

Towards a Celebration of Being Human: A Retrieval of the Metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas and Martin Heidegger

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For the contemporary scientist, the metaphysical quest may not be a mere fancy after all. In fact one hallmark of science in the closing years of the twentieth century is how much fertile ground it has plowed to allow *bona fide* metaphysical speculation to sprout — about whether the universe is a product of intelligent design, whether the human experience is part of some unfolding purpose, or whether we were in any sense meant to be here. In a rousing article entitled *Science, God and Man*, Robert Wright (1993) makes this salutary concession:

Such musings suggest a new legitimacy for the term metaphysics, which long had a bad name in scientific circles, a taint that has not quite faded. The idea that there might be any laws beyond the perceivable world, anything opaque to scientific inquiry, was considered by many a quaint relic of a more romantic era. But science's brash youth, when no mystery seemed beyond experimental conquest is ending. Ultimate questions remain unanswered and the sciences may be unable to answer them (p. 46).

This sober insight probably sprung from the growing realization that the principles for an adequate explanation of reality cannot be obtained from an exclusively empirical study of the universe. This is what Frederick Sontag (1966) discerned when he noted an increasing interest in metaphysics even among those who would like to confine philosophy to a narrow scope or a restricted method. And more recently, Kenneth Schmitz (1994) advanced his own observation:

...Metaphysics is quietly alive... It is no longer banished from the philosophical arena by the varieties of positivism that want to get on with more obvious matters, nor is it intimidated by the varieties of activism that want to get on with more practical projects. Indeed, metaphysics has become respectable enough in some quarters today so that it assumes in their eyes the face of the enemy (p. 2).

The task of developing a metaphysics, "a world view... the systematic elucidation of a basic outlook on the world" (Pritchard, 1966), is imperative. For as philosophy seeks to understand the ultimate and the most universal reason that underlies the real, its horizon of inquiry cannot be less than the totality of beings.

Jacques Maritain (1948) in fact insists that a philosopher is not a philosopher if he is not a metaphysician. And what makes the philosopher a metaphysician is precisely his intuition of being. Or as Stanislas Breton (1963) poetically ruminates: "if the sense of mystery is the pathos and the virtue of the philosopher... the sense of being has to be the prime mover of his reflections" (p. 351).

Without difficulty two great thinkers come to mind who could lay an incontestable claim to being authentic philosophers because of their lifetime preoccupation with the question of being. One would be Thomas Aquinas, with his conception of *esse* and the *Ipsum Esse subsistens*, the absolute actuality and universal primordial causality of *actus essendi*, and Martin Heidegger, with his insight into *Sein*, presencing, *Gelassenheit*, and the event of appropriation.

Nonetheless when we trod upon the metaphysical trail that they have blazed we seem to arrive at an impasse. For in Thomas Aquinas we encounter in the end a baffling silence coupled with his determined rejection of all his writings, an exasperation over the total impotence of metaphysical discourse to capture the meaning of *Esse* in its plenitude, as revealed by his experience of the ineffable Divine Being. And in Martin Heidegger we have to contend with his overcoming of metaphysics after it has "run out of reserves and possibilities" (Janicaud and Mattei, 1995) in grappling with such highest concept of *Sein*, "the last cloudy streak of evaporating reality" (Heidegger, 1959), and must now await the initiative of Being to reveal itself.

CONSUMMATION OF METAPHYSICS

Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas developed a metaphysics that “not only did not lose sight of being but made it the basis, the center, and the crown of his system” (Mondin, 1975). His concept of being refers to the *actus essendi*, the fundamental condition of possibility for anything to exist at all. It is, as Schmitz (1994) characterizes, “root and branch of all that is; it takes up everything into its full amplitude, even to the singularities” (p. 4). The emphasis then is on the act, *esse*, by which the subject, *ens*, exists. This is the basic structure of Thomistic metaphysics, the “interplay of *ens* and *esse*” (Schurmann 1990). Or as Louie de Raeymaker (1954) puts it: being is *esse* understood as the “most intimate in all reality and the fundamental validity of every perfection, penetrating everything from which nothing could withdraw without losing all meaning and existence” (p. 27).

This is to say that *esse* excels absolutely everything that is in *ens*, because only by virtue of *esse* do all other perfections accrue to *ens*. It is as such more powerful, *potior*, than anything else that belongs to the ontological structure of being. Aquinas himself writes:

Esse is the most perfect of all things for it is compared to all things as that by which they are made actual, for nothing has actuality except in so far as it exists [*Esse est perfectissimum omnium, comparatur enim ad omnia ut actus. Nihil enim habet actualitatem nisi in quantum est...*] (ST, I, 4, 1, ad 3)

Now this *esse* is that which “before all else, falls under apprehension... the notion of which is included in all things whatsoever a man apprehends” [*Nam illud quod primo cadit sub apprehensione est ens, cujus intellectus includitur in omnibus quocumque quis apprehendit.*] (ST, I-II, 94, 2). We encounter it in our direct experience of the *ens*. It is the power by which the *ens* is brought out of nothingness and through which it is continuously sustained in existence. It is therefore an *esse* that is conferred by the only possible source from which it can come and that is *Pure Esse* itself. Thus for Aquinas the metaphysics of *esse* cannot be separated from the doctrine of creation.

