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Dan Dahlstrom

As Aristotle puts it, 'being' (used interchangeably with 'existence' here) is said in many ways, including many opposing ways.¹ Potentialities exist precisely as potentialities for specific actualities but the potentialities and the respective actualities for which they are potentialities are not identical to one another, even though they are determinable only in terms of one another (e.g., the acorn and the mature oak, the glass before and after shattering). In this sense being exceeds the exclusive disjunction of potentialities and their respective actualities.

Something analogous holds for creators and creations, universals and instances, what is and what is not changing, and subjects and objects. Both creators and creations exist, and yet, while not identical, one is never without the other (unlike potentialities and their specific actualizations). Whereas instances exist only by instantiating universals, universals seem to exist only by virtue of being able to be instantiated, even if only in a thought (e.g., both Goodman's grue and the monster). x can be said to change relative to y only while either y or the relation between x and y in some respect do not change; thus, a birthday marks a change while the markers – the numbers of years and the numbers themselves – do not. Similar considerations apply to modern distinctions between subjects and objects. While not identical, both subjects exist and objects exist as do relations between them (and the place, as Heidegger puts it, where they are together).

These general preconsiderations bring us to the topic of presence. Presences are always correlative with absences, and not just in thought. They exist in mutually inherent ways and this inherent relatedness holds for each of the overarching ways that something can be said to be present or absent. Thus, we say that something is present *now* in view of the fact that it was absent and will be in the near future, that it is present *here* because it is absent somewhere else, or that it is present *to* an observer because it is also absent from the observer in some respect. The notion of this interplay of presence and absence encapsulates Husserl's insight that nothing is perceived adequately through the senses and Heidegger's complementary contention that various sorts of absences no less than presences generally make up entities' manners of being. The two claims floated here (that presences and absences are correlative and that being is said of both) entails that being and presence are not identical.

The fact that being is said in these contrary ways, e.g., that it is both present and absent (actual and potential, etc. albeit not in the same respect), may suggest that being is hopelessly indeterminate, that talk of being must equivocate. But, apart from the fact that we can unequivocally register the indeterminate, it would be a mistake to suppose that

¹ Aristotle speaks of *correlatives* (e.g., 'half' and 'double') and *contraries*, i.e., opposites that need not entail the existence of the complement but arguably depend for their intelligibility on it; these can be necessary to and binary for a specific kind of thing (e.g., odd and even numbers) or not (e.g., white or not-white) (*Categories* 6 and 10).

determinacy and univocity are defined by those very contrarities themselves. If being applies meaningfully to both sides of the disjunction as well as to the disjunction itself, then its meaning cannot be legitimately restricted to one side. Nor does it follow that being is neither present nor absent (neither potential nor actual, neither creating nor created, etc.). Probably more on target is Heidegger's suggestion (in the 1930s) that the "truth of being" is a determinate, unfolding, pre-vailing (*wesend*) interplay of presences and absences – a truth that is inaccessible (hidden) if one insists on identifying being with only one side of a particular disjunction.

Much as Quine notes that we are used to speaking principally of middle-sized objects, Heidegger observes that we are mostly concerned with beings, not being. Our survival depends upon distinguishing "things": potentialities from actualities, presences from absences, what is moving from what is not, and so on. As a result, our ordinary, practical ways of conceiving things and the theories they generate predispose us to think in terms of such entities and relations between them. If we turn our thoughts to being, it is accordingly natural to bring these ordinary ways of thinking (these bifurcations) along with us. Our natural proclivity ("fallenness") is to obscure the difference between being and beings by construing it as a difference between beings. Such a tendency is not only natural (rooted in our nature as organic beings, dependent upon interaction with beings, the rest of nature) but also historical. Our ways of thinking of being – including the ways glossed on this page – are necessarily traditional. Although handed down to us, they are not fully ours until we have decided, following due consideration, to make them our own. Hence, these inherited ways of thinking are in need of critical, authenticating analysis (what Heidegger somewhat histrionically deems 'destruction') that remains irredeemably fallible. Indeed, the history of metaphysics (emblematic of the history of being) strongly suggests that every epoch conceives being (ontology) in terms of a particular disjunction – e.g., creation, an all-objectifying subjectivity, technological (re-)producibility – and privileges one of the disjuncts as the primary being or sense of being (theology). In this sense every epoch is literally an *ἐποχή*, a "withdrawal" of being. Accordingly, while not unrelated, each epoch in a different way is forgetful of being itself, the unfolding of things that is both present and absent. So part of the task of thinking of being entails thinking being historically, i.e., appropriating and allowing ourselves to be appropriated by the event in which being conceals itself, albeit by no means without a trace. The task of the thinker is to bear witness to these traces of being, precisely as it refuses to yield to any attempts to master it, conceptually and otherwise.