

A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION OF “BEING” IN THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

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Abstract

In this paper, I apply Heidegger's concept of Being to conduct a theological reflection of “Being” in the Book of Ecclesiastes. God's being is a supreme Dasein, which in terms of essence is the Word/Logos, and which embraces the feature of “de-severance”, that is, eternity.

In addition, as a creator, God's being-in-the-world is essentially care.

Key words: Being, Dasein, the word, de-severance, infinity

I. Introduction

In this paper I apply Heidegger's concept of Being to conduct a theological reflection of “Being” in the Book of Ecclesiastes. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger's analysis of the features of being can be mainly sorted out in the following ways. First, Being is always the Being of an entity, so it can be considered as an ontological theme. Second, an understanding of Being belongs to Dasein. Third, temporality is the meaning of the Being of that entity which we call “Dasein.” Fourth, logos as “discourse” is being of the Dasein of God. Fifth, Being-in-the-world is characteristic of “de-severance.” Finally, Being-in-the-world is essentially care.

Being is always the Being of an entity. The totality of entities can, in accordance with its various domains, become a field for laying bare and delimiting certain definite areas of subject-matter. Thus, Being is considered as an ontological theme. It comports itself

proximally and in a way which is essentially constant—in terms of the ‘world.’ In Dasein itself, and therefore in its own understanding of Being, the way the world is understood is reflected back ontologically upon the way in which Dasein itself gets interpreted (Heidegger, 29-37).

An understanding of Being belongs to Dasein, but this understanding develops or decays along with whatever kind of Being Dasein may possess at the time. Any of the ‘categories’ such an idea prescribes may not be forced upon Dasein without proper ontological consideration (Heidegger, 37).

In addition, we shall point to temporality as the meaning of the Being of that entity which we call “Dasein.” If this is to be demonstrated, those structures of Dasein which we shall exhibit must be interpreted as modes of temporality. Time must be brought to light—and genuinely conceived—as the horizon for all understanding of Being and for any way of interpreting it. In

order for us to discern this, time needs to be explicated primordially as the horizon for the understanding of Being, and in terms of temporality as the Being of Dasein, which understands Being. 'Time' has long functioned as an ontological—or rather than ontical-criterion for naively discriminating various realms of entities. And we are accustomed to contrasting the 'timeless' meaning of propositions with the 'temporal' course of propositional assertions. It is also held that there is 'cleavage' between 'temporal' entities and the 'supra-temporal' eternal, and efforts are made to bridge this over (Heidegger, 39).

Furthermore, the being of Dasein of God is logos. If we say that the basic signification of logos is "discourse," then this word-for-word translation will not be validated until we have determined what is meant by "discourse" itself. Logos gets translated as "reason," "judgement," "concept," "definition," "ground," or "relationship." (Heidegger, 55). Indeed, logos is a letting-something-be-seen. One must let them be seen as something unhidden; that is, they must be discovered. Similarly, 'being false' amounts to deceiving in the sense of covering up; putting something in front of something and thereby passing it off as something which it is not. "Truth" has this meaning, and logos is actually a definite mode of letting something be seen. And because the function of the logos lies in merely letting something be seen, in letting entities be perceived, logos can signify the reason

(Heidegger, 57-58).

II. God's being of entity is the Word, an ontological theme of Dasein

"In the beginning was the Word/Logos, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Gospel John 1: 1). The Word is the being of the absolute transcendental One, Who is beyond the limitation of time before the creation of the whole cosmos. The Word, however, was incarnated into flesh and came into being in this world. Since then, He had been limited to the temporality of the operation of the whole universe until His resurrection and ascension. In fact, with the creation of the world, the totality of Being/Dasein is subjected to the temporality of this earth. That's why Jesus the flesh of God is also destined to be limited to such temporality.

When in flesh, the Word is the manifestation of God. "No one hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (Gospel John 1: 18). The Word brought the being of God into light; He interpreted and explained the invisible God in heaven. Full of truth and grace, His intrinsic essence was so rich that four perspectives are required for its explanation—in fact, all four gospels are messages for transmitting the understanding/knowledge of God to the world. In other words, with His expression varying with diverse perspectives, the Word of God is the language of God, which serves to express the intrinsic matter of the

transcendental One. Likewise, Being is language with various forms varying with time perspectives.

