannot be true that man's chief good is no more than the chief good of the beast.

No man wants us to treat him as if he were no more than a beast. We would all think it wrong, if faced with the choice between saving the life of a man or a beast, we were to save the life of the beast. But despite thinking

themselves better than a beast, many men pursue the goods we have in common with the beast as if they were our greatest good. But this statement upon which their life seems to be based, that is, that our chief good is eating and sleeping and sexual pleasure is refuted by the rejection of its consequence, that man is no more than a beast.

One could also, of course, reason from the statement that if man is more than a beast, then the chief good of man is more than the chief good of the beast. Affirming the antecedent "man is more than a beast" and we are forced to admit the consequent, the chief good of man is more than the chief good of the beast.

These syllogisms have something of the power and certitude of the mathematician's syllogisms based on proportions. It is as if the mathematician had seen this proportion: Half of six is to three and as half of four is to two. And then said: What is a three if it be half of four? A two, no more.

The Connection between What a thing is and its End or Chief Good

But what is seen explicitly in the first part of the exhortation is the necessary connection between what man is and what his chief good is. Just as there is a necessary connection between three and half of six, and between two and half of four, so likewise, there is a necessary connection between what man is and his chief good and between what a beast is and his chief good. Plato and Aristotle have taught us why there is a necessary connection between what a thing is and its end and good. The middle terms are *a thing's own act* and *a thing's own perfection* . A thing's own act done well is its end or purpose and a thing's own act (what it alone can do or does better) is determined by what it is. LIkewise, a thing's own perfection is its end and the perfection of things different in kind is different. The perfection of the eye is not the same as the perfection of the ear because *what an eye is* is not the same as *what an ear is*.

Hence, when we see in the second part what is necessary to complete the definition of man, that is, what he has in addition to the beast, we are prepared again to reason more perfectly to what man's chief good is.

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Before turning to the second part of Hamlet's Exhortation, there are some words to look at more closely in the first part.

The words *chief good*

The word *chief* added to good signifies both that it is the greatest good and also the good under which all other goods are placed

Why Hamlet use the metonym *time* for our life

The word *time* here is a metonym for the life of man. The name of the measure is used for the measured. Man's life is measured by time for it begins and ends in time. But it is especially appropriate to use this metonym for the life of man rather than the life of a beast or a plant. Man lives in time more than the other animals. Hence, in the third book *About the Soul*, Aristotle calls man the animal with the sense of time:

> Desires come to be contrary to each other. This happens when reason and concupiscence are contrary. This comes about in those having the sense of time: for the mind urges us to hold back on account of the future while concupiscence on account of the present - for what is pleasant now seems to be simply pleasant and simply good on account of not seeing the future.[4]

Thomas Aquinas comments on this:

> In man there are contrary desires, one of which the continent follow and others resist. He says therefore that desires are able to become contrary to each other and this happens "in those having the sense of time"; that is, those who not only know what is in the

[4]Book III, Chapter 10, 433b 5-10

> present, but who consider the past and the future - because the understanding sometimes commands one to draw back from something concupiscible on account of the consideration of the future, as when to one with a fever, it seems from the judgment of the understanding, that he ought to abstain from wine lest the fever become warm.[5]

Man begins to differ from the beast in his acts when he considers not just the here and now, but takes into account the past and the future before he acts. And as we will see in the second part, man is the animal with reason and reason is the ability to look before and after and the first meaning of *before* and *after* is that of time. Indeed, as Aristotle teaches us in the fourth book of *Natural Hearing*, miscalled the *Physics* (223a 21-29), time would not fully be without the numbering soul.

The word *market*

The word *market* can be explained in two ways. It can mean more or less the same as *mark* which means the end or goal aimed at. Or it can be taken for what man spends his time or life on or trades them for. But since that for the sake of which is the definition of end, the second explanation does not differ in substance from the first.

