

Being Itself as a Compromise of the One and the Necessary Being^{*}

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For realism, the ultimate rational standard is the law of non-contradiction because the basic proposition for the intellect requires: Being is not non-being. *The One* of Plotinus is beyond being, but *the Intellect*, emanated from *the One*, has being and is also one. With essence and existence, Aquinas endeavors to serve faith with reason in that God is defined as *being itself* according to the name of God who revealed to Moses. Writing for the atheists in his Five Ways, Aquinas defines God with five names, and his conclusion from the Third Way is the existence of a necessary being. *The One* is timeless without will; the necessary being exists in time; if *I Am Who I Am* is understood rationally with essence and existence, then the Biblical God becomes a god of intellect. *Being itself* is neither life-giving nor holy. Regarding time, *being itself* can be viewed as a compromise of *the One* and the necessary being of the Five Ways.

Keywords: *being itself*, *the One*, the necessary being

Philosophy became universal when scholars like Cicero (106-43BC) began translating works of Greek into Latin. What is changeable or subject to time and place cannot be truth and so philosophers as lovers of wisdom, pursue truth. *Nous*, coined by Anaxagoras (500-428BC), is an immaterial and active agent against the Greek naturalists in explaining the origin of the world but it has no personal identity. Aristotle (384-322BC) regards *nous* as independent of the body and thus immune from bodily death. Moreover, he identifies his supreme being with self-contemplative *nous* and thus it may be translated as a *theos* or god of intellect. For realism, the ultimate object for the intellect (*nous*) is being, and the ultimate standard for reason is the law of non-contradiction since reason's basic proposition requires that: Being is not non-being (Aristotle, 1973, 1005b20-25). Thomas Aquinas (1224/5-1274) was a realist and also a theologian, who wrote only in Latin. His ontology develops what had been known since Parmenides (b. 510BC) and had reached its former height by Plotinus (204-270). Aquinas defines the Biblical God to have essence and existence. Although he holds that people were not born with innate ideas, a standpoint against Augustine (354-430) from whom the Latin church drew its tradition, Aquinas endeavors to serve faith with reason in that God is defined as *being itself* (Aquinas, 1975, 22.9-10). The author of this paper, being a native speaker of Chinese which lacks a grammar with time tenses for verbs comparable to that of Greek, Latin, or English, gains insights from such notions written in English by following a realistic method that potentially renews the Chinese mind.

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The One

For Parmenides, being is one (*hen*) and it is not infinite but eternal; there is no time and change; both being and one have no origin. For Plato (428-348BC), being is many; his intelligible world of Forms has the Good (*agathos*) as its supreme and things of this world are imperfect copies or imitations of their corresponding Forms, which are real beings. For Aristotle who rejects the existence of Forms in another world, substance is the basic unit to study the world and metaphysics studies being as being (Aristotle, 1973, 1003a22-b10). Being, the gerund form of the verb “to be” with “is” as its singular form for the third person in English similarly reflects its Greek context: in the preposition “S is P”, where S and P can be changed but “is” remains the same.

Plotinus disagrees with Parmenides by claiming *the One* (*to hen*) is beyond being. He is also more mystical than Plato in his view that, a person is not merely a soul using a body but a self that can return to its origin. This is possible since the human soul has a higher part in *the Soul*, timelessly emanated from *the Intellect*, similar to the world of Platonic Forms and which in turn, timelessly emanated from *the One*, which is beyond being and thus not nothing (Plotinus, 2018, 5.1.10.1-5). Plotinus experienced the mystic union with *the One* four times, according to Porphyry (233-309), his disciple. Influenced by Plotinus, Augustine in *Confessions* three times recalled his internal ascension (Augustine, 1991, VII.X.16, VII.xvii.23, IX.x.24), confusing saving faith with which a regenerated sinner can enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5). Ontologically, *the Intellect* is lower than *the One* but in previous philosophy, *nous* is superior to the human soul which has a faculty of intellect. *The One* is infinite because it emanates without any losses. As beings, both *the Intellect* and *the Soul* are one but not as simple as *the One* which metaphysically is more inscrutable than the Good of Plato. The Israelite defines the good of their covenant God being merciful and faithful (Psalms 100:5), not being good itself. The basic meaning of God is Creator (Genesis 1:1); *the One* is not a creator since the Greek philosophy had no notion of a Creator who created the world out of nothing. In Chinese, one (Chinese character 一) is the simplest character with merely one stroke but the ancient Chinese did not develop much ontology on one.

The Necessary Being

Being a Catholic, Aquinas accepts the Triune God. Nevertheless, he believes in the double revelations of God, holding one can better understand the Biblical God through the natural world. His Five Ways demonstrates from experience the existence of God and gives names to God (Aquinas, 1948, Q. 2, A. 3), of whom his atheist audience formerly had no conceptions. Aquinas implicitly assumes that only God is uncaused and for all others, there is no infinite process to trace the causes; moreover, the distance between being and non-being is infinite. In the Third Way, he defines God as the necessary being who exists at every moment, whereas all others are contingent beings which can be nonexistent. A necessary being must exist unconditionally, inasmuch it is a concrete being and thus not as mystical as *the One* which is beyond being and outside of time.

