Esse/Essence and Grace: A Theological Inquiry into Thomist Methodology

Joyce A. Little

Marquette University

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ESSE/ESSENCE AND GRACE:
A THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO THOMIST METHODOLOGY

by

Joyce A. Little, B.A., M.A.

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Joyce A. Little
B.A., University of Denver, 1966
M.A., University of Washington, 1968

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In Room 207
Coughlin Hall

Committee in Charge:
Fr. Donald J. Keefe, S.J., Director
Fr. Harry J. Klocker, S.J.
Fr. Matthew L. Lamb
Dr. Robert Masson
Fr. Thomas Hughson, S.J.
Graduate Studies

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Dissertation Abstract

Essence/Grace: A Theological Inquiry into Thomist Methodology

Traditional Thomism, both philosophical and theological, has assumed that the essence distinction drawn by St. Thomas Aquinas lies within the domain of philosophy (nature) rather than of theology (grace). The source of this assumption is Thomas himself, who supposed the substantial correlation of esse and essence to be natural, thereby relegating grace to the role of accident. This dissertation challenges that fundamental assumption.

The dissertation consists of two parts. In Part I, the essence distinction itself is analyzed. The approach is methodological, not historical. Arguing that the basic methodological principle of Thomism is the act/potency complementarity which Thomas derived from Aristotle, Part I concludes that the correct application of that principle requires us to regard esse as gratuitous rather than as natural. That is to say, grace, within Thomist methodology, is substantial, not accidental.

The second part of the dissertation applies the principles of Thomist methodology worked out in Part I to contemporary Roman Catholic theology, first, with regard to the nature/grace problematic and the question of method which it has raised within this century, and, secondly, with regard
to the problem of contemporary historical consciousness and the need for a new perspective which it has raised in the wake of Vatican II. Arguing that Transcendental Thomism has failed to resolve the methodological problem with regard to the relationship between nature and grace and that liberation theology has failed to find the new perspective which contemporary historical consciousness indicates we require, Part II concludes that the act/potency methodology of Aristotle, as transformed by the Thomist esse/essence distinction, opens the way to a new theological approach to creation as Christocentric and covenantal, and that such an approach not only overcomes the methodological problems with regard to the nature/grace relationship, but also provides the new perspective which historical consciousness today requires.
Information on Author

Name: Joyce A. Little
Born: August 14, 1944

Academic Degrees:


Publications and Research:


Background and Experience:


Memberships in Societies:

Phi Beta Kappa
College Theology Society
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This dissertation is an inquiry into Thomist method. It proceeds on the basis of two fundamental assumptions with regard to theological method. First, theological method deals with the formal structural principles employed in systematic theology. Secondly, theology itself is not concerned solely with God or with man, but with the union between the two. That union as given in Christ, the God-man, grounds the theological enterprise.

Theological method is therefore a correlation of the revelation given in Christ with methodological principles drawn from one or another of the humanistic disciplines. This dissertation deals explicitly with the correlation of the revelation and principles drawn from philosophy.

In Plato and Aristotle, we are confronted with a fundamental choice between understanding reality as either extrinsic to or immanent within the material world. Plato proceeds on the basis of a notion of reality which treats the world as fallen from the essential integrity of pure form. Matter is, for him, that which fragments or disrupts the essential integrity of pure form. Such a notion of reality as dematerialized is expressed primarily in the principle of a form/matter contradiction or tension, whereby the fundamental ambiguity or angst of fragmented human existence is given a methodological account.

Aristotle, rejecting the purely formal realm of Plato, identifies reality with the material world. Reality for Aristotle is therefore found in the material world and not apart from it. Such a notion of the
"really real" as the material world is expressed in Aristotle's principle of the complementarity between act and potency, operative at the two levels of form/matter and substance/accident.

When either the Aristotelian or the Platonic approach is employed in order to understand the structures of being or reality, we have philosophy. When either of these approaches is correlated with the Christian revelation, we have moved from philosophy to theology. While both methods or approaches are capable of a theological transformation, this dissertation deals primarily with Aristotelian method and its transformation by St. Thomas Aquinas.

This dissertation attempts to establish five points. First, the basic principle operative in Thomas' works is the act/potency complementarity which Thomas derived from Aristotle. Thomist method is therefore Aristotelian and not, as is often argued, either Platonic or a synthesis of Aristotle and Plato. Secondly, the esse/essence correlation introduced by Thomas produces a radical transformation of Aristotelian method, a transformation which Thomas himself did not fully grasp or work out. Thirdly, that transformation is explicitly theological, and not, as is generally supposed, philosophical, inasmuch as it is the means by which the Aristotelian notion of material reality as necessary and eternal is transformed into the Christian notion of material reality as contingent and created. Fourthly, an analysis of the principle of esse within Thomist methodology requires us to recognize that the created order, within such a methodological framework, cannot be understood as substantially natural, but must be recognized as substantially graced. Grace, therefore, is not solely accidental in Thomism, but operates at the level of substance as well. Fifthly, Thomas' trans-
formation of Aristotle is, methodologically speaking, necessarily Christocentric, inasmuch as an Aristotelian and, therefore, a Thomist method proceeds on the basis of an intrinsic, not an extrinsic, analysis of the world as real. Hence, the union of God and man cannot be reduced to notions of human participation in divinity which invoke an extrinsic source, whether this be Ipsum Esse, the divine essence, the Divine Ideas or the disincarnate Logos. Rather, Christ must be recognized as the immanent source of unity and value in the created order, and the participation of humanity in divinity must be recognized as a mediated participation in Christ, the God-man. The substantial grace of creation is therefore, within Thomism, inseparable from the Incarnation and gratia Christi.

The most important of these five points, the one most central to the overall purpose of the dissertation, is the final one, namely, the argument that Thomist method proceeds on the basis of an intrinsic, not an extrinsic, analysis of the material world. The first part of the dissertation focuses on the failures of Thomas and subsequent Thomist philosophers, as well as Aristotle himself, to locate within this world a unified source for the composite intrinsic principles or causes of this world. The failure to locate such an immanent source has produced successive appeals to extrinsic or dematerialized sources, whether they be the separate substances or Prime Movers of Aristotle, the Divine Ideas of Thomas or the notion of Ipsum Esse employed by participationist Thomists.

The second part of the dissertation examines contemporary Catholic theology and contemporary quantum physics, finding there the same failure, whether it be Rahner's appeal to an infinite horizon of being,
Lonergan's appeal to infinite intelligence and the unrestricted desire to know, Metz' God of the absolute future or Einstein's God who does not play dice. In all of these cases, the reality and value of the world is reduced, in Platonic fashion, to a source extrinsic to it.

However, the problems and questions which contemporary theology must face require that we locate reality and value within the world. This is most acute with regard, first, to the nature/grace problem as it presents itself in this century, for the question is not one of locating an extrinsic source of grace nor even of asserting an immanent nexus between nature and grace, but of giving some methodological account of that immanent nexus. The need to locate reality and value within the world is also acute with regard to contemporary anthropocentrism and concern for the importance of the created order itself, where once again the question is not one of referring the value of this world to an extrinsic agent, but one of discovering within this world that source which unifies it and makes it good.

Heretofore Catholic theology has failed to link Christ to creation. Yet just such a link is what we require in order to resolve both the methodological problem raised by nature and grace and the problem which contemporary historical consciousness raises when it seeks a value and unity in this material order and not apart from it.

Both of these problems are explicitly Aristotelian ones, for they address the question of an immanent source of unity and intelligibility within the world. Their resolution is found in Christ, the God-man, in whom is given the union of the human and the divine. Therefore, a Thomist theological method, which proceeds by an analysis of immanent causality within the light of the revelation of Christ as the first-born of creation (Col 1.16), the One for whom and by whom all things
exist (1 Cor 8.5f, Heb 2.10), the One in whom all things hold together (Col 1.17), the Alpha and the Omega (Apoc 22.13), provides the basis for a theology of creation in Christ which responds directly to those theological needs which are most pressing today.


This dissertation was done with the help of a large number of people. I would like to thank, first, my fellow students, especially Kevin McMahon, Cindy Guthrie, Sr. Susan Wood, Dan Hauser, Fr. Bill Kelly and Rev. Terry Scherf, for their enormous support and encouragement. Secondly, I would like to thank the members of my board, particularly Fr. Harry R. Klocker, S.J., for their advice and suggestions. And last, but certainly not least, I would especially like to thank Fr. Donald J. Keefe, S.J., the Director of this dissertation, without whom, in all manner of way, this work could never have been done.
PART I

ESSE/ESSENCE: SUBSTANTIAL GRACE
INTRODUCTION

Twentieth century Thomist philosophy cannot be faulted for ignoring the real distinction between esse and essence. As one writer recently noted, "The year 1910 marks a watershed in the history of the real distinction debate; in that year the Jesuit Marcel Chossat rekindled the ever-smoldering embers of the real distinction controversy by doubting that St. Thomas ever held the doctrine traditionally ascribed to him."1 Since few Thomists can be found who agree with Chossat,2 the actual debate over this distinction has, in recent years, moved to higher ground. Assuming that St. Thomas did in fact draw such a distinction, most Thomists today ask whether or not that distinction and, indeed, Thomism itself, are best understood as fundamentally Aristotelian or fundamentally Neoplatonic.3 The discussion has therefore tended to focus on the centrality of esse, on the one hand, and the notion of participation, on the other.

Although disagreements among Thomists range far and run deep, these philosophers are as one in assuming the real distinction itself

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2 Other recent Thomists who have denied the esse-essence distinction include Francis Cunningham, Pedro Descoqs and J. P. Kenney.

3 Earlier studies supported the view of an Aristotelian Thomism. More recent works, especially those of C. Fabro, L.-B. Geiger, J. de Finance, L. de Raeymaeker, A. Little and W. N. Clarke, argue for a strong Neoplatonic influence at work in Thomas' thought.
to lie within the domain of philosophy rather than of theology. It is that assumption which Part I of this dissertation will challenge. The approach will be methodological, not historical. That is to say, no attempt will be made to claim that, in assuming the real distinction to be philosophical, contemporary Thomists are departing from what St. Thomas himself said. The textual evidence clearly indicates that Thomas did in fact understand the real distinction to lie within the domain of philosophy. Instead, Part I will proceed on a different course, one which nevertheless closely parallels in some respects the recent Thomist discussions on the real distinction.

First, the real distinction will be examined with regard to both act/potency and participation, in order to establish that the act/potency correlation is the basic methodological principle in Thomism. Such an examination parallels the current philosophical discussion on whether Thomas is Aristotelian or Neoplatonic, and that discussion will therefore be considered. Secondly, the place of esse will be appraised within Thomist methodology, with a view to establishing that, given the correct application of the act/potency principle, esse cannot properly be considered as a 'natural' element in existing things. Such an appraisal parallels the current philosophical discussion on the centrality of esse in Thomas' thinking, and that discussion will also be considered. The appraisal itself will show that, unless esse be understood as gratuitous and its gratuity to be theological, no coherent systematic account of the nature/grace relationship can be given within Thomist methodology.
CHAPTER 1

ESSE/ESSENCE: THE THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT

"Si on considère l'ensemble de la philosophie de St. Thomas on est frappé du rôle organique que joue cette doctrine capitale."¹ With those words, Roland-Gosselin has pinpointed both the importance of the esse/essence distinction within Thomist philosophy and the source of the difficulties which arise when one attempts a methodological analysis of it. To paraphrase La Fontaine, all roads lead to the real distinction and, conversely, all roads lead from it. In this chapter, I will examine the real distinction both with regard to its definition and with regard to its philosophical and theological uses by St. Thomas. No attempt will be made to trace the chronological development of Thomas' thought; rather, what will be shown are the interrelationships between this distinction and the methodological principles of act/potency and participation, on the one hand, and the theological doctrines of God as Ipsum Esse and the world as created, on the other. Only after the major elements in the structure have been set out can any attempt be made to determine the fundamental nature of that structure.²

²See chapter 2.
Definition of the Esse/Essence Distinction

Without debate the Scholastics accepted the fact that the essence, considered as a mere possible, was really distinct from its act of being, from esse. The precise point of contention was the following: in an actually existing concrete being, are the two elements which go to make up the being's metaphysical constitution, essence and esse, really distinct?³

To this question, Thomas' answer was consistently affirmative. "Maturity brought about a shift in St. Thomas's position on some matters, but in the matter of the real distinction the thought of St. Thomas remained unchanged throughout his scholarly career."⁴ However, a second question remains. What sort of distinction are we talking about? Avicenna had held a real distinction between esse and essence in his account of esse as an accidental characteristic of existing essences. Giles of Rome was later to maintain a real distinction between esse and essence as two distinct things which, although they are found composed in beings, can nevertheless be separated by the power of God. Therefore, as Kopaczynski points out, it would be less confusing and more accurate were we to speak not of the real distinction, but of the Thomist real distinction.⁵

There are three basic components to the Thomist real distinction. First, in contradistinction to Giles of Rome, Thomas maintains a distinction of principles, not of things. For this reason, Thomists generally refer to it as a 'real minor' or a 'real metaphysical'

³Kopaczynski, Linguistic Ramifications, pp. 8-9.
⁵Kopaczynski, Linguistic Ramifications, pp. 9-10.
distinction.

A real distinction is found wherever there are really several things, parts, elements, and the like, independently of any act of the mind. . . . When the distinction is between complete things or beings, we speak of a major real distinction. When the distinction is between the parts (elements, principles) of one thing, we call it a minor real distinction (for example, the distinction between a man's hand and his foot; or the distinction between his color and his shape).6

Secondly, in contradistinction to Avicenna, Thomas maintains a real irreducibility of either of these principles to the other.7 There is nothing in the essence of a thing which permits us to conclude to its existence.

Finally, the real distinction is perhaps more properly thought of as a real composition. "... we commonly attribute to Thomas a 'distinction' of essence and existence, whereas he usually spoke of their 'composition'."8 In point of fact, Thomas uses the verb 'distinguere' only once with reference to the relationship between esse and essence.9 The importance of this point cannot be stressed too much. There could be no composition between these principles unless they were distinct,

7"Everything that does not belong to the concept of an essence or quiddity comes to it from outside and enters into composition with the essence" (On Being and Essence, c. 4). Later, Thomas explicitly denies the Avicennian view of esse as an accident: "For the being of a thing, although other than its essence, nevertheless is not to be understood as something superadded in the fashion of an accident, but is as it were constituted by the principles of the essence" (In IV Metaph., 2, n. 558, English translation from Joseph Owens, An Elementary Christian Metaphysics [Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1963], p. 43).
9"Cum dicitur: Diversum est esse et quod est, distinguitur actus essendi ab eo cui actus ille convenit" (De Veritate 1, 1 ad 3).
and so it is not incorrect to speak here of a real distinction. Nevertheless, apart from their composition with one another, these principles have no reality.

The principles of which there is question are not beings which we could in any way consider in themselves, absolutely. They are transcendental relations and nothing else; all that we can say of them formally concerns their correlation. We are speaking, therefore, of "a distinction between two principles by whose union limited being is." St. Thomas' works abound in texts regarding the real distinction, so much so, in fact, that no two Thomists employ the same selection of texts when discussing it. The fact that Thomas always treats this distinction within the context of other matters contributes enormously to the diffusion of references. He does, however, deal with this distinction quite explicitly and at greatest length in Book II, chapters 52-54, of the Summa Contra Gentiles. There he discusses, first, the reality of such a distinction in intellectual creatures (chapter 52), secondly, the view that this distinction reflects an act/potency structure in those creatures (chapter 53), and, thirdly, the fact that the esse/essence composition is not identical with the form/matter composition (chapter 54). Indeed, in these three chapters we find almost

all of the major theological and philosophical elements which play a
part in Thomas’ use of the real distinction. These chapters, therefore,
afford us an excellent text upon which to focus in examining the various
strands which enter into Thomas’ treatment of the esse/essence composi-
tion. 13

The theological elements will be considered first. The philosophi-
cal elements will then be examined in light of Thomas’ theological con-
cerns. This procedure assumes that the philosophical principles serve
a theological program and are therefore controlled by that program. In
proceeding thus, this chapter reflects a methodological principle which
is central to the Thomist enterprise. As Thomas himself says at the
beginning of his most ambitious work, the Summa Theologiae:

Holy teaching can borrow from the other sciences, not from any
need to beg from them, but for the greater clarification of the
things it conveys. For it takes its principles directly from
God through revelation, not from the other sciences. On that
account it does not rely on them as though they were in con-
trol, for their role is subsidiary and ancillary; so an archi-
tect makes use of tradesmen as a statesman employs soldiers. 14

13 Gilson sees Summa Contra Gentiles as an important stage in Thomas’
 writings: “The doctrine of creation is bound to modify the notion of
metaphysics itself, in that it introduces into the realm of being a
first cause to whose causality everything is strictly subjected. This
is why, in his Contra Gentiles, in which he does not speak as a com-
mentator of Aristotle, but in his own name, Thomas Aquinas can take
over the very formulas of Aristotle, yet give them a distinctly new
turn” (Being and Some Philosophers, 2nd ed. [Toronto: Pontifical In-
stitute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952], p. 156). He later adds that
chapter 54 in Book II is where Thomas proves that the distinction be-
 tween substance and existence differs from the distinction between form
and matter (Ibid., p. 163). W. N. Clarke notes that Contra Gentiles
is the first work in which Thomas fuses act/potency and participation
(limitation principle), and cites CG I, 43, and II, 52-54, as the first
two places, chronologically speaking, in which these two principles
appear together (“The Limitation of Act by Potency: Aristotelianism
or Neoplatonism?”, The New Scholasticism 26 [1952]:192, 190n [hereafter
cited as Clarke, "The Limitation of Act by Potency"]).

14 ST I, 1, 5 ad 2.
Chapter 52 ("Quod in substantiis intellectualibus differt esse et quod est") begins with a consideration of the fact that intellectual substances, although not corporeal or composed of a mixture of form and matter, nevertheless fail to enjoy the same simplicity as does God. The reasons given for this follow from the nature of subsistent being, which is incapable of division per se, inasmuch as, in subsistent being, substance and being identify. After employing a series of arguments designed to demonstrate this truth, Thomas ends the chapter with a reference to Exodus 3.14, where God reveals Himself as He Who Is. Although the text comes at the end of the chapter, everything in the chapter hinges on it. Indeed, in maintaining that God's proper nature requires that His substance be His being, Thomas refers the reader back to Book I, chapter 22, where we are told that this "sublime truth" was revealed by God to Moses ("Hanc autem sublimen veritatem Moyses a Domino est edoctus").

To say that essence and existence identify in God was not, in itself, an extraordinary thing for a Christian theologian to say. To maintain, however, as Thomas does, that God's substance is His being, to give, in other words, the final say to existence over essence, was a radical departure from his predecessors and his contemporaries, both theological and philosophical. Invoking a literal interpretation of the Qui est of Exodus, Aquinas rejected both the Greek philosophical understanding of being as limited form and the Christian theological understanding of God as infinite essence. The fact that, for Thomas, God is pure act, Ipsum Esse, was to reverberate throughout his entire
God as Creator. Since chapters 52-54 appear in Book II, that part of Contra Gentiles explicitly devoted to the question of creation, much of the discussion of God as Creator has preceded these chapters and is therefore taken for granted within them. Because all creatures derive their source of being from God (chapter 6) and are brought into being by Him (chapter 15) from nothing (chapter 16) by a free act (chapter 23), creation is discussed in chapters 52-54 in terms of causality and God is designated as primum agens (chapter 52). Again, the arguments proceed from God's nature as subsistent being. Since God alone has His being through Himself or through His own substance, all other substances must receive their being from Him. God is being; all other substances have being ("Relinquitur igitur quod, quum Deus sit esse subsistens, nihil aliud praeter ipsum est suum esse"). Because only God is uncaused being, all other beings are caused. Since God is most perfectly in act, because he is act itself (Ipse actus), all beings which have act are dependent upon him. For that reason, God alone is the first agent, just as He alone is His own being.

In fact, Thomas concludes that Ipsum Esse belongs to the first agent as His proper nature, since being is His substance ("Ipsum esse competit primo agenti secundum propriam naturam; esse enim Dei est ejus substantia"). In other words, the Ipse actus which lies behind creation is identical to the Ipsum Esse which is God. And it is precisely

15 The metaphysical implications of God as Ipsum Esse are well detailed in Thomist scholarship. The theological implications have yet to be fully worked out. For an important study on the methodological principles of Thomas as they apply to theology, see Donald J. Keefe, Thomism and the Ontological Theology of Paul Tillich: A Comparison of Systems (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), cited hereafter as Keefe, Thomism.
because God is Ipsum Esse that He is able to effect causally a certain likeness to Himself in all created substances by imparting esse to them (chapter 53).

God as Infinite Perfection. Thomas' view of Ipsum Esse as infinite, not only in the negative sense of an absence of all limitation but in the positive sense of the plenitude of all perfection, follows from his view of God as subsistent being. Self-subsistent being is infinite because it is not terminated in anything. Therefore, subsistent being can be one only, since an infinite being must necessarily contain every perfection; if two such beings existed, they would be indistinguishable from one another (chapter 52). For Thomas, therefore, God is the source not only of being but also of every perfection, since infinite being is identical with infinite perfection. 16

God as Ipsum Esse, Creator and infinite perfection come together in chapter 54, where we are told that in all created beings there is a capacity to perfect and to be perfected. What Thomas clearly has in mind here is a twofold capacity which corresponds to the composite nature of all created being which he has spent these three chapters establishing. As substances considered apart from the being which they

16 This link between esse and perfection finds expression in Thomas' early writings. In a well-known passage in On Being and Essence, c. 5, Thomas writes: "Furthermore, although God is pure being, it is not necessary that he lack other perfections or excellences. On the contrary, he possesses all the perfections of every kind of thing, so that he is called absolutely perfect, as the Philosopher and Commentator say. In fact, he possesses these perfections in a more excellent way than other things, because in him they are one, whereas in other things they are diversified. This is because all these perfections belong to him in view of his simple being. In the same way if someone could produce the operations of all the qualities through one quality alone, in that one quality he would possess every quality. Similarly, God possesses all perfections in his being itself."
receive from God, they have the capacity to be perfected. As substances which enjoy a certain likeness to God by virtue of the esse which He imparts to them as Ipsum Esse, they have within themselves the capacity to perfect, a capacity which derives its efficacy from God as infinite perfection. As composite beings, their existence and perfections are a product not of their essential principles, but of their existential relation with their Creator. The distinction between essence and existence is therefore a real distinction which can be found in all created beings, material and immaterial (chapter 54).

All of the above arguments ultimately depend upon a literal reading of Exodus 3.14. Gilson has written, "we do not maintain that the text of Exodus is a revealed metaphysical definition of God; but if there is no metaphysic in Exodus there is nevertheless a metaphysic of Exodus." E. L. Mascall thinks that to speak of a metaphysic of Exodus is to take too narrow a view of the matter, but goes on to add that:

... it is, I believe, profoundly true to say that there is a metaphysic of the Old Testament and that it is substantially expressed by the Exodus text as St. Thomas interprets it. For although the Old Testament is written almost entirely in ethical and hardly at all in metaphysical terms, the declarations which it makes about the activity of God have very far-reaching metaphysical consequences, and however imperfect may have been the attempts of pre-Thomist writers to express in the Exodus Test as they understood it the Biblical truth about God, I believe that St. Thomas did succeed in this task through his radically existentialist outlook.18

The remainder of this chapter will examine the very far-reaching metaphysical consequences of Thomas' view that He Who Is is Ipsum Esse.


The Philosophical Framework

When Thomas sets out in chapter 52 to establish the fact that intellectual substances are composed, he provides several arguments, all of which are based on the notion that only God is utterly simple. This notion is itself based on the above-mentioned understanding of God as He whose proper nature is "to be". Since being and substance identify in God, there is no basis in Him for any kind of composition. From this, Thomas derives the fundamental principle on which all of his arguments in this chapter depend: "Now being, as being, cannot be diverse; but it can be diversified by something beside itself [praeter esse]."

Thus, when he argues in this chapter for a composition in intellectual creatures on the basis of 1) God's being as beyond every genus, 2) God's infinity and 3) God's uncaused nature, he is maintaining that generic/specific differences, finitude and the caused nature of intellectual creatures cannot be explained solely in terms of esse or being, because esse considered in itself is utterly simple and contains within itself no grounds for its own diversification. Hence, wherever we find creatures, we can recognize that being has entered into composition with or terminated in something other than itself.

At this point, every argument he has employed underscores the differences which obtain between God and creatures. The final two arguments of the chapter move in the opposite direction, revealing not only the uniqueness of God (perfect act and Ipsum Esse) but also the type of relationship which Thomas understands to exist between God and His creatures. In the fourth argument, Thomas maintains that, since God is "Ipse actus perfectissimus," it thereby follows that "this act is
being [esse], wherein generation and all movement terminate, since every form and act is in potentiality before it acquires being [esse]." This statement sets the stage for Thomas' discussion in chapter 53 of the act/potency composition in all intellectual creatures. In the fifth argument, Thomas insists that since God is Ipsum Esse, inasmuch as being belongs to Him according to His proper nature, it thereby follows that "that which belongs to a thing according to its proper nature does not belong to other things except by way of participation, as heat is in other bodies from fire."

Act/potency and participation are the two philosophical principles to which Thomas returns again and again in applying his doctrine of the real distinction to creatures and their relationship to God. Both are important. If either one is left out, the full significance of the real distinction cannot be understood. Their fusion in Thomas' thought constitutes, as W. N. Clarke notes, "a peculiarly original stroke of genius on his part." Before considering their fusion, however, each must be examined separately for the particular manner in which it enables Thomas to develop the fundamental features of the esse/essence distinction.

**Act/Potency and the Real Distinction**

As Gilson points out, "The composition of matter and form dominates the natural philosophy of Aristotle, but the composition of essence and existence is not Aristotelian." Thomas was forced to make a

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20 Gilson, History, p. 422.
distinction not found in Aristotle, and he was forced to do so for two reasons: 1) the Christian doctrine of a free creation \textit{ex nihilo} and 2) his own rejection of the form/matter composition as coterminous with all of created reality. His reasons for rejecting form/matter as the ultimate composition in created beings are set out in chapter 54 and will be considered in more detail later in this section when that chapter is examined.

Aristotle's identification of essence and existence was unacceptable theologically, because it presupposed that the existence of a thing belongs to it by virtue of its essence. Aristotle's necessary and eternal world is the inescapable corollary of that identification. Avicenna's view of existence as an accident of essences was also unacceptable, inasmuch as, while it provided for a created world, it led to the inescapable corollary that the world is necessarily created. For if esse is accidental to essence, it pertains to the nature of essences to exist and God is thereby placed under a necessity to create them. What Thomas required was a clear distinction between esse and essence, such that existence could in no way be understood as identical with or pertaining to essences per se. "Into Aristotle's eternal world, existing outside God and without God, the Christian philosopher introduces the distinction of essence and existence."