Why Hamlet couples *his chief good* and *market of his time*

By this coupling, Hamlet points out two things. One is that the *good* and the *end* are the same. And the second is that the good or end of *man* is the same as the end or good of *human life*.

Why Hamlet says *no more*

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[5] *Commentary on Book III of On the Soul*, Lectio 15, n. 829

The definitions of things are like numbers. When Hamlet says that man would be "a beast, no more" if his chief good were no more than that of the beast, he also insinuates by the words *no more* that man does have something in common with the beast (which is to be an animal) and that the difference between man and the beast is like that of numbers, as Aristotle, following Plato, teaches us in the eighth book of the *Metaphysics* [6] where the addition or subtraction of a unit gives a different species. Hence, we can begin to understand better the likeness of the implicit syllogisms in Hamlet's question and answer to the reasoning of the mathematician. To say it again, it is as if the mathematician were to ask: What is a three if it be half of four? And the answer would be: a two, no more.

Hence also when, in the second part, we consider what man has in addition to the beast, namely reason, we can complete the first definition of man as an animal with reason.

The Second Part of the Exhortation

In the second part, Hamlet tells us what man has in addition to the beast and what therefore will be found in his chief good (but not in the chief good of the beast).

But if we examine more closely the second part, we can see that Hamlet has given us implicitly five continuous definitions. Definitions are said to be continuous when one definition, or what is defined by it, enters into another. In geometry, for example, the definitions of rectilineal plane figure, of quadrilateral and of square are continuous. In logic, the definitions of sign, name, predicable and genus are continuous. In the philosophy of nature, the definition of motion is continuous with both the definition of nature and that of time. (Something like this is also found in syllogisms. When the conclusion of one syllogism is the premiss of another, the two syllogisms can be called *continuous*. Even elementary theorems in Euclid are based on continuous syllogisms)

In the second part of Hamlet's Exhortation, the definitions of order, of the act or use of reason, of reason, (and with some help from the first part) of man and of beast are continuous. The definition of order is found in the definition of

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[6] 1043b 32-1044a 14

the act of reason and reason is defined by its act and man is defined by reason and the beast by negating something in the definition of man.

Order is defined as a before and after. Hamlet uses the definition of order (before and after) in his definition of the act of reason which is a discourse in which there is looking before and after. And reason is defined as the capability, or (I shorten this to) the ability, for large discourse, looking before and after. Man can then be defined as the animal with reason. And the beast as an animal without reason.

The definition of man is also a beginning for knowing man's own act. Since man is an animal with reason, the act with reason must be man's own act. And since a thing's own act done well is its end, we can be led into ethics from Hamlet's exhortation since ethics is based on a knowledge of the end of man. Likewise the definition of man enables us to know what is the natural road in human knowledge. Since man is an animal with reason, the natural road in human knowledge must be the road from the senses into reason. But let us return to the exhortation itself.

We should now examine some key words in the definition of reason and of order. Hamlet tells us that reason is the ability for large discourse, looking before and after and order is a before and after. Four words should be examined here: *discourse, large, looking* and *before*. Each of these words has more than one meaning and not by chance. We cannot attempt here a complete exposition of any one of them. But we can indicate some of the main senses and their order so as to better understand Hamlet's definition of reason and order.

The Word *Discourse*

The word *discourse* comes from the Latin word for *running* which first names the well known act of our legs.

It is then carried over to other outwards actions of man. In this famous line from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare manages to use both the Latin derived word and the English word:

The course of true love never did run smooth.[7]

Then the word is applied to the movement of the eyes as when our eyes run down a column of figures or a list of names.

And at last, the word is placed upon an inward act of reason that is like running or motion, a going from this to that.

Perhaps the best way to understand this last sense of *discourse* is to distinguish the discourses of reason.

Every discourse of reason is a going from this to that, but there are four ways in which these discourses of reason can be distinguished. We can distinguish them first by how reason goes from this to that. And then we can distinguish them by the differences of the this and that between which reason runs. Third, they can be distinguished by their ends or that for the sake of which reason runs. And fourth, they can be distinguished by what the discourse is about.

