

Notes On a "Lovers' Quarrel": Heidegger and Aquinas/

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Martin Heidegger is concerned with medieval philosophy only within the larger context of the history of metaphysics — and his judgment is harsh. "The tradition of the truth about beings, which runs its course as 'metaphysics,' develops into a pile of distortions that conceal the original essence of Being — although it no longer knows that it does so. Herein lies the necessity of the 'destruction' of this concealment as soon as a thinking of the truth of Being has become necessary. . . ."¹

Anyone who knows the subtle genius, the complexity and richness of medieval philosophy must view this seemingly arrogant claim with serious misgivings. How can Heidegger assert that medieval philosophy is forgetful of Being when Aquinas is quite clear: "Being itself (*ipsum esse*) is the most perfect of all . . . , the actuality of all things" (S.T. I, 4, 1, ad 3). Indeed, essence is ultimately reducible to the act of Being. Forgottenness of Being? On the contrary, its clearest thematization!²

Heidegger's quarrel with medieval philosophy within the history of metaphysics is at once very simple and very complex. Its simplicity is rooted in the one issue that moves Heidegger's thought: Being is Time. Its complexity ranges into Greek philosophy as "phenomenological," into the Latin translations of Aristotle's lexicon, into the medieval employment of philosophy as the handmaiden of theology, and ultimately into the problem of hermeneutics. Perhaps we can summarize Heidegger's misgivings under the rubric: medieval philosophy is forgottenness of Being to the second power. That is: (1) already in Plato and Aristotle the essence of Being as Time, to which the pre-Socratics

were attuned but which they did not thematize, is reduced to a faint echo; (2) medieval philosophy, by taking over Plato and Aristotle as closed systems of language that could be adapted and put at the service of a theological problematic, effectively silenced even this echo. Medieval philosophy articulated Being not as essentially temporal and finite but as eternally stable reality rooted in the actuality of the Supreme Act, and in so doing, delivered to modern philosophy all that it would need to transform Being into the horizon of objectifiability posited by the transcendental subject (Kant).

In what follows I simplify the problem into three overlapping areas of consideration: the medieval "misunderstanding" of Aristotle's phenomenology, the Latin translations of Aristotle's key words, and the theological framework of medieval philosophy.³

1. At the basis of Western philosophy lies Aristotle's *Physics* — misread in the hellenic and medieval periods as a treatise on nature as distinguished from the *Metaphysics* as a meta-nature treatise on the ultimate ground of reality. Heidegger denies the distinction: "The *Metaphysics* are just as much 'physics' as the *Physics* are 'metaphysics.'"⁴ Both treat of what the Greeks called *physis*, Being as the presentness of things that are. Both inquire beyond (*meta*) "natural" beings (*ta physika*) to that which lets them be at all (*physis*).⁵

Physis as emergent presentness is the same as *phainesthai*, "to appear" — indeed, both have the same etymological root.⁶ Heidegger argues that the Greeks understood "to be" not as the simple "thatness" or actuality of beings, but as a phenomenological emergence out of hiddenness and into appearance for man. Beings are phenomena whose Being is emergence-appearance; and the latter never occurs except in correlation with its poetic-thoughtful reception in man's essence.⁷ If we articulate this reception as *legein* in the sense of "to let something be seen in the way in which it appears," we may speak of Being as phenomenological, a "circle" of meaningfulness in which the Being of beings "essences" or comes to presence only in, and as constitutive of, man's "essencing."

Moreover, this structure of meaningfulness is intrinsically temporal. We distinguish between "ordinary time" as Aristotle's "measurement of motion according to before and after" and aboriginal Time as the event of Being's emergence into the unhiddenness of man's essence, and its simultaneous self-withdrawal, as the very condition of the possibility of the appearance of beings. This event is a "movement" from concealment to unconcealment and back again — what the Greeks understood as *alētheia* ("truth"). Being as phenomenological is ruled by Time as unconcealment-concealment. Time is not man's measurement of sequential movement, but the "movement" of unconcealment measuring out man's essence.

In short, Greek thought, in grasping Being as temporo-phenomenological, grasps it as "kinetic-eidetic."⁸ Being as "kinetic" is the movement of unconcealment; Being as "eidetic" is the appearing of a being that appears (cf. *eidos*). Heidegger's "retrieve" is the effort at saying what remains unsaid in Aristotle, i.e., he reveals that the implicit presupposition of Aristotle's kinetic-eidetic phenomenology is that *withdrawal* predominates in kinetic emergence and that *hiddenness* rules in eidetic appearance. It is the retrieval of Time as the fundamental event that possibilizes Being.

