
UNIT 1 ENTITY

Contents

- 1.0 Objective
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Entity as Supposit
- 1.3 Entity as Individual
- 1.4 Entity as Finite
- 1.5 Entity as Historico-temporal
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 Key Words
- 1.8 Further Readings and References
- 1.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVE

Being, as we have seen, is that which is in some way or something. That which is in some way or something is in its own way in each being. As each being is in its own way, all beings are in their own ways. As all beings are in their own ways, there would be a plurality of beings that are many entities. In this unit, you are invited to study the meaning and implication of:

- Entity as supposit
- Entity as individual
- Entity as finite
- Entity as categorial
- Entity as historico-temporal

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Being is not something like a being. Being is what enables beings as beings, that in terms of which beings are already understood. If we grasp Being we will clarify the meaning of being, or sense of being. It means that in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something. This sense of being precedes any notions of how or in what manner any particular being or beings exist. It is pre-conceptual, non-propositional, and hence pre-scientific. At the same time, there is no access to Being other than via beings themselves—hence pursuing the question of Being inevitably means asking about *a* being with regard to its being. A true understanding of Being can only proceed by referring to particular beings or entities.

1.2 ENTITY AS SUPPOSIT

Accidents belong to their substance and inhere in it. They do not exist completely in themselves. Secondary or universal substances, expressed in species and genus, are communicated to, and predicated of, the individual substances. They do not exist

completely in themselves. But *supposit* or '*hypostasis*' is an individual, concrete substance which exists completely in itself, and thus incommunicable to any other being. It does not belong to another; it is the whole containing all the parts; it is the ultimate reality to which all functions, powers, and perfections of that particular being are referred; it is the possessor of its entire nature; it is self-contained and autonomous; it is that which is supposed; it is that to which all actions are referred; it is that which acts; it is the ultimate subject of actions or operations, e.g., this individual tree, this beast, this human, etc. It includes everything that can be predicated of a being. It is distinct from nature as the latter is part of supposit. It also takes in the accidents; whereas the nature does not. In other words, *supposit* or '*hypostasis*' is a *subsisting, distinct, complete being of a certain nature*. *Subsisting* means existing by an act of existing which it has on its own. It is not derived from another principle. It is that mode of existence in virtue of which a thing is self-contained and autonomous in its operations. *Distinct* means adequately distinct, i.e., not identical with any other. It is incommunicable to any other being as it already exists in act. Such a being can never be assumed by a higher supposit since their union could only be at best an accidental union. However, it is not impossible for an individual nature to be assumed by a higher supposit, and to exist, not by its own proper being, but by the being of the higher supposit. For instance, the human nature of Christ is not a human person as it does not exist by its own proper being, but by the divine being of the Word. *Complete being*: It is not a part or a principle of a being (human soul is not human supposit). It is the whole being. It is a complete individual substance which has subsistence. *Certain nature*: The supposit must be of a certain nature, i.e., it must have a root principle which gives the actions the ultimate unity which they (action) manifest, e.g., mineral, vegetative, animal, human and divine natures. Hence, all supposits are not finite persons; but all finite persons are supposits. The distinction is implicit in the traditional interpretation of 'person' by Severin Boethius and Aquinas. According to them, '*person is a subsisting, distinct, complete being of an intellectual nature*'. Supposit is of non-intellectual nature; whereas person is of *intellectual nature*. The common characteristic distinctive of God, spirits and human being is *intellectuality*. It is lacking in all beings below the level of human beings. Intellectuality is distinct from 'rationality'. The term 'rational' means 'having reason' or 'having the faculty of reasoning'; hence it cannot be applied to God. God is intellectual but not rational in this sense.

1.3 ENTITY AS INDIVIDUAL

The specific nature of a being is the result of the union of its proximate genus and specific difference. For instance, the specific nature of human consists of the proximate genus 'animal' and the specific difference 'rational'. The union of the two constitutes the specific nature of human who is a 'rational animal'. The specific nature is alike in all humans; for all humans possess the nature of a rational animal. From this standpoint alone there would be no difference in the concept one human and another. In an existing human this general 'specific human nature' becomes an 'individual human nature'. This is done through the union of the 'specific nature' with 'individuality'. For instance, Napoleon, through his individuality, is not merely a man, *but this man Napoleon*.

