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Escaping “Oblivion”: Rethinking Heidegger's Challenge through the Metaphysics of St.
Thomas Aquinas

by

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Abstract

The later Heidegger came to the conclusion that the history of philosophy is defined in terms of “oblivion” of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*). For the later Heidegger, since the history of philosophy is defined by “oblivion,” metaphysics must be “overcome.” For Heidegger, the history of metaphysics is defined by the history of answering and framing the question of Being. According to the notion of “oblivion,” the history of philosophy is a history of forgetting how to adequately pose the question of Being. The purpose of this thesis is to put to test the later Heidegger's claims of “oblivion” and “overcoming” through a confrontation with the metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas. The point is to zoom in on the scholastic epoch, an important point in the history of philosophy, for Heidegger, using Thomas as paradigmatic, in order to come to grips with where Heidegger's critique holds and where it does not.

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Textual Abbreviations

Works by Aquinas:

Commentary on Boethius's De Trinitate = CBT

The Disputed Questions on Truth = De Veritate

Questions on the Soul = QDA

Summa Contra Gentiles = SCG

Works by Heidegger:

Being and Time = BT

Being and Truth = BTR

Basic Problems of Phenomenology = BP

Identity and Difference = ID

On Time and Being = OTB

Introduction

“Many a revival confirms the irreproducibility of the past.”¹

The seven hundred year gap that separates the philosophies of St. Thomas Aquinas and Martin Heidegger covers the “medieval” or scholastic period to the modern, technological era of thought. Thomas's quill struck the parchment in an era when the Christian Latin West was firmly instilled with the capacity to see the world as created and determined by God. However, what is of interest to me is the notion that, for Thomas, though the world is imbued with God through and through, God is nonetheless not presupposed in order to establish his metaphysics. Heidegger, on the other hand, who philosophized at the culmination of World War Two, in the effervescence of unprecedented technologization which gave the Second World War a preternatural bloodiness, and in a post-Nietzschean world where God was proclaimed dead, saw the world through a vastly different lens. The question, which unites and separates the two philosophers, is the question of Being, the question of existence as such, as it relates to the human being. This question has, since the awakening of human thought, been a perennial, perhaps *the* perennial question. In this sense, as Aristotle pointed out so long ago, the question of Being is “the question which was raised of old and is raised now and always, and is always the subject of doubt.”² As such, it is no wonder as to why, when it comes to metaphysics, Aristotle—“the philosopher”, according to Thomas—can be read today and provoke the same amount of puzzlement as it did in Aquinas's era. The question of Being strikes to the core of human existence. Perhaps it is concomitant with the emergence of consciousness. Therefore, despite

¹ Gouris, Wouter. *The Scattered Field: History of Metaphysics in the Postmetaphysical Era* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), pg. 7.

² “Metaphysics,” in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Ed. Richard McKeon, trans. W. D Ross (New York: Random House, 2001), Book VII, Ch. 1, 1028b.

time and place, the question of Being re-emerges again and again. In this manner, the question has a certain enigmatic and ahistorical quality, not in the sense that the formation of the question and the answer(s) given to it aren't influenced by one's historical setting, but in the sense that the very emergence and impetus of the question arises again and again, “now and always,” despite one's epoch or circumstance. So long as human beings remain finite and are “here” and “now”, in-the-world, the question and wonderment about *this* existence remains.

It must be said right away that the aim of this thesis is not to simply chart out areas of convergence and divergence between Thomas and Heidegger. As Caputo put it in *Heidegger and Aquinas*, “A 'confrontation' which does no more than draw up a catalogue of common traits and points of difference is no more than a curiosity, an idle comparison which bears no fruit.”³ Like Caputo, we must go after the fruit, and it lies in the very underpinnings of the possibility of metaphysics as such; it lies in the difference between what prompts Aquinas to announce ground and Heidegger *Abgrund*. Herein lies the very possibility of achieving metaphysical certainty, indeed the very possibility of metaphysics at all. The ground on which metaphysics, for Aquinas, stands is, in Heidegger's mind, not a ground at all, but a carpet that has been pulled from our feet. If our relation to existence, to Being, is inherently groundless, metaphysics, as a science attempting to find and establish ground, is all for naught. This is the fulcrum on which I want to hinge the entirety of this essay. Therefore, what needs to be addressed is the following: how, through their respective philosophies, both hinging on the question of Being, does Aquinas establish ground, and Heidegger establish groundlessness and what does this entail?

³ John D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), pg. 1.

The molding according to which this “con-frontation”⁴ is going to be worked out is the later Heidegger's critique of the history of metaphysics as “oblivion” or forgetfulness of Being, *Seinsvergessenheit*. It is important to come to grips with the full implications of the later Heidegger's critique by elucidating its thrust so that Thomas's metaphysics can be placed within its scope. I believe this can only be achieved by coming to grips with the manner in which Heidegger reached the position of his later thought. This is the purpose of the first chapter. The aim is to shed light on the manner in which Heidegger came to the conviction that the history of metaphysics is a history of forgetfulness by showcasing important transitions in key areas of his thought so as to decode and clarify the radicality of his position. We will then be in a position to expound Thomas's metaphysics. This is the purpose of chapter two. Thomas's metaphysics will be examined by briefly sketching the background of his thought, and then by tracing the method by which Thomas arrives at the subject of metaphysics. Once this is accomplished it will be easier for us to place Thomas's metaphysics within the sights of Heidegger's critique. Chapter three will then consist of applying the thrust of Heidegger's critique to Thomas's metaphysics. The purpose of this investigation is to come to a clear position with respect to the claim of “oblivion” and, by applying this claim to a developed understanding of Thomistic metaphysics, decipher whether and in what manner Thomas's metaphysics could be said to be a product of oblivion.

⁴ For Heidegger, as pronounced in *Being and Truth*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), the term “con-frontation” bears an importance. *Aus-einander-setzung*, meaning, literally, “setting out and apart from one another.” Heidegger suggests that “con-frontation” is, “Not a formal refutation, demonstration of mere incorrect points, but *scission*—and that only on the basis of decision. *Decision* only as engagement in Dasein: the decision for” (BTR, pg. 62). Heidegger wants to show that any con-frontation should yield something. Not, as it were, a new list of facts to remember, but it should spark a change from within, a change that stems from an authentic engagement through the model of con-frontation. In this manner, we are not confronting Heidegger and Aquinas, but ourselves against their thought so that we can come to terms with our own understanding of metaphysics here and now.

The motivation for this investigation is twofold. On the one hand, for it to stay valid, Thomistic metaphysics must engage in contemporary debate. Heidegger's critique, therefore, must be taken seriously, rather than dismissed off-hand, without an understanding of its full implications. On the other hand, it is important for Heideggerians to have a knowledge of the shape that scholastic metaphysics took, from first-hand sources, so that Heidegger's critique can be interpreted correctly, rather than simply parroting the critique itself without a comprehension of its intended targets. Heidegger's critique is large-scale insofar as it is aimed at the entirety of the history of philosophy. In this sense, Heidegger's critique is, as it were, zoomed out; it is macro in its approach. What this project aims to do is zoom in. By holding up the details of Thomas's metaphysics in the light of Heidegger's critique, the idea is to both come to a fuller understanding of the nature of the critique itself, as well as to see how it holds up when it is zoomed in on one of its intended targets.

Aquinas and Heidegger are both philosophers of Being par excellence. In their respective manners, each cast unparalleled light upon the possibility and task of metaphysics. However, to say that metaphysics or raising the question of Being is what brings Heidegger and Aquinas together is too simple. Bringing two philosophers into confrontation under this guise is too obvious. Any two metaphysicians in the history of philosophy could be said to converge on this point. It is not simply the question of Being as such that unites Heidegger and Aquinas, but their orientation to the question of Being and the manner in which the question comes to be raised. The casting of the question of Being leads them into different directions and to vastly different conclusions, but they share a similar understanding of the place where the question itself emerges. It is the starting point, the mortal human being, situated in-the-world, amongst and as part of the

dunamis that surrounds it, faced with the question of the meaning of this existential placement.

The human being must raise the question of Being by beginning within the chaotic and enigmatic world from which, from the moment it opens its eyes, it cannot be disentangled.

For both Heidegger and Aquinas, Being is inextricably linked to the human being⁵ in a pre-reflective unity. We must always, insofar as we exist, have an intuitive knowledge of Being. In this way we are intertwined with Being through the fact of our existence. This is what is meant by “unity”. Our intuitive, pre-reflective understanding of Being forms an underpinning for any epistemic consideration of objective reality as such. For any act of understanding, a pre-reflective union with Being must precede. For both philosophers, the task of metaphysics, whether this is deemed possible or not, is to make the implicit, intuitive and immediate understanding of Being explicit. Metaphysics must provide a passage from the sensuous world of objects from which we begin and navigate towards the Being of beings which underwrites our capacity to conceptualize objective reality as such.⁶

It must be said that the goal here is not to denounce one or the other, nor to reproduce or revive a feeling long past. The focus of this confrontation is an examination into the nature and possibility of metaphysics; this fulcrum—the problem of the possibility of metaphysics—is utilized, as noted, to bring to the fore the issue of “ground”, which lies at the heart of the problem. This is to say that metaphysics is more than just trivial speculation into the nature of “that which is,” but its acceptance or refusal indicates whether or not an accessible, existential or ontological

⁵ For the moment I use the term “human being” in place of Heidegger's “Dasein” and Aquinas's “soul”. I do this to avoid using terms like “mind” or “consciousness”. Heidegger, for good reason, avoided these terms, and Aquinas worked in a framework where such terms were of no significance.

⁶ In this sense, it goes without saying that both thinkers are realists. It makes no sense to doubt the outside world as objective. What concerns them both is tracing the capacity to discern objects in reality towards the horizon which makes this possible as such.

ground between the human being and existence or Being can be sought out and established.

From the beginning, then, metaphysics is given a difficult task. The impetus of metaphysics is to announce, in the clearest manner possible, the way towards ground. Its job is to clear a path, as it were, for the rational mind to come to grips with existence.

Thomas presents an articulate answer to the question of Being by providing us with a rational path towards our most basic intellectual unity with Being. By pointing a way towards this unity, Thomas elucidates a “stop” in the order of rational explanation, showcasing a point where the rational finds its terminus in our immediate intellectual unity with Being; the same pre-reflective unity which provides rationality with its foundation in the first place. What he points us towards is a foundation which is all at once ontological and epistemological. Our intellect is linked existentially with Being and this provides the foundation and source of veridity for all judgments and reasoning as well as the terminus in which all reasoning finds its resolve. There is an inherent circularity or, if we impose anachronistic language onto Thomas, a hermeneutic, which cannot be escaped. Reason rests on a foundation which is also its terminus, that is, the pre-reflective unity with Being, which provides us access to the objective world in the first place.

For both Heidegger and Aquinas, the question of Being points back to us, the questioner who poses the question. For Aquinas, the question of Being is grounded in the intellectual soul. For Heidegger, the question of Being is housed in Dasein as the site of the question of Being. For both Aquinas and Heidegger, though their language differs greatly, the question of Being is always traced back to the human being. The turn towards the questioner who has Being as an issue differs vastly for Aquinas and Heidegger and leads to a different inquiry. Thomas's inquiry,

in modern language, is cognitive; it seeks to follow the path of understanding by beginning with the apprehension of the sensible world and ending in existential judgments. The manner in which Heidegger casts the question of Being motivates him to remain at the level of the ontological. Hence his examination of the questioner is led by his famous “existential analytic” of Dasein. By this he attempts to come to grips with, not specifically the manner in which thought gains knowledge, but the ontological constitution of the being that is Dasein. In other words, Heidegger is concerned to explicate existential a prioris—'existentialia'—that are essential to Dasein's being. He feels that this must be done if we are ever to thematize Being explicitly. We have to thematize Being by looking to *who* Dasein is, not *what* Dasein is. The early Heidegger feels that thematizing Being explicitly is possible. The impetus to thematize Being through existentially analyzing Dasein guides the whole structure of *Being and Time* as well as its extension and follow-up, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*.

Metaphysics, insofar as it seeks to establish and articulate ground, is a science which, for good reason, has been held close to not only Western philosophy, but Western humanity. In establishing ground, it establishes a sense of security in the face of existence. It gives the human being a sense of home by reassuring it of its place in the cosmos. In this vein, it is clear as to why Heidegger's denial of the metaphysical goal of achieving ground, is a cause for disconcertment. If we deny metaphysics the power to point the way towards ground, we admit to an essential groundlessness. This is, in effect, what Heidegger means when he suggests that Dasein is ontologically characterized by an essential “uncanniness” which is indicative of “unhomeliness.”⁷ There is an essential anxiety which is concomitant with our existence and it points towards the fact that we are not at home in the world; our feet never were attached to any

⁷ *Being and Time*, Trans. John Maquarrie & Edward Robinson (New York:Harper & Row, 1962), pg. 233.

firm ground. What we want to feel is the security of knowing we are in the shallow end of the pool, needing only to push our feet to the bottom in order to feel safety, when we are rather floating in the vastness of an ocean without a conceivable floor—in truth, an abyss. What we thought was a foundation is rather a contrived act of self-assurance which metaphysics has handed down historically, and rather dogmatically. An anxiety provoking confrontation with groundlessness is part and parcel of the risk one runs when one pronounces metaphysics deficient. In so doing, one has to confront our bindedness to Being as an inaccessible abyss, separating us from the goal of metaphysics. For Heidegger, what is needed is strength in the face of the question so as to remain within its perpetual circularity. It is not that nothing is accomplished through the question of Being, but rather that the question itself leads us into a vortex which brings to the fore our uncanniness.

In Heidegger's mind, the entirety of the history of philosophy is an attempt to establish ground by providing an answer to the question of Being. The problem is that these answers have never been scrutinized historically, but rather accepted without resistance. The status of metaphysics is burdened by a series of dogmatic presuppositions that have blinded us to the true nature of the question of Being, not only blurring its significance, but “sanction[ing] its complete neglect.”⁸ In this vein, what Heidegger calls *Destruktion* is a necessary component of his methodology when raising the question of Being. To *destrukt* the history of the question of Being is not to destroy or dismantle a text but to sift through it, taking it apart in search for, not only the answer it gives to the question of Being, but the source from which this answer stems so that the trace can be followed backwards to its source. The process is that of an uprooting. *Destruktion* forms a key aspect of the early to middle Heidegger's thought and its impetus—that of getting to

⁸ BT, pg. 21.

the source by way of an essential questioning of the history of the question of Being—never wholly disappears in his later thought, but rather gets transformed. By following the method of *Destruktion* through, Heidegger comes to the conclusion that the history of metaphysics is a history of forgetfulness. As such, the history of Western metaphysics has been plagued by a longing for the ground of existence, a ground which, for Heidegger, does not give itself in an objective manner because Being is that which makes objectivity—that which is given as such—accessible in the first place. Rather, what needs to be thought, for Heidegger, is the “event” or *Ereignis*; the sending of the 'dif-ference,' where beings—that which is sent—are set apart from Being, that is, are 'unconcealed' and made accessible. Therefore, our relationship to Being is one which can never give itself objectively. In our grasping of objects, that which “sends” or gives the sent over, is covered over in the very movement of grasping. The rug, as it were, is perpetually pulled out from our feet.

Through the search for ground, Western metaphysics has covered over the difference between beings and Being in such a manner that that Being became unthinkable as that which is concealed, covered over or withdrawn. At every point throughout the tradition, Being has been reduced to something entitative, to some being or other, thereby masking over and skewing the capacity to recognize the “event” and think the difference between Being and beings as difference.

For Heidegger, then, Thomas's metaphysics is part of the forgetfulness which defines the history of Western philosophy. However, Heidegger's assessment of Thomas's epoch hinges on a very stringent historical interpretation—the “history of Being”—which polarizes the history of Western ideas along an axis that obliterates the importance of certain ideas. As Philippe Lacoue-

Labarthe puts it in the documentary *The Ister*, for Heidegger, “History passes through the great axis, dare I say it, of Greece and Germany, as a battle against Rome, and voila: that's Europe.”⁹ In short, because of Heidegger's assertion that the history of Western philosophy is a history of forgetfulness that moves slowly away from the Greek origin, the progression of metaphysics is actually a decadence, a programmatic which, built into its inner structure, carries Western Dasein further and further away from the experience of *Ereignis*, of Being as a sending, where Dasein was not caught up or taken in by what is sent. To put it abruptly, Lacoue-Labarthe is suggesting that, for Heidegger, some history does not make history; it is rendered insignificant because of the polarized lens through which Heidegger understands the history of Being.

In Heidegger's later thought, Thomas's scholastic epoch represents a more violent Roman take-over of the Greek interpretation of Being than in his earlier opinion, which casted the scholastic interpretation of Being as more of an extension of Aristotelian and Platonic thought. The earlier Heidegger is not as critical of the Platonic rendering of Being in terms of *eidos* and the Aristotelian notion of Being in terms of *energeia*. He sees these renderings as closer to the original Greek experience of Being as simple presencing than in his later thought, which demotes their philosophies to a fateful seal with respect to metaphysics as a forgetfulness. Thus, in this respect, Thomas's epoch represents a movement two times removed from the original Greek experience of Being. In his later thought, Heidegger positions himself firmly against the tradition of metaphysics, for it is the impetus of metaphysics that carries the rogue of “forgetfulness”. Therefore, it is the later Heidegger's position which demands our attention because it is here that his most potent critique of Thomas's metaphysics resides.

⁹ See David Barison and Daniel Ross's *The Ister: The Movie*, DVD (Brooklyn:Black Box Sound and Image, 2004).

As Maritain once declared, “I am not a paleo-Thomist.”¹⁰ Digging up Thomas's positions in order to fashion them in a way that would re-instill a sense of security in the face of Heidegger's critique of metaphysics is not the goal. Rather, what I want to seek out is whether or not Thomas's metaphysics can be said to evade elements of Heidegger's critique. I think it does, and this requires that we read Heidegger's critique of the history of philosophy with a more critical eye. At the same time, Heidegger's critique forces us to take it seriously, and this means that from a Thomistic point of view, we must attempt to interpret its thrust. We must come to a clear understanding of where and in what sense the critique has grip and, likewise, where it does not.