III. Dasein of the Word exceeding temporality and transforming into Rema

The Word has a double meaning in Greek; its translation can be either “Logos” or “Rema.” In the beginning Logos preexisted with God and He was transformed into flesh within temporality. And then His crucifixion might result in the declaration of God’s death. Actually, Logos was dead just as St. Paul held that “the letter/the dead Logos kills”(2 Cor. 3: 6). The death of the Word, however, has an unconcealed side, which can be considered a margin with the function of supplementing the insufficiency of Nietzsche’s declaration. “For the preaching/the word of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1: 18). An unconcealed aspect of the Word is actually related to the living and diachronic nature of Rema, which is the metamorphosis of the dead Logos. For after the crucifixion of the Word, He was transformed into the living Word, that is, Rema, which in one sense broke the life-death cycle, exceeding the synchronic nature of temporality and rejuvenating His being within a diachronic temporality. Thus this accounts for Roman 10: 8, “But what saith it? The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the Word of faith, which we preach.” Thus, it is

inferred that just as he neglected the unconcealed salvation of this world in Ecclesiastes, so Nietzsche neglected or intentionally disregarded the unconcealed aspect of the Word. Furthermore, I go on the assumption that the misleading eschatology in some degree led to Nietzsche’s inspiration of “eternal recurrence.” Likewise, Nietzsche’s unawareness of the nature of Rema might result in his declaration, which provided a wrong premise for the decentered subject in postmodernity and a critical insight to the explanation of Jameson’s postmodern temporality.

IV. De-severance/infinity of the Word

On the one hand, infinity here refers to boundless Nature. On the other hand, in theology, infinity means eternal life. “He hath made everything beautiful in its time; also he hath set the world in their heart, so that man findeth not out from the beginning to the end the work that God doeth” (Ecclesiastes 3: 11). Here “the world” a Hebrew theological jargon can also be translated into “the infinite.” Therefore, it can be seen that God set the eternal life in men’s heart.

In addition to being characteristic of the Hebrew world view, Wordsworth’s “The Prelude” also explicitly portrayed his cosmology. Just as God is the center of the universe, man rules over all creations. The created world is confined to an absolute patriarchal power frame in which God is “the compass of the universe.” This

theological conception of Wordsworth is consistent with Alfred Tennyson's lines in his poem—*Crossing the Bar* in which he depicted God as an infinite pilot in his life journey.

For though from out of our bourne
of Time and Place

The flood may bear me far,

I hope to see my Pilot face to face

When I have crost the bar. (Bloom,

638)

Regarding the infinity and sovereignty of the transcendental God, I tend to accept Hegel's explanation of world history by the concept of Spirit. "The movement of understanding is constantly from the whole to the part and back to the whole. Our task is to extend in concentric circles the unity of the understood meaning. The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding" (Gadamer, 259). Wordsworth's language that speaks to us is inseparable from a theological understanding of the following lines:

To hold fit converse with the
spiritual world, And with the generations of
mankind Spread over time, past, present, and to
come, Age after age, till Time shall be no more.
Such minds are truly from the Deity, For they
are Powers. (Book Fourteenth, lines 108-13)

**V. Daein of the Word is God's Spirit,
who as being-in-the world cares
the World**

God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, and in his being, He is wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

The belief of God's essence is the foundation of all religious worship. (Heb 11:1.) He that comes to God must believe that he is.' There must be a first cause, which gives being to all things besides. We know that there is a God.

The world could not make itself. Who could hang the earth on nothing but the great God? Who could provide such rich furniture for the heavens, the glorious constellations, the firmament bespangled with such glittering lights? We see God's glory blazing in the sun, twinkling in the stars. Who could give the earth its clothing, cover it with grass and corn, adorn it with flowers, enrich it with gold? God only. (Job 38:8.) Who but God could make the sweet music in the heavens, cause the angels to join in concert, and sound forth the praises of their Maker? (Job 38:8.) The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.' If a man should go into a far country, and see stately edifices there, he would never imagine that these built themselves, but that some greater power had built them. To imagine that the work of the creation was not framed by God, is as if we should conceive a curious landscape to be drawn by a pencil without the hand of an artist. (Acts 17: 24.) God that made the world, and all things therein.' To create is proper to the Deity. The wise government of all things evinces there is a God. God is the great

superintendent of the world, he holds the golden reins of government in his hand, guiding all things most regularly and harmoniously to their proper end. Who that eyes Providence but must be forced to acknowledge there is a God.

