

FROM QUESTIONS OF BEING TO THE QUESTION OF BEING AS BEING

There are many questions of being, as many as there are different kinds of being and different kinds of science to study these different kinds of being. Every science presupposes some kind of being to inquire into or about, as the subject of its consideration. In fact, any critical question about anything given in experience is about what we take to be real, or being, in that experience, as distinct from what may be only imaginary. We never ask: why is there something rather than nothing, as I think we shall be hearing later on this afternoon from Lorenz Puntel. We always find ourselves intelligently in the presence of being, wondering what there is that stands up to the criterion of being as true and how to account for it as we encounter it in experience. From this come all sorts of questions about things as given in experience, as found in what we call the empirical or the natural sciences, the social sciences, including even the phenomenological sciences.

All of these particular sciences presuppose or open up to some ontology or some underlying conception of being taken to be intelligible in itself, as in the distinction between a first person ontology and a third person ontology or third person ontologies, as we allow for a distinct ontology for each one of the empirical natural and social sciences we know of, or for the ontology that is placed in parentheses in strictly phenomenological investigations. Each one of these sciences, in all of the wide diversity of inquiries into being that they represent, has its own particular dynamic of investigation, seemingly boundless in the face of an ever

expanding experience, with a seemingly boundless rebounding of questions that remain or arise once determinate answers are arrived at in each and everyone of those particular sciences.

What this ever-rebounding boundlessness of the particular sciences tells us is not that they have nothing to do with being. On the contrary, all of them have to do with being. All of them as sciences are questions of being, each one searching for a better grasp of what they are about, or their proper subject, alongside many others also searching for a better grasp of what they are about, or their proper subject. What makes them boundless is that each one of them is about one aspect of being as defined by its subject or by what it says it is about, whereas being as conceived at the base of all sciences cannot be restricted to anyone of its aspects, whether it be that of physics, or that of biology, or that of sociology, or that of phenomenological intentionality.

What this boundlessness of the particular sciences of being also tells us is that the question of being as such, or as being, cannot be studied in any particular science. That question is never raised in any particular science. To raise the question of being as being is to raise a question that has to encompass all the particular sciences under the formal aspect that they all have to do with being of one particular kind or another. We raise that question, not to undo or replace the work of the particular sciences of being, but rather to coordinate them and to integrate them into a more universal perspective or ontology regarding the universe as a whole.

This brings me to the question as to which question or questions should come first in the order of learning science for human beings, the particular questions

of being or the more universal and fundamental question of being as being, which is presupposed in the particular sciences of being but not answered explicitly in any way, unless one adopts the reductionist attitude that one's particular science is the only true science of being, regardless of any other claims to be about being either in particular or universally about being as being.

Here I would point out a very important difference between ancient metaphysics and modern ontology. In ancient philosophy, the question of being as being did not arise scientifically until after the particular sciences had gone a long way in their exploration of being. The record shows that the question of being, *ti to on*, was first raised by Plato in the *Sophist*, a late dialogue in which he was trying to distinguish the philosopher from the sophist. Not long after the question was turned into an inquiry into *to on e on* by Aristotle in Book Gamma of the treatise on *Metaphysics*, which is short for *ta meta ta phusika*, the subject matter of science that comes after the physics. The term, *ta meta ta phusika*, was not invented 300 years after Aristotle by Andronicus of Rhodes, as an editorial peg from which to hang a bunch of treatises left over as a sort of appendix of texts after the *Physics*, as a legend invented in the 18th century would have it, the time when Wolff's *Metaphysica Generalis* or *General Ontology* reigned supreme in modern philosophy, before Kant turned his critical eye on it as a science.

Scholarship has shown that the term *ta meta ta phusika* was in use among the Peripatetics from the first generation on to designate a series of treatises in a science that literally was to come after the *Physics* in the order of learning the sciences, the science for which Aristotle designated being as being, *to on e on*, as the subject in

Book Gamma, after much elaboration in Book Beta of the sort of questions this science was to treat of. I would further point out that in all this discussion about the subject for this metaphysical science Aristotle spoke emphatically of being in its present participial form, *to on e on*, when he could just as easily have spoken of it syntactically in its infinitive form, *to einai*. Both forms had been used from the beginning by Parmenides, though not interchangeably. In Plato's *Sophist* and in Aristotle's Book Gamma the question is about being in the form of a present participle, and not an infinitive. Metaphysics is about being in the concrete, as we think of being in English, and not about being as an abstract infinitive, as the Germans, and the French, and the Spaniards think of it. In his deconstruction of metaphysics, Heidegger makes a big thing of this present participial form for the classical question of being as being, which is bound to sound odd for a German accustomed to thinking of being, *das Sein*, in the form of an infinitive. Hence it is not surprising that he came to think of two questions of being, one with being in the form of the participle, *das Seiende als Seiende*, and another with being in the form of the infinitive, *das Sein als Sein*, setting the first one aside and proposing the second one as the task that remains for questioning at the end of philosophy.

