

BEFORE - CHAPTER 12

A CARRYING OVER FROM GREEK INTO ENGLISH OF CHAPTER TWELVE

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.

Aristotle distinguishes the four *central* senses of the word *before* in this chapter and then he brings in a “fifth” sense of *before*. I say ‘*fifth*’ sense because this sense is *not fifth in order*, nor is it one of the four central senses of the word *before*. But it is the *crowning* sense of the word *before*.

The first sense of *before* is in time: today is before tomorrow and yesterday is before today.

The second sense of *before* is in being. This is said to be before that when this can be without that, but not vice-versa. Thus one is before two and bricks are before a brick wall.

The third sense of *before* is in the discourse of reason. Thus in geometry, the definitions are before the postulates and the beginnings are before the demonstrations.

The fourth sense of *before* is better. Man is before beast in this sense.

Aristotle seems to have completed his task at this point. He has distinguished in order the central senses of *before* (not all the senses, but the central senses). But then he adds another sense. The cause is said to be *before* the effect even if they are together in time. This is the crowning sense of *before* since the end of reason is to know what and why and that is to know the cause.

This sense is not fifth in order for it is more like the second sense than the fourth. But because it is the chief sense of the wise man, it can be placed with the central senses as one of the chief senses. Thus there are five chief senses of the word *before*.

In this text, Thomas defines order by before and after and points out that distinction is presupposed to order:

ordo in ratione sua includit...rationem prioris et posterioris; unde secundum omnes illos modos potest dici esse ordo aliquorum secundum quos aliquis altero prius dicitur et secundum locum et secundum tempus et secundum omnia huiusmodi.

Includit etiam distinctionem quia non est ordo aliquorum nisi distinctorum. Sed hoc magis praesupponit nomen ordinis quam significet.¹

Since nothing is before or after itself, one must see some distinction between what is before and what is after before one can see that one is before or after the other. This also shows, as we have said before, why opposites, the basis of formal distinction, are placed immediately before the word *before* both here in the *Categories* and in the fifth book of *Wisdom* or *First Philosophy*.

Aristotle does not distinguish all the senses of *before*, but its *central* senses. The word *before* is a word equivocal by reason. Like the word *beginning* which is the first word in the fifth book of *Wisdom*, or the word *in* or *to be in* in the fourth book of *Natural Hearing*, the word *before* is equivocal by reason of a likeness of ratios. The first meaning in each is based on the most known ratio and the other meanings are ordered by their greater or lesser likeness to the first meaning. But when another meaning is so like the first meaning that it is not a step towards the second meaning (that is, being more like it than the first meaning) it is attached to the first meaning from the side rather than in a straight line forward to the second. This can be seen in Thomas' explanation of the word *in* in the fourth book of *Natural Hearing* and his explanation of the word *beginning* in the fifth book of the *Metaphysics*. In both commentaries, Thomas explains that there are other senses of the word besides those given by Aristotle. But these should be reduced to one of those given because of a close likeness. Thus *in time* is reduced to *in place* and the beginning of motion or time to beginning of a magnitude. Likewise, to some of the later meanings there may be others that can be attached to them on the side. Aristotle subtly gives us the central meanings of these words, but there are other meanings, which can be led back to one or another of these central meanings.

¹ *Scriptum super Lib.I Sententiarum*, Dist. XX, Quaest. I, Art. III, Solutio I

The first meaning or sense of a word equivocal by reason of a likeness of ratios is the ratio most known and this is the one closest to the senses where all our knowledge begins.

Since as the Poet says in *Troilus and Cressida*, "Things in motion sooner catch the eye than what not stirs", clearly the before and after in motion is most known to us. And since time is defined by this before and after (while motion is defined by act and ability), the first central sense of before and after is that in time as Aristotle teaches us here. (This is also connected with the reason Thomas gives for two genera of predicates from place and only one from time.) But to this central sense could be led back the before and after in motion and in the magnitude over which something moves. The closeness of the before and after in time, in motion and in place is seen in the similes of the Poet in one of his sonnets:

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore
 So do our minutes hasten to their end
 Each changing place with that which goes before
 In sequent toil all forwards do contend.

