



"A comparative look at Different Interpretations of Aristotle's Theory of 'Being Qua Being'."

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Abstract

Aristotle considers metaphysics a science that discusses being qua being (or "being insofar as it is being") and its essential attributes. Alongside "being qua being," he also speaks of absolute being. The multiple meanings of "being" in Aristotle's thought have led interpreters to diverse understandings of what Aristotle truly meant by "being qua being?" They would have disagreements. A disagreement that starts from ontology and impacts their theology. Among Muslim philosophers, Avicenna and Averroes (Ibn Rushd), and among Christian philosophers, Albert the Great (Albertus Magnus) and his student Thomas Aquinas, have commented on this matter. In Avicenna's view, what is meant by 'being qua being' is a universal concept that applies to all beings, including the Necessary Existent per se. Consequently, the Necessary Existent is part of the subject matter of philosophy. However, Averroes introduced the highest substance to explain "being qua being" and considered God the subject of philosophy. Consequently, he regarded the proof of God as part

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of the problems of natural science. In Albert the Great's view, "being qua being" is the simple existence as the first creation of God, and this simple existence is the subject of philosophy. In Thomas Aquinas's perspective, "being qua being," although the subject of philosophy, applies only to contingent beings, and God is the cause of this "being qua being." A comparative study of these disagreements and the reasons behind them forms the framework of this article.

Keywords

Being qua being, Aristotle, Avicenna, Averroes, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas

Introduction

Aristotle, by making "being qua being" the subject of philosophy, breathed new life into ontology and established it as a topic for subsequent philosophers to study. According to Aristotle, "that which is sought, from ancient times and now and always, and which is always perplexing, is what being is" (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1028b3-4). Of course, the term "being qua being" was also used by Plato, but his intention was to refer to the perfect being (Ens Perfectum). Whereas for Aristotle, "being qua being" is the common being (Ens Commune), which signifies a universal concept that applies to everything from matter (hyle) to the unmoved mover (Owens, 1978, p. 1). Aristotle discusses "being qua being" (To on hei on) in Book IV, Chapter 1 (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1003a), and he speaks of "absolute being" (Ontos haplos) in Book VI, Chapter 1 (Aristotle, 1991, pp. 1025-1026a). At the end of Chapter 6, he tries to equate absolute being with being qua being, yet some interpreters believe he wasn't successful in this endeavor (Owens, 1978, pp. 35-67). This very point has led to disagreements among interpreters. Therefore, the most fundamental issue in Aristotle's metaphysics is existence. This issue, both traditionally and historically since Aristotle's time, has been the source of sharp debates and numerous disagreements among those engaged in metaphysics. In fact, ever since Aristotle defined the subject of philosophy as "being qua being," there have been differing views among his interpreters regarding its meaning. This ontological disagreement has permeated the entire structure of each philosopher's thought, ultimately influencing their theology. Among Muslim philosophers, Avicenna and Averroes, and among Christian philosophers, Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, are prominent Aristotelian interpreters who disagree on the meaning of "being qua being." Such a fundamental disagreement can undoubtedly lead to vastly different philosophical systems. It's important to remember that Avicenna's *Shifa* was translated into Latin

in the 12th century, and Averroes' commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in the early 13th century. Both played a significant role in the understanding of "being qua being" in the Western philosophical tradition. A comparative study of these differing interpretations forms the structure of this research.

1. Aristotle and "Being Qua Being"

Given that Aristotle spent a portion of his life in Plato's Academy, he held two distinct perspectives on the issue of "being." That is, the problem of "being" for Aristotle during his time in Plato's Academy differed from what he later developed in his own Lyceum. In writings from his Academy period, the most crucial issue regarding being for Aristotle was that of signification and naming. Existence and non-existence, in themselves, don't indicate anything; even the word "being" itself doesn't signify anything unless it's part of a compound or a combination (Aristotle, 1962, p. 16b22). As he says in *Topics*, existence and unity are predicated of every being (Aristotle, 1962, p. 16b22). Thus, at that stage of his thought, Aristotle denies a universal concept of existence. During this period, Aristotle attempts to explain existence by placing it within a specific context or correlation. Existence is always a "this" or a "that"; therefore, "being qua being" or the universal concept of being is not discussed. The focus is on the structure of beings, not their mere existence.