Thomas distinguishes the discourse of reason by how reason goes from this to that:

> In scientia enim nostra duplex est discursus.
>
> Unus secundum successionem tantum: sicut cum, postquam intelligimus aliquid in actu, convertimus nos ad intelligendum aliud.
>
> Alius discursus est secundum causalitatem: sicut cum per principia pervenimus in cognitionem conclusionum...
>
> secundus discursus praesupponit primum: procedentes enim a principiis ad conclusiones, non simul utrumque considerant
>
> ...discursus talis est procedentis de noto ad ignotum...quando cognoscitur primum, adhuc ignoratur secundum.Et sic secundum non cognoscitur in primo, sed ex primo. Terminus vero discursus est, quando secundum videtur in primo, resolutis effectibus in causas: tunc cessat discursus.[8]

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[7] *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* Act I, Sc. 1
[8] *Summa Theologiae,* Prima Pars, Q. 14, Art. 7, c.

This can be translated thus:

> In our reasoned-out knowledge, there is a twofold discourse.
>
> One by succession only: as when, after we understand something in act, we turn to understanding another thing.
>
> The other discourse is by causality: as when through beginnings we arrive at a conclusion...
>
> The second discourse presupposes the first; for those proceeding from beginnings to conclusions, do not consider both at once.
>
> ...Such a discourse belongs to one proceeding from the known to the unknown...when the first is known the second is still unknown. And thus the second is not known in the first, but from the first. The end of the discourse however is when the second is seen in the first, the effects having been untied in the causes: and then the discourse stops.

In the light of this text, the question arises about the word *discourse* in the definition of reason. Should we understand the first or the second discourse?

Although both could be understood by the word *discourse* in Hamlet's definition, it seems nevertheless that one should have chiefly in mind the second discourse. Three reasons can be given for this.

The first reason is based on the truth that we should define ability by its utmost.[9] For example, we define a person's weight-lifting ability by the greatest weight they can lift, not by any lesser weight they can also lift. Now, as Thomas points out, the second discourse presupposes and includes the first, but the reverse is not true. Whoever is capable of the second discourse must also be capable of the first, but not vice-versa. Hence, we should define reason by the second discourse which is the utmost to which its ability (for discourse) extends.

The second reason is that the second discourse seems to be properly of reason, the discourse that is appropriate or proper to reason. The eyes can run down a column of figures or names. But they do not see one thing through seeing another or by seeing another.

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[9]See Aristotle, *De Caelo,* 281a7-25

A sign that the second discourse is proper to reason is that *discursus* became for the Latin logicians often a synonym for *reasoning*. And, of course, the fact that the second discourse is called *reasoning*, but not the first; and that *reasoning* is named from reason, as if its own act, is a sign that the second discourse is the one to define reason by what is proper to it.

The third reason is that we can see much better in the second discourse the difference between the movement of reason and the movements in the sensible world. When my body goes from being in Boston to being in New York, my being in Boston is not a cause of my coming to be in New York. Likewise, if my body goes from being healthy to being sick, my being healthy is not the cause of my becoming sick. But when reason goes from knowing the premisses to knowing the conclusion, knowing the premisses is a cause of coming to know the conclusion. And in the further discourse of reason, we come to know the conclusion not only from the premisses, but <u>in</u> the premisses. But how could we be in New York by being in Boston?

Defining and demonstrating and counting and calculating are main forms of discourse *secundum causalitatem*. In all of these, reason comes to know or understand by a movement rather than all at once.

