

Being and the Good

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1.

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Iwould like to start with recalling a question which is surprisingly unanimously considered if not the most basic, then in any case one of the most important questions of metaphysics. It is: ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’

The quoted question, expressed in this form relatively late by Leibniz, is hidden *implicite* among the assumptions of all metaphysical inquiries based on the experience of the randomness of being. The fact of the reference to being should be emphasised here in a special way: the question does not ask about why – for example – it is the way it is, and not any other way, but it directly concerns the ‘is’ itself. The question asks, to put it briefly, about the reason for being.

The question derives from the depths of our existential experience. Nothing is more obvious to us than the passing of everything that is directly given to us. We rightly associate passing with time from which there is no escape. We experience a

process of aging which occurs in us in a different way than in nature: it is reborn every year, while we inevitably succumb to the constant dwindling of our life forces and we feel our coming to an end more and more painfully. There is no one thing that would guarantee lasting. This concerns the material and spiritual things, and also the values realized in the world. The drama of its passing is perhaps the most painful thing for us. We observe the irreversible course of events in which the best of us give their lives away. We can see the occasionally growing waves of interpersonal mindless hatred and the surge of uncontrollable barbarism destroying the most wonderful creations of human genius. At times it happens in the name of good understood in this or that way. The tragedy of the situation, therefore, consists in equivalent values grappling in a scuffle where at least one of them must be thwarted¹. The questions which are then born within us, the questions like ‘Why are things like this?’, are not entirely metaphysical questions, even though they reach metaphysics. In order to get to them, one needs to reach deeper. It is not only about why things happen like this or like that, but why in general anything is.

If we preceded the arguments of the “five ways” of Saint Thomas with a question, we could formulate them in the following way: ‘Why is there change (movement)?’, ‘Why does causality exist?’, ‘Why does the order among beings exist?’ etc. As for ‘the third way’, our question would have to be: ‘Why does anything exist at all, since it is possible not to exist or since it in itself has no reason for being?’. A text of Saint Thomas leaves no doubt about the legitimacy of raising exactly this issue – after all it states the fact of the possibility of non-being:

[...] We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be [...] But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not (quod possibile est non esse quandoque non est). Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by something already existing.²

The philosopher to whom we owe the classic formulation of our question is G.W. Leibniz. In his treatise *The Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason* we find: “Having accepted this principle [namely the principle of sufficient reason – W.S.] we have a right to ask the first question which will be: ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’ For nothing is simpler and easier than something”³.

From the last sentence of the quote above, we can draw the conclusion that something is not easier and simpler, so it is complex, complicated,

¹ See M. Scheler, *O zjawisku tragiczności* [On the Phenomenon of the Tragic], trans. R. Ingarden, Lwów 1938.

² Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on the Divine Nature. Summa Theologiae*, I, q.2, a.3, resp. 1-26 (The e-text version based on the translation available on www.gutenberg.org).

³ G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Works of Leibniz*, translated by George Martin Duncan, Kessinger Publishing, 2003, p. 303.

108 it demands effort, and, therefore, strength or power to sustain itself. We will go back to this issue when considering possible answers to this ‘first’ question.

R. Ingarden also observed the necessity of asking the question under discussion in metaphysics, understood as the science of the essence of the actually existing world in the sense of the entirety of being:

[...] it is precisely the fact of the unnecessary of the real world in relation to its idea – both as far as its being and full definition are concerned! – leads to the question of why it actually exists and in its essence is defined as it happens in reality. What constitutes the basis of its being, and the basis which would lie within the scope of individual existence, as searching for this basis within the idea is futile in advance⁴.

The most precise analysis of our question was carried out by M. Heidegger. “Why is there existence at all, rather than nothing? That is the question. It is not perhaps any question. ‘Why is there existence at all, rather than nothing?’ – apparently, this is the first of all questions. [...] Everyone is affected by the hidden power of this question at least once and, in fact, he does not understand what is happening to him at that moment”⁵. This question, according to Heidegger, is not the first question in the temporal sense, but because of its importance. It owes its status to the fact that it is the most general, profound and originary. Due to its generality, it includes all existence, it does not stop at any detailed existence. It asks about ‘existence as a whole, existence as such’.

