THE THREE GRAND ERRORS OF MODERN (AND POSTMODERN) PHILOSOPHY

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> There was a time when metaphysics was called the queen of the sciences, and if the will were taken for the deed, the exceeding importance of her subject matter might well have secured for her this title of honour. At present, it is the fashion to despise metaphysics, and the poor matron, forlorn and forsaken, laments like Hecuba: *Modo maxima rerum, tot generis natisque potens—nunc trahor exul, inops.* Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason.* [1]

I. *Introduction.* How is it possible that, nearly two and one-half centuries after Immanuel Kant began the first edition of his masterful *Critique of Pure Reason* with these words, the Queen of Sciences has still not been rescued from her exile? Indeed, since then, her circumstances have only become direer. Kant's Queen has been left in despair by the false hope of Kant's own promise to save her, defiled by Friedrich Nietzsche's self-justifying will to power, declared dead by the positivists, nihilists, existentialists, and cosmologists of the 20th and 21st centuries, and slurred by Martin Heidegger, who, in asserting that metaphysics was wrongheaded from its very initiation by Plato, implies that she is a being who never should have been born.

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[1] *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. by Marcus Weigelt (New York: Penguin Classics, 2007), *ix—x*. The included Latin quote is from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and means: "Most powerful of all, supreme by race and birth—now I am led into exile, powerless." The translation appears in footnote 5 to the Preface.

For philosophers who are unwilling to toil in furtherance of a moribund enterprise, that so many great minds have concluded that philosophy is dead would seem indeed to paint a bleak picture. But careful consideration suggests that perhaps things are not so desperate as they appear. First, it is noteworthy that the diversity of rationales for the consensus against metaphysics reflects philosophies which are in no small extent irreconcilably at odds with one another and which are subject to their own critical deficiencies. Second, it should be taken into account that this dirge is the theme song of secularist, nationalist, and globalist movements, which seek to subordinate the individual to the broader community and which, therefore, find the marked propensity toward theism and natural rights often associated with metaphysics to be most threatening. And, third, as I claim here, it is entirely possible that the current sorry state of metaphysics does not reflect its actual demise but rather the error of the path it has taken since the beginning of modernity. It therefore remains worthwhile to inquire as to whether philosophy is an obsolescent enterprise of merely historical interest or whether it has instead only arrived at the end of a blind alley, and, if the latter is the case, what can be done to rescue Kant's Queen.

In this article, I claim that the failure of modern and postmodern philosophy has occurred under the operation of three major, but remediable, errors (which I am calling "Grand Errors"). These Grand Errors naturally developed together in the working out of the philosophy of the subject, in which reality is determined according to the meaning it has for a subjective consciousness. The first Grand Error was made

by René Descartes at the very outset of modern philosophy in his initiation of the philosophy of the subject without firmly establishing its substantial existence, which Descartes was precluded from accomplishing as a result of his flawed methodology of universal doubt. Descartes's attempt to establish his own existence by virtue of the fact that he was attempting to doubt it, called the "the *Cogito*,"[2] represents a radical turn away from the *objective* metaphysics which began with Plato and had reached its high-water mark with the scholastic philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. Thomism comprises a comprehensive philosophical system, including, of especial importance for the purposes of this article, a theory of the unified, objective intentionality of individual consciousness. Descartes's motivation was to rescue Christianity from the Scientific Revolution; however, given the profound deficiencies of his philosophy, his abandonment of scholasticism was premature, and it started philosophy down a dead-end road from which it has not yet returned. Although the philosophy of the subject has defined the philosophical discourse ever since Descartes, instead of fixing Descartes's Grand Error, the majority of Descartes's successors have chosen to abandon the self as substance in favor of various relativist or reductionist characterizations and, in so doing, have denied objective reason its grounds.[3]

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[2] "*Cogito*" is the sobriquet for "*Cogito ergo Sum*" ("I think, therefore I am"), which was originally stated by Descartes in French as "*je pens donc je suis*."

[3] See, Duane Armitage, "Anti-Reductionism and Self-Reference: From Plato to Gödel," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 57, no. 4. (December 2017): 401 ("Anti-Reductionism"). Armitage makes a convincing argument that the self-transcendence presupposed by rationality is inconsistent with reductionism.

One such successor is Kant who perpetuated Descartes's Grand Error by replacing the Cartesian would-be "I-substance" with Kant's own "I-think," which Kant characterizes as the "unity of apperception" and mere "form of the representation of thought". Kant was also responsible for the second Grand Error where, in his critique of reason, Kant privileges the categories of empirical understanding (which he asserts reason brings to bear in, and as a condition of, cognition) over the logic that is embedded in them. Kant's motivation was to construct a system that could withstand the skepticism of David Hume, his contemporary rival, by limiting knowledge to empirical objectivities and allowing for faith as an implication from the freedom that moral obligation presupposes. But Kant's ring-fencing of reason fails upon its own terms because logic is embedded not just in the categories but throughout the cognitive structure, including Kant's "I-think" and reason's intuitions of time and space and also its internal representations, and, therefore, logic cannot be a mere inference from the categories. Taken together, the effects of Descartes's and Kant's Grand Errors are to completely unground human rational experience, both on the side of the cognizing-I and on the side of its objects, and to render metaphysics impossible. Although many of Kant's successors, including the German idealists and at least some of the postmodern phenomenologists, criticize Kant on both counts, none of them attempt to re-establish the self on a substantive, individual basis, and few (other than the German idealists) seek to justify metaphysical knowledge beyond sensible experience or mental representations of it.

The third and final Grand Error was made by Heidegger, the German ontologist. Heidegger's foundational claim is that the achievement of a presuppositionless philosophy requires concrete clarification of the meaning of the being of beings ("Being"), which he asserts is a long-forgotten task that has never been accomplished. Heidegger calls the human being "*Dasein*" ("being-there"), characterizes it as "the being for whom its own existence is an issue," and asserts that it is neither Cartesian "I-substance" nor Kantian "I-think" but merely subsists as part of the unified structure in which its consciousness relates to the world of its experience. Heidegger subsequently abandons his transcendental approach in an attempt to "think Being" in a manner which avoids the assertedly rigidified concepts that have attended philosophy since Plato, resorting instead to a hermeneutic and etymological analysis of the pre-Socratics. But in so doing, Heidegger commits the third Grand Error, which is to privilege Being over the logic (which I will show is co-determinant with it), thereby ungrounding Being altogether and rendering nothingness ("Nothing") and non-Being (both of which are illogical and incoherent) meaningful and possible.

If these are, as I claim, mistakes, then they are undeniably great ones. Nevertheless, in addition to justifying the claim that they represent error, it is incumbent upon me to clarify the grounds for asserting that, among all the many errors of modern and postmodern philosophy, these three, in particular, stand out. There are three reasons for the prominence of the Grand Errors. First, these errors were made by thinkers who may justly be regarded as being among the most influential philosophers, in the case of Descartes and Kant, over the

course of many centuries, and in the case of Heidegger, over the relatively shorter period during and after his career. Second, as just described, the negative impact of the Grand Errors has been whelming. Third, I will show that the correction of the Grand Errors requires the re-justification of objective knowledge which will provide the basis for the revival of metaphysics, which is the definitive measure of their gravity.

II. *Pre-Modern Considerations: The Rise and Fall of Scholasticism*. To enable a proper assessment of the magnitude of Descartes's Grand Error, it is necessary to look back to the scholastic philosophy as epitomized by Aquinas, which immediately preceded Descartes. It is sometimes said that Aquinas's theology represents the superposition of Christology upon Aristotelian philosophy, but this is an oversimplification which does not do justice to the saint. Notwithstanding the many commonalities shared by Aquinas and Aristotle,[4] Aquinas departed from Aristotle in many

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[4] For an excellent comparison and contrasting of Aristotle and Aquinas, see Joseph Owens, "Aristotle and Aquinas," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, eds. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge University Press, 1993) ("Aristotle and Aquinas"), 38–59.

