

On "Being"

In *Being and Some Philosophers*: 2 f., E. Gilson speaks of "the fundamental ambiguity of *being*":

In a first acceptance, the word being is a noun. As such, it signifies either *a being* (that is, the substance, nature, and essence of anything existent), or being itself, a property common to all that which can rightly be said to be. In a second acceptance, the same word is the present participle of the verb 'to be.' As a verb, it no longer signifies something that is, nor even existence in general, but rather the very act whereby any given reality actually is, or exists.

Closely tracking Gilson, I. Leclerc, in *Whitehead's Metaphysics*: 19 f., comments on the same question as follows:

'[B]eing' is thoroughly ambiguous. It *can* be understood as signifying a concrete existent, but it can also have the meaning—to use Gilson's words—of 'a property common to all that can rightly be said to be.' This 'being as such' is readily capable of hypostatization; it can then be regarded as itself an ultimate existent, 'more real' than the concrete existing things. Further, even if 'being' be not thus hypostatized, it is very easy to confuse its use as a gerund with that as a past [*sic*: surely Leclerc means, as Gilson says, *present*] participle in, for example, the phrase 'the being of a thing.' In the former [use] it would refer to the 'nature' or 'essence' of the thing; in the latter[,] to 'the fact that' the thing exists. All this ambiguity has, in much of the philosophical thought of the past, led to grave difficulties and error through the implicit shifting from one meaning to the other.

My conclusion from this is that "being" can be used to designate either of five different things:

1. the *what* of a being (on a categorial-nominal-gerundive use of the term);
2. the *what* of any being simply as a being (on a transcendental-nominal-gerundive use of the term);
3. the *that* of a being (on a categorial-verbal-participial use of the term);
4. the *that* of any being simply as a being (on a transcendental-verbal-participial use of the term); or
5. the hypostatization of the *what* of any being as a being (on a transcendental-nominal-gerundive use of the term) into a transcendent being

beyond or in addition to all other beings, i.e., a "more real," or "eminently real," being.

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