Thomas distinguishes the discourses of reason by the *this* and *that* between which reason runs when explaining why natural science is said to proceed *rationabiliter* or reasonably:

> cum sit rationis de uno in aliud discurrere, hoc magis in scientia naturali servatur. ubi ex cognitione unius in cognitionem alterius devenitur, sicut ex cognitione effectus in cognitionem causae.
>
> Et non proceditur solum ab uno in aliud secundum rationem, quod non est aliud secundum rem, sicut si ab animali proceditur ad hominem.
>
> In scientiis enim mathematicis proceditur per ea tantum, quae sunt de essentia rei, cum demonstrent solum per causam formalem; et ideo non demonstratur in eis aliquid de una re per aliam rem, sed per propriam definitionem illius rei. Etsi enim dentur aliquae demonstrationes de circulo ex triangulo, vel e converso, hoc non est nisi inquantum in circulo est potentia triangulus, et e converso.

> Sed in scientia naturali, in qua fit demonstratio per causas extrinsecas, probatur aliquid de una re per aliam omnino extrinsecam. Et ita modus rationalis in scientia naturali maxime observatur, et ideo scientia naturalis inter alias est intellectui hominis magis conformis. Attribuitur igitur rationabiliter procedere scientiae naturali, non quia ei soli conveniat, sed quia ei praecipue competit.[10]
>
> Since it belongs to reason to run from one thing to another, this is more observed in natural science where, from the knowledge of one thing, reason comes to knowledge of another, as from the knowledge of the effect to a knowledge of the cause.
>
> And it does not only go forward from one to another in reason that is not other in things, as when it goes forward from animal to man.
>
> In the mathematical sciences, one goes forward only through what belongs to the essence of the thing, since they demonstrate only through the formal cause; and therefore in them, something is not demonstrated of one thing by another thing. For although some demonstrations are made about the circle from the triangle, or the reverse, this is not except insofar as the triangle is in the circle in ability and vice-versa.
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> But in natural science, in which there is demonstration through extrinsic causes, something is proven about one thing by another thing altogether outside of it. And thus the way of reason is most of all observed in natural science; and therefore natural science among the others is more in conformity with the understanding of man. To proceed then by way of reason is attributed to natural science, not because it belongs only to it, but because it especially belongs to it.

Sometimes reason runs from a *this* to a *that* when these are not other things. But the utmost of reason's ability to discourse is when it runs from one *thing* to another *thing*.

The first of these discourses is found when reason goes from the sensible singulars to the universal or from the image of a thing to the thought of it and when reason goes from one thought to another thought of the same thing.

The first discourse of reason is from the sensible to the understandable. Thomas speaks of this:

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[10]*In Boetii de Trinitate,* Lectio II, Q. II, Art. 1, Ad primam quaestionem

> Ex hoc enim quod anima corporis forma et actus est, procedunt ab essentia ejus quaedam potentiae organis affixae, ut sensus et huiusmodi, ex quibus cognitionem intellectualem accipit,
>
> propter hoc quod rationalis est habens cognitionem decurrentem ab uno in aliud; et sic a sensibilibus in intelligibilia venit,
>
> et per hoc ab angelo differt, qui non a sensibilibus discurrendo ad intelligibilia, cognitionem accipit.[11]
>
> From the fact that the soul is the form and act of a body, certain powers fastened to organs proceed from its nature, as the senses and others of this sort, from which it takes the knowledge of understanding
>
> because of this it is reasonable, having knowledge running from one thing to another; and thus it comes to the understandable from the sensible,

and by this it differs from the angel who gets knowledge without running from the sensible to the understandable.