The real distinction is clearly a Thomist, not an Aristotelian, principle. Nevertheless, Thomas uses Aristotle's act/potency framework to move beyond Aristotle. More precisely, he uses two of Aristotle's principles, act/potency as a unified composition and the priority of

\footnote{Idem., The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy, p. 68.}
act, as the means by which he gets to an act/potency account of the esse/essence distinction and an Act/act account of God's action as efficient cause.

1) Act/Potency as a Unified Composition. Having considered in chapter 52 that there is a composition in intellectual creatures, Thomas turns in chapter 53 ("Quod in substantiis intellectualibus creatis est actus et potentia") to a discussion of the act/potency nature of this composition. His first argument for such a composition rests on the complementarity or proportionality which defines the relationship between act and potency.

For in whatever thing we find two, one of which is the complement of the other, the proportion of one of them to the other is as the proportion of potentiality to act; for nothing is completed except by its proper act.

Behind this view of the act/potency correlation lies the Aristotelian use of act/potency to account for the problem of being and becoming. Steering between the Scylla of Parmenidean being and the Charybdis of Heraclitean becoming, Aristotle drew upon potency to explain how that which changes is neither being nor non-being. Becoming is the passage from being in potency to being in act. In the famous Aristotelian formula, motion is the act of a being in potency in so far as it is in potency. Act/potency was the means by which Aristotle accounted for the intrinsic unity of a thing without denying the reality of change. Although Thomas' application of this methodological principle to the real distinction is not relevant to the problem of change, it is enormously important with regard to the question of unity in a composed thing. Hence, Thomas insists upon the 'complementarity' of

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22 Aristotle deals most fully with potency and becoming in Metaphysics, Book IX.
act and potency and on act itself as that which 'completes' a thing. Act and potency are not two things, but two principles which are proportionate to one another in the unity of a single thing.\(^{23}\)

The proportion which Thomas has in mind here is that between the 'isness' and the 'whatness' of a thing, a proportion which applies even to intellectual substances. As he states in chapter 52,

> Although intellectual substances are not corporeal, nor composed of matter and form, nor existing in matter as material forms, it is not to be supposed that they therefore equal the divine simplicity. For a certain composition is found in them by the fact that in them being [esse] is not the same as what is [quod est].

He had worked out this distinction in a much earlier work of his, On Being and Essence. In a famous passage there, he points out that it is possible to know what a man or a phoenix is, without knowing that it is. From this, he concludes that esse is other than essence or quiddity.\(^{24}\)

In intellectual substances, therefore, essence is the 'whatness' or the intelligibility of the substance. As Owens puts it, "essence may be called 'nature' in the Boethian sense of what is intelligible through the definition of the thing."\(^{25}\) Act is the actualizing principle which makes that intelligibility an existent intelligibility.\(^{26}\)

2) Priority of Act. The second argument Thomas presents in

\(^{23}\)This principle has already been stated clearly in CG, I, 18: "In every composite there must be act and potency. For several things cannot become absolutely one unless among them something is act and something potency."

\(^{24}\)On Being and Essence, c. 4.


\(^{26}\)On esse as act, see CG I, 22 ("Esse actum quamdam nominat") and ST I, 54 1 ("Esse est actualitas substantiae vel essentiae").
chapter 53 on behalf of the act/potency correlation in things is based on the priority of act: "What ever is present in a thing from an agent must be act, for it belongs to an agent to make something in act."

This statement hearkens back to the discussion in chapter 52 on the priority of act. There he had written, "Since every agent acts in so far as it is in act, it belongs to the first agent, which is most perfect, to be most perfectly in act." The fundamental principle at work here is an Aristotelian one, the priority of act. For Aristotle, potentially existing things are always produced by actually existing things. Something can produce an act only to the extent that it is in act itself.

Employing this principle within the context of creation, Thomas goes well beyond Aristotle in maintaining not only an act/potency relationship of esse to essence in created things, but an Act/act relationship between God and His creation. The basis for the second is the priority of Ipsum Esse over created esse, the basis for the first is the priority of created esse over created potency. What this means, in both instances, is that esse is the first effect of God's creative power. As Thomas writes elsewhere: "being [Ipsum esse] is the most common first effect and more intimate than all other effects." That is why he argues, here in chapter 53, that whatever is from an agent is act. God as first agent produces, prior to all other effects, that being (esse) by which all substances are placed in existence. Hence, there is

27 *Metaphysics*, IX, esp. 1049b-1051a.


29 *De Pot.*, q. 3, a. 7 resp. Cf. *Ibid.*, q. 3, a. 4 resp, and q. 3, a. 5, obj. 2 and ad 2, as well as *In Lib de Causis*, lect. 4, init., and CG III, 66.
an Act/act relationship between God and creation. At the same time, this esse produced by God correlates with substance as act with potency, "since act, as such, is referred to potentiality." Thus, Thomas returns full circle to the point which it is the purpose of chapter 53 to establish: "Therefore, in every created substance there is potentiality and act."

At the same time, he implicitly rules out the possibility of substance as a kind of pre-existing potency which is simply standing there waiting to be actualized: first, because potency is a principle and not a thing, and therefore cannot exist on its own, and, secondly, because act is prior to potency and therefore in no way dependent upon it except as a principle of correlation. The created esse and the created potency come into existence simultaneously, or they do not come into existence at all. For only the thing exists, not its principles of correlation.

As Owens notes:

The proper effect of subsistent being is being, but that effect can be realized only in something else. In producing finite being, the first cause thereby produces the potency finite being inevitably involves. Its being maintains the priority, even though, strictly, the thing itself is what is produced. In creation, therefore, the production of the finite existential act is the production of the subject that is made to exist. It does not at all presuppose that any such subject already exists. Rather, viewed from a metaphysical standpoint, it produces the potency in sequence to, and not in priority to, the existential act that is received.30

3) Agens Enim Agit Sibi Simile (Act/act). The fourth and final argument which Thomas employs in chapter 53 to establish the act/potency composition in intellectual substances proceeds on the principle that


31 The third argument involves participation and will be discussed in the next section.
"The agent produces its like so far as it is in act." Referring back to chapter 6 in the same volume of *Contra Gentiles*, Thomas notes that it is through being itself (Ipsum esse) that every created thing bears a likeness to God. Therefore, esse is to every substance as act is to potency.

Creative causality is a key element in the esse/essence doctrine.

If the reason for the existence of this being is not found to be of the very essence, then I must look outside that essence for a principle of being. I conclude, therefore, that an existing limited and finite being is not sufficiently explained by its intrinsic structure, by the composition of act and potency. There must be other principles—extrinsic principles, to be sure, indicating not why these limited beings are such and why they are different from one another (for that is sufficiently explained by essence and "to be," matter and form, substance and accident), but simply why they are. Thus we are brought to the question of cause and of causality.\(^{32}\)

Efficient causality is the production of being. It cannot be otherwise. If esse is a composing principle in all substances which comes to them from outside themselves, that esse must be the proper effect of God, whose proper nature is Ipsum Esse. Furthermore, the relationship must be that of Act to act, since created esse is the first effect of Ipsum Esse.\(^{33}\)

Three important points must be understood. First, God is not the essential being of all things, but rather the causal being.\(^{34}\) This is simply another way of stating the real distinction. Only God's proper

\(^{32}\) Renard, *The Philosophy of Being*, p. 117.

\(^{33}\) Act/act is not, of course, the same thing as first act/second act, but the two of them are related as principles. That relationship will be explored in chapter 4.

\(^{34}\) In *I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 2 sol. Cf. *ST* I, 3, 8 ad 1: "Godhead is archetypally and causatively the being of all things, but not substantially their being."
nature is being itself. In all other beings, esse must enter into com-
position with a nature that is distinct from God's.

It [being] is a real nature itself, and is in fact given to
other natures through efficient causality. But it cannot be
given to them as a nature, and cannot enter into their natures.
It is really given to them through efficient causality, it is
really in them as a real act in a real potency. It is really
not any of their natures nor part of their natures.35

Secondly, efficient causality, for Thomas, is much more than the
placing of creatures outside their cause. It is the investiture of a
likeness to their cause within the very heart of each creature's exis-
tence. It is, in fact, that existence itself.

Existence may mean either a state or an act. In the first sense,
it means the state in which a thing is posited by the efficacy
of an efficient or a creative cause, and this is the meaning the
word receives in practically all the Christian theologies outside
Thomism, particularly those of Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, Scotus,
and Suarez. In a second sense, existence (esse, to be) points out
the interior act, included in the composition of substance, in
virtue of which the essence is a "being," and this is the proper-
ly Thomistic meaning of the word.36

Thus Aquinas can say that, while creatures are not being per se, they
do have being.37 Indeed, esse in creatures is the sign of their
createdness: "Now having an efficient cause is due to having real
existence."38 Not only is esse an intrinsic component in every created
being, it is that component which is most intimate to every being.
"Esse autem est illud quod est magis intimum cuilibet et quod profundius
omnia inest, cum sit formale respectu omnium quae in re sunt, ut ex

35 Owens, An Elementary Christian Metaphysics, p. 103.
36 Etienne Gilson, Elements of Christian Philosophy (Garden City,
37 In De Hebdomadibus, c. 2.
38 ST I, 44, 1 ad 3.
supra dictis patet."\textsuperscript{39} Existence is not simply a fact about created things, it is the source of their innermost reality.

Actuality is, then, an intrinsic condition of each existent and amounts to a good deal more than setting an essence into a context of efficiency. It is the existent himself viewed in the light of what internally perfects, ennobles, constitutes, and realifies him.\textsuperscript{40}

Thirdly, the real distinction of esse and essence is also the distinction between that which is contingent and that which is necessary in the created order. Since the real distinction means that existence is not a property of essence, esse must come to substances from outside themselves. The first created effect is, therefore, as Thomas notes, created esse, which enters into the constitution of created things not by virtue of their right to command it, but by virtue of God's free decision to confer it. As Gilson points out, "The Thomist distinction between essence and existence expresses the radical contingency of existence in all that is not God."\textsuperscript{41}

Essences, on the other hand, constitute the necessary component in creation. Since being cannot diversify itself and remains infinite unless it terminates in that which is other than itself (chapter 52), God's free decision to create beings within whom created esse is a constitutive component places Him under a necessity to provide an essential component by which created esse may be terminated and diversified. Please note that this necessity is methodological, not absolute. That is, it derives from the exigencies of the esse/essence distinction,

\textsuperscript{39} ST I, 8 1. Cf. In II Sent., I, 1, 4 sol.


\textsuperscript{41} Gilson, The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy, p. 435, n. 1.
not from the exigencies of divinity.

The contingency of esse is inextricably related to God as efficient cause. Since esse cannot be produced by essences, its presence in substances requires an extrinsic source.

Whatever is contingent (whatever exists contingently) must have a sufficient reason why it exists rather than not. But this sufficient reason is not an intrinsic one, since the essence is not the "to be." Therefore, it must be an extrinsic principle; and this is what we mean by an efficient cause. 42

It is here that Thomas makes a decisive break with Aristotle's notion of causality. Efficient causality as the production of being is quite alien to Aristotle's eternal and uncreated world in which the primary causes are movers, not creators.

It is at this point that the limitations of an act/potency methodology become most clear. For Aristotle, act/potency is the means by which he accounts for change, and the primary cause he considers is therefore the moving cause. Thomas, however, by introducing the distinction of esse and essence, turns act/potency and efficient causality into the means by which he accounts for the static or created nature of things. As a result, a strict Aristotelian act/potency methodology places severe limitations on what he can say at this level, particularly with regard to the question of a more-than-causal account of the relationship between Ipsum Esse and creatures as constituted in part by esse and the question of what, if any, reciprocity exists between esse and essence, matters which never confronted Aristotle. That is why, as Sweeney notes in his study of early Thomist texts on the real distinction, esse and essence are set "entirely within the frame-work of efficient causality, of the effect-cause relation between the creature and

God, of creaturehood." Within this framework, esse is the principle of act and the source of contingency, with essence as the principle of 'whatness' or intelligibility and the source of necessity. But how these two principles compose and what sort of causal reciprocity and proportion exists between them are matters which remain largely unanswered. To deal with the relationship between Ipsum Esse and creatures composed of esse and essence in a manner that goes beyond causality and to account for the reciprocity between esse and essence, Thomas has recourse to the notion of participation.

The application of participation language to the real distinction is rare in Thomas' early writings. Act/potency and participation are developed there on separate tracks. Only with Contra Gentiles does Thomas fuse these two streams of his thought. We will therefore return to Book II, chapters 52-54, when examining his notion of participation. Before doing that, however, it is important to pause here for a moment in order to examine more closely the radical transformation which Thomas effects in the Aristotelian understanding of act/potency by his introduction of the esse/essence distinction.

**Esse/Essence: The Separation of Act From Form**

Chapter 54 ("Quod non est idem compositio ex materia et forma, et ex substantia et esse") deals entirely with demonstrating that the composition of substance and being is different from the form/matter composition. After stating that matter is only a part of the substance...

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44 Thomas sometimes uses substance, as he does here in chapters 52-54, in an Aristotelian fashion to refer to the form/matter composition or essence. At other times, he uses it to refer to the existing thing, i.e., the esse/essence composition. This ambiguity with regard to substance will be taken up in chapters 4 and 5, where it will be
and that form is complementary to and not identical with being, Thomas concludes that "being [esse] is compared even to the form itself as act."

Supreme in their own order, substantial forms remain the prime acts of their substances, but, though there be no form of the form, there is an act of the form. In other words, the form is such an act as still remains in potency to another act, namely, existence. 45

Thomas goes on to distinguish between the form as the quo est, the substance (form/matter) as the ipsum quod est, and esse as quo substantia denominatur ens. He notes that material beings enjoy a twofold composition, first, a substantial composition of form/matter and, secondly, an existential composition of the composed substance with esse itself. Even in beings not composed of form and matter (angels), however, he insists that there remains a composition of form and esse. 46

Thomas therefore concludes that act/potency, not form/matter, is co-terminous with all of created reality.

It is therefore clear that composition of act and potentiality has greater extension than that of form and matter. Thus, matter and form divide natural substance, while potentiality and act divide common being. Accordingly, whatever follows upon potentiality and act, as such, is common to both material and immaterial created substances, as to receive and to be received, to perfect and to be perfected.

The importance of his separation of form from act cannot be overstated.

... Thomas Aquinas could not posit existence (esse) as the act of a substance itself actualized by its form, without making

argued that Thomas' failure to carry completely through on his transformation of Aristotelianism was caused in great part by his failure to free himself completely from the Aristotelian notion of substance.

45 Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, p. 174.

46 The non-material nature of angels is one of Thomas' favorite arguments for the esse/essence composition, e.g., In II Sent., d. 3, q. 11, a.1; In Boet. de Trin., q. 5, a. 4 ad 4; ST I, 50, 2 ad 3.
a decision which, with respect to the metaphysics of Aristotle, was nothing less than a revolution. He had precisely to achieve the dissociation of the two notions of form and act. This is precisely what he has done and what probably remains, even today, the greatest contribution ever made by any single man to the science of being.\textsuperscript{47}

This dissociation marks a break not only with Greek philosophical thinking about being, but also with traditional Christian thinking about God. First, the dissociation of act from form means the separation of being from form. Greek philosophy had always understood being to be formal, just as previous Christian theologians had understood (within the basically Neoplatonic framework they took over) God's being to be essential or formal. Secondly, the dissociation of act and form also means a separation of being from limit. For Aristotle and all of his predecessors, \textit{apeiron} (the unlimited) was employed as a negative concept not only in the denotative sense of that which has no bounds, but also in the connotative sense of that which is without form and therefore unintelligible. It was a privation, the absence of wholeness and completion. As Aristotle put it, "Nothing is complete (\textit{teleion}) which has no end (\textit{telos}); and the end is a limit."\textsuperscript{48}

With Plotinus and the Neoplatonists, an important shift in the use of \textit{apeiron} took place. Here the unlimited was associated with form, so that being came to be designated as "infinite form."\textsuperscript{49} This usage was

\textsuperscript{47} Gilson, \textit{Being and Some Philosophers}, p. 174.

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Physics}, III, 207a14.

\textsuperscript{49} This notion of infinite form appeared in the \textit{Liber de Causis}. "The essence of the doctrine was summed up and transmitted under the handy formula, 'Omnis forma pura est infinita' (every pure or unparticipated form is infinite), and appears to have been accepted in some form or other as a fundamental category of thought by most of St. Thomas's predecessors and contemporaries" (W. N. Clarke, "Meaning," pp. 149-150).
picked up by the early scholastics via Pseudo-Dionysius and John Damascene, the latter having actually referred to God as "an infinite sea." By Thomas' time, the linking of infinity and God had come into its own, although there yet remained pockets of resistance among those who either still related infinity to unintelligibility or feared that if God's essence were infinite, beatitude itself was jeopardized, since, as it seemed to them, the only sort of essence to which finite minds could have access must itself be finite. Thus, Christian theologians were not unprepared for the notion of Ipsum Esse as infinite. What they were unprepared for was the notion of Ipsum Esse as infinite act.

Aristotle would have found both the infinity and the act unintelligible. Act for him always meant formal act. Therefore, act was inseparable from limitation and that intelligibility or 'whatness' which Thomas associates with essence, not act. Where Aristotle was concerned, "the role of form or act is to impose a limit on the formless infinity of matter in itself and thus confer upon it determination and intelligibility." Formal act in Aristotle is the highest act possible. In Thomas, it can only be understood as a potency to esse, the act which has no form and therefore is capable of actuating all forms. This


51 For discussion of this, see Sweeney, "Mediaeval Opponents," pp. 236-243.

52 Clarke, "The Limitation of Act by Potency," p. 179.

53 "Ipsum esse est perfectissimum omnium: comparatur enim ad omnia ut actus. Nihil enim habet actualitatem nisi inquantum est; unde ipsum
dissociation of act from form is what enables Thomas to fuse participation and act/potency into a single framework.

**Ipsum Esse and Participation**

The first requisite for unravelling the complex threads which interweave to make up the Thomistic act and potency doctrine is to recognize that it contains two distinct elements. The first is a composition of two correlative metaphysical principles called act and potency, first introduced by Aristotle to explain the process of change. The second is the relating of these two principles to each other in terms of a theory of infinity and limitation, which, it must be admitted by all, cannot be found explicitly in Aristotle.

In his early writings, Thomas describes participation almost always in terms of reception. Thus, for example, he writes, "participare nihil aliud est quam ab alio partialiter accipere." Perhaps his most descriptive text on participation appears in *In Boethius de Hebdomadibus*:

To participate is to receive as it were a part; and therefore when anything receives in a particular manner that which belongs to another in a universal manner, it is said to participate it; as man is said to participate animal, because he does not possess the intelligible notes (ratio) of animals according to the latter's total "community" [i.e., universality]; and for the same reason Socrates participates man; in like manner also a subject participates an accident, and matter form, because the substantial or accidental form, which of itself as such is common [or unparticularized], is determined to this or that subject; and similarly an effect is said to participate its cause, and especially when it does not equal the power of its cause, as, for example, if we say that air participates the light of the sun because it does not receive it with the same brightness that it has in the sun.

**esse est actualitas omnium rerum et etiam ipsarum formarum** (ST I, 4, 1 ad 3).


55 In II de Caelo et Mundo, c. 12, lect. 18, n. 6. Cf. In Lib de Causis, lect. 4: "Secundum hoc quod participat est finitum, quia quod participatur non recipitur in participantem secundum totam suam infinitatem, sed particulariter."

56 In Boeth. de Hebd., lect. 2.
The text doesn't include esse and essence, because they are the object of his illustrations. Nor does the text include any direct application of the act/potency principle. It is not until *Contra Gentiles* that Thomas explicitly fuses act/potency and participation. In Book II, chapter 52, he tells us that, because only God's proper nature is being itself, other things can possess being only by way of participation. He then adds, "Therefore, being itself belongs to all other things from the first agent by a certain participation." He concludes that substance and being are identical only in God and must therefore form a composite in all other beings.

It is only with chapter 53, however, that he explicitly incorporates participation into an act/potency framework.

Likewise, whatever participates in a thing is compared to the thing participated in as act to potentiality, since by that which is participated the participator is actualized in such and such a way. But it was shown above (c. 15 and 52) that God alone is essentially a being, whereas all other things participate in being. Therefore, every created substance is compared to its own being as potentiality to act.

Here the use of act/potency to explain participation results not only in a fusion of these two aspects of his thought, but also in a modification of the act/potency framework itself. As a result, the two basic principles related to act/potency and applied to the real distinction (act/potency as a unified composition and the priority of act) remain, but in altered forms that are able to accommodate the notion of participation. They are 1) the limitation of act by potency and 2) the perfection of act. And just as Thomas uses the original two principles to arrive at an Act/act notion of efficient causality, so he uses their modification to develop a notion of efficient causality mediated by formal causality.
1) The Limitation of Act by Potency. Clarke regards the principle "Actus non limitatur nisi per potentiam" to be the "keystone of the Thomistic metaphysical system."\textsuperscript{57} Gilson regards it as the necessary corollary to the Thomist understanding of God as Ipsum Esse.

Outside the pure act of existing, if it exists, nothing can exist save as a limited act-of-being. It is therefore the hierarchy of the essences which establishes and governs that of beings, each of which expresses only the proper area of a certain act-of-being.\textsuperscript{58}

Owens reasons in a similar fashion, observing that if esse is, properly speaking, God's nature, then it cannot be the nature of anything else. It must therefore compose with natures different from itself.

It has to be produced as act, for it is always found as act, the act of every other act. It has to be produced, consequently, as the act of something other than itself. Every produced act of being, accordingly, involves its corresponding potency. It cannot be produced except as the act of that potency. . . . Produced being, therefore, is finite being. It is finite, not because it is being, but because it is the act of a limiting potency.\textsuperscript{59}

Thomas first states the principle that esse which is unterminated is infinite in Book I, chapter 43, of\textit{ Contra Gentiles}, when discussing God's infinity. There he says that "an act that exists in nothing is terminated by nothing." Noting that God is that act which in no way exists in another, he concludes that God is "ipsum esse infinitum."

In Book II, chapter 52, he returns to this theme: "Now subsisting being must be infinite, because it is not terminated in some recipient."

Here, however, the infinity of God is linked to His perfection and used

\textsuperscript{57} Clarke, "The Limitation of Act by Potency," p. 169.


to demonstrate that there can be only one God. Thus, Thomas is able to identify esse with absolute perfection. The application of an infinity/limitation interpretation to the principle of act/potency as a unified composition enables Thomas to say a good deal more about esse and essence than that they are the 'isness' and 'whatness' of an existing thing. Esse can now be seen as both an extrinsic nature (God) and an intrinsic principle of perfection, with essence functioning as an intrinsic principle limiting that perfection to the mode of a particular quiddity or intelligibility.

Act is the principle of perfection; potency is the principle of the measure in which one participates in this perfection, of the particular mode according to which it possesses this perfection, of the limits within which it receives this perfection.\(^6^0\)

In fact, essence as intrinsic limitation is a principle which cuts two ways simultaneously. In De Potentia, Thomas notes that esse is not limited in the same way that potency is limited by act, but rather in the fashion of act limited by potency.\(^6^1\) Matter, for example, is a potency limited by essence or formal act. Following this pattern, one would expect that essence, as potency, would be limited by esse. Yet essence performs the limiting function. Essence limits both that which lies below and that which lies above. In other words, form limits qualitatively as well as quantitatively.

2) Perfection of Act. As we have seen, Thomas' argument for the absolute perfection of God is based on God's nature as infinite being. Esse is pure act or, as Thomas describes it elsewhere, "actus ultimus, qui participabilis est ab omnibus, ipsum autem nihil participat."\(^6^2\)

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\(^{6^0}\) de Raeymaeker, The Philosophy of Being, p. 256.

\(^{6^1}\) De Pot., q. 7, a. 2, obj. 9.

\(^{6^2}\) Quaest. Disp. de An., q.u., a. 6 ad 2.
He also describes esse as that which complements every form, or actualizes every form. He even speaks of esse as that which best realizes the notion of unlimited perfect form. This capacity to actualize things is inseparable from the notion of esse as good. In fact, the perfection of esse is in some sense posterior to its actualizing capacity.

... the act of existing lies at the very heart, or if one prefers, at the very root of the real. It is therefore the principle of the principles of reality. First absolutely, it even precedes the Good, for a being is only good in so far as it is a being, and it is a being only in virtue of the ipsum esse which permits us to say of it: this is "being."

Thus, Thomas tells us that the perfection of a thing depends upon the degree of actuality which it achieves. He even maintains that, while living things are more important than those things which simply exist, nevertheless 'to be' is more important than 'to live', because 'to live' means not merely to possess life but to possess actual being as well. Esse is "actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum."

If God's essence is His esse, this must necessarily lead to the corollary that created beings, by their participation in created esse, are capable of sharing in a nature which exceeds their own. And this,

63 Quodl. XII, q. 5, a. 5.
64 ST I, 4, 1 ad 3.
65 ST I, 7, 1.
66 Gilson, Thomas Aquinas, p. 34.
67 ST I, 5, 1.
68 De Pot., q. 7, a. 2 ad 9.
69 Ibid. Cf. ST I, 4, 1 ad 3; I, 4, 2.
in fact, is what Thomas means by participation. "That belongs to another participative, which exceeds its nature, yet participates in some way in it." The actualizing of a substance is, by definition, its participation in a higher act. The principle underlying this is: act is always more perfect than potency.

It is important to note here the absence of a formal identity between act and potency. Esse and essence are not two different grades of a single nature. As principles they represent two different natures, and their composition produces the participation of the lower nature in the higher one. Their proportion to one another, therefore, rests upon the capacity of essence to 'receive' and limit pure act without destroying that act's fundamental perfection and capacity to perfect. For that reason, Thomas can speak in chapter 54 of those features which all created beings share in common:

Accordingly, whatever follows upon potentiality and act, as such, is common to both material and immaterial created substances, as to receive and to be received, to perfect and to be perfected.

The priority of act to potency indicates a primary dependence of essence on esse. The greater perfection of act reinforces this primary dependence. That is why Thomas can speak of esse as that which perfects, essence as that which is perfected. It is also why he is able to speak of esse as that by which all creatures are likened to their Creator (chapter 53). Esse is that by which every created thing participates in Ipsum Esse. For that reason, esse is the source of goodness

70 Comment. in ad Coloss., c. 1, lect. 4 (translation from de Raeymaeker, The Philosophy of Being, p. 31).
71 Quodl. XII, q. 5, a. 5.
72 De Pot., q. 7, a. 2 ad 9.
and perfection in all created things, and thereby that principle by which they are referred to God.