Still the question is: What is the principle of absolute individuation which makes an individual to be individual? Is individuality a reality really distinct from the reality of the specific nature? In this case, the principle of absolute individuation would be the entity of the individuality as such, and not the nature at all. Or, are the specific nature and individuality in an existing individual entitatively identical, with merely a distinction in

thought between them, so that they form a *metaphysical union*? In that case the formal principle of absolute individuation would be the entity of the individual nature or essence itself, and there would be only a virtual distinction between individuality and specific nature in an individual being. The latter view is preferred and it can be demonstrated in this way: The specific nature in itself must either be a universal or an individual nature. If it is universal, then a universal nature would exist as a universal. However, a universal nature cannot exist in the physical order of things as a universal. Therefore, the specific nature must exist as an individual nature. But if it comes into existence as an individual nature the entity of individuality is entirely superfluous and can no longer make it individual as it is already an individual nature in itself when it comes into existence. Hence the individuality of an existing nature is not really distinct (but only mentally) from the existing nature itself, and the principle of absolute individuation of an individual is the nature or essence itself. In other words, every specific nature becomes an individuated nature. Therefore, individuality is solely a manner of existence for nature. Then, the distinction between the specific nature and the individuality of an existing individual is a mental or logical distinction. They are distinct in concept because we define them differently. The question is: Is there a ground or reason or foundation in the individuals for making this distinction in concepts? It can be answered in this way: Individuality is the same for all beings. It is that which makes a specific nature to become individuated in this particular individual. But there is a great variety of specific natures among existing beings, each of which is individuated in a large number of existing individuals. Here we have the ground or foundation in the things themselves for our making a mental or logical distinction between the nature and the individuality in them. Now when there is such a foundation for making this distinction, the distinction is not real nor purely mental, but virtual. Therefore, there is a virtual distinction between the nature and its individuality.

The next question is: What is the principle which individuates a specific nature into a number of individuals or individual natures? This is the *principle of relative individuation*. The principle of relative individuation is *matter affected or signated by dimensive quantity*. It can be explained in this way: Since it is question of the plurality of individuals in the same species, the principle of individuation must be a principle of plurality. Plurality implies division and divisibility. The ground of divisibility will also be the ground or principle of plurality. Consequently, the ground or principle of relative individuation must be that ground of divisibility which enables a specific nature to be multiplied into a plurality of individual natures. Now in physical order the principle of divisibility is matter affected by dimensive quantity. When a portion of matter is separated from another, a plurality is effected in it which gives rise to a plurality of individuals of the same species.

Check Your Progress I
Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.
1) What do you mean by supposit?
.....
.....
.....
.....

2) Explain briefly the principle of relative individuation.

1.4 ENTITY AS FINITE

A being is ‘that which is in a particular way.’ The Latin word for being is *ens* which in English is rendered as entity. Everything that we see around us can be termed as beings or entities. The word being assumes different significances according to the situations. In our study of the metaphysics of being it should be taken to mean ... ‘anything that exists in the world.’ Being primarily denotes existence. Anything that has no existence can be said to be a non-being.

Something that really exists is said to be a real being. There might be some things which do not have concrete existence, for example, I may imagine an apple tree in my garden. As long the apple tree remains an object of imagination only the being of it is merely an imaginary being. However, everything that has real existence and even the imaginary beings can be termed as beings.

The metaphysical meaning of ‘being’

We shall now examine the metaphysical sense of the term being. The most important features of a being are the following:

- a) Being is referred to as something that *is*. This reference to being as something that *is* places it in contrast to *what is not* or non-being.
- b) In the language of metaphysics, being is said to be an *act*. By *act* we do not mean an action but the primordial basis of action. When we say that a being is an *act* we mean thereby that the being referred to makes its being felt by the fact of its existence. Hence, by *act* we have to understand the very act of being existent.
- c) The notion of being has a primacy over every other knowledge. The first thing that our intellect grasps with regards a thing is that *it is* or *it exists*. Without this primary notion of existence no other knowledge about a thing is possible.
- d) The notion of being is not a notion of a genus. By genus we understand the distinguishing and essential aspect of a thing. For example, man’s rational nature distinguishes him from animals. When we say that the notion of being is not the notion of a genus, we mean that the word being encompasses everything; that it has maximum extension without any specification. Being embraces all realities that are real or imaginable.

Being, in so far as it embraces all realities, is an analogical term. An analogical term is a term which stresses certain similarities of a thing in relation with another object without going into the details of characteristics or perfections of the things compared to. For instance, we may refer to God and human as beings. By this we mean both are

existing in reality. The term being is analogical because it can refer to the existence of the most supreme entity as well as the most insignificant thing we can imagine.

Finite Being as Categorical

According to Aristotle, a category is what describes the manner of a being. Substance and accidents are the basic manners of being to which all reality can be reduced. A being may be brought under 10 categories. These categories are the following: substance, quality, quantity, relation, localization, position, possession, time, action, and passion. For example, we may attribute these categories to Peter (substance), who is healthy (quality), of normal weight (quantity), son of Paul (relation), who is in his room (localization), and is seated (position), who has a pen in hand (possession), who is awake at 6 a.m (time), who is engaged in writing a letter (action), and who is now thirsty (passion). Thus nine accidents and substance together make up 10 categories. The said ten categories are considered to be the ten supreme classes (or genera) of being.

