

TO BE: THAT IS THE ANSWER!
(TO THE question “WHO IS THE LORD/KYRIOS/dominus/JHWH?”)
Mk 12:29-30; Ex 3:1-15; Num 12:8; Acts 17: 22-31

- I. AN ILLUMINATING MOMENT:** Moses at burning bush hears/sees/apprehends the God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob, now revealed as: JHWH=Jehovah
- A. Uniquely Jewish concept: JHWH (Jahwe/Jehovah; LORD)
1. Proper Name—first person: **I**; third person: **He**—“*the name by excellence*”
 2. Predominant word in OT: 6000 times
 3. Pronunciation: Samaritan *Jabe* best clue, since JHWH too sacred for Jews to say
 4. Definition: “As the Divine name is an imperfect form of the archaic Hebrew verb ‘to be’, Jahveh means ‘He Who is’, Whose characteristic note consists in being, or ‘*The Being Simply.*”
- B. Burning/unburned Bush on “the Mountain of God” attracts attention
1. Supernatural Voice from Beyond: “Moses, Moses”—personal address
 2. Sacred Space: “take off your shoes”—immediacy, transparency of contact
 3. Face-to-face (cf. Num 12:8)—mystical/supernatural/numinous—Encounter
- C. Revealing a PERSON’S PRESENCE—the living LORD established, on His Mountain—Horeb/Sinai) an “I/Thou” relationship (cf. Martin Buber’s *I/Thou*)—N.B.: “Thou/Thee/Thine” in KJV meant deeply intimate relationship (like German *Du*)
1. Simultaneously twofold, common sense intuition re the world we experience: things *be*
 - a. *What* (a tree, a chair, a person; a flag; a country) defines a thing, its *essence*
 - b. *Is* (really there) demonstrates its *existence*, its being
 2. Crucial intuition re God evident to Moses on “Mountain of God”
 3. C.S. Lewis: “We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade, the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him. He walks everywhere incognito, and the incognito is not always hard to penetrate. The real labour is to attend. In fact, to come awake. Still more, to remain awake” (*Letters to Malcolm*, p. 75).

II. AN ARRESTING APPREHENSION: “I AM WHO I AM”—HE *IS*
(THE SUPREME BEING)

- A. The most invaluable verb/word: absolute necessity of the word BE—I am; you are; she is; we were; I was; you will; I shall; Hamlet: “To be, or not to be”; McArthur: “I shall return!”; JFK: *Ich bin ein Berliner*”; Churchill: “We shall fight them on the beaches . . .”; Beatles: “Let it be, let it be”
1. *Copulative*: “I am a man (i.e. essence); then too: “I am short; I am elderly, I am married” (interesting accidents)
 2. *Substantive*: “I be” (existence essential if essence and accidents real)
- B. The most basic theological insight
1. Augustine: “For we are, and know that we are, and delight in our being and our knowledge of it” (*City God*, xi. 26).
 2. Augustine: “God . . . who abides forever, for whose presence no one has to wait, whose absence no one has to fear, for the very reason that He truly is, is ever present” (*De Ord*).
 3. John of Damascus: “Now, it seems that of all the names given to God the more proper is that of HE WHO IS, For, like some limitless and boundless sea of essence, He contains all being in Himself.”
 4. “Nothing but Absolute Being can satisfy human nature” (Augustine, *City of God*, XVII, 2; p. 84).

JEHOVAH (JHWH/YAHWEH)

** The proper name of God in the Old Testament; hence the Jews called it *the name* by excellence, the great name, the only name, the glorious and terrible name, the hidden and mysterious name, the name of the substance, the proper name, and most frequently *shem hammephorash*, i.e. the explicit or the separated name, . . .

** Jehovah occurs more frequently than any other Divine name. The Concordances . . . do not exactly agree as to the number of its occurrences; but in round numbers it is found in the Old Testament 6000 times, either alone or in conjunction with another Divine name. The Septuagint and the Vulgate render the name generally by “Lord” (*Kyrios, Dominus*), a translation of Adonai — usually substituted for Jehovah in reading.

** The Fathers and the Rabbinic writers agree in representing Jehovah as an ineffable name. . . . According to a Rabbinic tradition the real pronunciation of Jehovah ceased to be used at the time of Simeon the Just, who was, according to Maimonides, a contemporary of Alexander the Great. At any rate, it appears that the name was no longer pronounced after the destruction of the Temple.

** The judicious reader will perceive that the Samaritan pronunciation *Jabe* probably approaches the real sound of the Divine name closest; . . . Inserting the vowels of *Jabe* into the original Hebrew consonant text, we obtain the form Jahveh (*Yahweh*), which has been generally accepted by modern scholars as the true pronunciation of the Divine name.

** Jahveh (*Yahweh*) is one of the archaic Hebrew nouns, such as Jacob, Joseph, Israel, etc. . . . derived from the third person imperfect in such a way as to attribute to a person or a thing the action of the quality expressed by the verb after the manner of a verbal adjective or a participle. . . . As the Divine name is an imperfect form of the archaic Hebrew verb “to be”, Jahveh means “He Who is”, whose characteristic note consists in being, or *The Being* simply.

** Jahveh may be an imperfect *qal* from a grammatical point of view, and the traditional exegesis of Exodus 3:6-16, seems to necessitate the form Jahveh. Moses asks God: “If they should say to me: What is his [God's] name? What shall I say to them?” In reply, God returns three times to the determination of His name.