In one sense we could say that Heidegger found himself at the end of philosophy in his time in much the same way as Plato and Aristotle found themselves at the end of philosophy in their time. But in another sense we have to say that he found himself at the end of a very different kind of philosophy than that which the ancients had known, especially with regard to the question of being as fundamental to all scientific questioning, whether particular or universal. Heidegger spoke of two

questions of being and opted for the second one as if it were opposed to the first one, the classical one. What he was opposed to, however, was not the classical view of metaphysics, but the modern view of metaphysics epitomized in Christian Wolff about being in the abstract, *ens in genere*, or even more strangely about the *possible as possible*, reified as an object of thought, as Hegel would say. In rejecting this kind of metaphysical claim regarding the possible as possible along with Kant, Heidegger never went beyond the empty ontology it represented, not even in proclaiming the famous ontological difference regarding “the be of being” (*das Sein des Seienden*) which his early work on *Being and Time*, or *Sein und Zeit*, was supposed to lead into. *Sein* as distinct from *das Seiende* is still only an abstraction verging on something infinite, but empty, as a possible or as an idea or a postulate vaguely floating in an ideal realm.

The problem remains for us to pass on from the many questions of being, more accessible to our way of thinking critically about what is, to the question of being simply, which is not so accessible to our way of thinking and which is not and cannot be raised in any of the particular questions about being. It is not enough to defend the idea of science or of sciences of being against Humean skepticism. We must also defend the idea of a science of being as being against the Kantian critique of modern ontology and against the Heideggerian deconstruction of that same ontology, which leaves us with nothing to proceed with in any science of being as being.

In Book Gamma of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle raises the question of being as being as one that remains, after all the particular sciences have had their say about

being. "This science," he writes, "is not the same as any of the so-called particular sciences, for none of them contemplates being on the whole as being"(1003a, 24-25). The particular sciences abstract some portion of being, he goes on to say, and study the attribute of that portion of it, as in the mathematical sciences, but for the science that inquires into the first and most universal causes, the subject has to be being on the whole as being, to be studied as something with a nature of its own having attributes of its own as a whole. Given that this subject is found, in part, in all the other sciences as a sort of foundation or general framework, it should not go unexamined, in an inquiry of its own, with a method of its own, encompassing the whole of what there is simply as being.

All this is said by Aristotle about the question of being as being with reference to the particular sciences of being in his philosophy of nature. But the same sort of thing can be said by us in our day with reference to the modern sciences, all of which remain particular sciences, not only with reference to each other as sciences of particular aspects of being, but also with respect to being on the whole as being encompassing all its particular aspects under the universal dimension of being as being. After all that modern sciences have accomplished in their particularities, there always remains room for another science to explore the dimension of being as being scientifically and systematically, not just as an added luxury of scientific contemplation inaccessible to the particular sciences, but as a necessary intellectual requirement to ground all scientific questioning as questioning in the presence of being, and to uplift the value of scientific questioning toward the summit of being where the first and most universal cause of all being as being may reside.

What I would like to do here is show three things about the systematic question of being as being as the subject for the most universal science we know of in philosophy. First, I shall show how the question of being as being underlies or is presupposed, implicitly or explicitly, in all the particular sciences of being, so that at the end of them all another science has to come into play, not just to raise the question of being as being, and not just of being as particular in any sense, but also to coordinate the particular sciences of being with one another as parts of the universal order of being as we know it concretely.

Second, I want to show, conversely, how this question of being opens the way, not to a univocal or generic conception of being, but to an analogous conception that can accommodate the many particular questions of being in one and the same science, not in abstraction from the differences of being, but rather as a concrete order of different degrees of perfection in being, all of them in relation to the primary analogate of being, namely the human being, as the highest degree of being given in our experience.

