

# 1

## *On the Nature of Being-Itself*



The nature of being-itself is a speculative problem for us as much as it was for the ancients and scholastics. No speculative philosophy of the whole of things is complete without a theory of being-itself, even if the theory is nothing more than the claim that the problem of being-itself is misconceived. Furthermore, the problem of being-itself has long been associated with the problem of God. In certain ontologies, being-itself and God are identical. Consequently, consideration of the problem of the nature of being-itself is a promising and fair way to raise philosophical speculation about the transcendence and presence of God.

To the question, What is being-itself? a determinate answer is expected. Or if it is not expected, at least it is hoped for. The acknowledgment that we are looking for a determinate answer, however, should not commit us prematurely to a certain kind of determinate answer, namely, the answer that being-itself is determinate. There is a distinction between the claim that being-itself is determinate and the claim that the answer to the question of being-itself should be determinate, for the answer that being-itself is *indeterminate* is a determinate answer.<sup>1</sup> Since we shall in fact argue that being-itself is indeterminate, this is an extremely important distinction to bear in mind, and it will be defended on many levels in what follows.

<sup>1</sup> Why is it an advantage to use the barbaric term "being-itself" instead of the simpler term "being"? The advantage is that "being-itself" indicates the possibility of a strong distinction between the things that have being and the being that they have, or being-itself. If being-itself is determinate, then it is likely that the things that have being are constitutive of the very essential nature of being-itself; the distinction between the things that have being and the being that they have would be very weak if present at all. On the other hand, if being-itself is indeterminate, then there is likely to be a more external distinction between being-itself and its determinations. It must be kept in mind that the question at issue in the present chapter is not whether there is determinateness in being but whether being-itself is determinate. Should we answer that it is determinate, the awkward use of the term "being-itself" may be gratuitous. But should we answer no, then an important distinction is preserved. We shall, in fact, answer no.

The very distinction between the alternatives that being-itself is determinate or indeterminate marks a major division of watersheds. If we were to conclude that being-itself is determinate, there would still be many constructions of this to choose between. But the conclusion that it is indeterminate, as we shall argue in subsequent chapters, leaves only one way of making sense of being-itself and that is in terms of the theory of creation *ex nihilo*, which undergirds our speculative interpretation of the transcendence and presence of God. Because of the importance of this distinction, we shall begin our discussion of being-itself by asking whether it is determinate or indeterminate.

The question can fruitfully be posed only with some inkling of a criterion that could choose between the two alternatives. How can we initially construe being-itself so as to discover whether it is determinate or indeterminate? There is considerable weight in the philosophical tradition behind an identification of being-itself with that which unifies the diversity of the world. Philosophers have recognized that, however different things in the world might be, their very differences presuppose that they are determinate relative to each other and therefore exist in some more basic unity. At least the different things exist in the unity of having being, and whatever this entails. Any multiplicity presupposes some rudimentary unity: every many needs a one. The ontological one is what gives the multiplicity the unity it needs in order to be diverse. How a multiplicity is unified is the classical problem of the one and the many. It would be a great help to our pursuit of the nature of being-itself to correlate being-itself with the ontological one, the ground of the most comprehensive unity, and to ask what being-itself must be in order to unify the greatest possible diversity.

It is relevant, of course, to ask what the diversity consists in. But the answer to this question would involve a whole metaphysics to determine all the diverse kinds of being. Since this would be a digression from our present purpose, we can remain as neutral as possible by speaking of the many diverse things merely as "determinations" of being. Since they are diverse, they must be determinate; and since they all *are*, in some sense or other, they all have being. Being-itself is the being that they have considered in abstraction from them; whether in itself it is nothing more than an abstraction or whether it has transcendent reality of its own is the root question we shall have to answer.

Is it legitimate to attack the question, Is being-itself determinate or indeterminate? by asking the question, Must being-itself be determinate or indeterminate in order to be the ontological one for the many determinations of being? Weighty tradition, the usages of language, and convenience for our purpose urge that it is legitimate. The only negative voice, aside from attacks on speculative philosophy in general, is raised by the theory that being-itself is not in fact unified as one thing and is signified through merely analogically unified concepts. The *prima facie* ground for identifying being-itself with the

ontological one is that, regardless of what we say a thing is and regardless of what we say are the differences between things, we say of one and all of them that they *are*, even if what they are is only a fiction.

Now the concept of being presupposed here can be used univocally, equivocally, or analogically; there are no other logical possibilities. If the concept is used univocally, then it is quite safe to identify being-itself with the ontological one, for all differences between things would be traceable to differences in their natures, not to the being-itself in which they participate. If the concept is used purely equivocally, then being-itself cannot possibly be identified with the one. But neither, on this view, can there be any such thing as being-itself, only determinate beings; the ontological one for the many would have to be provided by the determinate beings in the many, a view that we shall examine and reject in chapter 2.

If the concept of being is used in that peculiar equivocation called analogy, however, then the identification of being-itself with the ontological one is much more problematic. For if the concept of being is applied to different things only analogically, then being-itself is not sufficiently unified in its relations to the many determinations of being to unify them. The legitimacy of our identification of being-itself with the ontological one depends upon the truth of the claim that the concept of being is used univocally. We shall discuss the consequences of pure equivocation in the next chapter and reject that view. At this point, however, we must determine whether we can reject the theory of the analogy of being.

## SECTION A

### *The Analogy of Being*

Almost inevitably in the present day, discussions of the analogicity versus the univocity of being are plagued by an ambivalence as to whether the problem should be treated first-intentionally or second-intentionally. The second-intentional treatment deals with whether the concept "being" is predicated analogically or univocally, and this is the context in which the scholastics usually treated the problem. Since in many ways the scholastic treatment is the most subtle and articulate, it would be unjust not to deal with the problem on this level. Yet at the same time, since differences in the ways concepts are to be predicated are grounded in differences in the things the concepts are supposed to interpret, the problem arises on the first-intentional level, too. Because the bearing of the problem of analogy versus univocity on the issues of the one and the many stems not so much from what it says about a theory of predication as from what it says directly about the nature of being-itself, it is more straightforward to state at least one's conclusions on the first-intentional level. Parallel to the alternatives that "being" is predicated either analogically or univocally are the alternatives either that there is more than one kind of being with no common element or that being-itself is one and common to all things that are. In practice, apart from a discussion of

knowing being analogically or univocally, it is impossible to keep the first- and second-intentional level discussions separate, and considerations move from one to the other.