However, in a more advanced stage of his philosophical thought, Aristotle introduces the universal concept of being with the phrase "being qua being." At this stage, his question isn't "what is this or that thing?" but rather, "what is existence or being?" At this point, he considers existence to be both self-evident (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1041a15) and analogical/pros hen (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1029a6-1030a21). Therefore, it can be said that in Aristotle's final view,

philosophy deals with the concept of existence in its general and abstract sense. It is at this stage that Aristotle considers philosophy the science of "being qua being" and states: "There is a science which studies being qua being and the attributes which belong to it in virtue of its own nature" (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1003a21-23, 1026a31).

In Aristotle's philosophy, the concept of "being" has multiple meanings. This is why, according to him, if we don't understand the various meanings of "being," we can't investigate the elements of existing things (Aristotle, 1991, p. 992b18-24, 1088b35-1089b33). In Eudemian Ethics, he further emphasizes that, due to the multiple meanings of "being," a single science alone cannot discuss "being" because it sometimes signifies substance, sometimes quantity, sometimes quality, and so on (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1217b23-35). However, in his Metaphysics, he states that despite the multiple meanings of "being," one science can indeed exist to discuss "being and beings" (To on and ta onta) (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1003a21-b16). For Aristotle, being has different applications across the categories (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1017a22-30). At the same time, these multiple meanings of existence refer back to a single, unifying principle (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1017a8, 1033a33).

Different Meanings of "Being" According to Aristotle: Being as Causes and Principles: (Aristotle, 1991, p. 983b), Being as Truth/True: (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1026a35, 993b19-20, 1017a30-35), Being as Nature: (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1015a), Being as Unity: (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1051b11-12, 1054a13-15), Being as Necessary: (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1015b 9-15), Being as Accidental Being (Being by Accident): (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1017a5-10, 1026a35), Being as Being per se (Essential Being): (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1017a5-10), Being as Actuality (Entelechy): (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1048a32), Being as Substance: (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1028b 3-4).

Among these various meanings, philosophers typically examine four: (1) Being per se (Essential Being), (2) Accidental Being, (3) Truth/True, and (4) Potency and Actuality. From this group, only two meanings—Being per se and Being in the sense of potency and actuality—are considered worthy of philosophical discussion. This is because, in Aristotle's view, accidental being cannot be the subject of any science, as this type of existence is not truly knowable or amenable to systematic study. For instance, a house possesses an infinite number of accidental attributes. Science cannot address this countless array of accidental descriptions. Likewise, truth and the true are not subjects of philosophical discussion because they pertain to propositions and judgments, not to things themselves. Therefore, only being per se (essential being) and potency and actuality are worthy of philosophical inquiry (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1026b5-10, 1027b29-35). However, precisely because Aristotle introduced philosophy as the science of "being qua being," this concept has been subjected to various interpretations and understandings among his commentators. Each interpretation, in turn, can dramatically alter the trajectory of philosophy itself.

We know that Aristotle's works were neglected and even faced destruction for a long time. It's not unlikely that this very fact contributed to the differing opinions of his commentators on numerous metaphysical issues. The disagreements among Aristotle's commentators regarding "being qua being," from his contemporaries to the present day, can be categorized into six groups. 1-Interpreters such as Theophrastus (Aristotle's friend and successor, died 287 BC), Alexander of Aphrodisias (the first Greek commentator on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, alive 220 AD), Syrianus (Neoplatonist philosopher, died 430 AD), and Asclepius (commentator on *Metaphysics*), believe that Aristotle's intention with "being qua being" is the separate, divine,