Third, I wish to show that this conception of being as present in our experience, and as signified in any direct exercise of judgment in which we claim to know being scientifically one way or another, systematically includes what I call transcendental properties of being as being, or what Aristotle called attributes of being conceived as the subject or as "the nature" of which metaphysics is the science. These are the properties of being as *one*, as *active*, as *true*, and as *good*, all of them convertible with being in its diverse degrees of perfection as being, and all of them systematically giving rise to the conception of being as a universe of many and

diverse beings in relation to one another, and in relation to a first universal principle and cause who orders them all to himself as to their end or to their second perfection as realized through their own initiative.

I

Questions of Being

All of this is a lot to say in one paragraph, or even in one paper, but let me try to spell some of it out. Let us begin by examining how the question of being as being remains to be raised after all the particular sciences have come to their conclusions as questions of being. Questions are first raised about particular things or beings in our experience: questions about social structures, about psychology, about biology, or about non-living things. All of them are about being of one kind or another, to be accounted for as real or as being. But none of them are about being as being, which remains unquestioned and unaccounted for as background for the particular aspects of being under the many questions of being. In other words, the being of the particular objects for these sciences is simply taken for granted.

We begin metaphysics, or the scientific study of being as being, when we turn to the question of being as being and when we recognize the necessity of raising this question, which cannot be raised in any particular science, not by asking why there is something rather than nothing, as happened in modern ontology with Leibniz, but rather by asking what it is that we have been taking for granted in any particular science or in all of them taken together. That is when we start asking about being simply as being in all the particular and diverse beings, about *ens commune*, without taking anything away from the many and diverse beings studied in the particular

sciences, and without reduction of any one of them to another or to some abstract generic whole.

The problem at the beginning of metaphysics, in determining its subject of consideration, is not one of excluding anything that is taken as being in experience. The question is not whether there is being to be studied scientifically, as is presupposed in all the particular sciences, but rather how all of what is presupposed and counts as real in the sciences is to be accounted for. Taken in its present participial form, “being”, *ens participium* as distinct from *ens nomen*, is not abstract in the least. It signifies being concretely as a whole. This subject is to be explored, not haphazardly, as if any or some particular cause within the whole could account for the whole, but systematically, in keeping with the presupposition of being in all particular sciences, in terms of one first and most universal cause of all there is to be accounted for in the given of experience, including particular causes known to be operative within the whole. In other words, the systematic science of being as being, does not start from nothing, but rather from all there is as articulated in the particular sciences of being.

II

The Analogy of Being as

Systematic Articulation of the Question of Being as Being

This question of being as being is most puzzling when it first comes on the scene in systematic philosophy, as we see in Plato’s *Sophist*, when he is trying to make the case for philosophy against the sophist as long as he is playing with

questions of being without getting into any systematic or critical science of being as being, as Aristotle would do later on. What can be made of the question of either not being (*ti to me on*), or of being (*ti to on*), as it has come down to us from Parmenides. To open up space between that stark dichotomy between not-being and being, the Greeks had begun to use a variation on the notion being, namely, *ousia*, based on the feminine form of the present participial form, *on*, namely, *ousa*, to allow for being that could be in motion or at rest, and hence to allow for different ways of speaking of being, as Aristotle would later put it in his systematic approach to the question of being as being in Book Gamma of the *Metaphysics*. What had been a simple question of not-being and of being in the *Sophist*, thus became a most complex question encompassing many diverse aspects of being in diverse modes of interaction and correlation among themselves.

Aristotle introduces this complexity in the question of being as being after arguing for the necessity of raising the question of being as being over and above all the particular questions of being, on the basis of how he first introduced the idea of a first philosophy as an inquiry into “the first principles and the most ultimate causes”, at the very beginning of the *Metaphysics*, so that “if those principles were investigated by those who also investigated the parts of beings, the parts must be the parts of being, not incidentally, but as being” (1003a27-31). This science, he notes, “is not the same as any of the so-called particular sciences, for none of the others contemplates being on the whole (*katholou*) as being; they slice off some portion of it and study what goes with this portion of it, as do for example the mathematical sciences” (Ibid. 23-27). It is understood, of course, that all study being, though not as

being according to the whole, but only a part, which it is for each particular science to determine for itself, leaving the more concrete question of being on the whole as being for another science to investigate.

