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# AKVINIETIS IR HEIDEGGERIO ONTOTEOLOGIJA

Aquinas and Heidegger's Ontotheology

## SUMMARY

My article aims to understand what Heidegger's ontotheology criticism of metaphysics is and then to see if Thomas Aquinas' metaphysics is a victim of his criticism. Heidegger's "Identity and Difference" seems to criticize the ontotheologian as naively thinking that the notion of being derives from beings. In truth, it is the other way around - being is a projection of the freedom of *Dasein*. Hence, unwittingly, the ontotheologian formulates an all too human understanding of God. Heidegger famously complains, "Man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this God." In order to understand Heidegger's claim that beings derive from the notion of being, the article goes on to investigate what Heidegger's "The Basic Problems of Phenomenology" calls the universality of *Dasein's* productive comportment. I argue that the presencing of beings outstrips productive comportment and so Heidegger fails to prove its universality. Finally, the article explains that by understanding the notion of being as a sameness within the differences of beings, Aquinas can begin his metaphysics from beings and reach God before whom the ontotheologian can experience both awe and joy.

## SANTRAUKA

Straipsnyje siekiama dviejų tikslų: suprasti Heideggerio ontoteologijos kritiką metafizikoje ir išsiaiškinti, ar toji kritika sugriauna Tomo Akviniečio metafiziką. Atrodo, kad ontoteologas Heideggerio traktate *Tapatybė ir Skirtis* kritikuojamas kaip naiviai galvojantis, jog esaties samprata kyla iš esinių, nors iš tiesų yra atvirkščiai – esatis yra *Dasein* laisvės projekcija. Todėl ontoteologas nesąmoningai formuluoja pernelyg žmogišką Dievo supratimą. Plačiai žinomas Heideggerio skundas, kad „prieš šį Dievą žmogus negali nei iš pagarbios baimės kristi ant kelių, nei groti ir šokti“. Stiekiant suprasti Heideggerio teiginį, kad esiniai kyla iš esaties, straipsnyje toliau nagrinėjama tai, ką Heideggeris traktate *Pagrindinės fenomenologijos problemos* vadina *Dasein* produktyvaus elgesio universalumu. Straipsnyje teigiama, kad esinių nuojautos yra pirmesnės už

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produktyvųjų elgesį, todėl Heideggeriui nepavyksta įrodyti jo universalumo. Galiausiai straipsnyje aiškina, kad Akvinietis, pasitelkęs esaties kaip tapatybės skirtingybėse sampratą, savo metafiziką gali pradėti nuo esinių ir pasiekti Dievą, prieš kurį ontoteologas patiria ir pagarbią baimę, ir džiaugsmą.

I hope to write a series of articles on Aquinas' metaphysics and ethics for journal "Logos". In a European setting especially, my project necessitates addressing Heidegger's ontotheological critique of a classical metaphysics. I will first try to fathom what Heidegger claims are the shortcomings of ontotheology, and then I will consider if these shortcomings are found in Aquinas' metaphysics.

In his presentation of ontotheology in *Identity and Difference* Heidegger delivers his well-known complaint with ontotheological metaphysics. The complaint is directed to the god that such metaphysics reaches. With echoes of Pascal, Heidegger complains: "man can neither pray nor sacrifice to this god. Before the *causa sui*, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this God" (Heidegger 1969: 72). The basic reason for these inabilities seems to be that the God of philosophy is too much a creation of the philosopher: "But assuming that philosophy, as thinking, is the free and spontaneous self-involvement with beings as such, then the deity can come into philosophy only insofar as philosophy, of its own accord and by its own nature, requires and determines that and how the deity enters into it" (Ibid., 56). This complaint suggests that the classical metaphysician is victim to a certain naivety about the activity of metaphysics. Metaphysics is less about the world and more about the metaphysician. In other words, the sug-

gestion is that the classical metaphysician has not grown up and accepted Kant's Copernican revolution in philosophy in which the known conforms to the knower rather than the knower to the known. This suggestion becomes clear if one investigates an ambiguity in what Heidegger calls the ontological difference between Being and beings.<sup>1</sup>

In "Identity and Difference", Heidegger devotes most of the prose to elaborating the difference in a traditional sense. Beings are first and Being expresses a true idea derived from beings. As such Being expresses the ground of beings. Also, between beings there are causal relations. These relations lead the metaphysician to a highest being that explains why Being is in beings. Heidegger says: "Metaphysics thinks of the Being of beings both in the ground-giving unity of what is most general, what is indifferently valid everywhere, and also in the unity of the all that accounts for the ground, that is, of the All-Highest" (Heidegger 1969:58). In the first respect metaphysics is onto-logic; in the second respect it is theo-logic.

There is, however, another earlier discussion of the ontological difference between Being and beings in which Being is less *a posteriori* and more *a priori*. In "Basic Problems of Phenomenology", Heidegger understands Being as an *a priori* condition for the presencing of things (Heidegger 1988)<sup>2</sup> Many texts to this effect exist. One of the most striking I would like to quote at length. In detail-

ing with what he means by “being” in the ontological difference between being and beings, Heidegger says:

We must understand being so that we may be able to be given over to a world that is, so that we can exist in it and be our own *Dasein* itself as a being. We must be able to understand actuality before all experience of actual beings. This understanding of actuality or of being in the widest sense as over against the experience of beings is in a certain sense earlier than the experience of beings. To say that the understanding of being precedes all factual experience of beings does not mean that we would first need to have an explicit concept of being in order to experience beings theoretically or practically. We must understand being – being, which may no longer itself be called a being, being, which does not occur as a being among other beings but which nevertheless must be given and in fact is given in the understanding of being (Ibid., 10–11)<sup>3</sup>

What is the early Heidegger saying about Being? As I understand him, he is saying that Being is the expanse up and against which realities are seen as realities. The driving idea is that the individual is only known in the light of the universal. Undergirding this driving thought is Heidegger’s description of what we experience. Does not saying that we experience beings mean that the beings are appreciated as instances of something larger, namely, Being? Similarly, to experience Fido as a dog means to experience Fido as an instance of dog. But unlike dog, being is underived from the beings that we experience. How could it be derived? Being sets up experienced beings in the first place. Whenever we have beings, we already have

being. Hence, in the previous quote Heidegger says that being is “before” all experience of actual beings and that the understanding of being is “... in a sense earlier than the experience of beings.” Continuing this *a priori* construal of being, “Basic Problems” says that “the understanding of being has itself the mode of being of the human *Dasein*.”

What Heidegger accomplishes in “Identity and Difference” is an explanation of the connection between these two senses of the ontological difference between Being and beings. His explanation is found in his description of a certain transition that Being undergoes and through which it comes to be present. In the transition Being does not go out to beings that are already there. Heidegger describes it as Being unconcealingly overwhelming what arrives. What arrives are beings with a certain concealment.<sup>4</sup> This sounds as if the Being that crosses over constitutes the beings that arrive, but Being is somewhat misunderstood because the arrival of beings masks or veils their origin in Being. Since the origin of beings is concealed, we think that Being is a true idea derived from beings and so in that sense expresses the ground of beings. This understandable misapprehension of the ontological difference is what perdures, and within this perdurance is metaphysics in the sense of ontotheology.<sup>5</sup>

An image might be helpful. Think the transiting of Being as along a line at which things will be at a midpoint. The transition of Being moves from left to right. This image will show the two senses of the ontological difference. The

first sense in which Being functions as a constitutive *a priori* for the presentation of beings is to the left of the midpoint. The second sense in which Being is understood as an *a posteriori* apprehended ground of beings is on the right. As Being moves from left to right, its first character is masked by the beings.

It should now be clear what the challenge of ontotheology is to classical metaphysics. By proceeding from beings to a first cause, the metaphysician is naïve about the initial presence of beings. The metaphysician has not thought through the founding role human *Dasein* plays in the setting up of beings. In short, the ontotheology critique targets the naive realism about the presence of beings from which the metaphysician begins to reflect. Aquinas also begins his metaphysics with realism. In particular, his estimate of sensation, e.g., what you are doing right now as you look this way, is an immediate realism. Sensation, for Aquinas, is a direct confrontation with real existents. I do not have to escape from my cognition to confront reality; I confront it within my cognition (Owens 1974: 74–85).<sup>6</sup> In fact, Aquinas regards this immediate realism of sensation as crucial for his essence/existence distinction. In sum, for a thing to both really and cognitively exist, the thing must be existence neutral and its existences distinct from it. Somewhat similarly, for the water to be both hot and cold, the water must be temperature neutral and its temperatures distinct from it.

In “Identity and Difference” Heidegger is not quite clear on why we should regard Being as this masked and

forgotten constitutive *a priori*. How does Heidegger make the case that Being is a constitutive *a priori*? If we return to “Basic Problems”, Heidegger seems to argue his case in two ways. First, Being is wide enough to include God.<sup>7</sup> Since God is not immediately known, then it seems that Being cannot come from our initial knowledge of things. For its source we must turn to ourselves. Elsewhere, I have discussed this first way of making Heidegger’s case and how Aquinas would fare in the face of it (Knasas 1944: 415–439). Heidegger’s second case is what interests me now. By analyzing *Dasein*’s productive comportment in chapter 2 of part 1 and *Dasein*’s basic determination of understanding/freedom in chapter 1 of part 2, Heidegger translates our experience of beings as being into an experience of things as handy and as equipment<sup>8</sup> Because of the translation, Being becomes identified with the world, or significance, involved in our freely chosen projects.<sup>9</sup> The correctness of this analysis will rest on a defense of the universality of productive comportment. In other words, our relation to things is always mediated in and through our freely chosen projects.

Heidegger is aware that sometimes we experience things as non-handy. Such an experience would seem to belie the universality of productive comportment. In defense of his thesis Heidegger says that the experience of things a non-handy means to experience things as “unfamiliar.” This latter in turn is reduced to some free projection of *Dasein*. In other words, the non-handy, or the unproduced as non-material for produc-

tion, is better described as the unfamiliar. This description can only happen thanks to the non-handly failing to fit into my presently chosen project (Ibid., 304–305). Heidegger mentions the example of entering a shoemaker's shop. If you are a banker, you will not just experience things. You will experience unfamiliar things. That experience is understandable given that the contents of the shop do not mesh with the project of high finance. In sum, our experience of things occurs within a dichotomy of things as handy or not handy, and *Dasein's* productive comportment is the basis for the dichotomy. So, productive comportment remains a universal mediating factor for our awareness of things. It is a level of *Dasein* more fundamental than *Dasein's* awareness of beings between which we place causal connections.

Does Heidegger's transcendental reduction succeed? It is true that we experience the non-handly as the unfamiliar, that is, as what does not fit into one's project. The description, however, should not end there. By presenting itself as the unfamiliar, as not fitting into one's project, something can give us pause, something can bring our projecting to a halt. The noteworthy point is that the temporary suspension of the projecting does not mean the non-presencing of the thing. The thing remains suspended before us without the mediation of some freely chosen project.

The presence of things as what-I-do-not-know-what-to-do-with is an open invitation to consider things in terms of what they are doing for themselves, namely, existing. Returning to Heidegger's example of the shoe maker's

shop, it is true that someone entering the shop with the preoccupations of a banker will experience the shop's contents as "unfamiliar." Is it that difficult to imagine the banker as dropping the project of banking and as letting things just present themselves?

In sum, presencing outstrips productive comportment. Productive comportment has an ebb and flow that contrasts to the continued presence of things. The unfamiliar can stop the comporting in its tracks. Other factors can do the same. Exhaustion in the midst of a difficult task can lead us to place the projecting aside but without the loss of the presence of things. In his "Metaphysics" I, 2, Aristotle noted that success in meeting practical needs and necessities meant a diminution of practical concern without a commensurate diminution in the presencing of things. In fact from this continued presencing of things, philosophy took its rise.

Hence, I fail to see productive comportment as subsuming the presencing of things. The phenomenology of sensation fails to lead in a transcendental direction. Real items stay basic and fundamental to sensation. By beginning with beings given in sensation, metaphysicians are not falling prey to the ontological error of missing the more profound dimension of *Dasein's* setting up of beings in the first place. As mentioned, in Aquinas's case the sense realism is especially important since it gives the real thing as also cognitively existing. That double existence for the thing enables the metaphysician to work out the *actus essendi* understanding of the thing's real existence.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, what of Heidegger's complaint that the *causa sui* god of the metaphysicians is something before which one cannot feel awe or dance? Does that complaint hold of Aquinas's metaphysical conclusion of subsistent *esse*? Aquinas regarded subsistent *esse* to be identifiable with the God of his Christian belief who told Moses that his name was "I am who am: ego sum qui sum" (Aquinas: 22). First of all, Aquinas never refers to God as a *causa sui*. The reason appears to be the absolute metaphysical priority of *esse* to essence. A *causa sui* would have an essence of some kind more fundamental to its *esse* in order to cause its *esse*.

Second, Aquinas, at "Summa Contra Gentiles" I, 5, agrees with Aristotle that the little we know of higher substances is loved and desired more than all the knowledge about less noble substances. Furthermore, this little and imperfect knowledge produces "intense joy" (*vehemens sit gaudium eius*) and brings the "greatest perfection to the soul" (*maximam perfectionem animae*). Later at chapter 8 of *Contra Gentiles* I, Aquinas expresses the matter in terms of intellectual vision and consideration, weak as they may be: "For to be able to see [*posse inspicere*] something of the loftiest realities, however thin and weak the sight may be [*parva et debili consideratione*] is, as our previous remarks indicate, a cause of greatest joy" (Ibid., 76). The ecstatic Thomistic metaphysician does not seem to be behaving like Heidegger's dour and bourgeois ontotheological metaphysician. Why the difference?

What is behind Aquinas' remarks is the phenomenon of analogical concep-

tualization. Understood as the grasping of sameness precisely within differences of beings,<sup>11</sup> any analogical concept, or analogon, is an intrinsically fascinating item. For example, "charming city" said of Paris and Rome expresses a sameness in difference. How else than by describing its winding alleys, ruins, baroque, and gelato can one answer the question "Why is Rome a charming city like Paris?" Of course these things are just what Rome has and Paris lacks. The sameness is in the differences. Since the sameness is grasped in the differences, it is to an extent hidden by them and so is grasped imperfectly. Nevertheless, one's imperfect grasp of the sameness, or analogon, can be stunning enough to engender a lifelong love for travel. Before I ever saw Paris, I never realized a charming city could take that form. What other charming cities are on the map? The grasp of the analogon dim as it may be is what is producing both the wonder and the excitement.

The notion of being, the *ratio entis*, is another analogon. It is another way something can be communicated but not according to the same formality. Modified by negative judgment to represent subsistent *esse*, the notion of being presents the first cause as an unfathomable deep of perfection. Before it, one cannot but experience profound awe and joy. Aquinas's thinking is ontotheological in the best sense of the word. Unlike Heidegger who locates the mystery of existence in the unrestricted freedom of elite human *Daseins*, Aquinas can locate it in a transcendent God.

## CONCLUSION

The article concludes that the mere presencing of beings is not mediated by any productive comportment of which ontotheologians are naively unaware. Despite the apparent philosophical minimal-

ism of this claim, Aquinas dimly spies within the very differences of these beings a sameness that he can employ to think the nature of the first cause without detriment to its inescapable transcendence.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that Heidegger is a Neo-Kantian as was his mentor, Edmund Husserl. For Heidegger the a priori is no stable and invariant structure. This is clear in a number of ways. One way is through a consideration of what Heidegger considers the great philosophers and poets to be doing. He says, "What philosophy essentially can and must be is this: a thinking that breaks the paths and opens the perspectives of the knowledge that sets the norms and hierarchies of knowledge in which and by which a people fulfills itself historically and culturally, the knowledge that kindles and necessitates all inquiries and thereby threatens all values" (Heidegger 1977: 10). What the great German poet Holderlin reveals, Heidegger describes this way, "The poet names the gods and names all things in that which they are. This naming does not consist merely in something already known being supplied with a name; it is rather that when the poet speaks the essential word, the existent is by this naming nominated as what it is. So, it becomes known as existent. Poetry is the estab-

lishing of being by means of the word... But because being and essence of things can never be calculated and derived from what is present, they must be freely created, laid down and given. Such a free act of giving is establishment" ("Holderlin and the Essence of Poetry" ed. by Werner Brock, Martin Heidegger: "Existence and Being" (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery, 1968), 281.

<sup>2</sup> The book is the text of a course that Heidegger gave at the University of Marburg in the summer of 1927. It was published only in 1975. Its close philosophical relationship to "Being and Time" is explained by Hofstadter in his "Translator's Introduction."

<sup>3</sup> "But as an investigation of Being, [phenomenological interpretation] brings to completion, autonomously and explicitly, that understanding of Being which belongs already to *Dasein* and which 'comes alive' in any of its dealings with entities" (p. 96); "understanding of Being has already been taken for granted in projecting upon possibilities. In projection, Being is understood, though not ontologically conceived. An

entity whose kind of Being is the essential projection of Being-in-the-world has understanding of Being, and has this as constitutive of its Being" (pp. 188-7); "If what the term 'idealism' says, amounts to the understanding that Being can never be explained by entities but is already that which is 'transcendental' for every entity, then idealism affords the only correct possibility for a philosophical problematic" (p. 251); "[Common sense] fails to recognize that entities can be experienced 'factually' only when Being is already understood, even if it has not been conceptualized" (p. 363); "All ontical experience of entities – both circumspective calculation of the ready-to-hand, and positive scientific cognition of the present-at-hand – is based upon projections of the Being of the corresponding entities" (p. 371). In sum, John Caputo, Heidegger and Aquinas remark: "[in 'Being and Time'] Being is the meaning or horizon of understanding within which beings are manifest (Caputo 1982: 53). Thus instead of being an abstract concept, a vacuous abstraction when separated from concrete beings, . . . Being for Heidegger becomes the meaning-giving-horizon, the transcendental *a priori*, which precedes beings and renders them possible in their Being. It is not an abstraction drawn from beings, but an *a priori* which precedes them."

