

Is the Doctrine of the Transcendentals Viable Today? Reflections on Metaphysics and the Doctrine of the Transcendentals

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Introduction:

In order to reflect on the question about the possibility of metaphysics today, the following essay considers a specific test case in the doctrine of the transcendentals. In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger briefly narrates the genesis of the transcendentals as being the universal conditions grounding Aristotle's *Categories*. Heidegger argues that the transcendentals consists of "those characters of Being which lie beyond every possible way in which an entity may be classified as coming under some generic kind of subject-matter (every *modus specialis entis*), and which belong necessarily to anything, whatever it may be."² Heidegger credits Aquinas as taking up the "task of deriving the *transcendentia*", and argues that in order to do so Aquinas must demonstrate that "*verum* is a *transcendens*." This move proves significant for the early Heidegger for it exhibits the compatibility between universal conditions and their existential referent, i.e. a metaphysical turn to the subject. Thus, Heidegger argues that Aquinas can only demonstrate "*verum* as a *transcendens*" by "invoking an entity which, in accordance with its very manner of Being, is properly suited 'to come together with' entities of any sort whatsoever...[and] This distinctive entity, the *ens quod natum est convenire cum omni ente*, is the soul (*anima*)."³ On the basis of this interpretation, Heidegger concludes, "Here the priority of 'Dasein' over all other entities emerges...this priority has nothing in common with the vicious subjectivizing of the totality of entities." This interpretation of the transcendentals evinces a turn to the subject that offers a one-sided reading of the doctrine of the transcendentals. Heidegger attends to the transcendentals as the first principles of cognition without considering in what way the transcendentals are the first principles of nature. The question thus arises as to whether he can have the former at the disim of the latter? The possibility of metaphysics and the viability of the doctrine of the transcendentals today require being attentive to both. In the following presentation, I wish to briefly give a history of the transcendentals before considering Aquinas' doctrine of the transcendentals as particularly found in *De Veritate*. Next, I intend to consider two modern though considerably different contemporary retrievals of the doctrine of the transcendentals by Jan Aertsen and Olivia Blanchette in order to arrive at my own estimation of Heidegger's interpretation of the transcendental, and its significance for understanding the challenge and yet the promise of the doctrine of the transcendentals today.

Before pursuing our task, let me qualify what I intend to accomplish here and the limitations and challenges of doing so. Without a doubt the foregoing is an ambitious project for a doctoral candidate and for a presentation, both of which are only matched by the unwieldy scope of the title, which would be impossible to answer sufficiently in the brief time allotted here. Any answer given would have to navigate the Charybdis and Scylla of (i) forcing modern concepts into a medieval framework thus abusing modern philosophy to

¹ I gratefully acknowledge my readers Daniel O. Dahlstrom and Garth W. Green for their invaluable comments. I also thank the Benedictine brothers of Weston Priory for a sacred space that provided the necessary silence and tranquility for completing this essay.

² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Collins, 1962), 34. Occasional references to German are from XXX

accommodate medieval philosophy, or (ii) inversely, forcing medieval philosophy into modern philosophy and similarly do injustice to the integrity of its concepts. On the one hand, this is the historical philosopher's concern and, on the other, it is the contemporary philosopher's concern. These concerns are the reason why an answer to the question will not be definitively posed here (to say nothing, of course, of my own ability as a lowly doctoral candidate even to do so). That said, as we will see Heidegger encourages such a comparative study, and how he employs medieval ideas provides a basis for accessing his own work. Thus, the foregoing will simply weigh Heidegger's reading of the transcendentals alongside the doctrine of the transcendentals in Aquinas in order to evaluate Heidegger's account. William Luijpen once stated and I paraphrase, "A philosopher asserts more in what he or she does not disclose."³ We will come to see that Heidegger left much unsaid.

I. History of the Transcendental—The Categories and Supra-Categorical

The doctrine of the transcendentals arose in medieval philosophy as a way of amending the list of predicates given in Aristotle's *Categories*.⁴ Although there are divergent theories about the general schema of the categories and their intra-coherence, one can generally speak of the categories as the foremost predicates of a substance; anything said about a thing falls into at least one or more of Aristotle's ten categories.⁵ Individually the categories are not universal, but taken together they designate the primary predicates of which all things must have at least one. Stated differently, though not every being will have all the categories, a being will have at least one or more of them. The medieval doctrine of the transcendentals originated through consideration of other predicates that are more universal than the categories. Since Aristotle's *Categories* did not appear to be comprehensive nor include terms

³ William Luijpen, *Phenomenology and Atheism* (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1964).