Some effects which are more universal need to be taken to more universal and original causes. Among all effects, the most universal is existence itself, which should accordingly be the proper effect of the first and most universal cause, which is God...

Now to produce existence absolutely, not merely of this thing or that sort of thing, belongs to the meaning of creation...(ST, I, 45,5)

Schmitz (1982) captures this point with utmost perspicacity in the following quote:

Esse... being most complete, it is the principle of plenitude that is reached in the journey from potency to act... It is the source of everything that is in the creature, and the source of generosity with which the creator creates... Only in this way can there be an it in the first place. Not that the intrinsic act of the creature does this out of and from itself (*a se*). Rather, the actuation in the thing at this most absolute level of actuality (*per modum actualitatis absolute*) comes about through the communication of *esse* to the creature by the creator (pp. 109-110).

Schmitz even advanced further by saying that it is not too paradoxical to say that before the created world had begun to be, it was not possible for it to be: "Saint Thomas concedes that we can speak of the possibility of the world prior to its being created, and mean by its possibility that it was not contradictory and impossible. God did not create a contradiction. But the real possibility does not lie with the creature. Before it was created there was no it in any sense; and so, there could be no possibility for it, no potentiality with respect to it" (p. 126). So the very condition for the creature to receive the gift of *esse* is concreated with the creation of this *ens*. This is what Aquinas (1952) meant when he wrote in *De potentia Dei* that in giving *esse*, God in the same act produces that which receives it — *Deus simul dans esse, producit id quod esse recipit* (q. 3, a. 1, ad 17m).

There cannot be absolutely anything in the creature, Aquinas tells us, unless first of all the creature *is*. For whatever perfection may accrue to the creature that perfection presupposes the most basic, that is, the ontological perfection which is *esse*. This is the reason why we can speak reasonably of a potentiality for *esse* only after the creature has been constituted in its being. Then by analogy and hindsight, we can speak of that potentiality as some kind of perfection. Now with regards to the perfections that are added to the creature that is already actuated, they can be added because the creature already was.

The capacity of the creature to endow itself with *esse* is manifestly impossible. Only the being which is Pure Being can be the source of the creaturely *esse*. And because in the creature everything else

ontologically depends on its *esse*, it therefore follows that all that is there in the creature comes from Pure Being. Nothing could have been effected by any other cause; indeed, any other cause is not conceivable, *simpliciter*.

Aquinas' metaphysical reflection on *esse* led him to the *Ipsum Esse*, the subsistent fullness of being whose essence, unlike that of the creature, is *esse* completely devoid of any imperfection whatsoever, in whom all other *entia* participate in a limited manner, and from whom all of them derive the entirety of their existence. This nature of the *Ipsum Esse* is what distinguishes creator from creature, a contrast greater than any possible similarity —*in tanta similitudine major dissimilitudo*— in so great a likeness an even greater unlikeness (Roberts, 1987).

Thus, for Aquinas, the chief problem of metaphysics culminates in the problematique of the absolute being. In metaphysical reflection the mind is directed towards the supereminent reality, driven to surpass the world, to conceive the plurality of things as existentially dependent on and as in some sense manifesting a transcendent one (Copleston, 1979). There is, in other words, a movement of the mind from the many, the multitude of beings, *entia*, which partake of *esse*, all in a manner imperfect and finite, to the one, the *Ipsum Esse*, who, rather than merely possessing it, is truly *esse*, in all its perfection and fullness.

This sustained discussion of *esse* by Thomas Aquinas is evident in all of his works. For this reason he is worthily hailed as the philosopher of being *par excellence*.

There is however an incident in his life that compels us to rethink his confidence in the metaphysical enterprise. For we learn that exactly three months to a day before his death, Aquinas underwent a most profound experience which enormously affected and subsequently changed him. It was a vision of the Divine. After that he abandoned his writing projects and remained silent for the rest of his life. When at one time reminded of an unfinished treatise he immediately replied that he could no longer continue because "everything which I have written seems like straw to me compared to what I have seen and what has been revealed to me" [*Omnia, quae scripsi, videntur mihi paleae respectu eorum, quae vidi et revelata sunt mihi.*]

John Caputo (1982) presents a characteristically metaphysical interpretation of the above incident:

At the end of his life Thomas underwent an experience of Being itself (of *ipsum esse subsistens*) in comparison with which his metaphysical-theological writings appeared to him as straw. And what is this straw except the straw of onto-theo-logic? (p. 253).

His vision of the divine being or the *Ipsium Esse*, which for Aquinas is the provenance and perfection of *esse*, led him to one vigorous conclusion; namely, that *Ipsium Esse*, despite all the rational strivings of philosophers, is really inexpressible in purely metaphysical parlance. The only appropriate response is reverence before the beheld, revelry in the mystery, silent worship of the *Ipsium Esse*. This transformation of Aquinas from the prolific writer about *esse* to the quiet worshipper of its highest mystery must be linked with his consciousness of his own doctrine of participation. Compared to the absolute otherness of the *Ipsium Esse* he, together with the rest of the *entia*, exists only as a negligible speck:

The philosopher [...] cannot fail to learn humility for his dry language can scarcely hint at the drama with which the creature first begins to be and continues to be. On this level, the creature is bounded at the nadir by nothing, and at the apex by eternity. The nadir haunts the creature with its finitude, for its completion lies wholly outside of itself in the perfect infinite. It is not simply limited; it is also radically dependent for its very being. In a word, it is, indeed, a creature (Schmitz, 1982).