** He uses the first person imperfect of the Hebrew verb “to be”; . . . Hence we have the renderings: “I am who am” (Vulgate), “I am who is” (Septuagint), “I shall be [who] shall be” (Aquila, Theodotion), “the Eternal who does not cease” (Ar.); . . .

** Here another question presents itself: Is the being predicated of God in His name, the metaphysical being denoting nothing but existence itself, or is it an historical being, a passing manifestation of God in time?

** Most Protestant writers regard the being implied in the name Jahveh as an historical one, though some do not wholly exclude such metaphysical ideas as God's independence, absolute constancy, and fidelity to His promises, and immutability in His plans . . .

[however] . . . the rules of hermeneutics urge us to take the expressions in Exodus 3:13-15, for what they are worth. Jahveh is He Who Is, i.e., His nature is best characterized by Being, if indeed it must be designated by a personal proper name distinct from the term God. . . . Finite beings are defined by their essence: God can be defined only by being, pure and simple, nothing less and nothing more; not be abstract being common to everything, and characteristic of nothing in particular, but by concrete being, absolute being, the ocean of all substantial being, independent of any cause, incapable of change, exceeding all duration, because He is infinite: “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, . . . who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8).

** The view that Jahveh is of Hebrew origin is the most satisfactory. Arguing from Exodus 6:2-8, [distinguished scholars] . . . maintain that the name was revealed for the first time to Moses on Mount Horeb. . . . On Mt. Horeb God told Moses that He had not acted with the Patriarchs as the God of the Covenant, Jahveh, but as God Almighty.

** Perhaps it is preferable to say that the sacred name, though perhaps in a somewhat modified form, had been in use in the patriarchal family before the time of Moses. On Mt. Horeb God revealed and explained the accurate form of His name, Jahveh.

--“Jehovah” in *Catholic Encyclopedia*

‘WHAT MAY BE KNOWN OF GOD IS MANIFEST’

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things” (*Romans* 1:18-23, NKJV).

* * * * *

“Let us rouse ourselves, let us stop living in dreams or in the magic of images and formulas, of words, of signs and practical symbols. Once a man has been awakened to the reality of existence and of his own existence, when he has really perceived that formidable, sometimes elating, sometimes sickening or maddening fact *I exist*, he is henceforth possessed by the intuition of being and the implications it bears with it.

Precisely speaking, this primordial intuition is both the intuition of *my* existence and of existence of *things*, but first and foremost of the existence of things. When it takes place, I suddenly realize that a given entity—man, mountain or tree—exists and exercises this sovereign activity *to be* in its own way, in an independence of *me* which is total, totally self assertive and totally implacable. And at the same time I realize that *I* also exist, but as thrown back into my loneliness and frailty by this other existence by which things assert themselves and in which I have positively no part, to which I am exactly as naught. . . . As for me, confronted with others, it is my own existence that I feel to be fragile and menaced, exposed to destruction and death. Thus the primordial intuition of being is the intuition of the solidity and inexorability of existence; and second, of the death and nothingness to which *my* existence is liable. And third, in the same flash of intuition, which is but my becoming aware of the intelligible value of being, I realize that this solid and inexorable existence, perceived in anything whatsoever, implies—I do not yet know in what form, perhaps in the things themselves, perhaps separately from them—some absolute, irrefragable existence, completely free from nothings and death. These three leaps—by which the intellect moves first to actual existence as asserting itself independently of me; and then from this sheer objective existence to my own threatened existence; and finally from my existence spoiled with nothingness to absolute existence—are achieved within the same unique intuition, which philosophers would explain as the intuitive perception of the essentially analogical content of the first concept, the concept of Being.

--Jacques Maritain, *Approaches to God*, pp. 18-19

The CONTINGENCY of Beings and (thus) the NECESSITY of BEING

“The third way [of demonstrating God’s existence] is taken from possibility and necessity, and runs thus. We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to corrupt, and consequently, they are possible to be and not to be. [N.B.: house flies come and go, nations rise and fall, things continually change; I once was not but now am and will pass away]

But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not. [N.B.: neither the mountains, nor the galaxies are forever]

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. [N.B.: *ex nihilo, nihil*—“from nothing comes nothing”]

Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence—which is absurd. 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 which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes. 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.

--Thomas Aquinas, ST, I, Q. 2, Art. 3

“The argument from contingent beings can be summarized as follows:

1. Some things exist but can not exist (i.e. possible beings).
2. And something has always existed.
3. But possible beings do not ground themselves.
4. Therefore, there must be a Necessary Being.

“In support of the first premise, Aquinas observes that whatever comes to be and ceases to be cannot be a Necessary Being. For a Necessary being must necessarily be. Only a contingent being can not be. The second premise implies the self-evident principle that nothing cannot cause something. Hence, if there were ever a state of total nothingness, then there would always be nothing, since nothing cannot give rise to something. Since something now is, then something must always have been. Further, the only thing that can ground a contingent being is a Necessary Being. For if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist. And if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist begins to exist only through something already existing. And the something that always existed must be a Necessary Being, not another contingent being. Therefore, there must be a Necessary Being as the cause of all contingent (possible) beings.”

--Norman Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal*