

LEO J. ELDERS S. V. D.  
*Institute of Philosophy «Rolduc», Kerkrade, Holland*

## The Transcendental Properties of Being

### Introduction: A Concise History up to Thomas Aquinas

In metaphysics the term «transcendental» is used to denote the different aspects of being, that is of whatever is real. The term indicates that being and its properties are present in each of the predicaments or categories, such as substance, quantity, quality, relation, location, time, action, etc. Therefore, they «transcend» the limits of these different classes<sup>1</sup>. Some early Greek philosophers had noticed that whatever exists must have some unity and goodness, but they never treated the theme systematically. The philosophy of being begins with Parmenides who describes his fulgurant intuition of the unitary and unchangeable character of being as having been revealed to him from above. Being is and not-being is not. Being is one and immutable; it is also knowable, for being and thinking, he writes, are the same.

A century later Plato intimates that the highest reality, the Good, is beautiful and is one. However, he did not say that all existent things are good and beautiful. Especially in his later philosophy he assumed the existence of two first principles, the second

---

<sup>1</sup> The Greek original is *ὑπερβαίνω*, meaning: to go beyond. Kant gave the term an entirely new sense: the human mind transcends the brute material of sense experience. The mind stands above it and it determines the meaning and contents of experience with the help of apriori categories such as the forms of space and time; the apriori categories of substance, accident, unity, plurality, cause, effect, etc.; the apriori ideas of the self, the world and God. Kant intends to establish this transcendence of the human mind over the material world. The knowing subject determines the form and sense of its experience. See K. BÄRTHLEIN, «Von der Transzendentalphilosophie der Alten zu der Kants»: *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 58 (1976), 353-392.

of which (called the Great and [the] Small or the Indeterminate Dyad) could certainly not qualify as good. Instead of being one, it was a factor of division and multiplicity. As to Aristotle, he calls unity a property of being<sup>2</sup>. Being and unity are not particular classes of things, but are attributed to whatever exists. In this way Aristotle implicitly confirms their transcendental character. In his introduction to *De partibus animalium* he writes that every being, however unsightly it may appear to be, can be studied by man and has a knowledgeable content. This intimates that every being has its truth.

Neo-Platonism contributed to the genesis of the study of the transcendentals inasmuch as Plotinus, referring to the First principle, develops treatises on goodness and beauty. In the Christian Neo-Platonism of Dionysius unity, goodness and beauty are attributed to God. It would seem that the treatise of the transcendental properties of being originates with these speculations about what is proper to divine being and is reflected in creation, rather than with the scattered remarks of the Greek philosophers. Avicenna mentions the transcendentals and calls them accompanying conditioners (*conditiones concomitantes*) of being, added from the outside to it, much in the way in which according to the Platonists forms or formal determinations are added to a subject or a basic form<sup>3</sup>. Averroes following in Aristotle's footsteps, does not admit that such properties as unity or goodness add anything to being. They signify the same thing as being. However, he does not speak of transcendental properties of being.

The first to do so appears to have been Roland of Cremona who mentions as transcendental concepts being, unity, something and thing<sup>4</sup>. The *Summa de bono* of Philip, the Chancellor of the University of Paris (about 1230) is considered the first systematic treatise on the transcendental concepts. Fighting the pessimism of the Albigenses he wants to show that things are good and, borrowing from Avicenna, he writes that three conditions accompany being. These three conditions are related to the three causes at work in the same thing, sc. the efficient, formal and final cause. Every being is characterized by each of these causes. Each thing receives its unity from God as the efficient cause, its truth from God as the exemplary cause and its goodness from God as its final cause.

<sup>2</sup> *Metaph.* 1004 b 5.

<sup>3</sup> See A. BADAWI, *Histoire de la philosophie en Islam*, II (Paris, 1972), pp. 634ff.

<sup>4</sup> See Dom H. POUILLON, «Le premier traité des propriétés transcendantes: La *Summa de bono* du Chancelier Philippe», *Revue Néo-scholastique de Philosophie* 42 (1939) 41-77.

Differently from what Avicenna had done, Philip places these «conditions» in being itself. «Truth» manifests being, while «goodness» makes being communicate itself.. Shortly after the publication of Philip's treatise, the *Summa theologiae* of Alexander of Hales (and his Franciscan colleagues) discussed the unity, truth and goodness of things. Although their main interest was to establish how these concepts are related to God's causality, they innovated in speaking also of a relation of being to the human soul. This text, indeed, marks a significant progress<sup>5</sup>. Alexander is well informed, but he uses several principles in trying to distinguish between the transcendental properties, such as the genera of causality on the one hand and the faculties of man on the other. His treatise witnesses to the actuality of the issue in the debate at the university of Paris during the first half of the thirteenth century.

Albert the Great uses the term *transcendent* to denote those predicates which transcend the predicaments, sc. thing, unity, something<sup>6</sup>. His treatise *De bono* (dating from about 1240) reflects certain disputed questions at the university of Paris. He mentions several definitions of the good and of truth and shows the convertibility of «good» and «being». Yet being and being good are not the same, because being depends on the efficient cause and goodness on the final cause. Goodness adds a new signification to being rather than some positive quality. However, in his commentary on the *De divinis nominibus* of Dionysius Albert wavers between certain interpretations, sc. whether the transcendentals add a certain nature to being or not, but he is aware of the novelty of the treatise on the transcendentals, which, he says, goes beyond Aristotle who does not say that truth and goodness are properties which accompany every being. Obviously, Christian revelation played a significant role in the development of the metaphysics of the transcendental properties of being. The Bible explicitly mentions the unity and goodness of God, the One who is and who is also wisdom itself and shining truth. Since every cause produces effects alike to itself, God's creatures must show some similarity with their Maker. Moreover, Holy Scripture says that all the things that God made are good and that they are made in wisdom and order. However, the first medieval author to explain the properties of being in a rigorous philosophical analysis is St. Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>5</sup> Part I, inq. 1, tract. 1, questions 1, 2 and 3. Cf. J. FUCHS, *Die Proprietäten des Seins bei Alexander von Hales* (München, 1930).

<sup>6</sup> See *Opera I: Liber de praedicabilibus*, IV, c. 3.

