DISTINCTION OF THE BEGINNINGS ABOUT THINGS

A distinction of the beginnings about things is brought out by Aristotle in the *Posterior Analytics* when he distinguishes between the common beginnings of reasoned out knowledge and the private beginnings of one reasoned out knowledge. The former beginnings are common to all forms of reasoned out knowledge while the latter are limited to one form of reasoned out knowledge.

Foremost among the beginnings common to all forms of reasoned out knowledge are the statements about being and non-being: it is impossible to be and not be (at the same time and in the same way) and it is necessary to be or not to be (in the same way of being in the same time). Other examples can be given about beginning and about whole and part: nothing is a beginning of itself (and nothing is before or after itself) and the whole is more than one of its parts. These are beginnings of every reasoned out knowledge. Every reasoned out knowledge goes forward from such beginnings.

The parts of the above statements (such as being and non-being, whole and part, before and after etc.) can also be said to be beginnings of all reasoned out knowledge.

But these beginnings are not enough for any reasoned out knowledge. Each reasoned out knowledge needs beginnings which are private to it. Thus the geometer needs to know, for example, what is a right angle and that all right angles are equal. In the first book of Euclid's *Elements*, the definitions and postulates are beginnings private to geometry and the axioms are beginnings common to it and other forms of reasoned out knowledge.

Boethius divides these beginnings in comparison to us. The statements which are beginnings are statements known through themselves. For statements known through other statements are conclusions, not beginnings. Boethius then points out the distinction between statements known through themselves *by all men* and statements known through themselves *by the wise* (that is, those learned in some reasoned out knowledge). Every man knows what a whole is and what a part is. And hence every man sees that a whole is more than one of its parts. But not every man knows what a right angle is and hence only to those who have some learning in geometry is the statement *all right angles are equal* known through itself.

It is not too hard to see that Boethius and Aristotle have distinguished the beginnings into the same two groups, but in comparison to different things: to reasoned out knowledge and to us. For the beginnings common to all reasoned out knowledge, or which are beginnings of all reasoned out knowledge, are the same as the beginnings which are known through themselves by all men. And the beginnings private to one form of reasoned out knowledge are the beginnings known through themselves by the wise.

Aristotle calls the statements common to all forms of reasoned out knowledge a*xioms*. (This word is, of course, used in quite different meanings by many moderns so we should be on our guard to not be deceived by equivocation.) In the fourth book of *Wisdom or First Philosophy* (the fourth book *After the Books in Natural Philosophy*), Aristotle that the axiom(s) about being and non-being, the beginning(s) about contradiction, is the natural beginning of all the axioms. But he does not explicitly order for us the other axioms after this first one.

But since one is almost the same as being, as Aristotle shows in the fourth book of *Wisdom*, and hence the subject of wisdom is both being and one, the axioms about one are also very fundamental. One such axiom is that nothing is separated from itself. And since it is a property of one to be a beginning and a beginning is the source of some before and after, the axioms about beginning and about before and after are very fundamental. We stated two similar axioms of beginning and before and after above: nothing is a beginning of itself and nothing is before or after itself.

Since reason is the ability for large discourse, looking before and after, the axiom about before and after is a very universal and important beginning for reason. Reason always sees some distinction before it sees a before and after. Since nothing is before or after itself, reason must see some distinction between what is before and what is after before it sees that one is before or after the other.

But that reason sees a distinction before it sees a before and after shows again how fundamental is the axiom of being and non-being, the axiom about contradiction. For the distinction of being and non-being, the opposition of

contradiction, is the beginning and cause of all distinction and opposition. Thomas is very clear about this:

> omnis distinctio, sive rei sive rationis, fundatur in affirmatione et negatione.[1]

And in another text, Thomas teaches us:

> Ubicumque enim est aliqua distinctio, oportet inveniri negationis et affirmationis oppositionem.
>
> Quae enim secundum nullam affirmationem et negationem differunt, penitus indistincta sunt: oportet enim quod quantum ad omnia unum esset quod et alterum, et sic essent penitus idem, et nullo modo distincta.[2]

Hence, the one who says that it is possible to affirm and deny the same of the same (in the same way and at the same time) is excluding all distinction or determination as Thomas explains when commenting on Aristotle's discussion of those who deny the axiom about contradiction:

> Item prohibet ne mente aliquid possimus definire vel determinare.
>
> Prima enim ratio distinctionis consideratur in affirmatione et negatione.
>
> Unde qui affirmationem et negationem unum esse dicit, omnem determinationem sive distinctionem excludit.[3]

Since distinction is before order (or before and after), the axiom about being and non-being or the axiom about contradiction (the opposition of affirmation and negation) is more fundamental than the axiom about before and after.

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[1] *Scriptum super Lib. I Sententiarum*, Dist XXXIV, Q. I, Art. I, Ad 2

[2] *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Liber IV, Caput 14

[3] *In IV Metaphysicorum,* Lectio IX, n. 660

After the axiom of before and after would come any axioms about what is before and after. But are there any axioms about what is before and after?

There are many statements of what is before and what is after involving words common to all reasoned out knowledge or words pertaining to being as being. Substance is before accident in many ways. Likewise, act is before ability in many ways. The through itself is before the through happening and the through itself is before the through another. Whole and part may be before each other in different ways.

The distinction of the beginnings private to each reasoned out knowledge must be left to the beginning of each reasoned out knowledge.

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