

Heidegger — A Thomist?*

I have always been intrigued by Heidegger's statement to his friend Scherer that he could get along with a liberalized Thomism.¹ That Heidegger should single out Thomism is surprising unless the German philosopher himself saw so many similarities between his own system and that of St. Thomas. To trace the similarities — and incidentally the differences — in the philosophical outlook of the pre-eminent philosopher of BEING of the twentieth Century and the greatest philosopher of Being of the Middle Ages is then the purpose of this research.

I have not called Heidegger an existentialist, for this is an epithet that he himself rejects. Not that Heidegger underestimates existence, which for him is the fundamental trait of Man and belongs to Man only: "In BEING and TIMES the term 'existence' is used exclusively for the being of "Man". Still for him, it is not Man and his existence that is all-important. It is BEING. And that is why he criticizes both Kierkegaard and Jaspers for their failure to 'pass from Existence to Being' Nor does Heidegger want to link his name with that of Sartre, who inspired by him, sought to create an Ontology (the subtitle indeed

* The quotations from Heidegger are from his works as edited by William Barrett and Henry D. Aiken in *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* An Anthology. Vol. III, Random House 1962.

1. Collins, James, *The Existentialists*, Gateway Paperback ed. Chicago 1964 p. 205.

of Sartre's BEING and NOTHINGNESS is: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology), for with the French philosopher, Man still comes out the measure of all things. This is clear from Sartre's very description of Existentialism as a Humanism. This is clear from Heidegger's own comparison of his stance with Sartre's: "Can such thought, if terminology is important at all, still be denominated as humanism? Certainly not, in so far as humanism thinks metaphysically. Certainly not, when it is existentialism and bears out the idea expressed by Sartre: "Precisement nous sommes sur un plan ou il y a *seulement des hommes*". Instead of this, if we think as in SEIN UND ZEIT, we should say: "precisement nous sommes sur un plan ou il y a *principalement L'être*".²

FUNDAMENTAL ONTOLOGY:

Because of his preoccupation with BEING, Heidegger's philosophy is best described as a Fundamental Ontology. Why fundamental? Heidegger, starting with Descartes' comparison of the whole of Philosophy to a tree, of which the roots are Metaphysics, the trunk Physics and the branches that issue from the trunk all the other sciences, asks: "In what soil do the roots of the tree of Philosophy have their hold?"³ And his answer is Fundamental Ontology. If Fundamental Ontology is the ground of Metaphysics, the latter is different from the former. Indeed for Heidegger, while Metaphysics represents beings as beings, Fundamental Ontology recalls the truth of Being. "As long as the truth of Being is not thought, all (traditional) ontology remains without its base. Hence the thought which with SEIN UND ZEIT tried to think forward into the truth of Being, called itself FUNDAMENTAL ONTOLOGY".⁴

Because Metaphysics represents through Concepts, its truth lies in the agreement of the mind with reality (*veritas*), whereas truth for Fundamental Ontology lies in the unconcealedness of Being (*aletheia*). Because concepts involve classes of things, man for Metaphysics is the rational animal, whereas since it is of the nature of Being to reveal itself, man for Fundamental Ontology is 'openness to Being'. Indeed Heidegger's complaint

2. Heidegger, Martin, *Letter on Humanism* p. 283.

3. Heidegger, Martin, *The Way back into the Ground of Metaphysics*, p. 207.

4. Heidegger, Martin, *Letter on Humanism*, p. 297.

against Metaphysics is that it has forgotten its ground, being characterized by 'oblivion of Being'. But has not Metaphysics always *spoken* of Being? Heidegger's answer is: "Even when it speaks of Being, it (only) means beings as a whole", Stated otherwise, Metaphysics has erroneously identified BEING with the totality of beings. And thus Heidegger's grievance: "From its beginning to its completion, the propositions of Metaphysics have been strangely involved in a persistent confusion of beings (*seiendes*) and Being (*Sein*)".⁵

Perhaps Heidegger's *j'accuse* against Metaphysics will be better understood if we see his criticism of Hegel. Metaphysics was for Hegel the general theory of that-which-is taken in its totality. Hegel's claim to have brought 'Being to the concept' i.e. succeeded in making Being the object of conceptual knowledge is, according to Heidegger, justified in respect to that-which-is (*seiende*) but not in respect to BEING itself (*Sein*). Why so? Remembering that the object of conceptual knowledge is Essence, Heidegger is saying that we could very well look for the essences of particular beings (*die Seiendheit des Seiendes*), but what would be the essence of BEING, especially if Being is understood as it was by Hegel, as a genus? If we consider Being as a genus, it will turn out to be the most universal generic concept and following the logical rule that the greater the extension of a concept, the lesser its comprehension, the result will be that BEING will become the most empty of concepts. And Nietzsche will be justified in his description of BEING as 'the last cloudy streak of evaporating reality' and in his diatribe against the "Error of BEING". If Nietzsche is right that Being is only a vapor and a fallacy, then it is useless to indulge in Metaphysics, for as Heidegger observes: "Being a vapor, a fallacy? If this were so, the only possible consequence would be to abandon the (basic metaphysical) question: Why are there essences as such and as a whole rather than nothing? For what good is the question if what it inquires into is only a vapor and a fallacy?"⁶

Hegel considered his system of Dialectical Idealism as the culminating point of Western Philosophy and Heidegger accepted this Hegelian judgment as true. And thus not only Hegel's Metaphysics but *all* metaphysical systems because of their over-

5. Heidegger, Martin, *The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics*, p. 210

6. Heidegger, Martin, *The Fundamental Question of Metaphysics*, p. 241.

emphasis on concept and essence were accused of forgetting BEING. And since Heidegger, following Hüsserl, considers Science as dealing with essences, such metaphysical systems will at best be a 'science' of being but not a 'Philosophy' of Being.

