

TEXTS FOR NAME BEING

It is very necessary for a philosopher to understand the word or name *being*, its senses and their order.

It is necessary for understanding and defending the axioms about being and non-being which are by nature the beginning of all the axioms (which are first beginnings of all reasoned out knowledge). It is impossible to be and not be (at the same time and in the same way) and it is necessary to either be or not be (at the same time and in the same way).

It is necessary for knowing why there can be one reasoned out knowledge of being as being even though that word is equivocal.

It is necessary for knowing the parts of the consideration of being as being as can be seen in Books Six through Nine of *Wisdom*.

It is necessary for understanding the universality of the first sophistical places outside speech

It is necessary for reasoning against the position and arguments of Parmenides and Melissus that being is one and in no way many.

It is necessary for understanding in what way lack and bad are said to be.

It is necessary for understanding in what sense God is being

The word *being* is perhaps the most difficult word of all to understand because of the plethora of its meanings which cannot be put in one order. Aristotle will eventually distinguish four groups of meanings which will be taken up in Books Six through Nine of *Wisdom* (accidental being and being as true briefly in Book Six; being according to the figures of predication, but mainly substance in Books Seven and Eight; and being as act and ability or potency in Book Nine). Plato in the dialogues or Socratic conversations puzzles over the meanings of *being*.

Only Aristotle, it seems, could have thought out in an ordered way the senses or meanings of *being*.

In distinguishing the senses of *being*, Aristotle seems to have followed the rule of two or three for the most part. For he first distinguishes between being by happening or through happening and being through itself or as such, a distinction into two. And he distinguishes being through itself or as such into three groups: being according to the figures of predication, being as true, and being as act and ability.

He divides accidental being into three.

And although Aristotle usually divides being according to the figures of predication into ten (as in the *Categories*), when Thomas unfolds this distinction, both in this Reading and in the commentary on the third book of *Natural Hearing* (the *Physics*), he always divides and subdivides into two or three to get eventually ten.

The beings of reason that are beings only in reason also seem to be two in kind as will be seen later.

And the division of being into act and ability is, of course, into two.

The division of being according to the figures of predication is placed between the division of accidental being which, although something other than the accidents that are distinguished against substance (in the division of being according to the figures of predication), presupposes the distinction of substance and accident in its explanation (for one kind of accidental being is when two accidents happen to the same subject or when an accident is said of its subject or vice-versa); and beings of reason which in the Fourth Book could be considered after substance, accident, motion, as Thomas gives four main senses there of *being* based on substance first.

But there is also an ascent from the less universal to the more universal when one goes from the division of being according to the figures of predication to being in reason to act and ability. And this characterizes wisdom, as we see elsewhere. Thus in the ninth book, Aristotle ascends from ability and act as found in motion to a completely universal consideration of act and ability and in

the consideration of one, we ascend from the one which is the beginning of number to the one which is convertible with being.

Since reason seeks to know the distinction and order of things, we can summarize here the distinction and order of being in general. But before doing so, it might be good to consider the distinction and order of distinction and order so we know what we are doing.

Things are distinct when one is not the other. Order in the strict or narrow sense is a before and after. Since nothing is before or after itself, there must be some distinction before there can be order and reason must see some distinction between things before it can see that one is before the other. Distinction is before order, both in being and in the discourse of reason. Things can be distinct even though they have no order, but they cannot have some order if they are not distinct. And reason can know the distinction of two things without knowing their order (if they have some order), but it cannot know their order without seeing their distinction. But order would seem to be better than distinction or before distinction in goodness.

The first distinction of being pointed out by Aristotle in this reading is between being as such or through itself and being by happening or through happening. Being as such is before being by happening in being. One can be a geometer or white without being a white geometer, but one cannot be a white geometer without being white and without being a geometer. But accidental being may be better than being as such. It is better to be a courageous geometer than to be just a geometer or just courageous. Thomas points this out in the following text:

Ad perfectionem autem rerum requiritur quod non solum sint in rebus entia per se, sed etiam entia per accidens: res enim quae non habent in sua substantia ultimam perfectionem, oportet quod perfectionem aliquam consequantur per accidentia; et tanto per plura, quanto magis distant a simplicitate Dei.

