

NOTE FOR WORD *ONE*

The words signifying the universal subject of wisdom (being and one) or its chief subject (substance) are put before the words signifying the parts of the subject. But Aristotle considers the word *one* before the word *being* although when he determined the subject of wisdom in the beginning of Book Four, he showed that it is about being before it is about one. And when he considers the subject of wisdom in book 6-10, the books on being (Bks. 6-9) come before the book on one and many (Bk. 10). Why then does he consider the word *one* before the word *being*?

He needs to consider *substance* after and next to *being* since substance is part of the distinction or division of being according to the figures of predication. If he considered *one* after substance, he would descend to something less universal. And, more important, the distinction of the senses of *one* is much more like the distinction of the senses of *being* than of substance. Hence, they should be considered next to each other. But it would make no sense to insert the reading on one between that of being and substance. Moreover, he began from the word *beginning* in Book Five and it is a property of one to be a beginning.

It is necessary to understand the word *one* because the subject of wisdom is being and one and both words are equivocal by reason. Further, among words equivocal by reason, these two words have perhaps the most senses and therefore are especially in need of being considered at length.

Since it is a property of the one to be a beginning, the necessity of understanding one shares in the necessity of understanding beginning. And since the one is a beginning of the many, one cannot understand the many without knowing the one

And since something must be one before it can be understood, all understanding is connected with the meaning of one.

The distinction between the one which is the beginning of number and the one which is convertible with being is very important and very difficult to see.

And it is necessary to understand the senses of one to reason against the position and arguments of Parmenides and Melissus that being is one and in no way many.

And the distinction of the senses of one is before understanding in what sense God is one.

Thomas and Aristotle often give just three senses of one per se:

Dicitur enim unum tripliciter: vel sicut continuum est unum, ut linea et corpus; vel sicut indivisibile est unum, ut punctum; vel sicut unum dicuntur illa quorum ratio est una, seu definitio, sicut vappa et vinum dicuntur unum.¹

But note the difference in this text:

...per se unum simpliciter et quod est numero unum, tribus modis dicitur.

Uno modo sicut indivisibile est unum, ut punctum et unitas, quod neque est multa actu neque potentia.

Alio modo quod est unum continuitate, quod tamen est multa potentia, sicut linea.

Tertio modo quod est unum perfectione: sicut dicitur calceamentum unum, quia habet omnes partes quae requiruntur ad calceamentum. Et haec unitas dicitur in omnibus illis ad quorum integritatem aliqua exiguntur, sicut unus homo, una domus.²

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *In I Physicorum*, Lectio III, n. 122

² Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum Super Lib. IV Sententiarum*, Distinctio VIII, Quaest. I, Art. I, Ad secundam quaestionem

Thomas notes how even Avicenna was deceived by the equivocation of one:
In X Metaphysicorum, Lectio III, n. 1981

Avicennna...Deceptus enim fuit ex aequivocatione unius. Quod quidem secundum quod est principium numeri habens rationem mensurae in genere quantitatis, significat quamdam naturam additam his de quibus dicitur, cum sit in genere accidentis. Sed unum quod convertitur cum ente circuit omnia entia. Unde non significat aliquam naturam determinatam ad aliquod genus.³

One of many texts where Thomas distinguishes between the one that is the beginning of number and the one which is convertible with being and with it the subject of wisdom:

duplex est unum;

quoddam scilicet quod convertitur cum ente, quod nihil addit supra ens nisi indivisionem;

et hoc unum privat multitudinem, in quantum multitudo ex divisione causatur; non quidem multitudinem extrinsecam quam unum constituit sicut pars; sed multitudinem intrinsecam quae unitati opponitur. Non enim ex hoc quod aliquid dicitur esse unum, negatur quin aliquid sit extra ipsum quod cum eo constituat multitudinem; sed negatur divisio ipsius in multa.

Aliud vero unum est quod est principium numeri, quod supra rationem entis addit mensurationem;

et huius unius multitudo est privatio, quia numerus fit per divisionem continui.

Nec tamen multitudo privat unitatem totaliter, cum diviso toto adhuc remaneat pars indivisa; sed removet unitatem totius.⁴

³ *In X Metaphysicorum*, Lectio III, n. 1981

⁴ *De Potentia*, Q. 3, Art. 16, Ad 3

And this distinction is important for understanding in what sense God is said to be one:

...unum dicitur dupliciter. Est enim unum quod convertitur cum ente, et est unum quod est principium numeri.

Loquendo de uno quod convertitur cum ente, non est determinatum ad genus quantitatis, immo invenitur in omnibus entibus: et sicut Deus est ens non aliquo esse quod non sit ipse, ita etiam est unus non aliqua unitate quae non sit ipse, sed per essentiam suam; et ideo maxime unum est.

Loquendo autem de uno quod est principium numeri, non potest transumi in divinam praedicationem quantum ad genus suum quod est quantitas, sed quantum ad differentiam suam quae ad perfectionem pertinet, sicut indivisibilitas et prima ratio mensurandi vel aliquid hujusmodi.⁵

Here is a text where Thomas shows how one is naturally before and a beginning of the many:

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.⁶

⁵ *Scriptum Super Lib. I Sententiarum*, Distinctio XXIV, Quaest. I, Art. I, Ad 1

⁶ *In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus Expositio*, Caput XIII, Lectio II, n. 977

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