### The Transcendental Properties of Being According to Thomas Aquinas

In the *Disputed Questions on Truth*, dating to approximately 1256-1257, Thomas gives a systematic explanation of the transcendental properties of being and their derivation<sup>7</sup>. This text is unique, and thus far has not been surpassed. The purpose of the *Disputed Questions on Truth* being to discuss truth and knowledge in general as well as related issues, Thomas begins by placing «true» in the framework of all the transcendental concepts, dealing with what is common before discussing what is particular. The text runs as follows:

«That which the intellect conceives first as most known and in which all concepts are resolved is being (*ens*), as Avicenna says in the beginning of his *Metaphysics*. Therefore, all other concepts of the intellect are formed because of an addition to being. But one cannot add anything to being as a content foreign to it, in the way a specific difference is added to the genus or an accident to the subject, because every content is essentially being. Therefore, even the Philosopher shows in the Third Book of the *Metaphysics* that being cannot be a genus. But in this way one can say that some things add to being to the extent that they express a mode (*modus*) of it which is not expressed by the term (being) itself. This can occur in a twofold manner: in one way so that the mode expressed is some particular mode of being. For there are various degrees of being according to which the different modes of being are thought and according to these modes we obtain the different genera of things<sup>8</sup>. For substance does not add a difference to being which signifies some content added to being, but by the term substance a special way of being is expressed, sc. being *per se*. The same holds for the other genera».

This occurs in a different way when the mode expressed is consequent upon every being. Now this mode can be taken in a twofold way, namely in one way as consequent upon every being considered in itself; in another way, inasmuch as it is consequent upon every being considered as ordered to another.

If the mode is in the first way, it expresses something in being in an affirmative or in a negative manner. But nothing is said affirmatively and predicated absolutely that can be conceived in every being except its essence according to which it is said to be. And thus the name «thing» (*res*) is given. It differs from being in that being is taken from the act of being<sup>9</sup>, whereas the name thing expresses the

<sup>7</sup> Question 1, article 1.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas means the categories or predicaments, such as substance, quantity, quality etc.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas points out repeatedly that «being» (*ens*, τὸ ὄν), sc. «that which is» means in the first place the being real of a thing, and in the second place that to which this being real is attributed (cf. *In VI Metaph.*, lesson 2: «Ens imponitur ab actu essendi»). We recall Aquinas's doctrine of being as the actuality and reality of things (*Summa theologiae* I q. 3 a. 4; a. 5 ad 1um; *In I Peri herm.*, les-

what-it-is or the essence of being. The negation which follows upon all beings in an absolute manner is the absence of division. This is expressed by the name «one» (*unum*), for «one» is nothing else than undivided being.

If, on the other hand, a mode of being is taken in the second manner, sc. according to the order of one to another, this can be in a twofold way. In one way according to the division of the one from the other. This is expressed by the term «something» (*aliquid*). For a thing is called some-thing as if it were some other thing. Hence just as being is called one inasmuch as it is undivided in itself, so it is called something as it is divided from others.

In another way this occurs according to the agreement of one being with another. Now this is not possible except when we have something which by its nature is such as to agree with all being. This is the (human) soul which in a certain sense is everything, as is said in the Third Book of the *De anima*<sup>10</sup>. In the soul there is indeed the faculty of thinking and the faculty of striving. The agreement of being with the faculty of striving is expressed by the term «good» (*bonum*), the agreement of being with the intellect is expressed by the term «true» (*verum*)<sup>11</sup>.

This remarkable text places being in the center of speculation. It is the first concept to enter our mind, which from the very start becomes aware of the actuality or reality of things, in short, of the fact that they are real, each in its own way. From there the mind apparently proceeds gathering its knowledge of reality. It discovers certain common properties of what is real, sc. that beings have some content, that beings are not in themselves divided but one and that each being is a different something than the things surrounding it. The mind begins to form the first principles, such as the principles of contradiction, of the excluded middle and of causality.

The transcendentals are not derived from a relation of things with the triple divine causality in relation to created things but from what things are in themselves and from how they relate to other beings and to the human mind. Interesting is the relation of being to the human mind<sup>12</sup>. Aquinas explains it by the fact that the human mind is as extensive as the world. It has a certain infinity, in so far

---

son 5 (*actualitas omnis rei, omnis formæ, omnis naturæ*).

<sup>10</sup> *De anima*, III, c. 8: 431 b 21. The theme that the human soul is, in a sense, everything occurs frequently in Aquinas' works.

<sup>11</sup> Translated by John Dudley, in L. J. ELDERS, *The Metaphysics of Being of St. Thomas Aquinas in a Historical Perspective* (Leiden, 1993), pp. 99-100.

<sup>12</sup> The connection of «true» and «good» with the human mind had been intimated by Albert the Great, but is now clearly formulated.

as there are no limits to its knowledge and the will can extend to all things<sup>13</sup>. The text explains how some of our first concepts originate. Such terms as «one», «thing», «something», «true» and «good» do not add anything real to being, but unfold its contents. In all its simplicity this derivation has the convincing force of its evidence. It delves into some of the processes taking place in our mind we are hardly aware of, for the first transcendental concepts are formed at a very early stage of our intellectual activity. Since the transcendentals reveal the properties of being, their study is part of metaphysics for it places being and its contents in the center.

It has been argued that this text of the *De veritate* is an *unicum* in the works of Aquinas. Elsewhere Thomas mentions unity, truth and goodness, but not «thing» and «something»<sup>14</sup>. However, the text is an introduction to the study of «truth» and has a general character. Its argument is so solid that its conclusions impose themselves. Moreover, a further analysis will show the importance of each of the five properties of being. One cannot sufficiently stress that the account is centered on being. Not the human mind imposes its intellectual forms on reality. It receives its knowledge from the existing things and gradually discovers the nature of being and its properties.

### The Properties of Being

According to Aquinas the first of the transcendental concepts is that of *res*, a term which in this context may be translated by *thing*<sup>15</sup>. References to *res* as a transcendental property of being are scarce in Aquinas's works, but because what the term stands for is so basic, it is presupposed in all analyses: being has a content and meaning. The concept of being develops into that of «thing», in so far as one immediately «knows» that being real is said of something particular and becomes aware that beings are objects of his thinking. Thomas says that the term *res* is acquired by the addition to being of «a general mode», that is: one now understands that being has an essential content. For this reason the word «res» ordinarily

<sup>13</sup> *S. Th.* I q. 7 a. 2 ad 2um. Cf. J. H. ROBB, *Man as an Infinite Spirit* (Milwaukee, 1974).

<sup>14</sup> See M. D. JORDAN, «The Grammar of *Esse*: Re-reading Thomas on the Transcendentals», *The Thomist* (1980) 1-26.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *S. Th.* I q. 39 a. 3 ad 3um: «Hoc nomen *res* est de transcendentibus».

expresses existing things<sup>16</sup>, that is beings characterized by their having a content, whether they are natural things or man made. God and the divine Persons are also called *res*<sup>17</sup> and divine Trinity is the supreme *res*<sup>18</sup>. The term *res* puts stress on the whatness of beings. In every day language we use the word «thing», implying that we mean something that exists. The term «being» itself is hardly used—which is to be expected since «thing» is acquired by adding something to being.

Avicenna was probably the first philosopher to distinguish between «being» and «thing»<sup>19</sup> and to point out that «thing» denotes the essence or content of a thing, which is the object of intellectual knowledge. Existence is always attached to «thing», he says, even in the case of «a thing of thought» (*ens rationis*), since it exists in our thought, but this might not be the view of Aquinas. According to Avicenna the essences of things have a sort of existence of their own, although not yet an existence in the world of natural things.

