CHAPTER 1

THE CONTACT OF SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY

The Origin of the Question

Medieval philosophy did not always have the tools by which the question of the scientific nature of theology could be asked. We can date the question with relative specificity: The question cannot be asked before about the year 1156.1 For the question of science is a question raised in Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics* and this text does not make its appearance in the Latin West until sometime around that year. However, in terms of its appearance in philosophical and theological texts, let alone in terms of commentaries of it, *Posterior Analytics* does not become an influential text until the early thirteenth century. It is only at that point, then, that the very question “Is Theology a Science?” can be asked.

The *Posterior Analytics* remains, in many ways, one of Aristotle’s most enigmatic texts. There is still debate, in fact, about just what this text is supposed to do. Is it a text that teaches the scientist how to pursue research? Or is it a text that merely shows the scientist how best to organize and present research?2 Even without attempting to answer the question of the goal of the text, commentators are still lacking consensus on what its more important doctrines are and how they function. Adding to this puzzle is the fact that Aristotle himself never seems to have put to use the methods set forth in *Posterior Analytics*.3

In its bare outlines, the *Posterior Analytics* presents an analysis of a disposition (gr. *hexis*, lat. *habitus*) that he calls *episteme*. We have this particular cognitive disposition of syllogisms only of a particular kind—those that are demonstrative. The text, then, spends most of its energy on detailing just what kind of syllogism counts as demonstrative—that is, it lays out the rules that a syllogism must obey in order to be counted as demonstrative and thus be available to the cognitive disposition *episteme*.
The Premises of a Scientific Syllogism

Because *Posterior Analytics* is concerned with a disposition that relates to a particular kind of syllogism, it presupposes the syllogistic logic treated in *Prior Analytics*. It will not be concerned, then, with the basic theory of the syllogism, rules for the validity of a syllogism, conversion of various forms of syllogism, and so on. What it will be concerned with, however, is just what requirements need to be fulfilled in order for a syllogism to count as demonstrative. These requirements will fall into two basic kinds: (1) requirements as to syllogistic form and (2) requirements as to syllogistic content. The requirements of form are relatively moderate. Aristotle holds that a demonstrative syllogism is most properly that syllogism in the first mood of the first figure—that is, “BARBARA.”

The requirements as to content are what take up the major portion of *Posterior Analytics*. Content, here, refers not to the particular terms that make up the propositions of a syllogism. Rather, content concerns the *kind* of premises that are required in a syllogism that is demonstrative. The premises must be “true and primitive (*protos*) and immediate (*amesos*) and more known (*gnorimos*) than and prior to (*proteros*) and explanatory (*aitios*) of the conclusion.” Furthermore, Aristotle tells us that these premises must be necessary, known in themselves [*kath’ auto*] and universal [*katholou*].

These requirements may be related to one another (as, for example, necessity is related to “in itself”) or they may be radically different (as, for example, true and explanatory). Taken together, however, they show that whatever a demonstrative syllogism is, it requires premises that themselves are not demonstrated. The indemonstrability of premises is required for Aristotle because he wants to show that we know something, but that knowledge is not from recollection. The indemonstrability of the premises is Aristotle’s solution to the Meno Paradox. Let us look briefly at each of these requirements.

- **True.** It is not the case that the premises of all syllogisms must be true in order to produce a true conclusion. However, since a demonstrative syllogism is to expose the *causes* of the conclusion or the *reason why* the conclusion is true, such a syllogism needs to have true premises. It is the causal relation, therefore, between a conclusion and its demonstration that leads to the requirement that the premises must be true.

- **Primitive.** According to Barnes, “primitive” means that there is nothing from which the proposition in question can be derived. It is for him, as it seems to be for Aristotle, related to “non-demonstrable.” This means that the predicate must belong to the subject qua itself...