Having said all this all this, Aristotle then drops the bomb of complexity in the conception of being as being as a concrete whole, not as an abstraction, as it has been presented in modern ontology, but rather as a diversity of different ways of being gravitating around one thing (*pros hen.*). Being, he says, is spoken of in a manifold way (*pollachos legetai*), but with reference to one (*pros hen*), and to one certain nature (*pros mian tina phusin*). To illustrate such a notion, he refers to the notion of “health”, which is said of all sorts of things such as diet, exercise, or pharmaceutical goods, but always with reference to a healthy organism as primary analogate. Thus “being” is used in a manifold way, but always with reference to one principle (*pros mian archen*). “For some things are spoken of as beings because they are substances (*ousiai*); others because they are properties of substance; others because they are genetic of substance; or corruption or privation or qualities of substance, or productive or genetic of substance, or of terms relating to substance, or negations of certain of these terms or of substance” (1003b5-10).

The idea of being as being thus entails a whole cosmology of being centering on what we take to be substances that come to be and cease to be. As manifold as the idea may be, it has its unity with reference to one (*pros hen*), like the manifold of accidents of one thing have their unity with reference to the substance of which they are all accidents. But that is only one way of conceiving the analogy of being, with reference to one substance at a time. If we take it with reference to the multiplicity

and to the diversity of substances in the universe, we come to a more universal idea of analogy with regard to an order of different degrees of being, or of perfection in being, different parts or beings in the order of being as a whole, all taken as differing and as relating to one (*pros hen*) as the primary analogate of being.

This is where the different particular sciences of being come back into the picture of a science of being as being. Analogy can give each one of them its due science of being. Metaphysics as a science of being as being does not in any way replace them or minimize them particular questions of being. But it does relativize them as parts of the whole questioning of being as being and sees in them varying degrees of being relative to one degree taken as the primary analogate of being.

The question of what to take as the primary analogate of being then arises, with every particular science trying to pull the answer in its direction, whether it be physics from the bottom up or anthropology from the top down or biology and psychology from somewhere in between of the extremes of down or up. Every particular science has a tendency to think of the particular being it studies as the primary analogate of the question of being, or of itself as the model against which other questions of being are to be measured, at least when these particular sciences admit that there are other questions of being than their own. But there can be no justification of such an arrogation from within any particular science or any particular question of being. The question of the primary analogate of being can be raised and settled only on metaphysical grounds or in the science of being as being, where the conception of analogy first comes to the fore, with its distinction of diverse

degrees of perfection in being, relative to the perfection of a primary analogate. And that primary analogate can be none other than the one raising the question of being as being. Anything less would be a form of reductionism of the science of being as being, or metaphysics, to a particular science such as physics, or biology, or psychology, or even economics.

The conception of being simply as being transcends the conception of being in any particular science of being, including that of anthropology or even of phenomenology, which, in Heidegger, is about the one raising the question of being as being. Even when we take the scientist herself or himself or the human being as the primary analogate of being in our experience of being, as I do and I think we have to do in metaphysics, and as I think the ancients did, when they spoke of the human being as the primary instance of substance as one, we cannot enclose the conception of being as being within the finitude of the human being, as Heidegger did in his phenomenological deconstruction of classical metaphysics. In its transcendental dimension, the conception of being as being does not replace or displace the particular conception of being in the human being. All validity of that conception is allowed within the conception of being as being. Metaphysics does not take the place of anthropology or of phenomenology, or of any other particular science of being for that matter. It only encompasses all these particular questions of being into a higher, more universal order of investigation or of questioning, one that would include higher and more infinite dimensions or degrees of being than the one we are aware of in the anthropological question of being for the one raising the question of being in the universe we experience as a whole.

III

The Transcendental Properties of Being as Being as

Key to Systematic Metaphysics

But if there is to be a science of being as being, transcending all the limitations of the particular sciences of being, how is it to proceed as a science for the rational animal who raises these questions about being as being, questions that seem to surpass his capacity to investigate? What more is there to say about being as being besides saying that it is or that it is what is said to be in the particular sciences of being? It is characteristic of a science not only to define its subject, or what it is about, but also to say what pertains to it according to itself, or as it is in itself. In other words, what are the properties of being as being that will enable us to proceed in the exploration of this subject?

This is not an easy question to answer in the case of being as being, for properties of a subject are usually what distinguish one subject from another among the particular sciences. In the case of the science of being as being we have to include all of these particular properties of different particular beings, as we transcend them, in raising the higher question of being as being on the whole. If we are going to think of properties of being as being, we will have to think of them as transcendental in the same way that we think of being as being as transcendental. In distinguishing different degrees of being, each with its own properties as being, according to the

particular sciences, we abstract not just from being as being, but also from any idea of transcendental properties of being as being there might be, if there are any to speak of. So that, even after having defined our subject as being as being, we are left without any idea of transcendental properties of being, unless we work them out ourselves in relation to the diverse degrees of perfection in being we find among the beings we know of within within being as a whole.