It is evident that what exists has a certain content. The contrary is simply unthinkable. Things do not exist exclusively for themselves as if they had no message for other beings. A person who does not say something says absolutely nothing<sup>20</sup>. Aristotle confirms it: in order to speak meaningfully one has to say something<sup>21</sup>. Everything that becomes and exists, comes from something and is something in one of the categories of being<sup>22</sup>. «Beings have a content» or «every being has some particular nature» is one of the first self-evident principles<sup>23</sup>.

### **The Unity of Being: Every Being is One**

The term «the unity of being» are used to express that every being, that is, that whatever exists is one. The meaning of this statement is that no existing thing is divided and comprises more than one being. Obviously there are different ways of being one: the

<sup>16</sup> Thomas calls them *res naturales*. The reading in *In IV Metaph.*, lesson 2, which says that the term signifies quiddity alone, does not seem correct. The text appears to have been contaminated by a preceding *tantum*.

<sup>17</sup> *In I Sent.*, d. 25 q. 1 a. 4.

<sup>18</sup> *S. Th.* I q. 39 a. 3 ad 3um.

<sup>19</sup> See his *Metaphysica* I 6, 72va (VAN RIET, *Liber de philosophia prima*, I, pp. 33 ff.).

<sup>20</sup> PLATO, *Sophistes* 237e.

<sup>21</sup> *Metaph.* 1006 a 13.

<sup>22</sup> *Op.cit.* 1032 a 12-15.

<sup>23</sup> See R. GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, *Le sens commun, la philosophie de l'être et les formules dogmatiques*. 4<sup>ème</sup> éd. (Paris, 1936) p. 165: «Tout être est d'une nature déterminée».

unity of an animal differs from that of a ring made of pure silver, the unity of a concept differs from that of an action. From the very beginning of philosophical speculation the Greek philosophers were enticed by the problem of the unity of things. The School of Miletus assumed the existence of one primary ἀρχή, such as water, an infinite mass of material or air, from which all things were derived. Parmenides who was from the School of Pythagoras taught the total oneness of all things and affirmed oneness as the primary attribute of being<sup>24</sup>. Plato was influenced by Pythagoreanism and posited a primary reality, sc. the form of the One, which he appears to have considered the principle of the essence of things<sup>25</sup>. The One is also the principle of the cognoscibility of things. Aristotle, for his part, analyses the different ways in which beings can be one, e.g. the continuous, the whole, the specifically or generically one, the individually one. He makes clear that the One is not a being by itself, but always an attribute of beings. It is to be identified with the things existing in the different categories<sup>26</sup>. This is tantamount to saying that unity is a property of being. However, in Neo-Platonism the One was placed above being. Because of its indeterminate character, bereft as it is of a positive content of its own, it was felt to be the source of all things which come forth from it, yet remain within it<sup>27</sup>.

Thomas Aquinas joins Aristotle in affirming the priority of being over and against unity. Being is the first concept. All further concepts are determinations of it:

«I answer by saying that "one" does not add anything to being, but merely the denial of division. Being one is nothing other than being undivided. Therefore it is clear that in statements "one" and "being" are convertible. For every being is either simple or composite. However, what is composite does not exist as long as its parts are separated, but exists after they are together and make up the composite thing. So it is clear that each being exists being undivided. It has its unity as it keeps its being»<sup>28</sup>.

As the passage of the *De veritate* on the deduction of the transcendentals shows, in the concept of unity we express that being is

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Aquinas notes that a metaphysician must examine whether all beings must be reduced to some one being (*In XI Metaph.*, lesson 3).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Metaph.* 1080 b 6; 1084 b 6; ALEXANDER OF APHRODISIAS, *In Metaph.* 53, 2-11.

<sup>26</sup> *Metaph.* 1053 b 9.

<sup>27</sup> The explanation of the role ascribed to the One is probably the preference the Neo-Platonists had for monism. See J. TROUILLARD, *La mystagogie de Proclus* (Paris, 1982), pp. 93-101.

<sup>28</sup> *S.Th.* I q. 11 a. 1. Cf. L. OEING-HANHOFF, *Ens et unum convertuntur: Stellung und Gehalt des Grundsatzes in der Philosophie des hl. Thomas von Aquin*, BGPMA 37,3 (Münster, 1953).



not divided. The concept of unity is formed as follows. After having obtained the concept of being, our intellect becomes aware that a being is not another being. It expresses this separation and applies this concept of separation or division to being, so that the insight follows that what exists is not divided in itself, i.e., that it is one. Once the concept of the unity of each being has been acquired, that of multiplicity follows. «Unity» signifies being as characterized by the absence of division<sup>29</sup>. However, the unity of being does not formally express that a thing is different or separated from other things. The concept of «being different from other things» is the next transcendental property of being, consecutive on unity.

### **A Being is Other than the Rest of Beings**

In the passage of the *De veritate* quoted above Thomas argues that after forming the concept of the unity of being as not divided in itself, we compare one being with another and form the concept of «some other thing» or «another what». This statement is so simple and self-evident that it seems trivial. However, one should remember that to study metaphysics implies also retracing the very first steps of our intellectual journey, in order to lay bare the ultimate and evident foundations of our knowledge.

In the philosophy of Plato the concept of otherness played an important role. Aristotle for his part emphasizes that things must be something and that each of the categories is another «what»<sup>30</sup>. After separating a being from not-being, that is from what it is not, the intellect compares being to other things and forms the concept of another, a different some-thing.

The concept of «other» or «otherness» has played an important role in the history of philosophy. Plato implicitly recognized the «another what» (*aliud quid*) as a primary concept inasmuch as he considered the form «otherness» one of the largest genera in which all other forms participate<sup>31</sup>. Aristotle notes that «the other» is opposed to the thing itself<sup>32</sup>. According to the Neo-Platonists descent in the hierarchy of being produces otherness<sup>33</sup>. Via St. Augustine,

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Q. d. de potentia*, q. 9 a. 7.

<sup>30</sup> *Metaph.* 1032 a 12-15.

<sup>31</sup> *Sophistes* 254d.

<sup>32</sup> *Metaph.* 1087 b 26ff.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. W. BEIERWALTES, «Andersheit: Zur neuplatonischen Struktur einer Problemgeschichte», in *Le néoplatonisme: Colloque de Royaumont* (Paris, 1971), pp. 365-372.

Boethius and Avicenna the theme of «the other» continued to hold an important place in philosophical thought<sup>34</sup>. Strongly influenced by Neo-Platonism Hegel devoted much attention to the concept of «something» and «otherness». «Something» exists as the denial of the denial. It proceeds from the synthesis of being and nothingness. The existentialists transposed the theme of otherness into their philosophy of man. According to Sartre «not-being-myself» is the basis of the concept of the other<sup>35</sup>. Even if this is a restrictive interpretation, it confirms the analysis given by Thomas.

