

NOTE ON THOMAS' PROEMIUM TO PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

The distinction of the kinds of philosophy is into two by their ends. Looking philosophy (which some call theoretical or speculative philosophy from the Greek or Latin words for looking) and practical philosophy or the philosophy of doing are the two chief kinds of philosophy and they differ by their ends. The end of looking philosophy, as its name indicates, is to see in the sense of to understand; but the end of practical philosophy is doing or action. Just as we use our eyes sometimes just to see (as to see, for example, a beautiful sunset or painting) and sometimes to do something (as to drive or make dinner), so likewise, proportionally, the use of reason in the two chief kinds of philosophy is for distinct ends or purposes.

We could state more precisely the ends of the two principal kinds of philosophy. The end of looking philosophy is to understand what and why while the end of practical philosophy is to do what is good or better for oneself, or for one's family, or for one's city or nation.

The distinction of looking philosophy into three kinds (natural, mathematical, and first philosophy or wisdom) is shown by Aristotle in the sixth book of *Wisdom* (the *Metaphysics*) and following him by Boethius in the *de Trinitate* which Thomas has laid out carefully for us.

The distinction of practical philosophy into three kinds (ethics, domestics and politics or political philosophy) is shown by Thomas in the last part of this Proemium.

Whoever compares the distinction of the kinds of looking philosophy shown by Aristotle with the distinction of the kinds of practical philosophy shown by Thomas will see how different are the ways in which the two are distinguished. And each is distinguished in the way that fits its end.

Since the ability to understand is immaterial (as we learn in the third book *About the Soul*) and something must stop moving or stand still before it can be understood, the kinds of looking philosophy are distinguished by how the things considered are to matter and motion in their existence and in their definition.

Since I can do something for my own good without intending the good of my family, or do something for the good of my family without intending the good of

the city, and some things I can do for the good of my city, there is here, as Thomas teaches us in the Proemium, a basis for the distinction of the kinds of practical philosophy.

If we can call the tool of philosophy a kind of philosophy, logic could be considered a third kind of philosophy. But it is not one of the chief or principal kinds, but is sought for the sake of acquiring them.

In the beginning of this Proemium, Thomas points out another way of distinguishing the knowledge of reason. He begins with pointing out a connection between wisdom and reason. Wisdom is the highest or greatest perfection of reason. Hence, what is characteristic of reason is especially found in wisdom. Aristotle had given as the sixth, and perhaps crowning attribute of the wise man, that he orders all others. And Thomas gives as the reason for this that wisdom is the highest perfection of reason and it is proper to reason to know order or to make order. We can see this in Shakespeare's definition of reason as the ability for large discourse, looking before and after. *Before and after* define order and by defining reason as *looking before and after*, Shakespeare had taught us that reason especially looks for order. Since wisdom is the highest perfection of this ability to look before and after, the wise man must most of all see the before and after, or order.

Wisdom is not only connected with reason in the way that Thomas indicates, but also in another way. It is acquired by the use of reason. And since we are most of all using reason when we look before and after, reason's knowledge must also be a knowledge of before and after or order. Hence, wisdom must also be a knowledge of before and after or order.

Aristotle had distinguished in the sixth book of wisdom between the looking sciences, the doing sciences, and the making sciences, starting from the cause they consider. But this distinction also includes logic.

But Thomas here begins from something proper to reason which is to know or consider order.

Although Thomas, *studens brevitati*, divides order in comparison to reason into four, it is easy to see that the first order is divided against the last three by the

distinction between order not made by reason and order made by reason. And thus the rule of two or three is being followed.

About the order which reason does not make, but only considers, Thomas has placed natural philosophy and also metaphysics or wisdom. Some texts add mathematics, but some lack this. The order considered in mathematics is to some extent made by our reason. For we construct equilateral triangles etc.. Hence, Thomas may have left mathematics out of the knowledge of the first order (the order not made by reason but only considered by reason) as not a clear case of such an order.

This distinction of the knowledge of reason is useful for considering the offshoots of more than one kind of knowledge. Rhetoric, the art of persuasion, is an offshoot of the second and third kinds of knowledge here. For as Aristotle teaches us in the *Rhetoric*, the art of persuasion is an offshoot of dialectic which is a part of logic and political philosophy. And modern experimental science is an offshoot of natural philosophy or natural science and the mechanical arts, an offshoot of natural science and technical science as Heisenberg says in his Gifford Lectures. Hence, the oldest part of modern science is a part of physics (a word derived from the Greek word for nature) called mechanics.

Duane H Berquist