DISTINCTION OF THE BEGINNINGS OF PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy is a reasoned out understanding of things or a reasoned out knowledge of them.[1] It is not that natural understanding of things which all men come to have that is confused and very general (although it may depend upon it).

Since philosophy is a reasoned out knowledge of things, it is *both* a *perfection* of reason in regard to things and acquired by the *use of reason*.

Because it is a perfection of reason to know things, philosophy must have beginnings about things. For as King Lear said, nothing will get you nothing. One cannot think out and reason out a knowledge of things from nothing. And unless these beginnings were about *things*, they would not give rise to a reasoned out knowledge of *things*.

Because it is acquired by the use of reason, philosophy also has beginnings about the right use of reason or beginnings of the good use of reason. For it is also possible to misuse reason.

Since the good use of reason depends both upon a knowledge of the roads to follow in our thinking (or a knowledge of the ways of going forward in our thinking) and upon our will (and to some extent even our emotions), philosophy has two kinds of beginnings of the good use of our reason.

One is the knowledge of the roads to follow in our thinking[2] or a knowledge of the ways of going forward in our thinking.

The other is the dispositions of will (and emotion) necessary to use our reason well.[3] For we may be willing to think about something or not willing to

---

[1] This is why Plato and Aristotle often call philosophy an *episteme* whose etymology from *coming to a halt or stop* suggests we can carry over this word into English by *reasoned out understanding* or *reasoned out knowledge*

[2] Hence, Aristotle usually calls philosophy a *methodos* which comes from the Greek words for *over a road*. Philosophy is knowledge over a road or knowledge that follows a road.

[3] Philosophy is itself named from one of these key dispositions of will, the *love of wisdom* . *Philosophy* however is used by Aristotle and Plato not so much to name the love of wisdom, but the *knowledge* which a lover of wisdom seeks. (And therefore most of all to name wisdom.)

think about it. Or we may be willing to think about something slowly and carefully or hastily. Or we may be willing to listen to or read those wiser than ourselves or unwilling. And everyone knows, for example, how anger interferes with the good use of our reason.

Thus philosophy has three kinds of beginnings: (1) the beginnings about things, (2) the beginnings which are a knowledge of the roads to follow and (3) the beginnings which are dispositions of the will (and emotions) which help us to use our reason well or remove impediments to using it well.

Since the good is *ex integra causa,* all these beginnings are necessary to go forward well in philosophy. But we need to consider each of them in particular.[4] However, one of them cannot be good without the others.

Duane H. Berquist

[4] It was the great Msgr. Dionne (Requiescat in pace.) who taught us the importance and necessity of considering all these beginnings. We dimwits are merely following in his footsteps.