

BC Biermann - PhD

Being in Opposition – Ontological Heritage (work in progress)

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made....

- The Apostle Paul in *Romans*

Ontological: of or relating to *ontology* – a combination of the Greek words *ὄντος* (being) and *λογία* (to speak) means the metaphysical science or study of being.

Heritage: from the Latin *hereditare* – something transmitted by or acquired from a predecessor.

Nature of Being and the Great Conversation

In measured lives that often appear formless, void, and shrink-wrapped in an intended gloom, it is a most human reflex to wonder at the strange dichotomy that would have us pierce the shadowy veil of this world and reach for the higher truths built by the Love that moves the sun and the other stars. At times – as we walk through valleys submerged at the bottom of the ocean – we cannot envision how we might appear in a world that often seems concealed by a sin-laced smog. If we evade a cognitive engagement with our ontological struggle, we might, like that strange little creature who murdered his kin for the power, emerge from the cave only to find that we've forgotten our own name.

My God!

Who am I?

Questions...

Where are the answers?

The nature of being is a crafted thing poured into the oppositional foundation of History's structure. The lovely Author separated the light from the darkness so that He could construct a narrative that permits its primary characters to know both their Father and themselves within the causal sequence of events that order our lives.¹ Viewed in a crystalline theological reflection, we no longer dig in the anthropological dirt to unearth the subject of the self deliberately buried like a lunar monolith set for alarm. Rather, we simply peer upwards to the fixed stars and undertake a more structural, narratological analysis and allow the predicate of the self to emerge like the radiant outline of a constellation drawn by clockwork against the shade of space. Orbiting around the Axis Mundi, it is only after we have set aside a Ptolemaic geocentrism, Copernican heliocentrism, and a Protagorean view that man is the measure of all things that we can begin our modest ontological quest.²

Together.

You an I and I an I.

My reader and only friend.

Both predicates of the I Am.

Yet, it is also through the Inspired works of men – both religious and secular – that I conspicuously glean much of that which floats in the pastiche airwaves of the post-postmodern age where all poets and philosophers are thieves. Born into such a time obliges this thief to transparently acknowledge the lives and ideas of those brackish thinkers that have born this new kind of ontology. As this reticent work is largely indebted to the pillared shoulders of those whose intellects far outweigh my own, let you and I briefly examine the rich Western ontological dialogue between those manmade cities of Jerusalem and Athens.

A conversation that frames our own...

Can you hear me?

Is anybody out there?

The Socratic Legacy – 424 to 322 BC

Book VII of the Republic:

And now, I said, let me show in a figure...

how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened.

Truth becomes nothing but the shadows of the images.

Like a philosophical surgeon wielding a scalpel of the mind, Plato (424 BC) makes the meta-incision that theoretically separates the transcendent, universal, conceptual realm of Being (Forms) from the immanent, particular, material realm of becoming (forms). Although Perictione's wide-browed son performed the procedure, his dialogues are rather nebulous when it comes to a thorough diagnosis of the nature and interrelation between the higher and lower levels of reality. Much like the orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity, Plato's Theory of Forms is a particular idea that materializes only in light of the whole. Gently introduced in *Phaedo* (360 BC), Plato employs the character-bound Socrates to dualistically argue that the soul seeks freedom from the body so that it may best grasp the truth of the ideal and self-predicated Forms. For Plato, the form of a beautiful woman is not Beauty in and of itself, but merely an imperfect spatio-temporal manifestation of its transcendent Form.

That song is beautiful.

That painting is beautiful.

That woman is beautiful.

How are they Beauty?

Our defective senses merely accumulate information about particulars and cannot offer us perfect knowledge of the Forms. From our predicament, Plato argues for a philosophical life designed to liberate the soul from the body's slavish appetites. While suicide is deferred by the idea that we are the gods' possessions and the philosopher's obligation to the betterment of the city, physical death represents the irreversible separation of soul and body.³ Death is the realization of the philosophic life because it is only after the soul is completely unchained from the body that it can clearly apprehend the True, the Good, and the Beautiful.

Dante's beatific vision.

Dave Bowman saw it full of stars.

The Christian telos.