In the beginning, however, the problem can be raised second-intentionally as that of predicating the concept of being, and we shall first consider the claims of the analogy theory. Two current uses of analogy may be distinguished: a classical or strong use, and a weak use that, though as old as Heraclitus, is very popular among philosophers today.

1. The strong use is the one associated with Thomas Aquinas, and it claims that the analogate is known *only* through the analogue. This use is for deriving or inferring knowledge about one thing when we have direct access only to another thing, its analogue. According to Thomas, the form of analogy proper in theology (and speculative philosophy about God) is that of *proportionality* in contrast to that of *proportion*. But the analogy of proportion is simpler and the contrast can be made best by explaining it first.

a) An analogical term (in the analogy of proportion) is one used in two ways; the ways are different in some respects, alike in others. As Aquinas said, such a

term is predicated according to concepts diverse in some respect and in some respect not—diverse inasmuch as they entail diverse relations, but one in that these diverse relations are all referred to some *one term*.<sup>2</sup>

This "one term" referred to enters into the analogy of proportion in the following way:

There exists a certain conformity among things proportioned to each other because of a mutual determinate distance or some other determinate relation between them, as two is proportioned to one by being the double of one.<sup>3</sup>

So two and one each have diverse relations to many things; but they are not diverse in that they belong to a number system wherein two is the double of one. The rub, however, is that in analogy this "determinate distance" or "one term" is what is *not* known. Or if it is, the result is a completely univocal system with no real equivocation whatsoever. Aquinas realized this in rejecting the analogy of proportion. "It is impossible for anything to be said of God and creature" by the analogy of proportion, "for no creature has a relation to God such that, through it, the divine perfection could be determined."<sup>4</sup>

b) The analogy of proportionality, on the other hand, claims not to depend on the distance being determinate between the analogous things; rather, the two things have similar proportions within themselves. Proportion-

<sup>2</sup> *Metaph.* IV, lect. 1, no. 535, trans. James F. Anderson, in *An Introduction to the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1953), p. 37 (italics mine).

<sup>3</sup> *De Veritate*, Q. 2, a. 11, in *ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

tionality is "a mutual conformity of two things *between which* there is no determinate proportion, but rather a mutual likeness of two proportions."<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, although we have no knowledge of the distance between God and man, we can nonetheless know, for instance, that God's intelligence is proportioned to his being as our intelligence is proportioned to our being.

The interpretation of this is ambiguous, however, and neither side of the ambiguity is satisfactory. On the one hand, the analogy of proportionality could be taken to assert, in the above example, that God's intelligence, like all his powers, is appropriate to his kind of being as our powers are to ours. But since we do not know the distance between man and God, we do not know what his kind of being is, and the analogy, in effect, gives no information about his intelligence at all. Nor does it say anything about God even in a backhanded way to assert that his features are appropriate to his kind of being, for "appropriateness" may be taken in a quite different sense for God than for man in this strong sense of analogy.

On the other hand, an analogy of proportionality could be understood to assert that the proportions in the analogous things are indeed similar. God's intelligence is related to his being similarly to the way man's intelligence is related to man's own being. But this is clearly false; man's intelligence is discursive and God's is immediate. We appeal to analogy instead of univocity precisely because of the differences, not the similarities, between God and man. And on this interpretation of proportionality, it is just the respect in which things are said to be analogous that similarity is to be denied.

But this argument seems too facile. God's intelligence is immediate because his being is simple. Man's intelligence is discursive because his being is discursive, that is, played out in parts. As simple being is to immediate intelligence, so composite being is to discursive intelligence; this is a perfectly coherent proportionality, and given any three terms the fourth could be worked out. The difficulty with this is the old one, however: to begin with *three* of the terms, *any* three, is to know the determinate distance between man and God. In other words, this presupposes an analogy of proportion. Austin Farrer, a contemporary thinker dealing with this problem writes:

Proportion logically underlies proportionality. . . . The natural use of the proportion is inseparable from that of the proportionality, as the apprehension of the very fact of the divine being is inseparable from some apprehension of its mode.<sup>6</sup>

In this statement (a proportionality in its own right) lies Farrer's ground for asserting the usefulness of the doctrine of proportionality. To speak of the divine being at all is already to have some notion of his nature and hence of the determinate distance or proportion between God and creature. For analogy to be seen as a problem, something like a determinate distance must be known, however vaguely. John Duns Scotus put this point most succinctly:

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* (italics mine).

<sup>6</sup> *Finite and Infinite* (2d ed.; London: Dacre Press, 1959), p. 53.

. . . Every denial is intelligible only in terms of some affirmation. . . . if we deny anything of God, it is because we wish to do away with something inconsistent with what we have already affirmed.<sup>7</sup>

And analogy is introduced just because of the denial of univocity.

The upshot of this is that the classical or strong use of analogy presupposes some non-analogical knowledge of the "determinate distance," some positive affirmation outside the analogy to show that the analogy is only an analogy by denying some of the implied similarities. It cannot be the case, then, that the analogate is known *only* by the analogue, and if there is any reason at all for speaking analogically at this point, it cannot be to *infer* from what is known something not known.