¹⁰ Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantiere and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Image Books, 1957), pg. 11-12.

Chapter 1:

Oblivion and Overcoming: Understanding Heidegger's Interpretation of the History of Philosophy

“I am incapable of determining ultimate worth or worthlessness; I have no judgment about myself and my life. There is nothing I am quite sure about. I have no definite convictions - not about anything, really. I know only that I was born and exist, and it seems to me that I have been carried along. I exist on the foundation of something I do not know.”¹¹

Thomas might agree with Jung and Heidegger in that we are endowed with no natural capacity for a full knowledge of the foundation that stands behind and comprises our inextricable link with existence. However, what he would not concede is the idea that the unification with Being, which defines us and underwrites all acts of consciousness, is not a foundation in the sense of providing a home for metaphysics. Heidegger's claim would be that Thomas can believe that our inextricable unity with Being suffices for metaphysical certainty because he does not think Being as a sending, but is rather caught up in what is sent. That is, Thomas considers Being in terms of what is granted, in terms of what is ontic, accessible as object to thought. Being becomes the collection of what is common to objectivity, while the notion of *aletheia* or unconcealing is disregarded because what is held back, the sending itself, cannot be thought. The notion of *ens commune* merely encapsulates the sent while the sending itself falls on deaf ears. For Heidegger, the Greek, pre-Socratic ear was attuned to the splendor of the sending. The history of metaphysics is a history of closing ourselves off to this attunement and attempting to find refuge in what is sent. This is why, for Heidegger, metaphysics is always in the business of thinking Being in terms of beings. In this respect, for Heidegger, Thomas is a typical figure in the

¹¹ C.G. Jung, near the end of his life, from his book published with associate Aniela Jaffé: *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Random House, 1989).

history of metaphysics. Thomas's metaphysics is indicative of a certain pattern of attempting to ground Being objectively; to think Being according to beings and in so doing, hide the concealing of Being in its sending.

The entirety of Heidegger's critical thrust thus stems from a faith in an “origin”, an opening wherein the purity of Being was merely attuned to, received as a sending without an attempt to ground it. Heidegger thus clings to a “purity” which was lost in the Roman take-over of the Greek world. Thomas, for Heidegger, and the whole of scholastic philosophy with him, falls into this category. The scholastics prepared the way for the modern metaphysics of technology by preparing the soil from which Descartes would claim the certainty of the *ego cogito*.

Heidegger developed two pivotal criticisms of scholastic philosophy. The first is established most thoroughly in 1927 with the publication of *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*; the second is established in 1941 with the development of his *Nietzsche Lectures*. They both focus on the scholastic distinction between *essentia* (the what or quiddity of a thing) and *existentia* (the that) as the dominant framework of scholastic philosophy, resulting from the Roman take-over of the Greek interpretation of Being. Being, according to Heidegger, for the scholastics, in accordance with the *essentia/existentia* distinction, is *actualitas*. Being as presence is understood as factual presence, as what is presented and grasped as such. The early Heidegger saw this characterization of Being as adequate when it comes to intraworldly entities—objects that are graspable by us—but inadequate when it comes to ourselves. This is because, according to Heidegger, Dasein is not a “what” but a “who.” Therefore, Heidegger's early critique suggests that scholastic thinking is not altogether wrong, but inadequate when it

comes to analyzing ourselves. In 1941, however, when he formulates the notion of “oblivion,” Heidegger sees the *essentia/existentia* distinction as much more violent towards the question of Being. His criticism is thus more forceful. It is not just that the *essentia/existentia* distinction is inadequate with respect to understanding ourselves, but that it renders the Greek experience of Being completely inaccessible in that it is focused on reality as objective, rendering the capacity to experience Being as a presencing impossible. The Heidegger of 1941 sees the scholastic or Roman transposition of the question of Being as the mold according to which philosophy gains its official seal as an oblivion or “forgetfulness” of Being. The later Heidegger places much more emphasis on the primordially of the Greek interpretation of Being. All movement away from this is a further covering over of this origin. The history of metaphysics, for Heidegger, becomes a history of covering over.

In order to come to grips with Heidegger's charge that the history of Western philosophy is a history of “forgetfulness” or “oblivion,” we must first lay out the foundation of this claim by looking into the impetus behind it. It is because of the idea that metaphysics cannot help but to remain in “oblivion” that Heidegger suggests that it needs to be “overcome.” This is to say that metaphysics itself cannot, through any manipulation or application of itself whatsoever, cure its own ailment, which is its incapacity to think Being adequately. It can pose the question of Being, and must by its very nature do so, but because of its own infrastructure, metaphysics cannot come to terms with the question adequately. Metaphysics is a framework which, through its own infrastructure, is perpetually incapable of attaining its goal.

The notion of “overcoming metaphysics” and the related concept of “oblivion” or “forgetfulness of Being” are notoriously difficult to conceptually pin down. This is in part

because the concepts themselves are, for Heidegger, part of a long and often meandering process of inquiring into the question of Being and trying to align with the question rightly. The process is by necessity a moving one; its meandering leads Heidegger to change his mind many times and reiterate concepts differently so as to bring to light more accurately the problem which he attempts to get across.

The reason for this is that, at bottom, philosophy is, for Heidegger, always a questioning-into; philosophy begins with questioning. It is in raising the question, here and now, that philosophy comes to life. In turn, the question, if entered into adequately, clears a “path” for thinking. On the other side of this coin is the fact that, for Heidegger, the questioner’s unchecked presuppositions close off paths, disallowing the question to open up channels for thought to follow. This is why any path cannot be foreseen in advance but is the result of entering into the question. Nor can a path stay cleared once it has been traversed. The question must be reopened and a “path” once again cleared. The only constant in Heidegger's thinking is the question of Being itself. We cannot, especially in investigating his later thought, adopt any methodology or system and hold on to it as a constant. We cannot attempt to impose on the question a structure that would point towards an answer in advance. This type of prejudice will close us off in advance to the paths that thinking can follow.¹² However, this reasoning, which necessitates a lack of systematicity renders Heidegger's philosophy itself difficult to explicate.¹³

¹² Questioning for Dasein is easy. For Heidegger, our problem lies in a confusion with respect to what constitutes an answer. He gives a good indication of what constitutes an answer in *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, (New York: Harper & Row, 1972): “The questions are paths to an answer. If the answer could be given, the answer would constitute in a transformation of thinking, not in a propositional statement about a matter at stake” (OTB, pg. 55). An answer does not involve, as it were, a new set of facts to be remembered, but rather constitute a transformation in thinking itself.

¹³ It is typical in philosophy, when it comes to exegesis and explication, to focus on the gears and springs of a philosophical system. Heidegger's point, however, is that if we simply take over the gears and springs of a system we end up blind to the direction toward which these gears and springs point thought. For Heidegger, it is thought

To aim to shed light on Heideggerian concepts runs the risk opening up a labyrinth that can engulf the whole process into a tangled web of technical vocabulary, something Dominique Janicaud calls “Heideggeriana.”¹⁴ It is impossible to present the way in which Heidegger develops his terminology in a linear way. This is why, rather than hoping to find linearity and systematicity, this chapter aims at exposing the impetus behind the terminology by paying attention to the footsteps of Heidegger's thinking more so than the words in which this thinking is expressed.

1.1. The Question of Being

In order to shed light on what motivates Heidegger's intellectual movement towards the notions of the history of philosophy as an “oblivion” and thus the need for “overcoming metaphysics,” it is first necessary to come to grips with the manner in which Heidegger conceives of the importance of the question of Being.

To make this obvious, we need to take apart Heidegger's notion of what exactly constitutes the “question of Being” as well as what makes it so crucial, beginning with the importance of questioning as such. For Heidegger, as he clearly expresses in his 1933-34 lecture series *Being and Truth*, the “fundamental task” of philosophy is inexorably tied to the *act* of questioning. As he puts it:

Philosophy—that is the question of the law and structure of our being. We want to make philosophy actual by asking this question, and to open this question by asking the fundamental question of

that is essentially related to Being. Systems of philosophy, when taken over and for granted, hinder thought and thus hinder our capacity to approach the question of Being.

¹⁴ This is why one must not be overly taken in by the Heideggerian vocabulary. Explaining technical definitions will not grant us an entry into a hidden systematicity. This is a wrong-headed way of approaching Heidegger. Rather, what is important is to examine the impetus behind the vocabulary.

philosophy. We want to open this questioning here and now, that is, not to talk about questions but to act questioningly, and to dare the engagement by asking the fundamental question of philosophy.¹⁵

This statement suggests that, for Heidegger, philosophy must be actualized in and through the questioner, who must bring it to life “here and now.” The “fundamental task” of philosophy is therefore not to be disassociated with the “fundamental question.” We know, from the introduction to *Being and Time*, that the “fundamental question” is the question of Being itself. But what makes this question so fundamental? And why and how does it inaugurate philosophy? To answer these questions, we needn't look any further than ourselves, at this very moment. This is to say that the question of Being is enjoined to the one who poses the question, to the one who can meaningfully question as such. This is the human being, or in Heidegger's nomenclature, “Dasein.” Accordingly, philosophy is an endeavor closest to the essence of humanity. In other words, it springs from the simple fact that we are “here,” “now,” amidst beings with a prior and implicit understanding of Being.

1.2. Dasein's Relation to Being

Our relatedness to Being is what defines us. This should be clarified in the sense that the question of Being does not define us as a “what” but as a “who.” It is “who” we are that the question of Being is linked to. “Who” we are is indicative of how we relate to the question of Being. This is why Heidegger suggests that the question of Being can only be worked out through existing itself.¹⁶ In his lecture series titled *Logic as the Question Concerning the Essence of Language*, Heidegger states that, “Either we become worthy of the question to ourselves or we

¹⁵ BTR, pg. 4.

¹⁶ BT, pg, 67.

pass through it questionless, by closing our mind to it. The question thus has an entirely peculiar character.”¹⁷ The power of the question, or its peculiarity, lies in the fact that, through it, we gain contact with our essence. Our essence is related to our existence. By existence, Heidegger does not mean *existentia* in the scholastic sense. Rather, because existence is always harnessed to ourselves, existence is something that must be taken over; it must be projectively worked out. This means that Dasein has a meaningful relationship to existence, which tables and cups, though they too are united to existence, do not have. Existence is not a question for the ontic, but only the ontico-ontological entity that is Dasein. This means that, though we exist as objects, similarly to tables and chairs, we also have an ontological element; we cannot discount the fact that we must come to terms with our existence ourselves. Heidegger names this *Existenz* in contradistinction to *existentia*, emphasizing the difference between Dasein and the present-at-hand.

Similarly, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger suggests that this “relation” between Dasein and Being is the pivotal root of the question of Being, so much so that the question itself involves an inherent circularity. This is not a fallacious circularity, but an essential “relatedness” built into the structure of our existence. The question of Being reaches into this relatedness. Heidegger puts it in the following way:

In the question of the meaning of Being there is no 'circular' reasoning but rather a remarkable 'relatedness backward or forward' which what we are asking about (Being) bears to the inquiry itself as a mode of being of an entity. Here what is asked about has an essential pertinence to the inquiry itself, and this belongs to the ownmost meaning of the question of Being.¹⁸

¹⁷ *Logic as the Question Concerning the Essence of Language*, trans. Wanda Torres Gregor and Yvonne Unna (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), pg. 44.

¹⁸ BT, pg. 28.

To raise the question of Being already presupposes a relatedness to Being, such that, for Heidegger, the question of Being, the “fundamental question” and “task” of philosophy, is decided for us in advance in the sense that it perpetually precedes us.¹⁹ Therefore, the question of Being is a question of our essential relatedness to Being which always precedes an explicit formulation of the question itself.

That the question of Being is decided for us in advance implies that we are inextricably linked with Being in and through our existence. This is to say that insofar as Dasein makes sense of the world around it and structures this understanding in one way or another in a meaningful manner, Being is at issue for it. To put Being into question is to put Dasein into question, which is why, in *Being and Time*, raising the question of Being poses the necessity of an “existential analytic” of the being that is Dasein. This answers the question of what exactly makes Dasein ontologically distinct. Heidegger's idea here is to not raise the question of Being blindly. Once he formulates the fact the Dasein has Being as an issue for it, Dasein itself become the locus of ontological interrogation; Dasein becomes the pivot of “fundamental ontology.”

For Heidegger, the history of philosophy is unequivocally the history of metaphysics; it is our relatedness to Being and the manner by which we respond²⁰ to Being that defines our history. Metaphysics, that is, the history of humanity's relation to and interpretation of Being as the Being of beings, is the framework and lens through which we have understood ourselves in relation to Being from Plato to Nietzsche, to the present, technological era. As he puts it, “Philosophy is metaphysics. Metaphysics [must] think Being as a whole—the world, man, God—with respect to

¹⁹ BTR, pg. 4.

²⁰ Because the question of Being is decided for us in advance, we cannot help but to “respond.” There is no evading this, which is why Dasein cannot be defined as a “what.” “Who” Dasein is depends upon how Dasein responds to the fact that Dasein has Being as an issue in its very being. The notion of *Existenz* is an attempt to capture the fact that, “who” Dasein is, depends upon how Dasein responds to Being.

Being, with respect to the belonging together of beings in Being.”²¹ This statement suggests that, in Heidegger's view, metaphysics is not just another 'science' that we can choose to take up or not; rather, the human being—Dasein—the entity Heidegger literally defines as “being-there,” is, by its very nature, constituted in such a way that metaphysics is, in a sense, unavoidable. While this may seem paradoxical since it is metaphysics which Heidegger will eventually suggest needs to be overcome, we cannot simply brush metaphysics aside or decide that we simply wish no longer to think metaphysically. Heidegger states in the “Introduction to What is Metaphysics” that, “As long as man remains the *animale rationale*, he is the *animale metaphysicum*.”²² As usual, Heidegger's statement here is enigmatic. It can be understood in at least two ways, given the context of “overcoming.” First, it can mean that because human beings are always rational beings, who are in touch with Being through the mediation of “what” it is that can be understood, metaphysics is unavoidable. Second, it can mean that insofar as we define ourselves in terms of *animale rationale*, which is an attempt to pin down Dasein's essence in terms of a “what,” we cannot help but to remain trapped in the metaphysical framework because the question of “who” Dasein is gets clouded over. Thinking of Dasein in terms of “who” rather than “what” frees up the space to think Dasein's essential relation to Being adequately. What can be thought is the notion that objects are accessible as such insofar as Dasein is in the first place united to Being. Dasein's unity with Being opens up the space²³ for Dasein to grasp objects meaningfully.

Part of the reason why the history of philosophy is a history of forgetfulness is its incapacity to think the belonging-together of Dasein and Being adequately. Being and Dasein as

²¹ OTB, pg. 56.

²² “Introduction to What is Metaphysics?,” in *Pathmarks*, trans. William McNeill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pg. 277.

²³ This is not a manner of “physical space,” but rather the space for meaning, the ontological space by which beings can be understood meaningfully.

a belonging-together are differentiated through sameness because thinking and Being are always united. As Heidegger puts it, “Sameness implies the relation of “with”, that is, a mediation, a synthesis (Kant): the unification into a unity.”²⁴ This means that Dasein's relatedness to Being is what allows it to stand amidst the difference between Being and beings. Thinking Dasein's relatedness to Being adequately, therefore, allows us to recognize the ontological difference as such. The ontological difference is thus not the same as our intrinsic relatedness to Being. Rather, the ontological difference is opened up as a difference in and through our relatedness to Being. Metaphysics must, as a rule, recognize Being, but it does so while thoroughly absorbed within the ontological difference so that it cannot recognize it as a difference. This is why Heidegger states that, “Oblivion belongs intrinsically to difference.”²⁵ Through traditional metaphysics, Being and beings cannot be recognized as a *dif-fering*, held apart in an openness or clearing—a scission—where Dasein stands as an ontico-ontological entity. Heidegger guides us to think the belonging-together of Dasein and Being such that the difference between Being and beings can be thought of as a holding-together which is set apart as a scission, that is, as the opening or clearing in which Dasein stands. At this point, Heidegger claims that the ontological difference is no longer taken-for-granted as a difference, meaning that our absorption within the difference no longer hides itself as a difference. Of course, in a certain sense, we always live absorbed within the difference, but we are able to think it as a difference without being blind to it, which is why Heidegger's thought here, in his mind, is non-metaphysical.

²⁴ *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pg. 25.

²⁵ ID, pg. 16.

1.3. Where Metaphysics and Oblivion Meet

Working metaphysical doctrines—the specifically formulated attempts to grapple with Being—come into play when Western humanity attempts to express a logical understanding of the relationship between the fact that beings are (*existentia*) and the manner in which beings manifest themselves in their particularity (*essentia*). Heidegger states in the essay “Metaphysics as History of Being” that, “The history of Being as metaphysics begins with this distinction and its preparation.”²⁶ In this manner, for Heidegger, the scholastic distinction between the fact “that” a thing is and “what” it is marks a crucial point in the history of humanity's relationship with Being. As he puts it, “The division into whatness and thatness does not just contain a doctrine of metaphysical thinking. It points to an event in the history of Being.”²⁷ This “event”, for Heidegger, is a new manner in which Dasein experiences its world. It is most importantly an “event” which catalyzes the movement of “forgetfulness” because our essential unity with Being, which opens up the difference between Being and beings gets covered over. The scholastic distinction between essence and existence, therefore, concretizes the inability to recognize the ontological difference as such; Dasein becomes wholly absorbed within the difference itself.