The second sense of *before* is in being. This sense can also be seen in the sensible world, but is less striking because things in motion sooner catch the eye than what not stirs. Aristotle takes a mathematical example to show that this second sense is different from the first for there is no motion in mathematical things. Yet this sense is still sensible. Bricks can be without a brick wall, but not vice-versa. Moreover, what is before in being is usually in our world before in time also, as the bricks are before the brick wall both in time and in being. But what is before in being need not also be before in time. If I print by pen the word *cat*, the letter *c* would be before the word *cat* both in time and in being. But if I had a stamp with *cat* on it, the letter and the word would come to be at the same time on the paper. Yet *c* would still be before *cat* in being. If I cut slices of bread from a loaf with a knife, one slice is before two and two before three in time as well as in being. But if they slice it in a machine at the bakery, the loaf goes from no slices to fourteen or fifteen all at once. Nevertheless, two would still be before three in being

Thomas notes the connection of time and number with order together in this text:

Rationem autem tam temporis quam numeri sequitur ordo, quia una species numeri naturaliter est alia prior et tempus est etiam numerus motuum secundum prius et posterius.²

The third central sense of *before* is in the discourse of reason as Aristotle's examples show. This is not in the sensible world like what is before in being can be. But it has a real likeness to before in being. Just as some things can be without other things, but not vice-versa, so likewise some things can be known without knowing other things, but not vice versa. I can know what a stone is without knowing that *a dog is not a stone*, but not vice-versa. I can know what a number is without knowing what a perfect number is, but not vice-versa. Thus knowing *what a stone is* is before knowing that *a stone is not a dog* and knowing *what a number is* is before knowing *what a perfect number is*.

To this third *central* sense is reduced any before and after in our knowledge.

The fourth central sense of *before* is before in goodness or better. This comes last for it is much unlike the other senses. What is better is often after in the other three senses. What is before in generation is imperfect and comes under what is before in time. The brick wall or brick house is better than the bricks and the word is better than the letters. Reason guess before it knows and thinks about something before understanding, but it is better to know than to guess and to understand something than to think about it. Hence, it is easier to pun on this sense and the first sense (or a sense attached to the first) for they are so far apart. In Helena's confession to the countess, Shakespeare puns on the fourth sense of *before* and a sense attached to the first (just as the pun "I see said the blind man, but he couldn't see at all" puns on the first and last senses of *see*):

Then I confess,
Here on my knee, before high heaven and you
That before you, and next unto high heaven,
I love your son

² *In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus Expositio*, Caput IV, Lectio III, n. 310

We can now ask the tongue-twister question. In which sense of *before* is one sense of *before* before another sense?

Since we name things as we know them or are at least aware of them, the order in naming clearly follows the order in knowing. Therefore, one sense of *before* comes before another sense in the third central sense of *before*.

After Aristotle has distinguished in order the four central senses of the word *before* and seems to be done, he adds another sense of *before*. Is this fifth sense fifth in order? I do not think so for then it would be more like the fourth sense than any other sense. The sense in which the cause is said to be before the effect is most like the second sense of before. Consider this text of Thomas:

illud a quo non convertitur consequentia essendi, est naturaliter prius et quodammodo principium.

Sed unum est huiusmodi quia *sine uno non* invenitur aliqua *multitudo*, sed invenitur aliquod *unum* absque omni *multitudine*.

Unum igitur est prius omni multitudine et principium eius.

Cuius signum apparet in numeris, quia *unitas* est *ante omnem numerum*, qualitercumque multiplicetur.³

As the effect depends upon the cause, so also what is after in being also depends upon what is before in being.