2. Medieval philosophy, on the other hand, in adapting Plato and Aristotle to a religious problematic essentially foreign to them, failed to grasp the unsettled state in which the Greeks had left the question of Being and Time. Some aspects of the resultant "misunderstanding" can be isolated in certain Latin translations of Aristotle's philosophical lexicon.⁹

The apex of Greek thought is reached in Aristotle's thematization of Being as *energeia* in the sense of emergence into *ergon*.¹⁰ *Ergon* does not mean "work" as the effect of technical production, but rather that which has moved into the unhidden presence of its *eidos*. The Latin *actualitas*, however, reads the *ergon* of *energeia* as that which is effected by a working activity (i.e., as "the *opus* of an *operari*, the *factum* of a *facere*, the *actus* of an *agere*"¹¹). Heidegger sees here the ruination of Aristotle's phenomenology, with momentous consequences. Movement, if there is any in *actus*, is reduced to divine causality under the pressure

of religious faith in God's making of the world, and God himself is designated as Pure Act. Aquinas' rereading of *energeia* is rooted in his Christian theology. But in choosing to read the God of his theology in philosophical terms as the supreme instance of an "existentially" transformed Aristotelian *energeia*, Aquinas carries over and compounds the very problem of *energeia*. Pace Gilson, the problem of *energeia* is not that it was a de-existentialized "form,"¹² but that it left unsaid the dimension of emergence from and return into hiddenness. Aquinas' "Being itself" as the actuality of all things does not, and indeed cannot, account for what Being originally is prior to its differentiation into thatness and whatness, except by further appeals to actuality in the form of God as Pure Act.¹³ The unsaid in Aristotle's *energeia* (viz., that the meaning of Being is Time) is unheard in Aquinas' *actus*. Hence, all attempts to rescue Aquinas from Heidegger's charge of the "forgottenness of Being" by demonstrating the primacy of the act of existence in the Angelic Doctor do not even touch Heidegger's charge — in fact they prove it.

Likewise, the translations of *hypokeimenon* as *subjectum* and of *ousia* as *substantia* lose the kinetic-eidetic dimension of the Greek. For Aristotle, beings come into presence and lie forth in the open (*ousia=hypokeimenon*). But the rendering of *hypokeimenon* as *subjectum*, while literally correct, casts presence-by-movement into shadow in favor of an "underlying stability" as a ground or basis to which "accidents" can befall. Thus too, the connotations of emergence and appearance that hovered around the Greek word for "accident" (*symbebēkoton*: "that which has moved into position along with . . .") are lost. The resonance of Time as the meaning of Being, which in Aristotle was only a fragile echo faintly heard, is here effectively silenced.¹⁴

3. Aquinas' metaphysics, like Aristotle's, is onto-theological in structure. To be sure, this does not mean that Aquinas' metaphysics is two sciences, ontology and natural theology. It knows only the supreme instance of Being and its participation by finite beings. Metaphysics is one science: onto-theology.¹⁵ But in Aquinas it is "theological" to a second degree insofar as it is guided by faith. This constitutes a radical transformation of the Aristotelian problematic. Heidegger, led by the "unsaid"

in Aristotle, follows *energeia* "backwards," as it were, to its roots in Time and ultimately in Being's mysterious self-hiding as the possibility of all meaning — and this always within phenomenology. Aquinas, led by the "said" of divine revelation, developed Aristotle's *energeia* "forward" out of the finitude of the phenomenological into the infinitude of the noumenal and eternal. For Heidegger, the hiddenness of Being is intrinsic to Being itself. For Aquinas the philosopher who, as theologian, also knows the promise of the beatific vision, whatever hiddenness there is in God as supreme act of Being, omnipresent in blinding luminosity, is due to the defects of man's intellect whether on earth or in heaven.¹⁶ The theologian already knows what lies beyond the limits of unaided philosophy. It's not that the left hand does not know what the right hand does, so much as that the right arm is longer and has already grasped the goal, leaving the left to put the pieces together in reasonable order.

Can this be credited as philosophy at all? Certainly philosophy in Aquinas deals only with what is knowable by reason, but reason is tutored, corrected and preceded by faith. Thus Heidegger: "Anyone for whom the Bible is divine revelation and truth has the answer to the question, 'Why are there beings rather than nothing?' even before it is asked: everything that is, except God himself, has been created by Him. God himself 'is' as the uncreated creator. Whoever stands on the ground of such faith can, in a way, participate in the asking of our question, but he cannot really question without relinquishing his status as a believer and taking all the consequences of such a step. He will only be able to act 'as if' . . ."¹⁷

Medieval philosophy: a trivializing? a process of deformation and decay? a disaster?¹⁸ To be sure, Heidegger seems to be "an unloving judge of Scholastic metaphysics."¹⁹ Yet he insists that a quarrel between thinkers is always a lovers' quarrel for the issue at stake.²⁰ Hence: "It would be foolish to say that the medieval theologians misunderstood Aristotle; rather, they understood him differently, corresponding to the different way in which Being sent itself to them."²¹ But there may be just a touch of irony in that irenicism. Heidegger is fond of reminding Christian philosophers and theologians of St. Paul's diatribe against

philosophy (I Cor. 1:20-22).²² And there are hints that he believes that the "path not taken" by medieval thought was the one blazed by its mystics.²³

Footnotes

Note: In referring to Heidegger's works I follow the standard abbreviations set down in William J. Richardson's *Heidegger* (1963). I cite first the German pagination and then, in parentheses, the corresponding pages in existing English translations, most of which are listed in Sass, *Heidegger Bibliographie* (1968). "WEG" abbreviates *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt, 1967).