The profundity of this question is in the fact that it reaches to the basis of all existence, to the ultimate, to the limit. And finally its originarity: it turns out that it ‘spurts’ from itself, that it creates its own basis from itself. “Due to the fact that the basis of all reliable inquiries spurts from the question ‘Why is there existence at all, and not rather nothing?’ and that in this way the question is a pre-jump, the origin, we have to consider this question to be the most originary one”⁶.

What is most unsettling in the discussed question is its reference to nothing, to nothingness. Heidegger attempts to limit the question to its first part: ‘Why is there existence at all?’ It turns out, however, that in this perspective not only does it lose its dramatic quality, but it also closes the way to revealing what is most important: the being of existence. “We ask: ‘Why is there existence at all, rather than nothing?’ Seemingly, we only hold onto existence in this question and we avoid futile philosophising about existence. But what are we actually asking about? Why is there existence as such? We ask about the basis of what existence *is* and what it *is*, and that it is not nothing instead. Essentially, we ask about being. But in what way? We ask about the being of existence. We interrogate existence about its being”⁷.

⁴ R. Ingarden, *Spór o istnienie świata* [The Controversy over the Existence of the World], vol. 1, Warszawa 1987, p. 59.

⁵ M. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

“Thus, it turns out that the question ‘Why is there existence at all rather than nothing?’ makes us ask an introductory question: ‘What is the case with being?’ [...] At the same time, the most important thing is to be constantly aware of the fact that we are unable to directly and clearly grasp the being of existence – neither in existence, nor amid existence, nor anywhere else”⁸.

In this way, the answer has been outlined. Existence, concrete existence, what is directly given to us exists due to being. Only being is.

Let us leave the accuracy of Heidegger’s answer on the side. The task remains. What we mean to find is an accurate, justified answer to the fundamental question of metaphysics.

2.

European thought has found two sequences of answers to the question: ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’. The Absolute of Existence is the patron of the first one, the Absolute of Good – of the second one.

The first one was initiated by Parmenides. He outstripped the question itself with his brilliant intuition of existence: ‘Existence is, nonexistence is not.’ Through centuries this mysterious truth has been meditated over, analysing more and more precisely the appropriate meaning of the words expressing it.

However, in fact not only did Parmenides outstrip the question, but he also cancelled it out. Since nonexistence is not, it does not threaten existence. There is no point asking: ‘Why is it?’ One might say: ‘It is because it is’, or simply ‘is’. What is beyond it is not nonexistence, as there is no nonexistence, but an illusion, a false experience of the world of ‘people with two faces’. Illusion should not be mixed with non-existence, although such a temptation exists, and even the greatest will succumb to it. This illusion will be fought – in a different way in each case – by Plato, Descartes, and Kant. The question of the possibility of illusion is not equivalent, though, with the question of the possibility of non-existence.

If there exists something which can not fail to exist, one needs to find the reason for that which exists despite the possibility of non-existence. The possibility discussed here is not fiction or an illusion. It is a real possibility, as it were, inscribed in the existence of the existent. But also the reason, which the possibility of non-existence is capable of overcoming, i.e. making the existent be, should be absolutely real. Thus, the reason itself has to be devoid of the possibility of non-existence. It has to exist in a necessary way. Existence, which is this type of reason, can be conceived.

For something – as Saint Anselm says in *Proslogion* – can be thought to exist that cannot be thought not to exist, and this is greater than that which can be thought not to exist. Therefore, if that-beyond-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought can be thought not to exist, then that-beyond-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought is not the same as

⁸ Ibid.

that-beyond-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought, which is absurd. Something-beyond-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought exists so truly then, that it cannot be even thought not to exist. And You, Lord our God, are this being.⁹

Let us draw our attention to the fact that in the above quoted reasoning, Saint Anselm refers to truth. Not only does a thought which tries to go beyond itself not cease to be true, but, on the contrary, it attains the absolute truth: the truth about God for whom it is impossible not to exist. Therefore, he is something which can be spoken of as the reason for all being: ‘What are You if not that supreme being, existing through Yourself alone, who made everything else from nothing?’¹⁰ And there is one more consequence: existence beyond which nothing greater can be thought has to be the highest intrinsic good: ‘It is certain, however, that whatever You are, You are not that through another but through Your very self. You are therefore the very life by which You live, the wisdom by which You are wise, the very good by which You are good to both good men and wicked....’¹¹

The concept of God as the Absolute Existence is taken to the ultimate heights by Saint Thomas Aquinas. His reasoning can be divided into two stages. The first is the justification of the existence of the ultimate reason for being. It takes place on the already mentioned ‘third way.’

Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary. But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things [...]. Therefore we cannot but postulate the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God.¹²

On the basis of this text one should not think that what has of itself its own necessity, belongs to the same chain of consequences which necessary things belong to, but the things which have their necessity beyond themselves. What is necessary *per se*, can not fail to transcend all other existences, even those which are in some sense necessary. The second stage of Saint Thomas’s reasoning refers to the demonstration of what the necessity of God’s being as the necessity by itself, *per se* consists in. Well, the reason for this necessity is the fact that God’s essence is his being.¹³

We do not always realise how exceptional this statement is. Saint Thomas tries to make his appropriate understanding available, by referring to the Aristotelian metaphysics among others, and in particular to the theory of potentiality and actuality: since there is nothing potential

⁹ Anselm of Canterbury, *Monologion. Proslogion*. Chapter 3, Oxford: Clarendon, 1965.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Chapter 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 12.

¹² Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on the Divine Nature*, I, q. 2, a. 3, resp. (The e-text version based on the translation available on www.gutenberg.org).

¹³ *Ibid.*, I, q. 2, a. 4.

in God, then His essence must be wholly caused through his being, and that means that essence and being are one and the same thing. In this way, God's essence completely falls outside our cognitive capabilities. In fact, even the method of analogy fails: in our experience we do not have at our disposal any such circumstance, in which questions about *what* (i.e. essence) of the matter and its *is* (being) would have the same answer. The only way to get closer to this secret might be the so-called apophatic theology. Yet, it only talks about what God is not, but it does not say what it is. Nonetheless, the name of God exists and it is his most appropriate name: 'He who is.' This name 'does not signify form, but simply existence itself. Hence, since the existence of God is His essence itself, which can be said of no other [...], it is clear that among other names this one specially denominates God.'¹⁴

The experience of randomness was not unfamiliar to Descartes either, yet he juxtaposes the problem of the reason for being with existence which is the most direct subject of experience – one's own 'I'. 'Therefore I have to ask myself if I possess such power by means of which I could make myself, who I am now, exist in a moment as well.'¹⁵ The answer is negative: I do not have such power, even though as a 'thinking thing' I would be undoubtedly aware of it. I am therefore existence dependent in its being. On what or on whom? Ultimately, I can only be dependent on such existence which is not dependent on anything. Being a thinking, but finite substance, I demand the infinite substance. I find the idea of this substance within me in a clear and distinct way, for this reason I do not risk making any mistake, I am also sure that this substance exists in a perfect way and that my idea of God refers to it precisely.

The necessity of being of the absolute existence as a reason for the being of our random, unnecessary-in-its-existence world is frequently emphasised by Leibniz in his works. He seems to answer the fundamental question of metaphysics which he himself formulated, when he says in the opening of the treatise *On the Ultimate Origin of Things*: 'In nature there is a *reason* why there is something rather than nothing. It is the consequence of the great principle which teaches that nothing happens without sufficient reason. In the same way, there has to be a reason why this exists rather than something else.'¹⁶

Reality, which can either exist or not exist, is not indifferent, however, toward the fact of being. In its hidden possibility of being, we discover the peculiar striving for being, 'seeking' it, 'pushing' for it, in accordance with the striving for perfection which a thing comprises. One would be inclined to say here that Leibniz anticipates Popper's concept of tendency, the theory which can also be interpreted as a theory overcoming the alleged indifference or neutrality of existence towards the good. Striving

¹⁴ Ibid., I, 13, 11.

¹⁵ R. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, vol.1 "Third Meditation", Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

¹⁶ G. Leibniz, *On the Ultimate Origin of Things* (The e-text version based on the 2004 Jonathan Bennett translation, www.earlymoderntexts.com).

112 for being is, at the same time, striving for perfection.¹⁷

This act of pushing for being can satisfy only the absolute being.