1.5 ENTITY AS HISTORICO-TEMPORAL

Heidegger in his most famous work “Being and Time” wants to find out what being as such means. He called it a fundamental ontology. He distinguishes between an entity (anything that is) and the being of an entity. He calls this distinction the ‘ontological distinction.’ Being of an entity is the meaningful presence of that entity within the range of human experience. Among all beings only human being is characterized with the understanding of being.

Heidegger defined ‘being’ in a different way than most other philosophers did. Traditionally, philosophers have defined being as the ground of essence and existence, that which provides the ‘foundation’ for a thing. Plato called this foundation as the eternal or universal form of things; Aristotle named it as the real substance; medieval theologians tried to define beings as things taking origin from the most superior being, the infinite. Refusing to conceive being as a kind of superior entity, an eternal foundation, ground, cause or origin of things, Heidegger argued that for something ‘to be’ means for it to disclose or to present itself. Being has to do with the “is”: what an entity is, how it is, and the fact that it is at all.

For this disclosure or self-manifesting of an entity to occur, there must be a clearing, an opening. Human existence constitutes the openness necessary for the disclosure of entities to take place. When such disclosure occurs through openness that I am, I encounter an entity as an entity, that is, I *understand* what it is. Heidegger uses the term “Dasein” to name this peculiar receptivity of human existence for the self-manifesting of being. In German the particle *da* means ‘here’ or ‘there’, while *sein* is the German verb ‘to be’. By Dasein Heidegger meant the ontological presence of man.

Human entity is distinguished by its awareness of the being of entities, including the being of itself. Heidegger names the human entity ‘Dasein’ whose being consists in disclosing and understanding being, whether the being of itself or that of other entities. In so far as Dasein’s being is a disclosure of its own being, it is called ‘existence’ or ‘ek-sistence’. Heidegger argues that Dasein’s own being is intrinsically temporal, not in the usual chronological sense but in a unique existential sense: Dasein ek-sists (stands – out) towards its future. This ek-sistential temporality refers to the fact that Dasein is

**Metaphysical Nature of
Finite Being**

always and necessarily becoming itself and ultimately becoming its own death. When used of Dasein, the word ‘temporality’ indicates not chronological succession but Dasein’s finitude and mortal becoming.

Heidegger argues that mortality is our defining moment, that we are thrown into limited worlds of sense shaped by our being-towards-death, and that finite meaning is all the reality we get. He claims that most of us have forgotten the radical finitude of ourselves and the world we live in. If Dasein’s being is thoroughly and radically temporal, then all of human awareness is conditioned by this temporality, including one’s understanding of being. For Dasein, being is always known temporally and indeed is temporal. Time is the meaning of all forms of being. The two main theses of ‘Being and time’ – that Dasein is temporal and that the meaning of being is time – may be interpreted thus: being is disclosed only finitely within Dasein’s radically finite awareness. Since Dasein is radically finite, disclosure is radically finite.

To be human means that one is not a static entity just ‘there’ among other things. Rather, being human is always a process of becoming oneself, living into possibilities, into one’s future. The ultimate possibility into which one lives is the possibility to end all possibilities: one’s death. Human beings are essentially finite and necessarily mortal, and so one’s becoming is an anticipation of death. Heidegger calls this mortal becoming ‘being-unto-death’. Dasein exists finitely and thus death is essentially and intrinsically inherent in its existence. Thus, Dasein constantly faces the possibility of the impossibility of itself or Dasein.

Authentic existence is born of the experience of inherent finitude, temporality, mortality. Authentic Dasein lives in the constant anticipation of death. This calls for an authentic awareness of one’s intrinsic finite nature. Being of Dasein is being-towards death. For the inauthentic Dasein, the past is over and the future is not yet and he wants to enjoy the present to forget its inherent temporality and finitude , its being-toward-death. The sign of an authentic existence is seen in the awareness of one’s essential mortality.

Check Your Progress II

- Note :** a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

- 1) Explain the various meanings of Being.
-
-
-
- 2) What do you understand by authentic existence?
-
-
-
-
-

1.6 LET US SUM UP

Every finite being constitutes a totality, a universe complete and closed in itself; it allows of no outside, everything can be said in it; yet this very totality is simultaneously marked by an irreducible finitude. The inner tension of a finite totality is attested by a loop that pertains to our basic attitude towards things. Spontaneously, we somehow presuppose that every entity depends on some sort of “external” reality, that it “renders” an independent state of things, yet this “external” reality is always-already disclosed through its own fundamental constitution rooted in Being, in the Being of entities.

1.7 KEY WORDS

- Hypostasis** : Hypostasis (Greek) means *that which stands beneath*.
- Ontology** : Ontology (from the Greek *on*, genitive *ontos*: of being and *logia*: science, study, theory) is the philosophical study of the nature of being in general, as well as the basic categories of being and their relations.