For Heidegger, the difference between essence and existence defines the manner in which Being, as presence, gets understood. Presence itself gets subordinated to *what* it is that is presenced. In other words, Being gets understood as the Being of beings. In the difference between essence and existence, essence (the what) takes precedence over existence (the that). Being itself gets understood in terms of whatness such that it becomes a “what,” which grounds

²⁶ “Metaphysics as History of Being,” in *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pg. 2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

beings. The need to account for beings in terms Being forces metaphysics to turn Being into a thing that accounts for the ground of beings in general. In turn, existence is understood as factual presence, the specific manner of being of the present-at-hand. Therefore, metaphysics thinks Being in terms of *what* grounds the objective. Beings take the fore in metaphysics insofar as beings are understood in terms of what is in need of grounding. Being fits the role of the ultimate accountant for beings – the highest being which grounds beings. Understanding the *essentia/existentia* distinction and the manner in which it frames the thought of Being, for Heidegger, is crucial for coming to grips with his notion of forgetfulness. The *essentia/existentia* distinction is the crux of metaphysics in the sense that it brings the interpretation of Being into a specific relationship with beings. Because beings take a factual precedence in the understanding of Being, Being as that which does not give itself, but yet, through our essential relation to it, opens up the difference as such, cannot be thought. In the wedding of Being to beings, which the *essentia/existentia* distinction creates, Being is understood strictly in terms of what is presented, rather than a presencing which allows for the grasping of objects in terms of whatness and thatness.

According to Heidegger, once the distinction between *existentia* and *essentia* as a basic metaphysical presupposition is put into place, the distinction itself, for the history of Western philosophy, goes unquestioned. The opening of the distinction itself and the condition that allows thought to access reality in terms of whatness and thatness is left out. Reality, understood as factual presence through the unquestioned inheritance of the *essentia/existentia* distinction, becomes the framework upon which the history of metaphysics gets built: beings point to Being because Being becomes hinged to beings as their causal ground. In other words, presence,

interpreted factually, demands ground. The impetus, which defines the history of metaphysics and is built into the very infrastructure of metaphysics, is the tendency to view beings in terms of groundedness. Because metaphysics demands that the factual presence of beings be accounted for, metaphysics becomes by necessity, an account of factual presence in terms of Being.

The biggest problem with metaphysics as underwritten by the *essentia/existentia* distinction, for Heidegger, is that it covers over what opens up the distinction as such. In this manner, Heidegger poses the question, “What is it that still remains as “—is” if we disregard the what and the that?”²⁸ Heidegger means, what is it that allows for the distinction to be a working distinction for metaphysics? What opens up the distinction as such? For Heidegger, the *essentia/existentia* distinction “divided” the thought of Being; but, in this maneuver, metaphysics forgot the origin of the distinction as such. Metaphysics began to take for granted what makes the distinction possible. Heidegger states it in the following way: “The origin of the distinction of *essentia* and *existentia*, or more so the origin of Being thus divided, remains concealed, expressed in the Greek manner: forgotten.”²⁹ When Heidegger speaks of “the origin of Being thus divided,” he means that, in terms of the ontological difference, the scholastic distinction between essence and existence, is a distinction on the side of Being, not beings. The thought of Being itself is coupled to the notion of “what” and “that”. Scholastic metaphysics, in Heidegger's view, is an epoch of accountability; it is an epoch which demands that beings be accounted for by Being and Being itself be accounted for by God. Being grounds beings and Being itself is grounded in the highest being.

²⁸ “Metaphysics as History of Being,” pg. 3.

²⁹ Ibid.

The need to account for beings as grounded in Being and Being itself as grounded in the highest being, is what Heidegger calls the “onto-theo-logic” constitution of metaphysics. This is to say that metaphysics, because it demands accountability for the grounding of beings in Being, necessarily thinks theology and ontology together. By grounding beings in Being, Being itself is in need of ground. God is the ground upon which Being itself is the ground for beings.

Accordingly, for Heidegger, Thomistic metaphysics is defined by an onto-theo-logy. This, for Heidegger is a constant, not exclusive to Thomas, but can be found in any metaphysical framework.

Having worked out the manner in which the scholastic epoch is defined, for Heidegger, in terms of the *essentia/existentia* distinction and the fact that it is a framework which thinks Being as a ground for beings, brings us closer to a more concrete understanding of what is meant by “oblivion”. Attempting to define oblivion, Heidegger has this to say: “Oblivion of Being means: the self-concealing of the origin of Being divided into whatness and thatness in favor of Being which opens out beings as beings and remains unquestioned *as Being*.”³⁰ Accordingly, by “oblivion,” Heidegger means that Being itself is not thought as that which opens up the *difference* between beings and Being, but rather as that which grounds beings in their being from within the difference. The difference as such is not something that strikes metaphysics, but is always taken for granted. As Heidegger suggests, “The oblivion of Being is not something omitted in the history of philosophy, something left out. Metaphysics has asked the question of Being, but only to bring Being into a relationship with beings as their ground.”³¹ Oblivion, then, has two essential factors: 1. It is connected to the scholastic distinction between whatness and

³⁰ “Metaphysics as History of Being,” pg. 4.

³¹ ID, pg. 7.

thatness, which covers over the capacity to think the ontological difference as a difference which is opened in and through our essential relation with Being; 2. Oblivion is intrinsically related to the metaphysical need to ground beings in Being and Being in the highest being.

For Heidegger, we live in this shadow. We live in an epoch which must come to terms with the fact that Being has been forgotten, hidden through our own attempt to come to terms with Being through metaphysics. The motion to “overcome” metaphysics is a motion to think Being without the shadow of interpreting Being in terms of whatness and thatness hanging over us. Likewise, overcoming metaphysics also demands that we refrain from the attempt to make Being into a ground for beings. If we do this, we automatically turn Being into what we are trying to avoid; we turn it into an entitative ground, itself in need of grounding.

In sum, Heidegger's criticism of Scholastic philosophy is bound to his notion of “oblivion”. His criticism is essentially this: “what” and “that” things are does not constitute our primordial relationship with Being, but is the manner in which we relate to objects in and through our primordial relationship with Being. Metaphysics assumes that whatness and thatness are definitive of the whole ontological story. To fill in the story and give a full account of Being, metaphysics defines Being as the causal ground of beings. In order, then, to understand Being as a ground for beings, Being itself is grounded in the highest being, accounting for both presence itself as well as what is presenced. In other words, presence is the ground of what is presenced and presence as such is grounded in God. Insofar as this account of Being is definitive of metaphysics, in the same stroke, metaphysics is a history of oblivion. This is precisely because metaphysics, in accounting for Being as the ground of beings, is incapable of thinking Being in terms of that which allows for the opening of the difference between Being and beings.

Metaphysics as a history of relating to Being in terms of whatness and thatness, because it covers over our essential relation to Being, is a history of sedimentary layering. Each metaphysical epoch is a covering over of our relation to Being, making the history of metaphysics a progressive covering-over.

1.4. Falling and Historicity

One of the reasons for this sedimentary layering is the fact that, for Heidegger, Dasein, as a historical being is “thrown” into an epoch, that is, a place and time in which people within the epoch already interpret the world and their surroundings in a particular way. What is of importance here is the fact that, as Heidegger terms it, the “everyday” way of understanding the world, in any epoch, is underwritten by handed-down tradition.

In order for any Dasein to interact with others and make sense of their existential landscape, they must take over their “everyday” way of understanding themselves and the world. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger refers to this everyday way of understanding as mitigated by the “they”, a shared and public way of understanding oneself and one’s surroundings. The “they” implicates Dasein in a homogeneity of meaning and interpretation. It is a baseline of sorts, which acts as a constant reference point for understanding. Each “thrown” Dasein must start from here and remain here in the sense that, in order for Dasein to communicate meaningfully, it must take over the manner of understanding which belongs to the “they.”

“Falling” denotes the tendency or need for Dasein to rely on this mode of “being-in-the-world.” This is not to be taken pejoratively. Dasein is existentially constituted this way; “falling” into everyday conceptions without putting them to question is something we can avoid, but

removing oneself from the constituency of the “they” is impossible. As Heidegger puts it, “This everyday way in which things have been interpreted is one into which Dasein has grown in the first instance, *with never a possibility* of extrication.”³² As a historical being, Dasein inherits layers of meaning, intertwined with the “they” way of understanding.

The impetus behind the early Heidegger's fundamental ontology is this: if we relate to Being in a taken-for-granted manner, which Heidegger is convinced the history of metaphysics has, we inadvertently take our own being for granted as well. This is the movement of “falling,” the taking-for-granted of our own existence because of a blindness to the question of Being. As such, Heidegger's attempt to raise the question of Being attempts to steer itself both away from a “they” interpretation and in the same stroke a traditional metaphysical interpretation. Both are dogmatic and close off the potentiality to encounter Being authentically.

The forgetfulness of Being that is indicative of oblivion has a connection to the early Heidegger's notion of “falling”. Metaphysics, in a sense, has “falling”, and hence forgetfulness, built into its very structure. Outside of its most direct sense (making explicit Dasein's ontological constitution), what Heidegger's “fundamental ontology” allows us to come to grips with is the manner in which Dasein can easily be blinded to essential aspects of Dasein's own existence. In fact, the tendency to “fall” and the existential bindedness to the “they” mean that Dasein perpetually has to make the question of Being clear for itself. Dasein cannot rely on the “they” for this, nor can Dasein rely on the history that has been handed down to it.

³² BT, pg. 213.

1.5. The Necessity of *Destruktion*

With the development of “fundamental ontology” in *Being and Time* and *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* the movement towards the notion of “overcoming metaphysics” is already evident. From the early pages of *Being and Time* a skeptical eyebrow has been raised towards the tradition of metaphysics. Why is this so? To get a handle on this, it is necessary to come to grips with the motivation of Heidegger's project in *Being and Time* and arguably what remains his project throughout his philosophical career. To put it tersely, the driving force behind the question that is opened in *Being and Time* is prompted by an uneasiness with regards to the metaphysical tradition's wavering and myriad interpretations of and answers to the question of Being. For Heidegger, the simple fact that metaphysics has wavered so much throughout its history in this regard means that the question of Being as such has never been posed adequately.³³ It has already been shown that metaphysics, as a historically situated tradition becomes sedimented. In a sense, this buries the question of Being in prejudicial “dogmas” that mask over the significance of the question to the point where, not only have we lost touch with the question, but these presuppositions, as Heidegger states, render the question “superfluous,” “sanction[ing] its complete neglect.”³⁴ When we take up metaphysics blindly, therefore, we take over traditional and basic presuppositions. Doing so, from the outset of this endeavor, we pervert our innate capacity to put Being itself into question, and, likewise, we remain blind to our own essence. As Heidegger puts it, “The task of ontology is to explain Being itself and to make the

³³ BT, pg. 21.

³⁴ Ibid.

Being of entities stand out in full relief. And the method of ontology remains questionable in the highest degree as long as we merely consult those ontologies which have come down to us historically.”³⁵ In this manner, for Heidegger, a methodological tool is needed in order to, as it were, shake off the taken-for-granted “dogmas” of the tradition.

Heidegger's method, integrated into his “fundamental ontology,” aimed at achieving a blank slate is called *Destruktion*. By this he means not to demolish the tradition, but to take it apart with an eye for what has been taken for granted with regard to the question of Being.³⁶ Through *Destruktion*, Heidegger aims to unearth the sources of metaphysical presuppositions by following them to their root, from thinker to thinker until the origin is exposed. It is, however, of importance to note that later on, because of the connotations the word *Destruktion* carries, Heidegger will prefer to use *Abbau*.³⁷ He does this because he feels that the word *Destruktion* cannot be received properly. He suggests that, “One can scarcely exaggerate the grotesque way in which people proclaim my attempts at thinking to be a demolishing of metaphysics.”³⁸ Heidegger is saying that he is not out to destroy or demolish metaphysics. The idea is to excavate the sedimentary layers of the metaphysical tradition, sifting through arduously and carefully. The force behind the notion of *Destruktion* is most clearly laid out in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. He suggests in the early pages that:

The store of basic philosophical concepts derived from the philosophical tradition is still so influential today that this effect of tradition can hardly be overestimated. It is for this reason that all philosophical discussion, even the most radical attempts to begin

³⁵ BT, pg. 49.

³⁶ In other words, Heidegger reads the great figures of the history of philosophy both in terms of what was said as well as in terms of what was left unsaid.

³⁷ “On the Question of Being,” in *Pathmarks*, trans. William McNeill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pg. 315.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

all over again, is pervaded by traditional concepts and thus by traditional horizons and traditional angles of approach, which we cannot assume with unquestionable certainty to have arisen originally and genuinely from the domain of being and the constitution of being they claim to comprehend. It is for this reason that there necessarily belongs to the conceptual interpretation of being and its structures, that is, to the reductive construction of being, a *destruction*—a critical process in which the traditional concepts, which at first must necessarily be employed, are deconstructed down to the sources from which they were drawn. Only by means of this destruction can ontology fully assure itself in a phenomenological way of the genuine character of its concepts.³⁹

The idea is simple: in order to come to grips with how we stand in relation to the question of Being today and take hold of it for ourselves, we must understand the history of humanity's relation to the question. The history of metaphysics is the archaeological site and *Destruction* is the tool by which to follow the sedimentary layers of the history of metaphysics. *Destruction*, therefore, forms a crucial aspect of Heidegger's "fundamental ontology." As we have seen, the history of metaphysics is a layering of strata upon strata. However, it is in these strata that metaphysics keeps its jewels and with this passes down its own unquestioned presuppositions. Within the strata lies every epoch's interpretation of the meaning of Being. It is through the history of metaphysics that we find our bearings in terms of how the question has been approached and what we need to rid ourselves of today to raise it accurately.

1.6. From *Destruction* to Destiny of Being

The history of metaphysics remains crucial for Heidegger even after he, so-called, "turns" away from the method of his "fundamental ontology." From his later perspective, after 1941,

³⁹ *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pg. 23.

when he has explicitly formulated the notion of “overcoming metaphysics”, he suggests that the *Destruktion* “prepared the way” for the capacity to think the notion of “overcoming.”⁴⁰ His later work, especially as elucidated in his lecture *On Time and Being*, seems to suggest that the thought of Being cannot be prompted accurately through the notion of *Destruktion*. However, Heidegger suggests that it is only by thinking through the *Destruktion* of the history of metaphysics that one can come to, as he puts it, “anticipate” the need to think the “destiny of Being” itself.⁴¹

For Heidegger, then, like Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus*, the work of *Destruktion* and his earlier fundamental ontology act as a kind of scaffolding from which to gain a certain necessary vantage. In this sense the scaffolding is never useless; the vantage it allows is indispensable. In the later *On Time and Being*, Heidegger points out that the notion of *Destruktion* allows us to see the epochs of Being's sending. This is how he puts it:

Only the gradual removal of these obscuring covers—that is what is meant by dismantling [destruktion]—procures for thinking a preliminary insight into what then reveals itself as the [sending] of Being. Because one everywhere represents the [sending] of Being only as a history, and history only as a kind of occurrence, one tries in vein to interpret this occurrence in terms of what was said in *Being and Time* about the historicity of man (Dasein) (not of Being). By contrast, the only possible way to anticipate the latter thought on the [sending] of Being from the perspective of *Being and Time* is to think what was presented in *Being and Time* about the *destruktion* of the ontological doctrine of Being of beings.⁴²

⁴⁰ “Introduction to ‘What is Metaphysics?’” in *Pathmarks*, trans. William McNeill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pg. 279.

⁴¹ OTB, pg. 9.

⁴² OTB, pg. 9.

By sifting through the history of metaphysics, for the later Heidegger, we attain an insight into the history of Being as “sending”; the above mentioned strata become indicative of the nature of these epochs where Being holds itself back from thought.

Being gives itself through beings but does not and cannot, in this unconcealing of beings, give itself over as a being itself. Being has to remain concealed from thought in order for what is unconcealed to show itself. Being can only give itself up as a concealing through what is unconcealed. In this manner, Being can only be named as what Heidegger calls the “nothing”⁴³ because it is no-thing accessible to thought, but is the concealing behind what is unconcealed. The interplay of concealing and unconcealing is what Heidegger terms “sending.” Being is a sending which sends forth what is sent into the opening, accessible to thought, but holds itself back in the process. The point is to think Being as a non-causal giving, which remains behind, while what is gifted is unconcealed. Thus Heidegger states that sending is a “giving which gives only its gift, but in the giving holds itself back and withdraws.”⁴⁴ Heidegger thinks Being as the granting of the scission, the difference or *Unter-Schied* between Being and beings in which we always find ourselves. In this manner, the later Heidegger goes so far as to denounce the word “Being” as inadequate in the sense that it cannot express what he attempts to think. “Being” is too burdened by the history of metaphysics; it belongs to metaphysics. Heidegger's concern becomes focused on that which opens up the difference between Being and beings as such, and in this sense, the real concern is not the “Being” of metaphysics, but that which grants Being as the central subject of metaphysics. Being becomes, for Heidegger, “sending”.

⁴³ “What is Metaphysics?,” in *Pathmarks*, trans. William McNeill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pg. 94.

⁴⁴ OTB, pg. 8.

Metaphysics has always been after what by its very essence cannot be caught up with by thought; the “Origin” itself as the opening of Being and beings to thought. What needs to be worked out for Heidegger, and what becomes the focus of his philosophy, is the “event of appropriation” or *Ereignis*, where sending is attested to and the difference between Being and beings is granted to thought. Defining *Ereignis*, Heidegger states that, “The event of appropriation is that realm, vibrating within itself, through which man and Being reach each other in their nature, achieve their active nature by losing those qualities with which metaphysics has endowed them.”⁴⁵ In other words, *Ereignis* allows us to recognize the ontological difference as a difference without metaphysically taking it for granted. Not only do we cease to be blind to the difference as such, but *Ereignis* allows us to consider Being in a non-causal way, that is, as a sending which is not a grounding of beings, but a “giving” or a “letting.”⁴⁶

The recognition of *Ereignis*, which allows us to think Being without holding on to the basic tenets of metaphysics constitutes, for Heidegger, a “step-back”⁴⁷ out of metaphysics. In this sense, the step-back out of metaphysics allows for a recognition of oblivion because oblivion means to live within the difference without being able to think it as such. The event of appropriation allows for what Heidegger calls the “scission” to be thought, that is, the opening where Being is set apart from beings. This is the *Austrag*; the open, perduring separation between Being and beings. *Ereignis*, therefore, grants access to the “sending” of Being so that the interplay between unconcealment and concealment can be thought. What Being unconceals is sent into the open for thought to access, what Being conceals is itself in this perpetual play. It is in this recognition that metaphysics is “overcome”. The step-back allows us to step out of the

⁴⁵ ID, pg. 37.

