

# HEIDEGGER AND AQUINAS



An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics

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alethiological dimension to St. Thomas. St. Thomas remains a causal thinker, the author of an objectivistic metaphysics, and the only *rapprochement* which has been made is that all this is cast in the language of *Ereignis*.

#### BEING AND THE TRANSCENDENTAL *Verum*

If the objection which I have made to Lotz's interpretation of Heidegger's relationship to Aquinas is that he has failed to bridge the gap between the objectivistic and the alethiological modalities of these thinkers, then it would seem that the place to turn for a deeper-level *rapprochement* would be the Thomistic idea of truth and of Being as truth. The Heideggerian correlate in St. Thomas would then be found not only in what he says about Being but particularly in what he says about the Being of truth and the truth of Being. It is not only to *esse* but also to *verum* that one must turn to find the depth dimension in St. Thomas which exempts him from the Heideggerian critique. That is precisely the route which Rioux follows in his *Being and Truth in Heidegger and Thomas Aquinas*.<sup>5</sup> For one must avoid a head-on confrontation of Heidegger's *Sein* with the Thomistic *esse* because of the radically phenomenological and post-phenomenological character of Being in Heidegger. One must not be misled by the grammatical and lexical isomorphism of these two words into thinking that both words are thought in the same terms. Now, I myself pursued this strategy in the preceding chapter and found it wanting. Let us see now what Rioux makes of it.

Rioux's argument about the *verum* in St. Thomas is preceded by an argument about *esse* itself. Hence Rioux makes two central and closely related claims about St. Thomas. First, he argues, in the spirit of Lotz and of Cornelio Fabro, that, contrary to Heidegger's claims, there is a penetrating insight in St. Thomas into Being as *Being* which can in no way be associated with any so-called "oblivion of Being." Secondly, and this follows from the first point, St. Thomas does not have a merely ontic, correspondence theory of truth; he has thought truth—the transcendental *verum*—strictly in terms of Being, and he has the strongest appreciation of the belonging together of Being and thought of which Heidegger speaks. Nor is Rioux content to measure the value of St. Thomas' thought against the rod of Heidegger's work.

For in Rioux's view Heidegger's "alethiology" remains captive to idealism, inasmuch as Being is tied to Dasein, so that "Being" is neither the concrete absolute of the Thomistic *esse subsistens* nor any particular being, but nothing more than the abstraction which the Scholastics call *esse commune*. Rioux develops these ideas on the basis of a thorough and probing analysis of the texts of Heidegger which cuts off the easy escape which Heideggerians frequently invoke: that all criticisms of Heidegger are based on a misunderstanding. Let me therefore examine first what Rioux has to say about *esse* and then about the *verum*.

Borrowing I think rather heavily from an article by Cornelio Fabro which I shall discuss below, Rioux emphasizes that in the Thomistic notion of Being as the *actus essendi* there is to be found a vivid intuition of Being in its active upsurge which meets all of Heidegger's objections against the metaphysical oblivion of Being. For Thomas, Being does not mean *οὐσία*, as in Aristotle, but the very act of Being. Thomas found in *esse a principium quo* (a principle by means of which) which was unknown to Aristotle, for whom form was the highest principle of substance. As St. Thomas writes: "Form is able to be called a *quo est*, according as it is a principle of being [a substance]. But the whole substance is itself a *quod est* [something which is]. And *esse* itself is that by which [*quo*] substance is called a being" (SCG, II, 54). In his discovery of *esse* as an act of being (*actus essendi*), as that principle by which the essence is brought forth into being, Thomas has broken with the oblivion of Being which precedes and follows him. Rioux says: "In this fundamental relationship of essence to the act of being which perfects it intrinsically, there resides the ontological difference underlined with so much depth by Heidegger. Being is that which is [*ens*] on the foundation of the act of being (*esse*) . . ." (p. 218). Elsewhere Rioux refers to *esse* as "that energy which animates every being and makes it appear in a concealed Presence" (p. 251). *Esse* as act means Being as upsurge, the active emergence into Being which is what Heidegger means by *φύσις*. As such *esse* means the emergence into presence and manifestness signified by *ἀλήθεια*.