1.8 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

Alvira, Thomas, Claveil, Luis/Melendo, Thomas. *Metaphysics*. Manila: Sinag-Tala Publishers, 1982.

Copelston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy, Greece and Rome*. Part, 1, Vol. 1. New York: Image Book, 1963

Coreth, Emerich. *Metaphysics, English Edition by Joseph Donceel with a Critique by Bernard Lonergan*. New York: Seabury Press, 1973.

Correya, Bosco. *Heidegger and Sankara: A Comparative Study of ‘Thinking of Being’ and “Advaita.”* Kalamassery: Jyotir Dharma Publications, 2003

Mercier, Jean L. *From Socrates to Wittgenstein*. Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1998

Panthanmackal, George. *One in Many*. Bangalore: SFS Publications, 1993

Panthanmackal, George. *Coming and Going: An Introduction to Metaphysics from Western Perspectives*. Bangalore: SFS Publications, 1993

Stumpf, Samuel Enoch. *Philosophy, History and Problems*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994.

1.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

- 1) Supposit or ‘hypostasis’ *is a subsisting, distinct, complete being of a certain nature*. *Subsisting* means existing by an act of existing which it has on its own. It is not derived from another principle. It is that mode of existence in virtue of which a thing is self-contained and autonomous in its operations. *Distinct* means adequately distinct, i.e., not identical with any other. It is incommunicable to any

other being as it already exists in act. Such a being can never be assumed by a higher supposit since their union could only be at best an accidental union. However, it is not impossible for an individual nature to be assumed by a higher supposit, and to exist, not by its own proper being, but by the being of the higher supposit. For instance, the human nature of Christ is not a human person as it does not exist by its own proper being, but by the divine being of the Word. *Complete being*: It is not a part or a principle of a being (human soul is not human supposit). It is the whole being. It is a complete individual substance which has subsistence. *Certain nature*: The supposit must be of a certain nature, i.e., it must have a root principle which gives the actions the ultimate unity which they (action) manifest, e.g., mineral, vegetative, animal, human and divine natures. Hence, all supposits are not finite persons; but all finite persons are supposits. The distinction is implicit in the traditional interpretation of 'person' by Severin Boethius and Aquinas. According to them, '*person is a subsisting, distinct, complete being of an intellectual nature*'. Supposit is of non-intellectual nature; whereas person is of *intellectual nature*. The common characteristic distinctive of God, spirits and human being is *intellectuality*. It is lacking in all beings below the level of human beings. Intellectuality is distinct from 'rationality'. The term 'rational' means 'having reason' or 'having the faculty of reasoning'; hence it cannot be applied to God. God is intellectual but not rational in this sense.

- 2) The principle of relative individuation is *matter affected or signated by dimensive quantity*. It can be explained in this way: Since it is question of the plurality of individuals in the same species, the principle of individuation must be a principle of plurality. Plurality implies division and divisibility. The ground of divisibility will also be the ground or principle of plurality. Consequently, the ground or principle of relative individuation must be that ground of divisibility which enables a specific nature to be multiplied into a plurality of individual natures. Now in physical order the principle of divisibility is matter affected by dimensive quantity. When a portion of matter is separated from another, a plurality is effected in it which gives rise to a plurality of individuals of the same species.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

- 1) We shall now examine the metaphysical sense of the term being. The most important features of a being are the following:
 - a) Being is referred to as something that *is*. This reference to being as something that *is* places it in contrast to *what is not* or non-being.
 - b) In the language of metaphysics, being is said to be an *act*. By *act* we do not mean an action but the primordial basis of action. When we say that a being is an *act* we mean thereby that the being referred to make its being felt by the fact of its existence. Hence, by *act* we have to understand the very act of being existent.
 - c) The notion of being has a primacy over every other knowledge. The first thing that our intellect grasps with regards a thing is that *it is* or *it exists*. Without this primary notion of existence no other knowledge about a thing is possible.
 - d) The notion of being is not a notion of a genus. By genus we understand the distinguishing and essential aspect of a thing. For example, man's rational

nature distinguishes him from animals. When we say that the notion of being is not the notion of a genus, we mean that the word being encompasses everything; that it has maximum extension without any specification. Being embraces all realities that are real or imaginable.

- 2) Authentic existence is born of the experience of inherent finitude, temporality, mortality. Authentic Dasein lives in the constant anticipation of death. This calls for an authentic awareness of one's intrinsic finite nature. Being of Dasein is being-towards death. For the inauthentic Dasein, the past is over and the future is not yet and he wants to enjoy the present to forget its inherent temporality and finitude, its being-toward-death. The sign of an authentic existence is seen in the awareness of one's essential mortality.