When reason runs or goes from the sensible to the understandable, it is not going from one thing to another thing. It is the same thing that is singular when sensed and universal when understood. When we go from experience to the universal, the universal is also contained in some way in the singular. Thomas explains this:

> ...singulare sentitur proprie et per se, sed tamen sensus est quodammodo etiam ipsius universalis. Cognoscit enim Calliam non solum inquantum est Callias, sed etiam in quantum est hic homo, et similiter Socrates in quantum est hic homo.
>
> Et exinde est quod tali acceptione sensus praeexistente, anima intellectiva potest considerare hominem in utroque. Si autem ita esset quod sensus apprehenderet solum id quod est particularitatis, et nullo modo cum hoc apprehenderet universalem naturam in particulari, non esset possibile quod ex apprehensione sensus causaretur in nobis cognitio universalis.[12]
>
> the singular is sensed properly and as such, but nevertheless sense is in some way also of the universal itself. For it knows

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[11] *In II Sent.,* Dist. III, Q. I, Art VI, Solutio

[12] *In II Posteriorum Analyticorum,* Lectio XX, n. 595

> Callias not only insofar as he is Callias, but also insofar as he is this man, and likewise Socrates insofar as he is this man.
>
> And hence it is that, such taking by the senses coming before, the understanding soul is able to consider man in both. If however it were the case that sense grasped only that which is of the particular, and in no way with this grasped the universal nature in the particular, it would not be possible that universal knowledge is us could be caused from the grasping of sense.

Reason also goes from one thought to another thought of the same thing. We have seen Thomas use the example of going from the genus to the species. When we go from animal to man, or from quadrilateral to square, we are not going from one thing to another thing. Likewise, in mathematics, as Thomas explains in the above text from his Exposition of Boethius' work *On the Trinity*, we do not go from one thing to another thing outside of it.

The discourse *ab uno in aliud secundum rem* is the high point of reason's ability. Not only is reason's discourse not confined within the limits of one thing, but it enables reason to know things it has not experienced. Thomas touches upon these things and also gives us a division of this kind of discourse in this key text:

> scientia rerum acquiri potest non solum per experientiam ipsarum, sed etiam per experientiam quarandam aliarum rerum: cum ex virtute luminis intellectus agentis possit homo procedere ad intelligendum effectus per causas, et causas per effectus, et similia per similia, et contraria per contraria.[13]
>
> a knowledge of things is not only able to be acquired by an experience of those things, but also by an experience of certain other things: since by the power of the active understanding's light man is able to go forward to understanding effects through causes and causes through effects, and like things through like things, and contraries through contraries.

When Aristotle, following Plato, speaks of the first two discourses, he compares reason to the runners in a race:

> It should not remain hidden to us that arguments from the beginnings and those to the beginnings differ. For it was well that

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[13] *Summa Theologiae,* Tertia Pars, Q. 12, Art. 1, Ad. 1

> Plato asked about this and investigated whether the road was from the beginnings or to the beginnings; just as in the race-course from the judges to the end or the reverse.[14]

In the Greek race-course, the runners sometimes would run from the starting-point to some post down the field and then from that post back to the starting-point. Likewise, our reason sometimes runs from a cause towards its effect, but more often in the contrary direction, from an effect towards its cause. (It depends upon which is known, or more known, to us.)

Hamlet adds the word *looking* immediately after *discourse* because in its discourse, reason is trying to see or understand. Thomas in this text uses the words *per modum motus* and *discurrendo* as equivalent:

> Ipsum autem intelligere animae humanae est per modum motus;
>
> intelligit enim anima discurrendo de effectibus in causas, et de causis in effectus, et de similibus in similia, et de oppositis in opposita.[15]
>
> However the understanding itself of the human soul is by way of motion.
>
> For the soul understands by running from effects to causes, and from causes to effects, and from like to like, and from opposites to opposites.

Hamlet's phrase that reason in its *discourse* is *looking* indicates that reason tries to understand by way of motion or discourse.

Reason then is the ability for all the discourses we have touched upon, but especially the discourse whereby it understands one thing from another thing. For this shows the utmost of its ability.

In the two passages where Thomas touches upon this last discourse, it is significant that he gives the same four ways that understanding one thing can help us to understand another thing. It is difficult, or impossible, to think of any other way in which understanding one thing could help us to understand

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[14] *Nicomachean Ethics,* Book One, 1095a 30 - 1095b 1

[15] *Quaestiones Disputatae de Spiritualibus Creaturis,* Art. 10, c.

another. If there is no dependence of one thing upon another and no likeness or opposition of one to the other, how could understanding one help us to understand the other?

