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**PULCHRUM AND PULCHRITUDO IN THOMAS AQUINAS'  
COMMENT ON DE DIVINIS NOMINIBUS BY PSEUDO-  
DIONYSIUS AREOPAGITE**

The research project which I would like to present here is an attempt at the analysis of a pair of notions: *pulchrum* and *pulchritudo* using differentiation into meta-language and object language<sup>1</sup>, which is a tool of analysis derived from 20<sup>th</sup> century logical semiotics. Let us therefore examine the logical status of this pair of notions as if from the outside, leaving aside their historical context of medieval logic, as the character of certain logical categories developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century seems universal enough to be commonly binding. One may therefore use such categories to analyse texts created in various periods of history.

This is also true about the differentiation between object language and metalanguage. Since logical semiotics assumes that this differentiation provides a solution to the antinomy of the liar<sup>2</sup>, it might also prove to be an effective tool for a semiotics analysis of other interdependencies within language including analysis of relations between abstract and specific names.

<sup>1</sup> The discovery and description of this differentiation is attributed to B. RUSSELL'S and N.A. WHITEHEAD'S *Principia Mathematica*, Oxford 1960, introd., ch. 2. They have arrived at their conclusions in the context of analysis of logical antinomies, the solution of which is the differentiation into language and metalanguage.

<sup>2</sup> These issues are developed in detail by Alfred Tarski in his study «Pojęcie prawdy w językach i naukach dedukcyjnych» [«The Concept of Truth in deductive languages and sciences»], Warsaw, 1933. See A. TARSKI, «Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics: papers from 1923 to 1938», J.H. WOODGER (transl.), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1956.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PULCHRUM AND PULCHRITUDO – A SEMIOTIC INTERPRETATION

To make statements on beauty, Aquinas uses two notions: *pulchrum* (τὸ καλόν) and *pulchritudo* (τὸ κάλλος). The word *pulchrum* or «beautiful» is used in Latin basically as an adjective of neutral gender and functions in sentences as a predicative word, and therefore it is used to say that something is beautiful. On the other hand, *pulchritudo* or «beauty» is a noun and an abstract notion. It functions as a subject in sentences which are general statements about beauty.

These two notions can be subject to differentiation into object language and metalanguage, mentioned above. In this sense the notion *pulchrum* operates at the level of object language, because it is used to ascribe the attribute of being beautiful to any thing, while *pulchritudo* is a metalanguage name used in statements about statements about beauty.

One of the assumptions I am adopting in this analysis, is the proposition on the existence of isomorphism between human language activities and thinking. This means that acts of reflection or acts of cognition of one's cognition, in other words, when one cognises that he cognises - *intelligit intelligere*<sup>3</sup>, have their equivalent in language activities which are statements about statements, i.e. metalanguage statements.

While «beautiful» (*pulchrum*) is a notion used in statements saying that something is beautiful, the term «beauty» (*pulchritudo*) does not really signify that something is beautiful, but rather reflects the fact of stating that something is beautiful. In accordance with the adopted interpretation assumptions, the emphasises is laid on the fact of stating the beauty of something, and not on its beauty itself.

Consequently, the notion *pulchritudo*, similarly to all the other abstract notions, does not signify a certain state of things, but a human action of cognitive and linguistic nature. Hence it does not signify a certain characteristics of a thing, but the fact that this characteristics is stated or cognised.

The above undoubtedly adds new significance to our understanding of abstract notions resulting from generalisation of notions signifying

<sup>3</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi*, R.P. MANDONNET (ed.), Paris, 1929, lib. I, d. 10, q. 1, a. 5, ad 2: «Eodem enim actu intellectus intelligit et intelligit se intelligere». Cfr. op. cit., I, d. 17, q. 1, a. 5, ad 3.

characteristic features of things. Parallely, these remarks can also refer to other pairs of notions, such as «true» and «the truth» (*verum – veritas*), «good» and «the good» (*bonum – bonitas*), «great» – «the greatness» (*magnus – magnitudo*), etc.