2. The weaker use of analogy, like the stronger or classical use, also depends upon a non-analogical ground. The weaker use is simply where the familiar is used to illuminate or illustrate something about what is unfamiliar. Having insight into something unusual, one person conveys this insight to another with the aid of an analogy; but it is presupposed that the other can have direct access to the unfamiliar also and that the analogy only suggests what to look for. When the insight is gained, the analogical term is understood to have two clearly different though related meanings: one in the context of the familiar, and one in the unusual context newly understood. That the analogy depends on extra-analogical knowledge of both the analogue and the analogate is not questioned, and this is the issue at hand.

In both the strong and weak uses, the positive non-analogical affirmation has a dual role, as has been indicated implicitly. On the one hand, as Scotus pointed out, the affirmation is the standard that establishes what is to be denied of the analogy, that determines what parts are not similar. On the other hand, it must be the ground for asserting the analogy itself, for if the analogate could be known *only* through the analogue, how could it be known that *any* analogy applied? There must be some third perspective, however rudimentary or vague, from which the analogy can be judged applicable. In many cases apart from the analogy of *being*, this non-analogical or univocal ground is trivial, especially where the weak use of analogy is concerned, for often analogy is invoked simply to suggest lines of thought to be pursued in detail non-analogically or to set in striking aesthetic relief what otherwise is boorishly literal though important. But in certain philosophical uses of analogy, especially those dealing with the concepts of being-itself and God, the univocal ground for the analogy is very important in itself.

3. These considerations about analogy, however, have yet to be made specific with respect to the knowledge of being; here the line between first and second intention begins to blur. The concern is whether the being had by the ontological many—for instance, both by God and by his creatures—is

<sup>7</sup> *Duns Scotus: Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Allan Wolter, O.F.M. (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1962), p. 15. See also Thomas' agreement with this, *Summa Theologica*, Pt. I, Q. 13, a. 2.



analogical or univocal. If it is true that any analogical predication of a term must have a univocal or non-analogical ground, both for asserting the analogy in the first place and for showing where it is equivocal, then God and his creatures, or any other kinds of beings, *cannot be said to be in different senses*. This is the important argument. There is no univocal concept able to ground an assertion that there is an equivocation in the respective senses in which two things are, for if "being" is not predicated univocally of two things, then no concept can be predicated univocally of them. This is because the sense in which concepts can be predicated of things depends upon the sense in which those things *are what they are*; that is, it depends upon the sense in which the things have or possess the properties or qualities interpreted by the concepts we predicate of them. But if the sense in which things are what they are is not univocal; if, that is, things differ not only in *what* they are but in the sense in which they are what they are, then no concept can be applied to them univocally. Hence, no univocal knowledge can ground the claim that "being" is predicated of two things analogically. Whatever analogical features things might have, they cannot be analogical in their being; or if they are, it cannot be known that they are. There can be no ground, then, for claiming that "being" is said of God and creatures in an analogical sense, since the analogy in the senses of being would undercut any positive univocal ground for asserting the analogy of being.

This point is relevant to more than the difficulty in knowing just that God's being is analogical with respect to ours. If "being" is analogical when applied to God and creatures, and if all our knowledge of God is by analogy with creatures (by the classical or strong use of analogy), then, as Scotus first made the point, no proper knowledge of God is possible at all;<sup>8</sup> for, if our knowledge of God originates with creatures, then "being" must be in the middle term of a syllogism connecting creatures' being and God's; but if "being" is analogical, then any such syllogism must commit the fallacy of equivocation.<sup>9</sup> For instance, in the syllogism, All rational beings love the Good, God is a rational being, and therefore God loves the Good; if the sense in which God is what he is—that is, the sense in which he possesses the attribute of being a rational being—is not univocal with the sense in which the creaturely rational beings are what they are, then the syllogism commits the fallacy of equivocation.

Defenders of the strong use of analogy recognize the force of this point, however. Aquinas, for instance, tried to meet it when he claimed that an analogy cannot be purely equivocal.<sup>10</sup> He argued that there must be unity sufficient to avoid equivocation in any concept that named both cause and effect. The concept would not be univocal when the cause is not in the same genus as the effect; but this would not destroy the unity of the concept, he thought. As the sun is the cause of generation in men, although not itself in

<sup>8</sup> Duns Scotus *De Anima*, Q. 21, u. 10; and *Opus oxoniense*, I, D. 3, Q. 2, no. 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Opus oxoniense* I, D. 3, Q. 2, no. 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Summa Theologica*, Pt. I, Q. 13, a. 5.

the genus *man*, so God is the cause of the whole order of creation, although he is not in the genus *creature*. But surely the unity needed to avoid equivocation is the unity, in this case, of the definition of the genus, and Thomas did not show what other candidate for unity there might be.<sup>11</sup>

4. The conclusions of this second-intentional discussion of analogy and being are twofold: (1) "being" cannot be predicated analogically of two things, for example, God and creatures, without presupposing a univocal ground that both suggests the analogy in the first place and denies what is purely equivocal in it in the second place; (2) if "being" is predicated analogically, there can be no univocal predication whatsoever with respect to those things. Hence, both the strong and weak uses of analogy presuppose that "being" is predicated univocally, whatever else may be analogical. The weak use of analogy never doubted this; the strong use had to be shown.

These conclusions can be stated in first-intentional form. (1) Although two things can differ in what they are, that is, in their determinations, they cannot differ in the sense in which they are what they are; to be different relative to each other, they must be or possess their determinations in the same sense. (2) If two things do differ in the sense in which they are what they are, then *in no way* could they be said to be alike; for the sense in which they *have* or *are* the determinations would be different. Hence, however the determinations of being differ, being-itself must be one.<sup>12</sup>

The conclusion that being-itself must be one removes the objection raised by the analogy-of-being theory to our strategy of identifying being-itself with the ontological one that unifies the many determinations of being. It is legitimate for us to ask what being-itself is by asking what it must be in order to be the one that unifies the many determinations of being.