The ontological dualism that exists between the indivisible Forms and the divisible particulars is generally referred to – by overeducated and underpaid pedagogues – as *extreme realism*. Approaching a still and venomous death, Socrates argued that particulars are beautiful only because they participate in Beauty Itself.⁴ In some ways a reaction to Parmenides' (510 BC) claim that there is no non-being, Plato dualistically reasons that since particular instantiations of beauty change over time from being beautiful to less beautiful, the Form Beauty itself must remain chaste and unaffected. In other words, particulars like a beautiful song, painting, or woman are not Beauty in itself, but rather predicates that merely participate in the standard of Beauty. Distilling this idea even further, extreme realism is ultimately expressed in several basic principles in which "F" is any Form such as Truth, Good, or Beauty.

Upon this rock ontology is built and rebuilt.

The core of duality.

Postmodernists take heed.

And then there came the philosopher.

Aquinas' thinking father.

Plato's most fêted apprentice

For Aristotle (384 BC), philosophy should achieve an understanding of the empirical world in pursuit of the Forms. Aristotle argued that Plato's surgical division of reality never truly explained – as it was possibly irrelevant – how a higher realm made objectivity and permanence possible in the lower. Aristotle saw no need to divide reality in order to explain experiential permanence and, as such, he sought to soften Plato's extreme brand with a more *moderate* brew, which asserts that necessary truths concerning sensible beings and their interrelation manifest through the abstraction of essences from particulars.

The truth unfolds from what is seen.

The actuality of thought is life.

Aristotle first protested against the ambiguous relation between particular forms and the manner they supposedly participated in the Form-ness of the universal Forms. The second and more systematic complaint is his **third man argument**, which problematizes the Platonic parallel between any two material objects in terms of their shared participation in a common Form.⁵ Aristotle's moderate realism theoretically sutures the incision made by the dualistic Platonic ontology and holds that universal Forms only exist as they are instantiated by particulars.

His invisible attributes.

His eternal power and divine nature.

Have been clearly seen.

In classic Aristotelian fashion, moderate realism represents the just mean between extreme realism and *nominalism*, or the philosophical position that denies the existence of the Forms simply on the grounds that words do not signify objectively existing entities.⁶ Carving out the middle ground, moderate realism distinguishes between the thing itself with the way in which it exists. Human nature is a reality, but it is the reality in the existence of individual human beings, not as a separate entity. Although Aristotle's path strayed from and even resisted Platonic thought, they both pave the same ontological superhighway that led from Athens to the God-man who would square the ontological circle and unleash Jerusalem's saints.

The Medieval Christian Synthesis – 354 to 1288 AD

So here we are then...

My reader and only friend.

You and I have come to the gate of the old Jerusalem.

We must pass through the old to see the New.

The destined life and death of the unstained Lamb rippled such theological philosophers as Augustine of Hippo (354 AD), Thomas Aquinas (1227), Duns Scotus (1266), and William of Ockham (1288). While stewing their own unique batch, each attempted to synthesize aspects of extreme and moderate avenues of Greek realism with Christianity. First in time and arguably foremost in thought among this collection of excessive minds, Augustine was magnetically drawn to *Neoplatonism's* romantic take on pure intellectual being and of the origin of evil.⁷ Greatly impressed by the *Septuagint*, or the Koine Greek translation of the Hebrew Torah, this philosophical estuary formed beyond conventional Platonism. The volatile relation between Plato's *Timaeus* (360 BC) and the Genesis creation narrative called forth Augustine's newly synthesized brand of cosmological thought. Though his salvation had yet to manifest in space and time, Neoplatonism drew Augustine closer to the Church and swayed his ontological idealism that materialized in his beliefs that his will reflects his appetitive nature and that a spiritual reality is the antecedent for its material predicate.

We do want we don't want.

And we want what we don't do.

Augustine's Neoplatonic views are most "visible" in his seminal *City of God* (426) that envisions two cities formed by two loves: the earthly city by the love of self, even to the contempt of God, and the Heavenly City by the love of God, even to the contempt of self.⁸ Synthesizing Plato's division of reality with Christian theology, Augustine glimpses the materialistic cities of man as immanent and finite simulacra of the transcendent and eternal New Jerusalem.