#### THE PRESENCE OF BEAUTY IN THE CREATED WORLD

It might be worth to consider now the consequences of such interpretation. What meanings do St. Thomas' utterances about beauty acquire, when we adopt such an understanding of the dependence between *pulchritudo* and *pulchrum*?

For Aquinas the difference between *pulchrum* and *pulchritudo* as referred to the Creation is such as the difference between a participant and an event in which he participates (*participans et participatum*). It is so – says Thomas – because we say that something is beautiful for the reason that it participates in beauty. Therefore causal relationship exists between *pulchritudo* and *pulchrum*<sup>4</sup>. If we can say that something is beautiful, then the reason for this must be ascribed to beauty, and therefore to certain content which manifests itself in things which are beautiful.

In the created world, absence of such duality is unthinkable, because the fundamentals of its ontic structure include the concept of being an effect, i.e. being something that was formed in some way. This has its isomorphic equivalent in the subject-predicate structure of language. Therefore, there must always exist some content which causes (i.e. functions as a cause – *causa*) that things which are cognised inform us about this content. Since we state about many things that they are beautiful, and such sentences are sensible and comprehensible, their content cannot be empty, and therefore it has to exist in some way.

Both in the eidetic approach, which concerns the content (essence) of being beautiful and in the semiotic approach, which applies the differentiation into object language and metalanguage, one can say that cause-effect relationship occurs between the «beauty-as-such» and the «beauty of a specific thing». This duality between the content of beauty and its «incarnation» cannot exist in God.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In librum beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*, C. PERA (ed.), Marietti, Taurini, 1950, caput 5, lect. 4, 337: «Pulchrum enim et pulchritudo distinguuntur secundum participans et participatum ita quod pulchrum dicitur hoc quod participat pulchritudinem».

### GOD IS BEAUTIFUL AND IS BEAUTY SIMULTANEOUSLY

In accordance with the principles of Thomas' concept of the nature of the divine being, there is no duality and no multiplicity in God at all. Also *pulchrum* and *pulchritudo* are identical:

In causa prima, scilicet Deo non sunt dividenda pulchrum et pulchritudo, quasi aliud sit in eo pulchrum et pulchritudo<sup>5</sup>.

Thus we might ask what may be the meaning, in the light of interpretative guidelines adopted here, of Aquinas' statement that within God, being beautiful (*pulchrum*) and being the beauty (*pulchritudo*) are the same?

Thomas emphasises God's simplicity and His perfection which embraces everything. In Him, everything is one. We could say that the simplicity of the First Cause demands to negate the differentiation into *concretum* and *abstractum* and, simultaneously, into object language and metalanguage. The First Cause is simple and perfect and as such encompasses everything in one. Negation of the differentiation signifies identity – and this is what is demanded by the nature of an absolutely non-complex being. He contains within Himself everything as one, identical with itself: what is complex in the world pre-exists in Him as simple<sup>6</sup>.

Since our minds and cognition and language operate within the complex, the only way to render that which is absolutely non-complex, is to negate the complex at all available levels, including action and language. In his *Summa theologiae* Thomas formulates this conclusion *expressis verbis* saying that acts of cognising the cognition or this *intelligit intelligere*, multiply infinitely in man (*in infinitum multiplicantur*), because each of them constitutes a numerically separate act. Meanwhile, within God they are all identical with one another, and constitute one act.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, caput 4, lect. 5, 336.

<sup>6</sup> *De div. nom.*, caput 4, lect. 5, 336: «Dicit ergo primo quod in causa prima, scilicet Deo non sunt dividenda pulchrum et pulchritudo, quasi aliud sit in eo pulchrum et pulchritudo; et hoc ideo quia causa prima propter sui simplicitatem et perfectionem sola comprehendit tota, idest omnia in uno, unde etsi in creaturis differant pulchrum et pulchritudo, Deus tamen utrumque comprehendit in se, secundum unum et idem».

