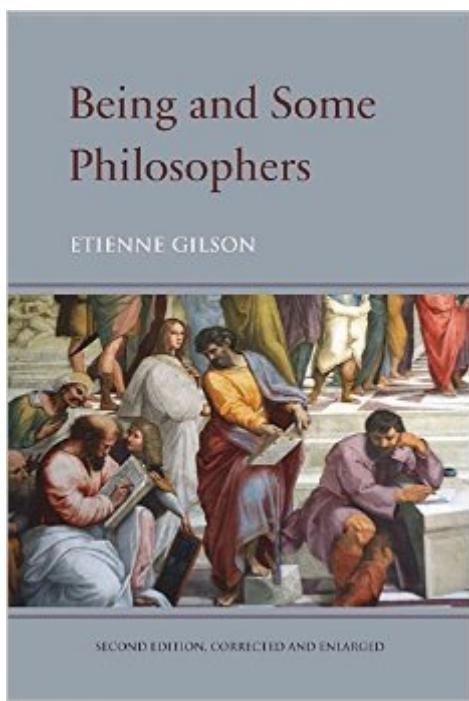


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Being And Some Philosophers



Synopsis

The study of being was one of the main preoccupations of Etienne Gilson's scholarly and intellectual life. *Being and Some Philosophers* is at once a testament to the persistence of those concerns and an important landmark in the history of the question of being. The book charts the ways in which being is translated across history, from unity in Plato and substance in Aristotle to essence in Avicenna and the act of existence in Aquinas. It examines the vicissitudes of essence and existence in Suarez and Christian Wolff, in Hegel and Kierkegaard, in order to uncover the metaphysical and existential foundations of modern thought. And yet *Being and Some Philosophers* remains not so much an historical investigation (although it could only have been written by a scholar steeped in the history of philosophy) but, in the words of its author, "a philosophical book, and a dogmatically philosophical one at that." Its passionate vigour has proven, over many years, at once fresh and provocative. Indeed, the appendix to this revised edition contains critiques of the book by two Thomists as well as Gilson's replies to their objections.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is perhaps the greatest and most illuminating study of the history of metaphysics and the problems that motivate it that I've ever read. Gilson begins by discussing metaphysics as the inquiry of being qua being and shows why philosophy is led endlessly back to this issue because of a fundamental ambiguity belonging to the concept of being. On the one hand we use being as a noun denoting possibility or the whatness of a thing. For instance, a triangle is a three sided figure regardless of whether triangles actually exist or not. On the other hand we use being in the sense of

the verb "to be" denoting existence or the fact that something is. Problems emerge when we recognize that when we speak of beings we tend to emphasize their intelligibility, essence or whatness, while nonetheless all of us are actually concerned with whether or not a particular essence actually is. Since there's not much that can actually be said about existence, philosophy progressively comes to emphasize the intelligibility of beings as in the case of Wolff, Kant and Hegel such that being becomes reduced to a field of pure possibility (formal ontology) that cannot explain what existence adds, if anything, to the being of a thing. Gilson traces this tension throughout the history of philosophy, examining Parmenides, Plato, Plotinus, the Scholastics, modern thought and existentialism showing how all of these different thought experiments have been attempts to come to terms with this issue. Ultimately Gilson wants to advocate a Thomistic solution to this problem, but whether you agree with Gilson's solution or not, what's truly of value in this book is the paradoxes and difficulties inherent in the different attempts to reconcile being as possibility or essence and being as existence.

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