Our first approach will be to ask whether being-itself must be determinate or indeterminate in order to unify the many determinations. We shall begin by considering the case for determinateness. The claim that being-itself is

<sup>11</sup> Cf. an interesting and related argument by Charles Hartshorne in *The Divine Relativity* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1948), pp. 17 f.: "To say, we know, not God, but something to which we know that God is analogous, does not meet my argument. Analogy involves relation, thus: —'We know there is Something to which the world is related as effect to cause.' If the relation is in God, then he is relative. If it is in the world, then the world has relation-to-God, and since this is a complex which includes God, and since God has, by hypothesis, only absolute being, the world must include this absolute being. Otherwise, what the world has is not relation-to-God, but relation-to, and nowhere, in the world or in God, is there any such relation as the analogy involves. So 'the analogy of being' fails to provide an answer to the question, what do we know when we know God?"

<sup>12</sup> A qualification of this discussion of analogy should be pointed out. Although it is undoubtedly true that the doctrine of analogy is connected closely with the Thomistic doctrine of creation, it is not necessarily true that the difficulties with analogy are fatal to Aquinas' creation theory. It may well be that what Aquinas claims is analogical about the relation between God and creatures can be given univocal interpretations; or it may even be that St. Thomas recognized a univocal ground himself. It will turn out, in fact, in the subsequent discussion that God is not a thing possessing his determinations in the same way that created things are what they are; rather God *is* the univocal being-itself that is common to the creatures. And this is not too different from Aquinas' own view of the matter.



something determinate has several interpretations, however; and the differences between the interpretations are far reaching and systematic. We shall consider four paradigmatic positions that espouse and interpret the claim that being-itself is determinate: the theory that being-itself is determinate as *ens commune*, that it is determinate as *ens perfectissimum*, that it is determinate as a self-structuring power, and that it is determinate but non-general.

## SECTION B

### *Ens Commune*

The simplest way of claiming that being-itself is determinate is to say that it is a property common to all beings. When it is said that all beings have being or participate in being-itself, what is meant, on this interpretation, is that there is a property or attribute "being-itself" that is a feature of all beings. Of course, on *any* theory of being, it must be possible to say that beings participate in being-itself. The distinguishing mark about this interpretation is that the being-itself in question is a determinate property alongside of or on a par with other properties. Being-itself on this interpretation is a common quality or predicate.

The claim that being-itself is a property common to all beings can be vague with respect to further interpretations of what kind of property is involved. On the one hand, it has been said that the common property is a surd, simply to be apprehended and not to be "explained" in terms of other intelligible characters. There is a kind of mysteriousness or arbitrariness about being-itself that recommends this kind of elaboration. On the other hand, it has been said that the common property is a specifiable character, like "presence to consciousness."<sup>13</sup> We are aware of this character from earliest times, and all we need to be told, on this view, is that this character is what we are looking for when we ask what being-itself is.

Regardless of these further interpretations of the common property, whether it is a surd or whether it is to be determinately characterized, we must acknowledge that the common property is determinate in a higher sense that puts it on a par with other determinations. That is, the common property contrasts determinately with other properties. A thing may have, for instance, the properties of "brown," "large," "live," and "being." Or it may have all those properties except "brown" or all except "being." The point of saying that being-itself is a property is to claim that things may either have it or not have it. Centaurs have hoofs but no being; abominable snowmen have large feet, but whether any have being is a matter still in question. Being may be a different kind of property from that of having hoofs, but this is like the

<sup>13</sup> For a contemporary defense of this view, see two articles by Robert R. Ehman: "On the Possibility of Nothing" and "A Defense of the Private Self," both in *Review of Metaphysics*, XVII (December, 1963), 205-13, and XVII (March, 1964), 340-60, respectively. But see also this author's "Ehman's Idealism" in the same journal, XVII (June, 1964), 617-22.

difference between "large" and "good." The differences are properly to be noted in their place, but the common characteristic of all properties, that they contrast determinately with each other, is most important to notice here.

This interpretation of being-itself as a property beside others immediately runs afoul of a fundamental dilemma of ontology, for if being-itself is a property, what is the ontological status of the other properties? The other properties, by hypothesis, contrast determinately with the property of being-itself. But to contrast with being-itself, they must have an integrity or being of their own over against being-itself. If being-itself is one of many properties, then those other properties must be, on their own and in contrast to the property of being-itself. But this is smuggling in a higher sense of being than the one in question.

Perhaps it should be said, to help this view, that being-itself is one property among others and that the others "are" only in the event that they have or participate in the property of being-itself. After all, many properties contrast with each other and yet by their natures entail the others; for instance, "red" is not the same as "colored" and yet it entails it. Or, to take the example mentioned above, if being is "presence to consciousness," it is different from the property of "squareness"; yet the property of squareness may have no being at all unless it is present to some consciousness. But what is at issue is not whether one property can participate in another, even to the point of necessary entailment; the issue concerns the ontological status of those characters of properties in virtue of which they contrast. If a property is other than being-itself, even if it has being, then that in virtue of which it is other than being must have an ontological status. The contrasting elements must be over against being-itself. Red may be a color, but it is not the same as "color" since it is different from blue, which is also a color. As "redness in contrast to blueness" is over against "color," so the contrasting properties that have being are over against being-itself. Otherwise there is no point in saying that being-itself is a property. But if this is so, then they have being over against being, which is a contradiction.

Perhaps it should be said, again to help the view, that only *substances* have being and that properties "are" only when they are properties of substances. To speak of properties having being, on this view, is merely a confusion. Substances have being, and being is a property of substances. On this interpretation it is a distorting abstraction to speak of the property of being-itself; one can speak of *being* as a property had by substances, but to isolate it and call it being-itself is an unwarranted hypostatization. Needless to say, this way out only occasions more difficulties of the kind that beset the previous interpretation. If substances contrast with being, what is their ontological status insofar as they contrast? And even if properties are only to be found in substances, how do they contrast with the property of being? If it is said that to be is to be a substance, that this is just exactly the property that being is, again, how does a substance contrast with its other properties? Its other properties are either exactly identical with it, all substances being alike,

or they contrast; if the other properties differ from substantial being, whatever in them is other than being-itself must have some ontological status, must have being of its own. So long as being is considered as a determinate property, it must contrast with other properties and be considered in that context as being-*itself*.