Therefore, since the ultimate ground must lie in something metaphysically necessary [in contrast with the physically or morally necessary – W.S.], and since the reason for an existing thing must come from something that actually exists, it follows that there must exist some one metaphysically necessary entity. It has to be different from the plurality of things, i.e. from the world, which we have shown not to be metaphysically necessary.¹⁸

Edyta Stein refers to the Cartesian theme in her research on being. The starting point of the metaphysical research is the fact of one's own being. When I pay attention to them, the double face of being and non-being reveals itself to me. 'I am' constantly falls outside of where I can focus my attention on it. Its fundamental way of being is time, only the elusive 'now' is present within it, its other phases are closer to nonexistence than existence:

My being, as I find it and as I find myself within it, is meaningless being (nichtiges Sein). I do not exist through myself and I am nothing through myself. At every moment I face nothingness and from one moment to the next I have to be given existence anew. But my being is being though and at every moment I encounter the fullness of being through it.¹⁹

In my being I encounter another being. It is not my own, but it is the support and the basis of my being which in itself has neither support nor basis.²⁰

3.

Plato is the patron of the second trend. When in *Phaedo* Socrates confides his intellectual adventures, he talks, among others, about the disappointment he experienced while reading the works of Anaxagoras. He read about his concept of the cosmic mind with admiration, but when he tried to find out what reasoning this mind follows, he failed to find the answer. But it has to be subjected to the Good. Only the Good is capable of elucidating the course of events and their aim, of justifying both the ontical and axiological structure of reality. One might suppose that Socrates' curiosity would only be satiated by Timaeus, who justifies the order of, and thus the good of the universe, by referring to the nature of its creator: 'He was good, and what is good has no particle of envy in it; being therefore without envy he wished all things to be as like himself as possible.'²¹

The theory of good is presented to its fullest extent in *The Republic*.

¹⁷ Ibid., footnotes 5-11.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁹ E. Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, translated by Kurt F. Reinhardt, Washington: ICS Publications, 2002.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, translated by Desmond Lee, Penguin Classics 1971, p. 42.

The Good is what is first, it is the principle (*arche*) of all things and their aim, in the noetic and – more importantly – ontical order, it plays the role analogical to the one played by the Sun in the order of visible things. G. Reale beautifully summarises the Platonic theory of Good: 113

In our judgement this is the ‘possession for all time’ that Plato has transmitted to posterity.

With Plato the West, for the first time, can respond to the question ‘why is there existence and not nothing?’ [...]: because existence is good; and in general, all things exist because they are positive, because it is good that they be just as they are [...]. The positive, order, and the Good are the basis of existence.²²

The concept of God – the highest Good finds the most profound advocates in two great thinkers of the Christian West and the Christian East. In *On the Nature and Grace* by Saint Augustine we find: ‘The highest good, the good beyond which there is no greater good, is God. Thus, it is the constant good, truly eternal and truly immortal. All the other goods, indeed, derive from Him, but they are not made of Him. What is made of Him is what He Himself is, but what derives from him is not what He is.’²³

God’s goodness is also the reason for creation. ‘For of the fullness of Thy goodness, doth Thy creature subsist, that so a good, which could no ways profit Thee, nor was of Thee (lest so it should be equal to Thee), might yet be since it could be made of Thee.’²⁴ Let us note that everything that exists due to God’s goodness, and it is good because it owes its existence to Him. The reason for the goodness of creations is, as it were, double: first, because they are created by God, secondly, because the motive for their creation is His goodness, in which – let us add – they also participate in a certain way.

And Thou, O God, sawest every thing that Thou hadst made, and, behold, it was very good. Yea we also see the same, and behold, all things are very good. Of the several kinds of Thy works, when Thou hadst said “let them be,” and they were, Thou sawest each that it was good. Seven times have I counted it to be written, that Thou sawest that that which Thou madest was good: and this is the eighth, that Thou sawest every thing that Thou hadst made, and, behold, it was not only good, but also very good.²⁵

In the works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, the Good is the first out of all God’s names.

For a start, then, let us look, if you will, at the most important name, “Good,” which shows forth all the processions of God. But we should really begin with an invocation of the Trinity, the source and, indeed, the superior of what is good [...] We should be uplifted to it and be shaped by it so as to

²² G. Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy*, vol. II, *Plato and Aristotle*, translated by John R. Catan, SUNY Press 1990, p. 244.