⁴ I owe this insight to Daniel O. Dahlstrom, who introduced me to the work of Jan Aertsen. Although a medieval doctrine, Aristotle was aware of the issue as it arose for him in refutation of Plato's conception of the Good. Jan Aertsen mentions that Aristotle distinguishes between universals and categories in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and in the *Metaphysics*. In the *Ethics*, Aristotle states, "good is spoken of in as many senses as is being; it is used in the category of substance...relation...quality, etc." Quoted from Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, trans. and ed. by Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8. Aertsen observes from this distinction that it is evident that "Its commonness is consequently of a different nature than the univocal commonness of a category." Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), Defining how the commonness of the transcendentals differ from the commonness of categories motivated the medieval discourse about the nature of the transcendentals—a discourse that hinged on the differing metaphysics of Aristotle and Plato. Although each of these in their own way anticipated the doctrine of the transcendentals by engendering questions from which it arose, it still must be maintained that the doctrine of the transcendentals as a 'doctrine' was unique to medieval philosophy. Aertsen states, "...it is not until the thirteenth century that we can speak of a proper doctrine of the transcendentals, in which these notions [Being, Good, etc.] are interrelated in a systematic way." (113)

⁵ Aristotle, *Categories on Interpretation*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. and ed. Harald P. Cooke (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1938). See Paul Studtmann, *The Foundations of Aristotle's Categorical Scheme* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008)

more universal and common than the categories listed by Aristotle, a new genre of predicates needed to be created. Jan Aertsen provides a succinct account of the emergence of the medieval concept *transcendens*:

“The term ‘transcendental’—medievales themselves speak of *transcendens*—suggests a kind of surpassing. What is transcended are the special modes of being that Aristotle called the ‘categories’, in the sense that the transcendentals are not restricted to one determinate category. ‘Being’ and its ‘concomitant conditions’, such as ‘one’, ‘true’ and ‘good’, ‘go through (*circumeunt*) all the categories’ (to use an expression of Thomas Aquinas). The doctrine of the transcendentals is thus concerned with those fundamental philosophical concepts which express universal features of reality.”⁶

What distinguishes the transcendentals from Aristotle’s categories is their unique universality. It should be noted that Heidegger provides a similar account of the history of the transcendentals:

“An understanding of Being is already included in conceiving anything which one apprehends in entities. But the ‘universality’ of Being is not that of a class or genus. The term ‘Being’ does not define that realm of entities which is uppermost when these are articulated conceptually according to genus and species... The ‘universality’ of Being ‘*transcends*’ any universality of genus. In medieval ontology ‘Being’ is designated as a ‘*transcendens*.’”⁷

If the universality of Being differs from the universality ingredient in genus and species, then how should this universality be conceived? It is precisely an answer to this question that Heidegger pursues in the opening pages of *Sein und Zeit* while reflecting on how Being is indefinable to the degree that it does not follow under the definitional guidelines required by logic since it is not an entity and how it is the self-evident insofar “some use is made of Being” whenever “one cognizes anything or makes an assertion.”⁸ In his attempt to understand the universality unique to the transcendental Heidegger joins a long tradition for historically how one conceived this universality became the problematic that differentiated

⁶ Jan Aertsen, “The Medieval Doctrine of the Transcendentals: The Current State of Research,” *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale*, vol. 33 (1991), 130. Also see *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals* where Aertsen explains, “So they transcend the categories, not because they refer to a reality beyond the categories but because they are not limited to one determinate category.” Although it cannot be considered at length in this essay, it is worth noting that Aertsen argues that this situating of the doctrine of the transcendentals in reference to Aristotle’s *Categories* distinguishes the medieval use from the Kantian use, “While in Kant the transcendental is concerned with the categories of reason, transcendental in the Scholastic sense is opposed to the categorical.” (92)

⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 22. [GERMAN]

⁸ *Ibid.*, 23. Also see p. 25 regarding the indefinability of Being and p. 27 for Being as a first principle. Heidegger’s use of Being as a ‘basic concept’ [GermanXX] resonates with first principle on pp. 29-30.