Ex hoc autem quod aliquod subiectum habet multa accidentia, sequitur quod sit aliquod ens per accidens: nam subiectum et

accidens, et etiam duo accidentia unius subiecti, sunt unum et ens per accidens; sicut homo albus, et musicum album.¹

After the distinction of being according to the figures of predication, there is more order to be seen. For substance is before accidents in being and in definition. But there is also an order among the accidents as Thomas teaches us:

Inter accidentia vero quidam ordo considerandus est.

Nam inter omnia accidentia propinquius inhaeret substantiae quantitas dimensiva.

Deinde qualitates in substantia recipiuntur quantitate mediante, sicut color mediante superficie: unde et per divisionem quantitatis, per accidens dividuntur.

Ulterius autem qualitates sunt actionum et passionum principia; et relationum quarundam, ut sunt pater et filius, dominus et servus, et alia huiusmodi. Quaedam vero relationes immediate ad quantitates consequuntur: ut maius et minus, duplum et dimidium, et similia.²

Substance and accidents are also in definition before those beings of reason that are lacks or negations.

After distinguishing act and ability in the Ninth Book of *Wisdom*, Aristotle will go on to show that act is before ability in definition and perfection and in time *simpliciter loquendo*.

Which is better, substance or accidents? Someone might think that accidents are better because they are a perfection of substance. But consider this text of Thomas:

Praeterea. In comparatione rerum ad finem talis ordo apparet quod accidentia sunt propter substantias, ut per ea perficiantur; in substantiis vero materia est propter formam; per hanc enim

¹ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Liber III, Capitulum LXXIV

² *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Liber IV, Capitulum LXIII

participat divinam bonitatem, propter quam omnia facta sunt, ut supra ostensum est.³

By geometry, the man understands.

There are many texts where Thomas distinguishes being according to the figures of predication and being as true. We should look at some of these. In the following text, Thomas points out that what is being according to the figures of predication can also being as true, but not every being as true can be found in things outside the mind:

Philosophus in V *Metaphys.*, text. 14, ostendit quod ens multipliciter dicitur.

Uno enim modo dicitur ens quod per decem genera dividitur: et sic ens significat aliquid in natura existens, sive sit substantia, ut homo, sive accidens, ut color.

Alio modo dicitur ens, quod significat veritatem propositionis; prout dicitur quod affirmatio est vera, quando significat esse de eo quod est; et negatio, quando significat non esse de eo quod non est; et hoc ens compositionem significat, quam intellectus componens et dividens adinvenit.

Quaecumque ergo dicuntur entia quantum ad primum modum, sunt entia quantum ad secundum modum: quia omne quod habet naturale esse in rebus potest significari per propositionem affirmativam esse, ut cum dicitur: color est vel homo est.

Non autem omnia quae sunt entia quantum ad secundum modum, sunt entia quantum ad primum: quia de privatione, ut de caecitate, formatur una affirmata propositio, cum dicitur: *caecitas est*; nec tamen caecitas aliquid est in rerum natura, sed est magis alicujus entis remotio; et ideo etiam privationes et negationes dicuntur esse entia quantum ad secundum modum, sed non quantum ad primum.

³ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Liber III, Capitulum LXXV

Ens autem secundum utrumque istorum modorum diversimode praedicatur: quia secundum primum modum acceptum est praedicatum substantiale, et pertinet ad quaestionem quid est, sed quantum ad secundum modum, est praedicatum accidentale, ut Commentator ibidem dicit, et pertinet ad quaestionem an est. Sic ergo accipiendo ens secundo modo dictum, prout quaestio quaerebat, simpliciter dicimus mala esse in universo.⁴

Another text where this distinction is shown:

...ens dicitur dupliciter.