But is Heidegger right in making Hegel the fulfillment of all Western Philosophy? Or is not Hegel, as Pryzwara points out, the fulfillment only of Descartes and therefore of modern Philosophy that in the words of Heidegger himself "has faced the distress of justifying its existence against 'science' and believes it can accomplish this most securely by elevating itself to the rank of science".⁷ Indeed Descartes sought to model Philosophy after Mathematical Science, Locke and the Empiricists and Kant himself on Newtonian Physics. And Hegel himself was no exception for he identified Logic and Metaphysics and for Heidegger, Logic is the ground of scientific thinking.⁸

ESSE and FIRST PHILOSOPHY

But what if there were a Metaphysics that interprets BEING not primarily as essence? A Metaphysics that does not seek to elevate itself to the rank of a science, whether mathematical or empirical, and does not need to, because it is already superior to both Physics and Mathematics? A Metaphysics that does not identify Logic with itself? Can such a Metaphysics be accused by Heidegger of not being a Philosophy of Being? Such a Metaphysics is that of St. Thomas, which makes *Esse* not *Essentia* the root of Being; which distinguishes Metaphysics as a discipline of first intentions from Logic as a discipline of second intentions; and which considers Physics as 'a wisdom but not the first', while Metaphysics is the first *philosophy*. Heidegger is not against Science as such. What he is against is the claim that 'scientific thinking is the only rigorous thought and that it alone can and must be made into the standard of philosophical thought' when the reverse is true that "all scientific thought is merely a derived form of philosophic thinking".⁹ What he is against is the scientific approach to Being. For Science

7. Heidegger, Martin, *Letter on Humanism*, p. 271.

8. Heidegger, Martin, *The Fundamental Question of Metaphysics* p. 233.

9. *ibid.*, p. 235.

seeks to analyze the object it investigates. Its attitude towards Reality is one of aggressiveness. This stance of Science has not been better expressed than by Kant who compared the scientist vis-a-vis Nature not to a pupil before a teacher, but to a prosecuting attorney face to face with a witness in court. Like the prosecutor, 'Reason makes Nature to answer questions of Reason's own determining'. Heidegger believes that the philosopher should adopt precisely the opposite attitude. He should approach Being with an openness which would permit Being to reveal itself. In this revelation the phenomenological method is very useful, for the phenomenon for Heidegger is not so much the appearance of being as Being revealing itself. All the foregoing ideas are very close to that of St. Thomas who holds like Heidegger that Science is based on Philosophy and not vice versa. Also that a thinker should surrender himself to being or reality, for it is the natural thing that determines the human mind and not the human mind that determines the natural thing. And that is why for St. Thomas it is wonder and not doubt (as it is the case with Descartes) that is the beginning of Wisdom. For *wonder* implies that Being is superior to Man's reason; while *doubt* emphasizes that the human mind is superior to Being. In Heideggerian terms: "Man is not the master of beings. Man is the shepherd of Being".

AETIOLOGY

Heidegger is like many other contemporary philosophers thus attempting to escape the heritage of Descartes. This is also shown in his view of *consciousness*. In contrast to Hüsserl who makes the mind confer upon the object the being it has by constituting it in consciousness (a sign again of the scientific rather than the philosophical approach), Heidegger sees consciousness simply as the means for Being to reveal itself. In other words, Heidegger emphasizes Being and not transcendental subjectivity. Indeed he is against any form of subjectivity. As Heinemann puts it: 'In the beginning was Being and not the Subject'.¹⁰ That Heidegger has gone beyond Hüsserl as Hüsserl had gone beyond Descartes can be seen if we remember that Descartes imagined the human mind and the material world as two hermetically sealed spheres

10. Heinemann, F. H., *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament*, p. 93.

impervious to each other. "With Husserl the walls of the mental sphere have become transparent and porous, penetrated everywhere by the arrows of INTENTIONALITY. Consciousness now points beyond itself to the objects of consciousness. With Heidegger the walls of the sphere have disappeared altogether. We are not creatures enclosed in consciousness as in a sphere and gazing out of this sphere through windows on a world outside; on the contrary, man is already out-of-doors in the open air of the world. Husserl's doctrine of the essential self-transcendence of consciousness leads to Heidegger's interpretation of human existence in terms of the basic etymology of the word: to ek-sist means to stand out beyond oneself",¹¹ to be essentially related to the world. The solution of the Cartesian problem by Husserl in terms of intentionality and by Heidegger in terms of Man's relation to Being are but echoes of St. Thomas. Everybody admits that Husserl's idea of consciousness as a consciousness of something was derived from Brentano, a Scholastic psychologist. And Heidegger's idea is implied by the Thomistic emphasis on the ESSE or the TO BE. As Gilson puts it: "To be is *not to be a solitude*".

Each and every man can share in the common good of his species and nothing that is human remains foreign to him. A *member of the universal brotherhood of being*, he can experience in himself that 'tending to' and he can see that everything else is acting to some purpose, a purpose which is indeed everywhere the same, namely to be. His end, then, is in the beginning and what is true of him is true of everything else".¹² Stated more simply, for St. Thomas, to be is to be act and therefore to be able to act and thus become related to other beings. If anything, St. Thomas' solution is more comprehensive than Heidegger's: Every being and not Man alone is linked with everything else through its activity and its activity has its source in its being or better still in its 'to be' (esse).