one account of the doctrine of the transcendentals from another.⁹ For instance, Philip the Chancellor, as the first Western thinker to develop a doctrine of the transcendentals enumerates the transcendentals unique universality in terms of their novel integration of the abstract and the concrete in a way that distinguishes them from other abstract concepts, making evident how they are common (*communitas*) to all things in a way that other predicables are not.¹⁰ Duns Scotus departs significantly from his predecessors (Aertsen calls it a “new phase in the history of the doctrine”) by rejecting “the traditional view that the transcendentals are characterized by being ‘common’ to all things” in favor of a conception of their universality as exceeding every genre; that is, they “cannot be constrained under any genus.”¹¹ Lastly and crucially for the purposes of this presentation, Aquinas conceives the universality of the transcendentals according to two interrelated trajectories or what Aertsen, following medieval usage, calls “two resolutions (*resolutio*)”: noetically as first conceptions of the intellect and ontologically as the general modes of being.¹² Each of these manifest a different aspect of the universality of the transcendentals: the first with regard to predication (that which is predicated of all things), and the latter with regard to metaphysics (that which is true of all things insofar as they are (*ens commune*)). To explicate the former Aertsen attends to Aquinas’ adoption of Aristotle’s principle of demonstration, and to expound the latter he shows how Aquinas’ conception of *ens commune*—a conception achieved through an innovative conception of *esse* as actuality—alters Aristotle’s metaphysics since with it “the conception of metaphysics itself became transcendental.”¹³ Of these three Heidegger often intimates a position closer to Scotus—this may not be terribly surprising in lieu of his dissertation on Scotus¹⁴—yet it is instructive then that in the closing pages of the introduction he choose

⁹ Aertsen, “The Medieval Doctrine of the ‘Transcendentals,’” 133ff. Elsewhere, Aertsen provocatively extends this to all philosophies that call themselves transcendental, “Even if all transcendental philosophies agree with one another in that they reflect on a surpassing, the differ from one another in the nature and direction of this transcending movement” (*Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, 92).

¹⁰ H. Pouillon, “Le premier traité des propriétés transcendentales, la ‘Summa de bono’ du Chancelier Philippe,” in *Revue néoscholastique de philosophie*, 42 (1939), 40-77. Pouillon states, “Being and its properties are for Philip principles, the most universal concepts, first and simple, at least in the sense that there is nothing in which one can logically resolve, nothing else enters their definition. For these notions alone, it is permitted to attribute the concrete in the abstract: being is, unity is one, truth is true, and goodness is good, whereas one cannot say that justice is just nor prudence is prudent.” [translation mine] On Philip the Chancellor, also see Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, 25-39.

¹¹ Aertsen, “The Medieval Doctrine of the ‘Transcendentals,’” 136. Aertsen directs us to L. Honnefelder, *Scientia transcendens. Die formale Bestimmung der Seiendheit und Realität in der Metaphysik des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit (Duns Scotus-Suárez-Wolff-Kant-Pierre)* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1990), 3-199; and A.B. Wolter, *The Transcendentals and Their Function in the Metaphysics of Duns Scotus* (New York: St. Bonaventure, 1946).

¹² Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, 91. “From the perspective of the resolution of knowledge, they are called the prima or ‘first conceptions of the intellect.’ Considered from their extension, they are the *maxime communia*, common to all things.”

¹³ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁴ Titled *The Doctrine of the Categories and Meaning in Duns Scotus* (1915). See Theodore Kisiel, *Becoming Heidegger: On the Trail of His Earlier Occasional Writings 1910-1927*

Aquinas as indicative of bringing a crucial move to the history of the transcendentals, and that he has specifically chosen Aquinas' conception of truth as a transcendental. We shall return to this point in a moment after considering the case of Thomas Aquinas as explicated by Jan Aertsen and Olivia Blanchette.