According to some authors the transcendentals «thing» and «some-thing» do not apply to God, who cannot be considered as one being among others. However, God is definitely a *res*, as Aquinas states on countless occasions. God is also «something», for the term signifies a thing of reason (*ens rationis*) which expresses what is proper to each being when compared to others. Applied to God it means that God is not a created thing. If one objects that before the creation of the world such a comparison is not possible, the answer is that before creation there are no transcendental concepts, (which are *entia rationis*, that is human ways to express the contents of being), although God in his infinite perfection possesses in a higher way what these concepts express.

### Every Being is True

By true we mean a statement conform to reality. As Aristotle observes, «It is not because we think that you are pale, that you are pale, but because you are pale, we who say so have the truth»<sup>36</sup>. According to this text the truth of what we think and say depends on its agreements with reality. Reality is the basis of the truth which formally is in our mind. However, besides this primary sense of «true» the term is also used to denote things that are what their outward appearance suggests, (true gold of a ring) and which possess a certain essence with all its properties. Plato speaks of «true guardians» and «a true city»<sup>37</sup>. In this sense truth is also an attribute of things, and the clarity of our knowledge depends on the truth of the object<sup>38</sup>. It is this latter meaning of «true» we are now concer-

<sup>34</sup> Cf. BOETHIUS, *De Trinitate*, c. 1: «Principium enim pluralitatis alteritas est».

<sup>35</sup> *L'être et le néant*, pp. 301ff.

<sup>36</sup> *Metaph.* 1051 b 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Republic* 347d; 372c, etc.

<sup>38</sup> *Op.cit.* 511c.

ned with.

Thomas Aquinas elaborated this secondary and derived ontological sense of the term «true» since things are ordered to the intellect, they can be known and communicate what they are. In this respect we call them true. This use of the term «true» in daily language is secondary, because «true» means in the first place the agreement of our judgements and statements with reality. Nevertheless the fact that beings have a knowable content and communicate themselves to us at the level of knowledge is as such fundamental<sup>39</sup>. That every being is true means that it has a meaningful content, and makes itself accessible to the human intellect. Things have, indeed, an intelligible content which man does not make, but which he discovers. They are not shut up within themselves but are willing to share, at the level of knowledge, what they are and what they have<sup>40</sup>. This characteristic of beings is called their truth. This is the reason why Aristotle could say that knowledge has been given, in order to allow us to go beyond the narrow limits of our personal being and to inscribe in our mind the intelligible contents of the entire universe<sup>41</sup>.

That all beings are true in the sense we have outlined above has not escaped the attention of several scientists. Einstein once wrote that the most incomprehensible thing about the world is its comprehensibility. Louis de Broglie said that the fundamental question is why scientific work is possible and Jacques Monod for his part states that «the corner stone of the scientific method is the postulate of the objectivity of nature»<sup>42</sup>, meaning the knowability of things. The natural sciences are only possible because things have this intelligibility and are accessible to man. Scientists accept this as self-evident, but the metaphysician examines what is implied by it and formulates this most basic property of beings, sc. that they have a knowable and communicable content, in other words, that they are true<sup>43</sup>. This knowability is immediately experienced and accepted by us as self-evident. Governments make funds available for the construction of ever more powerful telescopes in order to explore

<sup>39</sup> Q. d. de veritate, q. 1 a. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Q. d. de potentia, q. 2 a. 1: «Natura cuiuslibet actus est quod seipsum communicat quantum possibile est».

<sup>41</sup> Q. d. de veritate, q. 2 a. 1: «Unde haec est ultima perfectio, ad quam anima potest pervenire secundum Philosophum, ut in ea describatur totus ordo universi et causarum eius».

<sup>42</sup> *Le hasard et la nécessité* (Paris, 1970), p. 32.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. R. B. SCHMITZ, *Veritas rerum: Sein-Wahrheit-Wort. Thomas von Aquin und die Lehre von der Wahrheit der Dinge* (Münster, 1984), J. PIEPER, *Von der Wahrheit der Dinge* (München, 1957).

distant galaxies, because everyone knows and assumes that these galaxies can indeed be studied. Only those with a philosophical bend of mind begin to reflect about it and formulate the principle that things are true, that is, have a knowable content which they communicate to us. St. Thomas writes that things cannot be known if they are not knowable, but that the intellect can know beings without thinking about their knowability<sup>44</sup>. That beings are true does not mean that all beings are entirely decipherable for the human mind: to those beings which are immersed in matter or which have a higher mode of being than man, the human intellect is not fully adjusted, since the mind's horizon is the quiddity of material things. For this reason, some beings are known by us in a vague and analogous manner. The truth things possess is a treasure to be acquired by us. As Aristotle writes, the cognitive faculties have been given us in order to allow us to go beyond the limits of our individual being and to inscribe the intelligible contents of things in our mind. In this way we can enrich ourselves and grow at the level of the mind by acquiring knowledge of the truth of things<sup>45</sup>. The explanations given above make it plain that the truth of beings is a further determination of their even more basic property, sc. of their being «things» (*res*). A being has a content and is, in comparison to other things, a something, and this content can be known.

### Every Being is Good

A next property of being is its goodness. The concept of ontological goodness goes back to Plato and Aristotle. In his *Republic* Plato called the Good the highest being and the center of reality. All good things receive their goodness through participation in this principle, sc. the Idea of the Good. In fact «the god wanted all things to be good»<sup>46</sup>. To be imitated and loved is an essential characteristic of the good<sup>47</sup>. Following in the footsteps of Plato Aristotle defined the good as that which all things desire<sup>48</sup>. However, he rejected Plato's theory of the good being one form in which different things participate univocally. Starting from an analysis of our

<sup>44</sup> *S. Th.* I q. 16 a. 3.

<sup>45</sup> There is no passing from one class to another. Cf. *De celo* 268 b 1. In his later philosophy, sc. in his so-called unwritten doctrine, Plato attempted to reduce all things to two first principles, sc. the One and the Indefinite Dyad (also called the Great and (the) Small or the Infinite).

<sup>46</sup> *Timaeus* 30a.

<sup>47</sup> *Gorgias* 499c; *Philebus* 20d.

<sup>48</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* I, ch. 1.

way of attributing different classes of predicates to a subject, Aristotle developed his theory of the ten categories or predicaments of being. Some predicates belong to the class of quantity, others to that of quality or relation, others again to «being in a place», or indicate a moment in time, action or to undergoing something. These different classes cannot be reduced to each other, but are original, distinct and permanent ways of being. The term «good» is used in the category of substance, of quality, of relation, etc. It has as many meanings as the term «being»<sup>49</sup>. The reason why things are good is their perfection. Things are perfect if they have everything that belongs to them and nothing is lacking; likewise when things have attained their end they are called perfect<sup>50</sup>.