²³ Saint Augustine, *On the Nature and Grace*, I, 1, *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, Kessinger Publishing, 2006

²⁴ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, XIII, 2, translated by Edward Bouverie Pusey, Plain Label Books, 1954, p. 322.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, XIII, 28, p. 354.

Thus, there exists a principle of good other than the Good itself. Nonetheless, it is the Good that is the direct cause (*aitia*) of all existences, it gives them being (*ousia*) and form, while it remains beyond them, while it goes beyond everything that is. The Good is also an intentional cause of everything, although it acquires the shape of beauty in this particular function.

While reading the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, we must constantly recall that his deliberations are made in the spirit of negative theology, and that, in effect, everything referring to God has to be simultaneously tagged with a proviso that this reference might not be accurate, that it is filled with our helplessness to a greater extent than with any adequate, positive cognition.²⁷ This concerns both the notion of good and the notion of existence: ‘The divine name of good, which reveals all the consequences of giving the cause of everything, stretches out onto all existences and nonexistences and is beyond all existences and nonexistences. In effect, the name of existence comprises everything that is, yet it is beyond everything that is.’²⁸

As we have seen, both Descartes and Leibniz spoke of God in terms of the highest perfection. This thought was familiar to many other modern philosophers. Yet they always associated perfection with existence or being. A new approach to this issue was outlined in the twentieth century.

In the beginning of his famous book *God Without Being*, Jean-Luc Marion uses a motto taken from Heidegger: ‘If I were to write theology – and I feel like it at times – then the notion of ‘being’ could not appear in it, not under any circumstances. Faith does not need to consider being’. Marion’s thought, like Emanuel Lévinas’s thought earlier on, goes back – directly or indirectly – to the negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius. The notions of existence and being – even the notion of God – close off the right way to the cognition of His essence. One needs to create a new philosophy of God based on experiences other than those used so far, one needs to reject in particular the scholastic tradition and start talking about God beyond existence, about God who is the Good and Love. The origin of inspiration will not be found in the philosophers, but in the Bible and the mystics. Summarising Lévinas’s view on this issue, Józef Tischner says:

The Good is what is beyond existence and nonexistence. One cannot say about the good that it already is, as if it was, it would not call on us to realise it. One cannot also say that it is not, as if it was not, again it would not call on us to realise it either. The good ‘is’ in the literal meaning of

²⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names*, III, *Theological Works. Divine Names. The Mystical Theology. Letters*. Translated by Colm Luibheid, Paulist Press, 1987, p. 68.

²⁷ [...] One cannot deny anything or make any statement about Him, because we neither deny anything nor make a statement about Him, if we make a statement about Him or deny the things of the lower order. The most perfect cause of everything is beyond any confirmation or denial: it is higher than everything, completely independent from everything and moves everything’ Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Mystical Theology*, V.

²⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names*, V, 1.

the word ‘meta-physical’: its place is beyond the physics of the world. At ¹¹⁵ the same time, physics should also include ontology, which is its extension. The good ‘is’ higher than existence. If existence makes any sense, then this sense is hidden within the good. The good justifies existence in its being. And it is exactly for this reason that the principles guiding existence, including the principle of the excluded middle, cannot be the principles guiding the good.²⁹

We can be certain that Tischner’s own beliefs are contained within this summary. Let us leave them without polemics. Yet, let us note that in this text there is the word ‘is’ in inverted commas in the context of “‘is’ metaphysically” or “‘is’ higher than existence,” and it can be suspected that it justifies the very being of the Good... Well, could good *be* good without being?

4.

Now, a crucial question has to be asked: which of the two is right? If both are, then do they rule each other out?

So we ask: is something good because it exists, or does it exist because it is good? According to the Thomist tradition, the positive answer to the first question is true, in the case of the Platonic tradition – to the second.

Isn’t it enough to be good to exist? Plato, at least initially, did not see any problems here. The principle of identity, as in the case of Parmenides, ensured being to the identical. Every idea had this feature. Due to its identity it is the true existence – *to ontos on*. At its highest level, identity has to be owned by the highest idea. And this is the Good. If all ideas depend on it, then their existence depends on it too. The deliberations in *The Republic* leave no doubt at this point.

