

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 What is Being

What is the meaning of being? Historically speaking, this is both easy and difficult question to answer. The word 'being' disturbed the philosophers' mind since ancient to modern periods. Etymologically, the word 'being' means in Latin 'ens', in Greek 'on', in French 'étant', and in German 'Sein' which connotes existing. In strict sense, it is impossible to define being in a definition. For example- a bus can be defined as a motorized vehicle which is used for land transportation. However, in order to define being, one requires a more general notion within which being can be contained. Unfortunately, no such conceptions exist simply because being encompasses all reality. Therefore, instead of a strict definition, the various definitions of being are: 'that which exists', 'that which is', or 'that which is real'.

Strictly speaking, the word 'being' does not signify the same meaning as 'thing'. The word 'being' derives from the verb *esse* which means 'to be', it denotes the existence of something. The concept of being is not a simple concept. Because two elements are involved in this concept, one is something which is, and secondly the very act of being of that thing. Here, *something* refers to a subject that the particular reality that the *esse* belongs to. For example- the act of hearing is also the subject who hears. Nevertheless, these two elements constitute a unity. It signifies that the existence of one element implies that another element is present. Therefore, when we use the word being, we implicitly refer to it *esse*, even if we have not yet made the judgment that *something is* or that *it is*. So, we can say that being refers to something that exists in reality.

1.2 Evolution of Being

From Parmenides to Heidegger, metaphysicians have endeavored to understand the meaning of being throughout the long history of Western philosophy. Now, we will discuss the concept of being from different philosophers' perspectives.

1.2.1 Parmenides on Being:

From Ancient times, philosophers have been dealing with the problem of being. In fact, the concept of 'being' was first brought into the limelight by Parmenides. He is an Ancient Greek philosopher and also the founder of the Eleaticism School of philosophy. According to him, the multiplicity of existing things, their changing forms and motions are an appearance of a single reality or Being. This gives rise to one of the most famous principles "All is One." From this notion of being, he asserts that all claims of 'non-being' or of change are illogical.

He distinguished between two concepts, Becoming and Being. He developed the notion of 'Being' instead of Heraclitan 'Becoming'. According to Heraclitus, reality is changeable, flux, and becoming. But for Parmenides, the reality is one, unchangeable, and eternal being. For him, only one is real and manyness and changes are unreal. Although this distinction is a matter of intuition, we can see that in our real lives changes and plurality of things are palpable. So, for him, we need to learn about the philosophy of the truth or 'Being' before anything else. This being is flawless, unbreakable, and comprehensible.

1.2.2 Aristotle on Being:

In Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, there are three central ideas, i.e., 'being', 'substance', and 'form'. For him, there are various modes of being, but all these various modes of being, the primary mode of being is substance. Especially, First philosophy is concerned with

this kind of being that substances have. Again, he attempts to analyze what a substance is in terms of the idea of form. He asserts that it is form or essence that can be called substance in the most comprehensive and truest sense. Therefore, in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, the concepts of 'being', 'substance', and 'form' are closely related.

In Book IV, Chapter I of *Metaphysics*, Aristotle maintains that there is "a science that studies being in so far as it is being."¹ This science is called him 'First Philosophy' or Metaphysics. According to him, metaphysics is different from other sciences because not treated as being general. Metaphysics is a transcendental science. Since it is a branch of transcendental knowledge, its object surpasses us in a way that its unity does not preclude an internal strain toward multiplicity. However, as a type of knowledge that aspires to be a science, it must express itself precisely to adhere to the fundamental differences in its own object.

According to Aristotle, at least there are four senses of 'being'. In his *Metaphysics*, Book V, (chapter 1) and Book VI, (chapter 2) appear to be the two comprehensive passages that cover the senses of being in most detail. We find the following in Book V:

'Being' means, first, accidental being, second, absolute being [...] The senses of essential being are those which are indicated by the figures of predication; for being has as many senses as there are ways of predication [...] Again 'to be' and 'is' mean that a thing is true, and 'not to be' that it is false. Similarly, in affirmation and negation [...] Again, 'to be' means that some of these statements can be made in virtue of a potentiality and others in virtue of an actuality.²

He repeats these distinctions in Book VI in a different way:

But since the simple term 'being' is used in various senses, of which we saw that one was accidental, and another true (not-being being used in the sense of 'false'); and since besides these are categories, e.g., the

¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Trans. The Loeb Classical Library, IV, 1, pp. 1003^a21- 22

² Ibid., V, 7, pp. 1017^a 7, 22-24, 31-33; 1017^a 35-1017^b 2

‘what’, quality quantity, place, time and any other similar meanings; and further besides all these the *potential and actual* [...]³

We can differentiate the following four meanings of the word ‘is’ or ‘being’ according to Aristotle’s aforementioned quotations or texts:

- (a) **Essential being:** According to Aristotle, essential beings are those which are the figures of predication. In *Metaphysics*, Book V, chapter 6, he says: “Since, then, some predicates indicate what the subject is, others its quality, others quantity, others relation, others activity or passivity, others its ‘where’, others its ‘when’, being has a meaning answering to each of these.”⁴
- (b) **Potential being and actual being:** The term ‘being’ or ‘is’ can refer to either an ability or capacity or its current actualization. For instance, ‘is sentient’ would logically refer to the animal’s ability for sensation, and ‘is a scholar’ alludes to capacities that have been developed through training. However, the former might be used to describe anything that is seen or heard, while the latter could be used to describe a current presentation of scholarship.
- (c) **Accidental being:** The accidental being is not always or usually, it is what occurs. For example- a builder is a good musician, in this case, it is accidental character because it is the nature of a musician, not of a builder to do this.
- (d) **Being as truth:** The word ‘being’ or ‘is’ refers to the statement is true and the word ‘not-being’ means that it is not true but false. In *Metaphysics*, Book, V, chapter 6, Aristotle says: “ ...this alike in affirmation and negation; e.g., ‘Socrates is musical’ means that this is true; or ‘Socrates is not white’ means

³ *Ibid.*, VI, 2, pp.1026^a33-1026^b 2

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1017^a 25- 28

that this is true; but ‘the diagonal of the square is not commensurate with the side’ means that it is False to say it is.”⁵

However, the last two senses of beings are excluded by Aristotle. Because the accidental being, for him, is the object of no science. He holds that “accidental is akin to non-being.”⁶ the accidental being also lacks the definiteness and necessity which implied by being. But all science is of that is always or for the most part. In the sense of ‘being as truth’, Aristotle asserts that truth and falsehood do not exist in things, but rather in the mind, and therefore they are not the primary form of being. Since being as truth only exists in thinking or in a particular form of mind rather than a physical object. So, it is necessary to exclude the study of this type of being from metaphysics. As he states:

“that which is accidentally and that which is in the sense of being must be dismissed. For the cause of the former is indeterminate and that of the latter is some affection of thought, and both are related to the remaining genus of being and do not indicate the existence of any separate class of being.”⁷

After excluding these two senses of being, Aristotle continues his study of the other senses of being, particularly the first. Even the second, which is being as potential or actualization, is not entirely separate. We will now concentrate on this sense of being because, in Aristotle’s view, the study of being qua being is primarily concerned with being in the different categories. So, according to Aristotle’s theory, categories do not refer to certain types of things as being in themselves but rather simply to how particular things are beings in themselves. As a result, categories are the way of being of Being.

⁵ Ibid., V, 6, pp. 1017^a30- 1017^a35

⁶ Ibid., VI, 4, p. 1026^a21

⁷ Ibid. pp. 1027^b34- 1028^a2

In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle explicitly states that “there are many senses in which a thing may be said to ‘be’.”⁸ For him, the substratum or the primary being is the source of all the senses in which we ordinarily understand the concept of Being. The word ‘substance’ is derived from the Latin word ‘substantia’ which means ‘to stand under’. In the primary sense, according to Aristotle, substance refers to that which is not predicable of a subject but rather of which everything else is predicated. For him, substance is prior in every way to the other categories.

According to Aristotle, substance is the substratum or subject which supports the accidents. He distinguished between primary and secondary substances. A primary substance is a distinct substance that exists in a single being. For example- the substance of this cow or man or chair. On the other hand, secondary substance is the abstract or universal concept that represents the essence of the primary substance. For example- the substance of an eagle, man, chair, etc.

Accident is typically characterized as a reality whose essential nature requires that it be in something else, such as its subject when compared to accident substance has the most distinguishing characteristic of subsist, while accident has the most distinguishing quality of ‘to be in another’.

According to Aristotle, substance and accidents are the fundamental ways of being to which all may be reduced. Accidental perfections can be divided into nine types, even though they exhibit a great deal of diversity. These nine accidents and substances can form the ten supreme classes or genera of being known as Categories. These categories describe the real modes of being. These ways of being are logically connected to corresponding kinds of predicates that can be attributed to a thing since being is reflected in both knowledge and language.

⁸ Ibid, p. 1033^a33

Therefore, according to Aristotle, substance is neither its substratum nor its genus, it is a form of universal. So, for him, substance is a composite of matter and form. Matter, for him, is that which something is made of. Form, on the other hand, is that into which it is made. Technically, both are in potency. According to his theory of Hylomorphism, there are neither ‘matterless’ form nor ‘formless’ matter exists. For him, all actual things or substances are composed of form and matter as co-principles. According to him, forms exist in real things and human minds can rationally abstract these essences from actual things to understand them. In other words, for him, form is the determinate structure that determines an object’s essential attributes or characteristics. Contrarily, matter is the ultimate stuff from which all physical objects are created. From this, he developed his theory of causation.