Following Aristotle Aquinas holds that the essence of goodness consists in the fact that the thing of which the term good is predicated, is appreciated and desired<sup>51</sup>. All strivings and desires seek a good. The good functions as a magnet on all existing things<sup>52</sup>. A thing is desirable to the extent that it is perfect. Now whatever exists is perfect in so far as it has been brought to reality, that is, in so far as it has being<sup>53</sup>. The act of being gives each thing its existence in its own nature actualizing its contents and rendering it perfect and therefore good. Hence it is clear that good and being are the same in things. But goodness expresses desirability —something which being does not express.

Thomas states this as follows: «For every being inasmuch as it is being, has actuality and is perfect in one way or another. For every act is a certain perfection. Now, as is apparent from what was said above, the really perfect is desirable and good in its content. Hence every being as such is good»<sup>54</sup>.

However, a thing is not simply said good in the same way as it has being. Being is said primarily of the substance and secondarily of the accidents which determine the substance. But since goodness implies perfection it is said primarily of that by means of which a thing attains its perfection. This occurs more through accidental determinations such as health, development of the mental faculties, virtues etc. Being something or someone desired by others also ranks high in what we call being perfect. Perfection is not easily

<sup>49</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 1096 a 18ff.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Metaph* 1021 b 12ff.

<sup>51</sup> *S. Th.* I q. 5 a. 1.

<sup>52</sup> On this point Aquinas integrates the valuable elements of Plato's theory of the good.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas says *inquantum est actu*.

<sup>54</sup> *S. Th.* I q. 5 a. 3.

attained. Therefore goodness shows the character of a fullness of being still to be reached.

The thesis that every being is good casts light on the particular nature of metaphysics. In everyday life not all things seem good to us, in the sense of being willed, desired and loved by us. But in metaphysics we do not so much consider the expectations and desires of particular persons as the objective content and reality of things as well as their role and place in the universe. Things are considered for what they are and so we appreciate, underwrite and love their perfection. Apparently being is the foundation and source of the goodness of things<sup>55</sup>. In his doctrine of the truth and goodness of things Thomas confirms that being of itself goes toward man and gives itself to him; man's nature is such as to impel him to accept and to love being<sup>56</sup>.

### Can Being be Evil?<sup>57</sup>

The principle that every being is good seems to contradict daily experience. The reality of evil cannot be denied. Moreover, many things which may be good for some or serve some purpose, are not desirable or good for us. It is suggested by some authors that things, if not bad, are at best neutral and become good only when people can use them or find pleasure in them.

Ever since Socrates and Plato the study of evil has occupied a significant place in philosophy. While evil was at first substantified and identified with matter, evil demons or some natural element, later the insight dawned that evil is not a thing but a wound in being, sc. a privation of what should have been present in a being. Christian authors of the third and fourth century A. D. made an important contribution to the development of this insight. Being good, God only makes good things. Since evil is contrary to the good, and since there is no other creative cause besides God, evil cannot be a being with a content. It is the absence in a subject of what should have been there. Aquinas defines evil as «the removal of a good in the manner of a privation»<sup>58</sup>. This removal can be that

<sup>55</sup> This implies the rejection of the Neo-Platonic thesis of the priority of the good over being.

<sup>56</sup> *S. Th.* I q. 78 a. 1: «Res nata [...] animae coniungi et in anima esse»; *Q. d. de veritate*, q. 1 a. 1: «[...] anima nata convenire cum omni ente».

<sup>57</sup> If one wonders why evil, as the opposite of goodness is discussed in a treatise on the transcendentals, whereas «falsehood» as the opposite of truth is omitted, the answer is that falsehood is opposed to truth in its logical sense, but not in its ontological meaning.

<sup>58</sup> *S. Th.* I q. 5 a. 3 ad 2um and q. 5 a. 5 ad 3um.

of the substantial form, or of an accidental perfection, or finally the privation of a certain usefulness to man. The removal or privation always occurs in a subject. Decay and death of plants and animals are the privation of a substantial form. Illness, mutilation, blindness and dumbness are the privation of health and of the integrity of our faculties. Vices are the privation of virtues. With regard to the third form of evil, it is the privation of usefulness to other beings. An earthquake is in so far an evil, as for those living in the region affected by it, it wrecks havoc, and destroys people's lives and belongings<sup>59</sup>. Here is no question of a privation or defect in a subject itself, but of damage caused to others. It often happens that the privation in a subject is so acutely felt that the whole thing is considered evil, although it does consist of a positive being, functioning as its subject. Thus we speak of «an evil person», of «bad weather», etc.

The three modalities of evil mentioned above are forms of evil in substances. There is also evil in human actions, either at the level of work done and tasks carried out. Examples are faulty arguing, bad singing, poor painting, clumsy driving. This type of evil is caused by insufficient talent, skill or application and by faulty tools or materials used. At times it may be provoked by bad will. Besides this evil in the work we do, there is also moral evil. When an action which a person knowingly and freely performs, is deprived of its conformity to the rule of moral behavior, that is to the true end of human life, it is defective. Moral evil is called sin. Moral evil is not an infection from the outside but the choice and adoption of a particular stand in conflict with the end of man and is, in each occasion, opposed to the respective moral virtues which cover the whole field of human actions. Moral evil is the most total form of evil, because it deprives man of his perfection as man. Moral evil is responsible for a large part of suffering in human life.

### Every Being is Beautiful

In the basic text of Aquinas on the properties of being beauty is not listed. Is «beautiful» to be considered a characteristic of all things? Certain authors deny that «beautiful» is a transcendental<sup>60</sup>. The difficulty which we mentioned when discussing goodness also

<sup>59</sup> On this third form of evil see the *Q. d. de malo*, q. 1 a. 1 ad 1um.

<sup>60</sup> F. J. KOVACH, *Die Aesthetik des Thomas von Aquin* (Berlin, 1961), p. 75; H. POUILLON, «La beauté chez les scolastiques»: *AHLDMA* (1946) 263-315.

exists with regard to beauty. Certain natural formations, some plants and animals are far from pleasing the human eye. Nevertheless the beautiful has been for many ages an important theme of philosophical research. For the Greeks beauty implied order and symmetry. Plato considered beauty one of the main ideas, in which the beautiful things in the world participate. He invites us to ascend from the experience of the beauty of material things, passing through that of knowledge and virtuous actions, to Beauty itself<sup>61</sup>. Plato even identified the beautiful with the good: «Everything that is good is beautiful»<sup>62</sup>. Aristotle too associated the beautiful with the divine<sup>63</sup>. He describes the beautiful as that what pleases when seen or what pleases to the eye. He cites as attributes of the beautiful order, symmetry and limitation<sup>64</sup>, but also proper size: something very small or very large is not beautiful. In Neo-Platonism the beautiful occupies a central place. What makes things beautiful is their participation in an ideal of beauty. Whenever the soul encounters anything which bears a resemblance to that form, a shudder of recognition and joy pervades it<sup>65</sup>. Dionysius Areopagita pursues this line of thinking. In the splendour of his being God is beauty itself. He creates the world out of love of his own beauty and creatures share to a greater or lesser extent in his beauty<sup>66</sup>.