Yet with time, Plato becomes aware of the fact that identity is not enough. In *Parmenides* and *Sophist* a great revision of the theory of ideas takes place. Next to the idea, there appear the ‘highest kinds’ which seem to govern everything that is, including the world of ideas. Among these highest kinds are both identity and difference: the reasons for unity and plurality, and – the most important aspect for us at this point – for existence. The definition of existence quickly appears here too: ‘existence is nothing more than potency – *dynamis*.’³⁰ It is an ambiguous word: it implies potency, strength and power.³¹ Ideas on their own are enough: the full explanation of reality requires additional reasons. Existence, *to on*, seems to be one of them. If in the hierarchy of these reasons one needs to place the highest

²⁹ J. Tischner, *Spotkanie z myślą Lévinasa* [The Encounter with the Thought of Lévinas], in: E. Lévinas, *Etyka i nieskończoność. Rozmowy z Philipp'em Nemo* [Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo], trans. B. Opolska-Kokoszka, Kraków 1991, p. 8.

³⁰ Plato, *Sophist* 247e, in: Plato, *Sophist-Politician*, Kessinger Publishing, 2004.

³¹ ‘So I say that what possesses some sort of potency – to change something of any nature, or to experience the smallest being affected by a smallest thing even once – indeed exists. As this is my definition of existence: it is nothing else but potency’, *Ibid.*

116 reasons beyond ideas, then ideas, including the idea of the Good, depend on them. Similarly, according to the basic assumption of the 'unwritten philosophy' (*agrafa dogmata*) of Plato, everything depends on the dualism of primary principles.

In Tischner's works we can find another argument which supports the precedence of the Good. This is a peculiar interpretation of Saint Anselm's 'ontological argument.' It is formulated so concisely that the whole fragment is worth quoting:

I propose the following interpretation of the famous argument: that-beyond-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought is the absolute good. Is it possible for the absolute Good not to exist? Good 'demands' being, so to speak, through itself. The Absolute Good demands being in an absolute way. That which demands being in an absolute way can not but exist. Its being must be the same as its demand for being. God – as the absolute good – exists.³²

Tischner's argumentation is formulated in metaphorical language. The good demands being. In order to demand something, one has to exist. The scholastic principle: *operatio sequitur esse*, operates with iron logic, regardless of what approach toward scholasticism one adopts. To exist, one needs to have power to do so. Can the *a priori* analysis of the good prove that such power exists within the good? It seems that Tischner's argument is correct, if it is limited to the way of being, or rather – to use Heidegger's language – of 'happening' of goodness. If the Good is the *absolute* Good, it requires absolute existence its way of being; if it is Good, then it demands to be the way goodness is, that is to be in a *good* way. Yet, to be in an absolute way and to be Good, one simply needs to exist.

An analogical analysis can be conducted as far as the notion of perfection is concerned. The Anselmian existence beyond which nothing greater can be thought has to be the most perfect existence. This would not be the case, if it did not exist. Perfection demands existence – absolute existence. This statement can be reversed: absolute existence demands perfection. It is impossible for absolute existence not to be perfect existence. However, the difficulty is to prove that such existence truly is, or – in other words – to prove that the sentence 'the absolute existence exists' is true. It does not seem possible to do this in the way Tischner chose to prove it, that is, by starting from the experience of goodness:

How do we know that the Good demands existence? We know it from our own intrinsic experience. I want good, not evil. I participate in what I want, and I want what I participate in.[...] I am being-for-itself. As a being-for-itself, I want myself. Yet, I would not be a being-for-itself and I would not want myself, if it was not for the intuition of this good which can constitute me. I want to exist to the standard of goodness which I participate or can participate in.³³

These statements are profoundly justified. Sartre's idea of man as being-

³² J. Tischner, *Spór o istnienie człowieka* [The Controversy over the Existence of Man], Kraków 1998, p. 270.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 270-271.

for-itself (*Etre-pour-soi*) was enriched here with an axiological aspect: the dimension of goodness. Goodness is indeed a crucial factor for me as a being-for-itself. Yet, this being good, or being within the Good, is only, and also so much as, a peculiar, unique way of being. Namely, of being, which, as such, is the fact. 117

The question about the reason for goodness is not a question about the reason for being. Somehow it is more radical and more dramatic than the latter. When it is asked: ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’ the question about goodness is: ‘How is goodness possible despite the existence of evil?’ The question of the reason for being refers to the possibility of non-being, the question about the reason for good – to the fact of evil. The question about the reason for being inquires into the absolute being, the question about goodness only inquires into the possibility of goodness. Both are metaphysical. Let us not forget that the question: *unde malum?* has for ages been one of the most difficult questions to address.