Besides, man is a microcosm or lesser world. The excellent contexture and frame of his body is wrought curiously as with needlework. (Psa 139:15.) I was curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.' This body is endowed with a noble soul. Who but God could make such a union of different substances as flesh and spirit? In him we live, and move, and have our being. The quick motion of every part of the body shows there is a God. We may see something of him in the sparkling of the eye; and if the cabinet of the body be so curiously wrought, what is the jewel? The soul has a celestial brightness in it; as Damascene says, It is a diamond set in a ring of clay.' What noble faculties is the soul endowed with! Understanding, Will, Affections are a glass of the Trinity, as Plato speaks. The matter of the soul is spiritual, it is a divine spark lighted from heaven; and being spiritual, is immortal, as Scaliger notes; *anima non senescit*; the soul does not wax old,' it lives for ever. Who could create a soul ennobled with such rare angelic properties but God? We must needs say as the Psalmist, It is he that has made us, and not we ourselves.' (Psa 100:10.)

That there is a God, appears by his unlimited power and sovereignty. He who can work, and none can hinder, is the true God; but God can do so. (Isa 43:13.) I will work, and who shall let it?' Nothing can hinder action but some superior power; but there is no power above God: all power that is, is by him, therefore all power is under him; he has a mighty arm.' (Psa 89:13.) He sees the designs men drive at against him, and plucks off their chariot wheels; he makes the diviners mad. (Isa 44:45.) He cutteth off the spirit of princes; he bridled the sea, gives check to the leviathan, binds the devil in chains; he acts according to his pleasure, he doth what he will. I will work, and who shall let it?'

Furthermore, in terms of the Spirit, God is an immaterial substance, of a pure, subtile, unmixed essence, not compounded of body and soul, without all extension of parts. The body is a dreggish thing. The more spiritual God's essence, the more noble and excellent it is. The spirits are the more refined part of the wine.

We must conceive of him spiritually. In his attributes; his holiness, justice, and goodness, which are the beams by which his divine nature shines forth. We must conceive of him as he is in Christ. Christ is the image of the invisible God.' (Col 1:15.) Set the eyes of

your faith on Christ as God-man. In Christ we see some sparklings of the divine glory; in him there is the exact resemblance of all his Father's excellencies. The wisdom, love, and holiness of God the Father, shine forth in Christ. (John 14:4.) He that has seen me has seen the Father.'

God is infinite. All created beings are finite. Though infinite may be applied to all God's attributes - he is infinitely merciful, infinitely wise, infinitely holy.

The Greek word for infinite' signifies without bounds or limits.' God is not confined to any place, he is infinite, and so is present in all places at once. His centre is everywhere, *Divina essentia nusquam inclusa aut exclusa* [In no place is God's Being either confined or excluded]. Augustine. (I Kings 8:87.)Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee.' The Turks build their temples open at the top, to show that God cannot be confined to them, but is in all places by his presence. God's essence is not limited either to the regions above, or to the terrestrial globe, but is everywhere. As philosophers say of the soul, it is, *Tota in tota, et tota in qualibet parte*:

the soul is in every part of the body,' in the eye, heart, foot; so we may say of God, he is ubique, his essence is everywhere; his circuit is in heaven, and in earth, and sea, and he is in all places of his circuit at once. This is to be infinite.' God, who bounds everything else, is himself without bounds. He sets bounds to the sea; *Huc usque; Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further;*' he sets bounds to the angels; they, like the cherubims, move and stand at his appointment,(Ezek 10:16), but he is infinite, without bounds. He who can span the heavens, and weigh the earth in scales, must needs be infinite. (Isa 40:02.)

Vorstius maintains that God is in all places at once, but not in regard of his essence; but *Virtute et potentia*, by his virtue and influence: as the body of the sun is in heaven, it only sends forth its beams and influences to the earth; or as a king, who is in all places of his kingdom authoritatively, by his power and authority, but he is personally on his throne.

God, who is infinite, is in all places at once, not only by his influence, but by his essence;

If God be infinite by his omnipresence, then see the greatness and immenseness of the divine majesty! What a great God do we serve! (I Chron 29:91.) Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the glory, and the majesty, and thou art exalted as head above all.' Well may the Scripture display the greatness of his glory, who is infinite in all places. He transcends our weak conceptions; how can our finite understanding comprehend him who is infinite? He is infinitely above all our praises. (Neh 9:9.) Blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.' Oh what a poor nothing is man, when we think of God's infiniteness! As the stars disappear at the rising of the sun, oh, how does a man shrink into nothing when infinite majesty shines forth in its glory! (Isa 40:15.) The nations are as a drop of the bucket, or the small dust of the balance!' On what a little of that drop are we! The heathens thought they had sufficiently praised Jupiter when they called him great Jupiter. Of what immense majesty is God, who fills all places at once! (Psa 150:0.)

in the Book of Ecclesiastes is an ontological entity whose Dasein abides in the Word, which as Rema is characterized by "de-severance." That is, God's being actually goes beyond temporality, and indeed is the Spirit itself.

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VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, "the world/infinity"