To enjoy *esse* is the creature's eternal privilege; to enjoy only so much *esse* is its insurmountable handicap.

Martin Heidegger

Notwithstanding the fact that his theory of being has been the subject of some radically opposed commentaries — ranging from an assessment of his views as a myth and a hoax to a reckoning of his approach as a new path of thinking and concern — Martin Heidegger is reputed as the twentieth century philosopher of being. For him philosophic activity is engendered by and ultimately centered on the problem of being (Vail, 1968). As Johannes Lotz (1964) puts it: "Heidegger takes his stand from the very beginning in relation to Being for he views existence from Being itself and to Being itself... his thought... subordinates the question of existence to, and integrates it with, the question of being" (p. 6).

In *What Is Philosophy?* Heidegger (1956) remarks that thinking becomes philosophizing in the contemplation of being:

What is philosophy? The answer to the question consists in our corresponding to (answering to) that towards which philosophy is on the way and that is – the Being of beings (p. 71).

Indeed the elucidation of the meaning of being had been the single and constant beacon which the course of his thinking followed from the publication of *Being and Time* to the later years of his life in the retreat and solitude in the Black Forest.

One fundamental theme that dominated his thoughts in the beginning was the question of ontological difference. He considered this as preliminary to any discussion of being. For Heidegger, there is an essential distinction between being which signifies the particular phenomena in space and time, *Seienden*, and the being which is the abiding presence that keeps these phenomena temporally present, *Sein*. Metaphysics is the study of the Being of beings, *das Sein des Seiendes*.

The initial approach of Heidegger to the *Seinsfrage* or the being-question was by examining the moods of *Dasein* wherein the experience of being takes place. *Dasein* is man or the particular being who can inquire about and be concerned with the meaning of *Sein*. Rudolf Gerber (1967) notes that for Heidegger this special relationship of *Dasein* to *Sein* defines human existence and demarcates his ultimate horizons. *Dasein* is truly privileged among beings, for he receives his existence questioningly. Being is a matter of *Sorge* or concern for *Dasein* as he inquires into the process by which his own *Sein* comes to be. *Dasein* therefore stands in the openness of the projection of *Sein*.

Man and being are appropriated to each other. They belong to each other. From this belonging to each other, which has not been thought out, more closely, man and Being have first received those determinations of essence... Being itself... belongs to us; for only with us can Being be present as Being, that is, become present (*ID*, pp. 31-32).

Heidegger was strongly critical of how the development of metaphysics, in the history of Western philosophy, had degenerated into *Seinsvergessenheit* or the oblivion of being. He rejected the nihilism of Nietzsche and the categories encrusted into the idea of being by Kant and Hegel; the *actualitas* of Aquinas and its connotations of *facere* akin

to the way beings are rendered manipulable objects of *techne*; the transformation of the dynamic idea of presence among the Pre-Socratics into the static notion of permanent presence in the *eidos* of Plato and the *energeia* of Aristotle; indeed, the onto-theological character of all metaphysics.

For Heidegger, because of its history of forgetfulness of being, metaphysics no longer provides a seedbed on which to cultivate the conditions of possibility for raising the question of being. It is therefore urgent to undertake an overcoming of metaphysics for "the still hidden truth of Being is withheld from metaphysical humanity. The labouring animal is left to the giddy whirl of its products so that it may tear itself to pieces and annihilate itself in empty nothingness" (*OM*, p. 69). Metaphysics is to be superseded because, while it thinks the difference between Being and beings yet it fails to gain access to the *Austrag*, "the origin of this difference, that which makes the difference, that which opens it up as the kind of difference which it is" (Caputo, 1982).

That which bears such a name directs our thinking to the realm which the key words of metaphysics — Being and beings, the ground and what is grounded — are no longer adequate to utter. For what these words name, what the manner of thinking that is guided by them represents, originates 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 (*ID*, p. 71).

In another work, Heidegger (1977) speaks of this in terms of the *end of philosophy* which he also calls the *completion of metaphysics*. The meaning of *end*, however, must be carefully understood in the sense that Heidegger strictly employed it. It must not be understood as if philosophy has become a thing of the past, consigned as it were into the dustbin of history. Neither is it to be misconceived as though philosophy is a pursuit which has become obsolescent, dismissed as it were for having outlived its meaningfulness for human nature. Nor least of all is it to be mistaken as though for Heidegger philosophy in its essential sense has fulfilled its *telos*, relieved as it were for having finally accomplished its task. Against this last erroneous conception Heidegger was emphatic in saying that "completion does not mean perfection as a consequence of which philosophy would have attained the highest perfection at its end" (*BW*, pp. 374-5).

Philosophy for Heidegger, it must be recalled, is metaphysics because it deals with what and all there is precisely insofar as it is.

This is an idea that is not really an originally Heideggerian apprehension, but one which he inherited from the early Greek thinkers, upon whom he heaps the greatest of encomium.

It should also be remembered that Heidegger intones high praises specifically for the metaphysics of the early Greeks. What he disclaimed was the subsequent development of metaphysics from Plato down to its elaboration in the whole history of Western thought culminating with Nietzsche. So when Heidegger laments over the end of philosophy it is not the early Greek metaphysics over which he grieves. For in fact he considered early Greek metaphysics as the only one worthy of the name philosophy.

