9. EXISTENCE

Summary and general remarks. Frege’s concept of existence as non-emptiness is first presented (9.1). Next, it is shown that such an approach to existence is but a clarification of what Gilson calls the “Avicennian” or “essentialist” tendency in western metaphysics (9.2). The chapter concludes with a brief reference to the place of being in the world of concepts (9.3).

9.1 Exposition

In BG Frege does not understand particular affirmative sentences as implying existence. Such sentences are read not only “Some M’s are P’s” but also “It is possible that an M be a P”.¹ But perhaps because in the realm of extra-temporal things (Frege’s concern) there is no difference between possibility and being,² he later dropped that difference, and he understood particular affirmative sentences as implying existence³ (“there is at least one . . .”).

Concerning universal affirmative sentences, Frege in BG and GRL⁴ had already practically implied that they do not entail existence. This is formally stated afterwards in GRG I⁵ and is subsequently justified in a letter to Husserl.⁶

In his earlier writings Frege maintains that the logical symbolism should express existence; thus in UZBG Frege objects to Boole’s lack of Existentialutelle. In his earlier writings Frege has a philosophy of existence. In GRL as well, Frege’s ideas on existence are characterized by the two following traits. (1) Existence is a predicate of predicates⁷ (a second intention), i.e., existence is the fact that a concept “has” at least one individual; existence is non-emptiness of predicates. (2) The lack of contradiction does not imply existence.⁸

Frege’s ideas on unsaturatedness will oblige him to understand point (1) in a very special sense. According to him, it may be shown, but not said, that a first-level property has the property of not being empty.⁹

In a later period he coins a good neologism to designate the kind of existence to which he is referring, “Esgiebexistenz”.¹⁰ It is the existence expressed by sentences of the form “there is a . . .”, where the name of a concept should be introduced.¹¹

9.2 Gilson’s history of ontology and Frege’s concept of existence

Thinkers from other provinces of the philosophical world will probably protest against Frege’s viewing existence as a predicate of predicates, as a second intention which belongs only to the realm of ens rationis. But actually little is new in Frege’s conception of existence, and one may show that it enjoys a most respectable metaphysical past.

Gilson stresses that there have been two metaphysics or two ontological traditions, one, of essence, the other, of actus essendi.¹² Gilson’s meaning is correctly rendered – in my view – if one says that his dualism corresponds (is correlated) to the fact that for him the data (taken into account here) are two: essence and existence.

But perhaps this is a bad starting point, for one may ask where the dimension singularity–universality is to be found in that pair of concepts (essence and existence). Probably it will be found that “essence” (ousia, res, . . .) is still ambiguous concerning that dimension.

It would be more adequate to add a third factor to Gilson’s essence and existence, namely, the suppositum.¹³ Even without considering the relation between existence and each of the other two terms, one may at least affirm that the latter are located at different levels of Porphyry’s tree (UO). This will facilitate the understanding of the “dualism” pointed out by Gilson in the ontological tradition, for it will appear that Gilson’s characterization of both metaphysical tendencies cannot be sufficiently appreciated unless the dimension singularity–universality is taken into account.

In fact, while Gilson’s presentation of the views stressing the actus essendi may be easily grasped¹⁴, this is not the case with respect to his presentation of the opposite trend.¹⁵ But the latter suddenly becomes as clear as the former if one remembers Frege’s concept of existence. Frege’s view on existence requires a distinction of concepts and objects clearer than is usually the case in Aristotelian metaphysics.¹⁶

According to Gilson the origin of the “essentialist” tradition can be

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traced back to the Avicennian formula *esse accidit essentiae.*\textsuperscript{17} Here "accidit" has that peculiar sense which the Aristotelian tradition was obliged to introduce in order to deal with those higher predicates about which Aristotle himself gave no information. "*x accidit y*" means that *x* is not a mark of the property *y*, but a property of it.\textsuperscript{18} This "accidit" has a primarily negative sense: to exclude from the set of marks (of a given concept) such higher predicates as *esse*, *universale*, and so on.\textsuperscript{19} Gilson himself commends the "triplex respectus essentiae" as a means of better understanding the Avicennian formula "*esse accidit essentiae*."\textsuperscript{20} And the whole "essentialist" tradition is but a reiteration of that exclusion of higher predicates: *existence is not a predicate*\textsuperscript{21} (i.e., existence is not a mark of a first-level predicate).

Thus, it becomes plausible that the "essentialist" tradition considered by Gilson has viewed *esse* as a higher predicate. Here one should recognize the importance of the introduction of the dimension singularity-universality into our basic data. What Avicenna or Duns Scotus have in mind is that there is an *x* such that *x* falls under the concept *F*; they mean that "it happens" (accidit) to the concept *F* to have an individual. This is, in our interpretation, the meaning of *esse accidit essentiae*: existence as non-emptiness. This is also, of course, existence as a second intention, *Esgiebtexistenz.*\textsuperscript{22} Such a view of existence is also familiar to Gilson himself,\textsuperscript{23} although it may be presumed that he is not inclined to appreciate as "ontologically relevant" this sort of existence. What metaphysical relevancy may a second intention have? Is there not an "infinite abyss"\textsuperscript{24} between first- and second-level predicates? But these questions, in my view, could be spared if Frege's -- instead of Avicenna's -- theory of predication were assumed.