*The City of God that descends,
in the fashion of classical comedy.
As a bride adorned for her husband.*⁹

Augustine walked common ground with the Neoplatonists' attempt to move beyond the realm of becoming as they sought after a Being whose immutable existence unified the whole of a philosophically divided reality. A Platonic strand also funneled through Augustine's view that reality is either sensible or intelligible, and it is the intelligible that we should search it out through reason, guided by faith, but ultimately revealed in its highest Form.¹⁰ Augustine dreamed that Plato rightly explore justice in the city-soul of man writ large, but awoke to the fact that such an attempt was bereft of authenticity because Justice only truly existed in the City of God.

*All tears wiped away.
For those that the Father has given the Son.*

In 410, after Alaric I (370) – king of the Visigoths and former Roman leader of the foederati under emperor Theodosius I – dropped his broad blade through the Roman neck of the Empire, the West descended into the economic, political, social, and intellectual shadowlands of the Middle Ages. Obligated to such Persian and Arab philosophers as Avicenna (980) and Averroes (1126) respectively, it was not until the West recaptured the Greeks, and Aristotle in particular, that a few lights were able to emerge before the full breaking of the Renaissance and Reformation dawns. Built upon the manner each regarded the distinction between common human nature and what makes an individual unique, Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham all fashioned their own ontology through their fusion of Christian theology with Aristotle's realism. Aquinas first argued that a universal concept such as common human nature exists only as it is abstracted from matter in thought. The Philosopher's most adoring devotee views common human nature as singular through an infusion of individuating matter and universal by being received into the mind.¹¹ With Aquinas, while revelation is required to reach the highest truths, all sensory information is grasped by the mind, which elevates thought toward a preliminary apprehension of immaterial realities.

*The body of Christ.
The mind of God.*

A variation on Aquinas, Scotus believed that the individuating *haecceitas* – the properties of a species that other members of the genus do not possess – links particular humans to common human nature. With the Greeks, the human species (framed by the animal genus) is distinguished from the other animals primarily by the property of advanced rationality, which, according to Aristotle, makes man a "rational animal."¹² With Scotus, while rationality is *practically* indistinct with human nature in terms of a contractual commonness, human nature is also *formally* distinct with rationality just as the human species and animal genus are dissimilar.

Ockham – who believed that Divinely contingent human reason could prove neither the soul's immortality nor God's existence – argued in razor-like fashion against Aquinas that anything is a thing because of itself, not because individuating matter has been added to the thing. With regard to Scotus' position, Ockham penned that even a formal difference constitutes a real identity and that common nature is present in many individuals, which renders it powerless to distinguish one individual from another of the same kind. In other words, resting on Ockham's premise that a thing cannot be said to

be essentially something it is not, if your human nature is really distinct from you, then it is not your nature. Alternatively, if common nature does not individuate you, then the commonness of the common nature is purged.

Late Renaissance, the Age of Reason, and Early Phenomenology – 1596 to 1815

*Through the long medieval night,
a flame kept flickering in the shadow the Cross.*

The fire of serious ontological thought was rekindled in the warm climes of Italy and was further stoked in the colder and harsher lands of northern Europe where the Reformation took it firmest hold in such places as France, Germany, and the Netherlands. Son of Judge Joachim and father of modern mathematics and philosophy, René Descartes (1596) – most celebrated for his a priori argument for the existence of God and a major figure of 17th century continental rationalism – offers an binary and skeptical observation of self and other.¹³ During the systematically reasoned and newly specialized Enlightenment, the Cartesian belief that *Dubito, ergo cogito, ergo sum cogito ergo sum* (I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am) was the prevailing ontological view and, Descartes argued, proved the I Am.¹⁴

I have an idea of supremely perfect being.

Necessary existence is a perfection.

Therefore, a supremely perfect being exists.

Revealed by thinking as a lone consciousness, the individual Cartesian self, or the *res cogitans*, is placed in dualistic binary opposition to the Cartesian other, or the *res extensa*.¹⁵ Descartes – buried in ground mainly excavated for unbaptized infants – concluded that the external world exists because God is truth and created man with the nature to suppose the existence of an external world that corresponds to the internal world of ideas.¹⁶ Indirectly addressing Aristotle's complaint against Plato's vague connection between the higher and lower realms of reality, Descartes reasoned that God Himself sutures the incision that separates the private consciousness of the Cartesian self revealed by methodic doubt and the external world of the Cartesian other.

We share the mind of Christ.

We move as the Spirit leads.