unmoved, and unchanging being. According to this group, "being qua being" is equivalent to Being par excellence (Owens, 1978, pp. 9-15). 2-Medieval philosophers, including Muslims, Jews, and Christians, interpreted "being qua being" as absolute being. They considered it applicable to all beings, from matter (hyle) to God. Thus, they regarded "being qua being" as synonymous with common being (Ens Commune) (Owens, 1978, pp. 9-15), although they still held differing views on this matter. 3- From the 19th century onwards, Aristotelian scholars also weighed in on this topic. For example, Zeller argues that the multiple meanings of substance in Aristotle's philosophy led him to consider the sciences of ontology and theology as one. In Zeller's view, Aristotle's *Metaphysics* can be called both a science of ontology and a science of theology (Owens, 1978, p. 18). However, some, like Natorp, consider Zeller's theory incorrect and interpret "being qua being" as an unbearable contradiction, because metaphysics cannot be equated with theology (Owens, 1978, p. 19). 4- According to Werner Jaeger, the meaning of "being qua being" in Aristotle's philosophy during the Platonic-Aristotelian period—when Aristotle, influenced by Plato, posited two realms (sensible and intelligible)—referred to the unmoved being. However, in the later period, when Aristotle solely acknowledged sensible reality, absolute being became the subject of his philosophy (Jaeger, 1962, p. 218). 5- According to David Ross, Aristotle's philosophy evolves from the study of first causes and principles to the science that investigates all existence insofar as it is existence (Ross, 1975, pp. 252-3). 6- According to Werner Marx, Aristotle's ontology is, in reality, ousiology (the study of substance); that is, the question of "being" is the question of "substance" (Marx, 1977, p. 19), which ultimately leads to theology (Marx, 1977, pp. 57-9). In other words, the study of existence is inseparable from the study of substance, and every ontology in the Aristotelian system refers back to his ousiology.

that should be noted that due to the various names for metaphysics, Aristotle listed different subjects for this science. This very fact has led to disagreements among his followers and commentators. The subjects Aristotle outlined for philosophy include: 1-The science of the highest causes and principles of things (Aristotle, 1991, p. 982b9) / Investigation into the causes of "being qua being" (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1003a26-32, 925b3-4, 1059a18-20). 2-Unmoved and Separate Being: (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1026a19-23, 1064b1-6) In this sense, "being qua being" is examined as a separate being (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1026a23-32, 1064b6-14). 3- Science of Substance: (Aristotle, 1991, p. 96b, 1028b4-7, 998b31, 997a1-2, 1069a18) / Primary Substance: (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1005a35) / Causes of Substance: (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1005a35, 1003b18, 1042a5, 1069a18-19). 4- Divine Causes of Sensible Things: (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1062a16-18, 1026a). 5- Science of Truth: (Aristotle, 1991, p. 983b2-3). 6- Science of Form: (Aristotle, 1991, p. 92a34-36 and Physics Aristotle, 1991, p. 194b). 7- Being qua being in a universal sense: (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1003a, 1060b).

He also identifies the subject of philosophy in his *Physics* as: 1-Unmoved being, 2-Immovable, imperishable being, 3-Movable, perishable being (Aristotle, 1991, p. 198a29).

What's been discussed highlights the disagreements among Aristotle's commentators regarding Aristotelian being and ontology. As observed, these differences have persisted from Aristotle's time to the present day, underscoring the significance of ontology itself. The views of these commentators, and their divergent interpretations, not only demonstrate the importance of Aristotelian ontology but also reveal the inherent complexity and ambiguity in Aristotle's own statements.

2- Avicenna and "Being Qua Being"

In Avicenna's philosophy, "being qua being" (or "being insofar as it is being") is a concept that applies to all existing things, from matter (hyle) to the Necessary Existent per se (God). Therefore, in Avicenna's philosophy, the Necessary Existent per se, or God, is an instance of the universal being or "being qua being," not "being qua being" itself, as Averroes later proposed, nor its cause, as Thomas Aquinas argued. For this reason, God is not the subject matter of metaphysics in Avicenna's system. This is because the subject matter of any science is considered among its established and presupposed tenets, and the science only discusses its attributes. However, God's existence in philosophy is not considered established or presupposed; rather, it is one of philosophy's problems to be investigated (Avicenna, 1363, pp. 5-6). At the same time, Avicenna emphasizes that no science other than philosophy can prove the existence of God. This is because, in his view, sciences other than philosophy consist of physics, mathematics, and logic, and God is not proven in any of them (Ibid.). In Avicenna's system, theology is a part of ontology (the science of "being qua being"), since God is proven within first philosophy. Therefore, God is considered one of the instances of "being qua being."