Incidentally, to think of existence as a property of properties, is not necessarily platonism, as Brentano's impressive anti-platonism manifesto would suggest.\textsuperscript{25} In reply to this manifesto (as was already pointed out\textsuperscript{26}), one should observe that some anti-platonisms are mere victims of traditional predication theory.

Whereas Gilson is inclined to consider the "essentialist" tradition as a sort of decadence\textsuperscript{28}, Carnap sees an "Überwindung der Metaphysik"\textsuperscript{29} in something which is, at most, a better formulation of that "essentialist" tradition.

Anscombe-Geach [1] is a remarkable contribution "towards reunion in philosophy" in so far as they point to the possibility of complementing Frege's *Esgiebtsein* with the *actus essendi.*\textsuperscript{30} Ontology, as Gilson teaches, has had both views for a long time; Frege has contributed to the clarification of one of them, clarifying thereby their mutual relation as well.\textsuperscript{31}

Finally, let us consider an important example. Both Kant and Frege\textsuperscript{32} reject the ontological argument, the former because existence is not a predicate and the latter because it is a second-level predicate. Now, these two reasons are not so different if one considers that Kant actually means that existence is not a first-level predicate.\textsuperscript{33} As was mentioned, levels of predicates were banished from modern philosophy.\textsuperscript{34}

9.3 'Utrum ens sit summum genus'

On the basis of Gilson's research plus Frege's clarification of the Avicennian approach, other subjects could be investigated, for instance the problem of existential import.\textsuperscript{35}

Frege's predication theory allows one to make an interesting analysis of traditional problems, such as the question serving as title to the present section. In fact, in Aristotelian standards this question seems to be reduced to asking whether in the UO order there is a unique last element, because what other ordering relation (for concepts) could be found in those standards? If philosophers actually had in mind other relations (say, *praedicatio notionalis*\textsuperscript{36}), these relations were necessarily isolated from UO as belonging to another world (the world of *ens rationis*). Only in Frege's approach may these relations be fearlessly dealt with, and in a way which does not necessitate committing oneself either to platonism or to anti-platonism.\textsuperscript{37} Now it is obvious that in Frege's approach the question "utrum ens sit summum genus" becomes ambiguous with respect to the term "summum", because more than one relation between two concepts is available. To think of *being* as "the most general concept" was, already in 1884, not a *Vorurteil*\textsuperscript{38} but a meaningless question, for it was not duly specified in which sense "most" was to be understood.