3) **Efficient/Formal Causality.** We have already seen that, within an act/potency framework, esse is the first created effect of God as efficient cause. This places all existing things in a direct causal dependence upon God. It also makes esse the innermost reality of all beings. What is not clear within such a framework is the nature of the relationship between Ipsum Esse and created esse. Nor is the causal relationship between God and essence, on the one hand, and esse and essence, on the other, very apparent. The notion of participation allows Thomas to deal more effectively with these questions.

**Esse and Existential Participation.** Although chapters 52-54 do not deal at length with existential participation, all of the ingredients for it are there. In chapter 53, we are told that esse is that component through which we are likened to God. "It is through being itself [ipsum esse] that every created substance is likened to God." This follows directly upon a discussion of participation, in which all created beings are said to participate in Ipsum Esse. This participation is the third argument Thomas advances in the chapter to demonstrate the real distinction. The substance of created beings is as potency to the esse which they participate.

That esse is also the inner source of actuality for a substance becomes apparent in this chapter as well. To exist is not merely to be placed in a state of existence. It is to receive as a principle of one's own reality the very act which realifies or actualizes. The significance of existence deepens, however, in light of the previous

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73 See *ST* I, 5, 1 and I, 20, 2; also *CG* I, 28.
chapter (52). There we are told that Ipsum Esse is infinite perfection. To exist is therefore to receive esse as an inner principle of perfection.

In one sense, this is a partial return to Aristotle. Esse as an intrinsic principle of existence is not unlike act as an intrinsic principle of motion. An enormously important difference remains, however. Aristotle's principle of motion is a necessary component within substances, because it belongs to them by reason of their very natures. In Thomas, esse is a contingent component composing with substance (form/matter). It is necessary only in the sense that without it a thing cannot exist. But it comes from a source outside the substance (from God through efficient causality) and constitutes the participation of that substance in a nature other and higher than its own. This difference between existing substances in Thomas and in Aristotle cannot be stressed too much. It is a difference to which we will return in chapter 4.

Esse in created things is a participation in Ipsum Esse. 74 Participation is therefore existential, not formal. This is the single most important element in the Thomist doctrine of participation.

The fundamental principle of ontology is brought to light: existence is the first act, the unique source of all participation; existence does not participate in anything, but everything participates in existence."75

Here we have the reason why participation is necessarily linked with efficient causality, for God is the efficient, not the formal, cause of

74 "Esse cuiuslibet rei est esse participatum, cum non sit res aliqua praeter Deum, suum esse" (CG III, 65). Cf. Quaest. Disp. de An., a. 6 ad 2; In Boeth. de Hebd., lect. 2; ST I, 3, 4 and I, 75, 5 ad 4.
75 de Raeymaeker, The Philosophy of Being, p. 137.
In its application to being, the doctrine of participation has to be purged of any aspect of formal causality. In no sense can you say that part of being goes to each of its recipients. There is here no form to be divided among different subjects. If being as a nature may be called a form, it is a form that is entirely indivisible and unable to be shared as a nature with anything else. As the first efficient cause it can just make other natures be. In this communication of being, on the side of the first cause, there is no trace of strictly formal causality whatsoever. Being is imparted from that viewpoint, to creatures only through efficient causality. The finite nature is made to exist, without any addition at all in the order of nature. Nothing of formal nature is shared when being is participated.

Here, therefore, we also have that Act/act relationship between God and creation to which reference has already been made.

If the application of participation to efficient causality as creative causality marks a break with Aristotle, the interpretation of participation as existential, not formal, marks an equally sharp break with Plato. It is the necessary corollary to the earlier noted departure from the Greek view of being. If God is esse, not essence or form, participation in Him must be existential. There is no form to be shared.

A second point, which will be mentioned here and discussed at greater length later in this work, should be noted. Through esse, the groundwork for a Thomist doctrine of existential dynamism is laid. It is a dynamism which cuts in two directions at once. On the one hand,
Ipsum Esse and created esse form an extrinsic Act/act dynamism. Creatures are likened to God in the first instance because they exist. ". . . creatures are made to the image and likeness of God. Therefore each creature too involves existence and actuality but, unlike God, as shared, participated, limited by what each is, by its essence."\textsuperscript{79} Esse is that by which all creatures are referred to their Creator. As efficient cause, He is the extrinsic source of their participation. Their creation is, by its very definition, a sharing in His nature. That is the meaning of participation. On the other hand, and by the same token, created esse is that principle of perfection by which essence is able to compose with a nature higher than its own. Hence, essence is that element which is said to be perfected, esse that element which is said to perfect (chapter 54). Esse and essence therefore provide the foundation for an intrinsic act/potency dynamism.

**Essence and Formal Causality.** Gilson notes that Thomas' reformation of Aristotelian metaphysics had two consequences with regard to causality. First, it gave a much more precise understanding of efficient causality than Aristotle had provided.

The second consequence of the Thomist reform of metaphysics has been to introduce a clear-cut distinction between the two orders of formal causality and of efficient causality. Formal causality is that which makes things to be what they are, and, in a way, it also makes them to be, since, in order to be, each and every being has to be a what. But formal causality dominates the whole realm of substances, and its proper effect is substantiality, whereas efficient causality is something quite different. It does not make beings to be what they are, it makes them "to be."\textsuperscript{80}

Or, as Owens puts it, "being for St. Thomas is the terminus of efficient causality."

\textsuperscript{79}Sweeney, "Early Writings," p. 98.

\textsuperscript{80}Gilson, _Being and Some Philosophers_, pp. 168-169.
causality, but always by means of a formal cause." Ef esse is an extrinsic efficient cause, essence an intrinsic formal cause.

These two distinct forms of causality correspond to the two distinct principles which compose all existing things. They are another way of expressing the esse/essence composition.

Since they represent irreducibly distinct modes of causality, esse and existence are irreducibly distinct, but the reality of their distinction presupposes their composition, that is, it presupposes the actual reality of the thing.

Efficient/formal causality is also another way of expressing the contingency/necessity relationship between these two principles.

If the form is the cause of being in its own special way, that is, as formal cause, it will in its own order necessarily determine the essence to being. Formal causality is a necessary type of causality. All formal results follow necessarily from their formal causes, as may be seen in the procedures of mathematics. If its form determines every nature to be a being, then every nature is essentially a being. There is nothing in the form itself, however, that requires its submission to any efficient causality. That it is acted upon by another efficient cause does not follow with necessity from its own formal nature. If its act of being has to be given in this way by an external efficient cause, that act can only be accidental to it in this order of causality.

81 Owens, "Accidental and Essential Character," p. 22. As Thomas puts it, "esse naturale per creationem Deus facit in nobis, nulla causa agente mediate, sed tamen mediate alique causa formali; forma enim naturalis principium est esse naturalis" (De Veritate 27, 1 ad 3).

82 Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, p. 172.

83 Owens, "Accidental and Essential Character," p. 22. Owens' identification of the contingency of esse with its accidental character in the order of formal causality is important, for it helps to explain Thomas' apparent ambivalence regarding the nature of esse. Sometimes he calls it an accident, other times he denies its accidental character. When he calls it an accident, he specifies an accident as that which does not belong to an essence, as that which lies outside the essential realm (See Comp. Theol., c. LXVI, and Quodl. XII, 5). Esse comes to essences from outside them (On Being and Essence, c. 4). Esse or efficient causality is accidental to formal causality, in that the placing of a thing in existence and the constituting of it by a composing principle of esse remain distinct from and therefore outside the order of essence or formal causality.
Because esse and essence operate on the same level and yet within two different orders of causality, their reciprocity is causal.

... Thomas Aquinas maintains the Aristotelian principle that causes which belong in distinct orders of causality can exert reciprocal causality. In this case, efficient causality can give existential being to substance, just as conversely, formal causality can import substantial being to actual existence. Where there is no existence, there is no substance, but where there is no substance, there is no existence. It is then literally true to say that existence is a consequence which follows from the form of essence, but not as an effect follows from the efficient cause.84

At this point, however, a serious problem begins to make itself felt. If created esse is the first created effect, the actuality and the source of all of a thing's perfections, what role is essence left to play? That essence does have a function is apparent to everyone. The precise question is whether or not that function is positive or negative. In other words, does essence function causally only as a limiting principle or does it exercise formal causality in the full sense of producing a distinct formal element in created things?

In Clarke's words, what we are confronted with here is the question of the 'thick' versus the 'thin' essence. The thick essence

... is still looked on as possessing a certain positivity of its own, received indeed from existence as ultimate act, but giving it a distinct positive role of its own, precisely as distinct from the act of existence, so that the essence becomes the positive subject which exists, distinct as positive subject from the act of existence which it exercises.85

The thin essence, on the other hand, is

... nothing but the interior limiting principle, the inner limit or partial negation ... of the perfection which resides properly within the act of existence itself. The act

84 Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, p. 169.

of existence, accordingly, as thus limited, becomes the very sub-
ject which exists. 86

What is at stake here is nothing less than the real distinction
itself. If essence is not viewed as a positive principle of correla-
tion, esse begins to assume almost the entire burden of explanation for
existing things. Clarke, who is of the 'thin essence' school, says,
for example, that "on this view [thin essence] one must indeed tone down
rather drastically the 'reality' and solidity of the so-called 'real
distinction'". 87 He then adds:

To my mind, the essential point truly worth holding onto in the
doctrine of St. Thomas is the notion of limited participation in
the central perfection of existence, not the technical solution
of how to express this, whether by 'real distinction,' or some
other way.88

If, however, the real distinction is not an appropriate way to express
the Thomist doctrine of participation, this can only mean that the doc-
trine of participation has moved outside an act/potency framework and
toward a much more Platonic view of reality.

This is the point at which the two major themes of modern Thomist
scholarship converge: first, an increasing appreciation of the impor-
tance and priority of esse in Thomas' writings and, secondly, a renewed
interest in the possibly Platonic elements in Thomas' thought. The
first of these themes will be taken up in chapter 4, where the role of
esse will be examined more closely within the framework of Thomist
methodology. The second theme is the question of that methodology
itself, whether it be Aristotelian or Platonic. Since answering that

86 Ibid.
87 Ibid., p. 37.
88 Ibid.
question depends largely on an analysis of the formal elements in Thomas' system, chapters 2 and 3 will center on a more thorough examination of the Aristotelian/Thomist notion of essence, particularly as it relates to the question of whether Thomas employed an Aristotelian or a Platonic methodology.
CHAPTER 2

THICK OR THIN ESSENCE: THE METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEM

Thomist philosophy has gone through several stages in this century. These stages can be distinguished by their divergent views on the role of esse in Thomas' thinking. As the importance of esse became more apparent, questions began to arise regarding the notion of essence. These questions, in turn, fueled a growing rift between those Thomists who understand Thomas to have been fundamentally Aristotelian and those who understand him to have been fundamentally Neoplatonic. The more recent view, that of the so-called 'thin essence,' suggests that Thomas developed, in his later writings, a Neoplatonic notion of participation. One Thomist who takes this view describes Thomism as "a system which in its basic outlines reproduces certain of the structural features of a certain kind of emanationist Neo-Platonism."¹ Before examining in some detail the position of those who belong to the 'thin essence' school, we shall briefly survey the stages through which recent Thomism has passed, in order to see more clearly why this Neoplatonic interpretation of his work finds an audience among today's Thomists.

20th c. Thomism: The Shift from Aristotle to Plato

What has become known as 'Strict Observance' Thomism was the first

¹George Lindbeck, "Participation and Existence in the Interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas," Franciscan Studies 17 (June 1957):115 (hereafter cited as Lindbeck, "Participation").
clear view of Thomas' work to carry the day in this century. Associated with Thomists such as Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange and expressed in the Twenty-Four Theses, this position stressed the centrality of Aristotle's act/potency schema and interpreted the real distinction as little more than a corollary to it. As the First Thesis states: "Potency and Act so divide being that whatsoever exists either is a Pure Act, or is necessarily composed of Potency and Act, as to its primordial and intrinsic principles."2 Lumbreras, in his comments, notes that this statement is "true both in the existential and in the essential order."3 The Second Thesis defines act as "perfection" and potency as "limiting principle and capacity for perfection." It is only with the Third Thesis that the real distinction itself is asserted:

Wherefore, in the exclusive domain of existence itself God alone subsists, He alone is the most simple. Everything else, which participates in existence, has a nature whereby existence is restricted, and is composed of essence and existence as of two really distinct principles.4

As one recent Thomist has noted, the 'Strict Observance' position "tends to emphasize the continuity between Aristotle and St. Thomas, going so far as to find in Aristotle an anticipation of the Thomistic treatment of essence and existence."5

However attractive this position might have seemed at a time when Thomism was fighting for an objective reality over against the relativity

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3 Ibid.


of modernism and the 'elan vital' of Bergson, it failed on two very im-
portant counts. First, it never appreciated the 'existential' signi-
ficance of the real distinction, because it was never able to credit
esse with anything beyond the 'facticity' of things. Hence it always
tended, in practice, toward an 'essentialist' reading of Thomas. Second-
ly, in its failure to appreciate the genuine transformation Thomas had
introduced into Aristotle's work, it hitched the Thomist wagon far too
closely to the Aristotelian star. As Pegis has pointed out,

To identify St. Thomas with an Aristotle who is, in many important
respects, his own creation, is a compliment to St. Thomas himself. To
do so without realizing that St. Thomas' Aristotle is a Thomist
who, on some basic fundamentals, was never an Aristotelian is a
historical illusion that is both dangerous and without justifica-
tion in our day.6

'Strict Observance' Thomism was superseded by, as Kopaczynski calls
it, the 'Primacy of Esse' approach. This view is similar to 'Strict
Observance' Thomism, in that it regards both esse and essence as positive
principles, but, unlike the latter, it lays much greater stress on esse
as the source of perfection and value in existing things. 'Primacy of
Esse' Thomists are not as easily classified as 'Strict Observance'
Thomists, although, broadly speaking, they divide into two groups--
those who understand Thomas to have transformed Aristotle in light of
Christian doctrine and those who understand him to have transformed
Aristotle in light of Plato and the Neoplatonists.

The first group, spearheaded by Etienne Gilson, tends to under-
score the theological elements in Thomas' thinking--particularly the
Qui est of Exodus and the doctrine of creation.

6 Anton C. Pegis, Introduction to Saint Thomas Aquinas (New York:
... St. Thomas Aquinas, referring expressly to this text of Exodus, will declare that among all divine names there is one that is eminently proper to God, namely Qui est, precisely because this Qui est signifies nothing other than being itself: non significat formam aliquam sed ipsum esse. In this principle lies an inexhaustible metaphysical fecundity; all the studies that here follow will be merely studies of its results. There is but one God and this God is Being, that is the corner-stone of all Christian philosophy, and it was not Plato, it was not even Aristotle, it was Moses who put it in position. 7

Gilson later adds that "the five Thomist proofs are hung expressly from the text of Exodus." 8

For Gilson, the act of existing (esse) is Thomas' central insight and the key to his transformation of the eternal world of Aristotle into the created world of Scripture. It is also the only path by which we can get to a knowledge of the real distinction.

... so far as we are able to see, all the arguments one can use to establish the distinction between being and essence in Thomas Aquinas' doctrine presuppose the prior recognition of the notion of the "act of being" (esse). 9

The priority which Gilson assigns to esse and the real distinction reflects his view that Thomas' Christianity introduced a genuine transformation into Aristotle's metaphysics.

Although willing to grant considerable Christian influence at work in Thomas' thought, Gilson is unwilling to concede much to Plato. His major reason for refusing to do so lies in the Thomist notion of God as Pure Act, a notion which places God "beyond essence, at the very core of being." 10 For Gilson, this means that "His perfection is not a perfection received, but a perfection, so to speak, existed, and it is

7 Gilson, The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy, p. 51.
8 Ibid., p. 74.
9 Gilson, Elements of Christian Philosophy, p. 130.
10 Ibid., p. 34.
just that which will always keep Christian philosophy distinct from Platonism, in spite of all the efforts that may be made to identify them."\textsuperscript{11} Even the elements of participation in Thomas can be traced directly back, in Gilson's judgment, not to Plato but to Ipsum Esse: \\
\textquotedblleft... it is one and the same thing to conceive God as pure \textit{Esse} and to conceive things, so far as they \textit{are}, as including in their metaphysical structure a participated image of the pure Act of Being.\textsuperscript{12}

Although Gilson insists on the priority of \textit{esse} over essence and, therefore, of efficient causality over formal causality, and of the "radical and total" difference\textsuperscript{13} which such a shift in priorities forges between the worlds of Aristotle and Thomas, the fact remains that Aristotle's substance, now transformed into Thomas' essence, seems, from Gilson's point of view, not to have undergone any very radical changes in Thomas' hands. Although Gilson insists that the Aristotelian substance "will have to undergo many inner transformations in order to become a created substance,"\textsuperscript{14} he nevertheless also maintains that "the Aristotelian substance remains intact in the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas,"\textsuperscript{15} and that the world of Thomas "is a world of Aristotelian substances which \textit{are} in their own right."\textsuperscript{16}

This position finds support in Joseph Owens, whose views on Thomas are quite similar to those of Gilson. Granting the same priority to

\textsuperscript{11} Idem., The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{12} Idem., Elements of Christian Philosophy, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{13} Idem., Being and Some Philosophers, p. 160.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 162.
esse over essence, Owens insists on a theory of participation in Thomas which avoids being Platonic through the expedient of being existential.

"Existential act . . . can be a thing or a reality or a nature only in its primary instance, God. Outside God it cannot be a thing or reality or nature, but only the actualizing of some other nature." Therefore, Owens is drawn to the same conclusion as Gilson, namely, that while Thomism proceeds from the viewpoint of existence, it nevertheless leaves "intact all starting points in the realm of essence, both substantial and accidental." Unlike the new man in St. Paul, whose conversion requires him to cast off all the old trappings, this 'new' Thomist essence of Gilsonian Thomism continues to bear an uncanny resemblance to the old Aristotelian substance.

As long as Thomists could keep the motif of participation both at the periphery of their interpretation of Thomas and in isolation from any Platonic influences, as Gilson and Owens do, the positive character of the principle of essence went unchallenged. The closer, however, that participation was moved to center stage, the more difficult it became to justify the essence as fundamentally positive. This problem became increasingly severe among the second group of 'Primacy of Esse' Thomists, who approached the matter from a point of view which emphasized the participationist elements in Thomas' work as the primary force leading him to insist on the priority of the act of being.


For these Thomists, the notion of participation lies at the core of any philosophy of being. As de Raeymaeker puts it, "La participation sur le plan de l'être constitue le problème métaphysique par excellence, car il concerne précisément l'objet formel de la métaphysique."\(^{20}\) An immediate problem arises, however, as soon as one combines the primacy of esse with the notion of participation. If esse is the source of all perfection, value and intelligibility, and if created things share in perfection, value and intelligibility by virtue of their existential participation in Ipsum Esse, in what sense is it possible to regard essence as a distinct principle of anything positive? Aren't the intelligibilities which we abstract from created things simply 'contractions' or limitations of esse itself? And, if this is the case, isn't essence, ontologically speaking, no more than a limiting principle which 'finitizes' what would otherwise be that infinite perfection which is esse by definition?

L.-B. Geiger made the most serious attempt, among this group of Thomists, to salvage the positive function of essence. In order to do so, he had recourse to the view that in Thomas two separate types of participation are at work--participation by composition and participation by formal hierarchy.\(^{21}\) Participation by composition is the type which Gilson and Owens accept. Namely, participation in esse is the...

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19 Most prominent in this group of Thomists are L.-B. Geiger, Andre Marc, Alme Forest, Cornelio Fabro and Louis de Raeymaeker.


21 L.-B. Geiger, *La Participation dans la Philosophie de S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1953), consists of a discussion of each type of participation (Book One) and of their synthesis in Thomas (Book Two).
necessary consequence of the esse/essence composite in all created things. Participation by formal hierarchy, on the other hand, subordinates the esse/essence composition to the notion that created things participate in esse. Participation produces composition, not vice versa. This latter notion of participation necessarily stresses essence as a limiting principle rather than as a positive component within existing things.

For Geiger, this latter form of participation is pre-eminent in Thomas. Nevertheless, Geiger continued to insist that participation by composition also plays a role in Thomas' thought, and that essence therefore could never be reduced simply to a negative limiting principle without doing violence to what Thomas himself intended. "A son gré l'essence n'est pas cette pure limite négative étrangère à l'ordre de l'être." Geiger's view here is based on the fact that Thomas understands God to be the source of essence as well as existence.

Pour S. Thomas l'essence aussi bien que l'existence procèdent de Dieu. Dieu est certes subsistance absolue et existence nécessaire. Mais il est aussi pléniude absolue et simple de toute perfection représentée par les essences des créatures.

Paradoxically, Geiger's reason for refusing to reduce essence to a negative limiting principle turned out to be the very reason why a participationist reading of Thomas was ultimately unable to accept such a dual structure of participation. How could one talk about two distinct principles of participation emanating from one single, utterly simple source? To trace created essences to Divine Ideas didn't avail, because the Divine Ideas were in no way distinct from the Divine Essence. And to trace created essences to the Divine Essence as though

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22 Ibid., p. 203.
23 Ibid.
it were distinct from Ipsum Esse was to introduce a composition into Being which found no support in Thomas. In fact, this whole way of speaking about essences suggested that the diversity found in created beings could have its source in Being Itself, a view which, as we have already seen, Thomas himself denied.

As those Thomists committed to a participationist interpretation of the 'primacy of esse' struggled with these problems, another stage of Thomism was emerging, in which both the centrality of esse and the problematic character of essence were becoming apparent, though from quite a different perspective. Transcendental Thomism, proceeding by a method designed to meet the demands of the Kantian critique, sought in the human affirmation of being a means of demonstrating an intrinsic existential dynamism toward Ipsum Esse. Within such a framework, Maréchal, the first to apply transcendental method to Thomism, characterized the relationship between our abstractive knowledge of existing things and absolute being to be such that "La donnée subjective (ou "species") ne peut devenir objet dans la pensée qu'en se soumettant au premier principe, c'est-à-dire en revêtant une relation nécessaire à la forme absolue d'être." To associate the intelligibilities of existing things (the positive content of essences) with "la forme absolue d'être" is to be already well on the path to identifying all perfections with esse and esse itself with intelligibility. As Helen James John describes it, "The finite essence, caught up in the drive of the intellect toward the affirmation of being, as such, reveals

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itself as relative to and subordinated to that goal." Although transcendent Thomists did not set out to establish the Platonic nature of Thomas' thinking, they nevertheless reinforced such a view by insisting on an intrinsic intellectual drive toward Ipsum Esse which clearly parallels the notion of existential participation as developed by so many participationist Thomists. The notion of essence as 'thin' began, in the minds of many Thomists, to seem inescapable.

The 'Thin Essence' Position

'Thin essence' Thomism was born out of the 'primacy of esse' reading of Thomas. As soon as the full significance of Ipsum Esse as not only Pure Act, but source of all value and perfection, surfaced, it at once became apparent that such a notion of Being necessarily entailed a doctrine of existential participation. Such a doctrine could not but emphasize the role of essence as a limiting principle. This, however, seemed to contradict the earlier notion of essence as a positive principle of intelligibility. As D. J. B. Hawkins asked,

Is there not a contradiction in making a mere principle of limitation into a positive factor in the constitution of finite being? A limitation is a negation and nothing more. To assert a positive principle of limitation is like asserting that the surface of a sphere is distinct from the sphere


26 Transcendental method itself introduces into Thomism a Platonic starting point not accepted by Thomas himself. As Little notes, "the Platonic method was to argue from intellectual data as such. And because intellectual data form the core of Marechal's philosophy he is probably the most Platonic of modern Thomists, even somewhat at the expense of the main element in Thomism, which is Aristotelianism" (Arthur Little, The Platonic Heritage of Thomism [Dublin: Golden Eagle Books Limited, 1949], p. 96).
itself. That is clearly nonsense and so, therefore, it will be said, is the Thomistic conception of essentia or quiddity.27

The root of the problem lay in the earlier noted separation that Thomas' notion of Being introduces between act (esse) and form (essence), a separation unheard of in the Greek sources (both Platonic and Aristotelian) from which he draws. For Greek philosophy, act and intelligibility are indistinguishable; for Thomas they are not. Or, rather, for Thomas, act and intelligibility are indistinguishable in God, but distinguishable in created things. Or so they would appear to be, if one accepts the principle of essence as positive intelligibility and the principle of esse as little more than the facticity (actualizing) of that intelligibility ('Strict Observance' Thomism). Once, however, the principle of esse is defined as the source of perfection, such a dichotomy no longer seems possible. Esse itself is the fullness of intelligibility. Hence, essence as limited intelligibility can hardly be understood as 'other than' esse. At best, it must simply be a 'mode' of esse, but not a positive principle in its own right. This is the path which many Thomists saw open up before them. One is tempted to call it the narrow path, for it is the path of the 'thin essence.'

Kopaczynski characterizes Thomists on this path as "reformers," "Esseists" or "Exclusivity of Esse" Thomists. Their immediate forerunner is Arthur Little, who attempted to answer Hawkins' question about essence in 1949, five years before Hawkins asked it, in a book entitled The Platonic Heritage of Thomism. Their most vocal leaders have been William Carlo and W. N. Clarke. The most complete statement of their position is Carlo's The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to

Existence, published in 1966. The views of each of these three men deserve some attention.

Arthur Little: Essence as the No-Moreness of Being

Proceeding on the assumption that much of what can be found in Thomas actually stems from Platonic rather than Aristotelian sources, Little sets out to identify those areas in Thomas' thought which actually reflect Plato much more than Aristotle. As Little notes at the beginning of the second chapter:

The purpose of this chapter is to discover whether St. Thomas did in fact give to Aristotle's doctrine a more orthodox sense than that doctrine deserved. If he did it will be open to us to assign to Platonic influences many Thomistic ideas that St. Thomas himself believed to be inherited from Aristotle. 28

Little locates two such lacunae in Aristotle. The first of these is Aristotle's denial of God as efficient cause of the formal perfections of the world. This, in Little's judgment, prevented him from developing any doctrine of participation worthy of the name.

What Plato asserted and Aristotle denied was that this material world of ours was derived at least in its formal nature from the spiritual world. And only on this basis can any important doctrine of participation be erected. 29

Little then examines, in the first half of the book, the implications of efficient and formal causality in Thomas, particularly with regard to the fourth way.

Defining efficient causality as that causality by which God is able to produce a perfection which is formal in its effects because virtual within God Himself, Little concludes that the formal perfection produced by God "is, in a different order, identical with part of the

28 Little, The Platonic Heritage of Thomism, p. 20.
29 Ibid., p. 28.
perfection of the cause."  

Little describes the perfections which issue from the efficient causality of God as "not miniature replicas of God, but rather constituted of limiting essences that smother every divine property in them while yet leaving in their existences indications that what has been smothered is divine."  