⁴⁶ OTB, pg. 6.

⁴⁷ ID, pg. 50.

metaphysical framework in order to think Being as sending, which is not a causal grounding of beings and which allows the difference between Being and beings to be thought of as a difference.

We know that metaphysics must recognize Being, this is not what is forgotten in oblivion. Moreover, it is entirely impossible to truly forget Being since it is always implicit in our being-there. Rather, what it is possible to forget is how to pose the question. Metaphysics, as the unquestioned history of interpreting Being through the framework of the *existentia/essentia* distinction, is a history of forgetting. What metaphysics is oblivious or blind to is the incomprehensible concealment of Being in its “sending”. Oblivion, points to the incapacity to think the constant interplay between the unconcealment or givenness of beings and the concealment of Being which necessarily holds itself back, forever cloaked to finite Dasein. Therefore, the fact that metaphysics names Being as the Being of beings is not what makes it “forgetful”. Rather, it is the concealment of Being through its unconcealment that is not thought. This simply means that metaphysics does not come to grips with the “sending” of the difference as such; it rather takes the difference for granted in its thought of Being. *Ereignis's* capacity to allow us to think Being as a “sending” elucidates the futility of the metaphysical enterprise: attempting to locate Being as the conceptual and objective ground of beings is an impossible undertaking because Being does not and cannot give itself in this way. Making Being into an entitative ground is an undertaking that makes Being into something other than the unconcealing/concealing movement of *aletheia*.

Because the history of metaphysics is the history of humanity's attempt to ground beings in Being, metaphysics decides in advance the manner in which the relationship between Being

and beings is to be thought. This is what Heidegger names “abandonment.” This is just to say that Being gives over beings without giving itself and in this sense “abandons” beings into the open. Dasein, as an “ontico-ontological” being, is thus abandoned here too, but Dasein's ontological structures mean that Dasein is not abandoned in the way that the present-to-hand is. Dasein has to meaningfully take up its abandonment as an issue for it. In other words, Dasein is aware of its abandonment. This is why the question of Being is so pressing. Heidegger attempts to echo this pressure by formulating the question of Being adequately throughout the entirety of his philosophical career.

One of the later Heidegger's concern is to see Being as a “destinal” sending. What Being sends forth, thought is able to access. However, thought is absolutely incapable of accessing what remains concealed in the sending itself. Since Being is a sending, our relationship to Being is defined by the degree to which we are able to receive it. Metaphysics as a history of “oblivion” is thus an epoch which comes to grips with Being to the degree that the sending of Being allows.

Because the later Heidegger thinks of Being in terms of a sending that allows Dasein to come to grips with Being only in terms of what can be gleaned through what is sent, the notion of “oblivion” is not, per se, a criticism of Western thought. Oblivion only marks an “event” in our history of rationalizing our relatedness to Being, in other words, of coming to terms with what Being itself grants to us. I say this because I want to avoid the thought that this “forgetfulness” is something for which philosophers of the past are to blame. “Oblivion” is not the fault of anyone, but is itself an event in the history of Being. As Heidegger puts it, “The history of Being is Being itself, and only Being. However, since Being claims human being for grounding its truth in beings, man is drawn into the history of Being, but always only with regard

to the manner in which he takes his essence from the relation of Being to himself and, in accordance with this relation, loses his essence, neglects it, gives it up, grounds it, or squanders it.”⁴⁸ Through the distinction between essence and existence, the truth of Being became accounted for through beings, but to the degree that Being in its own terms became a truth grounding necessity, itself understood in terms of whatness and thatness. Heidegger is suggesting that Dasein's relation to Being is determined through Dasein's meaningful relation to beings. But what has been forgotten is that Being itself allows for the relation between Dasein and beings.

It is now possible to see that through the notion of “oblivion” or “forgetfulness of Being”, the later Heidegger has something more radical in mind than mere “falling”. “Falling” is an act; it involves a kind of choice, even if it is not fully reflective. Oblivion, on the other hand, is not an activity of forgetting. Rather, as Heidegger puts it, “Even where we have caught sight of oblivion in its full extent, we all too readily run the danger of understanding oblivion merely as a human act or activity.”⁴⁹ He goes on to say that, “People have indeed tended to represent the 'oblivion of being' as though, to say it by way of an image, being were the umbrella that has been left sitting somewhere through the forgetfulness of some philosophy professor.”⁵⁰

However, even though metaphysics is an epoch wherein the thought of Being must be overcome, one cannot simply push metaphysics aside as if it were of no use anymore. As Heidegger points out, “Metaphysics cannot be abolished like an opinion. One can by no means leave it behind as a doctrine no longer believed and represented.”⁵¹ Heidegger is not suggesting that we can simply move on from metaphysics and be done with it. This is not a possibility.

⁴⁸ “Recollection in Metaphysics,” in *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pg. 82.

⁴⁹ “On the Question of Being,” pg. 314.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ “Overcoming Metaphysics,” pg. 85.

Metaphysics contains our history so we cannot simply decide to be over it. It is an essential part of Dasein. Rather, what overcoming allows us to see is that metaphysics is itself an epoch, which is definitive of a certain characterization of Being. However, we must move onwards, staying open and attuned to what Being allows us to think in its sending. Through *Ereignis*, Heidegger thinks that he is showing us the pinnacle of our capacity to reckon with Being. He is showing us a way for thought to escape the impulse to think of Being in terms of a causal ground for beings. Moreover, what overcoming allows for is a certain perspective on metaphysics itself, a perspective that cannot be attained by remaining absorbed within the metaphysical framework itself.

The perspective of overcoming allows us to see that metaphysics is always, explicitly or not, after the “Origin”. This is the “Origin” of the opening where beings are set apart from Being. On the one hand, for Heidegger, the opening—the scission—in which we live—Being's sending—has an origination, which we can reckon with as something past. On the other hand, however, any plan to work backwards through what we call a history, cannot arrive at any contemplation of “Origin” other than the fact that Being's sending always conceals the “Origin” within itself. What *Ereignis* allows us to see is the fact that metaphysics cannot retrieve the “Origin” it is after, not because of an insufficiency, but because the “Origin” is what is concealed in Being's sending. In this sense, for Heidegger, the “Origin” is not a thing of the past, a kind of historical occurrence, but that which remains in a perpetual state of coming towards us. The “Origin” is concealed in Being's sending, yet, in a way, hangs in suspension insofar as Being is always a sending. This means Being is also always a concealing, the “Origin” and the ground concealed in unconcealing. Thus, by the same token, the ground is an inaccessible object for

metaphysics. Groundlessness is not a conjecture, in Heidegger's mind, but the rule in Being's sending.

If metaphysics is an epoch that is determined by humanity's response to the sending of Being, than overcoming too is an epoch granted by Being's unconcealing. This means that we can only think of the “overcoming” of metaphysics insofar as Being grants what is needed to think this through its unconcealing. Heidegger has shown us that we don't need to think of Being in the manner in which metaphysics dictates we must. We do not need to think of Being as a causal ground for entities, but rather as a sending which is a giving: what is sent is not causally held in place by Being, but is sent forth into the opening where Dasein dwells. For Heidegger, metaphysics cannot think of the opening or clearing where Being is set apart from beings as difference. The taking-for-granted of the difference prevents us from recognizing the “clearing” as the condition for thought to access what is present. What is present as such has taken precedence in our thought, thereby hiding the notion of Being as sending. Heidegger suggests that metaphysics has historically thought of Being in terms of illumination; Being has traditionally been reckoned with as that which illuminates, but never as the “opening” that any light presupposes.⁵² Only in the clearing can light illuminate. In Heidegger's mind the incapacity to think clearing is essentially related to the incapacity to think thought and Being as a “belonging-together”. This is because, for Heidegger, the clearing *is* the “belonging together of Being and thinking.”⁵³ The clearing is interscision or *Unter-scheidung* where Dasein finds itself as an entity amongst others.

⁵² OTB, pg. 66.

⁵³ OTB, pg. 68.

Heidegger's sounding alarm with respect to the notion of “oblivion” and the need to “overcome” metaphysics is a call to awaken to the fact of “oblivion,” not to somehow overstep its boundaries or negate it. We are not able to do so. “Oblivion” is definitive of the fact that Being withdraws. That Being withdraws in its sending is the essential component of unconcealing. There is no way out of this since the withdraw of Being defines our essential relation to Being. Such withdraw is the condition of possibility for difference and clearing. What Heidegger is alerting us to is the notion that metaphysics does not know of its oblivion or forgetfulness. In overcoming metaphysics, what is arrived at, “is not an extinguishing of the oblivion of Being, but placing oneself in it and standing within it.”⁵⁴ Overcoming metaphysics is therefore an awakening to the fact of oblivion, not a removal or negation of it. There is no sublation of the withdraw of Being – no beyond this existential fact. There is only an awakening to it, which is an awakening to oblivion itself. Overcoming metaphysics is thus not overcoming oblivion, but overcoming the tendency to think Being as the causal ground of beings.

In the same way that “oblivion” is not the fault of anyone. Heidegger is not criticizing philosophers such as Thomas for not being able to think “clearing”. This is because, for Heidegger, Thomas's metaphysics is frozen in time, buried in the stratum that is constituent of his epoch. Even in 1928, thirteen years before Heidegger came to the conclusion that the history of metaphysics is “oblivion”, it was still evident that the Romanization of the Greek worldview formed an important part of the sediments that have covered over the importance of raising the question of Being. Thomas's metaphysics belongs to this Romanization and so for Heidegger is constitutive of a movement away from the origin that was lost with the Greeks. But perhaps, as

⁵⁴ OTB, pg. 30.

we will have to see, Heidegger's narrow view of the Greek "Golden Age" led him to miss crucial aspects of philosophies such as Thomas's.

The most important factor of the scholastic epoch in terms of the forgetfulness of Being is the fact that, for Heidegger, it is incapable of coming to terms with Being as a sending. For Thomas, Being must always remain the causal ground of beings. Thomas's metaphysics must be bounded to the onto-theo-logical structure indicative of metaphysics in general. In this vein, Thomas is incapable of recognizing *Ereignis*. Without *Ereignis*, the ontological difference remains taken for granted as a difference, which is opened up by our relation to Being. As such, in Heidegger's mind the capacity to think *Ereignis* was an impossibility for Aquinas, not because of any fault of his, but because his historical circumstance would not allow for it.

1.7. Concluding Remarks

Heidegger's history of Being views metaphysics as an epochal formation with its evolution in the history of Being as a process granted by the sending of Being itself. It wasn't possible for Thomas to think of something like an overcoming. This is to say that the "oblivion" of Being is not something we hold past philosophers and thinkers accountable for. It is only in what Being unconceals that thought can get a hold. But insofar as Being has always been a sending, it might be the case that past thinkers, despite the epoch within which they thought, could also realize something like a "step back"; realize a way out of thinking Being as the ground of being and hit upon something like *Ereignis*. Heidegger's view seems to suggest the contrary, since past philosophers were uttering not metaphysical doctrines, but the words of Being itself. Since the later Heidegger was after the history of Being, with Dasein's historicity only implicated

through Being's unconcealing, past thinkers should not be able to come to terms with what Heidegger thinks remained concealed, especially through metaphysics itself. By this I mean that no past philosopher should be able to think of Being as a sending until metaphysics has, so to speak, run its course, which, for Heidegger happens in the extreme of the technological era. In Heidegger's mind, he is the philosopher that can point the way out of "oblivion" because he is able to think it through, showcase *Ereignis*, and point the way to the "step back", springing thought out of metaphysics.

But what has happened here? Did the later Heidegger give up on the idea of making explicit what is always implicit in Dasein's existence or does the recognition of *Ereignis* accomplish this insofar as it points to the incomprehensibility of what is concealed in Being's sending? Is this as explicit as one can get? Any admittance that metaphysics cannot make Being explicit conceptually admits that metaphysics is incapable of accomplishing its task. What Heidegger seems to be saying is that we live in an epoch where it is no longer possible to think ground. If we think through the history of metaphysics in Heidegger's fashion, through *Destruktion* to the notion of oblivion, we must admit that Being cannot be the ground of beings. We must admit that any notion of a deity, outside of what is opened up through Being's sending is unwarranted. Rather than making the thought of Being more enigmatic, however, this seems to strip it of its mystification since, when it comes to questioning into the strangeness of my existence, I am not warranted in postulating an alterity outside of myself in order to make sense of the strangeness. Rather, the strangeness points to myself, to my own sense of uncanniness as unheimely. In Heidegger's thought, if I say that the sending of Being is dictated by God or a

transcendent alterity, I am committed to ontotheology, instantaneously committing my thought to oblivion.

So long as we are *animale sensuale*, so to must we remain *animale metaphysicum*. After all, even in the epoch of overcoming, metaphysics never truly goes away. Insofar as we must remain rational beings, the only way to overcome metaphysics is through metaphysics itself. We must always start and remain *here*, with beings, questioning Being through what is present to us. The point, however, for Heidegger, is not to conflate presence itself with that which is presented. In Heidegger's view, this was the mistake of the scholastics. What defines metaphysics is the impetus to ground beings in Being and Being itself in God. Therefore, overcoming metaphysics is overcoming that part of ourselves that wishes to ground. However, the fact that beings are present, and likewise, that we are naturally directed towards beings, will always remain the manner in which Being confronts us. But, taken in terms of *aletheia*, this means that Being itself remains concealed through the unconcealing of what is present to us. Maybe this is why, in “Overcoming Metaphysics”, Heidegger suggests that the era of overcoming lasts longer than metaphysics itself.⁵⁵ Also, he strangely suggests that metaphysics does not go away, but “returns transformed.”⁵⁶ This means that, because of our existential constitution, we must always work within the rubric of the difference of Being and beings. Despite this existential fact, Heidegger urges us, through *Ereignis*, to view the ontological difference, not as a difference of separation where Being causally grounds beings, but rather as an interplay between the movement of concealing and unconcealing in Being's sending. Nonetheless, we remain the “ontico-ontological”

⁵⁵ “Overcoming Metaphysics,” in *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pg. 85.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

entity that must reside amongst other entities, making sense of them, but nonetheless stuck amongst them.

It might be the case that Heidegger had an overemphasized and nearly romantic view of the early Greek idea of Being as sheer presence. In doing so he comes to see, not just Thomas and the scholastic epoch, but the entirety of the history of philosophy as a decadence that covers over this primordiality. Heidegger does not recognize the essential in Aquinas, but only the scholastic epoch in terms of the *essentia/existentia* distinction and the onto-theo-logic structure this entails. Yet, as I will argue, Aquinas does not resort to God to found his metaphysics. Instead, metaphysics is circumscribed by the domain of natural reason. Heidegger hears only the rumble of scholastic disputations in Aquinas and does not hear the silent, meditative and astute attunement to the call of Being. A call that is answered not by asserting God and then developing a metaphysical doctrine that attempts to ground beings, but rather by using natural reason to forge a path from the sensible world toward which we are naturally directed, to the underlying intellectual identity with Being that underwrites all of our acts of consciousness.

Chapter 2

Access to Ground: The Way to the Subject of Metaphysics in Thomas Aquinas

“The metaphysician finds himself face to face with the object he seeks to seize at his own risk and peril. He and his object must fight it out alone in single combat.”⁵⁷

By following the method of Thomistic metaphysics towards the arrival of its subject, the purpose of this chapter is to elucidate two theses. First, to show that, for Aquinas, presupposing God is not required for metaphysics. Second, that Thomistic metaphysics leads to a notion of Being which underwrites all acts of cognition. To accomplish this, I will examine Thomas's theory of knowledge. This will entail, first a discussion of the order in which knowledge proceeds, followed briefly by a discussion of the intellectual soul and a fairly intensive examination of the role of judgment in Aquinas's metaphysics. Finally, a technical and methodological tool, named by Aquinas, the *via resolutionis*, will be examined. The *via resolutionis*'s place in Thomistic metaphysics illuminates most clearly Thomas's notion of Being as that which stands behind all knowledge and cognition whatsoever.

The order of knowing, for Aquinas, following Aristotle,⁵⁸ moves from what is by nature less known to what is by nature better known. We “know” Being as a *prima* or first. In this sense, Being is better known by nature, yet we do not grasp Being directly because it is not a sensible and material object for direct perception; it is not better known for us. The most familiar and better known for us, yet lesser known by nature, is the directly observable, sensible, material objects we encounter through direct perception. The task of metaphysics is to access Being,

⁵⁷ Jacques Maritain, *Untrammelled Approaches*, trans. Bernard Doering (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pg. 266.

⁵⁸ “Physics,” in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Ed. Richard McKeon, trans. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye (New York: Random House, 2001). Book I, Ch. I, 184a.

beginning with the sensible, direct objects of perception, to which we are naturally directed. Accordingly, the order of knowledge, to which metaphysics is wedded, proceeds from what is most directly sensible and better known for us, towards what is better known by nature. Therefore, metaphysics as the highest science, following the order of knowledge, will be closest to what is better known by nature, closest to the immaterial and intelligible and furthest away from the particular and sensible. We reach our immediate knowledge of Being only if we proceed through the sensible and material first. All human knowledge, for Aquinas, depends upon the senses, meaning that the body is a necessary factor with respect to achieving knowledge whatsoever. He suggests that, “Although the intellect is superior to the senses, nevertheless in a manner it receives from the senses, and its first and principle objects are founded in sensible things. And therefore, suspension of the senses necessarily involves a hindrance to the intellect.”⁵⁹ Aquinas diagnoses this fact by suggesting that, “The natural gaze of the human mind, burdened by the weight of a perishable body, cannot fix itself in the first light of truth, by which everything can be easily known.”⁶⁰ As such, both method of metaphysics, if it is to reach its subject, must chart a path from that which is directly observable by sense and better known for us, towards the intellect's primary relationship with Being, which is better known by nature.

The focus of Thomistic metaphysics is to begin with the directly observable and move towards an understanding of first principles of Being which stand in direct relation with the

⁵⁹ “Summa Theologiae,” in *The Collected Works of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Electronic Edition, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Christian Classics, 1981), Q. 84, a.1, n.