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Leonina, Marietti, Taurini (eds.), 1952, I, q. 28, a. 4, ad 2: «In nobis relationes intelligibiles in infinitum multiplicantur, quia alio actu

If *pulchrum* and *pulchritudo* are identical in God, therefore it means that in accordance with the adopted interpretation of these notions, any statement about God saying that He is beautiful is identical with a statement about a statement about His beauty. In other words, statement of beauty is identical with a statement about a statement about beauty. Simultaneously, the cognition of beauty is equivalent to the cognition of cognition.

The above conclusions call up other questions. The absence of division into object language and metalanguage, and, simultaneously, into cognition and cognition of cognition – being the original absence postulated for the divine being – in fact negates the nature of being as a non-contradictory one. In consequence, it also negates language used to describe the created world, because this language describes a world constructed of specific objects which always exist in certain time and space. Exclusion of any complexity or separation, through identification of components, leads to contradiction (antinomy). The reason for this is the fact that identity of object language and metalanguage means that a statement about some area is identical with a statement about that statement. However, these are two statements that remain different and each of them is identical only with itself. Therefore we introduce contradictory formulae, when we assume simultaneously that a particular statement in object language is not identical with anything else save itself and that it is identical with a statement about itself. Here we can clearly see how St. Thomas' statements about God are of antinomic nature, i.e. contain a statement about simultaneous validity of contradictory sentences. One has to emphasise this fact, because antinomies are implicit in Thomas' statements about the divine, though he himself does not admit it directly.

In this way human logic is transcended, as it is built on a model of a world composed of time and space elements. Time and space serve to distinguish objects and to differentiate between them. In such world, the rule non-contradiction is a binding source principle. According to it, simultaneous existence and non-existence of an object or feature in time and space cannot be true. However, there is no such requirement in the

intelligit homo lapidem, et alio actu intelligit se intelligere lapidem, at alio etiam intelligit hoc intelligere, et sic in infinitum multiplicantur actus intelligendi, et per consequens relationes intellectae. Sed hoc in Deo non habet locum, quia uno actu tantum omnia intelligit».

divine world. In the divine world, where any complexity is not possible, it is impossible to reach such non-contradiction. In consequence, the concept of God's simplicity, developed through negating complexity, is also a borderline concept, developed finally through excess (*excessus*) and negation (*via negationis*) of the most general structure of the complex world, expressed by the first principles of being and thinking. Thus non-contradiction, expressed in the being and cognition of the created world, is of a different character than the non-contradiction of the divine being. In order to make statements about God, one negates the very differentiation into object language and metalanguage, based on the principle of identity and non-contradiction.

To summarise the above, one might say that the divine being is super-logical being which language is unable to express structurally. Attempts to express the nature of the divine being require identification of *abstractum* with *concretum*, and object language with metalanguage, which, however, leads to disintegration of language structures, as it implies an immanent contradiction.

#### SOME FURTHER PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS

The complexity of the created world, which we have to exclude when making statements about God, involves, as has been already said, the presence of cause-and-effect relationship in the world. In this sense, we are also dealing with interdependence between beauty (*pulchritudo*) and being beautiful (*pulchrum*). This means that *abstractum* causes *concretum* and simultaneously metalanguage is a cause of object language.

Thus we must ask what meaning should be assigned to the statement that *abstractum* is a cause for *concretum*. There are several options; for example: qualities are primary to their time and space materialisations; or, content is original while its specific realisations are individual attempts to express it. In brief, this allows for various variants of Platonic type dependencies between the world of ideas, ideal contents and their specific realisations.

However, it might be more interesting to examine the validity of an assumption that metalanguage is a cause of object language. First of all, it may mean that any object language is dependent on metalanguage. Metalanguage intentions and directives decide about language activities at object level. Object language seems therefore secondary to metalanguage as its «product».