Aristotle also considers metaphysics the science of being, but he understands "being" in the sense of substance. For Aristotle, being and substance are one and the same. In his philosophical system, the question of existence reverts to the question of substance, and the theory of being is inseparable from the theory of substance. According to Aristotle, the number of parts of philosophy corresponds to the number of substances (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1004a, 3-4). Furthermore, in Aristotle, one of the meanings of "being" is "substance" (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1028b, 3-5). This is why figures like Werner Marx and

Bonitz refer to Aristotle's ontology as ousiology (the study of substance) (Marx, 1977, p. 57). As Bonitz states: The investigation into all concepts and meanings of substance is equivalent to outlining the entirety of Aristotelian philosophy (Burn, 1373, pp. 141-142). One who perceives in substance all forms of existence—namely, intellect, soul, matter, form, and body—and who does not consider accidents to have an existence independent of substance, can establish substance as the subject of metaphysics. Consequently, they can define philosophy as the science of substance and the essence of things. However, Avicenna cannot consider substance the subject of philosophy because substance, as a quiddity (whatness), is a contingent existent. Metaphysics, for Avicenna, is not limited to discussing only contingent beings. Based on this, Aristotle views the ten categories as categories of being, not categories of quiddity. In contrast, Avicenna, following Farabi, considers contingent existents to be composed of two conceptually distinct analytical parts: existence and quiddity. He then divides these contingent existents, from the perspective of their quiddity, into the ten categories of substance and accident (Akbarian, 1386, pp. 51-52). Avicenna, in emphasizing the distinction between "existence" and "quiddity" (or "essence"), follows Farabi's ideas. Through this distinction, he introduced existence as a distinct philosophical element separate from quiddity into Islamic philosophy. With such a transformation, Avicenna went beyond Aristotle, extending the analysis of the concept of existence beyond the realm of substance to the realm of actual existence.

3- Averroes and "Being Qua Being"

According to Averroes (Ibn Rushd), Aristotle's "being qua being" refers to the highest substance, a substance that is the first and final form (Averroes, 1377, Vol. 1, pp. 64-66, 293). Averroes views

philosophy as the study of "being qua being" insofar as philosophy is the study of the first form and the ultimate end of all beings. In his view, philosophy is the study of the first formal and final causes. In other words, philosophy is the study of the first form and the first ultimate end (Averroes , 1377, Vol. 1, p. 192). Also, he states: Philosophy is the study of the causes of beings qua beings, or the study of the primary causes of celestial bodies, or the study of all that is independent of matter. (Averroes , 1377, Vol. 2, pp. 711-712). Therefore, the subject of philosophy is God. And since the subject of every science is presupposed within that science, God must be proven in another science, namely physics (natural sciences). From this perspective, Averroes , in contrast to Avicenna , considers God to be a matter of physics, because philosophy discusses the substance that is the primary form and final cause of other things—that is, immaterial substances—and this must be proven in another science called physics.

Averroes criticizes Avicenna . According to Averroes , Avicenna , in this matter, followed and continued the path of Alexander of Aphrodisias. In Alexander of Aphrodisias's view, a naturalist cannot prove the existence of the principles of natural beings; rather, it is the philosopher who can do this. (Averroes , 1377, Vol. 3, p. 1420). According to Averroes , this is incorrect because, in the last book of Aristotle's Physics, the eternal substance is proven as the principle of natural beings. In his view, the only valid proof for the existence of God is this argument from motion. According to Averroes , the principles of sensible things, including the Prime Mover, matter, form, etc., are first proven in physics and then studied in a different way in philosophy. (Ibid., 1406-1407) The physicist studies them as principles of motion, while the philosopher studies them as principles of substance. The difference between these two is

that the philosopher ultimately studies the First Form, and the physicist studies the ultimate goal of substance. (Averroes , 1377, Vol. 3, 1421-1427, 1562-1574, and 1429-1430).