Also, in the discussion of Aquinas and Aristotle in Part II of this article, in addition to the original works, I consulted various secondary sources for their combined knowledge of both philosophers, including: Moritmer J. Adler, "Sense Cognition: Aristotle vs. Aquinas," *The New Scholasticism* 42 (Autumn 1968): 578–591; Frederick Copleston, SJ, *Medieval Philosophy: From Augustine to Duns Scotus*, Volume II of *A History of Modern Philosophy*, (New York: Doubleday, 1993) ("*Medieval Philosophy*"); Arthur Holmes, *A History of Philosophy*, Lectures, https://cosmolearning.org/courses/history-philosophy-with-dr-arthur-holmes/, Lecture 24, "Thomas Aquinas' Christian Aristotelianism," and Lecture 25, "Aquinas on God"; Lawrence Cahoone, *The History of Contemporary Philosophy from Descartes to Derrida, Part I*, Lectures, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybBwsldL0k4&t=5s ("*Contemporary Philosophy*"), Lecture 2, "Scholasticism and the Scientific Revolution"; Henrik Lagerlund, "Mental Representation in Medieval Philosophy," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Zalta, (Fall 2017 ed.) http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/representation-medieval/;

significant ways which, although they were often motivated by the former's theological concerns, are philosophically meritorious and, indeed, justify the claim that Aquinas's thought does not merely represent the christening of Aristotle but rather a high-order rethinking of Aristotelian metaphysics that is worthy of consideration in its own right. Those most relevant to this article center around Aquinas's theory of knowledge to which I now turn.

Although Aquinas adopts Aristotle's doctrines of actuality and potentiality, the four causes (material, efficient, formal, and final) and the threefold classification of the souls (vegetative, sensitive, and rational), unlike Aristotle, Aquinas employs the neo-Platonic doctrine of the *Logos* from St. Augustine and other Churchmen. For Aquinas, God holds in mind archetypes for all kinds of things including *materia prima* (pure potentiality), which is not the "stuff" of things but instead is a thinkable universal which must be infused in particulars before it becomes actualized.[5] In contrast to many of the Ancient Greek philosophers who have a negative view of matter because they consider it to be formless chaos, Aquinas sees matter positively as potentiality which exists for the form. In Thomistic philosophy, each extended being is a *substantial form*, which is an archetypal form of the species that

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and, William Temple, "Part I, Lecture III: The Cartesian *Faux-Pas*," in *Nature, Man and God*, 3rd ed., (Edinburgh: R. & B. Clark, Limited, 1940) ("*Faux-Pas*").

[5] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros, 1947), Questions 15, 22, and 44-49.

is immanent in matter and which is created *out of nothing* by God with its own nature and end (*telos*).

Aquinas's privileging of form over matter allows Aquinas to distinguish among the faculties of the rational soul according to those which require the body for actualization and those which do not. The feature of the rational soul that distinguishes it from the vegetative and sensitive souls of plants and animals, respectively, is the power of abstraction, which is the rational soul's highest power. The ability of human beings to reason abstractly empowers human rationality to identify not only objects of desire (which are accessible to animals) but also itself as soul and those objects which are good in general, and it is the provenance of the human freedom to act to obtain them.

Aquinas's epistemology may be broadly summarized as follows.[6] The unified human soul comprises the senses, the passive intellect, and the active intellect. Universals do not exist in the Platonic sense and are not given as such directly to intellect. Corporeal bodies act upon the senses, with cognition being a unified act of the passive senses and the active intellect. The senses apprehend particulars and, as a result, there arises in the passive intellect a phantasm (mental image), which is also a particular. Accordingly, the passive intellect does not know the real object directly but only an image that represents it. Knowledge of this sort is present not just in humans but also in animals. Human

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[6] *Ibid.*, Questions 84–88. Although Aquinas distinguishes the nature of the knowledge of ensouled reason both before and after the death of the body, only the former, which is the traditional subject of philosophy, is considered here.

intellectual cognition (that is, objective knowledge) is not of particulars but of universals, which the active intellect abstracts from the particular phantasms by intellectual perception of the potential universality that is only partially actualized in the phantasm. Importantly, Aquinian philosophy is distinguishable from the subjective idealism of George Berkeley in that for Thomists the universal idea is merely the means by which the particular object of empirical cognition to which it relates is understood and that it is the sensible object itself and not the idea of it that is actually known.[7] With respect to self-consciousness, Aquinas asserts that because the mind is a *tabula rasa* and all objective knowledge consists of abstraction from that which is apprehended by the senses, *the soul knows itself by abstraction from its individual acts of cognition*.[8] It follows that the human rational soul has no direct access to any other immaterial thing, including God.[9] However, because the object of the abstractive intellect is *being in general*, the objects of empirical cognition can be understood as finite manifestations of God, from which knowledge of God's existence, and analogical knowledge of God's nature may be inferred.[10]

With respect to ontology, whereas for Aristotle, the being of a thing and its essence are the same and are known by determining what a thing is, for Aquinas, there is a real distinction between the essence of a thing (which Aquinas understands in the Aristotelian way) and the

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[7] Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, 390.
[8] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Question 87.
[9] *Ibid.*, Question 88.
[10] *Ibid.*, Question 12.

being of a thing (that is, *that* it is) and the way each is known. It is difficult to overemphasize the importance of this distinction for Aquinian philosophy, which may be regarded as its fundamental truth,[11] and upon which Aquinas is able to hold, contrary to Aristotle, that God is not a mere essence (that is, pure actualization or the form of all forms) but the being *whose essence is existence* and the creative source of all Being, including goodness, beauty, and truth.

Although Aquinas adopts Aristotle's cosmology, which fixes the earth at the center of a series of concentric spheres, including those of the planets and the stars, and beyond which lies the sphere of the Prime Mover,[12] Aquinas reinterprets it in a theologically significant way. For Aquinas: the earth, as the home of God's greatest creatures, is inherently good; the two, together, are of great concern to God; and the realm of Aristotle's Prime Mover is heaven, which is the home of God, the creator of everything *ex nihilo*. And, although Aquinas agrees with Aristotle that the highest good that ensouled beings can achieve is governed by their *telos* and is therefore to actualize, to the extent of their abilities, their own highest faculties, whereas Aristotle does not believe in life after death and therefore concludes that contemplation of God in this life (together with enjoyment of earth's pleasures in moderation) is the best that human beings can do, Aquinas reaches a radically different conclusion. For Aquinas, because objective

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[11] Owens, "Aristotle and Aquinas," 39.

[12] The "Prime Mover" is one of the names given to the Aristotelean god who represents the final, teleological cause of all change in the world, but who, as pure actuality, is itself unmoved.

reason enables humans to act for any end which they can apprehend, human perfection can be achieved only in seeking universal good both in this world and afterwards.[13]

To summarize, the achievements of Thomism relevant to our investigations are as follows:

(1) Aquinas's Great Synthesis is a complete philosophical system, albeit one that from time to time leans heavily on revealed religion. It covers the nature and existence of God, the nature and existence of the human soul, a theory of objective knowledge, a moral theory, a political theory, and five proofs of God's existence (the "Five Ways")[14];

(2) Aquinas's philosophy includes a theory of self-consciousness that is neatly compatible with a rigorous empiricism;

(3) Aquinas's philosophy includes an explanation of the possibility of objective knowledge which, insofar as it includes objectively intelligible empirical realities (that is, substantial forms), persistent self-consciousness of the cognizing entity (that is, the soul), and the power of abstraction to objectively universal forms (that is, the *Logos*), it addresses all of its necessary elements;

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[13] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part 2, Questions 1–5; see also, Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, 399.

[14] The last two are not discussed here.

(4) Aquinas's philosophy includes a robust exposition of the intentionality of mental acts, which will be relied upon the phenomenologist of the mid-19th and 20th centuries; and

(5) Aquinas philosophy includes a robust theistic moral theory that is compatible with a rigorous empiricism and a human teleology, the latter of which will be revived in non-theological form by Nietzsche in his will to power and Heidegger in his depiction of *Dasein* (the name he gives to human beings) as the being who is concerned with its ownmost[15] potentialities for Being.

Aquinas's Great Synthesis constitutes the last major system in which theology, philosophy, and science could be said to represent a harmonious whole. Within just a few short decades after Aquinas's death in 1274 AD, the Renaissance led to revolutionary changes in culture, politics, and scientific knowledge, the last of which began to erode the classic Greek scientific underpinnings of Aquinas's philosophy. The science of the Renaissance blossomed into the Scientific Revolution in the 16th century, which replaced the geocentric system espoused by Aristotle (and embraced by Aquinas to his misfortune) with the heliocentric system of Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, and Johannes Kepler, and the doctrines of final and formal cause with the Galilean physics of matter in motion. Although certain post-Aquinian scholastic philosophers, most notably Duns Scotus and William of Ockham,

[15] "Ownmost" is a term which is used by Heidegger to connote that which belongs uniquely one's own personal identity.

made adjustments designed to keep pace with the advancements of science, it would ironically become apparent that Aquinas's success in developing a philosophy that admirably comprises all of rational experience contained the seeds of its own overthrow, because it manifested that philosophy had matured to the point where it could be conducted in its own right, free of theological claims.