There are three such transcendental properties of being, the *one*, the *true*, and the *good*, which were worked out in the metaphysical tradition from the very beginning, with Plato and Aristotle, and that came into play much more emphatically among the metaphysicians of the middle ages. These transcendental ideas have been largely ignored in modern ontology, most importantly by Kant, who could not figure out any way of going forward in metaphysics beyond the purely regulative ideas he came up with in his transcendental analysis, over and above the empty categories of the understanding to go with the sense manifold.

For the ancients and for the classical tradition, these three transcendental ideas found their way into every degree of perfection in being that the particular sciences could speak of. They correlated with the diverse degrees of perfection in being, found among the beings known in human experience, as a seed, so to speak, for the metaphysical outlook buried in the particular sciences of being. They were understood as convertible with the transcendental notion of being, so that for each degree of being in the universe or as given in experience, there was a corresponding

degree of *oneness*, of *truth* or intelligibility, and of *goodness* on which metaphysical discourse could be based in the science of being as being.

Before elaborating further on these three transcendental properties of being as being, however, I would add a fourth transcendental property of being to complement the other three and to bind all beings in their diversity and multiplicity of one universe of being or of beings. That is the property I would name *active*. For every degree of being there is a degree of activity for us to reflect on in coming to know *what* it is in itself and where it fits into the order of the universe as we know it. It is important to list activity as a transcendental property of being in post-modern metaphysics because of the new insistence on subjectivity or consciousness in the human being as primary analogate of being with regard to, not just the many questions of being, but also to the question of being as being as well. But to take the human being as primary analogate of being in this way is not in any way to depart from the ancient outlook, with its many adages about convertibility between action and being, such as *operari sequitur esse* or *quamlilbet formam sequitur aliqua inclinatio*. Action follows being of whatever form, and for every form there follows some corresponding inclination to take action. This was taken to be true, not just of the human being, but of every other kind of being, no matter how low its degree of action and its degree of being. That is why we reflect on what a thing does in order to discover what it is in itself, or in its nature. To ask what the nature of a being, is to ask in what its inclination to act consists.

Such questions are asked of any being in science, that is, of diverse beings or natures, in the particular sciences, or of being as being in metaphysics. In each case it is presupposed that the being is one, and not another, each one with an identity of its own. One does not mean that the being is simple in its identity. In fact, if we take the rational animal to be the primary analogate of being, and water to be a much lower secondary analogate of being, we would have to say that that oneness and simplicity are in inverse proportion to one another in the order of primary and secondary analogates. The more a being is one in the analogy of being and oneness, the more it is complex in its identity, with the human being as the highest, the most one and the most complex in the immanent order of being. The degree of oneness or identity in a human being is much higher than that in a body of water, which can be divided into many smaller bodies of water, with none of them losing its oneness, unlike the human body which cannot be so divided, without some parts, if not the whole, losing their identity as parts of a living human being.

To understand the two other transcendental properties of being, *truth* and *goodness*, we must understand beings in their oneness or their identity, not as hidden or as isolated in some secret place, but as relating to the powers of intelligence and will in the scientist inquiring into beings as they present themselves in experience. To inquire intelligently into things as being is to suppose some intelligibility or some truth to be discovered in the being in question at whatever degree of being we may be inquiring, whether lower or even higher than the intelligent inquiring being, who is somehow everything in his desire to know. For each degree of being there is a degree of truth to be taken into account in the analogy of being. As relating to the

power of willing as rational appetite, beings that present themselves in experience are thought of as good, again according to varying degrees of being and of intelligibility.

From all of this we come to the idea that, with the question of being as being, we are inquiring into and operating in a universal system of interconnected and interacting beings, being on the whole as being or as the universe of what there is and of what is coming to be as a whole, with its origin in what we have to think of as the first and most universal cause of being, and with the entire universal order of being or beings, seeking its ultimate second perfection in conjunction with this same first cause as final end. Sciences that do not rise to this question of a first and final universal cause for the universal order are not sciences of being as being. They are only particular sciences of being, having to do only with parts or aspects of being, without a method for dealing with being as the actual, concrete whole of all there is in the universe.

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