Now, there is some truth to the claim, as we saw in the preceding chapter, that there is a trace of Being as *φύσις*, as active upsurge, in Thomistic *esse*. And to this extent one can agree with Rioux. But Rioux seems wholly to ignore Heidegger's critique of *actualitas* and

of the causal character of any conception of Being within the horizon of making and acting (*agere*). The translation of *ἐνέργεια* into *actualitas* is precisely a fateful concealment of the meaning of original *φύσις* for Heidegger. Rioux nowhere addresses this point, which is explained no doubt by the absence of the *Nietzsche* volumes from his bibliography, although they had been published two years before his book appeared.

Rioux's argument is inspired by Fabro's essay entitled "The Currency and Originality of the Thomistic *Esse*."<sup>6</sup> Fabro wrongly takes it that the oblivion of Being spoken of by Heidegger is essentialism and that the antidote to essentialism is the Thomistic notion of *esse* as the *actus essendi*. This claim is at the heart of all the diverse responses on the part of the Thomists to Heidegger's charge of *Seinsvergessenheit*, yet from Heidegger's point of view it misses the mark in a very basic way. Fabro writes:

Our research begins with the firm conviction (which we intend to establish) that it is only in the perspective of creation that the radical foundation of *a theory of Being as the act of the being is possible*, an expression which (if it is properly understood) enables us to see the originality of Thomistic metaphysics with respect to the Aristotelian metaphysics of "the being as a being," which is the target of Heidegger's critique.<sup>7</sup>

Heidegger would indeed agree that Thomas' thought is a metaphysics of act and actuality and that it is entirely circumscribed by the doctrine of creation. But far from taking this to prove that Thomas is thereby extricated from *Seinsvergessenheit*, he would take it as a decisive testimony that he is not. Fabro's mistake is to think that for Heidegger Being means act—and I think that this mistake is rather commonly made by the Thomists:

The Being of Heidegger, like that of St. Thomas, is neither phenomenon nor noumenon, neither substance nor accident; it is simply act. But while Heideggerian Being is given in the flux of time by the consciousness of man, Thomistic Being expresses the act which is possessed essentially (God) or which rests (*quiescit*) in the heart of all being, as the primordial participated energy which sustains it outside of nothing (in the creature).<sup>8</sup>

And since Heidegger has attained only a finite act, not the infinitely creative act, he himself remains in the very oblivion of Being of which he speaks.<sup>9</sup> But Being for Heidegger is precisely *not* act, neither *actus purus* (EM 14/14) nor *actus creatus*, but the quiet splendor and simple radiance of what shows itself, which is wholly removed from all the categories of causality and actuality. The entire response which Fabro makes to Heidegger's critique of the metaphysics of *esse* as the *actus essendi* is vitiated, in my judgment, by his failure to come to grips with this central point and to have presented a Thomistic response to it. As Beaufret points out so lucidly, the very discourse of St. Thomas about Being in terms of *actus* and *actualitas*, far from extricating him from the oblivion of Being, thrusts him into it all the more deeply.

On the basis of his authentic understanding of Being, Rioux argues, St. Thomas develops an equally authentic conception of truth. He defends the Thomistic theory of judgment as having an ontological and not merely an ontic validity, as attaining the level of Being (the "is"). And he holds that this judgmental truth is rooted in the strictly ontological conception of truth found in the transcendental *verum*. The truth of judgment is founded on the truth of Being.

The judgment in St. Thomas is indeed the formal locus of truth properly so called. Truth is to be found formally only in the mind, not in things. But this does not open St. Thomas to all of Heidegger's criticisms of this theory. For the mind or intellect which judges is a faculty of Being (p. 181). It must not be understood as a faculty which erects pictorial representations within itself of the outer world, as in the Cartesian paradigm which Heidegger has in mind, but as a faculty which reaches the "is," the *est* in the *quod est*. The intellect for St. Thomas, in virtue of its intentional structure, is thrust into the world and so it never suffers from the usual objections made against all Cartesian and post-Cartesian "correspondence" theories. Unlike the theory of judgment entertained by the young Heidegger, which I examined in Chapter 1, St. Thomas' theory is "existential," intentionally directed at Being itself, the Being of what is. Judgment is not confined to the level of "meaning" and "validity" but attains to Being itself. Hence, though St. Thomas may have an *adequatio* theory of truth, he does not have a correspondence theory in the modern sense.