EPISTEMOLOGY

But not only Aetiology but also Epistemology is, for both Heidegger and St. Thomas, based on Ontology. For Heidegger

11. Barrett William & Aiken Henry D., *Phil. in the 20th. Cent.*, p. 135.

12. Gilson, Etienne, *Being & Some Philosophers*, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies. Toronto, Canada 1952 p. 186-187.

it is BEING that serves as the link between the thinker and the thought. To be (for Man) is to share in BEING and man's way of sharing in Being is to serve as the vehicle of Being's self-revelation. This man does by rising above himself, realizing himself by going outside of himself, by Ek-sisting. Man's existence is then at one and the same time, the act whereby Man is authentically. Thus in one and the same act what has been called subject and what has been called object are united in being.¹³ How close the foregoing is to Thomism can be seen with a little analysis. By thought, Man, who is not a pure spirit, but a composite of body and rational soul, rises above himself by rising to the *immaterial* world of knowledge. By thought, Man completes or fulfills or perfects himself by acquiring the form of the object known. By thought, Man transcends himself by becoming the object known. In one and the same act of knowing, the being of the subject knowing becomes identical with the being of the object known. The intellect in act is identical with the intelligible in act.

Again for Heidegger, Being's self-revelation involves the paradox that the more it reveals itself the more it becomes mysterious. As Lauer puts it: "To know the truth about Being is to know that Being is essentially hidden; to lift the veil from Being is to see how veiled it really is".¹⁴ Or in Heidegger's own words: "Once 'existence' is understood rightly, the 'essence' of being-there can be recalled : in its openness, *Being itself manifests and conceals itself, yields itself and withdraws*".¹⁵ The belief of Hüsserl and the scientists that sooner or later Reality will reveal all its secrets is thus for Heidegger naïve. This Heideggerian insight into the mysterious nature of Being is again Thomistic. Maritain, a Thomist if there ever were one, avers that "the proper object of understanding is being". And being is a mystery either because it is too pregnant with intelligibility, too pure for our intellect which is the case with spiritual things or because its nature presents a more or less impenetrable barrier to understanding due to the element of non-being in it, which is the case with potency, with becoming and above all with matter". And he adds: "The Mystery aspect predominates where

13. Lauer, Quentin, *Phenomenology*, Harper Torchbooks 1965 p. 171.

14. *ibid*, p. 170.

15. Heidegger, Martin, *The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics*, p. 212.

knowledge is most Ontological, where it seeks to discover either intuitively or by analogy Being in itself ... Where this mystery aspect predominates, the intellect has to penetrate more and more deeply the same object... has to pierce further and further the same depth. Its progress is by deepening. As John of St. Thomas puts it: the intellect assaults the same object with increasing force and penetration, *vehementius et profundius*".¹⁶

PHILOSOPHIA PERENNIS

If Being is ever a mystery and Progress in Wisdom is a continuous deepening insight, then Philosophy "requires as its indispensable pre-requisite a *stable* body of doctrine and a continuous intellectual *tradition*". Stated otherwise, that there should be a progress in Philosophy it should be a *Philosophia Perennis*. Did Heidegger believe in a *philosophia perennis*, a philosophy at one and the same time traditional and inventive, permanent and progressive? I think he did considering that for him "the history of Philosophy is Being's progressive self-revelation through the great minds that have actively contributed to its history, by their being-in-the world, by existing and thus forwarding that revelation".¹⁷ With St. Thomas then Heidegger believes that each new generation becomes the beneficiary of all the insights accumulated by its predecessors, profiting even by their very errors and transmitting a growing heritage to posterity.

SUBSTANCE? ESSE?

Despite the many similarities we have mentioned between Thomism and the philosophy of Heidegger, it would seem that as many differences obtain between the two systems. Indeed Heidegger is very critical of the entire tradition of Scholastic Philosophy. He accuses Thomism of accepting without change the Aristotelean approach to Metaphysics. To appreciate this gripe, we must realize that Heidegger and Aristotle agree on so many points. Both hold e.g. that the concept of being is the most universal one, and that its universality goes beyond that of any

16. Maritain, Jacques, *A Preface to Metaphysics*, Sheed & Ward 1946. pp. 4 & 7.

17. Lauer, Quentin, *Phenomenology*, p. 172.

genus. In this both differ from Hegel who thought of being as a generic concept. Both Heidegger and Aristotle consider being as indefinable and that it cannot be comprehended by anything that is. Furthermore for both of them *Metaphysics* considers being as being. What then is Heidegger's objection to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*? According to Heidegger, all the Greeks including Aristotle took as their starting-point the things found in the material world and explained everything in terms of the most universal classes of beings called by Aristotle *Categories*. In short, Aristotle's mistake was to explain Man, God and Being itself in terms of the *Categories*.

Let us take the case of Being first. We might as well admit that Heidegger here has a point against Aristotle. For Aristotle says that "the question which was raised of old and is raised now and always and is always the subject of Doubt viz, what BEING is, is just the question, what is Substance".¹⁸ And substance is definitely one, although the first, of the Aristotelean categories. Indeed Aristotle equates what primarily IS, the SUBSTANCE of that which is and WHAT the thing is. Thus Gilson. "The distinctive character of a truly Aristotelean *Metaphysics* lies in the fact that it knows of no act superior to the form, not even existence (*esse*). There is nothing above being and in being there is nothing above the form, and this means that the form of a given being is an act of which there is no act".¹⁹ From Heidegger's point of view, Aristotle would then be committing the same error as Hegel of not going beyond a 'science' of being, of searching merely for the forms or essences of things (*die Seiendheit des Seindes*) and therefore of not reaching SEIN (Being).