III. *Descartes's Grand Error*. Because the Scientific Revolution decisively undercut the scientific foundations upon which scholastic philosophy was largely dependent, the new science rendered inevitable the disappearance of scholasticism from the mainstream, at least in its Medieval form. Even so, a case can be made that the wholesale abandonment of scholastic philosophy in the early modern era was unwarranted. Although Copernicus's heliocentric revolution rendered the Aristotelean geocentric model obsolete, Thomism could certainly have been adapted to accommodate Copernicus, because Aquinas's concept of God as the First Cause, who exists immaterially and outside of the physical universe, does not require geocentricity. It is similarly so with respect to the supplanting of Aquinas's hylomorphism and final cause by Galileo's development of the science of matter in motion. That real objects act upon one another in accordance with physical laws does not explain the existence of such laws or the apparent order or design of the physical world, and it is certainly not explanatory of the full scope of human rational experience, including, especially, consciousness, objective reason, and morality, all of which are present in Thomism. Moreover, modernized versions of Aquinas's Five Ways remain hotly debated to this day and, as just noted, Aquinas's concept of intentionality was to have

such profound influence in the development of phenomenology six centuries later. In a related vein, it is worth observing that, like Heidegger, Aquinas follows Aristotle in holding that all Being (other than the Divine) is in constant movement towards its own *telos*, which is fundamental to Heidegger's *Dasein*.[16] Finally, although Aquinas's theory of objective knowledge as originally stated would not hold up today, it is structurally complete, and it could easily be modified to include, in addition to a cognizing soul, the irreducible logicality of all objectivity including objective reason and the objects of its cognition, which I will claim below characterizes Being.

In any event, the die was undeniably cast with Descartes's publication in 1641 AD of his *Meditations on First Philosophy*,[17] which inaugurated the philosophy of the subject and a new foundationalism and, with them, commenced an utterly different philosophical discourse. In the broadest sense, the most striking change that occurred in philosophy and science from the time of Descartes and Galileo onward is that each formally became an independent discipline, with philosophy proceeding with a mindful eye on science, and with science marching confidently forward in accordance with its newly developed methods of research and analysis. In this regard, Cartesian mind-body dualism may fairly be understood as an attempt to cede examination of man's physical being to science while retaining the examination of his spiritual being for

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[16] This is not to say that Aristotelian or Aquinian characterizations of Being escape the scathing criticism of Heidegger.

[17] Translated by Donald Cress, 3rd ed., (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993) ("*Meditations*").

metaphysics. However, the sundering by Descartes of the human psychosome irretrievably began a philosophical dialectic that continues to this day to spiral ever deeper into an abyss of confusion and incoherence.

In addition to being one of the most famous philosophers, Descartes was a great mathematician, an important scientist who is best known for his work in optics, a Christian, and a contemporary of Galileo. Given Descartes's credentials and background, it is no surprise that his philosophical inquiry is aimed at rescuing Christian philosophy from the growing skepticism of his era and that, as a great geometer, his strategy is to seek an axiomatic premise of Euclidean rank from which God, the soul, and physical reality could be deduced with certainty.

Descartes's method is to survey his rational experience to see whether there is any element in it that may not be doubted. The first category of knowledge examined by Descartes is sensory experience. Descartes takes as given that senses sometimes deceive with respect to matters that are distant or small, so he turns to what seems at first blush to be undeniable, namely, that at the time Descartes is conducting his inquiry he is sitting by a fire writing. Even though Descartes is prepared to assume that his perception is not the result of madness, he observes, fairly enough, that he has no way to determine with absolute confidence whether he is dreaming or awake. And, since everything we experience empirically can also be dreamed, Descartes concludes that all physical realities and the sciences that study them are subject to doubt.

Descartes next considers the obvious objection that whether one is asleep or awake there are certain mathematical truths, such as "two plus

three make five," which may not be doubted. However, Descartes points out that, sound as such judgments seem, it is possible that his assessment of them is due to the deceit of an evil genius who might have unlimited power over him. But it is here that Descartes makes a discovery that will forever change the course of Western philosophy: no matter how much the evil genius creates doubt in Descartes's mind, Descartes can be certain that he is engaged in the act of doubting! Descartes concludes that his substance is mental:

> … I am; I exist–this is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking; for perhaps it could also come to pass that if I were to cease thinking I would then utterly cease to exist. At this time I admit nothing that is not necessarily true. I am therefore precisely nothing but a thinking thing; that is, a mind, or intellect, or understanding, or reason…. Yet I am a true thing and am truly existing; but what kind of thing? I have said it already: a thinking thing.[18]

The rest of Descartes's argument that is relevant to this article may be summarized briefly as follows. By virtue of the argument from perfection, which is a variation of one of Aquinas's Five Ways, Descartes concludes that if Descartes exists, then so must God, who is innately known by Descartes as a perfect being who therefore would not deceive Descartes. Descartes has thusly proven, to his own satisfaction, the existence of God, *man as mind*, and empirical reality. Descartes proceeds by asserting that there are three distinct metaphysical substances: God, who is wholly immaterial and perfect (*Ens perfectissimum*); soul (*res cogitans*) which, as just noted, is mental, and, therefore, immaterial and immortal; and physical reality (*res extensa*), which is spatio-temporal, infinite, divisible, and corruptible. Importantly, the

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[18] *Ibid.*, 26-27.

Cartesian mind is the source of free will and the body is the source of temporal existence.

The flaws inherent in the *Cogito* (and mind-body dualism) have been chronicled in thousands of pages since Descartes first articulated it. For one thing, if the mind and body are utterly different substances, it is difficult, if not impossible, to see how they might interact. Descartes is aware of this difficulty, which he seeks to resolve by situating the soul in the pituitary gland; however, that is an idea that has since been discredited. Another difficulty arises because there is (at least arguably) a circularity in the argument, famously called the "Cartesian Circle," by virtue of the fact that Descartes's premise of God's existence as a non-deceiver is necessary to prove the reliability of direct intuition and the reliability of direct intuition is necessary to prove God's existence. There is also the closely related problem known as the "solipsism of the present moment," in which it is argued that, because consciousness always occurs in the present, all we ever know is that we exist in the present with a *present* recollection of having existed in the past and without any assurance of having continually existed.

There is yet another difficulty with the *Cogito* that is methodological in nature and which will lead us to Descartes's Grand Error itself. Unless Descartes is willing to assert *axiomatically* that the methodical doubting of everything in order to determine whether there is anything that may not be doubted will yield a foundation for epistemic certainty, he must begin by doubting his methodology. If one takes, as

do many empiricists, Kant, and the phenomenologists, including Franz Brentano, Edmund Husserl, and Heidegger, that consciousness is always *in relation to* something, then doubting all to which consciousness relates must effectively nullify consciousness itself.[19] On such a view, the presence of conscious doubting does not resolve the existential question but instead only formalizes it. We see, then, that asserting the validity of radical doubt on an axiomatic basis presupposes that consciousness itself is undoubtable and therefore exists, even if all of its contents may be called into question. This defect was immediately seized upon by Pierre Gassendi, a French priest and philosopher who was a contemporary of Descartes. Gassendi argues that associating a self with the act of thinking and then proving the existence of the self from the presence of thinking is a *petitio principii* and that all that Descartes is entitled to assert is the presence of thought.

It is clear that, in the view of the contemporary mainstream, Gassendi has gotten the better of the argument, which demonstrates, as a practical matter, the failure of Descartes's dualistic gambit. But the claim that I am making in this article that Descartes's defective argument is not merely one of the many mistakes that bold philosophical thinkers inevitably make but instead is one of the greatest in the history of modern philosophy, depends not upon a showing that Descartes lost his argument with Gassendi but that the consequence of Descartes's loss is that modern philosophy wrongly embraces the French priest!

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[19] See, Temple, "*Faux-Pas*," 64.

The argument in favor of the intuition of a substantive self begins with the simple observation that, like all intelligible arguments, the *Cogito* and all of the arguments *contra* rightly presuppose the existence of objective reason (without which they cannot be sustained). As a rationalist argument, the *Cogito* seeks to champion objective reason, even if it fails to do so. Although postmodern claims to the subjectivity of reason may be the *mode du jour*, they are incontestably unstable because they are always made by means of objective reason. If it were otherwise, the claim that reason is subjective would itself be a subjective claim.[20]

I take, therefore, as a given that there is objective reason. The question that next comes to the fore is: What are its presuppositions? Provisionally,[21] there are three, which, not coincidentally, were contained in a primitive form in Aquinas's theory of knowledge. First, for reason to be objective, its "rules" must be objective, which is to say that they must be necessary and universal. We know them well as the fundamental principles of logic: an object is identical with itself; an object cannot both be and not be at the same time in the same way; an object either is or it is not; and nothing is without reason. Second, the objects of reason, whether they are the physical objects of empirical cognition or the conceptual objects of mathematics or metaphysics, must themselves be such as to be intelligible under the objective rules of

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[20] The argument in favor of objective reason is brilliantly made by Thomas Nagel in *The Last Word*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[21] I will claim below that the rules of thought are in actuality predicates of Being and therefore the first two are really the same thing. See pages 45-46, below.

logic. If not, not only could they not be thought objectively, but they would be incoherent and could not be thought at all. Finally, objective reason requires a persistent thinker who consciously exists in relation to its thoughts. To see why this is so, we must look to the structure of thought itself.