<http://www.library.nlx.com/login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/xtf/viewdocId=aquinas/aquinas.02.xml;chunk.id=id52780;toc.depth=1;toc.id=idfront02;brand=default;query=>

⁶⁰ *Faith Reason and Theology: Questions I-IV of his Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute, 1987), Introduction, pg. 3.

intellect. In this manner, the method of Thomas's metaphysics does not posit God in order to gain traction and move towards its subject because God is not what is first known. What is first known is Being as that which we always already understand implicitly.

It is important to note from the start, that what is arrived at, in terms of the subject of metaphysics, is not Being in itself, but the first principles of Being, which we are inextricably bound to. It is in the first principles of Being, such as the principle of non-contradiction, which judgment rests and discursive reasoning gains its traction. As such, what metaphysics provides access to, as it were, is the unique human relation to Being in terms of first principles of Being. But first principles of Being do not account for a grasping of Being itself. The subject of metaphysics is being-in-general, not Being as such. As the quotation above enunciates, the burden of our finitude places us in no position to know “the first light of truth.” In this manner, our finitude is the force by which metaphysics moves. It is the very fact of our finitude that delimits the order of knowledge to which we are bound. We access the subject of metaphysics only through the order of knowledge which is indicative of our finitude. Therefore, God is not the subject of metaphysics, nor is God presupposed in order to establish the subject of metaphysics.⁶¹ What is presupposed is our finitude and the order of knowledge through which we must proceed.

Importantly, then, metaphysics is thus within the purview of natural reason. Aquinas, in this manner, could be said to be involved in a form of critique, showcasing the limitations and

⁶¹ A discussion of how God is not presupposed in order to establish the subject of metaphysics is a complex, controversial, and lengthy discussion which I cannot do justice to here. It will come up again in chapter 3, during a discussion of Heidegger's notion of onto-theo-logy. What is important to note, for now, however, is that the subject of metaphysics, for Aquinas, depends on access to immateriality. For a full discussion see Wippel's, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), pg. 23-65.

borders of reason so as to exemplify the scope and subject of metaphysics. The method of metaphysics must reflect this. As such, God cannot directly enter into the subject of metaphysics. God, as a necessary first cause, can be posited as the principle of the subject of metaphysics by natural reason, but cannot be an object for metaphysics. Metaphysics bears a relation to the divine insofar as it must take up first principles and causes, but this is attained from the viewpoint of natural reason and not of revelation. A crucial aspect of Thomas's metaphysics is the effort to keep revelation and reason on separate planes. By an unprecedented conjoining of metaphysics to the plane of natural reason, according to Jan Aertsen, for the first time “metaphysics becomes ontology”⁶² in Aquinas's hands. Strikingly, this amounts to, in Aertsen's mind, “The second beginning of metaphysics,”⁶³ meaning that metaphysics, in Aquinas's reconstruction, is undertaken in a new manner and is subjected to a new form of limitation where a theology based on revelation is distanced from what can be said through natural reason. In other words, metaphysics is placed firmly into the domain of rationality and becomes thoroughly ontological. Ontology, if Aquinas were aware of the word, would signal, for him, a manner of examining the world that brackets the theological perspective from the rational.

The subject of metaphysics, for Aquinas, is *ens commune* or being-in-general. The subject of metaphysics dictates that commonality with respect to the manner by which all beings can be said to exist take the fore. As such, the metaphysician does not have an interest in any specific being or region of beings, but rather that which is common to all beings insofar as they exist. The order of knowledge suggests that we are naturally directed towards particular sensible

⁶² Jan A. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (New York: E. J Brill, 1996), pg. 123.

⁶³ Ibid.

objects. The subject of metaphysics, however, demands that we move beyond the particular, towards a conception of *ens commune*.

2.1. The Intellectual Soul

The subject of metaphysics demands that we move from the sensible and particular towards first principles of Being, which underwrite and stand behind our knowledge of the sensible and particular. This is to say that metaphysics must come to grips with the first principles that unite the soul with Being such that the cognition of any object whatsoever can be had. Accordingly, Aquinas's metaphysics aims at exposing our implicit unity with Being, which comprises all acts of consciousness by examining the fulcrum of the human being's inextricable link to Being, the intellectual soul.

In defining the soul's intrinsic relationality, Thomas follows Aristotle's assertion that, “the soul is in a way all existing things,”⁶⁴ meaning that the soul is potentially able to become any actually existing object which confronts it. The soul does not literally become the thing. There is no substantial change to the soul itself; the soul is able to encode the form or quiddity of the being it confronts upon itself while maintaining its own essential integrity in the process. In other words, the soul remains itself while conforming with what is other. The soul is open to the world such that what is other to it can be brought into noetic relation—*adaequatio*—with itself. By *adaequatio*, Thomas means the manner by which the soul intentionally enters into conformity with the thing it beholds. The soul is “in a way all existing things” because of the fact that the soul can enter into relation—*adaquate*—with what is other to it. Therefore, the soul, as

⁶⁴ “On The Soul,” in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, trans. J. A. Smith (New York: Random House, 2001), (*De Anima*), Book III, Ch. 7, 431b, 20.

potentially all things, is open to the world in an astounding way. In a manner of speaking, the soul demands the world; it demands the opening which allows it to become what is other. As Caitlin Gilson Smith puts it, “Let us also understand that for St. Thomas consciousness contains the world in the mode of intentionality and that the world contains consciousness in the mode of finitude or existentiality as mutual transcendences.”⁶⁵ The soul's potentiality to become all things means that the human being and the world cannot be disentangled; the world and the soul mutually transcend each other. The soul is open to what is other insofar as the world and the soul are united.

2.2. Thomas's Aristotelian Integration: A Sketch

In order to examine how it is that the subject of metaphysics, *ens commune*, is arrived at by the intellectual soul, it is necessary to provide a brief sketch of how Aquinas examines the order of nature through an Aristotelian framework. In other words, what this sketch attempts to account for is a glimpse into the world-view or *Weltanschauung* that is essential to Thomas's metaphysics. Through this sketch, it will be necessary to give an account of what, in Thomas's mind, constitutes knowledge, both in terms of *scientia* and *intellectus*. The distinction is key in the sense that scientific knowledge (*scientia*) is demonstrative, whereas understanding (*intellectus*) constitutes the immediate and intuitive principles of Being in which all demonstrational knowledge rests. Our knowledge of Being as first, then, is a matter of understanding as opposed to scientific knowledge; it is intuitive and immediate rather than arrived at through demonstration. By working through what Aquinas defines as “knowledge” and

⁶⁵ *Metaphysical Presuppositions of Being-in-the-world: A Confrontation Between St. Thomas Aquinas and Heidegger* (New York: Continuum International, 2010), pg. 79.

how it is determined by the human being's intellectual soul, I intend to clear the ground for a discussion of metaphysical knowledge and the mechanisms involved in its access.

Everything that exists, aside from God and "separate substances", for Aquinas, derives its actuality by being a composite of matter and form. Form is a thing's intrinsic principle, the governance behind its determinate actuality; it is that through which a thing acts or, in other words, the force that governs the actuality of the thing's essential nature. Therefore, a thing's actuality is derivative of its matter-form constitution, the form granting the essential nature, the matter the accidental particularity. In addition, all matter-form composites are fitted into existence by way of potentiality and actuality. The form of all created beings delimits the range of potentialities that can be actualized according to its nature.

However, it is important to stress that, though the form is "the principle of being," as Thomas notes, it is the *unity* of the matter-form composite, its "oneness," that underpins the actual existence of a thing.⁶⁶ A material substance is a unity of matter and form. This is why Aquinas suggests that "act is predicated not of the matter, but of the whole" and that "being [*esse*] is the act of that whereof we can say that it *is*."⁶⁷ Therefore, we can existentially judge that a thing "is" by virtue of the unity that comprises its actuality. As Thomas puts it, "the whole substance itself, however, is *that which is*. And being itself is that by which the substance is called a *being*."⁶⁸ This statement pre-emptively hits the core of what we will need to work towards, namely, that Being (*esse*) is the ground upon which existential determinations rest. Though it is the form that constitutes the essential nature of a thing, delimiting its potential

⁶⁶ *Summa Contra Gentiles Book II: Creation*, trans. James F. Anderson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), Book II, Ch. 54, a.5.

⁶⁷ SCG, Book II, Ch. 54, a. 3.

⁶⁸ SCG, Book II, Ch. 54, a. 3.

actualities, it is the oneness of the substance that grants the capacity to predicate. The form is crucial with respect to the soul's capacity for *adaequatio*, but the composite, the whole of the substance, is that of which existence can be predicated. Though the soul demands the existent's form, any existential predication is based not on the form, but on the actually existing being (*actus essendi*) itself.

Thomas takes the Aristotelian picture of reality as *dunamis* and *energeia* and injects this framework into a Christianized worldview in which matter and form, potency and act, fall into the structure of a created order. In this move, Aquinas moves beyond the Aristotelian picture. In Thomas's Christian worldview, only God is free of potentiality as pure actuality. All existents are thus subordinate to God's Being (*actus purus*), as infinite Being without limitation or restriction. It is thus God's Being (*ipsum esse subsistens*) in which all existents have a share or participate.⁶⁹ All created existents have a necessarily limited share or participation in existence itself. It is in this manner that the subject of metaphysics is not God because God is not which is first known. As Wippel points out, concrete being (*ens*), "is restricted to that which participates in *esse* in finite fashion. This, in turn, is proportioned to our intellect, whose object is quiddity (*quod quid est*)... That alone can be grasped which has a quiddity that participates in *esse*."⁷⁰ In Thomas's mind, through natural reason we can assert the necessity of a first, immovable cause, but we cannot, in this life, know God through reason or faith. However, a fuller contemplation of God is associated with faith and not metaphysics. Metaphysics is aimed at making clear our implicit

⁶⁹ Participation is a non-Aristotelian aspect of Thomas's thought. The order of *dunamis and energeia* are delimited to all that which participates in *esse* (concrete being or *ens*); but the order of concrete being (*ens*) is sustained by the *ipsum esse subsistens* that holds it together. The theory of participation represents a movement beyond Aristotle, yet the Aristotelian picture of reality is upheld within participation itself. The Aristotelian aspect of Thomas's thought is thus generally limited to that which participates in Being.

⁷⁰ *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pg. 124.

understanding (*intellectus*) of Being through first principles which are self-evident and cannot be done away with.

The human being, as an earthly, intellectual creature is unique in the sense that it is linked to Being intellectually, through the immateriality of the soul. However, the body itself cannot be taken out of the equation. Our intellectual nature, according to the order of knowledge, is dependent upon the body, upon the material and sensible access, which is lesser known by nature, yet which comes first for us insofar as we begin with sensibility in order to proceed towards the immaterial and intellectual. Metaphysics is hinged to the order of knowledge insofar as it is tied to the domain of natural reason. However, metaphysics finds its subject at the end of this order, furthest from the sensible, particular and material. Metaphysics is dependent upon the intellectual soul's capacity to reflect upon its abstraction process, coming to terms with itself as an understanding thing, which is not material in its nature, but which is dependent upon materiality for its operation. As such, it seems to be no coincidence that Aquinas, in the introduction to his *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, refers to metaphysics as a science that will be “supremely intellectual.”⁷¹

2.3. Abstraction and Knowledge

Because metaphysics is dependent upon the order of knowledge, knowledge itself is a key ingredient with respect to understanding how, for Thomas, the method of metaphysics arrives at its subject. In this vein, the next task is to turn towards Thomas's theory of knowledge. The objective of this task is to make clear the fact that, for Thomas, metaphysical knowledge is, as it

⁷¹ “Commentary on the Metaphysics,” in *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, trans. Armand Maurer (Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1986), pg. 95-99.

were, built from the ground up. In other words, in order to access metaphysical knowledge we must have an understanding of how knowledge in general is acquired. Knowledge of being-in-general is not something that is available to us from the beginning. Rather, we must make the passage to being-in-general through what the soul is naturally directed to – the particular object to which the soul is conformed. The manner by which “the soul is in a way all things” forms the bedrock of metaphysics.

Aquinas states that understanding is divided into distinct operations. The “passive intellect” takes sensory information from the body and composes “phantasms,” a kind of sense-image that properly disposes received sensorial information taken in by the body so that the “agent intellect” can engage and produce knowledge of universals.⁷² Through the reception of phantasms the “agent intellect” is able to deposit the acquired quidditative information in the “possible intellect.” As such, what abstraction, for Thomas, describes is the nuanced manner by which the soul is able to become all things. The movement of abstraction describes the steps the understanding must take in order to arrive at knowledge, from the material input of the senses to the soul's immaterial understanding of the thing in reality.

According to Thomas's theory of knowledge, then, the human soul acquires an understanding of universals, which, though dependent on sensorial information, can't be arrived at through material means.⁷³ The operation of abstraction can't be arrived at materially because in the corporeal world, there exists only particulars, whereas knowledge depends on universality.

⁷² For a fuller explanation of the role of phantasms in the acquisition of knowledge see SCG, Book II, Ch. 59. Also, see *Summa Theologiae*, q. 85, a. 1.

⁷³ “But the intellect cannot be composed of individual matter and form, because the species of things understood are made actually intelligible by being abstracted from individual matter. And as a result of being actually intelligible they become one with the intellect” (SCG, Book II, Ch. 50, ¶3).

Strictly speaking, scientific knowledge (*scientia*), for Aquinas, is dependent upon abstraction. The acquisition of scientific knowledge, then, is the result of the movement from the material particular “this”, to its formal, universal nature, grasped immaterially by the intellect.

One might wonder here as to what more is needed to supply metaphysics with its subject matter. As Aquinas’s theory of knowledge has been articulated so far, what can be labeled as knowledge is necessarily arrived at through immaterial means in two senses: first, knowledge is dependent upon the human being’s essential nature, the immaterial soul; second, the immaterial soul accesses the form of the thing encountered such that the nature of the knowledge arrived at, as a universal, is by definition, not materially instantiated. The soul becomes one with the thing in act, fulfilling its function. If abstraction is a knowledge arrived at immaterially, and metaphysics, as stated above, needs to get beyond the materially instantiated world to arrive at being-in-general, then what is lacking in the epistemology that has been laid out so far? In other words, if the kind of abstraction which allows for knowledge of a thing’s essential nature is arrived at immaterially, why can’t abstraction provide the subject of metaphysics? What more is needed for Aquinas?

2.4. Thomas's *Commentary on Boethius's De Trinitate*: The Way Towards *Ens Commune*

To answer this question, and come to a clear understanding of how we are to firmly arrive at the subject of metaphysics, we must turn towards Aquinas’s CBT; this text gives one of the clearest statements of Thomas’s understanding of the access to and securing of the subject of metaphysics. Interestingly, Aquinas gives a definition of scientific knowledge (*scientia*) in Book II of the SCG that helps to prepare the way for an understanding of what he has to say in his CBT.

This is what he suggests: “Scientific knowledge [*scientia*], moreover, consists in the assimilation of the knower to the thing known. Now, the knower is assimilated to the thing known, as such, only with respect to universal species; for such are the objects of science.”⁷⁴ Likewise, Thomas’s focus in his CBT is to provide a treatise on the nature and division of the theoretical sciences into the “natural, mathematical, and divine” by shedding light on their respective subjects of inquiry according to the manner by which the known and the knower enter into relation. Thomas is forced to give a detailed account of how we should consider the sciences differently according to the nature of their respective subjects insofar as these subjects correspond differently to—are uniquely assimilated by—the intellect.

In q.5 a.1 of the CBT, he looks to accomplish this by examining the subject of each science in relation to the degree to which it is separated or conjoined to matter in its consideration. This is to say that the manner in which the knower is “assimilated” to the thing known depends upon the degree to which the thing known is bounded to matter in its consideration. Therefore, Aquinas’s treatment of the issue in this article should help provide insight into the way in which this is possible, shedding light on why the kind of abstraction that provides the knowledge of universals, pointed to above, is not sufficient to arrive at *ens commune*.

The first thing to say in this regard is that we must be careful to avoid a subtle conflation between the means of arriving at knowledge and the object of the knowledge considered. Though it may be true that all knowledge, as universal knowledge, is arrived at through immaterial means (the intellectual soul), this is not to say that the object of the intellect can be considered

⁷⁴ SCG, Book II, Ch. 6, a. 13.

apart from matter. Thomas gives as a good example of what he means by this, suggesting that, when we take up the human being as a subject of scientific inquiry, we cannot discard the notion of “flesh and bones.” Thomas states, not “*this* flesh and *these* bones, but not absolutely without flesh and bones.”⁷⁵ Thomas's example here shows why simple abstraction cannot arrive at the subject of metaphysics. Simple abstraction, though it comprehends the universal through the particular, remains at the level of materiality. To arrive at being-in-general, something more general is needed in order to allow thought to access what is common to all beings insofar as they exist. This is what I take Thomas to mean when he suggests that, “there can be nothing that depends upon matter for its being understood but not for its being, because by its very nature the intellect is immaterial.”⁷⁶ The intellect, as immaterial, though it receives information based on the materiality of the senses, is not material in its activity, that is, for its actual understanding of its object, because by its nature the intellect is immaterial. However, as noted, the being of the object understood, in Thomas's example, the human being, is dependent upon matter for its consideration. It is for this reason that, according to Thomas, the knowledge that is arrived at through the natural sciences, while being universal and necessary, is nonetheless thoroughly knotted to materiality. This is true because, as Thomas points out, these are objects of speculation (*speculabilia*) that depend upon materiality, both in their being as well as for their being understood.⁷⁷ As Thomas's example points out, the particular gives way to the universal by

⁷⁵ CBT, q. 5, a. 2, *Reply*.

⁷⁶ CBT, q.5, a.1, *Reply*.

⁷⁷ *Speculabilia* for Thomas are objects of knowledge which correspond to the subject of the science to which they belong. *Speculabilia* which are attached to materiality for their definition correspond to the natural sciences, whereas *speculabilia* which do not depend upon matter for their being or their being understood correspond to metaphysics. For a full discussion of this see Wippel's, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), pg. 69-107.

means of the intellect, but here, in physics and the natural sciences, the knower is assimilated to the thing known in a manner that remains tied to materiality.