Although toiling in the oversized shadow cast by the slender Descartes to which they reacted and revised, there are several German and Dutch ontologists worth animating. While scholastic philosopher and Hexenhammer adherent Rudolph Goclenius (1547) is generally credited with inventing the term "ontology," it is his rationally Enlightened countrymen Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646) and Christian Wolff (1679) who are more fondly remembered for their contributions in the sphere of ontological thought.¹⁷ However, before we get to the land of Weimars and Reichs, let us risk a northern route through the low country. Amsterdam son and Talmud critic Baruch de Spinoza (1632) famously holds to a lonely monism, or a doctrine in which there is a single substance from which Aristotle was supposed to account for the individuation of objects. Neither a thinking mind, nor a spatially extended body, Spinoza's ontology asserts only one substance that results from an inconsistency between infinite, thinking substance and finite, extended substance. Spinoza braved the storm and rejected the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter and argued that body and mind are two attributes of the same being. For Spinoza, the Divine Nature is a single infinite and eternal *Substance* that gave rise to the phenomenal universe, which precipitated charges of atheism as several chaps felt that Spinoza raised nature to the level of God, which effectively eradicated God. According to Spinoza, God is neither personal nor sovereign, but is simply a cog in a naturally deterministic system.

Nowhere and Everywhere.

Nothing and Everything.

Or is it nowhere and nothing?

Philosopher, mathematician, and son of a Schmuck, Leibniz, also reacting to the Cartesian account of matter, claimed that only beings endowed with true unity and capable of action count as substances. The theory of *monads* – simple substances that cannot be divided into parts – is the central articulation of Leibniz's ontology. If you were to ask him and he could hear you through his Antoinette-like black wig, Leibniz would tell you that no two monads are alike and that they possess an individual identity. The monad must not only exhibit properties, but contain within itself *potentially* all the properties it will exhibit in the future, as well as contain the *trace* of all the properties it exhibited in the past.

Pregnant with the future.

Laden with the past.

Only gracing us with their appearance when they have ample reason to do so, all properties unfold from within the monad, which leads Leibniz to wonder... if I can consider everything happening or appearing to me in the present... could I see in the present everything which will ever happen or appear to me? ¹⁸ From his monadal theory, Leibniz's ontology contends that everything results from the perceptual states of genuine, real substances, or mind-like simple substances that revealed the body through their gift of perception and appetite. Not surprisingly, asserting that monads are the grounds of all corporeal phenomena was absorbed as a rather contentious and conspicuous act.

Is a drop of urine an infinity of monads?

Does my urine then think about the universe? ¹⁹

According to the University of Leipzig lecturer, Confucius fan, and all-around academic supa-star, the principles of non-contradiction and sufficient reason are valid in both hypothetical and material reality. For Wolff, a being is any possible thing that possesses essential natures in the manner it is comprised by noncontradictory predicates. The essence of any possible thing is its principle of individuation, or *Principle of Being*. ²⁰

If only Wolff had a microscope.

And then Kant wondered...

How we can escape from within the confines of the human mind?

Empiricist senses and a posteriori reasoning?

Rationalist a priori reasoning beyond experience?

It was not until the late Enlightenment and German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724) – who never travelled more than a hundred miles from his beloved Kaliningrad – that we see the next truly epic entry into the ontological discourse. Considering the logic that buttressed Wolff's ontological system overly Platonistic, Kant introduced his transcendental analytic that centered on concepts and the exposition of sensible appearances. ²¹ Kant grew his epistemology from the application of only those subjective general concepts, or categories employed to fulfill certain spatio-temporal conditions. In order to treat the flaws he observed in the antinomies of prior metaphysical thought, Kant argued that we must accept the natural world as a world of appearances constituted by the application of the categories of sensible intuitions, and not a realm of things-in-themselves. ²² Indebted to both Baconian and Hobbesian detailed reflection, Kant's interdisciplinary synthesis is a monumental contribution to an ontological progression that centers on theories framed by specialized mathematical methods.

Kant has Wolff's microscope.

Can you see a thought or God through the lens?