Aristotle takes an example of a cause which is together in time and being with its effect to show that this sense of *before* is different from before in being or before in time. But a cause may precede its effect in time or duration when it causes its effect by some motion:

Fuit autem difficile considerare generationem Filii Patri coaeternam, propter assuefactionem humanae cognitionis in consideratione productionis rerum naturalium, in quibus una res ab alia per motum producitur;

³In *Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus Expositio*, Caput XIII, Lectio II, n. 977

Res autem producta per motum in esse prius esse incipit in principio quam in termino motus.

Cum autem principium motus de necessitate terminum motus duratione praecedat, quod necesse est propter motus successionem, nec possit esse motus principium vel initium sine causa ad producendum movente; necesse est ut causa movens ad aliquid producendum praecedat duratione id quod ab ea producitur.⁴

A cause may precede its effect in time and sometimes not in time:

1. Videtur quod Christus non potuerit mereri in instanti suae conceptionis. 1. Nullus enim meretur nisi agendo. Sed prius est esse rei quam ejus agere. Ergo in primo instanti conceptionis, quando Christus primo esse habuit secundum humanam naturam, mereri non potuit....

3. Praeterea. Quidquid Christus habuit in primo instanti suae conceptionis, habuit ab alio, non a se. Sed meriti sui ipse ipse causa fuit. Ergo in primo instanti conceptionis non meruit.

Ad primum igitur dicendum quod esse est prius quam agere natura, non tempore de necessitate.

Ad tertium dicendum quod illud quod Christus habuit in primo instanti suae conceptionis, scilicet meritum, et ab alio habuit, scilicet inquantum ad meritum exigitur gratia, et a seipso habuit, inquantum meritum procedit ab libero arbitrio. Non enim semper necessarium est ut causa causatum tempore praecedat, sed quandoque sufficit quod praecedat natura.⁵

What is the cause of the generation of something need not be together with that thing:

...poenitentia timore servili concipitur, qui poenam respicit. Nec oportet quod timor servilis et poenitentia sint simul; quia timor servilis non est causa esse ipsius poenitentiae, sed quasi

⁴Thomas Aquinas, *De Potentia*, Q. 3, Art. 13, corpus

⁵Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum Super Lib. III Sententiarum*, Dist. XVIII, Art. III, Objs. 1 & 3 & Ad 3

generationis ejus: sicut etiam sumptio medicinae est causa sanitatis, non tamen sunt simul.⁶

Although the sense in which the cause is said to be before the effect is led back to the second central sense, it deserves being brought out because it is the crowning sense of *before* for reason. Reason reaches its perfection and end by looking before and after in the sense of cause and effect.

Since there are many kinds of cause, something can be both before and after in the crowning sense according to different kinds of cause:

...omnis prioritas secundum ordinem naturae aliquo modo reducitur ad ordinem causae et causati; quia principium et causa sunt idem.

In causis autem contingit quod idem est causa et causatum, secundum diversum genus causae, ut patet in II *Phys.* (195a 5); et in V *Metaph.* (1013a 23): sicut ambulatio est causa efficiens sanationis, et sanatio est causa finalis ambulationis. Et similiter de habitudine quae est inter materiam et formam; quia secundum genus causae materialis materia est causa formae quasi sustentans ipsam, et forma est causa materiae quasi faciens eam esse actu, secundum genus causae formalis.

Ex parte autem cause materialis se tenet secundum quamdam reductionem omne illud per quod materia efficitur propria hujus formae, sicut dispositiones et remotiones impedimentorum. Et ideo in generatione naturali quando corruptio unius est generatio alterius per hoc quod forma una inducitur et alia expellitur, remotio formae praeexistentis se tenet ex parte causae materialis. Et ideo secundum ordinem causae materialis praecedit naturaliter introductionem alterius formae, sed secundum ordinem causae formalis est e converso.

Et quia forma et finis et agens incidunt in idem numero vel specie, ideo etiam in ordine causae efficientis introductio formae prior est; quia forma prior introducta est similitudo formae agentis, per quam agens agit.

⁶*Scriptum Super Lib. IV Sententiarum*, Dist XIV, Quaest. I, Art II, Ad primam quaestionem, Ad 4

Et similiter in ordine causae finalis: quia natura principaliter intendit introductionem formae, et ad hanc ordinat expulsionem omnis ejus cum quo non potest stare formae intentio.