But will Heidegger's objection hold against St. Thomas? While the true Aristotelean name for being is SUBSTANCE, the true Thomistic name for being is *esse* or the 'to be'. Unlike Aristotle, St. Thomas holds that the form itself has an act which is precisely ESSE. What is the result of making ESSE the act of acts? Says Gilson: "Thomas Aquinas could not posit ESSE as the act of a substance itself actualized by the form, without making a decision which, with respect to the metaphysics of Aris-

18. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1028 b.

19. Gilson, Etienne, *Being & Some Philosophers*, p. 47.

totle, was nothing less than a REVOLUTION".²⁰ It was a revolution because it made for the first time possible a Metaphysics that was really independent of Physics. This gives the lie to the Heideggerian observation at least in the case of St. Thomas that "From the very first 'physics' has determined the essence and history of Metaphysics. Even in the doctrine of being as pure act (Thomas Aquinas), as absolute concept (Hegel), as eternal recurrence of the will to power (Nietzsche), Metaphysics has remained unalterably Physics".²¹

Stated otherwise, the accusation that Metaphysics has remained unalterably Physics may be lodged even against Aristotle, but not against St. Thomas. For as Gilson notes: "The world of Aristotle is there (in the world of St. Thomas) in so far as reality is substance. It is the world of Science, eternal, self-subsistent and such that no problem concerning existence needs nor can be asked about it... But while keeping whole the world of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas realizes that such a world cannot possibly be 'metaphysical'. Quite the reverse, it is the straight 'physical' world of Natural Science, in which 'natures' necessarily entail their own existence; and even though such natures may happen to be gods or even the supreme God, they still remain natures. Physics is the very order of substantial reality in which existence is taken for granted. As soon as existence is no longer taken for granted, Metaphysics begins. *In other words, Thomas Aquinas is here moving the whole body of Metaphysics to an entirely new ground.* In the philosophy of Aristotle, physics was in charge of dealing with all natures i.e., with those beings that have in themselves the principle of their own change and of their own operations; as to those true beings which are unchangeable, they make up the order of Metaphysics, in virtue of their own unchangeability. In the new philosophy of St. Thomas, even unchangeable beings still remain natures, so that their handling falls within the scope of the philosophy of nature".²² The point of Gilson seems to be that so long as a discipline does not go beyond nature and Aristotle's First Philosophy does not do so since the highest act in it is Form (a constituent element of nature), then it is not strictly speaking Metaphysics. Only a Metaphysics that

20. *ibid.*, p. 174.

21. Heidegger, Martin, *The Fundamental Question of Metaphysics*, p. 229.

22. Gilson, Etienne, *Being & Some Philosophers* p. 166.

holds that there is an act above the form, that there is a perfection that transcends even nature itself can be a genuine Metaphysics. Such a Metaphysics that is divorced from Physics is the Metaphysics of St. Thomas, the Metaphysics of *Esse*.

ALETHEIA? ADEQUATIO?

But is the Thomistic *ESSE* equivalent to the Heideggerian *Sein*? Let us then discuss the central idea of Fundamental Ontology which is *the truth of Being*. Heidegger is quite explicit in saying that the essence of truth in St. Thomas is different from his own. Thus he says: "A statement of St. Thomas holds true for Medieval Scholasticism. *Veritas proprie invenitur in intellectu humano vel divino* (Quaestiones de Veritate q. I, art 4, resp). Truth is really met with in the human or the divine understanding. It has its essential place in the understanding. Here truth is no longer *Aletheia* but *Adequatio*".²³ Since *Aletheia* means the unhiddenness of Being, Heidegger's point seems to be that truth is a characteristic of Being rather than as is the case presumably with St. Thomas, Plato, Aristotle and even Nietzsche, a trait of the human mind. True enough that for St. Thomas logical truth resides *formally* in the mind. What must not be forgotten is that for him *fundamentally* it is in the things or beings themselves. And what about ontological truth? The very qualification 'ontological' shows that it is a characteristic of things rather than the human mind. True enough that in contrast to logical truth where the human mind must agree with the natural reality, in ontological truth the natural reality must agree with the divine mind. But if the relation to the divine mind is prescinded from, as Heidegger does, then where is ontological truth to be found? Obviously not primarily in the human mind for then it will reduce to logical truth from which it is distinct. If not in the human mind then it must be in things or beings. But perhaps Heidegger is distinguishing between the truth of beings and the truth of *Being*. And so we have to find out what Heidegger means by *Being*. Incidentally before leaving the question of Heideggerian truth, it might be worthwhile mentioning some questions raised by the philosopher Peter Wust regarding the same. "Take e.g. his (i.e. Heidegger's) definition of truth as

23. Heidegger, Martin, *Plato's doctrine of Truth*, p. 267.

unhiddenness of Being. Are truth and 'not being hidden' really the same? Is it not perhaps of the essence of truth that, in the last instance, part of it always remains hidden? And does an 'untruth' by the mere fact of being revealed become 'truth'?" And then comparing Heidegger's 'obscurity' with those of Kant and Hegel, Wust adds: "...but as to Heidegger, my God! I am confronted with one great riddle; and am not alone in this".²⁴