What Little has in mind here is participation by formal hierarchy as defined by Geiger, which produces a universe not unlike Porphyry's tree, a universe in which each essence represents not so much a divine idea as a different grade of being. As Little puts it, "Clearly what each of these grades imitates in contraction is the whole of the base, not any part of it."  

To the extent that essence connotes the total perfection of esse contracted to a formal, and therefore finite, mode by means of God's efficient causality, it can be said to be positive. In fact, since efficient and formal causality identify in God, the essence must connote that perfection which exists formally in the effect precisely because of its virtual and prior existence in God. The fourth way indicates clearly that Thomas recognized God to be exemplar cause of all created formalities and perfections.

The second failure which Little finds in Aristotle has to do with Aristotle's notion of passive potency.

Aristotle has hitherto been universally accepted as the vanquisher of Parmenides by his doctrine of passive potency. The contention of this chapter, mildly revolutionary to the history of philosophy and the only revolutionary contention

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30 Ibid., p. 38.
31 Ibid., p. 116.
32 Ibid.
in the book, is that Aristotle only partly understood Parmenides and definitely failed to answer him. 33

The problem, as Little sees it, is that Aristotle tried to resolve the Parmenidean dilemma by recourse to a notion of potency which left potency hanging somewhere midway between being and non-being. But, for Little, this only produces a contradiction which is unable to come to grips with the original dilemma.

How are we to conceive this compromise between being and non-being, to say nothing of exonerating the concept from contradiction? It is a reality that must be positive or not positive, that is (by the principle of the excluded middle) negative. And Aristotle seems to say that it is not quite either. 34

Therefore, while Plato took a view of potency as meontic non-being or the exclusion of being, Aristotle understood it to mean that which is not yet a being, that is, "being which is only part of what is required for a being." 35

The second half of Little's book consists of an examination of Thomas' notion of passive potency, in which Little analyzes those passages in Thomas which indicate that Thomas understood potency as non-being or the exclusion of further being.

Passive potency . . . is identified with the limit or no-more-being of a being. Therefore it is not a pure negation because it implicitly affirms as a possibility the measure of being that it is capable of determining by explicitly excluding this from its negation. 36

Although Little draws explicitly on seven texts from Thomas, 37 his

33 Ibid., p. 184.
34 Ibid., p. 186.
35 Ibid., p. 185.
36 Ibid., pp. 201-202.
37 These texts are: Comp. Theol., c. 17; CG II, 52; De Ver., 2, 3 ad 16; De Ver., 2, 2; CG I, 54; De Ver., 1, 5 ad 2; In Boeth. de Trin., 4, 1.
position rests primarily upon two arguments, both substantiated by citations from Thomas. The first of these arguments appeals to the principle that being cannot divide itself. Little relies heavily, as do other 'thin essence' Thomists, on Thomas' statement in *In Boeth. de Trin.* that

It cannot be that being is divided from being, in as much as it is being. Nothing is divided from being except non-being. Similarly, another being is not divided from this being, but by this that in this being there is included a negation of that being. 38

The second argument is a corollary to the first, namely, that the formal hierarchy of being is constituted by descending degrees of being.

Thomas is most explicit about this in *De Veritate:*

Hence the more closely a creature approaches God, the more it possesses of the act of existence; the further it is from Him, the more it possesses of non-existence. But, since a creature approaches God only in so far as it participates in a finite act of existence, yet its distance from God is always infinite, it is said to have more non-existence than existence. 39

Little concludes that, while essence implicitly refers to the positive perfection which defines the quiddity or 'whatness' of a being, it explicitly refers to the negative limiting principle which denies further esse or perfection to that being. Little concedes that this does not appear to have been Thomas' view of essence in *On Being and Essence,* but argues that in the later, mature Thomas, "the essence in the definition would be really identified with the act of being or existence considered as affected by the limit; but the limit itself would be the essence that is really distinct from the act of being." 40

38 *In Boeth. de Trin.,* 4, 1.

39 *De Veritate,* 2, 3 ad 16.

Hence, existing things are composites of being and non-being, in which the act of being (esse) is "shot through and through, as it were, by non-being."\textsuperscript{41}

W. N. Clarke: Essence as Limiting Principle Within Esse

The discussion about essence, in this country at least, only got off the ground after the 1957 publication of G. B. Phelan's article, "The Being of Creatures."\textsuperscript{42} Warning against the reifying tendencies inherent in the Greek essentialist vocabulary taken over by Thomas, Phelan re-examines essence within Thomas' existentialist reformation of that Greek essentialism. Referring to the passage in Contra Gentiles II, 54, in which Thomas asserts that being cannot diversify itself and therefore must be diversified "per aliquid quod est praeter esse" (already discussed in chapter 1), Phelan suggests that the "praeter esse" to which Thomas refers there is not "non-ens" but "non-esse."\textsuperscript{43} Phelan concludes that essence is therefore best understood as a "mode" of being which restricts esse.

To call it "essence" is all very well, provided essence is not regarded as some positive thing, but simply the "by which" (quo) or the mode, measure or manner in which the act, esse, is exercised. To say, for example, "Crystals

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid., p. 222.


\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., p. 122. Phelan's reason for arriving at this conclusion is quite tenuous. He notes that, in In I Phys., 6b, Thomas writes, "Quidquid est praeter ens est non-ens." Phelan therefore applies the principle he finds there to the text from CG. However, as Clarke notes in his commentary on Phelan's article, nowhere does Thomas himself say that "praeter esse" means "non-esse" (W. N. Clarke, "Commentary (b)," Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association 31 [1957]: 131).
are solids" means for the existential metaphysician "Crystals exercise the act of existence in a solid manner."44

The article was accompanied by two commentaries, one by W. N. Clarke, the other by William Carlo. Clarke's commentary is an early indication of the direction in which his own thought was moving. Rejecting the traditional view of essence as possessing "a certain density or perfection of its own,"45 Clarke locates the positive perfection found in a finite being within esse itself, "with the essence playing the role not so much of subject as of intrinsic limit or, more accurately, of measure, or mode, or determination, molding the basic perfection of esse from within and not from without."46 Later, Clarke would characterize this essence as 'thin.'

Clarke's primary concern is to recover the explicitly Neoplatonic elements at work in Thomas' thought. For him, the primary structure of Thomas' work is that of participation/limitation, which enables Thomas to transplant the Porphyrian tree of universal concepts from the rarified atmosphere of Plato's Forms into the Aristotelian world of concrete experience.47 Because Thomas used the act/potency framework of Aristotle to accomplish this transplantation, we can rightly characterize his work as a synthesis of Plato and Aristotle, though rather more Platonic than Aristotelian.

Such, then, . . . are the essential characteristics of the Thomistic doctrine of participation: a formal relational framework, clearly recognizable as taken over from the Neoplatonic

45 Clarke, "Commentary (b)," p. 129.
46 Ibid.
tradition, transposed—at least in its realistic applications—into the technical Aristotelian terms of act and potency, its ontological content emptied of the original Platonic ultra-realism of forms and replaced with the one basic analogical perfection of esse, and the whole applied with a consummate sense of analogy to the different orders both of reality and of ideas—such is the highly original synthesis that is Thomistic participation. 48

William Carlo: Essence as the Place Where Esse Stops

Carlo's major concern is one of freeing a genuine Christian existentialism from the tyranny of Greek essentialism. If this sounds something like the nominalist project, it is in fact quite the opposite. Unlike Ockham, who sought to free the concrete singular from the abstract universal, thus atomizing the world, Carlo seeks to free the single, all-embracing metaphysical principle of being (esse) from the atomizing effects of essentialist diversification.

The unity and plurality of things are certainly fundamental metaphysical facts of the universe. But they are not the most basic and foundational aspects of reality. Things are one because of their esse. God is Simple because He is Ipsum Esse. Creatures are composite only because they are limited esses that unite with other limited esses in secondary causality, and can, consequently, be separated. Unity and plurality have to be based on and rooted in being and ultimately in esse. In a metaphysics of being as esse we can explain all the facts of the universe including unity and plurality. Unity and plurality cannot of themselves found a metaphysics. They must be rooted in being, not unity but the one, not plurality but the many; one what? one being; many what? many beings.49

After summarizing the various historical controversies regarding the true nature of the real distinction, Carlo concludes, "The history of the controversies on the relations of essence and esse has a significant message to teach us. Namely, that the roof of the universe can be occupied by only one principle, Ipsum Esse Subsistens and that the roof

of metaphysics can be occupied by only one principle, esse."\(^{50}\)

For Carlo, the Greek understanding of essence is incompatible with the Christian doctrine of creation. "... the notion of essence was conceived to explain the Greek eternal universe and its ratio essendi was to function within such a universe."\(^{51}\) Addressing himself to those Thomists who suppose that such essences can enter the Thomist universe intact (he has Owens in particular in mind here), Carlo asks, "Can the eternal essence of Greek metaphysics become contingent by any sort of addition, no matter how complex? Is essence indifferent to being eternal or created?"\(^{52}\) Arguing that if a created being is one, then essence and existence must identify, inasmuch as composite things are separable and distinct,\(^{53}\) Carlo maintains that, "As all creatures flow from God, so all other principles flow from esse in the creative act. Creation is not a marriage, a joining of esse and essence, but a true birth."\(^{54}\)

Because a true Christian metaphysics is centered on the createdness of things, it is therefore much more concerned with the existence of things than with their diversification. Hence, the ultimate characteristic of such a universe and of all things within it is their isness. "Thus the introduction of esse is the distinguishing mark of a Christian metaphysics of being."\(^{55}\) Since the positing of a real distinction between essence and existence is, in fact, the positing of an extrinsic

\(^{50}\) Ibid., p. 111.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., p. 6.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., p. 7.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., p. 109.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., p. 111.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., p. 7.
limitation of esse, such a distinction introduces a fundamental and unacceptable dichotomy into a true metaphysics of being.\[^{56}\]

The 'Primacy of Esse' view (for which Carlo gives Gilson the lion's share of the credit) is, in Carlo's judgment, "a halfway house to the doctrine of the Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence. Existence cannot stand self-sufficiently alongside the Platonic essence but must encompass and include it in the theory of essence as a Mode of Esse"\[^{57}\]. Essence, therefore, and in this he agrees with Clarke, must be understood as intrinsic to esse, operating from within esse to produce the limited finite beings of the created world.

In order to illustrate what he means by this notion of essence, Carlo employs two metaphors. First, he asks us to envision existence as though it were a liquid in process of being poured from a pitcher. Add to that a sudden drop in temperature, and the liquid freezes before it hits the ground. Under these circumstances,

The shape it assumes is the determination of its own substance. Essence is not something extrinsic to existence which limits and determines it in the way that a pitcher shapes its recipient liquid, but essence is rather the place where existence stops.\[^{58}\]

In the second illustration, we are asked to imagine existence as a stream of water flowing down a mountainside. Again there is a drop in temperature, freezing the stream. If we then imagine chopping the stream into pieces, the blocks of ice which this produces would bear some resemblance to what happens when esse is intrinsically limited by essence.

\[^{56}\textit{Ibid.}, \text{p. 23.}\]
\[^{57}\textit{Ibid.}, \text{p. 3.}\]
\[^{58}\textit{Ibid.}, \text{p. 103.}\]
There is nothing in the blocks but frozen water or ice. But one is distinguishable from another by the place where they stop, the myriad grooves and raised surfaces left by the blade of the axe. This is what we mean when we say that essence is the intrinsic limitation of existence.\(^{59}\)

If this sounds as though Carlo were equating quality with quantity, he is. Creatures are, in his view, contractions of the infinite perfection of esse. The degree of contraction determines the level of perfection enjoyed by the creature. The greater the contraction, the lower the level of perfection. As Carlo puts it, a creature "is constituted as a certain level of perfection, a particular magnitude of esse, an existential quantum, a degree of being."\(^{60}\)

While there is much in what Carlo says to suggest that he has misconstrued the Thomist real distinction as a distinction of things rather than of principles, in point of fact, his starting point forbids him to consider even the possibility of a distinction of principles. Since God is both the fullness of perfection, on the one hand, and absolute simplicity, on the other, Carlo rejects any distinction between esse and essence which would suggest that, at the created level, that perfection which is both absolutely infinite and totally simple in God can be distinguished into an existential principle (esse) and a specific principle (essence).

... what positive effect could the creature have which is not, somehow or other, a diminution or limitation of the Divine Perfection, some characteristic which exists in its superabundance in God? Obviously for Aquinas there is none!\(^{61}\)

Many Thomists would, at this point, wish to fall back on the Divine

\(^{59}\) Ibid., p. 104.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., p. 113.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., p. 139.
Ideas. This, however, Carlo will not permit.

The traditional method of explaining the origin of plurality is through the doctrine of the Divine Ideas. But the doctrine of the Divine Ideas takes one just so far in explaining the origin of plurality and then it fails. How is a multiplicity of Divine Ideas rooted in the Divine Essence? To push the origin of plurality back to the rationes, the respectus, or intelligible aspects of the Divine Essence which the Divine Intellect perceives as imitable in a variety of modes by creatures is, it would seem, merely to relocate the point of confrontation between a unitary Divine Essence and the Divine Intellect which perceives it as imitable. The basic rationes which seem to underlie the plurality of the Divine Ideas and a Simple Divine Essence is still a traditional Greek formulation of the One and the Many! Using the model of the human intellect as a foundation for the doctrine of the Divine Ideas, as Thomas Aquinas explains the historical origin of the doctrine in the De Veritate, would seem to introduce plurality into being through a lesser being, an esse intentionale of sorts. Although this might be effective with a created intellect, can it be much more than a metaphor when applied to a Being for Whom to Know is to Be?62

Since esse is the source of all intelligibility, it makes no sense, in Carlo's judgment, to posit a real distinction between essence as limited intelligibility and esse as limitless intelligibility. The only possible distinction here is that between the finite and the infinite. Therefore, to understand essence as anything more than a negative limiting principle is to misconstrue Being Itself.

Once essence has been reduced to esse, the way is clear to reducing formal causality to efficient causality. "In a metaphysics of esse, essence needs only a subordinate relation of efficient causality to demarcate God from creatures."63 In the same fashion, second act is no longer required to explain the dynamism of subsistence. "We have here not a multiplication or addition of acts, of esse plus subsistere, but one self-same act manifesting its dynamism in a specified, contracted

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62 Ibid., pp. 107-108.
63 Ibid., p. 113.
These are the inevitable corollaries to a notion of being which identifies the positive perfection of essence with the total perfection of esse.

Instead of waiting from all eternity like the recipient essence of Avicenna, or being produced alongside of esse in a dual creation, barring these alternatives, which I consider the only alternative possibilities, then essence must rise out of the flood of esse like Thetis from the frothy wave. Essence flows from esse. Esse gives rise to essence. Essence is the intrinsic modification of the dynamism of actual exercise of the act of being. Why not describe essence, then, as the place where esse stops, bordered by nothingness?

Carlo's interpretation of Thomas rests upon the answers he gives to three questions. These questions, indeed, reflect the greatest problems which a 'primacy of esse' approach to Thomas leaves unresolved. And they are all methodological problems. The first question, "Why not describe essence, then, as the place where esse stops, bordered by nothingness?", addresses the problem of whether Thomas' methodology is Aristotelian or Platonic. The second question, "How is a multiplicity of Divine Ideas rooted in the Divine Essence?", addresses the problem of whether or not Thomas correctly applied his own methodology. The third question, "Is essence indifferent to being eternal or created?", addresses the problem of how to apply properly the Thomist methodology to the esse/essence relationship. The remainder of this chapter will consider each of those questions in turn.

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64 Ibid., p. 90.

Thomist Methodology: Aristotelian or Platonic?

The Textual Dilemma

The most obvious reason for not describing essence as "the place where esse stops" is a textual one. It simply doesn't square with a great many things said by the mature Thomas. In order to illustrate the point, four areas of his thought are examined below. No attempt is made to provide a complete textual analysis regarding these areas; rather, well-known and accepted views of Thomas are isolated for the sake of highlighting the problem.

Being. First, Thomas maintains repeatedly that being transcends the categories. For this reason, he is able to insist that a genuine distinction can be drawn between the quiddity of a thing and its act of existing, since only quiddities, not being, can be in a genus. 66 Furthermore, he states that, with the exception of God, no being is its own act of existing. 67 It is difficult to see how either of these positions can be reconciled with a view of essence which maintains that, to the extent that essence is regarded as positive and as the subject receiving existence, it is reducible to esse. If that is the case, then being does enter into the quiddity or definition of a thing and is, in fact, identical with that thing to the extent that it is a positive being.

Secondly, Thomas insists that a distinction must be made between divine being and universal being. 68 Divine or pure esse is the fullness

66 De Pot., 7, 4; De Ver., 27, 1 ad 8.
67 CG III, 65.
68 De pot., 7, 2 ad 6; ad 9; ST I-II, 2, 5 ad 2; cf. On Being and Essence, c. 5.
of perfection, and to it nothing can be added. Universal or common being, on the other hand, is such that additions can be made to it. As Thomas says in the *Summa Theologiae*, universal or participated being is raised to a higher level by the addition of a perfection. For this reason, Thomas cites Dionysius' remark that living things are better than merely existing things, and intelligent beings better than living beings. Of particular interest is the text of *De Pot.*, 7, 2 ad 9, in which Thomas differentiates between God's being and that being which can be added to and determined by essence.

Being, as we understand it here, signifies the highest perfection of all: and the proof is that act is always more perfect than potentiality. Now no signate form is understood to be in act unless it be supposed to have being. Thus we may take human nature or fiery nature as existing potentially in matter, or as existing in the power of an agent, or even as in the mind: but when it has being it becomes actually existent. Wherefore it is clear that being as we understand it here is the actuality of all acts, and therefore the perfection of all perfections. Nor may we think that being, in this sense, can have anything added to it that is more formal and determines it as act determines potentiality: because being in this latter sense is essentially distinct from that to which it is added and whereby it is determined. But nothing that is outside the range of being can be added to being: for nothing is outside its range except non-being, which can be neither form nor matter. Hence being is not determined by something else as potentiality by act but rather as act by potentiality: since in defining a form we include its proper matter instead of the difference: thus we define a soul as the act of an organic physical body. Accordingly this being is distinct from that being inasmuch as it is the being of this or that nature. For this reason Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.* V) that though things having life excel those that merely have being, yet being excels life, since living things have not only life but also being.

This text is often cited as supporting the notion of essence as a limiting principle, for Thomas here insists that essence acts as a potency to limit esse. Yet it is important to note, first, that this text asserts two different types of esse, secondly, that it supports

69ST I-II, 2, 5 ad 2.
the notion of essence as that to which esse is "added," and, thirdly, that, while Thomas specifically says that only non-being lies outside being, he also notes that non-being does not include form and matter.

Non-being. In the above-cited text, Thomas seems to place form and matter on the side of being. This is consistent with his earlier statement in the same work that being is common to potentiality and act.70 It is also consistent with his remarks in the Summa Theologiae where, in discussing creation, he speaks of form in terms of a work of art, a shaping to a meaning, and associates it with the Logos.71

To complicate the situation further, there are those places where he speaks of a lack of proportion between non-being (non-ens) and being (ens).72 If such is the case, then how is one to understand either potency or essence as non-being, when act and potency are said to be proportioned to one another? One possible way out of this dilemma is to argue that ens in the above texts refers to a being, not being per se. Yet that raises a further difficulty. If non-being and a being lack proportion, do not also common being (esse) and a being lack the same proportion? This would seem to be the sense of Thomas' remarks in the Summa Theologiae, where he describes esse as the "distinctive note creative action strikes," but carefully and explicitly denies that it is the subject created.73

Evil. A third area in his thought where such difficulties abound is that of evil. In the Summa Theologiae, he argues that evil cannot

70 De Pot., 3, 1 ad 12.
71 ST I, 45, 7.
72 ST I, 45, 5; De sub. sep., c. 10.
73 ST I, 45, 4.
signify any existing thing or a real "shaping" or "positive" kind of thing. Since he has previously associated shaping with form, he seems once again to be saying that form is positive. This is supported by his further statement in the same article that actions are grounded in forms. Two articles later, he describes form as a sort of "completion" and hence a sort of "good." In fact, he declares that the deprivations or negations associated with evil attach directly to qualities and forms. If qualities and forms are to be regarded as negations themselves, this would make no sense. All of this echoes what he had said earlier in De Potentia, that inferiority among created things does not imply imperfection on the part of those things which are inferior, for "imperfection denotes the lack of something which is natural or due to a thing." In fact, in his discussions of evil and of virtue, Thomas repeatedly insists on distinct positive definable perfections in things, for it is only by knowing what a thing ought to be that we are able to make judgments about what is due it.

**Participation.** Although there is a great deal in his writings to suggest that participation consists primarily of a finitizing or quantifying of esse, Thomas also speaks of participation as involving two distinct elements. Hence he discusses participation as the possession of a nature which is higher than one's own or as a share in a higher

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74 *ST* I, 48, 1.
75 *ST* I, 48, 3.
76 *ST* I, 48, 4.
77 *De Pot.*, 3, 1 ad 14.
78 *Comment. in ad Coloss.*, c. 1, lect. 4.
act than one's own. In De Potentia, he quotes Boethius to the effect that whatever exists participates both in being and in something else, and agrees that this is true of all created beings. Earlier in the same work, he had already referred to the fact that God's own act of existing is distinct from all other acts of existing because only His act of existing does not come to a nature other than itself. Thomas returns to the same theme in the Summa Theologiae, where he applies a similar notion of participation to creaturely causality: "A complete substance of some specific nature can reproduce its like, not indeed by producing that nature as such, but by applying it to a subject." These remarks are consistent with his view that God's esse "sit substantia vel natura Dei," whereas in created things esse "est actualitas substantiae vel essentiae." And these statements, in turn, support his assertion that formal causality is not reducible to efficient causality, but rather that efficient causality operates through a mediating formal cause.

The Hermeneutical Dilemma

Clearly we have conflicting textual evidence in Thomas with regard to all of the major questions regarding the relationship of esse and essence. This hermeneutical dilemma has not gone unobserved by either

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79 Quodl. XII, q. 5, a. 5.
80 De Pot., 7, 2 ad 8.
81 De Pot., 7, 2 ad 5.
82 ST I, 45, 5 ad 1.
83 De Pot., 7, 2.
84 ST I, 54, 1.
85 De Ver., 27, 1 ad 3; cf. Quaest. Disp. de Anima, a. 6 ad 9.
Carlo or Clarke. Clarke notes that both the 'thin' and the 'thick' essence can find textual support in Thomas.  

Carlo acknowledges the same two streams of texts, and asks, "Is there any way of explaining or reconciling these opposed positions?"  

Carlo has his own answer to this question.  

The starting point for this entire discussion seems to me to be the doctrine of the possibles. If possible being is no being and if essences considered in themselves are in potency and potential being cannot exert causality, then essence must be considered in a new light. This means simply that essence is merely a mode of being or esse.  

Although Carlo here disagrees with 'Primacy of Esse' Thomists on the precise nature of the starting point, his answer shares in common with theirs two characteristics. First, it seeks a metaphysical, not a methodological, starting point. Secondly, and as a consequence, it imposes a methodology on the texts themselves. That is to say, the starting point presumes the point of view from which Thomas' writings are to be interpreted, and the interpretation which results then becomes the means by which the point of view itself is demonstrated as valid. Thus, Gilson presumes that an authentic Thomism is characterized by the priority of esse and the real distinction between esse and essence, and goes on from there to demonstrate the Aristotelian/Christian synthesis which Thomas achieves and the secondary importance of a participation doctrine which is not Platonic. Carlo, on the other hand, presumes the valid principle at work in Thomas to be the non-being of

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86 W. N. Clarke, Preface to Carlo, Ultimate Reducibility, p. viii.
87 Carlo, "Commentary (a)," pp. 126-127.
88 Ibid., p. 127.
potency, and is thereby able to demonstrate the Platonic character of Thomas from the 'thin' essence which his starting point presumes.

Beyond the fact that such answers are quite unable to bring dissenting Thomists into dialogue with one another (their starting points being mutually exclusive), a more serious difficulty attends this metaphysical approach to the problem, namely, the fact that neither side is able to provide a convincing explanation for the two streams of texts. Gilsonian Thomists tend to deny the presence of a Platonic or Neoplatonic notion of participation, while 'Esseist' Thomists tend to dismiss the Aristotelian texts as 1) the early Thomas (Little), 2) a product of the misleading and reifying nature of essentialist Greek vocabulary which Thomas was forced to use (Phelan) or 3) Thomas' decision to use a vocabulary and a set of formulas familiar to 13th century theologians (Carlo). The first answer is not borne out by the textual evidence, while the latter two either provide no answer at all or do so at the expense of suggesting that Thomas willingly employed a vocabulary for which he really had no use to say a good many things he had no desire to say or that he played to the crowd of his day.

There is general agreement among Thomists that the early Thomas is fundamentally Aristotelian. As Clarke has noted, the fusion of Aristotelian and Platonic elements does not appear explicitly in his writings until Contra Gentiles. Thomists also generally agree that Thomas employs an act/potency methodology throughout his writings. Whether this methodology is Aristotelian ('Strict Observance' Thomism),

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89 Clarke, "The Limitation of Act by Potency," p. 192. Sweeney also notes that Thomas, in his early writings, seldom applied the notion of participation to the real distinction ("Early Writings," p. 120).
a synthesis of Aristotelian and Christian elements (Gilson), a synthesis of Christian and Platonic elements within a framework which is fundamentally Aristotelian (participationist Thomists) or a synthesis of Aristotelian and Christian elements within a framework which is fundamentally Platonic ('Esseist' Thomists) cannot be determined by defining a metaphysical starting point which presumes the very answer which it then proceeds to demonstrate, but rather by examining methodology itself. We must first establish the differences between the Aristotelian and Platonic uses of act and potency, and then determine which methodology Thomas actually and explicitly employs.

**Act/Potency in Plato and Aristotle**

In order to distinguish the act/potency framework of Plato from that of Aristotle, it is necessary to examine briefly how each understands the relationship of form to matter. Because of his insistence that being is immaterial, Plato attributes to matter only a negative relationship with form. However one interprets the Platonic doctrine of the Forms, one thing is certain--their perfection is identified with their immateriality. Materiality introduces an element of irrationality, of non-being, into the empirical world of sense experience. As Keefe notes,

... it is the first insight, the a priori, of Platonism, that the existential situation is irrational: It is the product of a "Fall" which is not implicit in the essential or conceptual structures of reality.

As the same author goes on to observe, "being and meontic nonbeing do not compose, but war with each other." As a result, the Platonic

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90Keefe, *Thomism*, p. 34.