That the *Cogito* is a *petitio principii* is sometimes argued from the formal fact that it begins with the word "I" (as in "I think"). But this unfortunate linguistic detail is not at all dispositive or even illuminating of the question. Given the logic of Descartes's era, he had no other means of formally expressing his foundational idea. In today's predicate calculus, we might state the case thusly:

$\exists S \wedge \exists T\,(T)S \wedge (\mathrm{S})\mathrm{T}$, coupled with the uniqueness equation;[22]

which (including the omitted uniqueness quantifier) may be translated into "there exists one and only one S and one and only one T such that S is the subject of a thought T and the thought T is about S." I justify this claim upon two grounds. The first is that a thought cannot be about itself, which is to say that a thought cannot be both its own subject and object. If it were otherwise, the thought would be endlessly and hopelessly self-referentially circular. The second is that, if thought could think itself (as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel claims of the Absolute), reason would be subjective, not objective, and there would

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[22] One of the several ways of expressing the uniqueness relation is as follows:

$$\exists x \forall y(\mathrm{P}(y) \leftrightarrow y = x)$$

which translates into "there exists an x such that for all y if y has the property P then y equals x." This means that X and only X has the property P.

be no objective knowledge. That this is the case is not only readily apparent on its face but proven by the fact that, if the history of modern and postmodern philosophy teaches us anything, it is that all of the thinkers who have denied the existence of a substantive self fall prey to one or more of the traps of circular reasoning, solipsism, relativism, groundless existentialism, or nihilism.

In fairness to Descartes, he seems to understand the distinction between the mind and its thoughts. After all, he identifies his substance as a *res cogitans* (thinking *thing*) and contrasts it with his body as *res extensa* (extended *thing*). But, because of his subjective and skeptical starting point, Descartes cannot rely on objective reason to prove the soul that is its precondition. And in furtherance of the point that Descartes might have been better served by circumspection in his rejection of Thomism, it should also be noted that Aquinas completely avoids this difficulty by articulating a structurally complete theory of objective knowledge.

Finally, I would be remiss if I failed to observe that our fundamental human intuition is that of a persistent, and indeed morally responsible, soul, which should place the burden of proof of the falsity of that intuition on those who claim that the self is not substance. This is both the final argument against Gassendi and also in the indictment of Descartes as having perpetrated an intellectually criminal error on metaphysics. The charge against Descartes is this: In employing the method of radical doubt, Descartes effectively legitimized systemic skepticism and added to the list of philosophically required

proofs (which already included the proof of the existence of God rightly placed upon the theists) those of the self and of objective reason.[23] As the first modern foundationalist philosophy, Cartesianism asserts the fundamental epistemological importance of consciousness, which is a precursor to the positive philosophy of Hegel, Brentano, and Husserl, and a precursor to the scathing critical philosophy of Hume, Kant, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. However, although Descartes's intent was to preserve the soul for Christianity, he wound up laying the soul bare to the relentless interrogation of his successors. In short, Descartes committed the most grievous error of inaugurating the philosophy of the subject without ever establishing its substance.

IV. *Kant's Grand Error*. Descartes was followed shortly afterward by a series of major philosophers, including Spinoza and Leibniz, two rationalists, and Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, three empiricists, all of whom have in common their rejection of the *Cogito*. Hume, the consummate radical skeptic, is proof positive that everything that could go wrong with Cartesianism did so in fact. Hume adopts Descartes's radical doubt as a methodology and, accepting only that all knowledge comes through sensory experience and that the human mind is a *tabula rasa*, Hume: denies any human propensity to reason; asserts that what purports to be scientific knowledge based upon causality is really a spurious set of conclusions based upon unfounded inductive reasoning; and, taking the Gassendi line to its logical conclusion, asserts that, instead of the

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[23] Cahoone, *Contemporary Philosophy*, Lecture 3, "The Rationalism and Dualism of Descartes."

substantive self of our internal intuition, all we have is the perception of what appear to be a connected stream of ideas, which are themselves subject to doubt.

Kant despaired that from the time of the separation of the physical sciences from metaphysics so much had been achieved by the former while, in stark contrast, metaphysics had descended into utter chaos. Kant could not accept Hume's radical skepticism, nor was Kant able to renounce his own Christian faith. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant therefore sets as his task the twofold exposition of the epistemological grounds of the certainty of scientific knowledge and the recharacterization of the traditional subjects of metaphysics, including God, free will, and the eternal soul, as the province of belief that cannot constitute knowledge but nevertheless is rationally compelled. To do this, Kant undertakes a thoroughgoing and systematic critique of the operation of reason in its full scope including empirical cognition, practical will, and the ideas of metaphysics.

Kant justifies his assertion of the certainty of scientific knowledge by proposing that, although all knowledge originates in the senses, reason brings to empirical cognition certain innate concepts under which sensation is organized as a precondition to its being known. These concepts include the aesthetic intuitions of space and time and categories of empirical understanding, including causation, which Kant unabashedly adopts from Aristotle. For Kant, since the intuitions and categories of cognition are foundational to reason and not at all dependent upon mind-independent reality under which sensation is

organized, they are certain, necessary, universal, and *a priori*. To demonstrate the objectivity of the categories, Kant shows that general logic is included in, and may be abstracted from, them. Kant characterizes these intuitions and categories as *transcendental* insofar as they are not sourced in the empirical world but strictly apply to it. Kant distinguishes the transcendental from the transcendent ideas ("Ideas"), such as God, soul, substance, and the world, on the grounds that the former are mind-dependent while the latter purport to have mind-independent existence of their own but are not given in sensible experience. He holds that, although empirical cognition and scientific analysis of it may be prone to error from time to time in particular cases, their theoretical certainty is assured by virtue of the transcendental character of cognition. Because in Kant's formulation, all *phenomena* that come before the mind are pre-packaged under the concepts and categories of pure reason, empirical knowledge is representational. To avoid the solipsistic trap associated with representationalism, Kant distinguishes between cognitive phenomena and their underlying realities, which Kant calls *noumena*, asserting that, although we may permissibly presume that *noumena* exist (just as we may, I suppose, permissibly presume that solipsism is incorrect), we can never have knowledge of them or the *things-in-themselves* which they represent. Kant makes a further important distinction between *noumena* in the negative sense, which are presumed to underlie empirical phenomena and may be thought only as the limit of empirical cognition, and *noumena* in the positive sense, which, if they exist at all, may be thought to be non-empirical realities.

Kant attributed the desperate state of the metaphysics of his time to a fundamental error committed by both rationalists and empiricists, namely, the application of the categories of empirical cognition and/or general logic to non-sensible experience. To make this case, Kant presents four paralogisms of the soul and four antimonies of pure reason. The paralogisms are fallacious arguments in favor of the existence of a substantial soul that only appear on their face to be valid. The antimonies are equally valid but contradictory rationalist and empirical proofs of the traditional questions of metaphysics.