ESSE or SEIN

But if Heidegger's notion of truth is a great riddle, his notion of Being is an even greater one. When Heidegger asks: "Yet Being — what is Being?" and answers: "It is itself", is he as Heinemann observes, uttering a mere tautology" such that "if this trivial tautology is the whole outcome of the new ontology, one can only say: Parturiant montes, nascetur ridiculus mus".²⁵ Whether we agree with this criticism or not, the question of what Heidegger means by Being still remains. Perhaps other quotations might help. For example: "Being is neither God nor the basis of the world. Being is further from all that is being and yet closer to Man than every being".²⁶ The second statement can be given an intelligible interpretation if we remember that Being (Sein) unlike being (seiende) is not the object of *conceptual* knowledge and 'so is far from all that is being'. This would make the Heideggerian *Sein* similar to the Thomistic *Esse* which unlike essence (ousia) is not the object of a concept. Indeed this interpretation of *Sein* as *Esse* even illuminates the statement: "Being is itself". For when Heidegger utters this apparent tautology, might he not be emphasizing the 'integrity' of Being, just as when we say 'Man is Man' we want to take Man as a whole in contrast to e.g. 'Man is animal' where we consider him only from one aspect. In this connection we must remember Heidegger's allergy to the splitting to which Man and his thinking is often subjected: to the distinction between subject and object, theoretical and practical, body and soul etc. Now *Esse* as Gilson points out is 'what insures the *Unity* of a thing. *Esse* is not what keeps elements apart, it is what blends them together as consti-

24. Heinemann, F. H., *Existentialism & the Modern Predicament*, p. 89.

25. *ibid.*, p. 90.

26. Heidegger, Martin, *Letter on Humanism*, p. 282.

tuent elements of one and the same being".²⁷ If *Sein* is *Esse*, but not *Ipsium Esse* (God) for Heidegger is explicit that 'Being is not God', then it is clear why Heidegger says that Being itself is finite, with which St. Thomas would agree for he says: "*prima rerum creatarum est esse*".

But why does Heidegger say that "*Being* is closer to Man than every being"? Because for him, 'Man is the neighbor of *Being*'. What does this mean? Perhaps Heidegger's translation of a Heracleitean fragment might throw light on the matter. The *dark Philosopher* said: "Man, so far as he is man, dwells in the *nearness of God*". Now Heidegger says something very similar. "Man is in his essence that being whose Being as ex-sistence consists of dwelling in the *nearness of Being*".²⁸ In the nearness of Being! in the nearness of God! But for Heidegger 'Being is not God'. *Being* must then be simply the divine element in Man, that which makes Man most like to God. And indeed we have this other quotation from Heidegger: "And against this it might seem that the *essence of the divine is much nearer to us* than the strangeness of the animal, nearer in an essential distance, which as distance is much more familiar to our existential essence than the barely conceivable abysmal kinship to the animal".²⁹ Man has therefore an element in him which makes him more akin to the divine than to the animal. But what can make Man most like to the *IPSUM ESSE* than his own *Esse*? From all these statements of Heidegger then it would seem that the equivalent of *Sein* is *Esse*.

Because St. Thomas emphasizes *Esse* and not substance as Aristotle does, we have seen that Heidegger's objection that Being is explained in terms of the categories may validly apply against Aristotle but not against St. Thomas. How about the case of man? In the first place, why are the Categories according to Heidegger inapplicable to man? Because Man is essentially distinct from things. For "things belong to genera and have qualities. But in contrast, the characteristics of man are not qualities but possible ways of Being". If things belong to genera and ultimately to Categories, it is because from the start they have

27. Gilson, Etienne, *Being & Some Philosophers*, p. 183.

28. Heidegger, Martin, *Letter on Humanism*, p. 288.

29. *ibid.*, pp. 278-279.

essences that they cannot change. That is, they are not self-changing and self-perfective. But Man is self-changing and self-perfective, and therefore *Ek-sisting*. For to ek-sist is to place oneself outside one's self i.e. to transcend one's self by perfecting one's self. The kind of being peculiar to Man is then Ek-sistence. And that is why Heidegger calls the fundamental characteristics of Man existentialia. EXISTENTIALIA are to Man, what Categories are to things. And since the primary Aristotelean category is substance, one can understand why Heidegger calls *existence* the substance of Man.

When Heidegger considers Existence to be the very substance of man, what he is emphasizing is that Existence enters into the very structure of man. Everyone knows that Kierkegaard was the forerunner of modern Existentialism. But Heidegger criticizes Kierkegaard's existentialism for being principally practical, its aim being to guide man in the conduct of their lives. Stated otherwise, Kierkegaard's shortcoming was to be preoccupied with man's condition to the exclusion of an insight into the structure of man's being, especially the insight that the essence of *man as man* (Dasein) lies in his existence. (Das Wesen des Dasein liegt in seiner Existenz). In all this, Heidegger is very close to St. Thomas for whom *existence* is not as in Aristotle a mere prerequisite to being, but forms a part of his very structure. But it might be objected that Heidegger limits ek-sistence to man, for he says: "Man alone exists. Rocks are, but do not exist. Trees are, but do not exist. Horses are, but do not exist. Angels are, but do not exist. God is, but He does not exist".³⁰ In contrast St. Thomas applies existence to all actual beings. True enough, because Heidegger limits the term 'existence' to self-changing and self-perfecting beings and only man is such. If the term 'existence' were understood in the Heideggerian sense, St. Thomas would heartily agree, for only man among changeable, corporeal beings is a Person.

In analyzing the structure of Man, Heidegger makes use of the phenomenological method. Heidegger believes this method to be the one best adapted for answering the question in which he is pre-eminently interested, the question of "What is meant by

30. Heidegger, Martin, *The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics*, p. 213.

Being?" because for him *Being* is the correlate of human consciousness, the primary intentional experience. For there is no consciousness which is not consciousness of being. In this again, Heidegger is not too far from St. Thomas who holds that we cannot think of anything without first thinking of it as 'being' or stated otherwise, "*being* (esse) is that towards which the intellect tends".

From the analysis of man, Heidegger will go to the analysis of *Being* as such. But why start with the being of man rather than with the being of things? Why not start with the objective world as the Greeks had done? Because 'only man can raise the problem of Being'. But why can only man do so? Because in the opinion of Heidegger, only *Man* like *Being itself* has *time* entering into its very structure which is not the case with things of the objective world whose main characteristic being essence makes them 'unchangeable' and not subject to time. But the relation between Being as such and *Dasein* will not be clear until we have discussed *Dasein* in more detail.