If being-itself is said to be the common element in all the things that are, there is always the temptation to characterize it in such a way as to put the differentia distinguishing the beings outside of being and in contrast with it. To say that the common element is a property determinately different from other properties is to do just that. But this is always fatal, since the properties things have over and above being *are other than being*, which is to be and not to be in the same respect.

The difficulties of the common-property interpretation exhibit a basic principle that can be given explicit formulation. It can be called the "principle of the ontological ground of differences," and it is that *two differing determinations of being presuppose a common ground in virtue of which they are relevantly determined with respect to each other and from which each delimits for itself a domain over against the other*. Although both differing elements must *be* in the same sense in order to be comparable, and thus must have being in common, at the same time they differ according to their individual integrities or natures and therefore each must have its "own" being; being-itself must be such that each being can delimit it and possess its own domain. The metaphor of a "domain" indicates its meaning roughly now but can be explained fully only when our reflection arrives at a positive account of being-itself later on.

The error of the interpretation of being-itself as a determinate property is that it emphasizes the commonality in the principle of the ontological ground of differences while it pays insufficient attention to the sense in which each being has its own being. Consequently, the interpretation acknowledges the latter side unreflectively by construing the relation between being-itself and the beings as that of universal to particular or of genus to species. Put in this bald way, it is readily seen that neither of these models can suffice. For, as Aristotle saw, neither the universal nor the genus properly bespeaks the features that differentiate their instances or species one from the other; yet these distinguishing features have their being, too, over against the universal or genus.

## SECTION C

### *Ens Perfectissimum*

It is natural to look from an *ens commune* theory to its opposite, an *ens perfectissimum* theory. Being-itself on this second interpretation is the determinate completion or totality of the ontological many or plurality of beings. Two sides of this interpretation must be emphasized. First, in order to be a determinate totality, not an adventitious massing or indeterminate collection,

being-itself in its complete sense must be the embodiment of a highest principle or category. This highest category cannot be exhibited fully by any limited number of the beings of the ontological many but must be exhibited by them all together. It must be a supercategory that integrates the many together and gives a determinate place to each. Secondly, the many beings included within the *ens perfectissimum* are in themselves only partial or abstract expressions or embodiments of being-itself. This is not to say that they may not be real, concrete, or capable of exercising brute force; it is only to say that with respect to being-itself they are abstract. Being-itself was construed this way by many of the idealists who wrote near the turn of the century; it is the block universe view attacked by James and others.

This second interpretation of the claim that being-itself is determinate founders, like the first, on the same fundamental dilemma of ontology, the dilemma of giving being-itself a positive characterization. This can be shown by asking whether the highest category has a significant contrast category. Is the determination that unifies all other determinations determinately what it is and not some other thing? Two answers are possible.

1. Suppose the highest category does not have a significant contrast term. But then it can have no determinateness uniquely its own whereby it internally relates, as a "third term," the abstract categories and beings it encompasses; for to have a significant determination of its own over and above the determinations of being it contains, it must have a significant contrast, contrary to the hypothesis. In virtue of what, it must be asked, does the highest category unite its contents? The answer must be, In virtue of its own determinate nature. But to be determinately what it is, the highest category must contrast with what it determinately is not. Otherwise it would contain the encompassed categories as a box indifferently contains a miscellany of things; even this analogy begs the question, since a box has a determinate principle of ordering space in virtue of which it unites its contents. The highest category, if not determinate over against a contrast term, could not of itself give an interpreting order to its contents, nor could it even be said to be anything more than the uncollected sum (already a contradiction!) of its parts. And at any rate, if it has no significant contrast and hence is not determinate itself, it cannot be an interpretation of the claim that being itself is determinate.

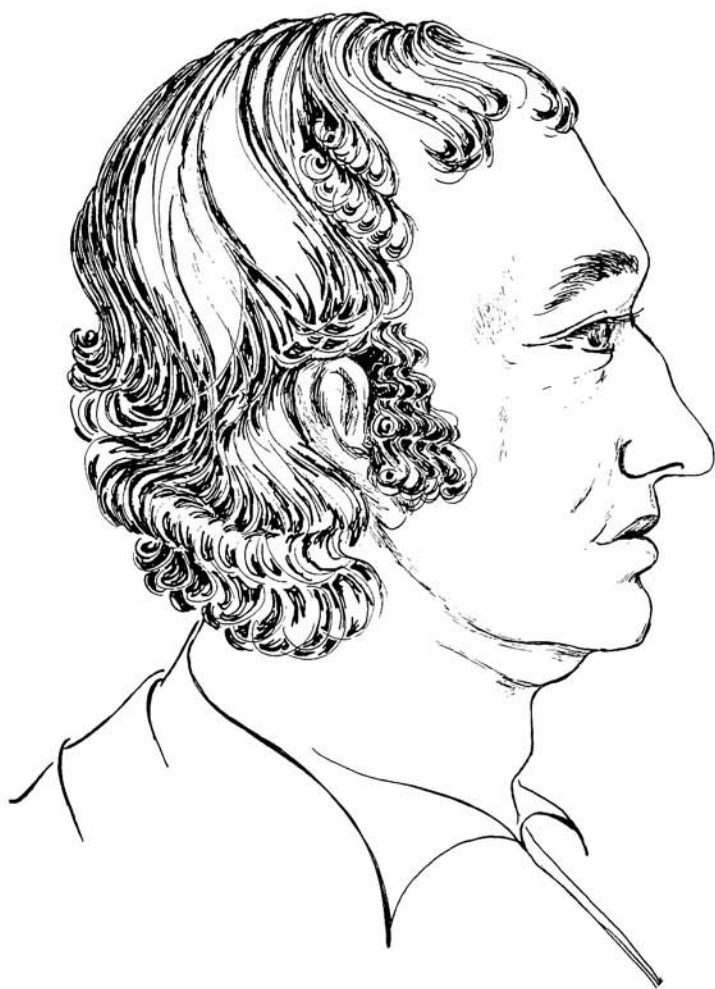
2. Suppose then that the highest category does have a significant contrast term. What can the contrast term be? Two answers are possible: (a) the contrast term could be one or all of the categories or beings contained within the highest category, or (b) it could be absolute non-being.