Heidegger thinks that the judgment, insofar as it is derived from

the pre-predicative level, is essentially "fallen," while St. Thomas, who also takes the judgment to arise from the pre-predicative, perceptual level (*omnis scientia oritur in sensu*), considers the judgment to be "perfective" of the perceptual, raising it for the first time to a genuinely ontological level (pp. 188–89). By means of the existential "is," the mind first explicitly affirms and encounters Being. It is in this judgmental "is" that the pre-ontological becomes ontological, that the Being which is implicitly known becomes explicitly affirmed. Rioux therefore goes on to say that Heidegger's opposition to discursive and judgmental reason results in a Manichaean dualism in which "thought" and reason are essentially at odds. This can be corrected by a more sober and ontological theory of judgment which does not relegate it to the ontic and put it hopelessly at odds with the ontological (pp. 130, 220–21).<sup>10</sup>

However, the truly ontological character of St. Thomas' conception of truth is found not in his theory of judgment, which is for St. Thomas a defective operation peculiar to the lowest (human) level of intellects, but in his theory of the transcendental *verum*. For Rioux the *verum* signifies "the rapport of the intellect and being" (p. 133). Heidegger's enlivening insight is into the essential belonging together of Being and mind in the notion of truth, the necessity of mind for Being to be revealed. Without mind there can be no *esse manifestivum*, which is one of the definitions of the truth which Thomas invokes (*De ver.* I, 1). Now, Heidegger himself acknowledges that in the Thomist conception of the mind as that whose nature it is to come together with all beings, to become all things in knowledge (*convenire cum omni ente*), there are contained the essentials of his own idea of Dasein (*SZ* § 4, 14/34). St. Thomas has already worked out a definition of man in terms of his relationship to and understanding of Being. The highest and defining characteristic of man is his participation in intellectuality, and the intellect is a faculty of *esse* (pp. 152–54; *ST*, I, 5, 2, c).

But Heidegger's essential failure is to have confined the relationship between Being and mind to a relationship between Being and Dasein, and not to have seen that what he is talking about, the essential need of Being to be manifested, the essential identity between Being and thought, is to be found only in the relationship between the divine Being and the divine mind (pp. 240–42). There alone, in the identity of *intelligere* and *esse* in God, does one find the essential

belonging together of Being and thought. There alone is Being necessarily manifested. The openness of Being is not its relative and contingent openness in Dasein, but its absolute openness in God. Heidegger thus, in Rioux's view, remains under the vestigial influences of idealism (pp. 250ff.), and because of this his thought is caught up in a serious contradiction. For although Heidegger affirms the transcendence of Being, he must at the same time affirm its dependence on Dasein. Being "needs" Dasein for its epiphany, yet Being is called the "simply transcendent." Indeed, Rioux adds, there is some question as to just what Heidegger's "Being" can possibly signify. It is not the separate absolute of St. Thomas' *esse subsistens*, yet it is more than just the *esse* of this or that individual. What else can it possibly signify but an abstraction which the Scholastics call *esse commune*, that which all beings have in common without regard to their mode of concretion, without regard even to whether they are infinite or finite? And what a high irony it would be if the upshot of Heidegger's attempt to rethink the question of Being in a more radical and concretely phenomenological way would have been to have succumbed to an abstraction, to the illusory reality of a creature of our own making!