It is not easy to justify the precedence of the good. Its superior metaphysical stand was never questioned, though, when it constituted the highest idea, the final model of everything that existed, or when it was treated as the prime cause – e.g. in Neo-Platonism, particularly conspicuous in the case of Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite; or finally, as an intentional cause – the aim and end of all aspiration, as in the case of Aristotle. In the end, what is the approach of goodness towards being, towards existence?

It seems that the most mature answer is given in the theory of transcendentalia. By this theory, existence and goodness are the same, they only differ notionally: *sola ratione differunt*.

According to this great theory, being is not axiologically neutral. Truth, the good and beauty are its particular manifestations. ‘Is’ means ‘is true’, ‘is good’, ‘is beautiful’. Or: ‘it truly is’, ‘it is good it is’, ‘it is beautiful it is’. There aren’t many texts that enrich the idea of the transcendentalia to a great extent and that ‘make one think’, but to those few belongs a short lecture delivered by Tadeusz Czeżowski, *What Are the Values?* Here is the end fragment of this lecture:

Categorical statements correspond to the make-up of the contents of representations, depictions or notions; transcendentalia are not representable; yet, they are found in many types of modal sentences. Being is found in the sentence ‘it is true that...’; similarly, other transcendentalia are found in the sentences ‘it is necessary that...’, ‘it is good that...’, ‘it is beautiful that...’ etc [..].

Therefore, the unrepresentable definitions: being or truth, necessity and possibility, beauty, moral value or goodness, are not the features of objects, but can be used to state objects in modal sentences. Their so-called lack of content is not enough to consider them only as subjective ways of referring to an object. Unlike features, that is, in the Latin terminology of accidents, they were called ‘*modi entis*’, i.e. ways of being of objects.³⁴

³⁴ T. Czeżowski, *Filozofia na rozdrożu (Analizy metodologiczne)* [Philosophy on the Cross-roads (Methodological Analyses)], Warsaw 1965, p. 120.

118 There is no need to be afraid, as Heidegger was, that values veil the purity of Being (*Sein*). There is obviously a problem as to whether transcendental values refer directly to being, or rather to existence. The Greek phrase *to on*, which according to Heidegger's own findings can mean both existence and being, and the Latin *ens*, which can be expressed both as a noun (*ut nomen*) and an adverb (*ut participium*), deriving directly from *esse*, allow for both translations. Even if one 'distilled' the pure being so that it would not bind to anything different towards it – like Hegel's *Sein* – then one would have to agree with the fact that it has to bind with a certain entity without which – according to Hegel – it would be pure nothingness. Creating existence understood as *that which is*, being becomes open to its transcendental *modi*, also comprising goodness, truth and beauty.

The characteristic trait of these three transcendentalia is their reference to the subject transcendental to them³⁵. They find, so to say, their second foundation in it. It resembles transcendence in the Kantian understanding which refers, however, neither to the forms of eye-witnessing nor to the categories of intellect, but to a special axiological intuition of existence as an existence which we – as human beings – cannot experience in any other way. We suspect, using an imperfect analogy, that the ultimate reason for transcendence is found in God, yet talking about the truth, the goodness and the beauty of the existence given to us, what we bear in mind is its direct reference to ourselves.