In fact, we are unsure whether it is sensible to say, a necessary being is infinite or not since it coexists with time. Although the necessary being has omnipresence, omnipresence is not omnipotence. The definition of the necessary being most understandably demonstrates its existence within the time frame of this world. Yet, this necessary being is not an object for meditation and it has no identity. The First Mover of the First Way is distinct from the Unmoved Mover of Aristotle (Aristotle, 1973, 1072b1-15), in that the movements are not eternal but have a beginning. The Fourth Way puts God in a certain genera and accordingly is similar to the Platonic Good, so combining this with the Third Way, a necessary being is the most perfect being. Only the conclusion from the

Fifth Way bears a relationship to a personal God. Unsurprisingly, in *On Being and Essence*, his founding work of metaphysics, Aquinas treats substances from top to bottom: God, intelligent beings among which separate souls are the lowest, and composite beings with matter and form. Being invisible, time can be defined as a succession of numbers in a proposition, and by *On Being and Essence*, time is a being (Aquinas, 1968, I.2). Philo (30BC-40), the first Jewish philosopher, defines eternity as the Form of time (Philo, 1997, VI.32), and he develops Plato's definition of time being the moving shadow of eternity (Plato, 1985, p. 30).

Being Itself

For the Israelite, the name of God represents a covenant relationship with his chosen people since Elohim as the Creator is general. God is from everlasting to everlasting (Psalms 41:13). In specifying his name to Moses, God said, "*I Am Who I Am*" (Exodus 3:14). The words indicate the will of God who uses the first person, unlike a self-contemplative god who never speaks; nevertheless, Aquinas focuses on the point that the name of God stands for his essence—that God is *being itself*—since for God there is always is-ing without a distinction of essence and existence. The starting point for faith is to believe in the existence of God. Thus, Aquinas reconciles the metaphysics of being with the Biblical God, since for Parmenides, being is *being itself* and pure being. For Aquinas, *being itself* is neither a universal being nor the Form of being, since he does not accept the Platonic Forms and *being itself* is more abstract than being. Nevertheless, based on the revelation of God, *being itself* is also a concrete being and a necessary being, metaphysically inferior to *the One* which has no self and revelation.

Time and space were created by God (Genesis 1:1) and the Nicene Creeds of 325 confirms it by specifying time as an invisible creation of God. The Son of God is the exact representation of his being (Hebrew 1:3). Before Abraham was born, Jesus is (John 8:58); although in his human nature, Jesus was a descendant of King David (Matthew 1:1). Following Aristotle, Aquinas defines time as the measurement of motion and time being an expression of succession, which can be understood with numbers. Comparable to *the One*, which has no essence, the god of Aristotle is a pure form. For Aquinas, God individualizes himself with the good since the good as a moral attribute cannot exist independently (Aquinas, 1968, V.2).

Divine Nature

God did not create human ancestors with his divine nature, but rather in his own image (Genesis 1:26-27). If his divine nature is a universal being, it can be shared but *being itself* cannot be shared. Nevertheless, both *being itself* and a universal being have no moral traits. Jesus Christ, the one and only son of God, has divine and human natures; since he was not created but as a person of the Trinity, he exists eternally with God. Regarding the being of God, the original Greek uses *hupostasis* (Hebrews 1:3), which literally is "standing under" and in later philosophy, a synonym of *ousia*, being, substance, and existence (Urmson, 1990, p. 78). Regenerated Christians can participate or share the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) for which the original Greek noun *phusis* represents, while the divine nature represented by *theiotees* in Greek is of the invisible qualities of God (Romans 1:18). Thus, even after Christians have been born again with the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:16), they are still saved sinners.

According to *On Being and Essence*, divine nature is the nature of God and thus it is a being, because we can construct a distinct proposition for it. For the Israelite, the Lord is holy (Leviticus 19:2). God is spirit (John 4:24) and the Spirit of God is God (Genesis 1:2). Since *the logos* is God (John 1:1), Aquinas' concept of serving faith with reason equates *the Intellect* with the Spirit of God. The Hebrew word *ruach* for spirit also means breath

and wind (Genesis 2:7, Job 34:14). Wind is not nothing but rather, air in motion; there are components in air. In *the Septuagint*, its Greek equivalent *pneuma* just means spirit which can be explained in worldly terms (1 Corinthians 1:22), for Aristotle takes the Unmoved Mover as the soul (*nous*) of the world and its intelligible principle. Inevitably, faith becomes more rational with a philosophized God since neither *being itself* nor the necessary being is a Savior.

Conclusion

To spread the gospel, the Apostle Paul prayed that God would give people a spirit of *sophia* (Ephesians 1:17), the wisdom that Greek philosophers cherish. When the Greeks or Latins accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior, the Old Testament with its Jewish customs became relevant to them, but they did not need to become a Jew first and then a Christian. Due to the universal saving power of the gospel, sinners did not need to learn Hebrew but could just rely on their native language to know the will of God. *The One* is without will and time, and a necessary being exists with time. In contrast, *I Am Who I Am* is understood rationally with essence and existence so God becomes known as a god of intellect. *Being itself* is neither life-giving being nor holy. Although Plotinus, Augustine, and Aquinas are all realists, *being itself* can be viewed as a compromise of *the One* and the necessary being of the Five Ways.

All Biblical references or quotations follow in brackets the book name with chapter and verse numbers in *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506, U.S.A., 1985; all Greek terms are transliterated in English.

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