¹ N II 415 (14f.), Stambaugh's translation (cf. note 3) revised. On the positive sense of "destruction," cf. SZ 22f. (44); WP 8 (33f.), 22 (71f.); US 109 (20), 131 (36); KM 185 (211); WEG 244f. (93).

² Cf. J.B. Lotz, "Das Sein selbst und das subsistierende Sein nach Thomas von Aquin," in G. Neske, ed., *Martin Heidegger zum seibzigsten Geburtstag* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959), pp. 180-194; more recently, John N. Deely, *The Tradition via Heidegger* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971); John P. Doyle, "Heidegger and Scholastic Metaphysics," *The Modern Schoolman*, 49 (1972), 201-220. On the reduction of essence to *esse*: K. Rahner, *Geist in Welt* (Munich: Kösel, 1957²), pp. 166-172, English translation, *Spirit in the World* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), pp. 156-162.

³ The chief sources for what follows are Heidegger's "Vom Wesen und Begriff der *Physis*, Aristotle's *Physik* B, 1," WEG 309-371 (translation by Thomas J. Sheehan forthcoming) and "Metaphysik als Geschichte des Seins," N II 339-457, trans., Joan Stambaugh in Martin Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), pp. 1-54.

⁴ WEG 312; cf. HW 298f. Compare W.D. Ross, *Aristotle* (London: Methuen, 1949²), p. 157.

⁵ Cf. KM 16f. (10-12). *Physis* originally meant Being as inclusive of both technical artifacts and natural things, but by the time of Aristotle it is generally confined to the Being of natural things (although the original sense perdures in *Meta. G.* 1, 1003^a 27: *physeōs tinos*). Cf. EM 12 (13); VA 19, 49; WEG 369f.

⁶ EM 54 (59), 77 (85).

⁷ EM 106 (117): ("... geschieht notwendig mit Erscheinung auch Vernehmen"); cf. also EM 11 (12); SZ 183 (228).

⁸ These terms are mine, not Heidegger's — but faithful to his meaning insofar as he maintains that Aristotle understood Being in terms of *kinēsis* and *stasis* (N II 404 [5]), the latter understood equally as *eidōs*, *telos* and *peras*. Our use of "eidetic" has nothing in common with Husserl's. Cf. EM 75-88 (83-97) and Oskar Becker, "Mathematische Existenz: Untersuchungen zur Logik und Ontologie mathematischer Phänomene," *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, 8 (1927), pp. 621 f.

⁹ For the following two paragraphs, cf. N II 410-420, 429-436 (10-19, 26-32).

¹⁰ Cf. *Meta.* TH, 8, 1049 b 5. Cf. WEG 352, 356; N I 77 f.; EM 48 (50).

¹¹ N II 412 (12).

¹² *Energeia* is Being. Cf. N II 407f. (8). Cf. *Nich. Ethics* I, 7, 1168^a 5f. (*einai; esmen d' energeiai*), K, 4, 1175^a 11 f. (*zōē energeia tis*).

¹³ N II 402 (3).

¹⁴ At best the problematic of Time shows up in medieval salvation history. Cf. N II 133.

¹⁵ Cf. ID 31-67 (42-74).

¹⁶ Cf. *Scriptum in Libros Sententiarum*, I, 8, 1, 1, ad 4 (in quadam tenebra ignorantiae; statum viae; quadam caligo, in qua Deus habitare dicitur). Cf. SG 112-114.

¹⁷ EM 5 (6), Manheim's translation amended. Cf. N II 132f.; FD 76 (98); SZ 49 (74).

¹⁸ SZ 2 (21): (trivialisiert); EM 11 (11): (Verunstaltung, Verfall); EM 6 (6): (verderbliche); cf. also footnote 1. It should be noted that these terms apply more generally than just to medieval philosophy.

¹⁹ Doyle, art. cit., p. 201.

²⁰ WEG (HB) 167 (285). Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 850=B 878 (N.K. Smith, p. 664).

²¹ SG 136.

²² WEG (WM:Ein) 208 (216); EM 6 (6).

²³ Cf. *Frühe Schriften* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1972), pp. 147 and 344, n.; 357; also SG 71; G 34 (61); *Der Feldweg in Listening*, 8 (1973), 34 (35).