Thomas Aquinas determines the concept of the beautiful as follows: it is proper to the good to satisfy our striving when we reach it, but it is proper to the beautiful to do so when it is known. The beautiful, therefore, adds the ordering toward the cognitive faculty. What pleases the appetite is good, what pleases the cognitive faculty is called beautiful<sup>67</sup>, for the things which please when seen are called beautiful. Hence the beautiful consists in the right proportion of parts. The eye is pleased by something well ordered and harmonious since it shares somehow in reason, and so it likes what resembles it<sup>68</sup>.

Something must be well ordered if it is to produce this satisfaction which the experience of beauty brings with it. Aquinas adds another characteristic of the beautiful, sc. lustre and clarity<sup>69</sup>. The

---

<sup>61</sup> *Symposium* 211d.

<sup>62</sup> *Timaeus* 87c.

<sup>63</sup> *De generatione animalium* 731 b 25.

<sup>64</sup> *Metaph.* 1078 a 36.

<sup>65</sup> *Ennead* I,6,9.

<sup>66</sup> *De divinis nominibus*, ch. 4.

<sup>67</sup> *S. Th.* I-II q. 27 a. 1 ad 3um.

<sup>68</sup> *S. Th.* I q. 5 a. 4 ad 1um.

<sup>69</sup> *S. Th.* II-II q. 180 a. 2 ad 3um.



beautiful shows itself to us in radiating clarity<sup>70</sup>. The order and clarity which constitute the beautiful arise from the essential form of beautiful things. In fact, the form is the ultimate basis of their beauty. It is a most intense participation in God's being. «Every form by means of which a thing possesses being, is a certain participation in God's clarity and splendour»<sup>71</sup>. A form is a luminous reality which proceeds from the first clarity<sup>72</sup>.

If one wonders why the eyes and ear seize beauty, as does the intellect, but not touch, taste or smell, the answer is that apparently sight and hearing are much closer to the intellect and perceive things more for what they are, than in view of their immediate bodily usefulness for us. Because of their collaboration with mind they sense the harmony of forms and colours as well as of sounds.

However, since a good number of the things surrounding us appear to lack this beauty, the question arises to what extent one can say that every being is beautiful. The answer is that when we speak of the beauty of being, we mean the beauty of its essence and formal perfection, which can be perceived by the intellect, but not by the senses. Indeed, the essence of things is full of order and lustre<sup>73</sup>. All things are beautiful because they are existing formal perfections and «the degree of their beauty is in precise proportion to the perfection of their being»<sup>74</sup>.

The beautiful is related to truth, in so far as the perception of a beautiful object produces joy. The basic striving of the intellect to possess the truth, as a well ordered content, agreeing with what it seeks most, comes to rest in the experience of the beautiful, as does the accompanying appetite of the will<sup>75</sup>. In this respect the beautiful comes in under the good<sup>76</sup>, adding a further determination to it, sc. «sought by the intellect». This relation of the beautiful with both the true and the good explains why it is not mentioned by Aquinas

<sup>70</sup> *S. Th.* I q. 39 a. 8.

<sup>71</sup> *In De divinis nominibus*, c. 4, lesson 5, n. 349.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, lesson 6: «Irradiatio proveniens ex prima claritate». Cf. F. J. KOVACH, «Der Einfluß der Schrift des Pseudo-Dionysius *De divinis nominibus* auf die Schönheitsphilosophie des Thomas von Aquin»: *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 63 (1981) 151-166.

<sup>73</sup> *In IV De div. nom.*, lesson 5, nn. 337-339. Cf. *Q. d. de potentia*, q. 4 a. 2 ad 31um.

<sup>74</sup> G. B. PHELAN, «The Concept of Beauty in St. Thomas Aquinas», in *G.B. Phelan: Select Papers* (Toronto, 1967), p. 160. Cf. ST. THOMAS, *In IV De div. nom.*, n. 355: «Nihil est quod non participet pulchro et bono, cum unumquodque sit pulchrum et bonum secundum propriam formam».

<sup>75</sup> *S. Th.* I-II q. 27 a. 1 ad 3um: «Ad rationem pulchri pertinet quod in eius aspectu seu cognitione quietetur appetitus».

<sup>76</sup> The definition of the good is: that which all things strive for.

as a transcendental by its own. As a synthesis of «true» and «good» the beautiful is the object of our contemplative knowledge. The beautiful is admired and loved. It is not in the first place a good one wishes to attain. Contemplative knowledge, when performed in clarity and proper order, as well as virtuous acts are beautiful. David Hume writes: «There is no spectacle so fair and beautiful as a noble and generous action»<sup>77</sup>.

### The Properties of Being in Modern Philosophy

The Franciscan philosopher and theologian Duns Scotus developed a different theory of the transcendentals. Unity, truth and goodness are not formally being. They differ from it because of their real formal content<sup>78</sup>. Scotus' view led to a substantification of the transcendentals and ultimately it initiates a way of thinking which deprives being itself of its unity, truth and goodness. Furthermore, Scotus no longer upholds that beings are ordered to the human mind<sup>79</sup>. Later authors were to continue this line of thought.

William Ockham reduced the study of transcendentals to that of certain concepts connected with all other concepts, regardless of whether they denote something real or not. In the later Middle Ages a dissociation of thought from physical reality set in. Truth and goodness came to be seen as subjective viewpoints, ascribed by man to things, rather than as properties of all beings<sup>80</sup>. To this effect one may recall the position of Aquinas: the transcendental concepts are fundamentally the same as being. They add a negation or a relation to being, which as such is a thing of reason (*ens rationis*), but which makes explicit what is virtually contained in being.

R. Glöcenius, who published a treatise of metaphysics in 1604<sup>81</sup> did not even mention the transcendentals. While Suárez accepted the bulk of the classical doctrine of the transcendentals<sup>82</sup>, except that he considered being as that which *can* exist. In his essentialism,

<sup>77</sup> *A Treatise of Human Nature*, III,1,2, quoted after A. A. MAURER, C. S. B., *About Beauty: A Thomistic Interpretation* (Houston, 1983), p. 71.

<sup>78</sup> This view results from his theory of the formal distinction: a different formal content (such as the definition of truth) cannot simply be identical with the formal content of being. This view reminds of the theory of some medieval Platonists who added formal perfections to a subject as many distinct entities.