91Ibid., p. 132.
a priori assigns to matter an extrinsic and disruptive effect on the essential integrity and intelligibility of being.

The human situation, under these conditions, is an eros, a search, for an essential unity and meaning which the existential, empirical world is unable to provide. Plato has often been either credited with or accused of (considering one's point of view) providing a purely mythical or mystical account of how the human mind is able to know being in a world in which materiality and sense knowledge are barriers rather than paths to the 'really real.' Copleston notes that the later Plato was more inclined to stress the role of dialectic in leading the human mind to such knowledge. Nevertheless, the Platonic view of existence as disrupted and estranged lends itself easily to non-rational accounts of the material world.

Aristotle, on the other hand, refuses the Platonic a priori. How, he asks, can the Forms be separate from the things of which they are the forms? Because he refuses to accept the notion that being and existence can be separated in this fashion, he attributes to matter a positive or composing relationship with form. Agreeing with Plato that matter is unintelligible, he nevertheless refuses to understand it as that element which disrupts intelligibility. Rather, as the principle of individuation, matter makes possible the multiplication of a single formal principle in the community of a species, which is eternal by virtue of its capacity to multiply itself indefinitely through its individual members. The material species (immanent form) is, therefore,

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93Metaphysics, I, 991b2-3.
the Aristotelian counterpart to the immaterial (extrinsic) Platonic Form.

Because Aristotle insists that substantiality resides in material being, matter and sensible experience are not barriers, but paths to knowing that being. It is not mere chance that leads him to open the *Metaphysics* with a paragraph which links our natural desire to know with the delight we take in our senses. 

Consequently, Aristotelianism is a rejection of the Platonic *eros* which seeks reality in a realm beyond the empirically given. Instead, Aristotelianism assumes the intrinsic intelligibility of the material world, and seeks its knowledge of being through an analysis of that world.

At this point, two clear differences between Plato and Aristotle are apparent. First, act and potency are contradictory in Plato but complementary in Aristotle. Because the Platonic potency is hostile to being, it must be identified with nonbeing. Because the Aristotelian potency is intrinsic to material being, it must be associated with that being. Here then we have the genesis of 'thin' and 'thick' potencies which, when transferred to the esse/essence distinction, translate into the 'thin' and 'thick' essences of the contemporary Thomist debate.

The second difference is a necessary corollary to the first. Because Plato understands potency to be unintelligible and disruptive of essential being, the empirical world is, by definition, incapable of submitting to rational analysis. As Copleston notes,

... in the Platonic physics, the chaotic element, that into which order is "introduced" by Reason, is not explained: doubtless Plato thought that it was inexplicable. It can neither be deduced nor has it been created out of nothing.

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94 *Metaphysics* I, 980a.
It is simply there (a fact of experience), and that is all that we can say about it. 95

Here lies the Platonic attraction to myth. Matter is irrational, yet it is also factual. "Incapable of being accounted for in terms of ontology and yet fundamental in the cosmos, it [matter] found its explanation in mythical accounts of a primal tragedy." 96

Aristotle, on the other hand, assumes the intrinsic intelligibility of material things. Act and potency, for him, are therefore the tools of an analytical approach which seeks in material things the intrinsic conditions of their possibility. Having rejected the Platonic Ideas, without denying the existence of formal intelligibilities in material things, he seeks to identify the immanent forms and primal causes of things. For this reason, as de Vogel points out regarding Aristotelianism, "la méthode de la métaphysique est essentiellement une méthode d'analyse logique et non pas de synthèse spéculative." 97 Because immanent forms require material conditions for their multiplication in a species, Aristotle uses act and potency as correlative principles to explain the necessary intrinsic components of material beings.

Aristotelianism does not pretend to be a psychologism; it does not result from an investigation of the phenomena of consciousness; its concern is the logical coherence of the empirical world, and it is driven necessarily to an essentialism. 98

In fact, both Plato and Aristotle are essentialist, identifying

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96 Keefe, Thomism, p. 12.
98 Keefe, Thomism, p. 40.
being with form or intelligibility. Because Plato's forms are extrinsic and immaterial, Plato necessarily separates being from existence. Because Aristotle's forms are immanent and materialized, Aristotle necessarily identifies being and existence. Thomas, on the other hand, uses esse and essence to go beyond their essentialism. Hence the esse/essence distinction takes priority over that of form and matter in his system. It is, therefore, the relationship of esse and essence which must be examined in order to determine his methodology.

The Methodological Resolution

Is the Thomist enterprise Aristotelian or is it Platonic? Because Thomas was most explicitly Aristotelian in his early works and only later introduced a more Platonic or Neoplatonic strand into his writings, it is necessary first to isolate those explicitly Platonic elements which he undeniably and deliberately introduced into his thought, and then to see why he did so. If it can be shown that his reasons for adopting them were to introduce the principles of Platonic method, then there is good reason to suppose he deliberately veered from Aristotle toward Plato. If, on the other hand, those elements were introduced within the context or in support of the Aristotelian view with which he originally started, we shall have good reason to suppose that it was never his intention to abandon it.

There are two notions from the Platonic/Neoplatonic tradition which Thomas clearly and deliberately made use of in his own thought. The more important of these was the Platonic doctrine of the Forms which, under the authority of Augustine, entered the Thomist world in the guise of the Divine Ideas. The second was the Neoplatonic notion of God as infinite. Since reference has already been made to
the latter notion and its use by Thomas, it will be considered first.

Infinity. As will be recalled, both Plato and Aristotle were prevented from associating infinity and being because they identified perfection and determination. If the perfect is that which is determined, then only the imperfect or undetermined can be infinite (formless). For them, therefore, infinity was necessarily associated with quantity, not quality. Plotinus and the Neoplatonists were able to advance beyond this position, attributing infinity to God. Their position, however, fell short of that later adopted by Christian theologians, inasmuch as the infinity they attributed to God was an "extrinsic and relative sort of infinity" which could be applied to God as the God who is unlimited by anything prior or extrinsic to him.99 Furthermore, God was not Being itself, but "the One beyond form and being."100 In such a system, being is still linked with intelligibility, and intelligibility is still linked with the determinateness of form.

The doctrine of creation enabled Christianity to break the Greek association between determinateness and intelligibility. As long as form and matter were regarded as uncreated, it was impossible to avoid the association of being with form (determination), inasmuch as there was nothing beyond form with which to associate it. By the same token, only matter could be regarded as in potency to being (form). Once, however, the notion arose that both form and matter are created, then both form and matter came to be regarded as potencies in relation to a source of perfection which transcended both of them. Form then


began to exercise a dual function as not only a determinate perfection which limited matter to the parameters of its own perfection, but as a receptive potency which exercised its determination in relation to a perfection beyond itself.

When Thomas moved from an essential to an existential notion of God, he broke not only with the determinate forms of Plato and Aristotle, but also with the notion of form as the highest perfection. It might well be argued that, had there been no notion of God as infinite for him to adopt, Thomas would have had to develop one, inasmuch as his notion of God as Pure Act was a rejection of all previous notions of God as form, and therefore of all notions of formal limitation in God.

Nevertheless, in *On Being and Essence*, Thomas doesn't speak of God as infinite. Rather, He is Pure Act. In fact, it is precisely His nature as pure being which distinguishes Him from all other beings, inasmuch as pure being is such that no addition can be made to it. Universal being, on the other hand, is susceptible of addition, and every other being is a composite of this universal being and one of those additions.\(^{101}\) None of this is surprising in a work which is acknowledged to be Aristotelian. Within the Aristotelian act/potency framework, God as Pure Act and other beings as a combination of act and potency (esse/essence) is the obvious way in which to distinguish Ipsum Esse from creatures. That God is infinite and the creature finite would be the obvious corollary, but in itself not important to the discussion.

If, however, Thomas had wanted later to move to a Platonic act/potency framework, the notion of God as infinite would have helped him enormously, since it would have given him immediate grounds for shifting

\(^{101}\) *On Being and Essence*, c. 5.
to a notion of potency as a limiting principle. He could have spoken of God as the infinite act-of-existing, who creates finite acts-of-existing. Any composition in creatures he could then have attributed to the distinction between infinite being and finite being. This is, as we have seen, the manner of speaking preferred by 'Esseist' Thomists, and we might expect to find Thomas using God's infinity to introduce this type of language, if these Thomists are correct.

When we turn, however, to the two Summas of Thomas, we find that such a transformation does not take place. In fact, these two works, which give us the overall structure of Thomas' thought during a period when he is presumed to have moved to a Platonic participation/limitation framework, offer striking evidence that he did not incorporate the notion of God as infinite for any purpose which could be characterized as Platonic.

First, the placement of his discussion of God's infinity in both Summas clearly indicates how peripheral it is in his thinking. In Book I of the Contra Gentiles, his discussion of God begins with chapter 10. God's infinity isn't discussed until chapter 43. In the Prima Pars of the Summa Theologiae, God's infinity is put off until question 7. In both works, the proofs for God's existence are offered before His infinity is established. More importantly, in both works the notions of simplicity and composition are employed to establish the distinction between God and creatures before God's infinity is demonstrated.

Secondly, the notion of infinity employed in both Summas is negative, not positive. That is to say, it is knowledge of God by way of negation. "... in God the infinite is understood only in a negative way, because there is no terminus or limit to His perfection: He is
supremely perfect. It is thus that the infinite ought to be attributed to God." For Thomas, therefore, God is primarily Pure Act and only secondarily, and by way of negation, infinite act.

In order to understand the significance of infinity as a negative attribute of God, one need only compare it with Duns Scotus' positive notion of God's infinity. Scotus understood Infinite Being, when predicated of God, to be "the most perfect absolute concept we can have of him." For Scotus, therefore, infinity signalled not the absence of limitation, but "a certain grade of perfection—infinity." Therefore, Scotus was forced to a univocal concept of being, in which the disjunctive transcendentals, infinity and finitude, express the primary distinction between God and creatures. Furthermore, since Scotus identified infinity with perfection in the sense of intelligibility, Infinite Being, for him, meant infinite intelligibility. That the 'esseist' Carlo sounds more like the 'essentialist' Scotus than like the 'existentialist' Thomas is an important point to which we shall return later in this chapter.

Thirdly, the internal evidence of Contra Gentiles I, 43 ("Quod Deus est infinitus"), and the Summa Theologiae I, 7, 1 ("utrum Deus sit infinitus"), indicates that the issue is treated, for the most part, within an Aristotelian frame of reference. The first five arguments in Contra Gentiles supporting the notion of God as infinite are all

\[CG\] I, 43.


104 Ibid., p. 30.
based, in one way or another, on the act/potency composition in creatures as contrasted with the pure actuality of God. Only one argument, the sixth, is explicitly participationist.

Question 7, article 1, of the Prima Pars of the *Summa Theologiae*, contains an analysis of form and matter which is half Aristotelian, half Platonic. Form is described as perfecting matter (Aristotelian), but matter is described as restricting form (Platonic). Thomas employs the Platonic notion of matter here in order to get to the notion of perfect unlimited form, so that he might transfer that notion into the order of esse itself. Therefore, he concludes that "maxime formae omnium est ipsum esse," and that God's existence is infinite because "esse divinum non sit esse receptum in aliquo, sed ipse est suum esse subsistens." Hence, Thomas uses the Platonic form for Aristotelian purposes, namely, to assert that esse divinum is unlimited perfection, par excellance, and, by implication, that form itself is limited perfection (the "ali­quo" which "receives" esse). He ends the article with the statement that "The very fact that God's existence itself subsists without being acquired by anything, and as such is limitless, distinguishes it from everything else, and sets other things aside from it."

Here we see that, contrary to the view of 'esseists' such as Little, Clarke and Carlo, as well as many participationist Thomists, Thomas argues from the simplicity of God and the composition of the creature to their respective infinity and finitude. In other words, the Aristotelian notion of act/potency provides the framework within

105 Thomas' use of "reception" occurs in that stream of texts in which he has a positive notion of essence in mind. This point has not been lost on Carlo, who lists it as one of the characteristics of that stream ("Commentary (a)," p. 126).
which he demonstrates the infinity of God. Furthermore, the procedure he employs is analytical, not intuitive, dialectical, phenomenological, mythical or mystical.

Nor should it go unnoticed that the same Aristotelian act/potency framework and the same analytical procedure govern his discussion of creation in both Summas. We have already examined in some detail chapters 52-54 in Book 2 of *Contra Gentiles*, where a) the composition in intellectual substances is established on the grounds of God's simplicity and subsistence before the notion of His infinity is introduced (chapter 52), b) the notions of act and potency as proportionate and complementary to one another are established before the notion of participation is introduced and integrated into that act/potency framework (chapter 53) and c) the act/potency distinction between esse and essence is said to transcend that of form and matter, including both material and non-material being in its scope (chapter 54).

The same emphasis on the composition of act and potency appears once again in the *Summa Theologiae* I, 45, 4, where Thomas asks whether creation is proper to composite and subsisting things. Apart from the significance of the question itself (he does not ask if creation is proper to limited acts-of-existing), he states quite clearly (*sed contra*) that creation is properly attributed to composite subsisting things.

Carlo, Clarke and others appeal to this article in particular, because Thomas says quite explicitly that forms and accidents are, properly speaking, not beings, but co-existents. 'Esseist' Thomists conclude from this that the Thomist essence is 'thin,' since esse (as the first effect of creation) would appear to be the only 'existent'
produced by creation. This overlooks two statements by Thomas, in this same article, which clearly indicate that esse cannot be regarded as an 'existent'.

The first statement appears in the first objection, where the question is raised as to whether or not creation is proper to composite beings, inasmuch as, according to the De causis, "Prima rerum creatarum est esse." Thomas notes that, since "esse rei creatae non est subsistens," it would seem that creation is not properly attributed to composite (i.e., subsistent) things. In answer to this objection, Thomas again states that esse is not subsistent, and goes on to resolve the difficulty by explaining that the statement, "Prima rerum creatarum est esse" means "esse non importat subjectum creatum, sed importat propria rationem objecti creationis." Although he does not refer to esse as a co-existent, he has already said, in the body of the article, that form is co-existent because it does not subsist, and that only subsistent things are created. Hence, the implication is quite clear that esse, although enjoying a certain ontological priority over forms and accidents, is also a co-existent.

The second statement is made with reference to the second objection, which suggests that creation would not seem to refer to composite things, inasmuch as composite things come out of their components, not out of nothing. Thomas responds that there are no pre-existing principles. Therefore, creation is the simultaneous bringing into being of the composite together with its component principles. Once again, esse is ruled out as the 'existent' produced by creation.

There is no hint of a 'thin' essence in this text from the Summa Theologiae. Furthermore, and once again, the procedure employed is
analytical, proceeding from the fact of composite beings to an examination of what can, properly speaking, be said to be produced by creation.

While the notion of God as infinite originated with Neoplatonism, it is a necessary corollary to the doctrine of God as Ipsum Esse as Thomas develops that doctrine in his early, Aristotelian writings. Necessary, because Ipsum Esse removes God from the realm of all material and formal limitation. A corollary, because it can express only negatively what Pure Act says positively. Thomas could have used the notion of God's infinity to shift his thinking into a more Platonic framework. The fact that he did not do so strongly suggests that he did not intend, in theory or in practice, to abandon the Aristotelian methodology. Can the same thing be said of the Divine Ideas?

Divine Ideas. In On Being and Essence, after discussing the essential component (form/matter) in composite substances (esse/essence), Thomas considers the relationship of essence to genus, species and difference. He comes very close to suggesting that the concepts the intellect forms with regard to species are purely logical, quoting Averroes to the effect that "it is the intellect that causes universality in things." He does pull back from this position in the next paragraph, however, maintaining that the universal "is not due to the being it has in the intellect but to its relation to things in their likeness." He does not, however, offer any explanation as to how several things are able to share in the single likeness which the mind is able to abstract from them. When we turn to the two Summas, however, we find there the principle of explanation—namely, the Divine Ideas as the

106 On Being and Essence, c. 2.
107 Ibid., c. 3.
exemplars of all created things.

Thomas' discussion of the Divine Ideas is rather sketchy in Contra Gentiles. In Book I, chapter 53, he takes up again the method which Carlo finds so questionable in the De Veritate, that of inferring from the human analogue of intellection to the presence in God of Divine Ideas. In the next chapter (54), he discusses the relationship of the Divine Ideas to the Divine Essence.

The intellect of God, therefore, can comprehend in His essence that which is proper to each thing by understanding wherein the divine essence is being imitated and wherein each thing falls short of its perfection. Thus, by understanding His essence as imitable in the mode of life [modum vitae] and not of knowledge, God has the proper form of a plant; and if He knows His essence as imitable in the mode of knowledge [modum cognitionis] and not of intellect, God has the proper form of animal, and so forth.

The statement, "wherein each thing falls short of its perfection", together with Thomas' repeated use of the word 'mode' (a favorite expression among 'thin' essence Thomists) might suggest he is introducing a Neoplatonic notion of essence as limitation, were it not for the fact that priority is given to the capacity of things to "imitate" the Divine Essence. Clearly, such an imitation must be positive, since finitude or limitation per se could not be regarded as an imitation or reflection of infinite being. That Thomas has a positive notion of essence in mind here is also reinforced by his use of the word 'mode' to designate perfections.

When we turn to the Summa Theologiae, the use of the Divine Ideas to shore up a 'thick' essence becomes even more apparent. The three articles in question 15 of the Prima Pars deal respectively with the Divine Ideas as a) exemplars and principles of knowing (article 1), b) forms of the stable and unchangeable natures of things (article 2),
and c) principles of God's speculative and practical knowledge. The same insistence on a positive view of essence reappears in question 44, article 3, which deals with God as the exemplary cause of all things. Here the emphasis is on how God must be recognized as exemplar cause, in order to account for the fact that things reach out to achieve determinate forms. Thomas attributes these determinate forms to the Divine Wisdom, concluding that, "Hence we should say that divine wisdom holds the originals of all things, and these we have previously called the Ideas, that is the exemplar forms existing in the divine mind."

It should come as no surprise that Thomas incorporates the Platonic Forms into his system in order to underwrite a positive notion of essence. The Platonic Form is, after all, the thick essence personified (or, rather, reified). Paradoxically, Thomas has recourse to the very doctrine which Aristotle so vigorously rejected in order to provide a transcendental grounding for the Aristotelian notion of positive potency. And he does so for a most Aristotelian reason, namely, to furnish a priori conditions of possibility for the essential component in existing things. The Divine Ideas, far from providing the occasion for a conversion to Platonism, are employed for strictly Aristotelian purposes.

We are now in a position to answer Carlo's question, "Why not describe essence, then, as the place where esse stops, bordered by nothingness?" The reason is clear. The Thomist project is not one of description, but one of analysis. To say that essence is the place where esse stops does nothing more than state a fact of our everyday experience, i.e., that things are finite. Such a description supposes the capacity (potency) of esse to stop, but provides no analysis of
the conditions of possibility which would permit esse to stop. If being is simple and unlimited by nature, then the positing of essence as a limiting principle intrinsic to being makes no sense. Being, by definition, would have no intrinsic capacity for such a limiting principle. If, on the other hand, being does contain such a principle, then that principle must be essence (potency). But, in that case, essence cannot be understood as a negative principle, for it would lie on the side of being. To posit God as the efficient cause of limitation doesn't improve upon the situation either, since God's ability to limit esse to particular modes presupposes the capacity (potency) of esse to submit to such a limitation.

Carlo has, in fact, abandoned altogether the analytical approach employed by Thomas. He makes this clear in his characterization of act and potency as "schematic," not "ontological," principles.

As in all other sciences we find in metaphysics both ontological and schematic principles. By schematic principles I mean those whose primary purpose is to organize or unify the multifarious data of the science (like the atomic theory in physics), rather than to capture more directly some aspect of reality. To our mind potency and act are principles of this order.108

Carlo has adopted, in place of the Thomist methodology, a form of Platonism which, at its best, is phenomenological or descriptive, and, at its worst, is mythic. It is Carlo, after all, who characterizes essence as rising "out of the flood of esse like Thetis from the frothy wave."

Carlo's dilemma can be traced to his desire to synthesize Aristotelian and Platonic methodology in a way which is simply impossible.

108 Carlo, Ultimate Reducibility, p. 92.
109 Idem., "Commentary (a)," p. 128.
He wishes to combine the Aristotelian notion of substantial reality as material reality (form/matter) with the Platonic notion of being as monist (form). This leads him to attempt to account for Aristotle's composed substances by means of Plato's single principle. When transferred into the existentialism of Thomas, this project forces a reduction of essence/esse to esse alone. Since, however, esse alone cannot account for finite being, the notion of non-being must necessarily be introduced. Once this notion is introduced, the Aristotelian substance has been abandoned in favor of the Platonic substance.

At this point, two courses are possible. One can maintain, with Little, that finite acts-of-being are "shot through and through, as it were, with non-being" (the Platonic 'fall' from the full integrity of being) or one can maintain, with Carlo, that material beings are limited acts-of-existing enjoying the same nature (esse) as God, though in a finite mode. As Henle notes, the Platonic notion of participation can issue only in a pure extrinsicism or in a pantheism. 110

110 R. Henle, Saint Thomas and Platonism (The Hague: N. Nijhoff, 1956), p. 377. The charge of pantheism is one to which 'thin essence' Thomists are particularly sensitive, and one which they, to a man, deny. Little tries to avoid the charge by recourse to the notion that finitude itself destroys any pantheist identity between God and creatures. "Thus creatures are not miniature replicas of God, but rather constituted of limiting essences that smother every divine property in them while yet leaving in their existences indications that what has been smothered is divine" (The Platonic Heritage of Thomism, p. 116). However plausible this might sound, it does not actually explain anything. No principle is offered to account for how a quantifying (finitizing) of esse could "smother every divine property," much less leave intact a limited, definable perfection in the esse so smothered. Nor is it easy to see how Little's notion of essence as the "no-moreness" of being is to be reconciled with the statement that finite beings are "shot through and through" with non-being. As "no more" being, non-being should lie outside the limit, not penetrate it. Actually Little's views are so ambiguous as to defy close analysis.

Phelan maintains that pantheism is avoided because esse can never be regarded as a thing. "If one must talk the language of participation,
Plato and Aristotle: Can They Be Synthesized?

Even if the above consideration of divine infinity and the Divine Ideas gives us good reason to suppose that Thomas never intended to abandon an Aristotelian notion of act/potency, the fact still remains that a great deal of what he says cannot be made to fit into that Aristotelian framework. If the doctrines of God's infinity and of the Divine Ideas offer evidence that Thomas actually employed an Aristotelian methodology, do they also offer evidence as to why Neoplatonic elements find their way into that methodology? Carlo's question, "How is a multiplicity of Divine Ideas rooted in the Divine Essence?" is very much

I would say, also, 'There is no being, esse, save the divine being, Esse; and all beings participate it.' This sounds pantheistic only to the ears of those who still think of esse as something" ("The Being of Creatures," p. 125). A problem, however, then arises with regard to things. If esse is not a thing and essence is non-being, how does the composition of a non-thing with non-being produce a being or a thing? To fall back, as Phelan does, on essence as a 'mode of being' is either to import the very positivity which his original use of the word 'mode' was designed to eliminate or it is to suppose that a mere juggling of words will suffice to achieve plausibility.

Carlo tries to avoid the accusation of pantheism by recourse to efficient causality. "The real danger in explaining the relations of creatures to God is not atheism but pantheism, the ties between Ipsum Esse and finite esses are much profounder than any differences. But as long as we remember that esse is communicated through efficient causality and not formal causality there is no danger of pantheism, of making God the Form of the World as William of Auvergne was tempted to do" (Ultimate Reducibility, p. 109). Since, however, the reduction of essence to esse is simultaneously the reduction of formal causality to efficient causality, the problem has merely been shifted to the existential order, where it remains unanswered and apparently unanswerable. For, as was previously noted, God's efficient causality can produce limited esse only if esse itself has the capacity (potency) for such limitation. By denying to potency any ontological status, Carlo denies the formal principle which God's efficient causality requires in order to operate at all. Carlo leaves the impression (in no way mitigated by his illustrations) that esse "flows" until it meets a wall of non-being, at which point it simply stops. To fall back upon efficient causality alone to account for this seems tantamount to saying that God creates the non-being which stops esse, an unhappy prospect on two counts, since it saddles God with non-being at the same time that it fails to provide any principle by which non-being can be understood to stop being.
to the point. For the point at issue is Thomas' synthesis of Aristotle and Plato. Can such a synthesis be done, or is the project itself an impossible, because contradictory, one? Before answering that question, we need to examine more closely the synthesis which Thomas attempted.

What shall be argued here is that the Aristotelian methodology is incompatible with Plato's Forms. The notion of God as Pure Act stands in direct contradiction to the notion of God's Essence as containing formal distinctions. The fact that Thomas is careful to insist that God's essence does not actually contain a multiplicity of Ideas in no way mitigates the basic contradiction which this doctrine introduces into his thought.

The basic contradiction stems from the fact that Thomas seeks a transcendental grounding for both components in the esse/essence distinction. Through esse, the creature is understood to participate existentially in the pure, infinite act which is Ipsum Esse. Through essence, the creature is understood to participate essentially or formally in the Divine Essence as God understands it to be imitable. In order to account for this notion of a dual participation in God, Thomas must reintroduce into the notion of God, which he had previously purged of all formal connotations, the Divine Ideas as the forms or exemplars of His creative activity. This contradiction is what Carlo's question addresses. And the answer to it is quite obvious. The Divine Ideas cannot be rooted in the Divine Essence, if God is pure, simple, infinite act. Nor can the Ideas themselves retain their qualitative character (i.e., as forms, perfections, intelligibilities) once they are placed there. This latter point is one which seems to have escaped most Thomists. 'Esseist' Thomists alone appreciate it. Their 'thin' essence is the product of
that appreciation.

The quantification of the Divine Ideas stems from the fact that if Ipsum Esse is one utterly simple and infinite perfection, it cannot be conceived as split up into a multiplicity of perfections or intelligibilities which are essentially different from its own perfection. A single infinite quality cannot itself be the source of a multiplicity of qualities. It can only be quantified or 'contracted' into smaller and smaller amounts, such that what is produced is not a multiplicity of natures distinct from the divine nature qualitatively, but a multiplicity of grades in being which are distinct from the divine nature quantitatively. Thomas himself cannot escape the logic of this situation. As a result, the Divine Ideas, which Thomas imports to ground the 'thick' essences he wants in created things, are unable to retain their 'thickness' or qualitative character vis a vis the infinite qualitative perfection of Ipsum Esse. Created qualities thus find themselves grounded in transcendental quantifications.