<sup>4</sup> "Being shows itself as the unconcealing overwhelming. Beings as such appear in the manner of the arrival that keeps itself concealed in unconcealedness." Heidegger 1969: 64 – 65)..

<sup>5</sup> Heidegger mentions "the Same, the differentiation" as what "holds apart the 'between,' in which the overwhelming and the arrival are held toward one another, are borne away from and toward each other. The difference of Being and beings, as the differentiation of overwhelming and arrival, is perdurance" (Ibid., 65). Thinking "the Same, or differentiation," seems to be placed outside of metaphysics: "For what these words [Being and being in the metaphysical sense], what the manner of thinking that is guided by them represents, originate as that which differs by virtue of the difference. The origin of the difference can no longer be thought of within the scope of metaphysics" (Ibid., 71). Earlier, Heidegger describes this more basic thinking as "a step back" in which the difference between Being and beings suffers an oblivion

(Ibid., 50). Iain Thomson brings out the ambiguity of "Being." He says: "This notion of the 'same' is recognizable as one of Heidegger's names for 'Being as such' (that is, Being in its difference from the metaphysically conceived Being of beings)" (Ontotheology 2000:309).

<sup>6</sup> „Basic Problems“ does contain some apparently realist assertions. First, Heidegger insists that a window "does not receive existence from my perceiving, but just the reverse. I can perceive it only if it exists and because it exists. . . . Perception or absolute position is at most the mode of access to the existent" (Ibid., 49). Second, he says that "perceivedness is not equated with extantness but is only a necessary though indeed not a sufficient condition of access to extantness" (Ibid., 67). But realism is not the sure interpretation here. To the first text, one could say that perceiving does not give the window existence because the projecting of being does that. As Heidegger says "being is what makes a being what it is as a being." (Ibid., 52). In the same vein one can read Heidegger's "Being and Time" remark: "Entities are, quite independently of the experience by which they are disclosed. . ." (Ibid., 228) To the second text, one could say that the necessary further condition for perception is not only the extantness of the perceived but *Dasein's* projection of being. In "Basic Problems" Heidegger does say "with respect to its possibility perceivedness is grounded in the understanding of extantness." (Ibid., 71)

<sup>7</sup> "What can there be apart from nature, history, God, space, number? We say of each of these, even though in a different sense, that it is. We call it a being. . . . We are able to grasp beings as such, as beings, only if we understand something like being. If we did not understand, even though at first roughly and without conceptual comprehension, what actuality signifies, then the actual would remain hidden from us" (Heidegger 1988: 10).

<sup>8</sup> "Only when we have apprehended the more original temporalizing are we able to survey in what way the understanding of the being of beings – here either of the equipmental character and handiness of handy equipment or of the thing-hood of extant things and the at-handness of the at-hand - is made possible by time and thus becomes transparent" (Heidegger 1988: 294).



- <sup>9</sup> "Interpretation of the possibility of being-in-the-world on the basis of temporality is already intrinsically interpretation of the possibility of an understanding of being in which, with equal originality, we understand the being of Dasein, the being of fellow-Daseins or of the others, and the being of the extant and handy entities always encountered in a disclosed world." (Ibid., 294.)
- <sup>10</sup> Heidegger also uses Suarez to critique from within the metaphysical tradition Aquinas's essence/existence distinction. The critique is one that assumes that the distinction is of two *rei* and then points out: "The question would then arise how the two can be taken together in a single unity which itself is." (Heidegger 1988: 95). That understanding of the distinction is a far cry from the distinction as it is known in *the duplex operatio intellectus*. The two can make a unity because of a strict potency/act understanding of the essence/*esse* distinction.
- <sup>11</sup> For this understanding of the analogical concept in contrast to the univocal concept, see Knasas, John F. X. *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003, 133-9), especially the citations of Jacques Maritain and James Anderson.