We can also distinguish the discourse of reason in a third way by its end. The end is either knowing (alone) or doing. If the end of the discourse is knowing alone, we have the discourse of looking reason. We can consider under this, the discourse of the dialectician, the discourse of the demonstrator and the discourse of the wise man. If the end of the discourse is some doing, we have the discourse of practical reason. The discourse of practical reason can be divided into the discourse of foresight and the discourse of art. A discourse is necessary both for doing and making. The discourse of art is more certain than that of foresight for the means of making are determined while those in doing are variable.

The discourse of reason can also be distinguished by what it is about.

The Word *Large*

The discourse of reason can be called *large* because it is about the large or because the discourse is itself large.

The discourse of reason can be about the large in two senses.

First, the discourse of reason can be about the universal while the senses know only the singular. A discourse about the universal can be called large because the universal covers a large area insofar as it is said of many, if not an infinity, of things.

Second, the discourse of reason can be about the *large* in the sense of great. *Large* in this sense is opposed to *small* as in *small talk*. The latter is talk about small or unimportant things.

The discourse of the philosopher is larger than that of other men in both of these senses. And the discourse of the wise man is the largest in both senses.

The discourse of reason itself can be called large insofar as it begins or ends in many things, or insofar as it is long.

Reason, as Boethius and Thomas teach us, gathers one simple truth from many things. This is first seen when reason separates out the common from experience by induction. And again from one simple truth that is a beginning, reason deduces many things and makes many applications.

The discourse of reason is long insofar as it goes through many steps or insofar as it is goes between things greatly distant. In the first way, the discourse of reason can be long even in geometry or arithmetic. But in the second way, the discourse of reason is long in the philosophy of nature and especially in wisdom. For reason goes from motion to the unmoved mover.

Reason is, of course, capable of *small* discourse in all the senses opposed to *large* discourse. But Hamlet defines reason by large discourse because we define any ability by its utmost. If one is capable of large discourse, one is also capable of a small discourse. But the reverse is not true.

The word *looking*

The word *looking* here means trying to see. And *to see* is used not in the first sense of the act of the eyes or the second sense of imagining, but in its third sense of understanding. We don't understand the discourse of reason if we don't know that reason is trying to understand by its motion. Motion is not for the sake of motion.

The Words *Before and After*

But it should not remain hidden to us that the word *before* is equivocal by reason (and hence also the word *after* and therefore also the word *order* and all other words defined by before and after such as *first* and *last*, *beginning, middle,* and *end* and so on)

Hamlet does not distinguish here the senses of *before*, but Aristotle has distinguished the central and chief senses:

> One thing is said to be *before* another in four ways.
>
> First and most strictly according to time, by which one thing is older and more ancient than another. For something is said to be older or more ancient in that its time has been longer.
>
> Second, that whose existence does not follow reversibly, as one is before two. If two exists, it follows right away that one exists; but if one exists, it is not necessary that two exist; so that the existence of the other does not follow reversibly from the one. Thus the *before* is such that from it, existence does not follow reversibly.
>
> In a third way, *before* is said according to a certain order, as in the sciences and speeches. The order of before and after belongs to the demonstrative sciences: the elements are in order before the diagrams; and in grammar, the letters are before the syllables. Likewise, in speeches, the proemium comes in order before the narration.
>
> Further, besides the aforesaid, the better and more honorable seems to be before by nature. For even the many say that those honored or loved by them come before with them. But this is perhaps the strangest of the ways.
>
> *Before* would seem to be said in that many ways.
>
> There would seem to be another way *before* is said in addition to the above. Of those things whose existence follows reversibly, the cause in whatever manner of existence to the other would reasonably be said to be before by nature. That there are such things is clear. The existence of a man follows reversibly in existence to the true statement about him. For if a man exists, the statement by which we say the man exists is true. But the true statement is in no way a cause of the thing being, but the thing being would seem to be a cause in some way of the statement being true. For the statement is said to be true or false as the thing is or is not.
>
> Thus, one thing is said to be *before* another in five ways.[16]