a) Suppose first that the contrast term is one of the beings or categories of being contained in the highest category. Now, although the highest category would be a significant contrast for one of its abstract parts because it would have determinations over and above any of its parts, the contrary does not hold. The abstract part has no determination over and above the whole of which it is the part, that is, the highest category; for the highest category

must wholly integrate its parts and hence all of its parts are completely internally related to it. The abstract part cannot be a significant contrast for the highest category unless its limitations make it sufficiently less than the highest category. But the limitations of an abstract part or determination of being are nothing more than the totality of the rest of the abstract parts or determinations. But an abstract part together with its limitations is the same thing as the highest category, for in order that the abstract part be unified with its limitations—that is, the other abstract parts—it must be unified within the highest category. The totality of parts is the same as the highest category; otherwise the parts could not be “totalled.” A thing cannot be a contrast term to itself.

b) Suppose second that the contrast term to the highest category is absolute non-being. Now by definition, non-being cannot contrast with the highest category by some determination of its own, since if non-being had a determination it would *be*. Then the contrast must be that non-being has absolutely no features, whereas being-itself does have determination. But if this is so, absolute non-being cannot be the contrast term for that specific positive determination in virtue of which the highest category unites its parts; and it is the highest category’s peculiar inclusive determination that needs the contrast, not determinateness as such. If the contrast is between non-being, which has no determinations, and a category that does have determinations, any abstract category of being would contrast with non-being just as well as the highest category could, since all abstract parts and categories are determinate.

It might be objected to our criticism at this point that the abstract parts of the highest category are abstract precisely because they are *not* wholly determinate and that the move beyond them to the absolute or highest category is necessary to give them complete determination. There are two historical ways in which this objection has been defended. One says that implicit within any element of being is a drive to become determinate with respect to what is other than that element and that so long as there is some such other the drive persists. At the end the absolute is reached when no other remains with respect to which being is indeterminate. The satisfied drive for determinateness, or being-itself, contrasts with non-being; the specific determinations it has depend upon the contingent facts of what it finds as its other along the way. Hence, according to this first theory, the satisfied drive toward determinateness, called Spirit, does contrast simply in itself with absolute non-being. This is the way of Hegel and the third interpretation of the claim that being-itself is determinate that will be considered. The second defense of the objection argues that the determinate knowledge of any part of being requires us to determine that part with respect to everything else; but it is characteristic of finite knowledge that it inevitably involves general terms, which are always partially indeterminate. Consequently, complete determinateness or being-itself is unknown to us; and since the need for a contrast term is characteristic only of finite thought,



G. W. F. Hegel



it cannot be required of the highest category, which our finite thought approaches as a limit. This is the way of Royce and will be considered as the fourth interpretation of the claim that being-itself is determinate.

The difficulties of the second interpretation of the determinate-being claim, however, like those of the first interpretation, exhibit a general dialectical principle. It can be called the "principle of the ontological equality of reciprocal contrasts": *if two determinations of being are contrast terms for each other, then they must be on the same ontological level and the categories descriptive of them must be on the same logical level.* Of course, if the contrast is not reciprocal, the determinations of being need not be on the same ontological level. The metaphor of "levels" in the statement of this principle serves to indicate its meaning roughly; but its full explication must wait for a more complete discussion of the nature of real distinctions.

The difficulty with this second interpretation of the claim that being-itself is determinate is that it accepts a meaning of "determinate" that requires that being-itself have a contrast term. Yet there is nothing on the same ontological level with being-itself with which it can contrast. Nor is there anything on the same logical level in the order of varying degrees of abstractness with which it can contrast. We must now turn to theories of being that couple the claim that being-itself is determinate with the further claim that this is because being-itself is determinateness as such.

## SECTION D

### *Being-Itself as Self-structuring Power: Hegel*

The third interpretation of the claim that being-itself is determinate is by far the most difficult to make plausible and by far the most tenacious once plausible. The difficulty in rendering it plausible stems largely from the fact that it involves a kind of apprehension of things that belongs to another, more romantic era. The notion of a powerful, vitalistic Spirit has all but disappeared from our fund of respectable categories and has in fact taken a prominent place in the museum of quaint anthropomorphisms seen through all too well. All that is left today of that fundamental category of romantic idealism is its abstract conceptual form, which, as Hegel would put it, is reality after dusk has fallen. The problem is that the notion of Spirit has not been refuted conclusively; its hold on our philosophic imagination has only been "gotten over," and it remains to be seen whether this getting over is an advance or a lapse. The tenacity of the theory stems largely from the fact that it was most notably elaborated by one of the most massive, persistent, thorough, consistent, and sensitive philosophic minds ever to write, G. W. F. Hegel.

The genius of Hegel's theory lies chiefly in the unprejudiced attention it pays to whatever subject matter is at hand. For Hegel no knowledge of a subject matter is determined a priori, or prior to the actual examination of it. Everyone knows that Hegel held the ultimate subject matter of philosophy to

be the proper form of thought and that the proper form of thought is the necessary rationality that determines the real.<sup>14</sup> But the "proper form of thought" has more kinship, for him, with the medieval notion of intellect adequated to its subject matter than it does to any a priori formal structure from which particulars could be deduced.