Therefore, what is arrived at through abstraction is universal knowledge, but not knowledge of *ens commune*; not knowledge of that which pertains to all beings insofar as they are being because abstraction remains constricted to knowledge which is circumscribed by a necessary genus/species grouping. In other words, what abstraction attains is universal knowledge which is dependent upon a certain fit into a genus and species. Accordingly, something more general is needed to arrive at *ens commune*. Though universal knowledge occurs through abstraction, it is universal in a still limited sense. It is limited to a universal conception of a species or genus, but cannot get beyond. It is a good thing that abstraction isn't naturally more general. Abstraction allows us for a quick capacity to move from the particular to the universal, identifying and grouping objects into genus and species in a way that is heuristically valuable to us. Metaphysics is thus unique in the sense that it depends upon a conceptualization of being-in-general which is not tied to the typical conceptual heuristics definitive of abstraction. Metaphysics cannot stop short at a consideration of this or that species or genus, which, though universal, describes beings in a still too limited sense. Metaphysics must move towards what is trans-categorical; it must move towards what is most general in the sense of not being confined to a species/genus demarcation and limitation. As a rule, if the object considered necessarily falls into a genus and species, it is not an object of metaphysical consideration.

When it comes to characterizing the *speculabilia* which are definitive of metaphysics, Thomas suggests that, "There are still other objects of speculative knowledge that do not depend upon matter for their being, because they can either exist without matter; either they never exist

in matter, as in the case of God and the angels, or they exist in matter in some instances and not in others as in the case of substance, quality, being, potency, act, one and the many, and the like.”⁷⁸ According to Thomas, “The science that treats of all of these... is called metaphysics; that is to say, *beyond physics*, because it ought to be learned after physics; for we have to proceed from sensible things to those that are non-sensible.”⁷⁹

With this in mind, Thomas’s comment that the first science will be “supremely intellectual” makes sense, because the more intellectual a science, the more it is removed from materiality and, moreover, the more it is engaged with the intellectual soul – the source of the human being’s essential nature. The more thoroughly intellectual an enterprise, the less the material and particular is dealt with, because the intellect is, in a manner of speaking, according to Thomas’s theory of knowledge, two steps removed from the sensible-material world.⁸⁰

The next task, then, is to zoom in on how it is, precisely, that the subject of metaphysics is achieved in this manner; as resting in the power of the intellect most “supremely,” such that the consideration of its subject, *ens commune*, is grounded in an access to immateriality. To do this we must turn toward Thomas’ notion of “judgment” as it relates to truth and knowledge so

⁷⁸ Ibid. To use John Wippel’s distinction, immateriality, for Thomas, can be understood in two ways. God and the angels are “positively” immaterial because they never exist in matter. We can grasp only what is “neutrally” or “negatively” immaterial, meaning that this kind of immateriality is found through matter, but need not, for its existence, be conjoined to matter. Thomas has “Being, one, potency, and the like” in mind; in other words, the transcendentals. For a full discussion see Wippel’s, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*, pg. 23-65.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ One might wonder here how it is exactly that a unity of the kind Thomas has in mind with respect to the matter-form composition of the human being is to be explained if the soul has its own act of operation, by degrees, distinct from the body. For a full treatment on this specific issue see Thomas’ account in *Questions on the Soul*, trans. James H. Robb (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1984). Aquinas doesn’t want to confuse the soul’s independent operation with a total separation. This is why Aquinas states that “a human soul is not an entity in the sense of being a complete substance which possesses its specific nature, but rather in the sense of being part of a being which has a complete and specific nature” (QDA, Q1, a.3). Aquinas is stating that, despite the soul’s independence from the body with respect to its operation, the soul is not completely an entity with a divergent nature; the soul is a part of the whole that comprises the nature of a human being.

that we can then come to grips with a specific type of judgment crucial to the acquisition of the subject of metaphysics. This type of judgment is called “separation” and it will be the most important point of exposition in this chapter so far. It holds the lock and key to access the subject of metaphysics. Separation is the judgment that gets the intellect above the materially instantiated ground upon which human beings find themselves.

2.5. Judgment, Separation, and Truth

It is necessary to first examine what Thomas considers to be the two central acts of the intellect. Following Aristotle, Thomas suggests that, “The intellect has two operations: one called the 'understanding of indivisibles,' by which it knows *what* a thing is, and another by which it joins and divides, that is to say, by affirmative and negative statements.”⁸¹ Thomas, following Aristotle,⁸² is making a distinction between the intellect’s capacity to simply apprehend a thing and the intellect’s capacity to make a positive or negative existential judgment. Thomas is explicit that the second act of the intellect—judgment—“has to do with a thing’s being (*esse*).”⁸³ This means that judgment must relate to a thing’s actual existence, its *actus essendi*. Judgment has something to do with the assimilation of the knower to the known such that the intellect, in judgment, brings itself into actual conformity with the thing it judges; the soul becomes the form of the existent it stands in *adaequatio* with. This is why judgment is at the level of truth and falsity whereas the first act of the intellect is not. Simple apprehension merely knows what a thing is without composing or dividing, which is to say, without making a positive or negative judgment regarding a thing’s being (*esse*).

⁸¹ CBT, q.5, a.3, *Reply*. Pg. 34-35.

⁸² See *De Anima*, Book III, Ch. 6, 430b.

⁸³ CBT, q.5, a.3, *Reply*. Pg. 35.

Thomas notes, “That which the intellect first conceives as, in a way, the most evident, and to which it reduces all its concepts is being (*ens*).”⁸⁴ Consequently, all other conceptions of the intellect are had by additions to being.”⁸⁵ In this manner of speaking, truth is an addition to being (*ens*) in terms of a predicative expression “of a mode of being not expressed by the term *being*.”⁸⁶ Therefore, the assimilation of the intellect to its object is the condition for truth such that the actual existent, which the intellect enters into conformity, grasps a mode of being, an essential nature, consequent upon being, but not captured by the term “being”, strictly speaking. Consequently, judgments are constituents of truth because they express predicative existential assertions of actual things in conformity with the intellect. As Thomas puts it, “the knowledge of a thing is a consequent of this conformity; therefore it is an effect of truth, even though *the fact that the thing is a being is prior to its truth*.”⁸⁷ A thing’s being, its *actus essendi*, is first. Judgment expresses truth by grasping and expressing the “mode” of the thing, not specifically captured by reference to “being” itself.

Now that judgment in general, according to Aquinas, has been explained, it is now possible to interpret a special kind of judgment called “separation”, critical for Aquinas, in establishing the subject of metaphysics. As a form of judgment, whatever separation is, it must be accomplished through assimilation; the condition for knowledge and truth. Thomas explains that, “since the truth of the intellect results from its conformity with reality, it is clear that in this second operation the intellect cannot truthfully abstract what is united in reality, because the

⁸⁴ In order to map Aquinas's notion of Being onto Heidegger's ontological difference, *ens* will be translated as being; *esse* will be translated as Being. As such, *ens* encompasses beings in the sense that it refers to the concrete and *esse* corresponds to Being in the sense that it is accessed through beings, but is itself not given up as a being.

⁸⁵ *The Disputed Questions on Truth (De Veritate)*, trans. Robert William Muligan S.J (Chicago: Henry Regnery Press, 1952), q.1. a.1.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* (my emphasis).

abstraction would signify a separation with regard to the very being (*esse*) of the thing.”⁸⁸

Thomas here is suggesting that I cannot *truthfully* separate what is integrally united to the thing in reality. I cannot truthfully separate what is united in reality because truth relates to the actual being (*esse*) of the thing in its conformity to the intellect. To predicate erroneously of this conformity is falsity. As such, in judgment, the intellect can truthfully abstract only things that are separated in reality.

It is worthwhile for the purposes of lucidity to highlight a central passage concerning the separative judgment in Thomas's CBT:

Accordingly, through its various operations the intellect distinguishes one thing from another in different ways. Through the operation by which it composes and divides, it distinguishes one thing from another by understanding that the one does not exist in the other. Through the operation, however, by which it understands what a thing is, it distinguishes one thing from another by knowing what one is without knowing anything of the other, either that it is united to or separated from it. So this distinction is not properly called separation, but only the first. It is correctly called abstraction, but only when the objects, one of which is known without the other, are one in reality. For if we consider animal without considering stone, we do not say that we abstract animal from stone.⁸⁹

This crucial passage highlights the manner in which the operations of the intellectual soul “distinguish one thing from another in different ways” according to the first and the second acts. Here we see Aquinas assign separation only to the second act of the intellect, judgment, while delimiting the scope of abstraction to the first act, simple apprehension. The crucial difference seems to hang on the fact that in separation, one understands what is being separated from what; here, there is conformity with reality. With abstraction or simple apprehension, one knows “what a thing is,” without the structure of judgment to support it. Thomas seems to be focusing on the

⁸⁸ CBT, q.5, a.3, Reply. Pg. 35.

⁸⁹ CBT, q.5, a.3, Reply.

fact that abstraction is narrower in scope, perhaps due to its lack of explicit conformity with reality that the level of judgment provides, so that abstraction, as defined here, has no *knowledge* of its unity or separation *in reality*.

Consequently, separation belongs to metaphysics as it considers what in reality, according to the manner of composing and dividing, can exist separately. To be clear, with respect to physics and the natural sciences, Thomas suggests that we cannot understand matter and motion “unless we understand it to possess quantity.”⁹⁰ Matter and motion cannot be separated from quantity in reality. Likewise, Thomas suggests that the consideration of substance without quantity depends on separation and, likewise, belongs to the domain of metaphysics as it alone has for its subject those common principles that beget being-in-general.

This is how separation gets out of the material and categorical determinations indicative of abstraction. It is a negative judgment, held together by the force of truth and knowledge, so as to arrive at the consideration of those first principles that can be separated out from materiality for their consideration. Separation, therefore, is a judgment crucial to the methodology of Thomas's metaphysics because it provides the foundation for metaphysical *speculabilia*. This is to say separation is the methodological tool that allows the metaphysician to gain access to the transcendental.⁹¹ Strikingly, these are the principles that are essentially linked to the intellect's

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Transcendentals form a crucial component of metaphysics for Aquinas. It isn't, however, important for the purposes of this investigation to highlight, with too much specificity, the nature of the transcendentals with respect to the metaphysics of Aquinas. For a thorough treatment see Jan A. Aertsen's, *Medieval Philosophy and the transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (New York: E. J Brill, 1996). Tersely, though, it is necessary to say that the transcendentals gain their status insofar as they transcend the categorical determinations that belong to the genus/species taxonomy. This is important because, as it has been shown, it is crucial for metaphysics to not be limited to the categorical in terms of genus and species. If this were the case, metaphysics could not be said to attain the viewpoint of being-in-general. What belongs to being-in-general must belong to all beings despite their genus/species determination.

first reference to being (*ens*), the immediate and nearly⁹² intuitive knowledge (*intellectus*), which provides rational knowledge (*scientia*) with its foundation.

2.6. Metaphysics and the *Via Resolutionis*

What separation achieves is a laying-bare of the unity of the manifold or horizon of being (*ens*) by way of working from the sensible-material landscape to that of the immaterial and intellectual in a way that is much more focused and profound than simple abstraction. Therefore, as Thomas points out, “It is called metaphysics because it considers being [*ens*] and its attendant properties; for these objects that go beyond physics are discovered by the process of analysis [*resolutio*] as the more universal is discovered by the less universal.”⁹³ The key word in this passage is “*resolutio*”; it suggests a method which is linked to separative judgments.

According to Aertsen, “The way of resolution is the 'demonstrative' method that Thomas opposes to the “rational” method.”⁹⁴ Aertsen here is referring to a key distinction made by Thomas in q.6 a.1 of his CBT. Thomas suggests that, “the ultimate end that rational inquiry ought to reach is the understanding of principles, in which we *resolve* our *judgements*. And when this takes place it is not called a rational procedure or proof but a demonstration.”⁹⁵ This is not to say that the rational method is not important; it uses logic to, so to speak, pave the way towards resolution. However, resolution, as the word suggests, resolves the discursive into the intellectual,

⁹² I say “nearly” here because it isn't fully clear that the intellect knows first principles of being perfectly intuitively. Thomas suggests that they are “induced” and a kind of *habitus*. But this is not the typical kind of induction modern philosophy is accustomed to. First principles of being (*ens*) can't be something induced in every instance of knowledge. This is a complex issue that cannot be worked out here. The precise status of first principles of being is the cause of much scholarly debate. What is of import, however, is the fact that all knowledge and cognition rest on the intellect's established knowledge (*intellectus*) of first principles of being.

⁹³ *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, pg. 99.

⁹⁴ “Method and Metaphysics: The *Via Resolutionis* in Thomas Aquinas,” *The New Scholasticism* 63, no. 4 (1989): 407.

⁹⁵ CBT, q.6, a.1, *Reply*. Pg. 64 (my emphasis).

pushing towards the pre-reflective unity we share with being (*ens*) in the form of first principles. Such first principles are indicative of *ens commune* in the sense that they are a necessity in the sense that they belong to our capacity to intentionally relate to any participating existent (*ens*) in Being (*esse*).

The *via resolutionis*, then, moves back toward first principles, which are consequent upon the intellect's primary relationship with being (*ens*), whereas the rational method moves within the spectrum of rational knowledge, which begins and ends with first principles. What this describes is a double-movement of knowledge, stemming from the intellect's first relation to being. As Thomas puts it, reason moves from "the knowledge of one thing to the knowledge of another: for example from the knowledge of effect to the knowledge of its cause."⁹⁶ What is important to remember is that the rational method moves within the spectrum of cause and effect; it begins in effect, with the sensible, and can reason back towards its foundation, the first principles of being (*ens*). Thomas, impressed with Aristotle's question as to whether metaphysics should study first principles of being along with first principles of demonstration,⁹⁷ answers affirmatively by wedding the two; first principles of being and first principles of demonstration share a unity. This is not to say that they are the same. Rather, principles of demonstration depend upon first principles of being (*ens*). Our rational discursive capacity depends upon our immediate understanding of being. There is an inherent hermeneutic involved in the method of metaphysics. The *via resolutionis* exposes the dependence of the discursive (rational) on the non-discursive (intellectual) because the discursive finds its terminus as well as its foundation in the intellectual. The *via resolutionis* drives towards the limit of reason and, in turn, exposes this limit

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ *Metaphysics*, Bk. II, Ch. 2, 996b, 30-35.

as its beginning. In other words, the way of resolution must be employed so as to resolve judgment back to the ground from which it originated, the intellect's primary relationship to Being, upon which all principles common to being depend.

Rationality begins and ends with the intellect's primary relation to being (*ens*). According to Thomas, the rational method as beginning from effect is the same as being immersed in "multiplicity," such that the method of resolution to first principles is a movement away from effect towards cause or, in other words, is a movement from "multiplicity" towards "unity." The unity achieved in the movement towards intellectual consideration of being qua being is a unity which is structured by the fact that being (*ens*) is what the intellect knows first. Thomas describes the double-movement as such:

It is clear, then, that rational thinking ends in intellectual thinking, following the process of analysis [*resolutio*], in which reason gathers one simple truth from many things. And again, intellectual thinking is the beginning of rational thinking, following the process of synthesis, in which the intellect comprehends a multiplicity in unity.⁹⁸

Therefore, resolution is essential to the method of arriving at the subject of metaphysics, because it is the method which allows for cognition of first and common principles that are inextricably linked with the intellect's immediate and non-discursive relation to being (*ens*). As Thomas suggests, "reason differs from intellect as multitude does from unity."⁹⁹ Rationality depends on first principles, which stand in relation to the intellect's immediate and intuitive knowledge of being. In other words knowledge in the form of *scientia* depends upon understanding

⁹⁸ In an explanation of this passage, Maurer suggests that, "The movement of reason from principles to conclusions is called 'the way of composition or discovery' (*via compositionis vel inventionis*); the movement of reason from conclusions to principles in which it resolves or verifies its conclusions is called 'the way of resolution' (*via resolutionis*)" (CBT, note 40, pg 71-72).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

(*intellectus*). Thomas's influence with respect to formulating the distinction between *intellectus* and *scientia* comes from Aristotle's statement at the beginning of the *Posterior Analytics* that, "All instruction given or received by way of demonstration proceeds from pre-existent knowledge."¹⁰⁰ In Thomas's view, then, following Aristotle, not all knowledge is scientific; the first knowledge we have of Being is *intellectus*, non-discursive, and immediate. As Aertsen points out, knowledge "*scientia* has the structure of coming 'from' or 'out of' (*ex*) something antecedently known."¹⁰¹ It sounds strange to the modern ear to hear of a "knowledge" that is not scientific or discursive, but not all human knowledge can be demonstrative, meaning that *scientia* does not apply to everything nor can it, especially that which grounds *scientia* itself.

What can be demonstrated rationally through *scientia* is derivative of first principles of demonstration, which are united to the intellect's first reference to being (*ens*), known *intellectus*. However, reason, by working back to first principles, using the method of resolution, can allow for a break into the realm of metaphysics and that of the intellectual. This is the double-movement. It is essentially a relation of the intellect with being (*ens*) so that rational thinking can move from within the multiplicity—the posterior—where we must begin, back towards unity and intellectual thinking, *via resolutionis*.

To link this back with separation, we can say that a separative judgment is what kicks off the method of resolution; it is what allows for the break with effect, with the sensible-material world of multiplicity, providing the means of the intellectual consideration of those common principles characteristic of all beings insofar as they partake in the unity that is being-in-general. Accordingly, resolution and separation hang together such that resolution explains the discursive

¹⁰⁰ "Posterior Analytics," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, trans. G. R. G. Mure (New York: Random House, 2001), Book I, Ch. I, 71a.

¹⁰¹ *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, pg. 76.

movement of reason towards the intellect, and separation provides the judgment that allows for a truthfully realized, “supremely” intellectual consideration of the subject of metaphysics.