The *end* of philosophy or metaphysics means instead that it is *at an end* because, after the early Greek thinkers, it is no longer attempted. It is at an end because it is in "that place in which the whole of philosophy's history is gathered in its most extreme possibility" (*TB*, p. 57). The *end* of philosophy means, in other words, that we can no longer be metaphysical because metaphysics is no longer possible.

All is not lost however; the horizon is not entirely desolate. The darkness of the evening is not an impenetrable curtain that completely shuts the light out. There is hope for the advent of dawn, there is promise of a coming sunrise. For the *end* of philosophy also means for Heidegger an opportunity offered, a *Lichtung*, a clearing, an opening presented for the possibility of a new and perhaps more original way of thinking.

Metaphysics then has to give way to another possible locus for the revelation of *Sein*: "a novel allegiance... the thinking which obeys the voice of being" (Schurmann, 1990). Thus in *The End of Philosophy* and the *Task of Thinking*, Martin Heidegger (1977) closes with a wistful peroration:

Perhaps there is a thinking which is more sober-minded than the incessant frenzy of rationalisation and the intoxicating quality of cybernetics... Perhaps there is a thinking outside the distinction of rational and irrational, more sober-minded still than scientific technology, more sober-minded and hence removed, without effect, yet having its own necessity (p. 391).

It is the thinking whose task is the surrender of previous thinking to the determination of the matter of thinking.

RETRIEVAL OF METAPHYSICS

The metaphysician who comes after Thomas Aquinas and Martin Heidegger finds himself faced with an awesome challenge: the task of recuperating the wealth of their metaphysics against the backdrop of its respective entanglements. Such retrieval presupposes a kind of critique that highlights a new angle within their system in order for us to be able to view their metaphysics with a fresh glance and likewise appreciate them in a different light.

Thomas Aquinas

In the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas we encounter his humble acknowledgment of an essential truth which Tony Kelly (1996) expresses succinctly but exceedingly well in these words:

The complexity and creativity of human language and thinking reaches its culmination in the realization that no more can be said, other than that God is in a way that cannot be known (p.200).

If indeed, as it is sometimes suggested, we may characterize the metaphysician as a prophet of being and his metaphysics the instrument of proclamation, then of Aquinas we could say that he ultimately discovered that the capacity to proclaim reaches a limit when it is no longer adequate to the depth of what is revealed. In this particular instance Aquinas realized that the power of human language is unable after all to muster enough eloquence to express the divine. Such however is not a denial of any capacity on the part of man to know God as much as a truthful admission of the infinite limitation of such aptitude. For man can know God, that is his greatest possibility; but he can know only that he does not know God, for he knows that God is in a way that surpasses every little thing he knows of Him.

Aquinas was therefore right in honoring God in silence “not because we say or explore nothing about him, but because we understand ourselves to fail in comprehending him” (Kelly, 1996). This response in silence however is to be correctly understood in the context of a metaphysics of being. John Martis (1996) beautifully elaborates on this:

Being, while its meaning discloses the meaning of God, is correspondingly itself revealed as something less than God. Being

is, in other words, an icon rather than an idol of God, that which does not substitute itself for what it points to, though it does make its referent present to the understanding in some sense (p.60).

So within the very Thomistic metaphysics of *esse* there is a ladder, as it were, through which we can climb out of the wall of silence in order to explore another response. This is intimated by Jean-Luc Marion (1991) who argues that even when he thinks God as *esse*, Aquinas nevertheless does not chain God either to Being or to metaphysics:

He does not chain God to Being because the divine *esse* immeasurably surpasses (and hardly maintains an *analogia* with) the *esse commune* of creatures, which are characterized by the real distinction between *esse* and their essence, whereas God, and He alone, absolutely merges essence with *esse*: God is expressed as *esse*, but this *esse* is expressed only of God, not of the beings of metaphysics. Being does not erect an idol before God, but saves His distance (p. xxiii).

As a matter of fact, Schmitz (1994) avers that “the universality of *being* is such that it enfolds the mind itself into its absolutely ample lap. Its horizon is without limit, even though the *beings* that first fall within the compass of the mind are themselves, one and all, limited beings. *Being* can be appreciated even prior to metaphysics as indefinite yet positive, comprehensive yet concrete” (p. 9).

The essential point to consider in this attempt towards locating a different response within the metaphysics of Aquinas is that the total alterity of God, flowing from the preeminence of His reality, establishes God himself as the unique cause of all creatures and originary source of their *esse* — *Deus ut causa universalis totius esse*.

Such is the nature of creative communication. It is total, encompassing, and absolute so that there is nothing in the recipient — the creature — that did not come from the giver — the Creator. And precisely because of this entitative dependence, creatures must dwell continually in *esse* for them to perdure in existence. So a necessary correlate to the notion of causality in our apprehension of God is that of participation as explicated in a distinctively Thomistic way:

Beings in their existence, knowing, and loving participate in the divine Be-ing, and so receive all that they are as a gift, in nature and in grace. Each finite being in its totality exists-in-relation-

to-Being from which it comes, and in which it homes for its ultimate fulfillment (Kelly, 1996).