The results are unfortunate. For the quantitative Idea (the 'thin' essence which can now only limit the quantity of esse in finite beings) is forced to compete with the qualitative essence (the 'thick' essence which constitutes the intelligibility or perfection in composite beings). As a result, qualitatively distinct species must try to find a place for themselves in a Porphyrian universe of quantitatively descending 'modes' of being. The two incompatible streams of texts in Thomas reflect these contradictions.

The introduction of the Divine Ideas forces a reduction of quality to quantity from which there is no turning back. But the responsibility for this reduction cannot be laid entirely at the feet of the Divine
Ideas. Three other factors played an important role in its development. First, the path which Thomas takes here was, unhappily, blazed by Plato, Aristotle, Neoplatonism and Christianity before him.

Plato's identification of the Forms with Numbers was an attempt to identify the qualitative with the quantitative. As Copleston notes, "Plato's motive in identifying Forms with Numbers seems to be that of rationalising or rendering intelligible the mysterious and transcendent-al world of Forms. To render intelligible in this case means to find the principle of order."\textsuperscript{111} Although Aristotle rejected the Number-Form doctrine, he in fact trod down the same path with his notion that the differences which constitute species in their genus could be reduced to mathematical units of one. As Copleston notes (with regard to Plato, but it is applicable to Aristotle as well), this whole procedure of "panmathematicism" is a form of rationalization, the validity of which is highly questionable.

That the real is rational is a presupposition of all dogmatic philosophy, but it does not follow that the whole of reality can be rationalised by us. The attempt to reduce all reality to mathematics is not only an attempt to rationalise all reality—which is the task of philosophy, it may be said—but presupposes that all reality can be rationalised by us, which is an assumption.\textsuperscript{112}

The major factor which prevented this quantification process from coming to full term in Plato and Aristotle was the fact that neither of them managed to locate the forms within a single identifiable perfection which transcended them qualitatively. Plato kept the Forms separate from the Demiurge, whereas Aristotle denied to the world any transcendent source of its intelligibility. As a result, the forms

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{111} Copleston, Greece & Rome (part 1), p. 219.
\item\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p. 221.
\end{itemize}
remained qualitative in relationship to matter and qualitatively distinct in relationship to one another.

When Plotinus and the Neoplatonists placed the Forms within Mind or Thought, a further quantification of them was inevitable. Now Quality was identified with Mind or Thought, such that the Forms contemplated by Mind could only be understood as diverse quantifications of that single quality. The result was the so-called Porphyrian tree, by which the qualitative distinctions found in the universe were thought to be quantified degrees of the single perfection of Mind from which they originated and to which they could be reduced. When Christian theologians saw their way clear to placing the Platonic Forms in the mind of God, they also found a way to make the Porphyrian universe their own. Thomas, as heir to this long process by which form became increasingly associated with quantity, could not but be strongly influenced by it.

The second factor contributing to Thomas' quantification of form stems from the fact that Thomas seems not to have recognized the full implications of his transformation of the act/potency distinction from the essential realm of form/matter to the existential realm of esse/essence. The act/potency distinction in Aristotle is specifically designed to account for change, and change is defined as the reduction of potency to act. In a form/matter universe, this necessarily means the reduction of quantity (matter) to quality (form). Under these circumstances, to be better means to be more in act.

Once the act/potency distinction is transferred to the existential order, however, the relationship of act and potency can no longer be regarded in such reductionistic terms. For, at this level, essence itself is an act, and it makes no sense to speak of the reduction of
act (essence) to act (esse). Nevertheless, Thomas seems not to have recognized completely this transformation of the act/potency relationship at the level of esse/essence. Hence, he accounts for the angelic hierarchy, in his early as well as his later writings, by a quantified notion of form which supposes that the superior angel has "more" act and "less" potency. This reduction of formal act to esse reflects a direct transfer of the essentialist notion of potency (matter) as quantitative to the existential level, where potency (form) continues to be regarded as quantitative.

The third factor is Thomas' inconsistency with regard to the principle that being cannot be the source of its own diversification. The principle itself is Platonic. It is precisely this principle which requires Plato to appeal to meontic non-being as the source of diversity. Thomas, however, did not adhere strictly to this principle. Instead, he appealed, via the Divine Ideas, to the Divine Essence as the ground of diverse intelligibilities among creatures. This is the paradox, referred to earlier, of using one Platonic doctrine (the Forms) to deny another one (the monism of being).

With the recovery of the primacy of esse, this paradox could not go unnoticed for long. Once the notion of esse as the source of all perfection and intelligibility was rediscovered, it became all too apparent that the real distinction between a formal intelligibility and its actuation was in fact a questionable distinction between a finite and an infinite intelligibility. In fact, it could be reduced to a distinction between the unlimited and the limited. This reduction was the discovery of 'thin' essence Thomists. It is also the source of their unhappiness with the Divine Ideas. To use the Divine Essence to ground
the essential diversification of esse is tantamount to saying that being does contain within itself the principles of its own diversification. Unlike Thomas, 'thin' essence Thomists will not grant this.

In reducing the paradox of Thomas to the "exclusivity of esse," however, Carlo and his colleagues have unwittingly introduced a new paradox into the history of Thomism. For their new 'esseist' position bears remarkable resemblance to the old 'essentialist' position. This has already been commented on with regard to Duns Scotus. We do not have to look far to discover the reason. In reducing the intelligibility of essence to esse, 'thin' essence Thomists return again to a view of esse as infinite intelligibility and to essence as its finite mode. Hence all beings are "grades of perfection" of one single infinite perfection. As Lindbeck, an adherent of the position developed by Little, notes,

Simply by having esse, creatures imitate God. All their other similarities to the divine stem from this, for perfections ontologically common to God and creatures are either convertible with being or are, as in the case of intelligence, pure perfections of being.113

In a revealing footnote to this remark, Lindbeck adds,

The extraordinary way in which St. Thomas argues that to know is to contain the form of another, therefore that which contains all forms, Infinite Being, must be the supremely intelligent (v ST. I, 14, 1, resp.) has led Hans Wagner to speak of "absolute idealism" and to say "der thomistische Universalienrealismus ist in Wahrheit ein konkreter Idealismus." Existent, Analogie und Dialektik, Munich, Reinhardt, 1953, 198-9.

For this reason, Lindbeck maintains that 'St. Thomas' doctrine of existence is participationist and--to use a word that thus becomes very nearly meaningless--'essentialist'!"114


114 Ibid., p. 110. There is one important distinction, nevertheless,
The error Carlo makes in his interpretation of Thomas lies in the very starting point Carlo has chosen. The principle that being cannot diversify itself is Platonic, and, in adopting that position, Carlo cannot but impose a Platonic methodology upon Thomas. Thus he fails to recognize the fact that Thomas himself does not adhere to that principle, and, in fact, explicitly employs the Divine Ideas to get around it.

Carlo is, on the other hand, correct in thinking that the Divine Ideas cannot be placed in the Divine Essence. A real distinction in creatures cannot be accounted for by positing two separate streams of participation in a single, utterly simple source. One cannot simply identify in the Creator what is distinct in creation.

Thomas' initial error lay in supposing that being does not contain the principles of its own diversification. This was both a methodological and a theological error. The Aristotelian methodology requires, as we have seen, that potency be both placed on the side of being and yet distinguished from it. Christian theology likewise, in its doctrine of the Trinity, demands acknowledgement of diversity within God. 115

Thomas' second error was his use of the Divine Ideas to ground the qualitative diversity of created essence. Again, the mistake was both between essentialism and esseism. The essentialist, by reducing esse to essence, emphasizes the formal or static character of existing things at the expense of their dynamism. The esseist, by reducing essence to esse, emphasizes their dynamism at the expense of their formal characteristics or natures.

115 Thomas was not unaware of this. In his discussion of the Divine Ideas in the Summa Theologicae, he cites the objection that if the Divine Ideas are eternal in God, "it follows that there is in God another real plurality besides that of the divine Persons: but this is contrary to the words of John Damascene that in God all is one except Ungeneration, Generation and Procession" (ST I, 15, 2).
methodological and theological. The Aristotelian methodology does not require the positing of an extrinsic source for the formal principles of things. On the contrary, because Aristotle denied Plato's doctrine of the extrinsic Forms, the methodology forbids it. Instead, the Aristotelian inquiry is an inquiry into the intrinsic conditions of possibility for formal intelligibilities. At the same time, the Christian doctrine of creation ex nihilo also forbids the positing of a priori conditions of possibility for creation. By introducing the Divine Ideas as the a priori conditions of possibility for created essence, Thomas attempts to rationalize what the doctrine maintains is beyond the reach of our reason. If this notion of the Divine Ideas is carried to its logical conclusion, it leads to a denial of creation ex nihilo. Phelan offers an excellent case in point, when he says,

> In being created creatures do not pass from potency to act; no potency precedes the act of absolutely beginning to be. They pass unintelligibly mysteriously by virtue of the wisdom and power of God, from being in the Divine Mode (i.e., in the Esse of God) to being in the created mode (i.e. in the esse proper to each). Thus God is each and every creature; but no creature is God, nor all creatures together. Existing from all eternity in the Esse of God, creatures emerge by the will of the Creator into another mode of being (esse), limited, determined, restricted but nevertheless not separated, though distinct, from the divine mode. 116

Both Thomas and Carlo make the same error. It is the methodological error of supposing that Plato and Aristotle can be synthesized. Each attempts in a different way to do so, and each fails.

From a theological viewpoint, which was of course Thomas' viewpoint, the temptation to synthesize Plato and Aristotle is enormous, inasmuch as each one seems to provide what the other lacks. Plato's being transcends the material world, and therefore lends itself more

easily to a theological conversion than does Aristotle's material being. Of course, Plato's notion of matter is impossible to reconcile with the 'good creation,' but then Aristotle is at hand to help out there. At the metaphysical level, Plato's transcendent being and Aristotle's immanent being seem complementary and, more importantly, their synthesis would seem to provide the ideal metaphysical context for discussing the transcendent/immanent God of Christianity.

At the level of methodology, however, the situation is quite different. Platonic and Aristotelian methodology are mutually exclusive, because a) they hold opposing views of being, and, as a result, b) they are diametrically opposed with regard to the role of potency (matter) in material things.

Substance is the a priori unity of being, and therefore the understanding and the reality of substance is identified with the understanding and the reality of being itself. The notion of substance may be logical or intuitive. It has been seen that there are two mutually exclusive methods of ontology, which correspond to these two notions of substance: the logical method of Aristotelianism, and the intuitive method of Platonism. The former asserts the materiality of substance, the latter requires its immateriality.117

The notion of being which informs each of these methodologies cannot be separated from its corresponding notion of potency or matter. One cannot combine Plato's notion of being with Aristotle's notion of act/potency. The two simply exclude one another. Thomas' attempt to synthesize them produced a number of contradictions in his thought. Carlo's attempt to interpret Thomas' thought as synthetic has issued in a suppression of the Aristotelian methodology which Thomas made his own.

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117 Keefe, Thomism, p. 29.
We have thus far maintained that 'Primacy of Esse' Thomists are correct in supposing that Thomas is Aristotelian, not Platonic, and that the 'thick' Aristotelian essence does not shatter in a Thomist universe. Does this mean that it enters that universe intact, as Gilson and Owens presume? Or, to repeat Carlo's question, "Is essence indifferent to being eternal or created?" Since we also maintain at this point that 'esseist' Thomists are correct in supposing that the Divine Ideas cannot be used to ground that essence, it might reasonably be expected that the Aristotelian essence is in for some severe shocks in a Thomist world, shocks which escaped the attention of Gilson and Owens.

In order to understand just what changes the Aristotelian essence does undergo, in other words, to understand how Thomist methodology properly applies to essence, we must next examine, first, the Aristotelian essence itself, and, secondly, the impact of esse on that essence in the composite beings of Thomas' world, being which, in their composition, bear above all the mark of having been created.
We have alluded to the fact that Gilsonian Thomists understand Aristotelian substances both to enter Thomas' world intact and to be radically transformed by that entry. What do they mean by this? The primary thing Gilson means is that it is possible for us to make a "sharp contrast between the point of view of existence and that of substance"\(^1\) in existing things.

If we look at the world of creatures from the point of view of its existence, then it is true to say that it has no existence of its own. Existence is in it, just as light is in the air at noon, but the existence of the world never is its existence; so that, in so far, at least, as the world itself is concerned, it can lose existence at a moment's notice, or, rather, without previous notice. On the other hand, if we look at this existing world from the point of view of its substance, there are aspects in it that tally with such a view, but there are others that do not.\(^2\)

Existentially speaking, the world is radically contingent. So much so, in fact, that "even though it were demonstratively proven that this created world is destined always to exist, it still would remain a permanently contingent world."\(^3\) From the point of view of existence, Aristotelian substances do not exist, as they do in Aristotle's world, in their own right. This difference between the two worlds "should be understood as both radical and total."\(^4\)

\(^1\)Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, p. 163.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 162.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 160.

\(^4\)Ibid.
Nevertheless, what does not tally with such a view, according to Gilson, is the substantially indestructible character of things in themselves.

Nothing looks more precarious than a thus-conceived world, in which no essence can ever be its own act of existing, yet the world of Thomas Aquinas is made by God to wear as long as that of Aristotle, that is, never to wear away. Why is it so? This is, I think, one of the most difficult points to grasp in the whole metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas, because we are here invited to conceive creatures as being, at one and the same time, indestructible in themselves, yet wholly contingent in their relation to God.5

The Thomist world is, therefore, "a world of Aristotelian substances which are in their own right. It is both a substantially eternal and an existentially contingent world."6 For this reason, Gilson maintains that "the Aristotelian substance remains intact in the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas."7

Yves Congar agrees that things can be understood in two different ways. Noting first that the Augustinian tradition tends to view things solely from the perspective of their relationship to God, such that things are regarded "not in their pure essence, but in their reference to the last goal,"8 Congar points out that this is not the Thomist approach to things.

On the other hand, for St. Thomas and for Albert the Great, his master, if it was true to say that everything had a relation to the last goal, i.e., God, this, however, was under the formality of the final cause and the exemplary cause, the latter, a kind of extrinsic formal cause. It was not under the relation

5 Ibid., pp. 161-162.
6 Ibid., p. 162.
7 Ibid., p. 170.
of the form itself, whereby a being is properly said to exist. Things had their own nature which did not consist in their reference or their order to God. So, concentrating merely on what things were in themselves, we could see in them the nature, the quid, by distinguishing this form from the mode or the concrete state or from the reference to an end. In this perspective, things, but particularly human nature, remained the same under the different states in which they were cloaked and, most significantly, human nature under the regimen of the Fall as in the Christian dispensation. 9

Congar, as can be seen, draws a somewhat different distinction than does Gilson. Gilson's distinction between the existential and the substantial is, to all practical intents and purposes, the esse/essence distinction. Things can be viewed either from the point of view of esse (existentially) or from the point of view of essence or form/matter (which is the Aristotelian substance). For Congar, on the other hand, the distinction drawn is entirely on the side of essence, where a differentiation is made between the form in relation to its extrinsic formal cause and the form itself, as the proper nature of a thing.

Both Gilson and Congar accept God as the source of created essences. Gilson, however, is reluctant to conclude from this that essences establish a bond of similarity and, therefore, of relatedness between the creature and God. On the contrary, since God as Ipsum Esse "is no particular essence," essence introduces an element of otherness, "namely, the very otherness which distinguishes it from its own possible existence." 10 Congar, on the other hand, sees essence, under the rubric of finality and exemplarity, as necessarily related to God as extrinsic formal and final cause and yet, at the same time,

9 Ibid., p. 105.
10 Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, p. 180.
as a form in its own right which can therefore be considered apart from that relationship to God. "St. Thomas, instead of looking at things more or less globally from the angle of a first cause and the final end, had a formal view from the standpoint of the things themselves."\textsuperscript{11} This notion that the intelligibility (essence) of the world both relates the world to God and establishes it in its own right is well expressed by Hampus Lyttkens in his study of the Thomist analogy of being.

\textellipsis creation can according to St. Thomas be regarded in two different ways: absolutely, or in relation to God. The likeness to God existing in creation can either be regarded absolutely, and creation is then designated in accordance with its own nature. The concept does not then imply any relation to something higher. The same property can, however, also be seen in the light of its perfect correspondence in God. It is then apparent that what exists in creation is merely an imperfect image of the divine perfection. A concept stating something of creation will consequently in this case also be imperfect. It has not its primary, perfect significance, but a lower, secondary. It becomes an analogous designation of creation.\textsuperscript{12}

Thomists such as Gilson and Congar are inclined to view Thomism as a synthesis of Aristotle and Christianity, rather than of Aristotle and Plato. Since the Christian doctrine of creation accounts for the world's dependence on God, we must return to the Aristotelian notion, first, of form (Congar), and then of substance (Gilson) in order to determine why it is that these Thomists argue for a formal or substantial independence in existing things.

\textit{Aristotle's Immanent Form}

As noted in chapter 2, Aristotle refused the Platonic Ideal Form.

\textsuperscript{11} Congar, \textit{A History of Theology}, p. 105.

Instead, he insisted that form be located within material reality, not apart from it. As Copleston points out, we have here the "doctrine of the immanent Form."\(^{13}\) Because Aristotle's God is neither efficient nor exemplary cause of the world, the world, formally considered, enjoys complete independence vis a vis him. The intelligibilities (forms) of the things of the world are, therefore, immanent not only in the sense of being accessible to the human mind, but also in the sense of deriving from no causes outside the world. A synthesis of Aristotle and Christianity, therefore, seemed to Christian minds to require the combining of the Aristotelian immanent form with a Christian extrinsic formal cause (God as Creator). This signals once again the appearance of the Divine Ideas, which were used to effect this synthesis.

Here, however, with regard to creation itself and our twofold view of it, Thomas adds a twist to the doctrine of the Divine Ideas. He draws a distinction between them as \textit{ratios} and as \textit{exemplars}. As exemplars, the Divine Ideas function as a part of God's practical knowledge whereby existing things are providentially ordered to Himself. As ratios, they function as part of His speculative knowledge whereby He knows things according to their proper natures. This distinction is set forth at some length in the \textit{Summa Theologicae},\(^{14}\) but the clearest brief account of it is found in \textit{De Veritate}, where Thomas writes,

\begin{quote}
Two aspects of a creature can be considered: first, its species taken absolutely; second, its relation to an end. The form of each exists previously in God. The exemplary form of a thing considered absolutely in its species is an idea; but the form of a thing considered as directed to an end is called providence.\(^{15}\)
\end{quote}

\(^{13}\) Copleston, \textit{Greece & Rome} (part II), p. 41.
\(^{14}\) \textit{ST} I, 15, 3.
\(^{15}\) \textit{De Ver.}, 5, 1 ad 1.
Commenting on this passage, Leo Ward notes that,

Anything in our world may be studied under the aspect of two realities at once, namely, the very nature of the thing and its "orderly relation (ordo) to the end"; the form belonging to each of these, to the nature of the thing and to its order or direction, comes from God; the form of the thing as "directed to an end" is called Providence. 16

This distinction between ratio and exemplar seems clearly to be what Congar has in mind when he speaks of Thomas' "strictly Aristotelian distinction between the order of exercise and that of specification." 17 As God has speculative knowledge of all essences, so do we. And that knowledge which we have is compatible with the Aristotelian principle of immanent forms which are both independent of God and accessible to the human mind.

Certainly St. Thomas was not ignorant any more than St. Bonaventure that all things must be referred to God. But alongside that reference to God in the order of use or exercise, he recognized an unconditioned bounty to the speculative intellect in the nature or specification of things, which was a work of God's wisdom. There was question of speculatively reconstructing the order of forms, of rationes, put into things and into the very mysteries of salvation by the wisdom of God. Such a program could be realized only by a knowledge of forms and natures in themselves. This is why St. Thomas' Aristotelianism is not external to his theological wisdom or to the very conception he has fashioned of it. 18

Once again, however, the Thomist use of the Divine Ideas provokes a battle between thick and thin essences, this time with regard not to being per se, but to creation and its Creator. The exemplar, as ordered to God, is the 'thin' essence'; the ratio, as containing no explicit reference to God, is 'thick'. We shall examine, as is proper from a theological perspective, first, the Creator and those dichotomies

17 Congar, A History of Theology, p. 106.
18 Ibid., p. 108
which the thick and thin essences produce with regard to Him, and then creation, with its corresponding dichotomies.

God the Creator: The Good or Goodness?

Arthur O. Lovejoy, in *The Great Chain of Being*, discusses at some length the dichotomy, which originated with Plato and continues into modern thought, between an "otherworldliness" which seeks "The Good" in a realm beyond the existential and a "thisworldliness" which locates goodness in the concrete actuality of existing things. Plato originated the dualism, with his supposition that the world constitutes not only a 'fall' from essential goodness but a shadowy manifestation of that essential goodness as well.

The world as "the great chain of being," implicit in Plato's thought, came explicitly into its own at the hands of the Neoplatonists. According to this notion, the world is constituted by

... an infinite number of links ranging in hierarchical order from the meagerest kind of existents, which barely escape non-existence, through "every possible" grade up to the ens perfectissimum—or, in a somewhat more orthodox version, to the highest possible kind of creature, between which and the Absolute Being the disparity was assumed to be infinite—every one of them differing from that immediately above and that immediately below it by the "least possible" degree of difference. 19

Such a world was understood to be ordered by the "principle of plenitude." According to this principle, in producing the world God produced a kind of mirror image of Himself. 'Natures' are therefore imitations of divine perfection, and the totality of divine perfection is mirrored in a descending hierarchy of perfections which contains no gaps because it encompasses the whole of the divine perfection. As Lovejoy points out, however, this notion of the universe promoted confusion regarding

man's ultimate goal, because it promoted two conflicting notions of God.

The final good for man, as almost all Western philosophers for more than a millennium agreed, consisted in some mode of assimilation or approximation to the divine nature, whether that mode was defined as imitation or contemplation or absorption. The doctrine of the divine attributes was thus also, and far more significantly, a theory of the nature of ultimate value, and the conception of God was at the same time the definition of the objective of human life; the Absolute Being, utterly unlike any creature in nature, was yet the primum exemplar omnium. But the God in whom man was thus to find his own fulfillment was, as has been pointed out, not one God but two. He was the Idea of the Good, but he was also the Idea of Goodness; and though the second attribute was normally deduced dialectically from the first, no two notions could be more antithetic. The one was an apoteosis of unity, self-sufficiency, and quietude, the other of diversity, self-transcendence and fecundity. The one God was the goal of the "way up," of that ascending process by which the finite soul, turning from all created things, took its way back to the immutable Perfection in which alone it could find rest. The other God was the source and the informing energy of that descending process by which being flows through all the levels of possibility down to the very lowest. There was no way in which the flight from the Many to the One, the quest of a perfection defined wholly in terms of contrast with the created world, could be effectually harmonized with the imitation of a Goodness that delights in diversity and manifests itself in the emanation of the Many out of the One.20

When Christianity adopted the Neoplatonic Scale of Being (the Porphyrian tree discussed in chapter 2), the conflict became even more apparent—and more complex. Now God's freedom as Creator had to be reconciled with a principle of plenitude which seemed to specify the kind of universe God must create in order to guarantee that the fullness of His perfection be completely mirrored there.

... it was impossible for a medieval writer to make any use of the principle of plenitude without verging upon heresies. For that conception, when taken over into Christianity, had to be accommodated to the very different principles, drawn from other sources, which forbade its literal interpretation; to carry it through to what seemed to be its necessary implications was to be sure of falling into one theological pitfall or another.21

20 Ibid., pp. 83-84.
21 Ibid., p. 69.
Hence, medieval theologians found it increasingly necessary to maintain God's freedom "by denying . . . that the actual exercise of the creative potency extends of necessity through the entire range of possibility."\(^22\)

This, in turn, threatened the chain of being, by supposing that 'gaps' could exist in it, thereby jeopardizing the notion that the universe constitutes a complete mirror image of the divine perfection. At the same time, it seemed to suggest that God's freedom to deny the world some manifestation of His own goodness is nothing more or less than divine whim, the exercising of free will solely for its own sake.

In Thomas' writings, the problem regarding God is most acute with regard to divine causality. Does God create according to nature or according to will? Thomas' answer to this question seems to rest on an identity of nature and will in God, such that what would be regarded as natural causality in a created being is actually voluntary causality in God. For Thomas maintains that a natural agent is by definition a determinate being and therefore able to produce only one effect. If this is what it means to act 'naturally,' then clearly God does not and cannot do so.

Now God's being is not of a determinate kind, but contains in itself the whole perfection of being, and consequently does not act by the determinism of a nature—unless perhaps it were to cause indeterminate and indefinite reality, and this we have shown to be impossible [I, 7, 2]. Therefore God does not act from necessity of nature, but defined effects proceed from his infinite perfection by the resolution of his intelligence and will.\(^23\)

Furthermore, Thomas argues that, since God's being is His intellect, all effects of His will pre-exist in Him not by nature, but by

\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 70.

\(^{23}\) ST I, 19, 4.
intellect. Hence, he causes everything voluntarily, not naturally.

Thomas has actually avoided the central issue at stake here by the simple expedient of defining his way around it. The central issue is not whether God could create an undetermined being such as Himself. The central issue is whether or not He is bound to create a universe of determined beings which mirror, in their diverse perfections, the total perfection of His own nature. In other words, is God capable of creating a world genuinely 'other' than Himself (thick essence) or is He instead able to create only such worlds as imitate His own nature (thin essence). If the latter is the case, then there is excellent reason to argue that, just as a determinate being 'naturally' produces the one determinate effect appropriate to its nature, so God 'naturally' produces the one order of determinate effects (the world) appropriate to His nature.

The issue is more important than is generally recognized, for it relates directly to whether or not God is The Good or Goodness. Lovejoy misunderstands the basic dichotomy here. For him, the fundamental split occurs between The Good, which is indifferent to everything not itself, and the principle of plenitude, which Lovejoy characterizes as "the expansiveness and self-transcendence of 'the Good'". For him, therefore, the antidote to a view of God as The Good rests on a reinvestment in the principle of plenitude, which reveals God as Goodness. What Lovejoy fails to see is that the principle of plenitude, far from offering a solution to the problem, is the problem itself. If medieval theologians were aware of the pitfalls in such a principle,

24 Ibid.

we could do worse than rediscover them for ourselves. In order to do so, we must turn to an examination of the doctrine of creation and the dichotomies which there correspond to the ones already seen in the doctrine of God.

Creation: Theocentric or Anthropocentric?

In his book, The Order of the Universe in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, John Wright notes that one can find time and again, in Thomas' writings, two different ways in which the universe is said to be ordered to God. Wright refers to one of these as a "general," the other as a "particular," ordering.

The "general" ordering is, although Wright never designates it as such, "the great chain of being."

God in His eternity contemplated the superabundant riches of His divine goodness and saw the infinite number of ways it could be shared by created imitations of Himself. He saw that it was lovable not only as His own proper good, but also as the common good of beings distinct from and dependent on Himself. . . .