Known as Wilhelm to his comrades, German philosopher and speculative logician Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770) transformed the Platonic dialectic from a search for first principles to the ever evolving synthesis of the thesis and antithesis. Both Kant and

Hegel claimed that our minds only have access to perceptions and concepts of the world. However, Hegel's idealism diverges from his predecessor's in that our ideas are constructed by society's collective consciousness, or *Geist* (Spirit), which dialectically evolves. Located neither in minds nor in objects, but rather in an abstract realm that contains the collective ideas of society, *Geist* is a modern phenomenon driven into the deep beyond by the human consciousness' attempt to perceive the material realm through the senses until it understands that individuals are united to others in a shared consciousness.

In line with Kantian idealism, Hegel believes that consciousness of an object necessarily implies consciousness of a subject, or a self perceiving the object. However, Hegelian phenomenal ontology also contends that self-consciousness involves not only a subject and an object, but also other subjects as self-awareness is achieved through the eyes of the other. Likening this new relationship to that between a lord and a bondsman, Hegel claimed that the former is independent, and its essential nature is to be for itself, while the latter is dependent, and its essence is life or existence for another.²³ In this disproportionate relationship, the lord's "lordship" depends on the bondsman's self-consciousness and, therefore, the validity of independent self-consciousness is found in the bondsman's self-consciousness rather than in the lord's. It is, ultimately, the bondsman's admiration for the lord that removes the narrow self-identifications and self-interest and enables him to attain absolute negativity – true self-consciousness.²⁴ As a result – while the bondsman achieved a kind of self-consciousness by discovering himself in opposition to otherness – a higher version is obtained *in* the otherness. It is not mastery of the other, but recognizing it and yielding to it, consciously subjecting oneself to it that accomplishes this.

*Bunyan's Christian travels to the Celestial City,
and transcends his fear and sinful servitude.*

Modern Phenomenology and Existentialism – 1913 to 1967

From Kant's fusion of philosophy with the hard sciences, an ontology developed that expanded Kant's phenomenological reduction of the material world. In the vein of Scottish son John Stuart Mill (1806), Moravian born Jew and Christian covert who later joined the Lutheran Church Edmund Husserl (1859) argues in *Logical Investigations* (1913) that the most efficient way to investigate propositional systems is to start with their linguistic manifestations and analyze the units of consciousness, or *intentional experiences* that a speaker utters through written or spoken expression. While one can discern accurate propositions such as the Binomial Theorem, Husserl wonders how one can grasp an abstract proposition, which becomes the substance of an intentional act. To this end, he employs the notion of proposition as abstract types, or *ideal matters* that can be instantiated by certain particular features, or *moments of matter* laid bare through phenomenological description. In this way, Husserl becomes father of a kind of phenomenological ontology, or phenomenology, which transforms the world into a phenomenon.

Heavily influenced by both Descartes and Kant, and applying what he called *transcendental phenomenology*, Husserl focused on the essential structures that allow the objects neglected by the natural attitude – characteristic of both everyday life and ordinary science – to constitute themselves in consciousness. Husserl argues that the resulting perspective on the realm of intentional consciousness should permit the phenomenologist an impartial justification of his worldview in order to examine their rational interconnections.²⁵ Existing precisely in that way in which they are phenomenologically experienced by human beings, the world is structured in the pure intentional consciousness as it is experienced through material reality.

First-person conscious reflection.

*As if there was another kind.
Extract the essence of experience.
Just drive until you crash and tell me what you see.*

Dedicating his masterwork *Being and Time* (1927) to his mentor, Husserl's assistant, University of Freiburg theology student, and one-time Nazi party member Martin Heidegger (1889) acknowledges that Husserl's phenomenology impregnated his own. Husserl's phenomenological reduction directs us from the natural attitude and our participation in the material world, to the detached analysis of the phenomenological attitude that allows us to describe the purity of things as they are in themselves. Heidegger problematizes Husserl's assertion that the original way we encounter things in themselves is the interface of consciousness purified by phenomenological reduction. Heidegger addresses other ways in which we exist and encounter things by analyzing the structures constitutive of things not only as they are met in the detached realm of consciousness, but also in a daily life driven by anxiety, or *angst*, when *Dasein* is threatened with annihilation.