MAN: DA-SEIN: BEING IN THE WORLD

To be a man for Heidegger is essentially to ex-sist. To ex-sist is to place oneself outside oneself. Man transcends himself in one way by perfecting himself. This we have already discussed. In another way by being oriented to the world. That is why man's being is a being-in-the-world, a *Da-Sein*, a Being-There.

To understand *Dasein* we must analyze its constitutive elements, the two principal ones being world and In-Being. For Heidegger, the world does not mean the sum-total of the things of Nature, for this would not necessarily involve a relation to man. *Dasein* and the World are correlatives. One is unthinkable without the other. To the objection that the world existed before the advent of man, we must remember that for Heidegger the 'world is always world of the spirit'. Metaphysics understands the world as 'beings in their totality' but Fundamental Ontology understands it as the spiritual world which of course only man can understand. Indeed Heidegger criticizes Descartes for omitting to analyze the 'worldliness of the world', for limiting himself to the study of physical and mental things in themselves.

To study the world as world, Heidegger analyzes not the things as given by Nature called by him *Vorhanden* but the artificial things made by man called by him *Zu-handen*. For only through *Zuhanden* do the *Vorhanden* become related to *Dasein*, i.e. part of the world.

Having analyzed the constitutive element *World* in the description of *Dasein*, Heidegger next analyzes the element of *In*, the *In-Being* of *Dasein*. First of all, how is *Dasein in the world*? Things are in the world as pencils are in a box. Here the relation is purely spatial, with each pencil unconcerned about the box or the other pencils present with it there. But in contrast, *Dasein* is present in the world as a man is in his home i.e. concerned about the things and persons dwelling there. Concern or Care (*Sorge*) is then for Heidegger the very essence of Man.

MODES OF SORGE

The full meaning of *Care* does not become clear however until we have studied its three modes: *Befindlichkeit*, *Verstehen* and *Rede*. In general, we may say that *Befindlichkeit* refers to the characteristics, traits, talents etc. a man is already born with, *Verstehen* with the purpose of man's existence and *Rede* to the things at Man's disposal that he can use to attain his end. For Heidegger then *Befindlichkeit* is related to a man's *past*; *Verstehen* to his *future* and *Rede* to his *present*. That is why *Care*, the very being of *Dasein*, has reference to *time* or as Heidegger prefers to call it *temporality*.

The fact that *Time* enters into the very structure of *Dasein* makes man *Finite*. Indeed in *KANT AND METAPHYSICS*, Heidegger claims that the finiteness of Man as revealed in the finiteness of his understanding, is the central idea of the *CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON*. This emphasis on man's finiteness is of course anti-Cartesian. The Cartesian mind is in a way 'infinite' since it can know everything as opposed to the Kantian mind which can know phenomena only. Again the Cartesian Mind is infinite in the sense that it looks at things as Spinoza would phrase it: 'sub specie aeternitatis' like God Himself.

Death is of course the best proof of man's finiteness and that is why Heidegger says that man is essentially a being-towards-

death. Death strictly speaking does not apply to the Cartesian Man, for with Descartes, the *mind alone is the man*, and the French philosopher takes pains to prove that the human mind is immortal.

Because he emphasizes Death, Heidegger cannot accept the Cartesian idea that the Mind alone is the man nor Descartes' over-emphasis on knowledge and reason. Indeed Heidegger criticizes Descartes for downgrading the practical and productive side of man. In this too Heidegger is very much of a Thomist, for St. Thomas holds that man is a substantial unity of body and rational soul and not only a mind. Indeed in his *Treatise on Man*, St. Thomas considers all the different aspects of man, his senses, his intellect, his sensitive appetites (passions) and his rational appetite (will).

What impels Heidegger to contrast Man so sharply with other corporeal beings is I think his fear that the uniqueness of man might be compromised. But then as Collins comments: "Can this uniqueness be preserved without limiting 'existence' to man? The affirmative reply of Thomism is linked with its doctrine on the mutual proportion between existence (*esse*) and the essential nature in every type of being. The more perfect the nature of a being, the more perfect its proportionate existential act".³¹ In simpler words, since the nature of man is different essentially from that of other bodily beings, his mode of existence is correspondingly different in kind from them.

DASEIN: PERSON?

How does Heidegger's view of *Dasein* compare with St. Thomas' view of *Man*? Heidegger emphasizes *Dasein*'s essential relation to the world which amounts in the last analysis to saying that man is essentially related to Being. For as Heidegger says: "to be a man is essentially to acknowledge the claim of Being upon oneself". If this is so, then it amounts to saying with St. Thomas that Man is a person. For a person is an individual substance of an intellectual nature. By his intellect, man, as Thomists would say is 'open to the infinity of being' which is very close to Heidegger's description of man as 'openness to being'. Man's being a person also distinguishes him essentially from the

31. Collins, James, *The Existentialists*, Ch. on Heidegger.

rest of Nature which are non-persons thus paralleling Heidegger's emphasis on the essential difference between Man and Things.

Take again the Heideggerian idea that Dasein in the light of what it aims at in the future, makes use of his innate or inborn capacities (past) to act in a given (present) situation with circumspective care. If we were to ask the following questions: 1) Why can Man have a goal in the future?; 2) Why can he know his inborn talents or even profit from his past mistakes?; and 3) why can he understand his present problem and even the means he must use to solve the same?, the answer to all these questions is that man is a person. By his intellect he can plan, by his intellect he can know which of his innate capacities to call into play, by his intellect he can understand the present problem facing him and the way to solve them.