However, this does not imply that we create or constitute goodness in this way. Our own being appears to us as a value which we directly experience, most probably due to what Tischner discovered as 'the axiological I.' But that is not the end. Our being, *Dasein*, is – in a manner of speaking – axiotropic. It means that it is also turned toward transcendental values, the values of existences which surround us, it is able to experience these values adequately. Let us note: even if we think that every day the world is axiologically neutral, then in the moments of the authentic experience of it, we discover, above all, its value within it. The basic axiological categories of good and evil with which we are instilled, on the whole adequately react to everything that happens around us. On the basis of this ability of ours, within the field of our experience, there appear the so-called metaphysical qualities, which Ingarden touched upon, and which can stir up within us the feelings of ecstatic happiness and deep sorrow, of courage and fear. We well know that in this way we get closer to the essence of existence itself, or even to its transcendental origins. And let us note that in order to express these experiences, we fall back on expressions involving being. Don't we say in moments of fear: 'so *is* it like this, so *is* such evil within us?' And in the moments of happiness: 'it is so good *it is*,' or perhaps more often: 'it is so good you *are*?' This is how being and goodness weave into one, and in effect – metaphysics and agathology.

³⁵ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Questiones disputatae de veritate*, q.1, a.1, Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952.

We respond with goodness to the good of the world, the good of reality, the good of existence and the good of being. Care—Heidegger's *Sorge*—springs from goodness. I once wrote that goodness is the good 'led through' the heart of a human being. I think it is true. If we could, under all circumstances, respond with goodness to any challenges we face, then maybe it would be easier for us to notice the transcendence of good?¹¹⁹

The human being is the only entity that is an existence among existences, and simultaneously goes beyond existence itself. I am aware of the fact that the first part of this sentence will face opposition. After the discoveries of phenomenology, after the revelation of the absolute of pure consciousness and the transcendental 'I,' how can one say that we are ordinary existences? Yet, it is true. It is also true that we are able to go beyond this situation. Just by taking some distance from our own being. Let me give a dramatic example. I once asked my friend, who – as I had already known – was inhumanely tortured in the Stalinist era at the Lublin Castle, how it was possible to bear such sophisticated tortures. I said: I would not be able to stand it. He answered calmly: You would. All you need to tell yourself is that the most they can do is to kill you. Only kill... To overcome this situation means to put yourself beyond your own life and your own death. It is difficult to find a more radical type of transcendence. I suspect that even Paul Tillich did not consider such courage of being.

In the already quoted *Introduction to Metaphysics* by M. Heidegger, we find an astounding question:

We ask about being of existence. We ask existence questions about its being. Yet, when we ask about it, in fact we preliminarily ask about being with respect to its basis (Aber wenn wir im Fragen bleiben, fragen wir eigentlich schon vor nach dem Sein hinsichtlich seines Grundes), even if this question is not developed and it was not decided if being itself is not a basis in itself to a satisfactory degree. [...] On the whole, how can we even ask about the basis of being of existence (Grund für das Sein des Seienden) – not to mention finding it – if we haven't sufficiently grasped being itself, if we haven't understood and comprehended it?³⁶

An astounding question. So being, *Sein*, demands the basis? It is tempting to point to the Good when answering this question. Certainly, it would go against Heidegger's intention. Yet, wouldn't it be true? The Good is placed not only beyond existence – as is the case in Plato, Plotinos and Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite – but also beyond Being. Maybe it equates with Being and constitutes its sense? 'It is good' – the formula, which is, as we have here suggested, an adequate expression of the transcendental good, would find here the justification of its truthfulness. At the same time, the Neo-Platonic theory of the diffusion of good: *bonum est diffusivum sui*: everything is good because it is, would also be justified.

³⁶ M. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959. The original text: M. Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, dritte, unveränderte Auflage, Tübingen 1966, pp. 24-25.

Nonetheless, one cannot interpret the precedence of the good and say that it is beyond being, that it goes beyond being. Perhaps it lifts up above existence, just like Pseudo-Dionysius wanted. Yet, if it is at all, then it either owes its being to being, or it equates itself with it. In the first instance, it is a random, finite good. In the second – the Absolute of Good.

To our initial question: ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’ the answer is: ‘because there is Existence which exists absolutely, and it is the Good.’

[...] I have long meditated over the modern philosophy [...] The many investigations which I carried on compelled me to recognise that our moderns do not do sufficient justice to Saint Thomas and to the other great men of that period and that there is in the theories of the scholastic philosophers and theologians far more solidity than is imagined, provided that these theories are employed properly and in their place.³⁷

³⁷ G.W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, XI, translated by George R. Montgomery, Kessinger Publishing, 2003, p. 17.