Kant, fairly enough, describes the common understanding of the soul as being persistent, indivisible, immaterial, and immortal. Although each of these qualities is consistent with the "I-substance" of Cartesianism, because none of them is sensible, Kant asserts that they all lie outside the Kantian intuitions of space and time and also his categories of empirical understanding. As a result, Kant cannot abide any knowledge of the soul as such and, instead, relegates it to the realm of reason-compelled faith. Even so, Kant cannot avoid treating the "I-think" epistemologically, and he does so in a manner that will have enormous implications for the history of philosophy. In Kant's philosophy, the "I-think" is nothing more than a *transcendental ego* which accompanies and provides the logical background of each thought. For Kant, the unity of the transcendental ego applies both to the spontaneous assembly of the various representations of an object (for example, the sound, metallic color, and cool hardness of a bell) into a single object and also across the many acts of judgment that a mind makes over the course of its conscious life. Kant asserts that the soul knows itself

only through the thoughts that are its predicates, even though Kant recognizes that this characterization entails a circularity, which he blithely passes off as unavoidable but acceptable.[24]

Kant begins his recharacterization of the traditional objects of metaphysics as reason-compelled belief, by purporting to show the failure of the traditional proofs of the existence of God (including variations of Aquinas's Five Ways). Kant nevertheless observes that human conduct is undeniably moral in nature and that, although the effects of moral obligation are evident in moral conduct, the obligation itself, in order to be necessary and universal, must be a product of reason. Kant calls this moral law the "Categorical Imperative" and asserts that it requires that one ought act "only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law."[25] Of course, one may only do so if one is autonomous and, in this respect, distinguishable from the non-human objects of empirical cognition which are governed by causation. It follows that freedom's source must be external to the sensible world. Kant notes that virtue and happiness often do not accompany one another in mortal life and concludes that it is therefore rational to expect that there must be a subsequent world in which the moral worth of a person is attended by commensurate happiness. Although God is not an empirically known object, he is what Kant calls the "transcendental ideal," which is the being to which reason, in its

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[24] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B405.

[25] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals,* N.p., (Digireads.com Book 2005) ("*Groundwork*"), 28.

relentless pursuit of the unconditioned, ultimately leads, and, as such, the presumptive arranger of a world in which moral worth and happiness coincide. In sum, Kant's argument from the fact of morality in this world, the moral obligation of pure reason, and the human intuition of autonomy which such obligation presupposes is that we are justified in believing in the immorality of the soul and the existence of God.

Kant's transcendental idealism is most often considered to represent a brilliant, if not fully successful, synthesis of rationalism and empiricism. It will therefore be unusual, as I am about to do here, to represent Kant's philosophy as essentially entailing the deconstruction of Thomism. There are two reasons why interpreting Kant in light of Aquinas, whose name never appears in *Critique of Pure Reason* or in the *Groundwork*, seems to be particularly appropriate. First, doing so will further advance the argument that the wholesale turn by modern philosophy away from the nascent attempts of the last scholastics (however ill-conceived) to reconcile Aquinian metaphysics with modern science was premature. Second, along similar lines, doing so will highlight that the failure of transcendental idealism to successfully limit knowledge to empirical experience suggests the continued viability of certain of Aquinas's *metaphysical* claims (in some cases, with substantial modification).

Aquinas's relevance to Kant lies at the heart of Kant's method of retrieving philosophy from Humean despair. Specifically, Kant may be characterized as taking something like Aquinas's Great Synthesis, separating the theological and metaphysical from the epistemological

aspects of it, and attempting to make the necessary adjustments to achieve the certainty of science while justifying freedom, God, and the eternality of the substantial soul on the basis of rationally compelled belief. Treating Kant in this way neither diminishes the genius of his Copernican Revolution, nor ignores that Kant, perhaps more effectively than any other, eviscerates the traditional arguments in favor of God. To the contrary, both of these moves are essential to the successful bifurcation of Aquinian philosophy by Kant. However, it must be kept in mind that not only did Kant refuse to dismiss the transcendental ideal (God) and the transcendental Ideas of soul, substance, freedom, and the world, but, instead, that he attached great importance to them and attempted to justify faith in them.[26] And in doing so, Kant erected an important bridge between empirical experience and the transcendent, namely, the freedom that moral obligation presupposes. This approach also suggests that one reason that some subsequent atheistic philosophers who share with Kant the empirical premise that all knowledge originates in sensible experience are so fearful of Kant's philosophy is that any breach in the wall against metaphysical knowledge that Kant so meticulously constructed poses the risk of empowering theistic claims.[27]

The parallels between Aquinas and Kant are easily identified. Both Aquinas and Kant are empiricists, in Aquinas's case, as the term is

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[26] Whether it is meaningful to speak about entities as to which we have no sensible experience will become a central issue of 20th century positivism.

[27] For an example of the rough treatment received by Kant at the hands of later empiricists, see Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1945), 701–718. In my opinion, for the most part Kant has the better of the argument against Russell. See, Albert Pacelli, *Being and Intelligibility* (Portland: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 82–93.

generally understood and, in Kant's case, with the caveat that he holds that all knowledge originates in sensible experience but occurs under *a priori* concepts of reason. Aquinas, of course, believes in God and the eternality of the soul, understands freedom as a correlative of the human intellect, and believes in the existence of the world on a geocentric basis pretty much as it was bequeathed to him by Aristotle. Kant denies none of these (substituting, of course, the Copernican for the Ptolemaic universe) but, because they do not arise in sensible experience, he relegates them all to faith. Aquinas adheres to Aristotelian general and categorical logic. Not only does Kant fully endorse Aristotelian logic, but he builds his entire epistemology around Aristotle's categories as concepts of the understanding and he bases his theory of judgment upon Aristotle's general logic. Kant even reintroduces something like Aquinas's substantial forms in replacing Divine archetypes with the forms of intuition and concepts of the understanding and matter with sensible representations the underlying reality of which (that is, *noumena*) is indeterminate. And it seems clear that Aquinas's hylomorphic soul is neatly covered under Kant's epistemology by conceiving the human thing-in-itself as being a unity that is both *noumenal* in the positive (spirit) and negative (body) senses, although, to my knowledge, Kant never suggests this as a possibility. Finally, Kant's de-ontological ethics presupposes freedom, identifies happiness as the goal of human beings, and implies the reconciliation of virtue with happiness in heaven, all of which are represented in, and compatible with, Thomism.

The adjustments that Kant made in his positive philosophy in order to render empirical experience scientifically reliable are intellectually spectacular. However, the deficiencies of Kant's system lie almost wholly in the limitations that he imposes upon pure reason's scope in order to causally close sensible experience. For Kant to avoid solipsism, not only is he required to *presume* the existence of *noumena*, which he willingly does, but it follows that *noumena* must either be the *cause* or the *logical correlates* of sensation, that is, the sufficient reason for it. Given Kant's system, ruling out causation on the grounds that it is limited to sensible experience within space and time is a simple matter. However, to limit the scope of logic, Kant must also argue that it is a mere abstraction from the categories of empirical cognition. But this is an argument that cannot hold up even within Kant's system. For Kant, as the conditions of empirical cognition, space and time are prior to, and wholly independent of, sensation, which is instead dependent upon them. Yet both space and time are plainly logical in structure, space in its geometry and time in its arithmetical sequencing; therefore, logic cannot be a mere abstraction from empirical cognition but must instead be prior to the categories and also space and time. Even if one wishes to argue that space, as a precondition to empirical cognition, is strictly limited to sensation and, therefore, the *logicality* of extension is limited to empirical cognition in which it is embedded, time is, in Kant's system, the form of *internal* intuition of consciousness and, therefore, not so limited. This position is buttressed beyond contention by the logicality of structure of the "I-think," which, as the unity of apperception, provides, by Kant's own

admission, the *logical* background of all thought, internal and external. Further, it seems that in abstracting logic from the intuitions and concepts of empirical understanding and then applying that logic to the critique of the very same intuitions and concepts is every bit as dogmatic as applying logic to non-sensible experience. Finally, the implication of Kant's privileging of the categories over logic is to leave sensation and its objects utterly ungrounded, which is a result that does not obtain if logic is held to have priority. For these reasons, especially the last, Kant's subordination of logic to the concepts of the understanding must be regarded as the second Grand Error of modern philosophy.

It is worth noting that there is another greater difficulty with respect to Kant's concept of the "I-think," but, since it follows directly from Descartes's Grand Error, it can hardly be regarded as new. As a mere formal condition of cognition, Kant's transcendental ego either is (as Kant admitted) circularly dependent upon the objects the cognition preconditioned by it or it is an empty "point" at which cognitive synthesis of individual objects and the totality of sensible experience temporally occurs. But neither structure can provide the basis of the systematically logical unity of the pure concepts of reason or of cognitive objectivity—in other words, either way, there remains unanswered the question: "If cognition is not the act of a substantive, self-transcending entity, then who is it that knows itself to be engaged in the act of thinking?" Kant's categorization of the "I-think" therefore does more than render rational experience subjective—it results in its utter ungrounding. Kant's bifurcation of Aquinas's

philosophy parallels Descartes's bifurcation of the psychosome and his doctrine of the "I-think" elevates and formalizes Descartes's error of failing to establish the soul of the *Cogito* substantively. Aquinas completely avoids this trap by asserting that the soul knows itself by virtue of its powers of abstraction, which is a power upon which Kant leans heavily but does not explain, almost certainly because he cannot justify it as belonging to his transcendental ego.