Therefore, Aristotle believed that the substance of an object is its underlying principle of structure which must be present in the collection of materials into an organized whole rather than just a collection. this principle of structure is the form or essence which is the substantial component of every individual thing.

1.2.3 Aquinas’ on Being:

Like Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas believes that metaphysics is the study of being qua being or the study of the most basic elements of being that constitute a being and without which being cannot exist. Thus, being becomes the main focus of Aquinas’ philosophy. Aristotle had a big influence on him. According to Kerr, “Aquinas’ metaphysical thought follows a modified but general Aristotelian view. Primarily, for Aquinas, a thing cannot be unless it possesses an act of being, and the thing that possesses an act of being is thereby rendered an essence/existence composite.”⁹ If there is an act of being in an essence then the act of being is constrained by the essence whose

⁹ Kerr, Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy

act it is. The definition of an object or thing is its essence in itself and material substances are the paradigm examples of essence/existence composites. However, he acknowledged that not all substances are material, for example, God. For him, material substances are made up of matter, for example- trees, cars, etc. It is stated that there is a composite of matter and form. All other things or objects are spoken of the matter/form composite which becomes the main reference of being.

According to Aquinas, the primary subject of philosophy is being. For him, metaphysics is not only the study of being, but it is also the study of particular aspects which is common to all beings. There are particular aspects of being that are common in the sense that they apply in general to all beings. These aspects are essence and existence. For him, existence and essence belong to every being. Therefore, the study of essence and existence, and their relationships are the primary focus of metaphysics. These also include:

1. The compositions of substance and accidents
2. The compositions of matter and form.

1.2.4 Augustine's Concept of Being:

Augustine, a prominent Christian philosopher, developed the concept of being in his theological and metaphysical writings. Three main pillars make up his metaphysical perspective:

1. The existence of the uncreated God-being or Being itself which is also known as the Uncreated Ipsum Esse.
2. The created esse, which is existence stated in terms of being, such as that of creatures or other created beings.

3. The relationship between the Uncreated ipsum Esse and the Created Esse. This connection between beings can be explained in this way: “All created beings proceed from the supreme uncreated Being by creation on account of Its goodness, but they all also return to this Being and Its goodness on account of perfection.”¹⁰

According to Augustine, being can only come from Being, likewise good can come only from Good. Because, for him, God is the primordial source of all beings and the absolute fullness of being. He argued that God must be an uncreated and immutable esse or being because only his causation can explain the existence of the created esse or being, restricted in changing forms outside Esse. So, it is logical to state that God is the supreme or highest existing being and he is also created from nothing. Therefore, according to him, God is the only thing which truly may be called Being and this Being is the source of all other beings.

1.2.5 Renè Descartes:

The French philosopher Renè Descartes is considered a father of modern philosophy. In this era, the philosophers are focused on the problem of ‘substance’ instead of the problem of ‘being’. Descartes mainly focuses on the ‘Cogito ergo sum’ or ‘I think therefore I am’ which is a milestone in the history of philosophy. this ‘Cogito ergo sum’ is the foundation of his epistemology and metaphysical ideas. He began by doubting everything he could doubt, including the existence of the external world, the reliability of his senses, and even the existence of God. In the process of radical doubt, he realized that he couldn’t doubt the act of doubting itself. Doubting required thinking, and thinking was undeniable. This means that the very act of thinking proves one’s existence. In other words, if you doubt or think, you must exist as a thinking being.

¹⁰ S.J. Gabrowski, op.cit. p.170

So, Descartes reduces all reality to two fundamental substances: mental substance and physical substance. These two substances are fundamentally distinct from one another. For him, the spirit or mind is immaterial, thinking and non-spatial, while the body is material, extended in space, and non-thinking. This dualism forms the basis of his metaphysical framework. He believed that despite their fundamental differences, mental and physical substances interact with each other. For example- the mind can influence the body by causing bodily movements, and the body can affect the mind through sensory experiences. According to him, the pineal gland, a small structure in the brain, serves as the point of interaction between the mental and physical realms. He suggested that this gland acted as a kind of interface where the immaterial mind could communicate with the physical body.

He argued that God, as a benevolent and non-deceptive being, guarantees the truth of clear and distinct ideas. Thus, the existence of God serves as a bridge between the finite thinking being and the external world, ensuring the reliability of human reason.

Therefore, we can say that in Descartes' philosophy, being refers to the certainty of one's existence as a thinking being, established through the act of thought or doubt. This thinking being or self is distinct from the material body and serves as the foundational point of certainty and knowledge.