*Existence and presence.
Being there and here.
But never objectively present.*

Central to Heidegger's ontology is a description of the structures that comprise the human being, or *Dasein*.²⁶ For Heidegger, beings are not originally constituted in pure consciousness, but rather in *Dasein*'s being. A reaction to and revision of Husserl, Heidegger's, phenomenology is a method of ontological inquiry that grants access to being and investigates the notion that philosophy has considered beings found in the world, but has neglected to thoroughly investigate the darkest and most complete of all concepts – being itself. In *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger argues that Western philosophy has ignored being because it was considered glaringly obvious. In response, Heidegger's question of being centered on three main presuppositions with regard to Being: that it is universal, indefinable, and self-evident.²⁷ Second, Heidegger's philosophy addresses the Husserlian notion that all philosophy could and should be a description of experience of things themselves, which meant that experience is always already situated in the world. Heidegger transforms the Husserlian notion that all consciousness is intentionally directed toward something into an existential analytic that properly describes experience by locating the being, or *Dasein*, that provides the description ontological context.

*Here I am.
I am in the world.
My actions matter.*

Criticizing the traditional view of human existence as a rational animal, Heidegger's existential analytic argues that *Dasein* is thrown into the world of others and the mystical possibilities of life and the dark inevitability of death. Existential responsibility centers Heidegger's notions of authenticity and permits *Dasein* to transcend the calculating temporality of the shared human quest furtively codified in the Western philosophical tradition.

*The Great Conversation.
Spoken on the first level of discourse.
Lived on the second.*

French existentialist, novelist, and WWII prisoner of war Jean-Paul Sartre (1905), like Husserl and Heidegger, distinguished his classificatory ontology from a metaphysics that tends to make universal declarations. However, unlike Heidegger, Sartre does not engage metaphysics, instead, like Kant, observes how metaphysics poses philosophical questions. In *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Sartre seeks to maintain Nietzsche's atheistic illusion of the "worlds-behind-the-scene" and also his denial of the "being-behind-the-

appearance." So, like Nietzsche and Machiavelli before him, Sartre has relegated himself to the realm of phenomenal appearance and, as a result, he coverts all dualisms into the finite and infinite, which theoretically replaces the old dualism of being and appearance.²⁸ Sartre revises Aristotelian moderate realism in the sense that appearance does not merely reveal essence, but it is the essence. However, the finite object's essence is, in a sense, always put off to the next level and extends into an appeal to an infinity of relative points of view of that object.

*If you can forever put off point of view,
then does the object exist?*

For Sartre, by asserting the reality of that cup is that it is there and that it is not me, he establishes a dualistic phenomenological ontology that analyzes two dissimilar and irreducible categories or kinds of being: the unconscious *in-itself*, or *en-soi*, and the conscious *for-itself*. *Being-in-itself* and *being-for-itself* possess mutually exclusive characteristics and yet human beings are a unique ontological combination of both. Active, fluid, and dependent upon the being-in-itself, the transcendent being-for-itself is the *nihilation*, or internal negation or of the passive, solid, and self-identifying being-in-itself. The being-in-itself's facticity, comprised by its surroundings, language, and previous choices, is juxtaposed by the being-for-itself's ability to transcend the facticity of the being-in-itself's natural situation. While we are all beings engaged in situation, the combination of facticity and transcendence that forms any situation is unknowable and, as a result of this ambiguity, Sartre paradoxically argues that humans are condemned to be because we are always more than the sum of our situation.

Although often labeled a dualist, Sartrean ontology differs from the thinking thing (mind) and the extended thing (matter) of Descartes. With Sartre, only the being-in-itself is conceivable as substance, or thing, while the being-for-itself is a *no-thing*. Both thing and no-thing, humans exist in a combination of the past and future, or the present, which grants the possibility for the being-for-itself as other to nihilate the facticity of being-in-itself's self-identification. While the being-in-itself appears in its relation to the being-for-itself, the being-for-itself appears in its relation to the Sartrean Other. This entity is discovered through, for example, the experience of an embarrassing situation that forces us into the experience of the Sartrean Other's objectification, or the alienation of the being-for-itself from its false perception of unity by being seen by others.

*Is there something in my teeth?
I hope she wasn't looking.
Did I brush my teeth?*

Being in Opposition: A New Kind of Ontology (2007 – undetermined)

Resembling the dialectic between self and other it frames, Western ontological discourse has never changed in a macro-evolutionary sense, but rather has sought to adapt – in ways both clear and subterranean – the original Platonic division by suppressing one realm of being to the exclusion of the other. It has been the personal charge and spiritual muse of much greater and even greater minds to carve the tunnels that light the way for this new kind of ontological view that merely reacts to a philosophical legacy etched in time's roughly hewn stone.