Unde cum gratiae infusio et remissio culpae...se habeat sicut introductio unius formae et expulsio alterius, constat quod secundum ordinem causae materialis remissio culpae praecedat infusionem gratiae; sed secundum ordinem causae formalis, efficientis et finalis, infusio gratiae natura prior est. Et propter hoc etiam utrumque invenitur dici causa alterius. Infusio enim gratiae est causa remissionis culpae per modum causae formalis; sed extirpatio vitiorum dicitur operari virtutum ingressum per modum causae materialis.⁷

Another text on being before and after according to different causes:

...aliquo modo gratiae infusio et culpae remissio praecedunt; aliquo autem modo praedicti motus: quod patet ex simili in generatione naturali quae est terminus alterationis. In eodem enim instanti terminatur alteratio ad dispositionem quae est necessitas et generatio ad formam. Et tamen secundum ordinem naturae utrumque est prius altero aliquo modo; quia dispositio quae est necessitas, praecedat formam secundum ordinem causae materialis; sed forma est prior secundum ordinem causae formalis. Et secundum hunc modum illa qualitas consummata est etiam formalis effectus formae substantialis secundum quod forma substantialis est causa accidentalium.

Et ideo cum isti motus qui sunt in ipsa justificatione impii, sint quasi dispositio ultima ad gratiae susceptionem suo modo, praecedunt quidem in via causae materialis, sed sequuntur in via causae formalis. Et ideo nihil prohibet eos esse formatos, quia hoc ad rationem et perfectionem esse formalis pertinet: sicut qualitates quae introducuntur simul cum forma substantiali, quodammodo formantur per formam substantialem.⁸

⁷Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum Super Lib. IV Sententiarum*, Distinctio XVII, Quaestio I, Art. IV, Ad primam questionem

⁸Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum Super Lib. IV Sententiarum*, Distinctio XVII, Quaestio I, Art. IV, Ad secundam questionem

Why is the sense of before in being the central sense rather than the sense in which the cause is before the effect?

Perhaps this casts a little light upon that question. The central sense should be more known to us. And if it is a second or later sense, it should follow closely upon the sense before. But it is a matter of experience that students have more difficulty in seeing that, or how, the cause is before the effect when they are together in time. Students know that two is half of four, but sometimes have difficulty in seeing that it is half of four because it is two rather than the reverse. But what is before in being is often also before in time so they more readily see that and how it is before, as, for example, the bricks are before the brick wall (and they can even be after the wall has been knocked down). We can see here also that before in being is closer to before in time.

Understanding before and after is before defining reason as reason. For reason as reason (as Shakespeare teaches us in Hamlet's Exhortation to Use Reason) is nothing other than the ability for large discourse, looking before and after. And this definition of reason is the reason why it belongs to the wise man most of all to order things and to see the order in things. For wisdom is the highest and greatest perfection of reason which is the ability to look before and after (and before and after define order). The whole of wisdom is ordered to knowing the first cause which is before all other things in other senses as well. God is before all other things in being as well as in the sense in which a cause is before its effect. He is also before all other things in goodness. Next to God in goodness is the order of the universe. And what senses does this involve? Here is an interesting text of Thomas:

Ordo universi includit in se et conservationem rerum diversarum a Deo institutarum, et motionem earum: quia secundum haec duo invenitur ordo in rebus, secundum scilicet quod una est melior alia, et secundum quod una ab alia movetur.⁹

Appendix

⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, Prima Pars, Q. 103, Art. 4, Ad 1

DIVISION OF CHAPTER TWELVE: SENSES OF THE WORD *BEFORE*

The distinction in order of the four central senses of *before*.
The crowning sense of before, one of the five chief senses

Does opposition come before distinction?

In what sense of *before* does distinction come before order

In what sense of *before* do before and after come before together?

In what sense of *before* do before and after come before order; beginning, middle and end; and first, second etc. and last?

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