In Kant, we have reached the acme of modern philosophy but, sadly, in his hands human rational experience is still ungrounded and, as a result, philosophy is about to descend into not only chaos but utter despair. First, the German idealists explicitly seek to resolve the deficiencies inherent in treatment of the self non-subtantively by placing consciousness within the universe in a constitutive way. But this merely elevates solipsism to the universal level of the Absolute, which Hegel presents as thought thinking itself, and, since, as has been shown, thought cannot structurally think itself, the instability of German idealism and its relatively short lifespan are not surprising. Not long afterwards, Nietzsche declares God to be dead and himself to be the Anti-Christ and, following Schopenhauer, who characterizes the Kantian things-in-themselves as will, Nietzsche characterizes all reality as a chaotic struggle of wills for dominance over each other and themselves. The British empiricists gladly accept the Kantian ringfencing of reason and his critique of the proofs of God but not his rationally compelled faith. To avoid the epistemic leaks inherent in transcendental idealism, the British empiricists deny synthetic *a priority*, revert to the Humean characterization of science as

induction-based probability, and propose that reality is precisely as given to the senses and nothing more and, in so doing, lay the groundwork for an increasingly minute epistemological domain. The linguistic philosophers of the 20th century deny Kant's permissive conceptualizing of metaphysical concepts, attribute linguistic meaning to use, and, in the case of Wittgenstein, its greatest proponent, assert that the self is the limitation of the cognitive world, and in the case of Jacques Derrida, assert the utter incomprehensibility of language. Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, reduces consciousness to a mere flow that resists understanding as anything more than a "transcendental residuum." And Heidegger first proposes *Dasein* as the point at which Being discloses itself, and then, in a manner similar to Wittgenstein, argues that Being, as the ungrounded ground of all reality, can be thought but not articulated. These are many, but not all, of the philosophers who have declared metaphysics to be dead. Heidegger remains of especial interest, notwithstanding his abandonment of philosophy in favor of the mystical contemplation of Being, because in arriving at his endpoint he makes the third and last Grand Error.

V. *Heidegger's Grand Error*. Heidegger's philosophy represents his own, unique working out of the most significant line of phenomenology which developed directly from Husserl, Heidegger's mentor. Early in Husserl's career, he discovered that consciousness is itself intentional, which is to say that consciousness is always *of something*, and he took up as his central object of study the relation of consciousness to its objects with the explicit goal of developing a presuppositionless philosophy. Husserl was thusly heavily indebted to

Aquinas. Heidegger's "immanent critique" of Husserl was that, in starting with consciousness as his foundation, Husserl presupposes the Being of its objects, and Heidegger contends, therefore, that to achieve presuppositionlessness one must start with Being. Over the course of several volumes, Heidegger asks three questions that are important to the thesis of this article: What is the meaning of Being? Why are there Beings instead of nothing? What is the ground (*grund*) of Being?

Although answering the first question is the stated objective of *Being and Time*,[28] Heidegger was only able to address it in that book from the subjective perspective of *Dasein*, because, for reasons discussed below, he abandoned the project before completing the book. Heidegger begins his investigation by asserting that Being includes everything we think, do, or say, but that Being, as the determining characteristic of beings, is excluded from being an entity itself. Nevertheless, Heidegger determines that it is possible to describe Being concretely by interrogating *Dasein*, the being as to whom we, as *Dasein* ourselves, have privileged knowledge of our own Being.

Heidegger starts his analysis with an unusual and precarious proposition, namely, that *Dasein* has a *pre-ontological* understanding of "something like" a world (hereinafter, the "World") and to the Being of each being that is presented to *Dasein* in the World, in relation to both of which *Dasein* existentially always is. Heidegger endeavors to achieve

[28] Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, reprint ed. 2008). All page references are to the later German editions as indicated in the cited edition.

an ontological understanding of *Dasein* from these relations. In Heidegger's analysis, *Dasein* always understands itself existentially from the standpoint of its possibilities of Being-in-the-World (that is, its ownmost possible relations and modes of comporting itself). *Being and Time* may be fairly characterized as the attempt to work out the connection between the Being of *Dasein* and Being (in general), and, indeed, for Heidegger, although the "existence" of mind-independent reality is undeniable, the question of Being is one that has no meaning in the absence of *Dasein*. Heidegger's method is to allow *Dasein* to show itself from within itself by phenomenological examination of *Dasein* in its everydayness (that is, the way in which *Dasein* comports itself in and to the world in its everyday life), from which Heidegger hopes to identify the ontical structures of the Being of *Dasein*, and then to abstract from them the ontological meaning of Being in general.

Dasein's fundamental relations are threefold. First, *Dasein* relates to the World equipmentally, that is, by understanding Being in accordance with the relevance of objectivities to *Dasein's* existential concerns. Second, *Dasein* relates to "Others" (meaning other *Dasein*) in its social conformity. And third, *Dasein* relates to itself existentially in terms of its ownmost potential for Being, which, when it is being authentic (that is, mindful of its Being), it must interpret in terms of the ever-present possibility of its death or not-Being. Heidegger characterizes Dasein's ontical structure as "care," which he defines as

"Being-in-the-[W]orld which is falling[29] and disclosed[30], thrown[31] and projecting[32]", and for which *Dasein's* ownmost potentiality-for-Being is an issue, both in its Being alongside (that is, in relation to) the "World" and in its Being-with Others. Dasein is thusly the being who is always in the circumstance of having to take responsibility, actively or passively, for its own Being from within itself. And this gives its existence the character of always existing in the present, which is situated ontologically between the decisions *Dasein* has already made and the decisions it will make with respect to its potentiality for Being.

For Heidegger, "Reality" is commonly understood as the "external world" which is consistent with *Dasein*'s fallen interpretation of it, not with the World of *Dasein*'s equipmental relations and, therefore, the question of whether the "Real" can be understood to exist independently of consciousness can only arise on this mistaken interpretation. Heidegger tells us that "[t]he question of whether there is a world at all and whether its Being can be proved, makes no sense if it is raised by *Dasein* as Being-in-the-World" and then asks rhetorically "who else would raise it?"[33] Heidegger avoids the looming solipsistic trap by asserting that "the fact that Reality is ontologically grounded in the

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[29] The term "falling" is used by Heidegger to connote that *Dasein*, in its circumspection and absorption with its World, is lost in the publicness of the of Being-with Others.

[30] The term "disclosed" (*erschliessen*)is used by Heidegger to connote the "opening up" of the World that is fundamental to Dasein's relation to it.

[31] The term "thrown" (*werfen*) is used to describe the factual, social, and historical circumstances which determine Dasein's existential possibilities.

[32] The term "projecting" (entwerfen) is used to connote designing or scheming not in the sense of a plan but in the sense of choosing ways of being.

[33] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H202.

Being of *Dasein*, does not signify that only when *Dasein* exists and as long as *Dasein* exists, can the Real be as that which in itself is."[34] Instead, Heidegger asserts that, in the absence of Dasein, entities neither or nor are not.[35] In my interpretation, although Heidegger does not say so, in addition to Being and not-Being, Heidegger appears to be allowing for "non-Being", which is an important incoherence that I will examine shortly.

Heidegger's analysis of the existence of the self is similar to his analysis of the existence of Reality. The question remains how can *Dasein* exist as a unified Being whose essence is care? Heidegger asserts that the "authentic-I" is neither Cartesian "I-substance" nor Kantian "I-think" but that self-hood *subsists structurally within the existentiality of care* itself. Heidegger explains that care does not need to be founded in a self because care is constituted by its own existentiality.[36]

All that remains for the concrete definition of the Being of *Dasein*, is the demonstration of its temporality, which is to say that *Dasein* is the being that temporalizes. For *Dasein*, Heideggerian temporality is the fundamental mode of the interpretation by the self of its ownmost relation to the World, or, more precisely, of its Being-in-the-World in the fullness of its potentiality for Being-there and is therefore *the horizon for the intelligibility of the process of Being*. In Heidegger's

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[34] *Ibid.*, H212.
[35] *Ibid.*
[36] *Ibid.*, H323.

understanding, ontologically, *Dasein* does not have a past, a present, and a future—it has only its care, which is thrown projection plus fallenness/discourse.[37] It is only in ontic existence that the common notions of time, which are fully derivative of *Dasein*'s temporality, come into view as *Dasein*'s past, present, and future.