*I take off my everyday clothes covered in everyday vanity.
I put on noble robes and enter the Ancient courts of Ancient men.
And there I am greeted by them kindly and taste the food that alone is mine.
And I am not ashamed to speak to them and ask the reasons for their beliefs.
And they... in their collective Humanity...
Answer me.*

This new ontology is spiritually animated by the Platonic view that we must transcend material things in order to find the True, the Good, and the Beautiful – concepts

synthesized by and contained within Augustine's transcendent Master. Infused with life, the material body shutters and breathes the realistic pragmatism found in the unifying principles of Aristotle's moderate realism and the perceiving and appetitive qualities that form the genuineness of Leibniz's mind-like simple substances. A spiritual and material being, this new ontology frankly acknowledges an authentic division of reality, if only revealed in theory, while paradoxically recognizing that we only have direct access to appearances perceived through the senses and processed in the gray matter form of our brain.

*Indeed Monsieur Descartes
I think therefore I am.
But I also occupy a space in act within.
Therefore I am.*

While technology has permitted the modern eye to see thinking manifest in the realm of appearances as bullet-fire discharges in the brain, the content of our thoughts remains absent even when uttered. It is in light of the ever present and absent nature of reality that this new ontology sees the Judeo-Christian meta-Cartesian Other who eternally contains and will ultimately suture the incision that separates transcendent reality from the one in which we all have appeared.

*Plans within Plans.
The City of God is Eden.
We appear only so we can journey Home.*

Though longing to live in the ethereal Axis Mundi, this new ontology apprehends the great value of plying our unique place and vested interaction in a material realm quantified by a phenomenally related system. Moving by way of Kant's spatio-temporal view of appearances, this new ontology draws practical telos from Heidegger's existential analytic and a *Dasein* responsible for its own existence within a world pregnant with the designed possibilities that constitute the grand human narrative.

*I will put enmity between your seed and her seed.
To the woman He said, I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth.
To the man He said, Cursed is the ground because of you.
We are here and we must act.*

Though the perfect narrative Form has been written onto transcendent pages, the stories of you and I – my reader and only friend – unfold in space and time. Federally responsible for our absent sin and immanently accountable for our present offenses – this new ontology finds its ethos in the paradoxical duality between a kind of Leibnizian illusion of free will and a Heideggerian emphasis of an active being-in-the-world. While Sartre argues that man is condemned to be free because he cannot escape the anguish, abandonment, and despair that results from the crush of profound responsibility, this new ontology attempts to envision a determined being that senses its illusory freedom within a kind of Husserlian propositional system that looks to linguistic manifestations as the utterances of Divine consciousness.

It is the I Am – as the unifying principle for the whole of reality – who has spoken the human drama into existence and articulated it through the foundational principal of all expression – binary opposition. Just like the Argument Socrates laid before Cebes, based upon the central antinomy of light and dark, this new ontology attempts to perceive how a bondsman being manifests through its self-sacrificing struggle within the oppositional structure of this Divinely authored narrative unveiled in measured time and contrasting space.²⁹

*These words carry meaning because the ink opposes the page.
The grand human narrative is the struggle of between the seed.
We find our being in opposition as we return Home.*

Endnotes: Ontological Heritage

¹ Genesis 1:4, *New American Standard Bible* (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1999), 1.

² Plato, *Theaetetus* (Newburyport: Focus Publishing, 2004), section 152a.

³ Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. David Gallop (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 61c-69e.

⁴ Plato, *Phaedo* (1999), 100b-102d.