II. Aquinas's Doctrine of the Transcendentals in *De Veritate*—Aertsen & Blanchette

De Veritate 1, 1-2 and *Summa theologiae* I, q. 16 are crucial texts for understanding truth as a transcendental in Aquinas. On the basis of these Aertsen argues that truth is both a logical transcendental and a metaphysical transcendental. By this he means that the being of reason (*ens rationis*) associated with logic and the real being (*ens naturae*) of metaphysics are coextensive (*aequiparantur*).¹⁵ The former, *ens rationis*, pertains to “those concepts that reason attaches (*adinvenit*) to the things it considers, such as the notions of ‘genus’ and species.”¹⁶ Truth is a logical transcendental, then, because it is “applicable to every categorical being” insofar as it is understood. The latter, *ens naturae*, “deals with things themselves by considering what is common to them, i.e. being qua being. Each of these attends to the commonness (*communia*) or what I have called the universality of the transcendentals differently but coextensively or integrally, and each has different implications for understanding truth as a transcendental. Yet, they are coextensive and mutually reciprocal. This is evident in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 16, a. 3 in which Aquinas states,

“As ‘good’ has the *ratio* of the desirable, so the ‘true’ has an order to knowledge. Now everything is knowable insofar as it has being (*esse*). For this reason it is said in the third book of *De Anima* (431b 21) that ‘the soul is in a sense all things,’ through the senses and the intellect. And therefore, as good is convertible with being, so is the true. But as good adds to being the notion of desirable, so the true adds a relation to the intellect.”¹⁷

Emphasizing Aquinas' assertion that, “Everything is knowable insofar as it has being (*esse*).” Aertsen comments on this, “the real identity of the ‘true’ and ‘being’ is mediated by the notion of act. Everything is knowable, not insofar as it is in potency but insofar as it is in act [ST q. 87, a. 1]. Insofar as a thing is in act, it is called ‘being’ (*ens*), for the name ‘being’ is taken from the act of being. Actuality is the ground of both the knowability and the entity of things.”¹⁸ If I had to summarize this in my own words I would say that the act generative of

(Evanston, IL.: Northwestern University Press, 2007) S. J. McGrath, *The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy: Phenomenology for the Godforsaken* (Washington D.C.: CUA Press, 2006)

¹⁵ Aertsen, “Is Truth Not a Transcendental?” in *Wisdom's Apprentice: Thomistic Essays in Honor of Lawrence Dewan, O.P.* (Washington D.C.: CUA Press, 2007), 5. On this matter I side with Aertsen over Dewan, who maintains that truth is solely a logical transcendental in “Is Truth a Transcendental for St. Thomas Aquinas,” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, vol. 2, no. 1 (2004), 1-20. See my “The Doctrine of the Transcendentals and Aquinas' *De Veritate*: A Comparative Analysis of Lawrence Dewan and Jan Aertsen,” Presentation to 46th International Conference of Medieval Studies (Kalamazoo, forthcoming).

¹⁶ Ibid. For an extensive treatment of the logical sphere of the transcendental see Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, 243-261; 278-283.

¹⁷ Quoted from Aertsen, “Is Truth Not a Transcendental?”, 10.

¹⁸ Ibid.

knowledge resides not only in the intellect but in things, and that an account of the way things are in act is a necessary compliment for understanding the act of intellection.¹⁹ This kind of harmonization is precisely what Aertsen is after when he calls truth a relational transcendental; that is, a transcendental conceived according to the correlation of being and the soul or intellect, and comments on the aforementioned passage, which is worth quoting at length:

“Thomas understands Aristotle’s statement as a reference to the special position of human beings in the world. Man is all things *quodammodo*, namely, not by his being, but by his knowing; it is that in which the perfection of an intellectual substance consists. Knowing beings are distinguished from non-knowing beings in that the latter have only their own form, whereas knowing beings are by nature able to assimilate also the forms of other things. Their nature has ‘a greater amplitude and extension.’ An intellectual substance has ‘more affinity’ to the whole of things than does any other substance. Through its intellect it is able to comprehend the entire being (*totius entis comprehensiva*). The human mind, one could say, is marked by a transcendental openness.”²⁰

Aertsen’s concluding sentence is especially profound—“the human mind...is marked by a transcendental openness”—and may intimate more than he himself would be willing to admit. Can we deepen what Aertsen has so perspicuously taught us?