The above reflection gives us a glimpse of the new response indicated for us. *Esse* is a perfection that is endowed and, as a *perfection*, it is a *good* that is bestowed. Aquinas considered goodness as a transcendental attribute of being so that for him being and goodness are interchangeable: to be is to be good and to be good is to be. We find this equation articulated in the *Summa Theologica* as follows:

Goodness and being are really the same and differ only in idea; which is clear from the following argument. The essence of goodness consists in this, that it is in some way desirable. Hence the Philosopher says: *Goodness is what all desire*. Now it is clear that a thing is desirable only insofar as it is perfect: for all desire their own perfection. But everything is perfect so far as it is actual. Therefore it is clear that a thing is perfect so far as it exists; *for it is existence that makes all things actual*,... [*esse enim est actualitas omnis rei*] Hence it is clear that goodness and being are the same really (I, q. 5, a. 1, Resp.).

It follows therefore that the very source of *esse*, the *Ipsum Esse*, being the fullness of ontological perfection is also goodness itself. This goodness was initially manifested in the first act of creation and is continually disclosed by God in his ongoing gift of His being to the created realm. It is most gracious on the part of God to continue to allow the creature to participate in His being. For the finite creature has no claim on infinity so that its preservation in being is not necessary. Enmeshed in its contingency or existential fragility, the creature is utterly dependent for its *esse* on the continued support of God. That God grants this dependence is most praiseworthy.

Such act of God cannot but be an act of love. For to will the *esse* of the creature is to will its good, which is what love is all about — the desire for what is good. As such created power is to be identified with radical love (Schmitz 1982). And so we arrive at an extremely gratifying realization: the *Ipsum Esse subsistens* is simultaneously the *Ipsum Amare subsistens*. Or as Kelly (1996) puts it better: “The notion of God as Be-ing discloses the radicality of the divine Being-in-love” (p. 202).

The vision contemplated by Aquinas became an added urge towards the direction of a new response. It makes us realize that the whole reality springs forth from the unmitigated largesse of God and

that the universe in all its grandeur and beauty has come forth from the loving gratuitousness of that same God. The whole of creation ecstatically vibrates with that love of God. And so with utmost simplicity Aquinas demonstrated that we can only bow before this *Ipsum Esse / Ipsum Amare* in worshipful silence.

These insights consequently move us from a metaphysical discourse on being to an ethical mode of being in the world where we move about, from contemplation to an appreciation of the giftedness of our existence, from reverence to a witnessing that proclaims the divine generosity and shows our puny attempt at reciprocity. The metaphysician besides being a shepherd of the meaning of *esse* must become at the same time a crier of how the preciousness, beauty, and the fragility of his *esse* is to be prized and celebrated in the way he lives his life.

Martin Heidegger

The profundity that permeates his reflections clearly suggests that Martin Heidegger addresses the *Seinsfrage* from the vantage point of a unique and special experience of being. It is what Charles Malik (1977) calls "the articulation of an already existentially articulated *Dasein*" (p. 3). Thus his thinking exhibits an extraordinary sensitivity to an encompassing presence, a presence that defies expression through concepts and makes a mockery of the rational and technical language of philosophy and the sciences. That Heidegger therefore should, and did indeed wage, a sustained critique of the history of metaphysics is a consequence of that experience. He denounced that metaphysics has been instead the hiding place of Being. A systematic attempt to overcome that metaphysics should then dominate the way we deal with the very question regarding the essence of metaphysics.

Such remarks above are not to be construed as an intent to disparage metaphysics as a completely effete and thereby worthless enterprise in philosophy. Caputo (1986) affirms that metaphysics has long been the medium through which Heidegger has learned what he has to say. There is a wealth, a grain of the truth of Being, that lies hidden in and by the metaphysical tradition, and this Heidegger conceded; so that "his thought has, to a large extent, consisted in a dialogue with the history of metaphysics in the hope of uncovering what metaphysics has kept concealed" (pp. 259-260). And as Heidegger

himself admits, "...a regard for metaphysics still prevails even in the intention to overcome metaphysics" (*ID*, p. 24).

One remarkable contribution of Heidegger to metaphysics is his undisguised raving over the unparalleled place and role of *Dasein*; it is a positing of the possibility of man to attain authentic human existence and of his openness to *Gelassenheit*. *Dasein* is, as it were, a *Lichtung*, an opening, in which Being as *Anwesenheit*, as presence, is granted. This is an exclusive privilege of *Dasein*.

Man: standing within the approach of presence, but in such a way that he receives as a gift the presencing that It gives by perceiving what appears in letting-presence. If man were not the constant receiver of the gift given by the "It gives presence," if that which is extended in the gift did not reach man, then not only would Being remain concealed in the absence of this gift, not only closed off, but man would remain excluded from the scope of: It gives Being. Man would not be man (*TB*, p. 12).

This does not mean however that *Dasein* is endowed with power over Being, in the fashion of a Moses who could command the sea to part so that the exodus of the Israelites could come to pass. Man cannot of his own will bring about *Gelassenheit*. "...Man does not have control over unconcealment itself, in which at any given time the real shows itself or withdraws" (*BW*, p. 299). As Michel Haar (1993) remarks, the event of appropriation is wholly dependent on the unilateral initiative of Being. The revelation of Being is not for *Dasein* to bring about. If it should transpire at all, only Being can make it happen.