REFERENCES

2. Aristotle [4], I, 203,b. 30. Cf. also Maritain [1], § 84, p. 272; Bocheński [1], p. 257.
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4. BG, p. 23; GRL, for example, § 47.
6. Published by Bartlett [1], p. 11. The letter is dated 1906.
7. GRL, § 53.
10. UBR, p. 10.
11. KSC, p. 453.
12. Particularly Gilson [1]. For the special case Aquinas–Duns Scotus (as two representatives of both tendencies), cf. Gilson [2].
13. This is, as far as I know, the best designation for individual in the Western philosophical tradition. The necessity of having a threefold schema (instead of the much repeated essence-existence or Sophia–Dasein, clearly follows from some texts of Gilson [2], for example, p. 205 (in particular the footnotes). The discussion reproduced there between Aquinas and Duns Scotus shows that there are three factors. It likewise becomes apparent that only in terms of three such factors may the disagreement between both philosophers be formulated. For Scotus “nec valet, rhetor duae esse, igitur est duo entia”; while for Aquinas speaking of two esse implies two individuals. It is correct to say that the disagreement concerns the insight into esse (Gilson [2], pp. 347–348, 378), but this, in turn, requires the taking into account of the dimension singularity-universality as well.
14. Aquinas' esse: “Pour Thomas d'Aquin [...] chaque être a son esse propre, en vertu duquel précisément il est un être, et qui est en lui ce qu'il a de plus intime: il est quod est magis intimum cuilibet et quod profundus omnibus inest” (Gilson [2], ibid., as in the preceding note). It is clear, at least, that this existence has nothing to do with second intentions, i.e., with non-emptiness of predicates. Here existence is, so to speak, a property of the first level.... of course a most exceptional one, because it cannot be conceived as other properties (i.e., of an "already existing" entity). According to some critics, Aquinas' esse is today represented by Heidegger's Sein (cf. for instance Echaury [1]).
15. “... le terme ‘esse’ ne connotte plus d’abord l’acte d’existir mais plutôt l’être de la substance définie par sa quiddité” (Gilson [2], p. 378). “Chez Duns Scot, il n’y a pas d’esse par lequel une essence soit un être; le mot esse désigne alors simplement la substance elle-même prise dans sa réalité actuelle hors de sa cause et de l’intellect” (ibid., p. 486). “Dès que l’esse ne signifie plus l’acte d’être mais la réalité de l’essence posée hors de sa cause...” (ibid., p. 486, note 2).
16. Because it will be necessary to stress that existence does not concern individuals, but properties. Kaufmann [1] describes existence, one, many, number (i.e. the higher predicates of his Avicennian philosophers) as being accidents of the things (pp. 422, 424, 343 etc.). What are these things? Frequently they are... sets of marks, i.e., concepts. Thus, to say that existence is an accident (p. 422) is not to say that existence is an entity which may be absent from Peter (while Peter continues to exist), but that existence is not a mark of man.
17. Cf. Gilson [1], Ch. IV.
18. “Accidentes accipitur dupliciter, uno modo proprii, alio modo pro extraneo; quando Avicenna inquit quod existentia accidit essentiae, ly accidit accipitur pro extraneo, non alio modo, id est non est de quidditate essentiae” (a text of a later Scotist, quoted by Gilson [1], p. 134). Gilson [1], p. 126, note 1, removes any doubt about whether the original text of Avicenna’s doctrine is duly respected by the Latin versions.
19. Cf. the following decisive text: “et sic loquitur Avicenna de quidditate V Metaph., cap. 1, ubi dicit omne tale esse accidens essentiae, quod non est de formali concepto ejus, et quidditatem ad omne hujusmodi esse in potentia, ut ad unum et multum et caetera hujusmodi” (Duns Scotus, quoted by Gilson [2], p. 203).
22. Whitehead–Russell [1], *24.03, Russell [5], V.
23. “on ne peut pas démontrer qu’un être existe parce qu’il est nécessaire, ou infini, ou suprême; tout au contraire, on saura que la nécessité ou l’infini existe lorsqu’on aura prouvé l’existence d’une essence [read: “suppositum”] qui les possède” (Gilson [2], p. 124, commenting on Duns Scotus).
25. Cf. Section 5.44.
27. Ibid.
28. As it follows from Gilson [1].
30. Although these authors do not employ my terms, I think that this is what Anscombe–Geach [1] (pp. 90–91) mean.
31. The result is that Gilson’s suggestion: il faut choisir (Gilson [2], p. 205) is no longer meaningful.
32. For instance, FUB, p. 27, note.
33. It is curious to observe that Kant [1], (Erste Abt., erste Bet., 1) begins by viewing the problem in terms of higher predication: “Es ist aber das Dasein in denen Fällen da es im gemeinen Redegebrauch als ein Prädikat vorkommt, nicht sowohl ein Prädikat von dem Dinge selbst, als viehmehr von dem Gedanken den man davon hat.” (We quote the text of the edition Königsberg 1783.) As Wolff [1], § 243 indicates, “realitas” also means quidditas and real predicates are those which belong to the set of marks of a quidditas. (Cf. Heidegger [1], p. 164f., p. 184f.; Heidegger [2], p. 10.) Instead of developing the idea of existence as predicate of dem Gedanken, Kant will content himself with saying that existence is not a “real” (first level) predicate. (Cf. Eiser [1], “Existence”, in fine.) Heidegger, commenting on Kant, seems interested in pointing out the positive side of that negative statement. (Cf. Heidegger [1], p. 184; Heidegger [2], pp. 8, 14, 26), and he even suggests (as does Kant) that existence is some sort of predicate, for instance: “Weil Sein kein reales Prädikat, aber gleichwohl Prädikat ist, mithin dem Objekt zugesprochen und doch nicht dem Sachgebiet des Objekts entnehmbar ist...” (Heidegger [2], p. 26). But when it is time to say more precisely what sort of predicate existence is, we see that existence is related to subjectivity (ibid.).
Brentano is perhaps the only coherent philosopher in matters of whether existence is a predicate; he definitely considers existential sentences as eingliedrig ("A ist") and the possibility does not even remain for asking what sort of predicate existence is. (For instance, Brentano [1], 27, in fine, cf. Brentano [3], for example, p. 106.) But behind Brentano’s "A", the dimension singularity-universality is hidden as
it is concealed behind Gilson's incomplete dichotomy essence-existence.
Aristotelian metaphysics of *ousia* and Aristotelian predication theory together
have contributed to create the illusion that such pairs of terms as essence-existence,
*Sosein*-*Dasein*, etc. are exhaustive.
“La chose”, “res”, “Ding” – *ousia*’s inheritors –, ambiguously cover both universals and singulars. Such is the ambiguity covered by “essence” or “Sosein”.
34. Section 7.56.
35. “Les Scholastiques on fort disputé de constantia subiecti, comme ils l'appelloient,
c'est à dire, comment la proposition faite sur un sujet peut avoir une verité réelle,
si ce sujet n'existe pas” (Leibniz [1], p. 429). What is that *subject*? Is it a singular
or a universal? If that term corresponds to “res”, then we may realize how am-
biguous was the problem de constantia subiecti.
notionalis” and “praedicatio realis”; the former occurs when a *secunda notio de
prima praedicatur*. (This is of course but one example.)
37. Cf. Section 7.58.
38. Heidegger [3], § 1.