Again Heidegger mentions two things dreaded by Dasein: 1) the fact of being responsible for ourselves because of being 'thrown' into the world, and 2) the fear of losing authenticity, of becoming just 'one of many'. These two 'dreads' again presuppose our being persons. For being a person we are endowed with free wills and having free wills we are responsible for our actions. Indeed we are so responsible for ourselves that we 'decide' our own future of eternal joy or eternal misery. And dread of just being 'one of many', of losing our individual uniqueness, amounts to our dread of losing the other aspect of being a person, the aspect of being an *individual substance*. That is, we can cease to act like a person (and hence lapse into what Heidegger calls inauthentic existence) if we give up or better stated do not live up to either our being an individual substance or our being of an intellectual nature.

If I am not mistaken then, in all his descriptions of Dasein, Heidegger is simply recovering the idea that man is a person in the Boethian sense. It is not too far-fetched to say that with the Greek poet Heidegger would say: Of all admirable things in Nature I know of none more admirable than Man. But inquiring into the reason why, he will say with St. Thomas: *Persona est id quod est perfectissimum in tota natura*. Person is that which is most perfect in nature. The difference between Heidegger and St. Thomas would only be that St. Thomas is clear as to the reason why man is a person. It is because man is made to the

image of God who is Himself a Person. The problem of man leads us then inevitably to the problem of God.

THE HOLY. THE NECESSARY BEING

Because Dasein does not know its 'wherefrom and whereto' and because Heidegger emphasized Death, some of his followers, notably Sartre, want to classify Heidegger as an atheist. The truth seems to be rather that Heidegger holds the problem of God in abeyance. For he says: "Only from the truth of Being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy can the essence of divinity be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought and said what the word 'God' is to signify".³² In short, Heidegger believes that we cannot solve the problem of God without first solving the problem of the truth of Being and the latter is yet unsolved since Heidegger claims he is the first to even put the problem of Being in its proper perspective.

The foregoing however does not prevent Heidegger from criticizing the entire tradition of Scholastic theology. Because he believes that Thomism has accepted without change the Greek approach to Being, Heidegger regards the Thomistic God as merely the supreme instance of that *which is*. To call God the First Cause, the Highest God and the Last End is in Heidegger's view to understand Him only as the superlative among beings. In other words, Thomism commits the error of applying the categories of the world of things to God.

The answer to Heidegger's criticism of St. Thomas is the same as that already discussed in the case of Being as such. *Esse* not being a form (or as Kant would later phrase it: Existence is not a predicate), St. Thomas cannot be accused of not transcending the categories proper only to things. For the categories emphasize essence and not the *to be*. And only in the case when *being* is considered genus will the Heideggerian objection hold.

It is true enough that St. Thomas applies the terms First Cause, Highest Good etc. to God, but we must remember that Cause, End, God apply to God and creatures, just like the term

32. Heidegger, Martin, *Letter on Humanism*, p. 294.

'being' does, not univocally, but analogously. The causal effect of second causes is strictly limited to modifying subjects that already exist; it can not go as far as to cause the very existence of the effects produced as in the case of the First Cause. In short, the causality of the First Cause is a creative causality. As Gilson puts it: "homo faber can never become homo creator because, having only a received being he cannot produce what he himself is not, nor overstep in the order of causality the ranks he holds in the order of being. Creation is the causal action proper to God, it is possible for Him and it is not possible for any save Him".³³

The fact that Creation is the production of the entirety of the thing, the fact that it involves the passage from non-being to being itself throws some light on the Heideggerian attitude towards death. For Death for Heidegger sharpens into focus the possibility of not-being for man. It shows in the words of Heidegger that the human condition is to 'be exposed to nothingness'. If in anxiety we feel that 'nothing itself, nothingness as such was near'³⁴ what is this but to stress the Christian idea that save for the power of God sustaining us in being at every moment of our lives, we will lapse back since we were produced 'out of nothing' into the nothingness from which we came. Of course since Heidegger prescind as yet from the question of God, for him through anxiety 'we transcend the totality of being, but not in the direction of God, but in that of nothingness'.

Because of this emphasis on Nothingness, Heidegger's philosophy is often thought of as a nihilistic ontology. It is a 'nihilism' that bears witness to what Holderlin, Heidegger's favorite poet, calls *Welt-nacht* (World-Night). "Weltnacht designates an age in which the old gods are dead and the new gods are not yet born. God is absent, He withholds himself; there is no god who visibly and univocally could unite men, fill the world with splendor and give meaning to it. The time is barren, for it does not even notice God's absence. Nothingness has replaced God".³⁵ What Heidegger seems to be emphasizing is that 'the death of God' necessarily leads to the "homelessness of man". But "homelessness lies in beings abandonment of Being". Hence for Heidegger Home-

33. Gilson, Etienne, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, p. 90.

34. Heinemann, F. H., *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament* p. 99.

35. *ibid.*, p. 107.

coming presupposes the recovery of the truth of Being. In the closeness to Being lies the salvation of modern Man. "In this closeness the decision, if any, is reached as to whether and how God and the gods deny themselves and the night remains, whether and how the day of the Holy dawns, whether and how in the rise of the Holy an appearance of God and the gods can start anew".³⁶ All the foregoing seems to indicate that like Nietzsche, Heidegger remains in search of God. That is why he turns to the poets such as Holderlin and Rilke because he holds that the poets name gods and that it is they who discover their traces.

