

INTRODUCTORY NOTE TO THE FIFTH BOOK OF WISDOM

The fifth book of *Wisdom* (the *Metaphysics*) illuminates the beginning and the end of reason's knowledge and, to some extent, the middle.

The words or names, whose meaning are considered in this book, are those used most of all in wisdom (which is the end of reason's knowledge) and are those also found in the axioms which are the statements known through themselves by all men (and therefore are the beginning of reason's knowledge). Since the words used in the axioms are also the words used most of all in wisdom, Aristotle is killing two birds with one stone. By distinguishing the central senses of these words, Aristotle is both helping us to understand the axioms distinctly and to answer sophistical objections against them from mixing up different senses of these words and also helping us to understand the subject of wisdom and its causes and properties that are named by these same words.

Although Thomas in his exposition of the books of *Wisdom* puts the fifth book as the beginning of the books about the subject of *Wisdom* (Books Five through Ten), it could also be seen as useful to conclude the consideration of the axioms (begun in the second part of Book Four).

The reason why the words used most of all in wisdom to discuss its subject (and its causes and properties) are also the words in which the axioms are stated, can be seen after we see why (in Book Four) the subject of wisdom is being and one and why the axioms are about being as being. (This is most clear in the first axioms which are about being as being: something cannot both be and not be at the same time and in the same way; and something must be or not be.)

And because these words pertaining to being as being are most universal (as is the subject of wisdom), they are used to some extent everywhere in the middle of our knowledge. And thus, as we said in the beginning of this note, the distinction of these words illuminates not only the beginning and the end of all reason's knowledge, but also to some extent what is in the middle.

Aristotle discovered that these key words are all equivocal by reason. They all have many meanings and not by chance. There is a connection or order among their meanings. Hence, to understand these words fully, one must both distinguish their central senses and also find the order of those senses or meanings.

Aristotle was the first and almost the last philosopher to succeed in thus understanding these words. Although understanding the words one uses does not make one wise, nevertheless *not* understanding the words one uses would seem to exclude one from being wise.

For each word, we will give Thomas' exposition of Aristotle's text in his commentary on the Fifth Book of Wisdom. This will be followed sometimes by a note containing observations on that word and additional texts (mainly from Thomas) casting further light upon that word.

Thomas divides the words or names in Book Five into three parts or groups. Since every reasoned out knowledge has a subject whose properties and causes it considers, the first part of Book Five is about the names of causes, the second part about the names of the subject of wisdom or parts of the subject, and the third part is about the names of the properties of the subject. It is natural to consider the names of the subject before the names of the properties because the properties follow upon the subject. Perhaps he begins with the names of causes because already in Book One and in *Natural Hearing* (the *Physics*), he has considered the four kinds of cause.

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