The originality of metalanguage is paradoxical in nature. It seems that in order to say something about a statement, i.e. in order to form a thesis in metalanguage, we must first have a object language thesis at our disposal. However, the situation is exactly opposite. In reality, certain language meta-intentions exist first and only then they can be formulated in object language. For instance, first there appears cognitive and linguistic orientation towards truth, which occurs at metalanguage level<sup>8</sup>, and then one attempts to implement this orientation in expressed theses of object language. This metalanguage orientation is in a way immanent to all sentences of object language. In consequence, the universal is primary to the detailed. We arrive here at a possibility of semiotic interpretation of the inclination of our thinking towards Platonism.

This interpretation corresponds to an interpretation of the language of logic, e.g. a classical sentence calculus, which believes that this language constitutes a coherent set of action directives from metalanguage level, and that object sentences are generated by sentence calculus formulae after substituting constants for variables.

Furthermore, the originality of metalanguage indicates its source nature, and therefore its greater importance. It not only a statement of fact or cognition of fact alone, but also a statement about this statement and simultaneously the cognition of cognition which are of original character and significant value.

<sup>8</sup> The concept of truth is of metalanguage nature, as it is by no means just adequacy itself, but a statement about or cognition of that adequacy. See *ST*, I, q. 16, a. 4, ad 2: «Ad secundum dicendum quod secundum hoc est aliquid prius ratione, quod prius cadit in intellectus. Intellectus autem per prius apprehendit ipsum ens; et *secundario apprehendit se intelligere ens*; et tertio apprehendit se appetere ens. Unde primo est entis, secundo ratio veri, tertio ratio boni, licet bonum sit in rebus».

See also, Thomas Aquinas, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio*, R. SPIAZZI (ed.), Marietti, Taurini, 1950, lib. 4, lect. 4, 1236: «Intellectus autem habet apud se similitudinem rei intellectae, secundum quod rationes incomplexorum concipit; non tamen propter hoc ipsam similitudinem diudicat, sed solum cum componit vel dividit. Cum enim intellectus concipit hoc est animal rationale mortale, apud se similitudinem hominis habet, sed non propter hoc cognoscit se hanc similitudinem habere, quia non iudicat hominem esse animal rationale et mortale: et ideo in hac sola secunda operatione intellectus est veritas et falsitas, secundum quam non solum intellectus habet similitudinem rei intellectae, sed etiam super ipsam similitudinem reflectitur, cognoscendo et diudicando ipsam. Ex his igitur patet, quod veritas non est in rebus, sed solum in mente, et etiam in compositione et divisione».

This also means that object language is impossible without metalanguage. Statements about statements are primary to object statements: it is a condition for making statements, because on these very level, cognitive decisions are made and they resulting in judgements issued at object language level. Higher level language governs lower level language (is the cause). Metalanguage is logically primary and as such is a source of rules for object language.

This leads to a further conclusion that cognition in its proper sense would be impossible without a subject ascertaining this cognition and therefore cognising its own cognition. Here we arrive at the meta-source of any cognitive and linguistic activities, which is the human subject, able to reflect and create an image of the image of reality and to assess his assessment of it. Here is the meta-level, similar to a source from which flow all cognitive and linguistic activities referring to specific objects of the world.

Perhaps this might imply that in order to build statements about the world one needs previous, inborn knowledge residing at this metalanguage level, which allows one to construct partial images of the world (expressed in object language sentences) and lets them be a part of a greater whole, controlled from this meta-level by a subject who is able to reflect.

Words have their consequences. The analytical speculation presented here is an attempt to examine the consequences that identification of *pulchrum* and *pulchritudo* may have for someone who considers the 20<sup>th</sup> century differentiation of object language and metalanguage as binding. To me, these consequences seemed so interesting that I decided to share them with you.

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