There is no determining "why" the Event comes to pass as it does, why it has thrown us into the darkness of the technological world, why, or how it will "turn" away from the "Gestell" towards a new world. If to live "without why" for Meister Eckhart means to live with a disinterested and loving trust in God's fatherly call, in Heidegger it means to acknowledge the inscrutability of the play of Being (Caputo, 1986).

This is why in the *Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking*, Heidegger (1969) enjoins us: *Wir sollen nichts tun sondern warten* — "We are to do nothing but wait" (p. 62).

There is undeniably some palpable indeterminacy to be gleaned regarding the event of appropriation or *Ereignis*. Heidegger often spoke of an *Abenland*, an evening land which he lamented had been the sad

fate of the West, and anxiously he longed for the coming of a new day, the possibility of a new beginning, when "the *Ereignis* will send itself once again and transform the world into a place of dwelling" (Caputo, 1973).

Although the *Ereignis* is beyond the control of man, *Dasein* has to prepare for the *Ereignis*; it has to open itself to this event. Such requires a particular disposition on the part of *Dasein* that it may be able to receive with gratitude the revelation of Being. Heidegger calls that disposition *Seinsdenken* or thinking. And he maintains that this thinking is to take over the *Dasein* as the locus of response to Being (Schurmann, 1990). This shift in the locus of possible appropriation was indicated for Heidegger by the identity that he found between Being and thinking. In the *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger (1977) declared:

Thinking is of Being inasmuch as thinking, coming to pass from being, belongs to being. At the same time thinking is of Being insofar as thinking, belonging to Being, listens to being. As the belonging to Being that listens, thinking is what it is according to its essential origin. Thinking is — this says — Being has fatefully embraced its essence (p. 196).

At the end of philosophy which he proclaims, Heidegger exhorts us to lay aside metaphysics and to undertake thinking. Philosophical discourse must give way to the language of thinking, for it is only through thinking that we can herald the possibility of a new dispensation of Being. This accordingly is really what Being bids us to do:

That which calls us to think in this way presumably can do so only insofar as the calling itself, on its own needs thought. What calls us to think, and thus commands, that is, brings our essential being into the keeping of thought, needs thinking because what calls us wants itself to be thought according to its essence. What calls on us to think demands for itself that it be tended, cared for, husbanded, in its own essential being by thought. What calls us on to think gives us food for thought.

What gives us food for thought we call thought-provoking. But what is thought-provoking not just occasionally, and not just in some given limited respect, but rather gives food for thought inherently and from the start and always — is that which is thought-provoking *per se*. This is what we call most thought-provoking. And what it gives us to think about, the gift it gives

to us, is nothing less than itself — itself which calls on us to enter thought (*BW*, p. 367).

So thinking for Heidegger is the greatest endowment received by *Dasein*. And the only fitting way to give thanks for this gift of being able to think what is most thought-provoking is by giving thought to it. The supreme thanks then is thinking and the grossest thanklessness is thoughtlessness. "Real thanks never consists in that we ourselves come bearing gifts, and merely repay gift with gift. Pure thanks is rather that we simply think" (*WICT*, p. 143).

Martin Heidegger classified thinking into two. The first is calculative thinking which is directed at beings. It employs representations and operates by the laws of logic. The domination by technology of human thinking has succeeded in establishing this as the only legitimate kind of thinking. Heidegger argues however that there is a dimension of thinking which goes beyond the calculus of inferences. It is possible, indeed it is imperative, for man to ask questions about the meaning of existence. Such questions require more than just the scientific practice of observing objects in a detached way. This other kind of thinking is meditative thinking. It necessitates a greater attunement to how the world speaks to us in all the various ways in which one exists. For meditative thinking deals with Being itself. It shuns the use of conceptual devices but speaks from out of a direct experience of being.

Each and every one can respond to the call of thought. In his *Memorial Address*, Heidegger (1969) assures all of their capacity for this thinking and at the same time reminds them of what this thinking requires:

Yet anyone can follow the path of meditative thinking in his own manner and within his own limits. Why? Because man is a thinking, that is, a meditating being. Thus meditative thinking need by no means be "high-flown." It is enough if we dwell on what lies close and meditate on what is closest; upon that which concerns us, each one of us, here and now; here, on this patch of home ground; now, in the present hour of history (p. 47).

The call however is just an invitation. Hearing the call simply does not immediately empower anyone with the capacity for meditative thinking: "Meditative thinking does not just happen by itself. At times it requires a greater effort. It demands more practice. It is in need of

even more delicate care than any genuine craft. But it must also be able to bide its own time, to await as it does the farmer, whether the seed will come up and ripen" (*DT*, p. 47).

Moreover the openness of man to the projection of Being may remain a possibility only. He can exist like other beings, not knowing and not caring about his connection with Being. He can wallow in the noisy chatter of banal everyday existence, continue to ride on the machinery of rationalization, and fail to listen to the essence of things. Ernst Breisach (1962) warned that when this happens man recedes into inauthentic human existence. He can however mount a reversal and attain authentic human existence when he cares about Being and through thinking lets it speak itself in him. Thereby he gains "the deepest personal experience that he can ever have" (p. 83).