<sup>79</sup> See Allan B. WOLTER, O. F. M., *The Transcendentals and their Function in the Metaphysics of Duns Scotus* (St. Bonaventure, N. Y., 1946).

<sup>80</sup> See A. LOUTH, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford, 1983).

<sup>81</sup> *Metaphysicae Systema Methodicum*.

<sup>82</sup> *Disputationes metaphysicae*, III,1,8-10.

«quiddity» is the name which expresses being most properly. As properties of being he accepts unity, truth and goodness. But in seventeenth century philosophy the treatise of the transcendentals was denied meaning or, at best, the question was discarded, since the interest in metaphysics waned. Descartes hardly uses the term transcendentals and gives it the meaning of eminent. By his *cogito*, which introduces a real break between man and physical reality, he opened the road to modern subjectivism. On the horizon of Western man an attitude of dominating nature now emerges. It becomes man's aim to rearrange the world on the basis of his knowledge..

In his *De augmentu scientiarum* Francis Bacon rejects the traditional view of the transcendental concepts. Questions about truth and goodness belong to theology. Thomas Hobbes pours ridicule on the doctrine of the properties of being. The definition of being as the indivision of being is senseless, because one concludes that what is undivided is undivided<sup>83</sup>. Who does not know that man and one man, man and truly man have the same meaning? Truth or verity is not an affection of things but of the propositions concerning it. In his *Cogitata metaphysica* Spinoza devotes a chapter to the question of the transcendentals. He acknowledges that all metaphysicians (of his time) assert that being is one, true and good, although practically no one really reflects on these attributes. Spinoza believes that these predicates are only ways of thinking which do not add anything to being. It is meaningless to speak of truth as a transcendental determination of being. Clarity is the criterion of truth. Likewise «good» is not an absolute attribute, but is used with respect to certain things. A being can be good and bad at the same time, according to the persons or things it is in contact with. hence for Spinoza the transcendentals are only extrinsic denominations<sup>84</sup>. Spinoza even writes that those who consider «true» an affection of being are clearly mistaken, because it can be said of things only in an improper way. The same holds true of «good», since a thing considered in itself is neither good nor bad.

Although Leibniz is well acquainted with scholastic philosophy he hardly mentions the transcendental concepts<sup>85</sup>. They are different ways of thinking about the same thing. Perhaps obeying to his interest in mathematics, Leibniz felt that these concepts lack clarity.

---

<sup>83</sup> *Logica*, III, 7. See also H. KNITTERMEYER, *Der Terminus transzendental in seiner historischen Entwicklung bis zu Kant* (Marburg, 1920), p. 118ff.

<sup>84</sup> *Cogitata metaphysica*, I, c. 6.

<sup>85</sup> Knittermeyer, o.c., 177.

Christian Wolff went far beyond this, by trying to transform the classical metaphysics of the properties of being. Unity is considered in the context of quantity. Because of its unity every being is seen as an individual thing. Wolff does not speak of the relation of being to the will. Ontological goodness is replaced by the postulate of regularity. Goodness is the agreement of the perfections of different things. The concept of perfection should take the place of the unclear scholastic notion of the good<sup>86</sup>. Truth means order in the relations of things to one another, such as the one first principles express. Since the different parts of the world are mutually connected and collaborate, there is ontological truth<sup>87</sup>.

Christian Wolf is one of a group of German metaphysicians, such as A. G. Baumgarten and Christian August Crusius, who influenced Kant. All of them are characterized by their total confidence in the power of human reason and their interest in nature. In France the authors of the *Encyclopaedia* made man the center of the universe and severed the world from its metaphysical connection with God. With Kant this shift in philosophical speculation reached its definite form. Instead of studying being as such he considers man's transcendental consciousness, which, Kant argues, thinks and expresses reality according to its own categories. Transcendental philosophy is born. Man's reason constitutes itself its objects which lie beyond it: the ego, the world and God. In § 12 of the second edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant observes that according to scholastic meta-physics every being is one, true and good. However, this sort of arguing, he says, did not produce results to speak of, so that in recent years this chapter of metaphysics was only kept alive out of respect for the past. These terms are not predicates of things but logical requirements for our knowledge. In this way Kant's philosophy led to a disfigurement of objective reality.

Some of Kant's contemporaries were aware of the consequences of this theory. In a study of 1796 a certain Dr. Jenisch wrote that it is a depress-ing thought that we no longer know the reality of the world and that nature with all its wonders appears to fall back into nothingness<sup>88</sup>. Toward the end of Kant's life idealism developed. According to Hegel being is in-determinate: the transcendental concepts are the result of a process of becoming, but are not intrin-

<sup>86</sup> *Philosophia rationalis seu ontologia*, I,3, chapters 4 and 6.

<sup>87</sup> *Cosmologia generalis* (Frankfurt, 1731), p. 71: «[...] ut mechanismus mundi sit fons veritatis transcendentalis quae in mundo tamquam ente datur et quae mundum ens verum efficit».

<sup>88</sup> *Über Grund und Wert der Entdeckungen des Herrn Professor Kant in der Metaphysik, Moral und Aesthetik*. See F. HOLZ, *Kant et l'Académie de Berlin* (Frankfurt, 1981), p. 46.

sic properties of being<sup>89</sup>. Whereas in idealism the attributes of being are merely the product of thought or an exteriorization of human ways of thinking, Marxism holds the reverse. Thought is material being transferred to the human mind. The reduction of the life of the mind to matter becomes complete with Lenin and Stalin. The physical attributes of material things, such as movement, becoming, extension, replace the transcendentals. Usefulness becomes the primary value. Recognizing some goodness already present in things, as the ancients did, is erecting an obstacle which prevents us from dedicating ourselves to progress. There is no definite ontological truth, for matter is in a state of constant becoming.

Nietzsche spoke of a devaluation of all values. By «nihilism» as he defended it, he understood the radical refusal of values, of the goodness and meaning of being. Every belief, every insight is necessarily wrong since there is no true world<sup>90</sup>. There no longer are any values left, but each of us must make his own. «The most noble concepts such as that of being, are nothing more than the smoke of things that evaporate»<sup>91</sup>. The world appears to us as logically ordered, but in reality we are dupes of an illusion<sup>92</sup>. Being is never identical with itself. The only thing we are certain of is change<sup>93</sup>.

### **Twentieth Century Philosophers on the Transcendentals**

During the first half of the twentieth century European philosophy was marked by phenomenology. The initiator of this movement, Edmund Husserl, reacted at first against the idealism prevalent in German universities. His motto «Back to things» sounded as if he advocated a return to philosophical realism. In reality, however, his position on this point developed into a different direction. For the school of Husserl, things are not beings in the ordinary sense of the term, but are objects standing in a relation to the human mind, called consciousness. Contrary to what the Aristotelian tradition holds, the intelligible contents of things are not really acquired by the intellect. Things do determine, up to a point, man's consciousness, but remain outside it and the human subject; man's

<sup>89</sup> *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, § 24.