In his major opus *Philosophy of Being: A Reconstructive Essay*, Olivia Blanchette critiques the modern proclivity to overly accentuate possibility by offering metaphysics of actuality as an alternative. Blanchette’s proposes a twofold trajectory based on the inextricable compatibility of knowing and being; namely, the act of the intellect and the actuality of being.²¹ Regarding the former, Blanchette explains how the discipline of metaphysics arises from reflection on the act of judgment itself and our very ability to reflect on this reflection. As Blanchette calls it, “a reflection that seeks understanding in its very transcendence of understanding.”²² To help clarify this point he makes a distinction—a distinction derived from considering the relation of being and truth—between the act or exercise of judgment, *actu exercito*, and the terms used for making a judgment, *actu signato*. By means of this distinction, Blanchette introduces the occasion for metaphysics as the mind’s transcendental orientation in every act of judgment. This transcendental orientation is evident by mind’s proclivity and residual grasp of truth in every act, *actu exercito*, of judgment. Blanchette writes, “Implicit in the act

¹⁹ One must be careful here not to misunderstand the point I am trying to make. I am not arguing that the act of the intellect is reducible to and can only be given an account of on the basis of it being activated by things. Fundamentally, transcendental Thomism never departs from an appreciation of the a posteriori while still recognizing the dynamic depth the intellect possesses in every act of intellection. It is not uncommon for this depth to be conceived precisely on the basis of Aristotle’s axiom, *anima est quodammodo omnia* [“the soul is in a sense all things”]. Even a metaphysics of cognition entails a metaphysics of being was the point made by J. Maréchal, *Le Point du Depart*, Cahier V XXX Reference XXX, p. E. STEIN???

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

²¹ Olivia Blanchette, *Philosophy of Being: A Reconstructive Essay in Metaphysics* (Washington D.C.: CUA Press, 2003), see especially p. 27.

²² *Ibid.*, 51.

[*actu exercito*], though not in the terms [*actu signato*], of a judgment is the claim that we already know, somehow, what truth is, and that what we are saying entails some truth or correspondence with being. The idea of truth here is not so much one of correspondence as one of relation or reference to being, which presents itself.”²³ Thus, this transcendental orientation toward truth fundamentally entails a transcendental orientation toward being. He follows this with a quote from the corpus of Aquinas’ *De Veritate* 1, 1 that further supports the distinction between *actu exercito* and *actu signato*: “That which intelligence first conceives as what is known best [*quasi notissimum*], and in which it resolves all conceptions, is being.”²⁴ Another way of saying this in line with the language given in the history of the doctrine of the transcendentals above is to say that the supra-categorical becomes evident through every act of judgment in its application of the categories or the predicamental is made possible by the supra-predicamental. With this distinction in place and with establishing the occasion and method of metaphysics, Blanchette arrives a definition of transcendental, distinguishing it slightly from modern conceptions of the term, bringing us closer to understanding the challenge of continuing the doctrine of the transcendentals in modern philosophy:

“We could speak of the method of metaphysics, therefore, as transcendental, but we must be careful to understand the term correctly. First, the method is transcendental in the sense that it transcends any method used in the direct exercise of judgment, such as that of empirical science or phenomenology, the transcendence that we have been at pains to bring out here. But it is not transcendental in the sense that it is concerned only with the form of knowledge, and not with a content of its own, as the transcendental of critical philosophy or phenomenology seems to be. It is transcendental in this modern sense only in that, in order to bring out its particular content, it has to reflect upon the *actual* exercise of judgment that begins directly in experience.”²⁵

Blanchette further distinguishes his conception of transcendental from modern conceptions by emphasizing the metaphysical actuality of being. Earlier I noted that Blanchette suggests a twofold trajectory for metaphysics: the act of the intellect that we just briefly discussed and the actuality of being. Regarding the second trajectory, the actuality of being, Blanchette innovatively—to my knowledge the first to do so though undoubtedly with the inspiration of Maurice Blondel to say nothing of the warrant given by Aquinas himself—argues that act is a transcendental property of being. In order to add ‘act’ to the list of transcendentals Blanchette must demonstrate that act of being is more than an accidental property of a substance, and that it is a universal, common property of being as such. This is no minor feat—an accomplishment that accommodates certain trajectories in contemporary phenomenology. To prove act is a transcendental Blanchette subtly distinguished between act as a transcendental and action particular to each substance by “a certain determinancy in their nature that is open to perfection through action.” (185) In this manner, Blanchette

²³ Ibid., 54. [Brackets mine]

²⁴ Ibid., 55.