One consequence of this a posteriori approach is that the ontological categories do not retain fixed meanings throughout all domains of reality. The connotations of the term "will," for instance, change many times in Hegel's treatment of the will's development of freedom. The usual interpretation of Hegel's dialectic as a movement from a thesis to its antithesis and finally to a synthesis obscures the essential fact that in the process of dialectic even the meanings of the moves change from one moment to the next. Only in the vague domain of history, where particular thoughts are obscured and only general trends are brought to attention, does the dialectical process have anything like the simple structure of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The result of Hegel's claim that the categories of thought appear in many guises and that the guises are essential to the truth of the categories is that any general criticism of his theory is subject to the charge that it falsifies by taking categories out of context. Whereas Plato encouraged the abstraction of forms or essences from the particular contexts in which they are found in experience, Hegel saw this as "mere" abstraction contrary to the true aim of thought, the pursuit of the love of wisdom rather than wisdom itself.<sup>15</sup> It is a great surprise to many philosophers who attempt to work out a thoroughgoing nominalism to find Hegel sitting on the prize. Since Hegel claimed that the rational is the real only when the rational categories are particularized in individual contexts (and only categories so particularized are properly rational and not abstract<sup>16</sup>), it would seem that the only unity of the system of reflection is constituted by the rational but ideosyncratic cogency of the individual moves run through serially. It would seem that there are no universal categories that apply with a fixed sense to all domains, no unifying themes, no general principles that can be considered in abstraction from the details of the system. This would indeed be a thoroughgoing nominalism. But Hegel was a nominalist only with respect to concepts. His doctrine of Spirit claims that there is a kind of generality that is not conceptual generality but that pervades all of reality.

Spirit has an essential structure that can be described. But the structure of Spirit is a dynamic structure, a structure primarily of moves. Spirit is a move from the simple identity of the beginning to the determination of that identity with respect to what is other than its simple nature, thus making the identity complex and inclusive of its other. Prior to the move of determina-

<sup>14</sup> See *The Logic of Hegel*, trans. W. Wallace (2d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892), secs. 9-17, pp. 15-28.

<sup>15</sup> See *Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie (rev. 2d ed.; London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1931), p. 70.

<sup>16</sup> See *The Logic of Hegel*, sec. 6, p. 10.

tion, the simple identity is indeterminate with respect to its other, and hence the contrast between the identity and its other cannot be made except from the standpoint of the move already made. Consequently, the distinction between the identity and its other, the opposition between them, is always abstract since there are no distinctions but determinate distinctions and a determinate distinction is always in the context of a resolution where the relation between the identity and its other is determinate.

The conceptualizable distinctions between the moments of Spirit's progress, however, are not the whole story, for at the heart of Spirit is power or dynamics. Power always stems from a source or initial identity, moves through a medium, and produces a product. This directional movement cannot be overlooked, for otherwise the theory would collapse into the second interpretation of the determinateness of being discussed above; it is the distinguishing characteristic of Hegel's romantic idealism. Because of the directional dynamics of Spirit, the stages of Spirit's movement are real, though abstract, even where determination is not complete. Their indeterminate status must have some kind of reality for the concluding determinate synthesis to be the result of a dynamic exercise of power. What the reality is, is a problem to be conjured with below.

The structure of Spirit is often taken as the model for a self. But Hegel drew a definite distinction between finite selves and an infinite self. With suitable modifications, the structure of Spirit and its development can be applied to finite selves, as Hegel did in his *Phenomenology of Mind* and *Philosophy of Right*. But when talking about Spirit as the ontological principle of reality, Hegel meant an infinite self or infinite Spirit. Two additional clarifications of the notion of infinite Spirit are required.

First, considered in the first moment of simple identity, the power of infinite Spirit *creates* its other. Considered still from the standpoint of the simple identity, this creation does not take place according to any rational principles, nor does it have a determinate form. From the standpoint of the synthetic determination of the simple identity and its other, the simple identity has its later development implicit within it; but from the immediacy of the simple identity, its development is not even implicit, only indeterminate. In creating, then, Spirit has moved beyond its simple identity; to fix on a moment in itself is to conceive abstractly and miss the reality of the dynamics of Spirit. To create a determinate other, Spirit must be already at the third, determinate, and synthesizing stage. Consequently, the dynamics of Spirit always transcend the abstract structure of its nature. The simple identity's other has no determinate form and hence no being until it is determined with reference to the identity. (It is a characteristic of *finite* spirit that its other does have a form of its own prior to being made determinate with respect to the spirit; finite spirit does not create *ex nihilo*.)

Second, infinite Spirit need not move through a temporal medium. In fact, since it creates its other, and the other is the medium, the dynamics of infinite Spirit apart from finite spirit cannot be temporal. Only finite spirit moves

temporally. The sense we have that all exercise of power is temporal stems from the fact that our usual understanding of power is that of finite power, which produces only novel arrangements of already existing things through time. Infinite power, which produces its product in its entirety, cannot be temporal but rather simply productive; there is no contradiction in thinking of the exercise of infinite power as atemporal.

It is interesting to note that the creative work of Spirit, which gives rational form to its product only when it has moved beyond it, is an analogue to Hegel's *a posteriori* method. Since philosophy works, according to him, by following the development of Spirit, the conclusions of the dialectic can never be deduced from the premises or starting point. The nature of rationality is not determined until after the determinations are all in.

As an interpretation of the claim that being-itself is determinate, Hegel's theory says that to be is to be Spirit. Spirit's essential nature is the drive to become wholly determinate. It is in virtue of the fact that Spirit is complete determinateness that it, as being-itself, contrasts with absolute non-being. Yet we can hardly speak at this point of the need for a contrast term for being-itself. Being-itself has its meaning in virtue of the fulfillment of a dynamic drive that is implicit in all the parts of being. From the standpoint of a stage prior to the end of Spirit's development, the meaning of being-itself is the determination of the yet indeterminate end. In fact, only at the end can we speak of being-itself instead of being-becoming-itself. From the standpoint of the end, being has no meaning apart from its simple identity, which is the outcome of its abstract predecessors; but to ask for the meaning of being at this point is to presuppose a standpoint beyond the end, a determinate other, which is contrary to the hypothesis that the end is the end. Absolute non-being cannot be an other. The meaning of being-itself is simply complete determinateness, and determinateness acquires its meaning from its implicit development.