4- Albert the Great and Being Qua Being

Albert the Great, a Christian philosopher of the 12th and 13th centuries and a commentator on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, considered the subject of philosophy to be simple being (*Esse simplex*). In the first part of his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Albert the Great states that simple being, as God's first creation, is the subject of philosophy (Doig, 1972, pp. 52-53), and he does not contradict this view in later sections. Therefore, for Albert the Great, being qua being is synonymous with simple being. Albert the Great believed that the principles of simple being are beyond natural phenomena. Because these principles are discussed in philosophy, it's also referred to as metaphysics. Furthermore, philosophy is called divine science because the divine and primary principles of simple being are the completers and perfecters of everything else (Doig, 1972, p. 78). Like Averroes , Albert the Great accepted the natural argument for the Prime Mover (Doig, 1972, p. 53). The key difference, however, lies in their understanding of philosophy's subject: Albert the Great considered the first creation as the subject of philosophy, while Averroes viewed God as its subject.

Albert the Great considered being (To be) to be identical with existent. According to Roland Gosselin, this identification allowed Albert the Great to consider the first creation as "being" itself (Gosselin, 1948, pp. 175-9). However, Doig argues that Gosselin's interpretation relies on a distinction between existence and essence that Albert the Great did not understand in the way Gosselin suggested (Doig, 1972, p. 80).

5. Thomas Aquinas and Being Qua Being

For Thomas Aquinas, metaphysics, first philosophy, and divine science are used interchangeably in a certain sense. Although he believed that metaphysics discusses the First Cause, spiritual substances, and universal being, it is only universal being that becomes the subject of philosophy (Aquinas, 1995, p. XXXII). In other words, being qua being is the subject of philosophy. This doctrine is presented and explained in several places within his commentary on the Metaphysics (Aquinas, 1995, pp. 196-206; 396-403; 695-701; 707-711).

According to Wippel, while 13th and 14th-century thinkers followed Avicenna's path, they were divided on how to explain the relationship between the science of being qua being and divine being. Siger of Brabant and Scotus, in the late 14th century, believed that God, in His capacity as existent, was an instance of being qua being, which is the subject of philosophy. Thomas Aquinas, however, took a unique stance on this matter. In his view, the subject of philosophy is being qua being and universal being, but God is not an instance of universal being. God is the cause of universal being (and in effect, the instances of universal being). Thomas Aquinas considered the ultimate goal of philosophical inquiry to be the knowledge of God. This, of course, implies that the proof of God's existence is one of the central issues in philosophy. However, in his commentary on the Metaphysics, Aquinas also presents texts where he asserts that God, as an unmoved mover and an immaterial essence, must be proven in natural philosophy (physics). He views this as a necessary prerequisite for beginning philosophical study (Aquinas, 1995, 398; 593; 1169-1170; 2267). Essentially, whether God's existence is to be proven within physics or philosophy in Aquinas's thought system remains a point of contention among contemporary interpreters.

Thomas Aquinas likely adopted the term "universal being" (or "common being") from Avicenna , who frequently used the term. Thomas utilized "universal being" in numerous instances, notably in the first part of his *Summa Theologiae* when explaining the distinction between likeness and image (or imagination/conception). He states that likeness is, first, a type of image, and second, the perfection of a being—a being that is itself the image of something else (Aquinas, 1947, 636-7; 1983, 28; Aquinas, 1995, pp. 222-3). Thomas considered universal being to be the most fitting and real effect of the highest cause, which is God (Aquinas, 1947, p. 1166). Therefore, Thomas applied "being qua being" or "universal being" to contingent beings, viewing God as their cause. In other words, for Thomas, if "being qua being" or "universal being" is the subject of this science, then the philosopher must reason from knowledge of this subject to understand the cause or principle of everything that falls under "being qua being." For Thomas Aquinas, being qua being cannot be predicated of God. In his view, God is the cause of the instances of being qua being, not an instance Himself. If God were an instance of being qua being, it would imply that He is His own cause, which is a contradiction. It's important to note that, for Avicenna , the concept of "being" extends from the Necessary Existent (God) down to prime matter. Therefore, for Avicenna , one would say that a contingent being is composed of existence and essence. However, in Aquinas's system, since being qua being refers to contingent beings, and God is not an instance of being but rather its cause, it is perfectly acceptable to state that a being is composed of existence and essence.