²⁵ Ibid., 65. Emphasis mine. One can see how important this use of “actuality” in this quote if one considers the following from the previous page: “Metaphysics is the attempt to make this primordial knowledge [first knowledge of being] critical precisely with reference to being in act through reflection upon the actual exercise of judgment in which we come to know being as being in act.” (64) [Brackets mine]

arrives at act being a transcendental by first not making act solely coincide with the essence of thing and second by demarcating this primordial act of being, or as he calls it “a certain determinancy”, from the action produced by individual essences. With this distinction in place, Blanchette argues that action derives from the combination of essence and the act of being thereby making act in general a prerequisite for action in general. He writes, “The act of being does not flow from the essence from the essence that limits it in a finite being. It is simply in composition with this essence, as in the case of human being, where the concrete human essence limits its act of being. Action flows from the composite of an essence and its act of being.”²⁶ Making act a transcendental puts Blanchette in conversation with phenomenology but the metaphysics required to make it such decidedly offsets him from it. While Blanchette admits that arguing for the transcendental of actuality resonates with the modern turn to the subject and the emphasis on action in phenomenology, he still augments these sympathies with a traditional metaphysical account of act given through the distinction between essence and existence, thereby cleverly connecting the ancient etymology of cause, *aitia*, as deriving from a forensic context having to do with action, responsibility, and imputation.²⁷ Later on in the work Blanchette enumerates the metaphysics of the act of being in terms of act and potency with act being a perfection of being, the details of which cannot be pursued here. But just as the act of judgment transcends the terms or signifiers used in each judgment, so also the metaphysics of the act of being transcends any attempt to define it essentially. “At this point we might be tempted,” writes Blanchette, “to ask for a definition of act to show what this act of being is. But such a definition cannot be given, since as Aquinas remarks, act is one of those first simple concepts that cannot be defined, because we cannot go on indefinitely in definitions (In Metaph IX, 5, § 1826).”²⁸

In sum, Aertsen helped us to see how Aquinas’ notion of truth as a transcendental followed a twofold trajectory: the being of reason (*ens rationis*) associated with logic and the real being (*ens naturae*) of metaphysics. In the course of enumerating each of these, Aertsen intimated the importance of the act of the intellect meeting the act of being in Aquinas’ *De Veritate* 1,1, which he came to describe as a kind of “transcendental openness.” This description prompted us to deepen our understanding of the transcendental by turning to Blanchette’s twofold account of the transcendental according to the act of the intellect and the act of being, paying particular attention to the significance of act for him. Now, having considered Aquinas’ account of the transcendental with the help of Aertsen and Blanchette, we are in a position to reconsider Heidegger’s reading of Aquinas on truth as a transcendental.

III. Heidegger’s Interpretation of the Transcendentals—The Priority of *Dasein*

Returning to Heidegger’s interpretation of the transcendental in Aquinas, his appeal to Aquinas’ notion of truth as a transcendental corresponds to his argument for the priority of *Dasein*. This priority is founded on *Dasein*’s unique disposition or relation toward Being.²⁹ Heidegger lists three ways that *Dasein* “takes priority over all other entities,” with the third priority prompting Heidegger to Aristotle’s *anima est quodammodo omnia* and his appeal to

²⁶ Ibid., 174.

²⁷ Ibid., 186. This is precisely how Blanchette differs from Heidegger when he worries that he reduces action to essence.

²⁸ Ibid., 343.

²⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 32.

Aquinas's consideration of truth as a transcendental. His exposition here is a further elaboration on his pointed description of *Dasein* elsewhere:

“Being as the basic theme of philosophy is no genus of some entities and yet it concerns each entity. Its ‘universality’ is sought on a higher plane. Being and the structure of being lie beyond each entity as such. Being is the *transcendens* simply. The transcendence of the being of *Dasein* in an exceptional [transcendence] insofar as the possibility and necessity of the most radical individuation resides in it. Every disclosure of Being as *transcendens* is transcendental knowledge. Phenomenological truth (disclosedness of Being) is *veritas transcendentalis*.”³⁰

If one permits, Heidegger appears to construct an analogy suggestive of the schema that generated the doctrine of the transcendentals: the ontological is to the categorical as the ontic is to the supra-categorical. If one pursues this analogy even further we see that just as the medieval transcendentals surpass the categories by virtue of their universality just as *Dasein* as ontically prior does to any ontological description of it.³¹ It is the with this transcending primordially of *Dasein* in place that Heidegger introduces Aristotle's dictum, “Man's soul is, in a certain way, entities”, and lauds Aquinas' move to secure the transcendentals especially truth by turning to an entity who is all things:

“Thomas is engaged in the task of deriving the ‘*transcendentia*’—those characters of Being which lie beyond every possible way in which an entity may be classified as coming under some generic kind of subject-matter (every *modus specialis entis*), and which belong necessarily to anything, whatever it may be. Thomas has to demonstrate that the *verum* is such a *transcendens*. He does this by invoking an entity which, in accordance with its very manner of Being, is properly suited to ‘come together with’ entities of any sort whatever... Here the priority of ‘*Dasein*’ over all other entities emerges, although it has not been ontologically clarified. This priority has obviously nothing in common with a vicious subjectivizing of the totality of entities.”³²

This is truly a remarkable passage, and it speaks volumes that he sees his own understanding of *Dasein* as somehow compatible with the medieval transcendental tradition in a way that perhaps other descriptions are not. The concluding phrase especially captures the reader. To whom does this refer? Is this a turn away from Kant? If so, in which direction: toward the medieval conception of the transcendental or toward a Husserlian conception of the transcendental? Certainly, more evidence ways toward the latter than to the former no matter what degree he may couch his conception of *Dasein* in Aristotelian-medieval terms. Thus, it can be conceived as an amalgam of both. In his discussion of Heidegger's

³⁰ Quoted from Daniel Dahlstrom, “Heidegger's Transcendentalism,” *Research in Phenomenology*, vol. 35 (2005), 34.

³¹ Heidegger articulates this in terms of the priority of *Dasein*, “But with equal primordially *Dasein* also possesses—as constitutive for its understanding of existence—an understanding of the Being of all entities of a character other than its own. *Dasein* has therefore a third priority as providing the ontico-ontological condition for the possibility of any ontologies.” (34)

³² Ibid.

transcendentalism, Daniel Dahlstrom perspicaciously discusses how Heidegger's thought "attempts to root all epistemic or alethic valence in conceptual activity" and as such retains "vestiges of the transcendental turn." As such, Dahlstrom argues that Heidegger "conceives the project of *Sein und Zeit* in terms that combine the medieval concept of 'transcendence' with the modern (Kantian and Husserlian) concept of the transcendental."³³ Much more could be said here, but the gist remains the same; namely, Heidegger's retrieval of the medieval tradition remains highly selective so that he can put in conversation with a modern conception of transcendence thus making evident what he leaves unsaid become more pointed when we compare that to those expositions of the transcendental by Aertsen and Blanchette though some points of contact remain between them.

Now that we have covered Aertsen, Blanchette, and Heidegger regarding the transcendental, we are in a better position to appreciate the similarities and silences in Heidegger's appeal to Aquinas' account of truth as a transcendental. Far from being an overly clever interpretation of Aquinas, Heidegger proves to be quite conscientious, erudite and selective of that which is consistent with what he wishes to convey about *Dasein*. Silences speak louder than words. With Aertsen, we see that Aquinas' conception of the transcendental doubly coincides with the synthesis of knowing (*ens rationis*) and being (*ens naturae*). Teasing out the implications of each of these Aertsen arrives at a consider of Aquinas' interpretation of Aristotle's *anima est quodammodo omnia*, which he describes provocatively as a "transcendental openness." In order to further understand the nature of this "transcendental openness", we sought the help of Blanchette, who furthered our understanding of the transcendental with his exposition of the act of the intellect and the act of being, paying particular attention to the significance of the notion of act. What makes Blanchette particularly relevant for this essay is the way he articulates his conception of transcendental in comparison to Heidegger's. Blanchette confirms that Heidegger was right to begin with *Dasein* and that the modern turn to the subject can be quite complimentary with the medieval conception of the transcendental.³⁴ Still Heidegger says little about what Blanchette calls the "act of being" and what Aertsen designates as *ens naturae* in his consideration of the transcendental in *Being and Time*.³⁵

By way of conclusion, one can say that in a manner I have tacitly answered the question regarding the viability of the doctrine of the transcendentals today; namely, it's viability must come through a conversation with contemporary reflections on the transcendental—a conversation that I hope to have initiated here and hope to pursue in greater detail elsewhere.

³³ Dahlstrom, "Heidegger's Transcendentalism," 34.

³⁴ Blanchette, *Philosophy of Being*, 67. Also see p. 70. Blanchette also frequently describes the human being as the primary analogate of being.

³⁵ However, see Heidegger, *Basic Problems in Phenomenology*