God, therefore, willed to manifest His perfection and to impress His likeness upon creatures "as far as this was possible". And since no single creature was capable of receiving in itself this divine outpouring, of showing forth the full splendor of the divine goodness, He decreed to create a vast multitude of beings so that the perfection which exists simply and uniformly in Himself might exist in variety and multiplicity in creatures. 26

Within this ordering, the universe is the primary created effect which God intends, and all parts in it are ordered to one another for the sake of the common good which constitutes the universe as such. This type of ordering produces a theocentric world, i.e., a world which exists to mirror the divine perfection itself. The world's ordering to God as its final end is achieved through similitude to God.

The "particular" ordering is centered primarily on intellectual beings.

God contemplated His goodness and saw that it deserved to be shared with others by being known and loved by them in immediate vision. This then was the essential decision of God in creation, to share His divine life properly so called, granting others to know and love Him as He knows and loves Himself. Consequently He decided to create intellectual beings as the recipients of this divine gift, and to create other beings which might assist them to achieve this destiny. The universe which God intends is thus essentially a society of intellectual beings, served in various ways by other beings. The perfection of this society in beatitude is what He most intends in creation; this is the ultimate essential good of the order of the universe.27

Within this ordering, intellectual creatures are the main effect which God intends, and all other parts of the universe are ordered to their service. Such an ordering produces a much more anthropocentric world, at least in the sense that the material world exists for the sake of human beings.28 Such a world is ordered to God as final end through intellectual activity, not assimilation, i.e., through that activity which is proper to intellectual beings themselves and not through their perfect imaging (similitude) to the divine perfection.

The question remains, according to Wright, as to which ordering Thomas thought had priority.

And here we encounter what is probably the most fundamental problem in the whole theology of the universe. For if the intellectual creature transcends the order of the universe in the activity of beatitude, how can it be that the order of the universe is the supreme created perfection and the reason for God's willing everything else? Is the perfection of the intellectual creature subordinated to this order, or vice versa? This question has probably aroused more discussion than any other concerning St. Thomas's doctrine on the universe.29

27 Ibid., pp. 191-192.
28 In II Sent., d. 1, q. 2, a. 3; Comp. Theol., c. 169; CG III, 112; ST I, 65, 3.
29 Wright, The Order of the Universe, pp. 118-119.
Wright supposes, as did Thomas, that these two orders are mutually compatible. In fact, Thomas often combined them, as in the following passage from the *Summa Theologiae*:

Each creature has its proper operation and perfection; secondly, lower creatures serve the higher, as the creatures below man provide for his welfare; thirdly, individual creatures manifest the perfection of the entire universe; and finally, the whole universe and all its parts have God as their goal, in so far as the divine goodness is reflected through them and thus his glory manifested. Over and above this, however, rational creatures have God as their goal in a special way, since they can attain him by their own operations of knowing and loving. Thus it is apparent that the divine goodness is the goal of everything corporeal.\(^{30}\)

Yet their compatibility is far from obvious. There are, in fact, several indications that they cannot be simultaneously embraced. The primary difficulty here, as the practiced reader should now suspect, can be traced back once again to thick and thin essences.

A theocentric world imitating the divine perfection and ordered to God through assimilation is a world of 'thin' essences. In such a world, pleroma or plenitude is achieved to the extent that the universe imitates in its diversity the total perfection of the divine nature. The material world exists to manifest God\(^{31}\) and knowledge of the natures of things is knowledge of the universe as a hierarchy and of one's proper place in it.\(^{32}\)

Diversity in such a universe, as previously noted in chapter 2, necessarily produces inequality, because diverse things can only reflect different quantifications of the divine perfection. As Wright notes, "Diversity of parts, furthermore, implies grades of goodness; for things

\(^{30}\)ST I, 65, 3.

\(^{31}\)Comp. Theol., c. 72, c. 102; ST I, 47, 1; ST I, 65, 2.

\(^{32}\)Jerem. X, 2; CO II, 3.
differ by being more or less perfect." Indeed, this problem manifests itself most strikingly in Thomas within the context of sexual differentiation. For Thomas maintains, "Now just as variety in the grading of things contributes to the perfection of the universe, so variety of sex makes for the perfection of human nature." In a universe of thin essences, this can only mean that the sexes are unequal. Interestingly, Wright cites this text and notes other examples of this 'grades of goodness' approach in Thomas without, seemingly, realizing the implications of such a view.

On the other hand, an anthropocentric material world created for the sake of material rational natures and ordered to God by being ordered to human nature is a world of thick essences. In such a world, pleroma or plenitude is achieved to the extent that human beings attain union with God through those operations appropriate to human nature. The material world exists to support the human community, and therefore knowledge of that world enables human beings to make a proper use of it. Because diversity in things does not exist to mirror either

33 Wright, The Order of the Universe, p. 89.

34 ST I, 99, 2.

35 "St. Thomas uses this example of the universe [incorruptible things are more perfect than corruptible ones] whose perfection involves many grades of goodness to explain the perfection of other things. Thus the diversity of sexes pertains to the perfection of human nature. Human society profits from having both those who marry and attend to contemplation. The perfection and beauty of the Church arises from the varied gifts of grace that God confers, manifesting the plenitude of grace to be found in Christ the Head. All these cases are presented as similar to the perfection of the universe" (Wright, The Order of the Universe, pp. 94-95).

36 "Creatura corporalis ordinatum ad rationalem naturam quasi ad finem" (Comp. Theol., c. 169). Cf. CG III, 22.
divine or human nature, diversity is not reducible to quantity.

Lovejoy argues that the latter world can be rescued from the former by applying the logic of the principle of plenitude.

The good for any being, according to the accepted principle also inherited from the Greek philosophy of the fifth century B.C., lies in the realization of its specific "nature"; and it was, therefore, customary to formulate the argument even for the most extreme otherworldliness nominally in terms of "conformity to nature" in this sense. But the concrete meaning given to this was derived wholly from that dialectic whereby the good was identified with self-sufficiency. Man, as rational, was declared to be capable of realizing his nature only in the possession of absolute, underivative, and infinite good, that is to say, in a complete union or assimilatio intellectus speculativi with the divine perfection and beatitude. But this denaturalization of the notion of specifically human good would have been impossible if the logic of the principle of plenitude had been applied at this point, as in a later age it was to be applied.37

However, this understanding of human good as an assimilation to the divine perfection cannot be circumvented by pursuing the logic of a principle which rests on the supposition that human "nature" is a finite quantification of an infinite perfection. To pursue the logic of such a position to its conclusion does not result, as Lovejoy would like to believe, in a "conformity to nature" view, but rather in a "conformity to divinity" (The Good) view, of human goodness. As Carlo has put it, essences or limited natures are simply "finite esse seeking to remedy its own limitation and imperfection by the appropriation of further esse in secondary causality."38

Lovejoy supposes that the Divine Ideas are the key to a logic which can rescue the world as a reality (nature) which has value in its own right.

... through the Middle Ages there were at least kept alive, in an age of which the official doctrine was predominantly

37 Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being, p. 96.

38 Carlo, Ultimate Reducibility, p. 112.
otherworldly, certain roots of an essentially 'this-worldly' philosophy: the assumption that there is a true and intrinsic multiplicity in the divine nature, that is to say, in the world of Ideas; that, further, "existence is a good," i.e., that the addition of concrete actuality to universals, the translation of supersensible possibilities into sensible realities, means an increase, not a loss, of value; that, indeed, the very essence of the good consists in the maximal actualization of variety; and that the world of temporal and sensible experience is thus good, and the supreme manifestation of the divine.39

However, it is precisely this doctrine of the Divine Ideas which undercuts Lovejoy's project. For the Divine Ideas as exemplars of creation are the basis for the assimilation of the universe to God. "For St. Thomas teaches that the divine ideas have the nature of an end. The universe achieves this end, then, by assimilation, by expressing what is contained in the idea of the divine mind."40

The problem, as noted earlier, is most apparent in the area of causality. The universe imitates God not only by its existence, but also by its essence. As one writer expresses it,

... not only does the existence of creatures declare to us that God exists, but their nature manifests to us God's nature. If, per impossibile, they were related to him only in the order of existence, then the perfections which their natures imperfectly exemplify could only be alleged to exist virtually in God; God would cause the perfections in creatures but those perfections would not necessarily in any way resemble God. But the communication of existence to creatures is not one act and the communication of essence another. Finite essence is only the mode of finite existence, and in the order of essence, as in the order of existence, creatures are related to God by his one creative act which both makes them and makes them what they are. Creatures therefore manifest God's nature as well as declaring his existence, and we can thus assert with confidence that all the perfections that are found in creatures are also formally, though eminenteri modo, in God himself.41


40 Wright, The Order of the Universe, pp. 52-53. As Thomas puts it, "because an exemplary form or ideas has, in some sense, the nature of an end, and because an artist receives the form by which he acts—if it is outside of him—we cannot say that the divine ideas are outside of God. They can be only within the divine mind. . ." (De Ver., 3, 1).

41 Mascall, Existence and Analogy, p. 123.
According to this view, God is prevented from creating anything genuinely 'other' than Himself. Since created essences do not exist in God "by nature," then, so the argument runs, they must exist in God "by knowledge." For that reason, Gerard Smith maintains that "the divine ideas are the ideal conditions under which creatures may pre-exist in God, their cause." The fact that God's nature (Esse) is His knowledge (Intelligere) means, the same author goes on to say, that such a pre-existence is "extraordinarily mysterious." Before concluding directly to mystery, however, we might first want to ask ourselves whether such an account is coherent.

What we appear to have here is a view of divine causality which subordinates voluntary causality to natural causality. This is most apparent in Thomas, as Lovejoy points out, when Thomas tries to maintain that God creates in the universe "a perfect likeness of himself" without simultaneously producing an infinity of effects. Thomas faces a real dilemma here. On the one hand, the principle of plenitude requires that the totality of divine perfection be mirrored in the universe. On the other hand, Thomas feels obliged by the doctrine of creation to insist that God, in His freedom, could have created other worlds. Hence, Thomas attempts a reconciliation of the two by recourse to an account of divine causality which leaves the impression that this world, containing (as Thomas tells us it does) all divine perfection,

43 Ibid.
44 For discussion of this, see Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being, p. 76.
has exhausted the spectrum of intelligibilities without exhausting God's freedom. Thomas tries to avoid such a conclusion by supposing that an infinite perfection can be completely imitated in a finite number of effects.

Oddly enough, in trying to protect God's freedom to produce a variety of worlds, Thomas does not see God's ability to produce only one type of world (i.e., only such worlds as imitate His own nature) as an infringement of His freedom. There are, I think, two primary reasons for this—Thomas' analogy of being and the causal principle which underlies it. The principle that an effect must pre-exist in its cause leads inevitably to a reduction of voluntary causality to natural causality and produces necessarily a theocentric analogy of being.

Thomas' Analogy of Being: Some Fundamental Dichotomies

Nothing is more central to Thomas' work than the analogy of being. As Phelan notes,

The importance of analogy in the philosophy of St. Thomas literally cannot be overestimated. There is not a problem either in the order of being, or in the order of knowing, or in the order of predicating, which does not depend for its ultimate solution on the principle of analogy. Not a question can be asked either in speculative or practical philosophy which does not require for its final answer an understanding of analogy.

Phelan later points out that Thomas' "solution to the problems explicitly raised and implicitly suggested by the apparent antinomy of

\[ 45 \] An important key, perhaps, as to why Ockham follows Aquinas in the history of philosophy.

\[ 46 \] CG II, 45.

Being and Becoming, the One and the Many, is to be found in his doctrine of analogy.48

For Thomas, the analogy of being is fundamentally causal. As Gilson notes, few expressions occur more often in Thomas than "omne agens agit sibi simile," i.e., every cause produces an effect that resembles it.49 Klubertanz' textual study of analogy in Thomas reveals causality to be one of the main components of this doctrine. "Creatures resemble God because they are proportioned to Him as effects to their cause."50 This confirms what Hampas Lyttkens' previous study on Thomist analogy had already established.

All St. Thomas' analogies between God and the world are ultimately based on the relation of cause to effect. The likeness of an effect to its cause is the prerequisite of our knowledge and designations of God, and likewise of our conceiving creation as in relation to God. Ontologically, the analogy between God and the world is accordingly the likeness of effect to cause.51 Thomas' notion of analogy, therefore and as Lyttkens notes,52 supposes a connection between God and creation that requires each one to approach the other. This twofold movement, of God toward creation and of creation toward God, allows us to pinpoint within the context of analogy those same dichotomies which it has been the purpose of this and the previous chapter to explore.

48 Ibid., p. 21.
49 Gilson, The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy, p. 95.
51 Lyttkens, The Analogy Between God and the World, p. 244.
52 Ibid., p. 477.
God's Approach to Creation: The Rationalization of God's Creative Activity

Thomas' notion of analogy, when considered from the side of God, has two problems. Both have been discussed earlier, but are worth reconsidering within the context of his doctrine of analogy. First, there is the problem of whether or not God's causality as Creator is natural or voluntary. Lyttkens summarizes these two types of causality as found in Thomas.

As regards causes acting by nature, Aquinas reckons with two different possibilities. An effect may be absolutely like its cause. The contents of its form are then identical with the contents of the cause. Aquinas called such causes univocal. But sometimes the effect, even of a cause acting by nature, is only imperfectly like its cause, and the form will be less perfect in the effect than in the cause. The cause is then called equivocal. A typical example of this is the sun as the cause of fire. But even then there is a natural likeness of effect to cause—a likeness in nature and essence.

In rational causes, on the other hand, the form of the effect pre-exists as an intellectual prototype. The conceived and the realized form will accordingly be intellectually identical. The form will only have another kind of existence (modum essendi) in the cause than in the effect. In the form, it exists intellectually, in the latter materially. There will accordingly be no natural likeness, but the effect may be said to exist virtually in its cause, as this must have the power to realize the effect. As regards the relation of cause to effect, it should also be noted that the effect is produced for a purpose—the acting cause tries to reproduce as far as possible its likeness in the effect. A perfect cause like God will accordingly produce an effect as like Himself as possible. 53

There is a difficulty here, however. If God's intellect is His nature, it is not easy to see how we can avoid understanding His causality as a type of natural equivocality. If a natural equivocal cause produces an effect like itself in some respect and yet inferior to it, how does this differ from God's creative activity, which produces effects like His nature (His nature is His Esse, and His Esse

53 Ibid., p. 189.
is His Intelligere) and yet inferior to it? In fact, we seem to have here a distinction without a difference. This does not go unnoticed by Lyttkens.

The connexion between God and creation presumed by analogy implies an approach on the part of God as well as of creation. On the part of God, this means that His very nature will to some extent be like the forms in the things. . . . On this point there is a risk of stressing more the natural than the volitive aspect of God.\(^\text{54}\)

This is only part of the dilemma which the Thomist notion of causality produces. A second problem remains, namely, the hierarchy of beings which such a notion of divine causality cannot but produce. Lyttkens notes that this hierarchy of being "points in the same direction" as does the bond between God and creation, i.e., in the direction of emphasizing God as a natural cause.\(^\text{55}\) In point of fact, the bond between God and the world, on the one hand, and the hierarchy of being, on the other, are simply two sides of the same causal coin. Just as natural equivocal causes produce effects like themselves, so does God (hence the bond). And, just as natural equivocal causes produce effects inferior to themselves, so does God (hence the hierarchy).

The only sense in which God's causality can be regarded as voluntary lies in the fact that He is able to produce for a purpose and hence is able to realize a complete mirror image of His own perfection in the diverse effects which he produces. This is the point at which Thomas is most Neoplatonic.

In Aristotle, the likeness [between cause and effect] was on the one hand that the cause of an effect transfers a form of the same type as its own, and on the other that a rational cause realizes a conceived form or prototype. The idea of likeness between cause and effect is, however, not used to describe the relation

\(^{54}\) Ibid., pp. 477-478.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., p. 478.
between God and the world. This was done by the Neoplatonists. Three of their thoughts are adopted by St. Thomas: first that the unitary precedes the manifold. The higher up in the hierarchical scale, the greater will be the unity, while the higher at the same time comprises all that is subordinate and more divided. A higher cause can therefore comprise in its unity what is below it. In this way God can in Himself comprise all His effects, and creation will thus constitute a dwindling scale of likeness to God. Secondly, St. Thomas adopts the idea that cause is superior to effect by distinguishing between univocal and equivocal causes. In the relation between an equivocal cause and its effect, a property in the effect exists in the cause in a more perfect way. Thirdly, St. Thomas uses the thought that the effect exists in the cause in the mode of the cause, and the cause in its effect in the mode of the effect. 56

Hence, Thomas is not altogether able to avoid the notion of creation as emanation.

St. Thomas looks upon creation as having issued from God. The act of creation implies to him mainly an addition of esse, everything else pre-exists in God—all forms "flow" out of the ideas in Him. All forms have a correspondence in God's nature. If the likeness of effect to cause is—as in St. Thomas—based in this, some sort of emanation is inescapable. 57

As the same author also notes, however, "This is a conception which makes it difficult to uphold the thought of a creation from nothing." 58

What we have here in Thomas is a rationalization of the doctrine of creation. Thomist philosophers would not disagree.

The philosophy of St. Thomas purports to provide a rational explanation (complete in principle and capable of indefinite development in demonstrative detail and application) of the universe as a whole and of its relation to God, the Creator and Ruler of the world, insofar as such explanation can be afforded by the light of reason unaided by Faith. 59

Congar goes further, arguing for a "rational theology" in Thomas which rests upon our ability to use the immanent forms of created things

56 Ibid., pp. 349-350.
57 Ibid., pp. 413-414.
58 Ibid., p. 414.
59 Phelan, St. Thomas and Analogy, pp. 2-3.
(their ratios) to arrive at analogous knowledge of the mysteries of faith.

The process, which consists in abstracting something "formal" and disengaging this from its modes and then applying this "formality" to the mysteries of faith by the use of analogy, rests entirely on the distinction between a ratio and its mode and on the conviction that a ratio does not change its essential laws when it is expressed under these different modes. In short, a rational theology rests entirely on the conviction that in the transposition of an idea to the level of transcendent realities, whose positive mode escapes us, the eminenter does not destroy the formaliter.

Although Congar does not seem to be aware of it, there is, unfortunately, some sleight of hand at work here. If the eminenter does not destroy the formaliter, this is not because the formaliter is a ratio or thick essence which allows creation to stand in its own right. It is because the formaliter is an exemplar or thin essence which necessarily refers a thing back to God. The analogy between God and the world is based on the Divine Ideas not as ratios, but as exemplars.

... we can most adequately name the analogy between God and creatures as an analogy of causal participation. Implicit in this description are further qualifications: God is the cause of the world by intellect and will, and so as an intelligent efficient cause He is both the primary exemplar and the ultimate goal of all creatures, and they exist as images, made to the likeness (in imitation) of their Creator.

Therefore, the very rationality of theology which Congar wishes to defend, on grounds that creation has formal principles within it which permit us to gain a knowledge of it apart from God, turns out to be rational only by virtue of the assumption it makes that ratios are actually exemplars whose transparency (thinness) permits us to see beyond them to the God whom they imitate.

60 Congar, A History of Theology, p. 110.

Not only does such a view defeat its own purposes, by presupposing that very relatedness of the world to God which it then sets out to establish, such a process of rationalization also seems incompatible with the doctrine of creation ex nihilo sui et subjecti.

In proving that everything is created, Aquinas often adduces the Neoplatonic thesis that a property which is realized to different degrees in different things is received from the source possessing the property most perfectly. But this argument puts more stress on how a property is propagated than on creation out of nothing.62

The key word here is 'how.' Thomas' attempts to explain the 'how' of creation are hard to reconcile with a doctrine of creation which would appear to rule out from the start any ability on our part to reason our way behind the scenes of God's creative activity. The doctrine rather suggests that the only source of such knowledge is revelation, not reason.

Creation's Approach to God: The Spiritualizing of the World

In chapter 2, we explored the reductionism of the thin essence position, whereby all qualitative differences are understood to be diverse quantifications of esse. This produces a rationalization of diversity whereby all specific differences are reduced to mathematical terms (species differ by units of one).63 The reductionism, however, is not simply formal; it is material as well. And this material reduction creates a great problem with regard to the analogy of being, inasmuch as the causal principles which underlie that analogy make it impossible to account for the material component in existing things as an imitation of the divine perfection.

63 See p. 92.
This brings us to the principal question: how can God, who is entirely immaterial, create matter? Aquinas replies that there is nothing to prevent a rational cause from creating something quite different from itself. But that answer is in direct conflict with another thesis fundamental to his analogy, viz. that God as a cause creates everything in His own likeness. . . . How can God then be conceived as creating materia prima, which is pure potentiality? As such, it lacks all likeness to God. Either must the applicability of the thesis that effect and cause are alike be restricted, in which case much of what Aquinas teaches of God becomes uncertain, or else he has been unable to explain how God could create materia prima. 64

In De Potentia, Thomas speaks of matter as that whereby created things differ from their cause. He goes on to add,

Accordingly in creatures there are certain perfections whereby they are likened to God, and which as regards the thing signified do not denote any imperfection, such as being, life, understanding and so forth: and these are ascribed to God properly, in fact they are ascribed to him first and in a more eminent way than to creatures. And there are in creatures certain perfections wherein they differ from God, and which the creature owes to its being made from nothing, such as potentiality, privation, movement and the like. These are falsely ascribed to God: and whatsoever terms imply suchlike conditions cannot be ascribed to God otherwise than metaphorically, for instance lion, stone and so on, inasmuch as matter is included in their definition. They are, however, ascribed to him metaphorically by reason of a likeness in their effects. 65

To paraphrase Congar, where matter is concerned the eminenter does destroy the materialiter. As Lyttkens says, "the causal analogy is really only applicable in the sphere of rational reality." 66

Esseist Thomists attempt to get around this situation by reducing matter itself to esse. Carlo sees matter as either "a debile esse, a weakness at the heart of being," 67 or the "elasticity or plasticity of esse," that is to say, "the ability of a being to become something

65 De Pot., 7, 5 ad 8.
67 Carlo, Ultimate Reducibility, p. 131.
other, by an increase or decrease of esse."\(^{68}\) Rahner, a transcendental Thomist, takes the same path, maintaining that "what is material is nothing but a limited and as it were 'solidified' spirit, being act."\(^{69}\) These Thomists are carrying to its logical conclusion that view of creation to be found in Thomas whereby creation mirrors God only to the extent that it imitates the divine \textit{Intelligere}. As creation approaches God, therefore, "it must accordingly lose something of its massively concrete sensibility."\(^{70}\) The Thomist analogy forces a de-materialization of the world.

Analogy makes us regard creation spiritualistically—if that expression is not misunderstood. The invisible spiritual reality is revealed in the visible, sensible reality by the forms and perfections in the things. There will further be a dualism between spiritual and sensible. The latter represents something potential and deficient. When the degrees of potentiality of the forms increase, the forms, to exist, must be joined to matter. Only the spiritual and intelligible can attain to real likeness to God. Analogy as the connecting link means that creation will primarily be regarded from the point of view of the rational and spiritual hidden in it. The visible things can only bear witness of God and imitate Him by properties from which all sensible imperfections can be abstracted, but as creation exists in order to imitate God in different ways—or to a lessening degree—creation cannot include anything that has no such likeness.\(^{71}\)

Furthermore, the reduction of both matter and form to esse, even if it is able to avoid pantheism, undercuts God's transcendence. God's approach to creation and creation's approach to God produce a quantified

\(^{68}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 127.


\(^{71}\) \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 478-479.
hierarchy of being in which God is regarded

... as at the apex of a series of ever more perfect properties such as being, goodness, wisdom, etc. But if God is only the first in a rising series, it will be difficult to maintain His absolute transcendence, and He is in a way brought closer to creation. 72

As can be seen, Thomas' theocentric analogy of being, by rationalizing God's creative activity, produces several unfortunate consequences. First, it jeopardizes the doctrine of creation ex nihilo. Secondly, it subordinates God's voluntary causality to natural causality. Thirdly, it produces a world of thin essences, in which neither the 'otherness' of immanent form nor the value of materiality can ultimately be salvaged, either in the existential or the essential realm.

The Proper Thomist Analogy of Being: Creation in Christ

The Thomist analogy of being, because theocentric, is incompatible with Aristotelian methodology, a state of affairs which is most apparent in its inability to save the Aristotelian immanent form. The problem lies in causality. Thomas maintains two contradictory positions. He desires, on the one hand, to retain Aristotle's immanent form as that which enables us to understand the world apart from its ordering to God. He provides, on the other hand, no condition of possibility for such an immanent form. God is extrinsic exemplary cause, but not intrinsic formal cause, of created things. 73 Hence, although Thomas makes a distinction in the Divine Ideas between their function as

72 Ibid., p. 478.

73 "God can be related to us only as a source. Since there are four causes and since He is not our material cause, He is related to us as our efficient cause, our telic cause, and our exemplar form, though not as an intrinsic formal cause" (In I Sent., d. 18, q. 1, a. 5, c [English translation from Klubertanz, St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy, p. 54]).
ratios and as exemplars, in point of fact the Divine Ideas function causally only as exemplars of the Divine Essence, ordering all created things to that Divine Essence.

This contradiction introduces, in turn, a fundamental incoherence into Thomas' doctrine of participation. According to Thomas, "participare nihil alid est quam ab alio partialiter accipere." In chapter 2 of his Commentary on Boethius' 'De hebdomadibus', perhaps the single most important text to be found on participation in his writings, Thomas points out that, in all existing things, there are two orders of participation.

Everything that is participates in that which is esse, in order that it may be; but it participates in something else in order that it may be something; and through this, that which is participates in that which is esse in order that it may be, but it is in order that it may participate in something else. Everything simple has its esse and that which is one has its esse. In every composite thing the esse is one thing, and that which is, is another.

We have already noted, with regard to the real distinction, this recurrent insistence in Thomas' writings for the need to distinguish between an existential and an essential order of participation in creation. Thomas goes on in De hebdomadibus to point out several different types of participation.

To participate is to receive as it were a part; and therefore when anything receives in a particular manner that which belongs to another in a universal manner, it is said to participate it; as man is said to participate animal, because he does not possess the intelligible notes (ratio) of animal according to the latter's total "community" [i.e., universality]; and for the same reason Socrates participates man; in like manner also a subject participates an accident, and matter form, because the substantial or accidental form, which of itself as such is common [or unparticularized], is determined to this or that subject; and similarly an

74 In II de Caelo et Munde, c. 12, lect. 18, n. 6.

75 See pp. 68-69.
effect is said to participate its cause, and especially when it does not equal the power of its cause, as, for example, if we say that air participates the light of the sun because it does not receive it with the same brightness that it has in the sun.