Brilliant as this theory is, however, the fundamental dilemma of ontology strikes it down. A question must be put as to the completion of determination, the last step in the dialectical development of Spirit. Is this last step determinate? Two answers are possible.

1. One could say that the last step is not determinate. Spirit is always moving beyond the stage it has made determinate; the dynamics of Spirit always transcend the stage that has been made determinate. There is, in effect, no last step, since any determinate stage is transcended. The last step is a move, not a stage, and the move lacks the determinateness of a stage. Being-itself is not so much complete determinateness as the *drive* toward further determination. The more one emphasizes the romantic quality of power in Hegel's notion of Spirit, the more this interpretation is plausible. But it has two difficulties.

a) The interpretation falls into what Hegel calls the "bad infinite," a conception of infinity that is a mere formula for repetition, not a concrete demonstration or showing of infinite transcendence. Given any provisional

last stage, Spirit transcends it by creating an other that is determinately related to it: this is a mere formula. On this interpretation it turns out that rationality goes from abstract principles to concrete reality and then again to abstract and finite thought. Perhaps Hegel would say that the *question* as to the completion of the dialectic of Spirit is essentially abstract; but the whole force of his argument has been to show that only the completion is concrete, only the completion is being-itself. And if he says that questions as to the last step always must deal with a particular candidate, then he has given up the claim that being-itself is determinateness as such. This may be what he would do, but it would be an adherence to descriptive philosophy to the exclusion of ontology, which puts him outside the pale of our present reflection.

b) The second difficulty with this interpretation is that it claims that being-itself is only abstractly determinate; the essential nature of being is to be indeterminate, to be transcending any explicit determination toward an implicit determination that at the moment of transcendence is indeterminate. The rational discipline of power comes after the fact, and the essential nature of Spirit or being-itself is immediate and arbitrary transcendence. The mediation of determinateness is always less concrete than the sheer transcending power itself. This interpretation, of course, puts Hegel outside the camp of those who claim that being-itself is determinate; but it also has an unusual twist for our traditional understanding of Hegel. It is not quite accurate to say, as he did, that the real is the rational and the rational is the real, where rationality is taken to mean determinate and necessary, for whereas the rational is always real, the real is rational only abstractly, since rationality is abstract. However rational the dialectic might be from the standpoint of its terminus, from the standpoint of the beginning or simple identity, the moves ahead are contingent, free, and arbitrary; every terminus is itself a starting point. Furthermore, the reality of Spirit as self-transcendence makes any stage more abstract in its determinate *terminal* aspect than in that *initiating* aspect which faces transcendence indeterminately. The essential thing to say about being is that it is indeterminate, and that its product, its determination, is abstract when considering being-itself. If Hegel is to move over to the position that being-itself is most essentially indeterminate, our quarrel with him is inconsequential at this point; it would only be to argue about how the determinations get produced and how they can be related to indeterminate being.

2. One could also answer the question whether the last step in the dialectic is determinate in the affirmative. This is the answer of most of Hegel's successors. But then the question must be, How can the last step be determinate and still be the last step? This is to question whether complete determinateness is possible. If the process of complete determination is to be completed, then it must have a determinate last step, a step that is a third term giving determinate unity to the many elements that lead to it. The unifying determination of the last step is not contained in its predecessors, and to be determinate it needs a contrast term. But this is exactly the position

of the second interpretation of being as determinate considered above. The difficulties with that interpretation are fatal for this answer of Hegel.

Hegel is notorious, however, for having an answer to every move made against him, and this discussion is no exception. The form of our argument has been to consider Hegel's theory of Spirit as an answer to the question of the nature of being-itself, and then to pose for that theory the issue whether the completion of Spirit is determinate or not. The question forces a dilemma: if the answer is no, then the theory at once denies that being-itself is essentially determinate and is led to assert an un-Hegelian irrationalism; if the answer is yes, then the theory reduces to the second interpretation of the claim that being-itself is determinate, which was already in trouble. But Hegel's typical response to a dilemma is to affirm both sides and to claim that the sheer posing of the dilemma presupposes a common ground, beyond the contradictories, which resolves them. Thus, although each side of the dilemma falls by itself, when both sides are affirmed together within a third term there is no difficulty. The truly dialectical answer to the question whether the completion of Spirit is determinate or not determinate is that it is both, since that is the very dialectical nature of Spirit. We must see whether Hegel is entitled to this response and whether it helps his case as a defender of the claim that being-itself is determinate.

The horns of the dilemma are that the completion of Spirit is either determinate or indeterminate. If the indeterminateness side means sheer power to the exclusion of determinateness, then obviously Hegel could rejoin that Spirit is beyond and inclusive of both. Yet in fact the indeterminateness side means simply that which transcends but *includes* as abstract moments the determinations of reality. Hence, the horns of the dilemma do not oppose two abstract elements but rather an abstract element versus the whole of which it is a part. There is no third term beyond Spirit.

But we critics do take up a standpoint that is beyond and inclusive of the horns of the dilemma. Hegel could argue that there must be a mistake somewhere because the very ability to frame the question presupposes a third position. The question, however, as was admitted above, is an abstract one, far removed from any concrete candidate for the last move of dialectic. And the abstractness of the question allows it to be raised without presupposing a standpoint in reality beyond the alternatives within the dilemma. Abstract thought is characterized by the fact that it treats as alternatives elements of a concrete whole that are only abstractly to be distinguished. And the justification of abstract thought is that on Hegel's theory of Spirit there is no other way of raising the question of the meaning of being-itself. Hegel might, in true nominalist fashion, conclude from this that the question cannot be raised. If so, this excludes him from the camp of candidates to defend the claim that being-itself is determinate.

But suppose Hegel is justified in making this move to a third term beyond the alternatives of the dilemma. How would this help him make out the case that being-itself is determinate? The question whether being-itself is determi-