Heidegger is typically obscure in explaining why he abandoned the *Being and Time* project after only completing the first part. In Heidegger's subsequent work he clearly rejects the transcendentalism of *Dasein* in favor of an objective hermeneutic and etymological exposition of Being. The reason for Heidegger's "turn" is, I think, hinted at when Heidegger asserts that the selfhood is included in the care structure and that, in the absence of *Dasein*, although Reality "is" in some sense, it can neither be said to be nor said not to be. Whatever this structure implies, clearly it seeks to rule out that *Dasein*'s transcendental Being-in-the World arises out of Nothing. In other words, Heidegger wants to know what lies beyond *Dasein*'s temporal horizon[38], in what seems to be the realm of non-Being.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in *Introduction to Metaphysics*,[39] Heidegger turns to the question of Being itself, which he

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[37] The term "discourse" (*rede*) is used by Heidegger to describe the "articulation of intelligibility" or the way in which Dasein understands its Being-in-the-World.

[38] See, Thomas Sheehan, "Why Did Heidegger Abandon the Transcendentalism of Being and Time?" N.p., https://www.academia.edu/33754569/WHY_DID_HEIDEGGER_ABANDON_THE_TRANSCENDENTALISM_OF_BEING_AND_TIME.

[39] Trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2nd ed., 2014). Page references are to the 1953 edition of *Einführung in die Metaphysik* published by Max Niemeyr Verlag (Tübingen).

deliberately frames as, "Why is there Being instead of Nothing?" (hereinafter, the "Why" question). In pursuing the answer, the book proceeds as follows: (1) the *Why* question is provisionally characterized as the most originary question; (2) after justifying the inclusion of in the *Why* question of the apparently unnecessary phrase "instead of Nothing", Heidegger asks, "How does it stand with Being?"; (3) in order to identify a starting point that is free of Classic and post-Classic presuppositions, Heidegger turns to the pre-Socratics who characterize Being as "*phusis*," which means "emerging abiding sway"; (4) the ontology of *phusis* is developed in terms of its ontological priority and the way in which it appears as *meaningful presence* to *Dasein*; (5) Heidegger then identifies four ways in which Being, as a concept, is commonly considered restricted by the scope of other related concepts (Being versus becoming, Being versus seeming, Being as thinking, and Being versus the Ought) and shows that such concepts are incorporated in, and subsumed by, Being; and, finally (6) Being is shown to be the *ousia* (substance) of beings.

It is in his answer to the *Why* question that Heidegger explicitly commits the third Grand Error implied by his theory of selfhood and by the non-Being of Reality, which is the privileging of Being over logic. Having abandoned the subjectivism of *Dasein*, Heidegger attempts to unfold the *Why* question by focusing on the idea of "Nothing." Heidegger states the obvious, namely, that the phrase "instead of Nothing" appears to be utterly superfluous. After all, if there is no Being, then what besides "Nothing" could prevail? By reformulating the *Why* question as "Why are there beings at all?" Heidegger makes the case that the *Why* question clearly and unequivocally seeks the *ground* of Being, and admits that,

if the question is to be considered logically, the idea of "Nothing" is self-contradictory and incoherent. It follows that Being, as that which is originary, is either necessary and therefore its own ground or that Being and Nothing, its apparent opposite, are ontologically prior to logic and are therefore "ungrounded." Heidegger argues that logic cannot be prior to Being because logic is dependent upon Being and therefore that logic can never be the "tribunal" in which Being is judged. If that is the case, the question immediately becomes whether it is possible to articulate any sort of understanding of the meaning of Being. Heidegger responds that philosophy, properly understood as being above science and logic, keeps company only with poetry which is constituted (when good) by an essential superiority of spirit.[40] And this is the perspective that, with ever increasing emphasis, characterizes Heidegger's work of his later years.

As a result of the foregoing, Heidegger sees his task as an unscientific exposition of Being, which explains his resorting to the pre-Socratics, who think and write long before the ascendency of science and logic. The result of Heidegger's analysis may be briefly summarized as follows. *Phusis* is understood by the Ancient Greeks as the fixed continuity of that which arises from the concealed. *Phusis* is that which emerges from and throughout all nature but is more than nature. *Phusis* describes the emergence and standing of beings by virtue of which they become intelligible. And so, not only are selfhood and Reality implicit

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[40] Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 29.

in the constitution of *Dasein*'s care but so is our understanding of Being—for how else can we be the being for whom its own Being is an issue?

Heidegger continues to forsake scientific philosophy by presenting Being in terms of what he asserts it is mistakenly understood not to be. Heidegger claims:

(1) as perdurance in the face of change, *Being and becoming* are the same;

(2) as the emerging sway, Being is in itself the *seeming* or appearing of that which presents itself and truth lies in the unconcealment of Being as it appears;

(3) *logos*, as "gathering gatheredness," was once synonymous with *phusis*; however, with Plato's Ideas and Aristotle's substance, Being became something that is categorially determined and the subject of propositional truth, and the truth of disclosure became the truth of propositions. This is a mistake: Being is prior to thinking; and

(4) because Being is prior to the Idea of the Good, it is presupposed by moral philosophy, including even Hegel's Absolute.

The last of Heidegger's works that is relevant to the discussion here is *The Principle of Reason*,[41] which is the text of a series of lectures given at the University of Freiburg during 1955–56. The

[41] Trans. Reginald Lilly (IN: Indiana University Press, 1996).

question that Heidegger addresses in *The Principle of Reason* is the ground of Being itself, which Heidegger hopes to reach by a hermeneutic analysis of Leibniz's principle of principles: *Nihil est sine ratione* (Nothing is without reason). Heidegger tells us that the reason that *Nihil est sine ratione* is the principle of principles is that, in asserting that everything has a reason, the principle of reason applies to all of the other rules of thought and, importantly, in the word "reason" it speaks also to itself. Heidegger also tells us that the principle of reason is a *modus vivendi* because it underlies the essential seeking of the unconditioned that characterizes our pre-ontological cognitive acts. However, Heidegger asserts that the principle of reason cannot apply to itself without being circular and cannot not apply to itself without being self-contradictory. Nevertheless, Heidegger opts for the latter by arguing that although the principle of non-contradiction is a keystone of scientific reasoning, philosophically, ever since Hegel, we must acknowledge the possibility that the fact that something contradicts itself does not mean that it is not real. Heidegger then compounds his Grand Error with the following: "The [p]rinciple of [p]rinciples without reason—for us this is inconceivable. But what is inconceivable is by no means unthinkable, given that thinking does not exhaust itself in conceiving."[42]

Notwithstanding this difficulty, Heidegger continues his exposition by telling us that the principle of reason is the fundamental

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[42] *Ibid.*, 18.

principle of cognition, which Leibniz calls the "*principium reddendae rationis*" ("the principle of rendering reasons").[43] This leads next to important question of whether the principle of reason is restricted only to that which is discernible or whether it means that that *nothing can be said to be* if cannot be cognized. Heidegger's answer is clearly that the Being of realities and their existence are one and the same.[44] Heidegger is precluded from going any further because of his position on the inapplicability of the principle of reason to itself. For Heidegger, the principle of reason is simply a principle of Being and it reads in a completely different intonation: "*Nihil est sine ratione*"—every being (as a being) has a reason. Heidegger concludes that the principle of reason means that Being and reason belong together, but because the principle of reason cannot apply to Being but only beings, Being, itself, is ungrounded.

After *The Principle of Reason*, Heidegger devoted substantial attention to the philosophy of Nietzsche, which insofar as it includes Heidegger's characterization of Nietzsche as representing the end of philosophy, is useful in understanding Heidegger's fundamental criticism of metaphysics as such. Specifically, Heidegger claims that metaphysics, which begins with Plato's positing of the existence of Ideas as the foundation of reality, reaches its endpoint with Nietzsche's metaphysics of the will to power. In Heidegger's interpretation, Nietzsche's philosophy, notwithstanding its explicit eschewing of Being (which in

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[43] *Ibid.*, 22.
[44] *Ibid.*, 23.

Plato consists of immutable Ideas) in favor of the eternal becoming of the will to power, represents the exhaustion of the possibilities of philosophy precisely because it nevertheless fixes everything that it seeks to unleash: the philosophy of the subject that began with Descartes ends with its characterization by Nietzsche as pure will; epistemology ends with the recognition that truth is necessarily imbued with the falsity of fixing that which is always emerging (that is, *phusis*) in the ontological becoming of beings so that beings may be subject to the rules of thought (which only apply to that which is fixed); the metaphysics of the will to power becomes fixed in the permanence of its own *telos* of domination and self-overcoming; and the historical becoming of the world is fixed in the circle of eternal recurrence, which Nietzsche claims is the eternal repetition of the history of the universe.[45] Heidegger's response to the end of philosophy is to forego it as it has been traditionally conducted in favor of the unscientific "thinking of Being" which Heidegger pursues in the form of increasingly poetic and metaphorical discourse.