2.7. Participation and some Concluding Remarks

I want to finish this chapter with some final remarks regarding Thomas's theory of participation and how it fits into a discussion of the subject of metaphysics. I am going to accomplish this through a discussion of the distinction between *ens* and *esse* in Thomas's thought. This distinction forms a key aspect of Thomas's language concerning Being. In fact, both words mean Being, but in different senses. According to Wippel, “the most important case of participation for the metaphysician [is] that of beings in *esse*.”¹⁰² What Wippel is noting here is the fact that the metaphysician must take seriously the manner by which particular beings participate in the act of being (*esse*). As such, for Thomas, there are two manners in which Being is spoken. *Esse* signifies that which is participated in but which itself cannot participate in anything.¹⁰³ *Ens* signifies “that which is” in a concrete manner as participating in the abstract “act of being” (*esse*). Thomas puts it nicely when he suggests:

“Rather, being [*esse*] itself is the most common. It is thus participated in by another while it doesn't participate in anything else. But although that which is [*ens*] is the most common, it's nevertheless said concretely. Hence it participates in being [*esse*] itself—not in the way in which something less common participates in something more common, but it participates in being [*esse*] itself the way the concrete participates in the abstract. This is why Boethius says: That which is (viz. an entity) can participate in something, but being [*esse*] doesn't itself in any way participate in anything.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pg. 95.

¹⁰³ *Commentary on the Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, Trans Peter King, (Peter King:2005). http://individual.utoronto.ca/pking/editions_and_translations.html, Ch. 1, Rule. 2, pg. 7.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

This explains why being, as what we know first, is not assigned to *esse* but to *ens*:¹⁰⁵ being as the concrete actuality which we are always already united to and implicitly know. If being was not known first in the sense of *ens*, as a *concretum*,¹⁰⁶ it would be impossible for us to make a judgement. The soul cannot know *esse* as an object or fact because *esse* is never a “what” but is the act of Being in which concrete tangible being (*ens*) participates. It might be said that being (*ens*) is the fact of the concrete world which the soul is united to from the beginning intentionally. However, it is *esse* which the soul is united to in act. Yet *esse* is never an object known, because *esse* is itself not an object. Rather, *esse* is that through which an object that can be known has its existence. As such, *ens* participates in *esse*, yet *esse* does not participate in anything. The human soul needs a “what” by which to enter *adaequatio*, but the “what” that the soul relates to is always “that” insofar as it participates in *esse*. Accordingly, the soul never “knows” *esse* in itself. The soul knows *esse* as it is exemplified through concrete existents because every being insofar as it exists has Being (*esse*). Importantly, then, the soul demands quiddity for knowledge. The soul demands *ens* embedded in *esse*. Therefore, the *actus purus* of the *ipsum esse subsistens* (God) can never be known in itself because the intellect is not properly directed to *esse*, but only to, as Caputo puts it, “*ens-in-esse*.”¹⁰⁷

The human being in this sense, in and through the intellectual soul, is naturally related to what is other; the soul is poised outwards towards the world because of its intentional intertwining with being (*ens*) as that which is known first. The fact that a thing “is” is dependent

¹⁰⁵ *De Veritate*, Q.1, a.1. This point is especially exemplified in Aertsen's, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals* (pg. 187).

¹⁰⁶ Aertsen suggests that “The first known is the concrete 'what is,' not 'to-be” (*Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, pg. 187).

¹⁰⁷ *Heidegger and Aquinas*, pg. 130.

upon its act of existing (*actus essendi*), making *ens* always yoked to *esse*. *Esse*, in turn, allows for knowledge of *ens*. For the soul to “know”, it needs otherness in terms of *ens* as a concrete tangible by which to enter into relation. Common to *ens*, though, is participation in *esse*. As such, *esse* is not beyond the subject of metaphysics *because* common to all *ens* is the essential act of existence. If we know *esse* in any sense, it is an abstract notion of what is common to all beings as actually existing. We know that each existent *has* Being. However, we cannot know subsisting Being (*esse*) in itself precisely because of the fact that that pure *esse* is beyond *ens*. *Ens-in-esse* is the condition for knowledge and because of this, *esse* itself cannot be known. The soul, then, is existentially linked to *esse* in terms of participation for its own actual existence, yet is relationally or intentionally united to *ens* in terms of what is other to the soul. The soul knows actual existence through its natural directedness to *ens*.

The force of Thomistic metaphysics resides in its methodological capacity to bring human thought, to the degree that it is capable, in alignment with its immediate and implicit knowledge of being, making metaphysics “supremely intellectual.” This does not allow us to grasp Being (*esse*) as such, but brings us face to face with ourselves in the sense that it brings us to the brink, to the point where the rational (*scientia*) finds rest in the intellectual (*intellectus*). Our first knowledge of being in terms of *ens*, then, for Thomas, anchors us firmly into our existential relation with reality. It forms the hinge by which the soul and the world mutually transcend each other, allowing the soul to access the world in the mode of intentionality and the world to provide the soul with actuality. This is the sense in which I want to suggest that, for Thomas, our first knowledge of being as *ens* points to a kind of ground, it provides us with reason to believe that our relation to existence rests on a firmness. Moreover, for Thomas, the

question of Being is not rendered superfluous. Rather, it is the primary concern of the highest science. It is a lengthy process which takes us to the foundation as well as the limit of rationality, pointing to that which stands behind all acts of intentionality or consciousness. Though Being is not considered in terms of *aletheia*, what is held back or perpetually concealed is not ignored. What we access in terms of ground, is not the holding back of Being (*esse*) in full relief, but rather a remarkable reliability with respect to the first knowledge of being (*ens*) to which we are inextricably united.

Chapter 3:

Testing the Critique

“I don't know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it. What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms. What I touch, what resists me – that is what I understand.”¹⁰⁸

To bring this confrontation to a close I will address specific aspects of Heidegger's critique and apply them to Thomas's metaphysics in order to see where the critique holds true and where it does not. This should culminate in an understanding of why, for Thomists, the Heideggerian critique should be taken seriously, and why, for Heideggerians, it is important to have a good understanding of the shape of scholastic metaphysics in order to lay claim to an understanding of what is meant by *Seinsvergessenheit*. As this chapter will make clear, it is not the case that Heidegger's critique is a ready-made mould that can easily be applied to a figure such as Thomas. The culmination of this discussion will lead to a challenge for Thomistic metaphysics. Is it possible, within the rubric of Thomistic metaphysics to interpret Being as a sending, despite a thoroughly ontotheological framework? How could something like this be accomplished? In a like manner, the challenge to Heideggerian thinking is to formulate a more precise definition of oblivion because, as I will show, it isn't fully clear that ontotheology, in and of itself, necessitates the title “oblivion”.

Since the basis of Heidegger's critique of scholastic metaphysics is centered on the *essentia/existentia* distinction, an examination of how this distinction maps on to Thomas's metaphysics is a fitting place to begin. The distinction highlights the quiddity of a thing in contrast to the fact that it exists. In Heidegger's mind, this distinction defines the metaphysics of

¹⁰⁸ From Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (Toronto: Penguin Books, 2000), pg. 51.

the scholastic epoch. Heidegger is suggesting that Being, for Thomas, is understood in terms of the distinction between “what” and “that.” “That” a thing exists, under this rubric, is subordinated to “what” it is. In Heidegger's mind, the fact that “what” a thing is takes precedence over “that” it is, means that Being is understood factually. In other words, presence gets sorted out in terms of “what” is present. Being, considered in this manner, is the account of presence in and through what is presented. As such, Being, for Heidegger, in the scholastic epoch is *actualitas*. In this manner, beings take a certain precedence in thought. The *essentia/existentia* distinction is problematic, for Heidegger, because in reckoning with Being in terms of an account of what is presented, metaphysics hides the concealing of Being from thought. Metaphysics thinks only in terms of what is present as such, which is how and why beings take a certain priority in the scholastic thought of Being. The scholastic epoch does not ignore the question of Being, but because it grasps Being as what accounts for the present, scholastic thought is incapable of recognizing Being as that which withdraws in its sending.

In this manner, Thomistic metaphysics, for Heidegger, thinks Being in terms of what is sent, while ignoring the sending itself. In Heidegger's later language, thinking Being in terms of what is sent is the same as thinking Being in terms of what is present. Only, in Heidegger's later language, there is much more emphasis on the concealing and unconcealing of Being. In missing Being as concealing, scholastic metaphysics is incapable of thinking what is presented as unconcealed in Being's sending. Because scholastic metaphysics, through the *essentia/existentia* distinction, hides the thought of Being as a sending, it cannot think the difference between Being and beings adequately: the very rubric of scholastic metaphysics hides the recognition of the difference as such, as a difference that is opened through the sending of Being. The difference

itself is taken for granted or missed as a difference, and this is the criterion upon which Heidegger bases his notion oblivion. There is an inherent irony, not just in scholastic metaphysics, but in metaphysics in general, for Heidegger: the attempt to think Being through the *essentia/existentia* distinction actually prevents thought from thinking Being in terms of unconcealing. What metaphysics is after is a viable conceptual basis for Being, but attempting to acquire a conceptual basis in terms of what is present inevitably misses the withdraw or concealing of Being. In grasping what is sent, in a sense, we are always too late – Being perpetually conceals, and the concealing itself is not recognized.

A Thomistic reply to Heidegger's concerns over the *essentia/existentia* distinction involves pointing out the implications of the theory of “participation”. At first glance, Heidegger's concern seems justified insofar as the subject of metaphysics for Aquinas is *ens commune*. Thomistic metaphysics takes its subject as what is common to entities insofar as they exist. The subject of metaphysics, then, seems to fall into the hands of the Heideggerian critique from the beginning because *ens commune* seems to suggest that Being is indeed reckoned with strictly in terms of factual presence. In a certain sense this is true. This is because *ens* represents the most universal in terms of what is concrete and tangible. *Ens* is what the intellect stands in a primary relation with; concrete being-in-general is the reality the soul knows from the beginning. The subject of metaphysics is *ens*, not *esse*, because *ens* represents the concrete actuality to which our intellect is naturally directed, while *esse* in itself remains infinitely beyond the access of human cognition. In order for the method of metaphysics to gain traction, it must begin with what we are naturally directed to – the material and sensible particularities with which the soul can enter in *adaequatio*. However, as has been shown, *ens* is so by way of participating in *esse* in

a concrete manner. In this manner, though *ens commune* represents the concrete in the most universal way, Being is not subordinate to the entitative. Rather, via participation, *ens* must be viewed as subordinate to *esse*. This means that, though the intellect is naturally directed towards *ens*, *ens* itself is necessarily dependent upon *esse*. That the intellect is naturally directed towards quiddity means that the intellect relates to Being by being naturally anchored to *ens*. The intellect understands being (*ens*) as *prima* and this first knowledge underwrites the capacity for the soul to “in a way become all things.” Each thing with which the soul can enter into relation is so by way of its participation in *esse* as the basis for understanding and knowledge. *Ens* as concrete being, participating in the act of existence—*esse*—delimits what can be an object for the intellect.

Accordingly, Thomas's theory of participation holds that beings have Being insofar as they have a finite, participatory share in subsistent Being. Thomas suggests that, “Being [*esse*] itself belongs to all other things from the first agent by a certain participation. That which belongs to a thing by participation, however, is not that thing's substance. Therefore, it is impossible that the substance other than the first agent should be being [*esse*] itself.”¹⁰⁹ Finite beings are set apart from infinite and subsistent Being by an infinite gap. However, because God is equated with pure *esse*, as *ipsum esse subsistens*, there is no way for the intellect to know God in terms of quiddity, precisely because God is beyond *ens*; *ens* alone is what the intellect is naturally directed to. In a telling passage, Thomas states:

It belongs to Him alone to be in act in the most perfect way, that is, to be Himself the most perfect act. Now, this act is being [*esse*], wherein generation and all movement terminate, since every form and act is in potentiality before it acquires being [*esse*]. Therefore, it belongs to God alone to be his own being, just as it pertains to Him only to be the first agent.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ SCG, Bk. II, Ch. 52, n. 8.

¹¹⁰ SCG, Bk. II, Ch. 52, n. 7.

The real crux of Thomistic metaphysics, then, is the opposition between the finite and concrete *ens*, held in existence via the positive upsurging of infinite *esse*. In other words, each being has *esse* by virtue of the participatory structure, which holds concrete, finite existence in place, but is not equivalent with *esse* itself. Importantly, for Thomas, we always say that a thing “has Being,” meaning that existents are not equivalent to Being (*esse*), but have a finite participation in Being. As Thomas puts it, “act itself is more perfectly in act than that which has act, since the latter is in act because of the former.”¹¹¹

There is a definite causal structure that runs through participation, which at the same time is a transcendent structure. God, as the first agent and pure *esse* itself, by virtue of His own essence—Being itself—is the causal source of concrete existence and is beyond concrete being in holding it up. *Ens*, which the soul knows first as concrete being, is so causally by way of self-subsistent *esse*. Accordingly, the fundamental distinction in Thomistic metaphysics is *ens/esse* not *existentia/essentia*. The *ens/esse* distinction captures universality in two senses. First in terms of the concrete universal being (*ens*) that the intellect knows first; second, in terms of *infinite esse*, which is never knowable by us, but upon which the whole of concrete being depends. The *essentia/existentia* distinction doesn't seem to capture the nuances of the *ens/esse* distinction, crucial to understanding Thomistic metaphysics. If the *essentia/existentia* distinction, which for Heidegger defines scholastic metaphysics, captures the *ens/esse* distinction, how it does so is not obviously clear. Moreover, it doesn't seem to have been made explicit by Heidegger at any point.

What is clear, however, is the fact that Thomistic metaphysics centers on *ens*, not *esse*. For Heidegger, such a focus inevitably misses something crucial, the “nothing” itself. As such,

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Being for Heidegger, which is the ultimate direction of the question concerning metaphysics, is not the same as the “being” (*ens*) Aquinas has in mind when he sets out to establish the subject of metaphysics. However, we shouldn't be too quick to underestimate the subject of Thomistic metaphysics. At every point of our natural directedness to *ens*, *esse* is not ignored. In a sense, *esse*, in the Thomistic framework, does signify “nothing” in the sense that *esse* is no-thing: it is always beyond the thing itself to which the human being is naturally related. What is essential to metaphysical knowledge is that any given thing must *have* being (*esse*) in order for it to be a being (*ens*) that is naturally proportioned to the intellect. Thus, the scope of metaphysics is limited to that which is proportioned to the intellect in the most general sense.

Ens Commune frames our finite knowledge, yet because *ens* is dependent upon *esse*, there is always an essential lacking on the side of finite knowledge as well as an essential excess from the side of Being (*esse*) itself. The essential lack, indicative of finite knowledge, which Thomistic metaphysics points to, is in the same stroke suggestive of the transcendence of Being. At each point of our concrete finitude, *esse* overfills and exceeds us, both with respect to our being as well as with respect to what we can rationally comprehend. The infinite upsurge of *esse*, at every point of concrete existence, is what is uncanny in Thomas's thought and this uncanniness is thoroughly embedded in the subject of Thomistic metaphysics. To say “*ens commune*” implies the infinite abundance of *esse*, upon which *ens commune* depends. There is an overflowing of *esse*, which swells concrete being with a plenitude with which thought cannot catch up, yet which grants solidity to the concrete existence to which we are naturally directed. The distinction between finite, concrete *ens* and infinite *ipsum esse subsistens* forms the bedrock of Thomistic metaphysics. In so doing, the distinction does much more than illuminate the subject of

metaphysics as *ens commune*, it opens our eyes to the infinite excess upon which our finite knowledge depends.

In this sense, we can see where Heidegger's *essentia/existentia* distinction somewhat misses the mark when it comes to the metaphysics of Aquinas. Moreover, it is clear that, through participation, Being is not understood in terms of factual presence, nor as the highest being. Rather, concrete and finite (*ens*) is so by way of its participation in infinite *esse*. *Ens commune* speaks to our fundamental and existential predisposition towards that which is first known in terms of first principles of being (*ens*). *Ens commune* defines the manner in which beings are understood in general by us. Not this or that being, but being-in-general: the concrete tangible reality with which we are in touch. The manner in which we confront *esse* is always mediated through *ens* simply because *esse* does not give itself up in a tangible way; *esse* defines pure Being itself – pure actuality (*actus puris*), in which concrete being participates and upon which they causally depends. Our finite access to Being is enclosed by *ens commune*.

Participation, for the Thomistic metaphysician, therefore, signifies the human being's finite borders with the infinite upsurge of self-subsisting Being, in and through which our concrete reality, defined in terms of *ens*, is upheld. Metaphysics cannot get beyond being-in-general. There is no way for thought to get past it; being-in-general is the first and final word for metaphysics since the first principles of being (*ens*) are the foundation and terminus of knowledge. However, by sketching the limitations of finite knowledge, as bordered on infinite *esse*, Thomistic metaphysics points to the wholly transcendent Other beyond being (*ens*), which constitutes the concrete and created reality, which metaphysics has a grip. Because Being in itself is wholly beyond thought's access, Being as *ipsum esse subsistens* is thoroughly beyond *ens*.

Hence, infinite *esse*, in its pure act of self-subsistence, is infinitely Other. Therefore, alterity is at the center of Thomistic metaphysics. The soul is poised outwards towards otherness. Otherness, for the soul, is concrete reality as *ens*, which is accessed by the soul in terms of the cognition of first principles of being (*ens*). The whole of concrete reality or being-in-general, however, is upheld by what is infinitely Other to thought. In the upholding of *ens*, *esse* is always in excess of finite thinking while at the same time causally upholding the entire structure.

Heidegger's position is that Being, for Thomas, is reduced to factual presence, but this isn't fully true. The *ens/esse* distinction elucidates that we are naturally directed to factual presence, but that this is supported by *ipsum esse subsistens*, which cannot itself be accounted for concretely. *Esse* represents what is always held back in our understanding of the concrete, yet which, by necessity, permeates and holds up the whole of concrete being. *Esse* represents self-subsisting, infinite Being which can never be directly accessed conceptually because of its infinite Otherness. To be sure, such a "holding-back" of *esse* is not an unconcealing, but is rather a holding-back in terms of the causal superstructure that is participation. Holding back, for Thomas, is a matter of what always exceeds thought. What we can say about *esse* is extremely limited because our access to it is limited. We know only that each existent has a limited share in Being but cannot be equated with Being in itself and that Being itself is pure abundance that cannot be captured conceptually in any regard. Insofar as finite thought is enclosed by *ens commune*, the infinite abundance of *esse* in itself perpetually remains beyond the confines of finite knowledge.