Our engagement in the thinking of Heidegger has allowed us to understand his overcoming of metaphysics and to retrieve from his critique the call for a distinctive thinking, a call that we can adequately respond to because our existence and thought are derived from an intimate participation in Being (Gerber 1967).

...We ask what the relation is between man's nature and the Being of beings. But - as soon as I thoughtfully say "man's nature", I have already said relatedness to Being. Likewise, as soon as I say thoughtfully: Being of beings, the relatedness to man's nature has been named. Each of the two members of the relation between man's nature and Being already implies the relation itself... *No* way of thought, not even the way of metaphysical thought, begins with man's essential nature and goes on from there to Being, nor in reverse from Being and then back to man. Rather, every way of thinking takes its way already within the total relation of Being and man's nature, or else it is not thinking at all (*WICT*, 79-80).

This relation between thinking and being is not an identity of equivalence. Thinking and being are founded together in the *essent*. The way to understand this relation is through the concept of belonging — Being and thinking are principally belonging. As Hugh Silverman (1977) explains it: "if we realize that Being and thinking are principally *belonging*, then we can examine precisely the fashion in which they *belong* to one another together. Being and thinking do belong. They belong as the essence of man" (p. 242).

Heidegger (1969) borrowed the elegant words of the poet Johann Peter Hebel to capture the significance of the call for man to thinking:

"We are plants which — whether we like to admit it to ourselves or not — must with our roots rise out of the earth in order to bloom in the ether and to bear fruit" (*DT*, p. 47). And Caputo (1986) offers his own eloquent summation of that call:

Heidegger's call, it seems to me, is ultimately a call to retrieve our humanity by understanding the attunement of man with what he calls the "world." The world is not a spatio-temporal-causal system, not the "nature" of the "natural sciences." The world is on the contrary the matrix of meaning within which a man lives his life. The world is daylight and night time, oceans and mountains, water and soil. It is the theater of all giving birth and dying, growing ill and growing well, sleeping and waking, succeeding and failing, maturing and aging. From the world issue meanings in which a man experiences his mortality and his humanity, his grandeur and his misery, his powers and impotencies. I believe that the central thrust of his later writings consists in calling us back to this forgotten and withdrawn world, calling us back out of the technological world in which we are systematically divested of our worth. The technical world threatens to consume us. And Heidegger's writings are a summons to find a new possibility in the midst of an all too present and suffocating actuality (p. 263).

Thinking then is really a celebration of a stylistic of existence that only man as *Dasein* is capable of, so that through him the light of Being may shine forth. To become human means to learn how to think. It is the fundamental human activity.

CONCLUSION

What we have attempted in the foregoing is a recovery of the essential tendencies in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas and Martin Heidegger. One of the two most glaring is their overcoming of metaphysics.

Thomas Aquinas ultimately realized that there is a way higher than the metaphysical. Metaphysics is to be thrown away. *Ratio* after all is a defective instrument which must be set aside for a higher way. Metaphysics is to be overcome. Discourse on being is to be superseded by a celebration of *esse*, a rejoicing over the fact that we are. Similarly this is what Caputo (1982) recuperates from the writing of Thomas Aquinas:

Behind the discursive argument, the conceptual distinctions, the whole impressive display of *ratio* which is found in St. Thomas, there lies hidden an experience of Being... We must learn to hear St. Thomas' words anew, divested of their onto-theo-logical significance and re-invested with their experiential value. We must hear in *esse*, not the Roman *actualitas* described by Heidegger, but the intensely Christian experience of Being, a religious experience of God's presence in the world and in the soul. We must hear in *esse* upsurge, coming-to-presence, *Anwesen*, not the *sistere extra causas* of Scholastic metaphysics. For if God is in all things inasmuch as all things have *esse*, then God, from whom their *esse* is shared, is present to them. We must learn to think of God not as the cause of the world but as that fullness of presence which is intimately present to the Being of things... The doctrine of participation must cease to be a causal theory which articulates the dynamics of the creative action and become a doctrine of presencing, as Max Muller has argued. This means that the task of thought must be, not to account for things by means of a causal reckoning, but to savor the Being of things, to meditate their presence, to learn to see in the reflected light of Being itself, a light which is also a primordial darkness..(283-84)

There is more to being than just the fact of actuality. The *esse* by which a creature is, according to Aquinas, is not just a mere principle but in fact an incarnation of the *Ipsum Esse / Ipsum Amare* within its reality. And if this truth is to be appreciated in its richest meaning then a pure discourse on *esse* is to be transcended. It will simply not suffice. It may not even be appropriate, if the learned silence of Aquinas is to be our gauge.

The same overcoming of metaphysics is pronounced no less in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. The task of man is to respond to what addresses itself to him and to open himself into the unconcealed through thinking. Glenn Gray (1968) reflects on this task:

Thinking is not so much an act as a way of living, or dwelling - a way of life. It is a remembering who we are as human beings and where we belong. It is a gathering and focusing of our whole selves on what lies before us and a taking to heart and mind these particular things before us in order to discover in them their essential nature and truth (p. xi).

Heidegger himself underscored that "wherever man opens his eye and ears, unlocks his heart, and gives himself over to meditating

and striving, shaping and working, entreating and thanking, he finds himself everywhere already brought into the unconcealed" (*BW*, p. 300).