Although Heidegger's philosophy is of the first rank, it is deficient in various ways, two of which are relevant here. The first is the third Grand Error of privileging Being over logic, which is foreshadowed by his characterization in *Being and Time* of Reality as neither being nor not being, made explicit in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, and reaches its ultimate conclusion in *The Principle of*

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[45] See, Blitz, Mark, "Heidegger's Nietzsche," *The Political Science Review* 22, no. 1 (Fall 1993): 56.

Reason with the ungrounding of Being. In asserting that logic is dependent upon Being, Heidegger misses the obvious, which is that in addition to two possibilities of either Being being prior to logic or *vice versa*, there is a third, namely, that Being and logic are codeterminate. That is to say, that what is inherent in all objects that present themselves and come to a stand before reason are the predicates of logic—each such being is identical with itself, each such being cannot both be and not be at the same time in the same way, each such being either is or it is not, and each such being must have its ground. These "logical objects" are therefore in the Being of all beings, including Being itself. Being, logic, and the mighty principle, not only ground all that there is, but ground themselves as well. We do not apply "rules of thought" to beings to which we first bring our transcendental understanding of Being, we recognize the logic inherent in, and which is a precondition of the Being of, the beings which present themselves to our reason. Cognition is not rule-based, it is a process of *seeing* the inherent logic of all that there is. Being and intelligibility are strictly self-same. And the great ontological consequence of this understanding is that Heidegger's Nothing becomes an incoherent foil, which is to say that Being as the self-grounding ground of all that is and is thinkable, is necessary. So, it turns out that the principle of principles has yet a third intonation: *Nihil est sine ratione*, meaning that Nothingness is irrational.

It is fair to ask, then, "How does the principle of reason ground itself?" The answer is a simple one. It grounds itself in its own Being. The difficulty goes away as soon as one realizes that the

difficulty lies in the question, not in the answer. Cognition entails the intellectual *seeing* of its objects. Logic is the articulation of this kind of seeing of Being. Logic does not have to answer to something higher or something else because in its inherence in the Being of things neither is there nor can there logically be anything higher or anything else to which it might respond. The rules of thought are the irreducible predicates of everything that is or can be thought. Being and intelligibility are the same, not only in the cognition of objects, but in reason's self-understanding. Being is thus necessary and universal. "Nothing" is incoherent and self-contradictory. And, so, by the way is "non-Being."

The second deficiency in Heidegger's ontology that I would like to bring to light is a mistake in Heidegger's theory that Being, as a philosophical concept, begins historically to "hide itself" with the advent of Platonic Ideas (which become, ontologically, that which is real) and is irretrievably (until Heidegger) lost from philosophy with the misguided translation of *phusis* into *natura* (birth) and *logos* into word at the advent of Christianity. As has been mentioned, at the pinnacle of scholasticism, Aquinas's concept of Being is hardly static and, in the case of human beings, it reflects the *telos* of an orientation toward God. Aquinas's Great Synthesis therefore represents a continuing development of Classic Greek thought and one which includes a comprehensive and dynamic explanation of the full scope of human rational experience (albeit one that includes substantial forms and is heavily theological) and it is not until Descartes's *Cogito* that the self and all reality becomes irretrievably ungrounded.

VI. *The Problem with Metaphysics and How to Fix It*. Of course, the three Grand Errors can only be considered impactful if their correction leads to philosophy's resuscitation. If my claims are correct, then the path forward must lie within the nature of the Grand Errors themselves. Early on in this essay, I peg the demonstration of the explanatory necessity of a real self on the existence of objective reason. Only a persistent, substantive self can know that it is engaging in cognitive activity and thereby consider its cognitive acts objectively.[46] This is what apparently distinguishes human from animal rationality. This is plainly understood by Aquinas who argues that the soul knows itself from its power to abstract substantial forms from the particular objects of its cognition. Regardless of the ultimate viability of the doctrine that substantial forms are the provenance of God, in the mere recognition that objective knowledge presupposes the existence of objective rules of thought, that realities must be sufficiently orderly to be abstractly understood, and objectivity requires consciousness of self as a persistent, rational entity, Aquinian philosophy is far in advance of virtually all of the philosophy that follows from and after Descartes. Regardless of what one might think of the substantive merit of Thomism,

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[46] In *Being and Intelligibility*, I posit the homogeneity of reason, propose an unaxiomatic deduction of the natural numbers based upon the metaphysics of logical objects, and assert that Kurt Gödel's incompleteness theorem is inapplicable to the understanding of the unaxiomatic logic of Being. See, Pacelli, *Being and Intelligibility*, 124-149, and 192. After reading Armitage's "Self-Reference," however, I would go the further step of asserting (without accepting Gödel's Platonism) that Gödel's incompleteness theorem demonstrates that the preconditions of objective knowledge include a self-transcendent rational being as well as an *unaxiomatic* understanding of the nature of logic itself, such as that described in this article and in *Being and Intelligibility*. See, Armitage, "Self-Reference," 10—11.

it is undeniable that his core metaphysics is structurally sound precisely because it addresses all of the elements upon which objective reason is based, both on the side of the knowing subject and the object of knowledge.

It should go without saying that Descartes, as the founder of the philosophy of the subject, understood the importance of the self as foundational to objective rational experience. But his method of universal doubt necessarily includes as its operating mechanism *the doubting of all objective knowledge*. Although Descartes distinguishes between himself as a thinking being and his self-doubt as an idea, he cannot possibly establish himself as an objectivity *precisely because of the nature of his program*. Oddly, subsequent philosophers of various schools' rebuke Descartes, not for so much for his failure to establish the self as substance, but for thinking that the self is really anything at all!

Kant not only formalized Cartesian subjectivity as the "I-think" but, in Kant's zeal to save faith from science, Kant had no choice but to degrade and to confine logic to the demonstrating the objectivity of the categories of understanding and the judgments implicit in them. In forbidding any knowledge of the things-in-themselves, Kant unmoors metaphysics at the objective side of the cognitive relation. The result is to unleash a Pandora's box of metaphysical demons and deniers, including Hegel's thought thinking itself, Nietzsche's rudderless will to power, the existentialism of Jean—Paul Sartre, the despair of

metaphysical knowledge of Wittgenstein and of all knowledge of Derrida, and the failed analytic and positivist philosophies.

Heidegger is a natural successor to Descartes and Kant, first, in his depiction of *Dasein* as a transcendental entity which brings meaning to its relations with the other entities in its World but never attains substantive existence beyond being party to those relations, and, second, in the ungrounding of all Being by granting it priority over logic. The difficulty of Heidegger's privileging of Being over logic is particularly glaring in his turn to the "thinking of Being" because, by the terms of Heidegger's own analysis, he has deprived himself of any tools for doing so. One can only "think Being" in accordance with the logical predicates which objectify it. And there is nothing wrong with that. Nietzsche's "fixing" of Being is not the same as "freezing" it. Seeing the ground of a thing that is in constant flux does not remove the change inherent in it; to the contrary, the second intonation of the principle of principles tells us that nothing can be said to be that does not have its ground. Even if Nietzsche's core premise is correct-that the real nature of Being is the power that seeks its own enhancement to dominate others and itself—there is a difference between understanding the relentless coming to be of the will to power as Being and rendering the will to power inert. Heidegger purports to desire to think Being, but in his denial of the co-determinacy of Being and logic, he leaves himself nowhere to go except into the mystical incoherence of non-Being.

There is great irony in that Descartes, Kant, and Heidegger, and each and every other philosopher mentioned in this article, justifies

his claims based upon objective reason but that none of them offers a satisfactory explanation of what objective reason is or how it comes to be so. Descartes's characterization of direct intuition as "clear and distinct" knowledge is an elementary depiction that can hardly be regarded as advancing knowledge on this topic. Kant comes close to finding the key to objectivity in his justification of concepts of pure reason by reductive method but turns in precisely the opposite direction before he can see the irreducible logic of the objects of cognition. Both of them seek to avoid solipsism by "objectivizing" knowledge, Descartes, through God, and Kant, through the concepts of pure reason, but nether succeeds in establishing its precondition of a persistent self. Heidegger provides a cogent explanation of what thinking is but misses the most important point of all, namely, that Being and logic are strictly self-same. And, as Aquinas well knew, it is in contemplation of the logical formality of Being that metaphysics and the world of its intentionality open up to the human intellect. For metaphysics to reawaken it must begin by establishing objective reason itself, which is the very means by which it is conducted. Only then can philosophy re-access what it once righteously pursued with vigor and confidence of purpose, which is, the question of the true nature of human rational experience.

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