⁵ Aristotle, *Peri Ideon* (New York: Peter Lang Pub Inc., 1984). Aristotle begins with his mentor's assumption that there is a plurality of material forms, or "large" things. For example, a large apple, bird, and cat, or A, B, and C. By the One-Over-Many principle, there is a Form of Largeness, or FL1, which, by the principle of Self-Predication, is large. It is through their participation in FL1, that the apple, bird, and cat are large. However, Aristotle goes on to say that we can add one (FL1) to the many (apple, bird, cat) and form a new plurality of large material forms (FL1, apple, bird, cat). Again, by the One-Over-Many principle, there is a Form of Largeness, or FL2, which, by the principle of Self-Predication, is large. Again, it is through their participation in FL2 that the apple, bird, cat, and now FL1 are large. However, in this case FL1 partakes of FL2, and yet Plato argued that the Forms are Non-Self-Partaking, or no Form partakes in itself. So, Plato must argue that FL1 is not identical to FL2, which gives us at least two Forms of Largeness, or FL1 and FL2, which contradicts Plato's principle of the singular Uniqueness of the Forms, which tells us that there can only be one Form of Largeness. What is more, according to Plato's principle of Self-Predication, FL2 is large, and hence the one (FL2) can be added to the many (apple, bird, cat, FL1) to form a new plurality of large things (apple, bird, cat, FL1, FL2). Replication of Aristotle's logic demonstrates that there is an infinite hierarchy of Forms of Largeness, with each Form partaking of the infinite number of Forms above it in the hierarchy. Yet, according to Plato, anything that partakes of many things must itself be many, which means that each Form in the infinite hierarchy of Forms of Largeness is many. However, given the One / Many and Purity principles, it follows that each Form in the infinite hierarchy of Forms of Largeness is not one, which ultimately contradicts the Platonic Oneness principle. Thus, Aristotle argues that the Theory of Forms really explains nothing about the similarity of objects because to explain the similarity between a man and the Form of Man, one needs a third man and so forth. The explanation of the original similarity is never given and it is only relegated to the next level.

⁶ Nominalism is not the same as *conceptualism*, a kind of ontological agnosticism, admits an ideal existence within us of abstract and universal concepts, but it holds that we do not know whether or not these mental objects have any foundation outside our minds.

⁷ Generally speaking, Neoplatonism is the period of Platonic philosophy that began with the work of Plotinus (204 AD) and ended with the closing of the Academy by the Emperor Justinian in 529 CE.

⁸ Augustine, *City of God* (New York: Doubleday, 1958), 295.

⁹ Revelation 21:2, *New American Standard Bible* (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1999), 1195.

¹⁰ Augustine, *City of God* (1958), 152-153.

¹¹ Diogenes Allen, Eric O. Springsted, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1958) 114-116.

¹² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. (Sioux Falls: NuVision Publications, 2005), 95-120.

¹³ Continental rationalism was predominant in the continental schools of Europe, whereas in Britain empiricism dominated. Descartes' view was advocated by Spinoza and Leibniz, and opposed by prominent empiricist thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume.

¹⁴ René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998), 18-22

¹⁵ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: Meditation Two*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1993), 17-24. The binary opposition between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* form the Cartesian ontological system. *Res extensa* was used to denote the physical world and *res cogitans* was used to denote the thinking being, the being that perceives its own beingness. Problematized by the British empiricists, this Cartesian view of the self appeals to the transcendent Judeo-Christian God in an attempt to evade the skeptically solipsistic view of an external world and other minds that cannot be known and, therefore, might not exist.

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- ¹⁶ Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: Meditation Six* (1993), 47-59.
- ¹⁷ Rudolf Goclenius, *Lexicon philosophicum quo tanquam clave philosophiae fores aperiuntur, informatum opera et studio Rodolphi Gocleni*, 2^{cd} ed. (Frankfurt: Georg Olms, 1980) XII. It is generally accepted that the first appearance of the Latin word "ontologia" was known in two works published in 1613 in Rudolf Goclenius' work.
- ¹⁸ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Monadology*, trans. George R. Montgomery (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), 249. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, trans. George R. Montgomery (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), 1.
- ¹⁹ Voltaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. 22 (Basel: Birkhäuser Basel, 1994), 434.
- ²⁰ John Burns, *Dynamism in the Cosmology of Christian Wolff* (New York: Exposition-University Book, 1966), 44-51.
- ²¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer, Allan W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 345.
- ²² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1998), 479-559.
- ²³ Georg W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 115.
- ²⁴ J.N. Findlay, J.N. "The Phenomenology of the Spirit: An Analysis of the Text," in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 522.
- ²⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (London: Macmillan Pub Co., 1962).
- ²⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie, Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1962), 27.
- ²⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (1962), 22-23.
- ²⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 5-6.
- ²⁹ Plato, *Phaedo* (1999), 69e-72e.