Metaphysics for Heidegger has to open to a new engagement — to a thinking which is in fact a way of being for *Dasein*. The way out of the strained discourse on being that metaphysics has been transformed into is to embark boldly on a new path of thinking which is at once a new way of being. This celebration of a new path of thinking and a new way of being is necessary because "releasement toward things and openness to the mystery never happened of themselves. They do not befall us accidentally. Both flourish only through persistent, courageous thinking..." (*DT*, p. 56).

The other essential tendency that we have revealed is the unique role of the human being or what von Balthasar beautifully calls "the human capacity to be being fully" (Bieler, 1993). At the end of metaphysics stands man: the silent worshipper of Thomas Aquinas and the *Dasein* attuned to meditative thinking of Martin Heidegger. At the close of the discourse on being waits man still: for the *Ereignis*, according to Heidegger; for the fuller revelation of *Ipsium Esse / Ipsum Amare*, according to Aquinas. There is then so much to celebrate about being human. This special collocation of the human being at the end of metaphysics generates a tremendous substance of gratitude.

There is a demand however that is imposed on man for him to be able to celebrate his being human. The event of appropriation does not come upon man as a matter of course, and the revelation of the divine has to be merited through grace. The celebration of being human is a task to be accomplished. It is not an invitation to prideful complacency.

Lambert van de Water (1973) captures this point through a wonderful rendering of the thought of later Heidegger:

Thought is not only a waiting for Being...Man is not the master of Being, but its shepherd. But he is a guardian only if he renders Being true by projecting it. Thereby he incurs the rich and constant danger of making Being into everything (beings) or into nothing (non-being). But without this risk and this danger man no longer stands in the most essential tension of the happening of Being that is simultaneously everything and nothing. Being is the happening of the most fundamental *coincidentia oppositorum*. Accordingly thought is the courage to stand *simultaneously* in theory and *praxis*, in presence and absence, in history and fatality, in relativity and absoluteness, in individuality

and universality, in affirmation and negation. This standing is a sustaining, a holding on and holding out in the conviction that it will never altogether be (pp. 401-2).

The celebration of being human is a historical project in the sense of being continuous. It is an enduring challenge for *Dasein*. There can be no *final* celebration of being human. The event of appropriation has, in a manner of saying, no definite schedule of its coming. Man has to continually wait — but not in the fixed manner of the Jews waiting as they still do with their imagined vision of what is to come, but rather a waiting in the fashion of the *anawim*, who displayed an openness to the mystery and a sincerity that earned for them the privilege to be the first recipients of the epiphany by the Messiah to humankind. This is what it means by celebrating our being human. It is understandable then, under this light, why Heidegger relished so much the simple life of the country peasant.

The celebration of being human is also a challenge towards authenticity. Man is man to the degree that he is able to celebrate being human. This means for Aquinas discerning much more deeply the profound significance of his participation in the life divine. The silence of Aquinas is not just the silence of surrender to the futility and poverty of human discourse before a vision of the divine reality, but it is also a silence that purifies man and divests him of any other mundane concern so that the *Ipsum Esse / Ipsum Amare*, in all its glory and charity, may seize and captivate him and then in his life he may become the witness to its shining forth.

The devout Christian that he was, Thomas Aquinas would undoubtedly hear an echo of his own voice in von Balthasar and claim his words as what he himself meant by a celebration of being human, and its distinctive significance for the Christian:

A Christian has to conduct philosophical enquiry on account of his faith. Believing in the absolute love of God for the world, he is obliged to understand Being in its ontological difference as pointing to love, and to live in accordance with this indication... the mystery of the fact that anything exists at all becomes for him yet more profound and in the most comprehensive sense more worthy of enquiry than it does for any kind of philosopher... The Christian remains the guardian of that metaphysical wonderment which is the point of origin for philosophy and the continuation of which is the basis of its further existence...

The Christians of today, living in a night which is deeper than that of the latter Middle Ages, are given the task of performing the act of affirming Being, unperturbed by the darkness and the distortion, in a way that is vicarious and representative for all humanity: an act which is at first theological, but which contains within itself the whole dimension of the metaphysical act of the affirmation of Being. Those who are directed in this way to pray continually, to find God in all things and to glorify Him are able to do so on particular grounds (that is particular graces) which allow them to perform their 'creaturely duty'... But insofar as they are to shine 'like the stars in the sky,' they are also entrusted with the task of bringing light to those areas of Being which are in darkness so that its primal light may shine anew not only upon them but also upon the whole world; for it is only in this light that man can walk in accordance with what he is truly called to be (pp. 646-9).

Even Heidegger, if he should for once recall his Catholic beginnings, would have no quarrel with this clarion call to celebrate being human in the way a Christian is entreated by von Balthasar to do.

At the conclusion of this retrieval we may paraphrase the question first raised by Leibniz: *Why is there being rather than nothing?*, and inquire instead: What does it mean for man *to be being*, that is, attain to meaningfulness, rather than *to be nothing*, that is, slide to insignificance? We can then attempt an answer, from a perspective beyond the silence of Aquinas and the overcoming by Heidegger — to be being for man is to celebrate his being human, to *think* as only a human being *could* and to *live* as truly a human being should. The *could* of thinking and the *should* of living is what we find in the thought of Thomas Aquinas and Martin Heidegger, after the experience of the vision and before the beginning at the end of philosophy, respectively.

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