"GOD IS": "GOD EXITS"

But is God dead in the sense that He does not exist? Heidegger is silent on this point. What he emphasizes is that there is an infinite gap between God and creatures, so much so that God cannot be treated either by Science or Philosophy. For Science is limited to that-which-are and Philosophy is limited to Being itself (Sein). But God is neither the Supreme That-Which-Is nor Being itself, for "Being itself is *finite* in essence and is not applicable to God". Furthermore accepting the phenomenological principle of a rigorous correspondence between the mode of experience and the mode of being, Heidegger holds that no bridge can be built between the God of Religion (the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and the God of Philosophy (the Uncaused Cause, the Necessary Being) even if it is granted that Philosophy could treat of God.

Regarding the phenomenological principle that the mode of experiencing is related to the mode of being, the question may be raised as to whether the mode of being spoken of is its mode in the mind or in nature. If the mode referred to is that in the mind, then the principle is true. Indeed St. Thomas has already pointed out that 'a thing is received according to the condition of the recipient'. Thus the mode of being of a stone known through the senses (particular) is different from its mode of being when known through the intellect (universal). But obviously the mode of being of the stone in nature is the same in both cases. In the same way, God from the point of view of his relations to persons may appear different from God from the point of view of his

36. Heidegger, Martin, *Letter on Humanism*, p. 286

relations to things, but extramentally it will be the same God. In the basic terminology of Logic, the same material object may be considered from two different formal objects.

Furthermore the distinction made between the God of Religion and the God of Philosophy is based on the Heideggerian extreme dualism of persons and things. That is, the God of Religion is to persons as the God of Philosophy is to things. And since persons and things are diametrically opposed, Ergo... But is it not the case that the God of Religion, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, was the creator not only of persons like angels and men, but also of Heaven and earth and other non-persons found there? And do not the sensible beings from whose existence the God of Philosophy is inferred include persons as well as things? Do the contingent beings in St. Thomas' third proof from which we conclude to the absolutely Necessary Being called God not include human beings who are persons as well as other bodily beings which are things?

What Heidegger seems to have forgotten is *analogy* which is involved in all human language whenever we talk positively about God. We can say that both God knows and man knows. But the way that God knows is proportioned to His Being, while our way of knowing is proportioned to ours. Of Course the other way of talking about God is through negation, through the denial of all the imperfections and limitations involved when the term is applied to creatures. Thus man's knowledge has the imperfection of having to be based on the senses, of having to proceed discursively, etc. All such limitations disappear when knowledge is applied to God.

Negation applies to God especially when we consider Him in contradistinction to particular beings. He is not this being, nor that being, nor that other, nor even the totality of beings that appears to us in contrast with particular instances of being, that-which-are (seiendes). Stated otherwise, for Heidegger only when *Being* is understood as completely other than that-which-is or the sum-total of things-that-are can the entire realm of that-which-is be revealed in its proper nature. What Heidegger says of Being (who for him is not God) is truer still of God. Only when God is understood as completely other than any of his creatures or the totality of created things can the true nature of

Nature itself be revealed. In short, God is the Absolutely Transcendent One. Heidegger's Being which he also defines as 'transcendens as such' may then be considered as earthly image of the Christian God.

Summarizing the main points of our essay, we may say that St. Thomas and Heidegger agree on the following points:

1. Both philosophers emphasize being and both interpret it as the 'to be'. Heidegger's *Sein* is equivalent to Thomas' *Esse*.
2. Both are opposed to a Metaphysics of Essences and both agree that beings is not a genus.
3. As against Descartes and Kant, both advocate a 'surrender' rather than an aggressive attitude towards reality.
4. Both agree that Philosophy (Metaphysics or Ontology) is superior to Science.
5. Both believe that being should be emphasized rather than subjectivity.
6. Both hold that man is essentially related to the world or better still to being.
7. Both agree that Being is a mystery and that Progress in Wisdom consists in a continuous deepening insight.
8. Both believe in a *Philosophia perennis*.
9. Both agree in the fact of man's responsibility for himself.
10. Both agree in the danger of Man's living an inauthentic existence.

The divergences, which are more apparent than real, are:

1. To the Heideggerian accusation that Thomism explains man in terms of objective categories as when it defines man as a rational animal, it is answered that Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* in terms of 'existentialia' amounts to the Thomistic claim that man is a person.
2. To Heidegger's accusation that the Thomistic God is only the supreme instance of that-which-are, it is answered that Thomists use the terms cause, good, end, not univocally, but analogously.
3. To the Heideggerian objection that no bridge can be built between the God of Religion and the God of Philosophy,

it is answered that the distinction between the two is subjective, from our point of view and no objective in *that Being* itself.

4. To Heidegger's accusation that the Thomistic notion of truth as *veritas* makes truth a characteristic of the human mind, while his own interpretation of truth as *aletheia* makes it to be a trait of Being, it is answered that a distinction must be made between logical and ontological truth.
5. To Heidegger's accusation that Thomas accepted without change the Greek approach to Metaphysics and made the mistake of explaining Being in terms of the categories, it is answered that Thomas emphasized *esse* while Aristotle emphasized *Substance*, and unlike Aristotle, was able to divorce Metaphysics from Physics.

This essay we hope has amply proven that Heidegger like so many other contemporary philosophers is really anti-modern in the sense that it is Modern Philosophy, (the philosophy initiated by Descartes and finding its fulfillment in Hegel) that he is actually criticizing. Indeed I have the feeling that Heidegger is recovering the forgotten truths of Thomism. Liberated from his wrong conception that all metaphysical systems like Hegel's are Metaphysics of essences and from his wrong view of St. Thomas as a mere carbon copy of Aristotle, we may say that Heidegger turns out to be a Thomist— a very good Thomist. Did Heidegger say that he could get along with a liberalized Thomism? Perhaps it will be closer to the truth to say that Thomists can get along with a liberated Heidegger.

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