Following Avicenna , Thomas Aquinas held that the discussion of God should be addressed within philosophy, not in physics, a view contrary to Averroes 's belief. Nevertheless, it's worth noting that Thomas, at the conclusion of his commentary on

Aristotle's *Physics*, acknowledged that the unmoved mover—which he identified with God—could indeed be proven within that science. This approach allowed Thomas Aquinas to defend the unity of philosophy and divine science in a way that was unique among 13th-century thinkers (Wippel, 1995, pp. 85-86). For Thomas, the philosopher discusses God indirectly, specifically in God's role as the cause of the instances of being qua being (Wippel, 1995, p. 86). Thomas distinguished between theology based on reason and theology based on revelation. He believed that reason-based theology begins with "being qua being" and culminates in God, while revelation-based theology starts with God and ends with "being qua being" and creatures as reflections and resemblances of God. This harmony between these two types of theology in Thomas Aquinas stems from his theory on the relationship between reason and faith. In his view, reason and faith originate from a single source: God, who is both the revealer of divine truth and the creator of human reason. Therefore, no inherent contradiction exists between the two. If an apparent conflict arises, it must mean one of them is false or mistaken, because otherwise, it would imply that God propagates falsehoods, which is impossible. For this reason, Thomas accepted that theologians should utilize philosophical argumentation in their theological discourse.

It's worth noting that whether "being" (ens) and "existence" (esse) are used synonymously by Thomas Aquinas is a point of contention among Thomists. Consequently, there are disagreements in interpreting Aquinas's statement that "being is imposed from existence" (Ens imponitur ab esse). According to Doig, this statement indicates that being is distinct from existence (Wippel, 1995, pp. 111, 114). However, for Gilson, this same statement signifies that being is identical with existence (Gilson, 1994, pp. 29-45; Gilson, 1960, pp. 190-215). It should be noted that Gilson's theory has been criticized by McNerny (McInerny, 1959, pp. 315-335).

Thomas Aquinas held some key disagreements with his teacher, Albert the Great, on these points: Albert the Great rejected the threefold classification of philosophy's subject matter—namely, existence, primary causes, and God. Thomas, however, accepted this division, but reinterpreted it not as a segmentation of the subject itself, but rather as distinct issues or questions within philosophy. Here's a breakdown of the differences between Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas on key philosophical points: 1- Albert the Great rejected any form of argumentation concerning the cause of being qua being. Thomas, conversely, strongly argued for God's causality in relation to being qua being. 2- Albert the Great considered philosophy "divine" because it engaged with the most divine aspects of things. Thomas, on the other hand, deemed philosophy "divine" because it discussed God as the ultimate cause of philosophy's subject, which is being itself. 3: Albert the Great called philosophy "first philosophy" because it discussed its subject in a universal manner. For Thomas, philosophy was "first philosophy" because it discussed spiritual substances as the primary causes of being. 4- Albert the Great reduced all things to simple being as the universal form, thereby placing philosophy at the end of the hierarchy of sciences. Thomas, however, reduced all concepts to being as the fundamental basis of the reality of things. Similarly, for Thomas, philosophy is studied last, thus also placing it at the end of the hierarchy of sciences. 5-): Albert the Great referred to philosophy as "metaphysics" because the principles discussed in it transcend natural things. Thomas, however, called it "metaphysics" because it is situated at the end of the hierarchy of sciences. Due to this distinction, we can say that for Albert the Great, it was Transphysics (meaning beyond physics), while for Thomas, it was Metaphysics (meaning after physics).