We cannot here enter into an exposition of this magnificent text of Aristotle and show that he has perfectly ordered the central senses of the word *before*. But even a cursory examination of this text will begin to reveal how much lies under the words of Hamlet. Reason looks before and after in all five senses given here, as well as in the senses attached to them.

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[16]*Categories*, Chapter 12

Godlike

Since God understands all things at once by understanding Himself and there is no discourse or movement in Him, it seems simply false to say that reason or the ability for large discourse, looking before and after, is *god-like*.

Reason is god-like insofar as it is able to understand and to the extent that it understands in act. But Hamlet has told us that reason understands by a discourse in which it looks before and after. The greatest virtue of practical reason is called *foresight* which word itself points to before and after. And the Latin word for this virtue (*prudentia*) is also derived from the Latin word for foresight (*providentia*) When Thomas explains the word *Deus,* he does so by *providentia:*

> hoc nomen *Deus*...imponitur...ab universali rerum providentia: omnes enim loquentes de Deo, hoc intendunt nominare Deum, quod habet providentiam universalem de rebus. Unde dicit Dionysius, 12 cap. *de Div. Nom.* quod *deitas est quae omnia videt providentia et bonitate perfecta*. Ex hac autem operatione hoc nomen Deus assumptum, impositum est ad significandum divinam naturam.[17]
>
> This name *God* (*Deus*) is imposed from the universal providence of things: for all speaking of God intend to name that which has universal providence over things. Whence Dionysius says, in the twelfth chapter *About the Divine Names*, that "Godhood is what sees all things by providence and perfect goodness." The name *God*, taken from this operation, is laid down to signify the divine nature.

Thomas also sees order as the proper effect of divine providence:

> Convenientia ordinis perfectionem providentiae demonstrat: cum ordo sit proprius providentiae effectus.[18]

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[17] *Summa Theologiae,* Prima Pars, Q. 13, Art. 8, c.
[18] *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Liber III, Caput LXXVII

> The suitableness of order shows the perfection of providence: since order is the proper effect of providence

And Thomas often quotes St. Paul in the Latin text:

> Quae a Deo sunt, ordinata sunt.[19]

> The things which are from God, are ordered

And the Latin text of *Iudith:*

> Tu fecisti priora, et illa post illa cogitasti, et hoc factum est quod ipse voluisti.[20]

One man is wiser than another and more like God by his reason when he sees what is before or after what the other man sees or, in general, when he sees a before and after which the other man does not see.

Five General Reasons Why We Should Use Reason

Hamlet touches upon at least five general reasons why we should use reason (or use it more than we do).

One reason is in comparison to what is below man; two reasons are in comparison to what is above man; and two reasons are in comparison to man himself.

The beast is below man. If man does not use his reason, he falls to the level of the beast.

God is above man. If man uses his reason, he obeys God who has given us reason so that we might use it. "Sure he that made us with such large discourse, Looking before and after, gave us not That capability and god-like reason To fust in us un'used."

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[19]*Rom.*, XIII, v. 1: Quoted in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Liber III, Caput LXXVI
[20]*Iudith*, IX, v. 4

And in using reason, man becomes like God who is above him.

Having looked above and below man, we can now look at man himself. Since man is an animal with reason, man cannot be true to himself if he does not use his reason. And as Polonius says elsewhere in the play: "This above all: to thine own self be true"

And since the chief good or end of man involves the use of reason, man cannot achieve his chief good or end without the use of reason.

Anyone of these five reasons by itself is a powerful motive for using reason. Taken together, they are overwhelming.

Duane H. Berquist