

NOTE FOR SECOND BOOK OF WISDOM, READINGS 2-4

In showing that the cause is more true than the effect, Aristotle reasons from a beginning stated briefly as *that on account of which more so* (or in Latin *propter quod unumquodque, illud magis*). But perhaps it can be stated more fully in this way: When the same belongs to two things, but to one of them because of the other, it belongs more to the cause. This can be exemplified first in some homely examples. If hot is said of the fire and the air around the fire, but of the air around the fire because of the fire, which is hotter or more hot? Clearly the fire. And if wet is said of the water and the cloth, but of the cloth because of the water, which is more wet? Clearly the water. This beginning or principle is used in every part of philosophy. If known is said of the premisses and the conclusion of a syllogism, but of the conclusion because of the premisses, then the premisses are more known than the conclusion. Indeed, if they were not, we would not use them to prove the conclusion. And if good or desirable is said of the end and of the means, but of the means because of the end, then the end is better or more good than the means. If it were not better, we would not desire the means for the sake of it. Likewise, if true is said of the cause and of the effect, but of the effect because of the cause, then the cause is more true than the effect.

Thomas, in replying to an objection, points out that this beginning must be understood in those things that are of one order:

Propter quod unumquodque, illud magis, intelligendum est in his quae sunt unius ordinis, ut supra dictum est. Propter Deum autem alia cognoscuntur, non sicut propter primum cognitum, sed sicut propter primam cognoscitivae virtutis causam.¹

And in another text more fully:

cum dicitur, *Propter quod unumquodque, illud magis*, veritatem habet, si intelligatur in his quae sunt unius ordinis, puta in uno genere causae: puta si dicatur quod sanitas est propter vitam, sequitur quod vita sit magis desiderabilis.

¹ *Summa Theologiae*, Prima Pars, Q. 88, Art. 3, Ad 2

Si autem accipiantur ea quae sunt diversorum ordinum, non habet veritatem: ut si dicatur quod sanitas est propter medicinam, non ideo sequitur quod medicina sit magis desiderabilis, quia sanitas est in ordine finium, medicina autem in ordine causarum efficientium.

Sic igitur si accipiamus duo, quorum utrumque sit per se in ordine obiectorum cognitionis; illud propter quod aliud cognoscitur, erit magis notum, sicut principia conclusionibus. sed habitus non est de ordine obiectorum, inquantum est habitus; nec propter habitum aliqua cognoscuntur sicut propter obiectum cognitum, sed sicut propter dispositionem vel formam qua cognoscens cognoscit: et ideo ratio non sequitur.²

Here is a subtle text of Thomas on the way in which something can be more true:

obiectum fidei est verum; unde secundum quod contingit esse aliquid magis verum, sic etiam contingit aliquid magis credere.

Cum autem veritas constet in adaequatione intellectus et rei, si consideratur veritas secundum rationem aequalitatis, quae non recipit magis et minus, sic non contingit esse aliquid magis et minus verum;

sed si consideretur ipsum esse rei, quod est ratio veritatis, sicut dicitur in II Metaphys., eadem est dispositio rerum in esse et veritate: unde quae sunt magis entia, sunt magis vera; et propter hoc etiam in scientiis demonstrativis magis creduntur principia quam conclusiones. Et sic etiam contingit in his quae sunt fidei. Unde Apostolus, I ad Corinth., XV, probat resurrectionem mortuorum futuram per resurrectionem Christi.³

In the following text, Thomas explains that things have the same order in being and truth, but this does not mean that being and true are entirely the same:

5. Praeterea, illa quorum dispositio est eadem, sunt eadem. Sed veri et entis est eadem dispositio. Ergo sunt eadem. Dicitur enim in

² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Prima Pars, Q. 87, Art. 2, Ad 3

³ *De Caritate*, Art. 9, Ad 1

II *Metaphysic.*: *Dispositio rei in esse est sicut sua dispositio in veritate.* Ergo verum et ens sunt omnino idem.

Ad quintum dicendum, quod dispositio non accipitur ibi secundum quod est in genere qualitatis, sed secundum quod importat quemdam ordinem;

cum enim illa quae sunt causa aliorum essendi sint maxime entia, et illa quae sunt causa veritatis aliorum sint maxime vera; concludit Philosophus, quod idem est ordo rei in esse et veritate; ita, scilicet, quod ubi invenitur quod est maxime ens, invenitur quod est maxime verum.

Nec est hoc ideo, quia ens et verum ratione sunt idem, sed quia ex hoc quod aliquid habet de entitate, secundum hoc natum est aequari intellectui; et sic ratio veri sequitur rationem entis.⁴

In showing that there are first causes in the four kinds of cause, Aristotle considers those kinds of cause in almost the same order as in the First Book of Wisdom. He considers mover and matter, then end and last form.

In showing that there are first causes in each kind of cause, Aristotle gives a reason for the kind of cause called mover that could *mutatis mutandis* be given for all four kinds of cause.

He passes over matter in particular, partly because the Greeks all thought there was a first matter and partly because this kind of cause is least important for wisdom. He shows something else as Thomas explains in the commentary on this Reading.

He is more expansive about the kinds of cause called end and form because these kinds of cause are especially important for wisdom and because there seems a special opposition of them to the endless since both end and form are a limit or end.

Aristotle touches upon the second, third and fourth senses of *limit* when he gives under matter the limits of change, then the end as limit, and then the

⁴ *De Veritate*, Q. I, Art. 1, Obj. 5 & Ad 5

form or definition. Perhaps, we can be led from the first sense through the four, as from the more known to the less known. A cube would not be limited if the squares which contain it were not limited. The squares which contain it would not be limited if the lines which contain the squares were not limited. But the lines are limited by points. And the point is a limit which does not have a limit. One does not go on forever with every limit having a limit. Aristotle reasons in the first book of *Natural Hearing* that the beginnings are limited because they are contraries and contraries are the species furthest apart in a genus and there can only be two such species just as there can only be two points which are *furthest* apart on a line. The point is also a beginning which does not have a beginning while the line and the surface are beginnings that have a beginning. Here again with the point we get back to a beginning that does not have a beginning even though it is not a beginning in the sense of a cause. Just as there is a beginning or limit in the first sense which has a beginning or limit, and a limit or beginning which has no limit or beginning in the first sense, so there is a cause which has a cause and a cause which does not have a cause. By not considering the announced purpose of seeing if there is a first cause in the genus of matter and instead talking about the limits of change, and then going to the end before the form, Aristotle follows the same order as the second, third and fourth senses of *limit* in the Fifth Book of Wisdom.

When Aristotle reasoned to the existence of a first or unmoved mover in natural philosophy, or to a good that is not desired for the sake of anything else in ethics, or to genera that do not have a genus in logic, he was seeing in particular what is being shown universally here in the Second Book of Wisdom.

Duane H. Berquist