Esse doesn't withdraw in any Heideggerian sense, but is wholly beyond *ens*, infinitely exceeding it in holding *ens* in place. The holding-back of *esse* with regards to finite thought is an

infinite excess, beyond what thought can grasp. Each time we grasp an entity's form, we know that the being grasped necessarily depends upon Being, but abstraction is limited to the *ens* which has *esse* as *actus essendi*. The *ipsum esse subsistens* that is causally responsible for concrete being, is wholly transcendent, yet permeates every being's *actus essendi* at every point of its existence. At every moment of actual existence, concrete being depends upon the participatory upsurge of infinite *esse*.

Heidegger's critique, though, at this point, is not evaded. Even if the *essentia/existentia* distinction is not the pivotal distinction that defines Thomistic metaphysics and factual presence is not exactly equivalent with Thomas's conception of Being, participation still construes existence in an onto-theo-logical way. *Ipsum esse subsistens* causally and definitively grounds beings in concrete being and concrete being in Being, exemplifying the onto-theo-logic structure that Heidegger suggests governs the history of metaphysics.

Heidegger is at odds with two major factors that seemingly cannot be avoided in Thomas's metaphysics: The fact that *ipsum esse subsistens* grounds beings in Being in a causal manner; and the fact that Being as pure *Esse*, through the theory of participation, must be thought of as a wholly transcendent structure, making Being something wholly Other to Dasein in the sense that Being never reaches Dasein. In Heidegger's thought, because Thomistic metaphysics is circumscribed by participation, the deity must enter philosophy, making Being equivalent with God in a grounding and thoroughly causal sense. As Heidegger puts it, "The Being of beings is thus thought of in advance as the grounding ground. Therefore, all metaphysics is at bottom, and from the ground up, what grounds, what gives account of the ground, what is called to account

by the ground, and finally what calls the ground to account.”¹¹² In Thomas's metaphysics, Being grounds beings in terms of participation, and Being itself is grounded in terms of *ipsum esse subsistens*. As such, even if we don't equate Being with the God of Christian revelation, nonetheless, the structure of ontotheology holds. Factual presence as *ens* is causally grounded by *ipsum esse subsistens*, which is wholly Other than concrete being.

In the succinct yet profound lecture *Time and Being*, Heidegger shows how, through *Ereignis*, it is possible to think of Being non-causally, that is, to think Being as a giving without attempting to construe it as the causal ground of beings. Heidegger suggests that:

To think Being itself explicitly requires disregarding Being to the extent that it is only grounded and interpreted in terms of beings as their ground, as in all metaphysics. To think Being explicitly requires us to relinquish Being as the ground of beings in favor of the giving which prevails concealed in unconcealment, that is, in favor of the It gives.¹¹³

What Heidegger showed in *Being and Time* is that temporality is the “transcendental horizon”¹¹⁴ of the question of Being for Dasein. What Heidegger elucidates in the later *Time and Being* is that the unconcealing of Being is the (non-causal) granting of temporality and, likewise, that the granting of temporality mediates our confrontation with Being.¹¹⁵ As Heidegger puts it, “Being and time determine each other reciprocally, but in such a manner that neither can the former—Being—be addressed as something temporal nor can the latter—time—be addressed a being.”¹¹⁶ Heidegger's motive in *Time and Being* is to probe further, beyond the presencing of Being and

¹¹² ID, pg. 58.

¹¹³ OTB, pg. 6.

¹¹⁴ BT, pg. 377.

¹¹⁵ OTB, pg. 3

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

the givenness of time, towards the “It” that “gives” both to thought.¹¹⁷ As he puts it, “we must show how this 'there is' can be experienced and seen. The appropriate way to get there is to explain what is given in the 'It gives', what 'Being' means, which—It gives; what 'time' means, which—It gives.”¹¹⁸ Heidegger is attempting to get beyond the metaphysical interpretation of Being as the ground for beings by questioning into what it is that grants Being and, therefore, time, as such to thought.

Heidegger locates the “It” that “gives” in *Ereignis*. As Being perpetually withdraws in its sending, Dasein finds itself in the clearing, which is opened through unconcealing. *Ereignis*, as the “event of appropriation,” where Being and thought meet, is the condition of possibility for Dasein to find itself not just in the “clearing,” but in the temporal and existential “moment,” which remains constant in the moment's passing.¹¹⁹ Hence, Being grants temporality in its unconcealing and temporality grants the horizon upon which Being confronts Dasein. This doesn't mean that time gives or causes Being, but that both are given mutually to thought in such a way that both are reciprocally determined through one another yet cannot be equated. In co-determining each other, time and Being do not cause each other, but rather cannot be questioned or understood independently of one another.

Ereignis is, in a sense, the middle term in the equation between the givenness of time and Being. However, as the middle term, it does not give rise to any sublation or move beyond; the structure or *Austrag* is perpetually upheld in Dasein's existence. The point, for Heidegger, is not to get beyond or to negate, but to delineate Dasein's unique and essential ontological structure,

¹¹⁷ OTB, pg. 5.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ The past present and future all culminate here; this is Dasein's ecstatic temporal structure. Dasein, as such, is stretched here. The clearing is the opening where Dasein's temporality is unified – the past and future are held in the present “now”.

which “appropriates” the “event” of sending itself in terms of time and Being. For Heidegger, *Ereignis* constitutes that moment where Dasein receives the givenness of time and Being as held apart, yet unified in their co-determination. *Ereignis*, then, is a kind of receiving of unconcealment. Heidegger's thought of *Ereignis* as a testament to the sending of Being, accomplishes the task of thinking Being without regards to the grounding of beings. *Ereignis* gets out of the metaphysical tendency to bring the thought of Being into a causal and determining relationship with beings. Rather, what is thought is the “event” where the sending of Being is “appropriated.”

The distinctiveness of Heidegger's thought of Being, elucidated through *Ereignis*, depends upon the thought of sending. This is to say that *Ereignis* allows us to see Being not as a causal grounding for beings, but as a sending which is a “giving” or a “letting-be.” There is no causal determination in “giving,” but only the gift itself as unconcealed while the sending of the gift bears no relation to the gift other than the fact that the sending itself has withdrawn or concealed. With a focus on Dasein's receptivity to Being as an ontological constituent of Dasein's being, Being is thematized in a way that avoids the need to ground beings. What is thought is Being itself according to the manner in which Dasein has Being as an issue.

The sending of Being is precisely a giving or letting, which is not a causing but the interplay of concealing and unconcealing. This undoes the thought of Being as an entitative ground and allows Being to remain itself, that is, that which remains behind, concealed in what is unconcealed to thought. With *Ereignis*, Heidegger is showing us how to think Being in a manner that is closer to the pre-Socratics. He is attempting to guide thought out of the rubric of metaphysics, which has buried our capacity to think being adequately. In Heideggerian terms,

there is no way for Thomas to think of Being in a non-causal sense. Because of this, something like *Ereignis* can never be hit upon by Aquinas. This is because the thought of Being as pure *esse* provides the means for the whole ontological story of existence. There is no need to question the “It gives,” which opens Being and time to thought. Being in terms of *esse* is wholly Other to thought, infinitely exceeding it.

Participation dictates a full separation between transcendent Being as *esse* and the finitude of concrete existence as *ens*. For Thomas, following the dictates of his Aristotelian worldview, time is not the “transcendental horizon” upon which the question of Being emerges, but is the result of materiality insofar as matter is indicative of potentiality, actuality, motion, generation, and corruption. Temporality belongs to the finite, matter-form constituent. In accordance with the theory of participation, the One beyond being (*ens*) is beyond time. The transcendent nature of *esse* demands that Being be removed from the temporal and historical. Time belongs to the world of created and finite beings. Therefore, Thomas can never conceive of Being as a historical presencing, a giving of itself to the human Being in terms of time. Only through *Ereignis* and the step-back is it possible to show that time belongs to Being as presence and that Being is presence insofar as we are temporal. The co-determination of time and Being cannot be thought under the guise of participation, making the thought of *Ereignis* and the sending of Being inaccessible to Thomas. Being is infinite and ahistorical Being, transcendent to us, yet causally determining finite existence in terms of *ens*.

The fact that Thomas's metaphysics depends on an infinite transcendent *esse*, wholly beyond *ens*, renders Being an excess beyond the comprehension of finite thought, not a concealing that withdraws in sending. For Heidegger, thinking and Being are a belonging-

together in a sameness. It is Being's sending that opens the "clearing" for Dasein. For Aquinas, thinking and *ens* share a unity that participates in *esse*, but *esse* remains wholly Other to the human being. But does this mean that Thomas's metaphysics must inescapably remain in oblivion?

Our task as metaphysicians, for Aquinas, is to come to terms with the first principles of *ens*, upon which all finite knowledge and cognition depend. By working towards first principles *via resolutionis*, we reach the point of unity upon which discursive reasoning is hinged. In so doing we come to see that first principles of Being are also the terminus for discursive reasoning as well. We find the grounds upon which knowledge is based. The ground in the sense of first principles of being provides knowledge with reliability. We know that our soul is linked to *ens* for knowledge and linked to *esse* for its *actus essendi*. *Esse* describes the foundation for *ens*, which is all at once an existential as well as epistemological ground. *Ens*, as the ground for knowledge is not the final word of Being, but is only the final word of finite knowledge for us. There is an infinite beyond in every intentional act. The perpetual holding-back of *esse* in its holding-up of *ens* is always in infinite excess of thought.

For Heidegger, Thomas cannot help but miss the concealing of Being insofar as Thomas must think of Being, not as withdrawing, but as perpetual and infinite excess, which causally determines beings in their being and allows thought to access those beings in the mode of intentionality. So, in Heidegger's mind, Thomas's metaphysics belongs to a history that is unavoidably in oblivion. As I pointed out, oblivion belongs to the ontological difference, in Heidegger's opinion. Taking for granted the ontological difference as such is oblivion. Only in heeding to Being as a sending through *Ereignis* can the ontological difference be recognized as

the difference to which metaphysics is oblivious to and to which thought must awaken.

Thematizing “sending” allows Heidegger to conceptualize the clearing or opening where the difference between Being and beings is granted to thought. In Heidegger's mind, we don't adequately come to grips with the ontological difference as such until we conceptualize our relationship to the sending of Being. In so doing, it is possible to conceptualize what grants the Being of metaphysics to thought.

For Heideggerians, the very structure of participation makes it impossible to recognize the ontological difference as a difference opened up to thought. The difference, in Aquinas's metaphysics, is not, a difference opened to thought through sending, but a difference between concrete, finite existence and infinite *esse*. The notion of difference here is dependent upon a causal determination of beings in Being. As such, though there is an account of the difference in Aquinas's metaphysics, it is nonetheless still taken for granted as difference.

It is evident at this point that divine transcendence is the crux upon which metaphysics rests for Aquinas insofar as *ipsum esse subsistens* is what grants concrete being its actuality, allowing the subject of metaphysics to become accessible to thought. However, what is not thematized, and what Heidegger ultimately takes issue with, is that which opens up the subject of metaphysics as such to be thought by the metaphysician. In other words, what is it that grants the metaphysician the capacity to make *ens commune* the subject of metaphysics? More fundamentally, what is the space or opening that allows the human being to posit the difference between *esse* and *ens*? Because Thomistic metaphysics is dependent upon the theory of participation, the question of the difference as such is not evident for it. This is because what opens the difference between *ens* and *esse* is not itself questioned into.

For Heidegger, on the other hand, the dismissal of the wholly transcendent allows him to think of Being and thought as a sameness that constitutes the opening or clearing in which Dasein dwells. Being is not what is beyond being, but that which unconceals beings. By ridding his thought of the wholly transcendent, Being can be thought as a non-causal, and thus, non-metaphysical, sending, attested to by *Ereignis*. This allows Heidegger to think of Being as that which always approaches Dasein in its sending, which is why Being is always an issue for Dasein. Being is not answered to by being stored in a metaphysical framework, but must always be responded to insofar as Being perpetually approaches us in its sending

Is there a way to think of Being as a sending, while nonetheless allowing Thomistic metaphysics to posit *esse* as an infinitely transcendent Other? In Heidegger's mind there is not. By making Being something transcendent like God, thought immediately lacks the capacity to reckon with Being as a historical sending that grants epochs and worldviews to finite Dasein. Moreover, as soon as Being attains the status of something beyond being, it becomes impossible to pose the question of Being adequately. It is not possible to see that thought and Being are a belonging-together. Because of this, for Heidegger, not only will thought remain in oblivion, but our own essence will remain clouded by the incapacity to recognize that our response to the question of Being determines our essence. In other words, we are not able to see that we are the being who has Being as an issue, always responding to Being. Oblivion, then, also entails that we are, in a certain sense, oblivious to our own essence.

If there is anything the Thomistic metaphysician has to take seriously in the Heideggerian critique, it is the notion of “sending.” That is, Thomistic metaphysics must take seriously the charge that in order to question Being adequately, the Thomist must ask into what it is that grants

ens commune to thought so that it can become the subject of metaphysics. The answer cannot simply be “*esse*.” What needs to be thematized is the manner in which *ens* as such is received and opened to thought in a manner that allows the world itself to be thematized in Thomistic terms. What is the Thomistic equivalent to Heidegger's *Ereignis*? What allows the world and thought to mutually transcend each other, allowing *ens commune* to take on the status of the subject of metaphysics? To answer this, it is necessary to define the manner in which the human being stands in relation to *ens* in terms of *esse*, not factually, but rather in terms of the existential moment that defines the human being's relationship to Being (*esse*) in terms of *ens*. As such, the question becomes, not only what grants the subject of metaphysics to the Thomistic metaphysician, but how *esse* itself gets related to.

To be sure, temporality, for Aquinas, is cast out in the typical Aristotelian sense, that is, in terms of matter and motion. However, implicit in Aquinas's thought is an understanding of a more primordial relationship to existence, which is not explicitly worked out in terms of time, but which is tied to the lived existential moment. Embedded in Thomistic metaphysics is the notion that, at every moment, the human being is intentionally linked to *ens* through an implicit knowledge of first principles. The unity that thought shares with *ens* allows for a conception of an “event” where *ens* as such is granted to thought by *Esse*. The world as an opening where the human being finds its intentional bearings in terms of *ens*, is at every lived moment, constituted and upheld by *esse*. Thomistic metaphysics, therefore, allows for a certain attestation of an ontotheological “event” where human thought and the concrete world find their meeting as mutual transcendences. This is not a Heideggerian “event” in terms of *Ereignis*, but it is an “event” in its own right, which points towards the fact that in each existential moment the human

being is aware of itself and its world as mediated through *ens*, but that the granting of *ens* is a kind of “sending” via *esse*. What is sent, in terms of *ens*, is not *esse* itself, but the concrete world in terms of *ens*, to which the human being stands in intentional relation. What is attested to is the moment itself. Insofar as the human being knows *ens* the human being stands in the opening where *ens* is granted to thought.

However, does the notion of a Thomistic “event” allow us to conceive of a Thomistic metaphysics that is not in “oblivion”? What Heideggerians need to consider is that in the same manner in which Heidegger was able to probe the history of philosophy in search for what was left out or unsaid so as to form a historical delineation of our interpretation of Being, so too can the Thomist probe the text for what remains implicit in it. The difference is that the Thomist can look for what Heidegger himself could not see because of his own orientation towards and understanding of philosophy as a history of covering over the question of Being. It is possible that in the act of making explicit what is unsaid in a text, one opens up endless possibilities, such that the process of *Destruktion* is never ending. There is no “final word” of a text. As much as Heidegger attempted to steer away from prejudice and dogma with respect to the question of Being, his own orientation may have created a certain blindness in its own right, making it impossible for Heidegger to consider aspects of a metaphysics such as Thomas's in a light that sees it, less in terms of “oblivion”, and more in terms of what Heidegger himself was attempting to think. This doesn't take anything away from the ingenuity of Heidegger's thought in drafting the notion of “oblivion” and “overcoming” metaphysics. One has to take seriously his account of the history of philosophy. What I have attempted to show is that, for Thomists, it is crucial to take into account the notion of “sending”. This doesn't mean that one has to concede that

Thomistic thinking is or is not in oblivion. However, it does force the Thomistic metaphysician to ask into, in a specific sense, what “it” is that grants *ens commune* the status of the subject of metaphysics. As I pointed out, one cannot simply reply “*esse*.” One has to thematize the world as the opening in and from which *ens* is encountered as *ens*.

For Heideggerians, on the other hand, in order to understand what is meant by oblivion, one cannot simply repeat Heidegger's words; one must find their meaning for one's self. Thomas is a great case for this: an understanding of his metaphysics makes it clear that it is not so easy to construct the manner by which he belongs to oblivion. It is not the case that Heidegger's claims can be easily fitted to Thomas's metaphysics. Moreover, it remains possible to find, implicit in Thomas's metaphysics, aspects which Heidegger himself could not see because of his orientation to the text. In other words, there may be a way to find, within Thomas's thought, a thinking that allows for the thought of “sending” in a uniquely Thomistic sense. One may come to terms with the ontological difference as such from within Thomistic metaphysics. One may postulate that it is not ontotheology as such that makes metaphysics forgetful and, if this is the case, it is possible to come to terms with oblivion from within the ontotheological structure. Heidegger himself notes that the point is to “wake up” to “oblivion” so that we can stand firm within it. We do not get beyond oblivion, but must only recognize it for what it is.

In conclusion, the work on “oblivion” and “overcoming” metaphysics is far from clear at this point. Though Heidegger's claims must be taken seriously, it is up to current Heideggerians to make his claims more explicit. Rather than simply repeating Heidegger's thesis, it needs to be applied to specific metaphysical frameworks in order to be made clear. I have proposed such an application for the case of Thomas Aquinas. However, as it was shown, what the Heideggerian

critique does exemplify is the fact that metaphysicians must take seriously the task asking into the sending of Being. The notion of sending forces us to ask into what grants the subject of metaphysics as such to thought. More specifically, for Thomists, the challenge is to take seriously the call to thematize sending in a Thomistic sense, while nonetheless hanging on to the ontotheological foundation that Thomistic metaphysics demands.

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