I am impressed by the knowledgeability of Rioux's renderings of Heidegger and Aquinas and by the incisiveness of his criticism of Heidegger from a Thomistic standpoint. But I remain unconvinced by his argument. I think that the main merit of this work is to have exposed the nerve of the disagreement between Heidegger and Aquinas. It is true that in the judgment the ontological level becomes explicit, but for Heidegger this is at the cost of the original integrity of the encounter with Being. For it has become explicit in the form of an objectivistic discourse *about* Being. Heidegger's objection against the judgment is that in it the original experience of Being, the face-to-face encounter with Being in all its pristine originality, is transformed into a statement which is uttered from the standpoint of one who has disengaged himself from the experience, and who then seeks to "represent" it. This "representation" need be taken not in the strong Cartesian sense, but in the minimal sense of speaking *about* (*über*) the experience instead of *from out of* (*aus*) it—whence the title of Heidegger's little poetic piece "out of the experience of thinking," "*Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*." That title expresses in a single phrase Heidegger's "method," that is, his way of making his way. Heidegger

objects to the proposition, not because it makes the "is," the ontological, explicit, but because it makes it explicit in the manner of objective discourse. He prefers the thinker's or the poet's way of "naming" Being, that is, of making it explicit. The "is" must be named, not in the manner of "existential judgments," but by poets and thinkers who have been touched by it.

And that is why the rest of Rioux's argument against Heidegger is in vain. Heidegger would meet the claim that his thought suffers from an inevitable anthropomorphism, that what he calls the belonging together of thought and Being is to be found not in Dasein but in God, by questioning the standpoint from which such a claim is made. Such theories for Heidegger are theories only, speculations, theoretical contrivances, which from the "phenomenological" standpoint are free-floating (*freischwebend*), without phenomenal base, lacking in a birth certificate in the things themselves. Heidegger would disallow the distinction which Rioux wants to draw between *esse reale* and *esse manifestivum* as an invention of the disengaged and ultimately worldless subject. Lotz, Rioux, and Fabro complain that Heidegger fails to make the move from the experienced world of phenomenal Being to the realm of "real" Being which is the cause of the world of Being in time. Yet to make such a move, to "ascend" to an explanatory and causal ground of Being, is essentially at odds with Heidegger's path of thought and can have nothing to do with it. Being, the Event, can mean only what we hear and see it to mean, and we can speak of it only insofar as we have been touched by it.

From Heidegger's standpoint it is Rioux's objectivism which represents the true abstraction, not Heidegger's Being. For this objectivism is possible only if one disengages oneself from the actual situatedness of human Dasein and attempts to speak of Being as it is, apart from Dasein. Objectivism is a possibility only for a thus abstracted Dasein. The Being of which Heidegger speaks is the Being which gives itself up into presence. He has forsworn to speak of any other possible kind of "Being."

And so I am, as I said, unconvinced by Rioux's fine book, although I am grateful to the author for having so ably exposed the nerve of the disagreement. The abyss which separates Heidegger from Aquinas is, in the parlance of philosophy, a "methodological" one. It is the difference between alethiological experience and an objectivistic explanation, between encounter and disengagement, between being

touched by the grace of Being and explicating it in causal categories. One must show that one of these two "methods" must give way, must break down. For if they are taken in their separate integrity, there is no bridge between objectivism and alethiology.

#### BEING AND *Esse Intentionale*

Rioux's work raises an important issue which must be discussed further. Rioux claims at the end of his book that Heidegger "does not make the distinction between a manifestation of Being according to the *esse* which is proper to beings and according to their intentional *esse* . . ." (p. 258). John Deely has taken up this point and made it the theme of his interpretation of Heidegger and Aquinas.<sup>11</sup> This is an interesting strategy, for it recognizes the mistake of thinking that the realist *esse* of St. Thomas and the phenomenological *Sein* of Heidegger are spoken in the same mode, and it looks instead for the properly Heideggerian correlate in St. Thomas in his conception of Being as known, not Being "in itself." What Heidegger has discovered or, more properly, recovered, on this interpretation, is not Being itself, as Heidegger would have us believe, but the traditional idea of *esse intentionale*, Being as it enters into the intentional life of man (= Dasein). Though the Scholastics first articulated the notion of intentional being, it was not until Heidegger that this "wholly unique sphere" (as Maritain, whom Deely greatly favors, put it) was fully thematized and elaborated. The structures of culture and history, long absent from Scholastic analyses, can be properly treated only within the framework of intentional life. Deely therefore offers us a translation of certain basic terms in Heidegger's vocabulary into the language of St. Thomas in order to make Heidegger's insights accessible to the Thomists and then to show how Heidegger has deepened and elaborated these ideas.