<sup>90</sup> *Aus dem Nachlaß der Achtzigerjahre* (Schlechte, III,555).

<sup>91</sup> *Götzen-Dämmerung* (Schlechte II,463).

<sup>92</sup> *Der Wille zur Macht*, § 516 (Schlechte III,538f.).

<sup>93</sup> *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, § 26 (Schlechte II,59).

past experiences and his situation co-determine his perception of things. A pure objectivity is no longer possible. Instead of understanding and explaining the world, a phenomenologist tries to describe what *he* experiences. In this way there is no definite truth, but each human being has his own truth. Man's «consciousness places the objects which it deals with in a state of hovering and isolates them. From this moment on, they are beyond all judgment [...] some joy may be derived from describing and understanding every aspect of experience. But the "truth" which the phenomenologist ascribes to each of these aspects is of a psychological order»<sup>94</sup>. Consciousness, to the extent that it assigns some meaning to the object («das sinngebende Bewußtsein») is the center of phenomenology. Imagination allows us to consider the object from various points of view<sup>95</sup>. The manner in which we consider the content of experience (*Abschattung*) is dependent on our situation and previous experience<sup>96</sup>.

Such phenomenologists as Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty asserted that it is impossible really to know things as they are. What gives meaning to things is man's appreciation and use of them<sup>97</sup>. Things themselves are dark and hostile. They have no truth and goodness<sup>98</sup>. In Merleau-Ponty's perspectivism our knowledge of things depends on our embodiment<sup>99</sup>. At the start of the process of knowing a thing is formless, but when we keep looking at it, it begins to take shape. If we no longer look at it, it fades away and falls back into chaos. As such there is no truth in things nor any goodness. As a formless mass they are alien to our intellect<sup>100</sup>.

Martin Heidegger subscribes also to a phenomenological approach. He considers beings from the viewpoint of the manifestation of Being, i.e. the mysterious depth behind them (which is in no way to be identified with God). People often pay attention to superficial aspects of things, forgetting Being. Being never communicates itself fully. Our encounter with it depends on the moment in time at which we are now. Being may reveal something to us, but it also conceals itself. In the final analysis, man projects truth and

<sup>94</sup> Albert CAMUS, *Le mythe de Sisyphe*, pp. 63f.

<sup>95</sup> E. HUSSERL, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* (Den Haag 1950), p. 163.

<sup>96</sup> *Op.cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>97</sup> J.-P. SARTRE, *L'être et le néant*, p. 15.

<sup>98</sup> *L'imaginaire*, p. 233.

<sup>99</sup> *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 269.

<sup>100</sup> *Op.cit.*, p. 276f.; p. 369.

goodness on to beings<sup>101</sup>. Man stands as a foreigner in the face of the world, which he sees threatened by nothingness. He is filled with anxiety and lives in darkness. Beings do not communicate their truth to man. For Heidegger the fundamental question (which receives no answer) is, why there is something and not nothing.

In neopositivism the propositions «every being is true» and «every being is good» are tautologies and bear no relation to reality<sup>102</sup>. Scientific knowledge accepts only statements dependent on experience. We can only refer to individual things, never to something applying to all things. «Meaning» is not inherent in things, but is attached to them by us<sup>103</sup>.

For those who adhere to the so-called philosophy of values<sup>104</sup> things themselves have no value, but acquire it when man takes interest in them. As Gabriel Marcel observed, the introduction of the idea of value into philosophy, is as it were a sign of a fundamental devaluation of reality itself «[These philosophers] try to find again in the imagination that which on the level of reality they tended to do away with»<sup>105</sup>, sc. the truth and goodness of things.

\* \* \*

The doctrine of the transcendental attributes of being shows that things are not obscure, indifferent or absurd, but have a meaning and value by themselves which they are prepared to communicate to man. When we open our mind to their message, both in natural pre-philosophical experience as well as in scientific-philosophical knowledge, we shall discover no absurdity or hostility, but objective values, namely knowability and meaning, goodness and beauty. Precisely these attributes constitute the metaphysical nourishment of man, as Jacques Maritain once observed<sup>106</sup>.

At times we can improve the quality of things and make them more useful to our purposes or think of new applications and thus, in a sense, create values. However, this takes place on a subordinate level and presupposes a basis, sc. their ontological properties of

<sup>101</sup> See *Vom Wesen des Grundes*. Cf. A. DE WAELHENS, *Le philosophie de Martin Heidegger*, (Louvain & Paris, 1969<sup>a</sup>), p. 103.

<sup>102</sup> A. J. AYER, *Language, Truth and Logic* (Dover Edition), p. 86.

<sup>103</sup> K. POPPER, «Selbstbefreiung durch Wissen», in L. REINISCH (Ed.), *Der Sinn der Geschichte* (München, 1967), pp. 100-106.

<sup>104</sup> «Wertphilosophie», «philosophie des valeurs».

<sup>105</sup> *Les hommes contre l'humain*, p. 127.

<sup>106</sup> *Les degrés du savoir*, p. 9: «Ce dont nous avons besoin ce n'est pas de vérités qui nous servent, c'est d'une vérité que nous servons».

beings. If we see only the aspect of their usefulness, we lose the sense of being and become people for whom «the perceptible no longer has anything attractive [...] [and who] move among things which mean nothing to them [...], [who] make themselves a world according to their fancy [...] In this way the world has no longer anything to do with God, but only with man<sup>107</sup>.

To open oneself to the transcendental attributes of being means that one gives preference to being over having. In the heart of being lie unity, truth, goodness and beauty which invite us to a community with being and fill our mind with knowledge and perfection<sup>108</sup>. Moreover, the limited perfections of beings which we come to know, point beyond themselves to a source of being from which they proceed and in which they exist.

The doctrine of the transcendental properties of being is a fundamental part of the metaphysics of Aquinas: being is not split up, not chaotic, empty, obscure, disgusting or threatening, it possesses unity in all its forms; it is meaningful, knowable and good; it is related to the human mind, which in its turn is ordered to things to be enriched by them and to find support in their goodness, and joy in their truth and beauty. At the same time the study of the transcendentals takes us back in time to the beginnings of our intellectual life, when the first concepts and principles were formed<sup>109</sup>.



<sup>107</sup> E. MOUNIER, *Révolution personaliste et communautaire* (Oeuvres I), p. 390.

<sup>108</sup> See G. MARCEL, «L'être devant la pensée interrogatoire»: *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie* 52 (1958) 1-42; 15.

<sup>109</sup> For a more detailed treatment of the transcendental concepts see Leo J. ELDERS, *The Metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas in a Historical Perspective*, I, transl. by John Dudley (Leiden, 1993).