However, a critique of Thomas Aquinas's theory could be raised by pointing out that, firstly, he created a gap between God and

universal being. This then begs the question: how is the separation and chasm between being qua being and God bridged in Thomas's thought? This question can't be answered through causality because a similarity (or kinship) between cause and effect is necessary. Both equivocation (shared word, different meaning) and univocity (same word, same meaning) are dismissed by Thomas Aquinas himself, so we must resort to analogy. Secondly, Thomas has confused universal being with particular beings. God is an instance of universal being, and the cause of particular beings. Therefore, universal being, or being qua being, has no cause. What is an effect are the instances (particulars), not the general concept of existence. However, Thomas elsewhere states that being qua being is not an effect because if it were, all beings would have to be effects, leading to an infinite regress of effects. Thus, there must be a being that is not an effect (Aquinas, 1947, II, 52; ST, q, 44, 1, ad, 1). This latter point would support Thomas's view.

6- Differences Among Avicenna , Averroes , Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas

The key difference among Avicenna , Averroes , and Thomas Aquinas lies in their understanding of the subject of philosophy: "being qua being." Avicenna considered "being qua being" (as the subject of philosophy) to encompass all existent things, from prime matter to God. For this reason, he accepted the univocity of being (meaning "being" has the same fundamental meaning across all existents) and consequently considered God's existence a matter to be discussed within philosophy itself. In contrast, Averroes equated being qua being with separate substances, considering God as the very subject of philosophy and thus a topic for the natural sciences (physics). Thomas Aquinas, however, applied being qua being exclusively to contingent beings, positing God as their cause. Simultaneously, for Thomas, God

is a concern of both philosophy and the natural sciences. Another fundamental disagreement between Thomas Aquinas and Avicenna lies in their explanation of the relationship between universal concepts and the subject of philosophy. For Avicenna, common notions are considered essential accidents of being qua being. However, for Thomas Aquinas, common notions are the essential accidents of being composed of existence and essence. Thomas also believed that philosophy, like being and unity, discusses "thing" (*res*), and "thing" can be predicated of everything that "being" can be predicated of. Such a conception of "thing" is not found in Aristotle, nor in Averroes or Albert the Great. Therefore, it can be seen as an influence of Avicenna on Thomas Aquinas.

Thomas says that both Plato and Aristotle consider God as the cause of all beings (Aquinas, 1947, pp. 304-306). He also states in his commentary on *Metaphysics*, section 1164, and in *Physics*, that Aristotle's book *Alpha of Metaphysics* contains a proof for the cause of existence. According to Gilson, the aforementioned substantial cause (*causa substantia*) in section 1164 and the cause of being (*causa esse*) in section 259 do not mean the cause of existence in the sense of creator (Gilson, 1960, pp. 70-71). However, for Avicenna, Averroes, and Albert the Great, the concept of a cause of existence is not present in Aristotle's philosophy.

Conclusion

It's clear from what has been discussed that ever since Aristotle defined the subject of philosophy as "being qua being," there have been disagreements among his interpreters regarding its meaning. This disagreement in ontology has permeated the entire structure of a philosopher's system, ultimately influencing their theology. For instance, Avicenna considers "being qua being" to be a universal

concept that applies to all beings, including the Necessary Existent. Therefore, his theology is considered an integral part of his ontology.

As a result, being qua being is the subject of philosophy, and God is one of its issues. However, Averroes, by critiquing Avicenna's view, offered a theological interpretation of being qua being, equating it with separate substances and considering God as the subject of philosophy. Since the subject of any science is assumed within that science, it must be proven in a higher science. Therefore, he considered it among the issues of physics. In the Christian tradition, Albert the Great rejected Averroes' view. Contrary to Averroes, who considered God the subject of philosophy, Albert believed the first created being of God, namely simple existence, to be the subject of philosophy. In his view, what Aristotle meant by being qua being was precisely this simple existence, and thus simple existence is the subject of philosophy.

Finally, Thomas Aquinas, by qualifying "being qua being," applied it only to contingent beings and considered God as their cause. At the same time, for him, God is considered an issue of philosophy from one perspective and an issue of physics from another. The differences in interpreting "being qua being" thus alter the relationship between ontology and theology on one hand, and the relationship between theology and metaphysics and physics on the other.

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