AUREOL AND THE AMBIGUITIES OF THE DISTINCTION OF REASON

Sven K. Knebel (Berlin)

It is well known that the schoolmen were oft en occupied in differentiating between the possible meanings of sentences like “A is not B”, where A and B refer to simple terms, not to propositions. For this purpose, they devised several types of non-identity or distinction. The present paper calls attention to the taxonomy of the distinction of reason (distinctio rationis), which was meant to save opposite predicates from contradiction when real identity is supposed to obtain between their respective subjects, A and B. Although my study is to a certain degree about Pierre Aureol’s teaching on this issue, I shall not be inquiring directly into the position of Aureol as expounded in the first and the eighth distinction of his first book on the Sentences and in the fifth question of his Quodlibet. I shall rather focus on a dispute in the mid-17th century. This later source will give us the sense of Aureol’s being very much alive at that time. We thus suggest that it is worthwhile to have a look upon our 14th century author from this later perspective.

I. Distinctio Rationis Ratiocinatae

The question concerning what kind of distinction is to be drawn between a thing’s essential predicates that are neither inclusive nor included, e.g., ‘animal’ and ‘rational’, is a time-honored ontological issue. From about 1500 on, the distinction between a genus and its differentia began to be employed as the paradigm case for the so called distinctio rationis ratiocinatae. This is to say: it is up to the mind to distinguish between animal and rational, yet in doing so the mind does not proceed arbitrarily, but operates on a foundation on the side of the object, i.e., it manifests different empirical effects and from this one can gather that their causes also are different. The distinction between animality and rationality thus became the paradigm case for the distinctio rationis ratiocinatae among those who embraced this type of a distinction, that is: among the Thomists. The Scotists, the champions of the distinctio
formalis, of course for the most part found it superfluous. The Franciscan friar Bartholomew Mastri (1602–73), however,¹ in his 1646 Metaphysical Disputations is far from questioning its usefulness. The “arguably most important 17th-century Scotist”² joins the Thomists in seeing a real need for this type of a distinction and many of his pages are devoted to the question, attempting to make sense of it from a Scotistic standpoint. Among several contemporary proposals reported by Mastri in his effort to provide the rationale of a distinctio rationis ratiocinatae, there is one which is especially relevant here. Its author was the Theatine Zaccaria Pasqualigo (d. 1664), whose two volumes of Metaphysical Disputations appeared in 1634–36.³

In order to explain how the distinctio rationis ratiocinatae works, that is to say, how it indicates a distinction in the object itself, without this distinction being mind-independent, Pasqualigo tells us that he means by ‘object’ any individual substance and then posits two modes of being for every object: real or extramental being on the one hand, objective or intentional being in the mind on the other. The object’s objective being is taken to be something distinct from the object in itself as well as from the mental activity. First, it is distinct from the object in itself, since an object’s mental representation often does not square with reality. The mind grasps something which as such is not contained in the object itself. From this fact it must be inferred that the object’s representation differs from the object itself, since the object in itself cannot vary in this way. Secondly, the object’s objective or intentional being must not be confused with the mental activity, since the act of knowing is not what is represented, but the means of representation. Thus, a mode of being must be granted, ‘objective being’, which is neither the mind’s formal concept nor the object in its real being. Pasqualigo goes on to draw two conclusions. His first