This is not to say that Heidegger's work leaves nothing to be desired in Deely's mind. Rather he wants to argue that Heidegger's success is limited because his method, phenomenology, is in principle so unable to accommodate "the aboriginal questioning of Being" (p. 176), that Heidegger himself must in the end be the victim of, and not the liberator from, *Seinsvergessenheit*. Heidegger's Being is Being as meant, Being as intended (= *esse intentionale*, *esse quod est intra*

ter, I refer the reader to the Bibliography in which I have supplied a more complete list of studies in the area of Thomas and Heidegger. In particular I find Sheehan's "Notes on a 'Lovers' Quarrel': Heidegger and Aquinas," to be very rich in insight although unfortunately short. My aim in the present chapter has been to discuss not everything, but only the most important studies and the ones which give us the best sampling of the diverse issues involved.

2. Johannes Baptist Lotz, *Martin Heidegger und Thomas von Aquin: Mensch, Zeit, Sein* (Freiburg: Herder, 1975). All page numbers in parentheses in the body of the text in this section will be to this volume unless otherwise noted. Because of its comprehensiveness I have based my exposition of Lotz's views upon this work. His essay "Das Sein selbst und das subsistierende Sein nach Thomas von Aquin," in *Martin Heidegger zum siebzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. Günther Neske (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959), pp. 180-94, is an adumbration of the present volume. A fuller sketch may be found in "Being and Existence in Scholasticism and in Existence-Philosophy," trans. Robert E. Wood, *Philosophy Today*, 9, No. 1 (Spring 1964), 3-45. The essays included in *Sein und Existenz* (Freiburg: Herder, 1965), pp. 97-242, except for the previous essay (pp. 340-408), tend to be in the nature more of book reviews than of a critical confrontation with St. Thomas. See also "Heidegger und das Christentum," *Doctor Communis*, 4 (1951), 63-73.

3. *Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, pp. 108-109, 247-48.

4. See the last section of this chapter, "Ἀλήθεια and the Participation of Being"; see also G 38/63.

5. Bertrand Rioux, *L'Être et la vérité chez Heidegger et saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963). All page numbers in parentheses in the body of the text in this section will be to this volume unless otherwise noted.

6. Cornelio Fabro, *Participation et causalité selon saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain; Paris: Editions Beatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1961), pp. 13-83. This chapter originally appeared as an article in the *Bulletin Thomiste* in 1956. See also his "Il nuovo problema dell'essere e la fondazione della metafisica," in *St. Thomas Aquinas, 1274-1974*, ed. Maurer, II 423-57.

7. Fabro, *Participation*, p. 51.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

10. See also my critique of the distinction between "thought" and "reason" in the later Heidegger in *Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, pp. 264-70.

11. *The Tradition via Heidegger: An Essay on the Meaning of Being in the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971). This book evolved from an article entitled "The Situation of Heidegger in the Tradition of Christian Philosophy," *The Thomist*, 31, No. 2 (April 1967), 159-244. All page numbers in the body of the text in this section will be to *The Tradition via Heidegger*, unless otherwise noted.

12. See Powell's "The Late Heidegger's Omission of the Ontico-Ontological Structure of *Das Sein*," in *Heidegger and the Path of Thinking*, ed. John Sallis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1970), pp. 116-37.

13. Powell, "The Late Heidegger's Omission," pp. 119-20.

14. *Heidegger*, p. 154.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 687.

16. Gustav Siewerth, *Das Schicksal der Metaphysik von Thomas zu Heidegger* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1959). All page numbers in the body of the text in the next three paragraphs of this section will be to this volume unless otherwise noted. See also the interesting portrait of Siewerth's relationship to Heidegger in Fischer-Barnicol's recollections of Heidegger in "Spiegelungen—Vermittlungen," pp. 98-100.

17. Max Müller, *Existenzphilosophie im geistigen Leben der Gegenwart*, 3rd ed. (Heidelberg: Kerle Verlag, 1964). All page numbers in the body of the text in the remainder of this section will be to this volume unless otherwise noted. For a commentary on the earlier editions of this book, see Jean Langlois, "Heidegger, Max Müller et le Thomisme," *Sciences Ecclésiastiques*, 9 (1957), 27-48.