Uno modo quod significat essentiam rei extra animam existentis, et hoc modo non potest dici ens deformitas peccati, quae privatio quaedam est; privationes enim essentiam non habent in rerum natura.

Alio modo secundum quod significat veritatem propositionis, et sic deformitas dicitur esse, non propter hoc quod in re esse habeat, sed quia intellectus componit privationem cum subjecto, sicut formam quamdam. Unde sicut ex compositione formae ad subjectum vel ad materiam, relinquitur quoddam esse substantiale vel accidentale, ita etiam intellectus compositionem privationis cum subjecto per quoddam esse significat. Sed hoc esse non est nisi esse rationis, cum in re potius sit non esse.⁵

And a third text where this distinction is made:

...secundum Philosophum, V *Meta.* (D 7. 1017a31035; L. 9, nn. 895-896) esse duobus modis dicitur.

Uno modo, secundum quod significat veritatem propositionis, secundum quod est copula; et sic, ut Commentator ibidem dicit (text 6) dicit, *ens est praedicatum accidentale*. Et hoc esse non est

⁴ *Scriptum Super Lib. II Sententiarum*, Distinctio XXXIV, Quaest I, Art. 1, Utrum malum sit, Solutio

⁵ *Scriptum Super Lib. II Sententiarum*, Distinctio XXXVII, Quaest I, Art. II, Ad 3

in re, sed in mente quae conjungit subjectum cum praedicato, ut dicit Philosophus in VI *Metaphysicorum*.

Alio modo (1017a, 22-27; L. 9, nn. 889-895) dicitur esse quod pertinet ad naturam rei, secundum quod dividitur secundum decem genera. Et hoc quidem esse in re est, et est actus resultans ex principiis rei, sicut lucere est actus lucentis.

Aliquando tamen esse sumitur pro essentia, secundum quam res est; quia per actus consueverunt significari eorum principia, ut potentiae vel habitus.⁶

In the following passage from Shakespeare, the false is said to be that which is not:

Cleopatra to Caesar	This is my treasurer; let him speak, my lord, Upon his peril, that I have reserv'd To myself nothing. Speak the truth, Seleucus.
Seleucus:	Madam, I had rather seal my lips Than to my peril speak that which is not.
Cleopatra:	What have I kept back?
Seleucus:	Enough to purchase what you have made known. ⁷

Likewise, in this passage from Shakespeare:

Mistrust of good success hath done this deed.
O hateful error, melancholy's child,
Why dost thou show to the apt thoughts of men
The things that are not? O error, soon conceiv'd
Thou never com'st unto a happy birth,
But kill'st the mother that engender'd thee.⁸

⁶ *Scriptum Super Lib. III Sententiarum*, Distinctio VI, Quaest II, Art. II, Responsio

⁷ *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act V, Sc. 2

⁸ *Julius Caesar*, Act V, Sc. 1, about Cassius' suicide

What is the division of the beings of reason that are only in reason? Thomas touches upon the division of what is in reason only in this text: when explaining how one, true and good add only something of reason to being, a negation or a relation:

Id autem quod est rationis tantum, non potest esse nisi duplex. Omnis enim positio absoluta aliquid in rerum natura existens significat.

Sic ergo supra ens, quod est prima conceptio intellectus, unum addit id quod est rationis tantum, scilicet negationem: dicitur enim unum quasi ens indivisum.

Sed verum et bonum positive dicuntur; unde non possunt addere nisi relationem quae sit rationis tantum.⁹

A being of reason or *ens rationis* may be either a negation or privation (which is distinguished from a *positio*) or a relation (which is divided against *absoluta*). We find both of these beings of reason in what is convertible with being.

All privations or lacks would seem to be only beings of reason:

...privatio non dicitur ens naturae, sed solummodo ens rationis¹⁰

Thus blindness is a being of reason only:

Caecum enim aliquid addit supra hominem, scilicet caecitatem, quae non est aliquod ens in natura, sed rationis tantum, secundum quod ens est comprehendens privationes....¹¹

Likewise, negations are beings of reason:

⁹ *De Veritate*, Q 21, Art. 1, corpus

¹⁰ *De Veritate*, Q. 21, Art. 2, Ad 7

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, Q. 21, Art. 1, corpus

Et ideo hoc ipsum quod est non posse recipere additionem...distinguit primam bonitatem, quae est bonitas prima, ab aliis bonitatibus.

Hoc autem quod non est recipere additionem, cum sit negatio, est ens rationis,

et tamen fundatur super simplicitatem bonitatis primae.¹²

Thus, in general, negations and privations or lacks are only beings of reason:

illa communitas qua aliquid praedicatur communiter de ente et non ente, est rationis tantum, quia negationes et privationes non sunt nisi entia rationis.¹³

Some relations are real, but some are in reason only. We can speak of these when we take up toward something or relation.

The following text suggests that there is a sense of *being* common to substance and accident just as there is a sense of *nature* common to matter and form. When we say that there is a reasoned out knowledge of being as being, we would seem to be using *being* in this common sense before we say that it is chiefly about substance.

Dicit ergo primo quod Parmenides assumit propositiones falsas, quia accipit quod est, idest ens, dici simpliciter, idest uno modo, cum tamen dicatur multipliciter.

Dicitur enim ens uno modo substantia, alio modo accidens; et hoc multipliciter secundum diversa genera:

potest etiam accipi ens prout est commune substantiae et accidenti.

Patet autem quod propositiones ab eo sumptae in uno sensu sunt verae, et in alio sensu sunt falsae. Nam cum dicitur: *quidquid est praeter ens est non ens*, verum est si *ens* sumatur prout est

¹² *De Veritate*, Q. 21, Art. 4, Ad 8

¹³ Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, Q. 3, Art. 4, Ad 3

commune substantiae et accidenti: si autem sumatur pro accidente tantum, vel pro substantia tantum, falsum est, ut infra ostendetur.¹⁴

Are there other divisions of being per se besides those given here by Aristotle? The following text suggests another division of being per se which is not given in Book Five:

Adhuc. Ad divinam providentiam pertinet ut gradus entium qui possibiles sunt adimpleantur, ut ex supra dictis patet. Ens autem dividitur per contingens et necessarium: et est per se divisio entis. Si igitur divina providentia excluderet omnem contingentiam, non omnes gradus entium conservarentur.¹⁵

Is it because contingent and necessary are defined by ability? This is perhaps after the distinction of being into act and ability. The contingent is able to be and able not to be while the necessary is not able not to be (and the impossible is not able to be). The before and after of these is very important in arriving at the existence of God. (The word *possible* is used in that proof.)

The distinction between good and bad is also after the distinction of being into act and ability. For the bad is the lack of an act one is able to have and should have while act is the end and good of ability

In the following text, Thomas speaks of universal and singular as differentiae or per se passioness of being:

Amplius. Natura generis perfecte non potest cognosci nisi eius differentiae primae et passioness propriae cognoscantur: non enim perfecte sciretur natura numeri si par et impar ignorarentur. Sed universale et singulare sunt differentiae, vel per se passioness entis. Si igitur Deus, cognoscendo essentiam suam, perfecte cognoscit naturam communem entis, oportet quod perfecte cognoscat universale et singulare. Sicut autem non perfecte cognosceret

¹⁴ *In I Physicorum*, Lectio VI, n. 39

¹⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Liber III, Caput LXXII, 2nd argument

universale si cognosceret intentionem universalitatis et non cognosceret rem universalem, ut hominem aut animal; ita non perfecte cognosceret singulare si cognosceret rationem singularitatis et non cognosceret hoc vel illud singulare. Oportet igitur quod Deus res singulares cognoscat.¹⁶

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¹⁶ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Liber III, Capitulum LXV, 3rd argument