In summarizing this passage with regard to the Thomist analogy of being, Klubertanz says,

A species participates in its genus; an individual participates in its species (logical participation); substance participates in its accidents; matter participates in its form (limitation of act by potency); effects participate in the perfections of their causes (analogous participation). Since Thomistic discussions of the analogy of participation between God and creatures always involve causal participation, we are directly interested only in the last of these types of participation, that of an effect in the perfections of its cause.76

Here Klubertanz brings us to the core of the problem. The Thomist analogy of being forces a reduction of all formal participation (i.e., generic and specific participation) to the merely logical order, because the formal components in things can find no ultimate home in a God who Himself lacks all formal elements. As Klubertanz says, "We hold . . . that outside the mind there are no formally common perfections, whether this community be one of specific unity of identity or of analogical unity."77 And, be it noted, the mind to which he has reference is the human mind. Outside the human mind, formally common perfections are found nowhere, not even in the divine mind.

Klubertanz states here the only conclusion to be drawn from a doctrine of participation which attributes the formal perfections in things to the Divine Ideas understood not as a plurality in the mind of God, but as "a single entity, the divine essence, which knows itself as imitable in various ways."78 This is why, as was noted in chapter 2,

76 Klubertanz, St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy, p. 56.
77 Ibid., p. 113.
78 Ibid., p. 53n.
there is no ultimate way in which to draw a distinction between the perfections derived from esse and those derived from essence, except by means of a dubious distinction in existing things between esse and the 'thin' essence which quantifies that esse. Because Thomas' analogy of being is causal and because no account can be given of formal causality which does not conclude to God as extrinsic efficient cause, no ontological basis for intrinsic formal perfections can be found in Thomism. In other words, the Aristotelian immanent form cannot be salvaged. Even appeals to the divine wisdom, understood as the divine Word, are to no avail. For the divine Word is a Person, not a form. Any attempts, therefore, to identify the immanent forms of creation with Him must ultimately conclude to the same thin essence to which the Divine Ideas themselves conclude. 79

If the Aristotelian thick essence (the immanent form to which Congar appeals, as well as the essence which Gilson characterizes as genuinely 'other' than esse) is to be saved, it can only be done by providing a causal source for immanent forms which cannot be reduced simply to the efficient causality associated with esse. There is no question here, as many Thomists might fear, of reifying universals; rather, it is a question of locating an immanent formal causal principle which can account for immanent formal effects in created things. As Owens and Gilsonian Thomists in general insist, "Existential act

79 It should be noted, with respect to the Word, that a thin essence position is difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile with the doctrine of the Incarnation. According to 'thin essence' Thomism, to become incarnate can only mean to become finite. Yet the doctrine states that the Word became man. It supposes essence to be a positive perfection in its own right and not simply a diminishment (quantification) of esse, a supposition which finds support in Thomas himself. See ST III, 2, 1.
... can be a thing or a reality or a nature only in its primary instance, God. Outside God it cannot be a thing or reality or nature, but only the actualizing of some other nature. If this be so, then some causal principle must be given which can account for the existence of natures other than God's.

Such an account must, in the first instance, provide a causal source of created formal effects which is distinct from Ipsum Esse, the Divine Ideas, the divine mind, the divine essence, the divine Wisdom or the Word of God. Any attempt to locate the source of immanent formal effects in God as extrinsic exemplary cause defeats itself from the start, as has already been noted. The Aristotelian essence is 'thick' precisely because Aristotle, contra Plato, refused to identify it with an extrinsic Form or perfection. This means that the Thomist analogy of being cannot be theocentric; "rather, the analogy is necessarily anthropocentric."  

An anthropocentric analogy of being is necessary not only in order to avoid the reduction of all created perfections to the single perfection which is God, but also in order to provide an account of the material world as existing for the sake of man (Thomas' "particular" ordering of the universe). An anthropocentric analogy of being allows us to consider the diversity of material things in terms not of quantifications of the divine perfection, but of qualitative differences which serve human purposes, making the world a suitable environment for man.

To say that the analogy of being is necessarily anthropocentric,

81 Keefe, Thomism, p. 82.
however, is not to go far enough. For the problem is not merely one of locating an immanent formal cause distinct from God's extrinsic efficient causality. If we were to do only that, we would not only distinguish but also separate at the level of causality that which is distinct but inseparable in existing things. What we must locate is a causal source which corresponds to the esse/essence distinction in beings. What we require is a single source which is both esse and essence, both transcendent and immanent. That source can only be Christ, the God-man, the Creator immanent within His creation.

Creation in Christ

In his book, Foundations of Christian Faith, Karl Rahner notes that "we can understand creation and Incarnation as two moments and two phases of the one process of God's self-giving and self-expression."

What he means here is perhaps better understood with reference to an earlier article of his on the knowledge and self-consciousness of Christ, within which he discusses how we might understand the Incarnation.

The Hypostatic Union implies the self-communication of the absolute Being of God--such as it subsists in the Logos--to the human nature of Christ which thereby becomes a nature hypostatically supported by the Logos. The Hypostatic Union is the highest conceivable—the ontologically highest—actualization of the reality of a creature, in the sense that a higher actualization would be absolutely impossible.

He goes on to point out that,


In as much as the Hypostatic Union involves an ontological 'assumptio' of the human nature by the person of the Logos, it implies a determination of the human reality by the person of the Logos and is therefore at least also the actualizing of the potentia obedientialis, i.e. of the radical capacity of being 'assumed', and hence is also something on the part of the creature, particularly since . . . the Logos is not changed through the Hypostatic Union, and anything happening (which is the case here in the most radical way) takes place on the side of the creature. 84

Without apparently realizing it, Rahner here points the way to an explicit understanding of creation as Christocentric. The one thing missing is the recognition that the human species itself comes into existence by means of the Incarnation. The Incarnation is, in fact, creation, and its most immediate formal effect is the human race itself.

With or without the Fall, Christ is the existential formal cause of humanity; He is the creator immanent in his creation. His formal effect, co-extensive with humanity, is the existence of the human race, the human substance. Since this existence is contingent, it is the equivalent of the creation of humanity; this creation, since it pertains to a temporal substance, is continual, passive spectata. The continuum of humanity and humanity's world is unified and given intelligibility by its immanent formal cause. When this cause, and the consequent effect of the cause, is understood to be contingent, it is understood to be the existential formal cause: this is the Thomist insight and starting point. 85

A Christocentric analogy of being offers solutions to all of the major problems posed by the Thomist theocentric analogy. First, it solves the causal dilemma posed by the real distinction, i.e., the problem of distinguishing without separating formal causality from efficient causality. As a result, two distinct orders of participation, one existential and the other formal, can also be distinguished without being separated.

84 Ibid., pp. 204-205.
85 Keefe, Thomism, p. 125.
Christ, as human, is a created participation in human substance; as a divine Person, He is the uncreated actuality of that participation; i.e., He is the creator of His, and of all, humanity. The terminus of His creative act is the Incarnation, by which His divinity, as Esse, is correlated to His participated human nature. This correlation is thus the creation of all men; it is the contingent existential actuality of the human substance, in which all human persons participate, and by participating in which they are human persons. The human substance is therefore actual by the actuality of Christ; He is the formal cause of the substantial actuality of men. 86

Esse orders the world to God by virtue of the world's created participation in the Esse of the Incarnate Logos, while essence simultaneously orders the parts of the world to one another and to man by virtue of the essential participation of every existing thing in Christ as immanent formal cause of humanity.

Secondly, a Christocentric analogy of being allows us to avoid the quantifying of diversity and the rationalizing of creation which necessarily accompanies every view which links diversity with the Divine Ideas. Consequently, it enables us to avoid as well the inconsistencies which attach to the Divine Ideas when they are employed to cope with the problem of the One and the Many. Gerard Smith pinpoints those inconsistencies well when he writes,

Creatures pre-existing in God's knowledge are known as distinct precisely because the esse of God is variously imitable and He knows it. On the other hand, the distinctly known creatures have no esse in God which is not His intelligere; they have no esse of their own. Thus, if one says creatures in God's knowledge are either God or not-God (the first alternative swamping the distinction between God and creatures, the second destroying the pre-existence of the effect in the cause), the answer would seem to be: creatures as the divinely known principle of plurality are God; creatures as the known plurality of that same known principle of plurality are not God, because they are not known as God. Thus the known principle of plurality is at once one and, equivalently, many.

86 Ibid., p. 91.
The difficulty, as always, persists inasmuch as we do not know this divine principle of plurality. 87

Creation in Christ not only avoids such quandaries but identifies the divine principle of plurality as well. For, within a Christocentric analogy of being, "the Thomist concrete universal which has no particular name but is constituted by the contingent existence or creation of humanity in time and space by means of the Incarnation, is best understood as the human species, correlated to the Trinity in the Incarnation, in the spatio-temporal continuum proper to a material species." 88 Hence created diversity, mediated by Christ, finds its ultimate source in the plurality of divine Persons. Such a view of creation forbids a quantification or rationalization of created essences by forbidding their reduction to the divine essence. 89 Although it identifies the ultimate source of diversity as the Trinity, that source remains a mystery inaccessible to and, in fact, even unidentifiable by human reason itself.

Thirdly, a Christocentric analogy provides a positive role for materiality. Because creation is in and by the Incarnate Word, and not simply in and by the Word Himself, "creation is material, and

87 Smith, Natural Theology, p. 247.
88 Keefe, Thomism, p. 103.
89 Only in the Trinity "is there assurance that the difference between qualities, which is given in humanity as male and female, is not a matter of more or less, for each of the divine Persons possesses the entirety of the Godhead, suo modo, and does so by a complete self-reference to a qualitatively different Person or Principle. . . I do not believe there is any other way of finding a qualitative analogy between man and God than by understanding the imaging as trinitarian or covenantal. 'Nature' or 'essence' or 'immanent form' won't do it; their concept is monist, and inevitably any analogy to a supreme monad is going to be a quantitative proportion" (letter from Donald J. Keefe to author, June 16, 1983).
implies, as its correlative, the material universe, which is the context of human existence." Material things are positive entities, both formally and materially, because they fill human needs in a world designed explicitly for human habitation.

Finally, just as a Christocentric analogy of being (because of its provision for immanent formal causality) salvages Aristotle's notion of intrinsic substantiality, so also does it salvage theology's notion of intrinsic gratuity, by making possible a methodological means of accounting for creation as graced from within as well as without.

... the ontological effect of the Incarnation cannot be understood as though it were an accidental incursion into natural humanity of an extraordinary God-man bearing extraordinary information, as an adventitious remedy for the Fall. Such a view of Christ makes his coming irrelevant to the immense multitude who lived before Him, and to the possibly more immense multitude who, since His birth, have remained in ignorance of Him. The Incarnate Word described in the Johannine Prologue and in Paul's letters to the Romans, to the Colossians and to the Ephesians must be taken rather more seriously. He enlightens every man, all men are created in and through him, and the universe is recapitulated in him. In the systematic language of Thomism, Christ cannot be other than the cause of all created actuality, and he is such, not simply as the Logos but as the Logos Incarnate.

The Aristotelian Substance

Creation in Christ forces two radical transformations in the Thomist notion of substance. First, it requires an identification of substantiality with humanity, not with individual human beings.

The Logos is not incarnate by assuming finitude, but by assuming a human nature. This assumption was the actuation of a human nature, the creation of man. But "a man" is not the object of creation, for it is substance which is actual; a man, in

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90 Keefe, Thomism, p. 62.
91 Ibid., pp. 91-92.
isolation from the substance in which his nature participates, is only potential, and cannot so exist. Therefore the Incarnation, the creation of the man Christ, is the creation of humanity, whose contingent, existential actuality of intellectus is the actuality of the cosmos; intelligibile in actu est intellectus in actu. The formal cause of this intellectus is the created actuation of Christ's human nature, His intrinsic essence-esse correlation. In no other way can the existential contingency of man and the created universe be understood by Thomism. 92

Secondly, it locates grace at the substantial, as well as the accidental, level of being. As Keefe puts it, "this creation, the Incarnation of the Word in humanity, is a grace, for it need not have been so; the Incarnation is not deduced from the necessities of human nature." 93 In other words, a proper reading of Thomist methodology can account for creation solely in terms of the Incarnation. Without the Incarnation, there is no immanent formal cause; without Christ, there is no human race. "Creation is complete by man's participation in the event of Christ; . . . Participation in this event is possible only because the event exists, immanent in the human substance, as the formal cause of that substance." 94

To say that the proper application of Thomist methodology produces such radical changes in Thomas' notion of substance raises obvious questions as to whether or not the Aristotelian substance can be said to play any role in a world created in Christ, particularly in view of the fact that Thomas' methodology has been defined as fundamentally Aristotelian. In order to examine this issue more closely, we shall next consider Gilson's view that Thomas' world, properly understood,

92 Ibid., p. 88.
93 Ibid., p. 62.
94 Ibid., p. 128.
is "a world of Aristotelian substances which are in their own right."\(^{95}\)

Since Gilson's view of the world as both autonomous and ordered to God rests on a distinction which he makes between substance and existence (essence and esse), we shall consider, first, Gilson's position, with a view to establishing that the Platonizing of Thomism by reducing it to a single order of participation cannot adequately be countered by the denial of participation itself. Secondly, we shall consider the existential order of things, examining first the principle of esse and then the relation of essence to esse in existing things, with a view to establishing that Gilson's distinction between physics (the substantial realm) and metaphysics (the existential realm) is methodologically incoherent unless it be converted into a distinction between nature (essence) and grace (esse).

\(^{95}\)Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, p. 162.
CHAPTER 4

THE ARISTOTELIAN SUBSTANCE AND THOMIST METHODOLOGY

In order to see what Gilson means when he says that the Aristotelian substance remains intact in the Thomist doctrine, it is necessary first to review briefly Aristotle's notion of substance. According to Aristotle, substance can be understood in two ways, as "(A) the ultimate substratum, which is no longer predicated of anything else, and (b) that which, being a 'this', is also separable—and of this nature is the shape or form of each thing."\(^1\) Substance is, in the first instance, the individual thing, and, in the second instance, the essential nature of that thing. As David Ross points out, "this double meaning pervades Aristotle's whole treatment of substance."\(^2\)

Substance as the individual thing is the primary meaning Aristotle gives to the term, and in this sense, substance is inseparable from being.

... there are many senses in which a thing is said to be, but all refer to one starting-point; some things are said to be because they are substances, others because they are affections of substance, others because they are a process towards substance, or destructions or privations or qualities of substance, or productive or generative of substance, or of things which are relative to substance, or negations of one of these things or of substance itself. It is for this reason that we say even of non-being that it is non-being.\(^3\)

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Therefore, as Aristotle notes later in the same work, while being has many meanings, "that which 'is' is the 'what', which indicates the substance of the thing." 4 Furthermore, since unity is identified with being and the being of a thing with the thing itself, Aristotle can maintain that 'man', 'one man' and 'one existent man' all refer to the same thing or reality. 5

Gilson's most thorough treatment of the role played by Aristotle's substance within Thomist metaphysics occurs in chapter V of Being and Some Philosophers. The chapter title itself, "Being and Existence," is significant, inasmuch as Gilson will argue that being, in Thomas, is, in the first instance, "what Aristotle had said it was, namely, substance." 6 Hence, Gilson's distinction between being and existence is, on one level, a distinction between the concrete thing (Aristotle's substance in its primary sense) and that concrete thing's esse (act of existing). Thus Gilson is able to identify the Thomist notion of being (the existing thing) with the Aristotelian notion of substance. It is this identification which provides the substantial point of view from which, as Gilson will argue, Aristotelian substance can be understood to enter the Thomist world intact. This substantial point of view is one which identifies, as Aristotle did, essence and existence.

For those who identify what Thomas calls being with what is commonly called substance, there can be no distinction between essence and existence, since being and essentia are one and the same thing. Each time Thomas Aquinas himself is looking at being as at a substance, he thereby reoccupies the position of Aristotle, and it is

4 Ibid., VII, 1028a13-14.
5 Ibid., IV, 1003b27-33.
6 Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, p. 157.
no wonder that, in such cases, the distinction between essence and existence does not occur to his own mind.  

Nevertheless, the Thomist distinction between esse and essence does, according to Gilson, produce a genuine and far-reaching transformation of Aristotle's world, such that the Aristotelian substance which "remains intact in the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas" also "will have to undergo many inner transformations in order to become a created substance." In the first of these transformations, the Aristotelian substance, "which is one with its own necessity," will have to become "radically contingent."

In order to illustrate what this means, Gilson draws upon an analogy employed by Thomas in the Summa Theologiae, in which the esse of substances is compared to the light which permeates the air without mixing with it. Thomas concludes, "sic autem se habet omnis creatura ad Deum, sicut aer ad solem illuminantem." Thus, as Gilson notes, "In short, whereas the substance of Aristotle exists qua substance, existence never is of the essence of any substance in the created world of Thomas Aquinas." Hence, Gilson concludes that in addition to the substantial order, there is an existential order in which the Thomist notion of being (esse/essence) cannot be identified with the Aristotelian notion of substance (essential nature) and in which, therefore, Aristotelian substances do undergo important changes in a Thomist universe.

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7 Ibid., p. 158.
8 Ibid., p. 160.
9 Ibid.
10ST I, 104, 1.
11Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, p. 161.
Just as the substantial order considers Aristotelian substances in their primary sense (existing things), so the existential order considers them in their secondary sense (essential natures).

This dual order produces a seeming paradox in Thomism, according to Gilson. Although the Thomist universe is radically contingent, it is nevertheless made to endure as long as Aristotle's necessary universe. This paradox arises from the fact that creatures are "indestructible in themselves, yet wholly contingent in their relation to God." According to Gilson, therefore, we see juxtaposed at the core of the Thomist universe the substantial and existential orders. Creatures understood as intact Aristotelian substances are "indestructible in themselves," yet the same creatures understood as transformed Aristotelian essential natures correlated to the Thomist principle of existence (esse) are "wholly contingent in their relation to God." Here we have the same dual ordering as was found in Congar, with one very important difference. Gilson avoids the Divine Ideas altogether. His rejection of a Platonic reading of Thomas is most apparent at precisely this point.

For Gilson, the notion that creatures are understandable in themselves is based on their character as Aristotelian substances, not on the Divine Ideas as ratios. And the notion that creatures are related to God is based on their existential character, not on the Divine Ideas as exemplars. Hence, Gilson avoids the Porphyrian or Neoplatonic universe, with its view of creatures as constituting a hierarchy of formal participations in the divine essence. To the extent that creatures are related to God, they are so by virtue of esse, not essence.

12 Ibid., p. 162.
It is, in fact, the existential character of the creature, according to Gilson, which makes the above-mentioned paradox in Thomas so difficult to grasp. Returning to the light/air analogy, Gilson points out that just as light permeates the air without rooting itself in the air, so "existence has no root in even actually existing things." Therefore, one is forced to ask, "How is it that those very substances in which existence never takes root can nevertheless be everlasting in their own right?"

The answer to this question, according to Gilson, is twofold. On the one hand, Aristotelian substances (essential natures), because distinct from esse, have no potency within themselves for non-being. Both being and non-being lie on the side of existence, not essence. On the other hand, esse itself, though a gift, is not a series of acts of existing which stands in need of constant renewal, but a gift which is whole and enduring by its very nature.

God is not eternally busy retailing existence to beings, nor are substances applying for it from moment to moment. The gift of existence is irrevocable, when it is granted to beings which, as regards themselves, are unable to lose it.

Thus in the substantial order, Aristotelian substances remain intact and indestructible. Only in the existential order do they undergo a transformation which makes them radically contingent.

The world of Aristotle is there whole in so far as reality is substance. It is the world of science, eternal, self-subsistent and such that no problem concerning existence needs nor can be

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13 Ibid., p. 161.
14 Ibid., p. 163.
15 Ibid., p. 164.
16 Ibid.
asked about it. It is one and the same thing for a man in it to be "man," to be "one" and "to be." But, while keeping whole the world of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas realizes that such a world cannot possibly be "metaphysical." Quite the reverse, it is the straight "physical" world of natural science, in which "natures" necessarily entail their own existence; and, even though such natures may happen to be gods, or even the supreme God, they still remain natures. Physics is that very order of substantial reality in which existence is taken for granted. As soon as existence no longer is taken for granted, metaphysics begins. 17

What Gilson desires to establish here is the autonomy of both science and philosophy. Science is substantial in its own right, i.e., it proceeds as though reality were the uncreated Aristotelian world of necessary substances. Thomist metaphysics is existential in its own right, i.e., it proceeds as though reality were the correlation of the Aristotelian substance with its corresponding act of existence. Theology, or the realm of the supernatural, is a third order which lies beyond both the physical and the metaphysical, because

With Thomas Aquinas, the supernatural does not begin with a certain class of substances. Precisely because composite substances are natures, only that which is beyond such substances can be said to be supernatural. 18

This threefold order of the world is not, however, without its problems, especially with regard to metaphysics. One can understand how science as Gilson defines it might be viewed as autonomous, inasmuch as its precision from both creation and esse is simultaneously a precision from all theological and philosophical concerns. But how is metaphysics, with its advertence to esse and existential contingency, able to declare itself autonomous vis a vis theology (this is simply another way of asking how a created and therefore existentially contingent world can be regarded as autonomous in any sense)? Such

17 Ibid., p. 166.
18 Ibid., p. 167.
autonomy can only find its justification in an existential order which
is itself autonomous. In fact, the very autonomy of science also de-
pends on establishing the existential autonomy of the world. For the
Aristotelian substance can hardly be the proper object of scientific
inquiry if either creation itself or the principle of esse introduces a
relationship between God and existing things from which no precision is
possible. Hence, Gilson's assertion of a substantially intact Aris-
totelian world in Thomas depends upon his being able to demonstrate the
existentially autonomous character of that Thomist world.

In order to establish the world as autonomous, Gilson considers
the relationship between esse and essence. Focusing on the reciprocal
causality exercised by these two principles, he notes that the Thomist
transformation of Aristotle resulted in both a more precise definition
of efficient causality and a clear-cut distinction between the orders
of efficient and formal causality.  

Gilson returns to the light/air
analogy to illustrate the relationship between these two causal orders.
Just as the light of the sun causes light in the air, so also does the
diaphaneity of the air cause that light. Both esse and essence cause
existence, each in its own order and in its own way. As esse is
supreme in the order of existence, so form is supreme in the order of
substance (essence). Thus, Gilson concludes that "just as essence is
in potency to the act of its own existence, so also is the act of exis-
tence in potency to the formal act of its own essence." Hence, form
is the cause of existence just as the diaphaneity of the air is the

19 Ibid., p. 168.
20 Ibid., p. 171.
cause of light. In fact, existence can be understood to arise from
the principles of the thing, as Thomas himself pointed out when he
said, "esse in re est, et est actus entis, resultans ex principiis
rei, sicut lucere est actus lucentis." What concerns Gilson most here is the sharp distinction which he
understands Thomas to have drawn between formal and efficient causality.
Gilson is, in particular, intent upon establishing that all formal ef-
facts in existing things arise solely from the side of form or essence
(the substantial order). His purpose is twofold. First, if the Aris-
totelian substance is to enter the Thomist world intact, this means,
minimally speaking, that all of its formal characteristics must con-
tinue to be identified in Thomas, as they were in Aristotle, with its
own essential nature.

Secondly, if the existential order is to be understood as autono-
mous, on the one hand, and non-disruptive of the Aristotelian substance,
on the other, esse must be completely detached from all notions of
formal causality. For, if esse were to act in any way as a formal cause,
it would necessarily introduce (through efficient causality) formal
changes into the Aristotelian substance, thus destroying its intactness,
while simultaneously introducing (through the same efficient causality)
formal characteristics, into existing things which would necessarily re-
late those things to Ipsum Esse, thus jeopardizing the world's exis-
tential autonomy. Hence Gilson's statement that "existence may well be
said to be 'formal,' but it is not a form."23

21 Ibid., p. 174.
22 In III Sent., d. 6, q. 2, a. 2.
23 Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, p. 171.
So important is this point to him, that he indulges in one of his rare criticisms of Thomas over precisely this issue. The issue itself is participation, and the question at hand is whether or not esse must be understood not only as a principle which actualizes existing things, but also as a principle which necessarily draws them into a participated relationship with the divine nature. After quoting several texts in which Thomas designates esse solely as the act or actuality of all forms, Gilson adds:

Where he is merely following his pen, Thomas Aquinas is liable to go still further and to say, as he once did: "Each and every created being shares, so to speak, in the nature of existence: quodcumque ens creatum participat, ut ita dixerim, naturam essendi," which of course does not mean that "to be" is itself a nature, and still less that it has a nature, but that, as Saint Anselm had already said, God is the very nature essendi in which each and every being, so to speak, participates.24

Gilson's earlier-noted reluctance to speak of creatures in terms of formal participation in the divine nature is bound up with his desire to avoid a Platonic interpretation of Thomas. His reluctance here to speak of creatures in terms of existential participation in the divine nature is equally bound up with his desire to affirm the Aristotelian character of Thomism, an affirmation which requires him to deny the notion that esse introduces any intelligibility into the created order which is not already there by virtue of Aristotle's substance. The notion of esse as the principle of the divine nature by which we participate existentially in God as in His nature (Intelligere) is avoided by Gilson not the least because it threatens our autonomy both essentially (substantially) and existentially.

For Gilson, the problem with regard to esse is "precisely to know

24 Ibid., pp. 175-176.
if existence can be nothing else than either an empty logical concept in the mind or a relation in the thing.”25 And this is a problem because "what is at stake is the metaphysical realization of the autonomous character of the order of existence.”26 For, if existence is merely an empty logical concept, then it is identical with the essence of a thing, and we are back into an essentialist metaphysics in which the relation of a thing to God (its existence) is identical with its essence, and there is thus no point of view from which it can be regarded as autonomous. Only by dissociating conceptual representation (form) from esse (act) can we avoid a metaphysical stance which is able to understand the world solely in its relationship to God. Hence, the clear-cut distinction between efficient and formal causality translates into an equally clear-cut distinction between esse as actuality and essence as intelligibility (conceptual representation, form). "For 'to be' is, in things, the very act by which they are actual beings whose essences can be conceived as universals by way of conceptual abstraction."27

At this point, it would appear that Gilson has saved the Aristotelian substance in its secondary sense, i.e., as essential nature, from any formal disruption by esse, but how can the autonomy of Aristotelian substance in its primary sense, i.e., as the existing thing, be salvaged existentially, when esse itself is the very principle by which Aristotle's necessary substance is transformed into Thomas' contingent one? The answer to this question, according to Gilson, lies

25 Ibid., p. 177.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
in the primacy of esse itself.

What the contingency of existence means is, that all actual beings are contingent with respect to their cause, and this is but another way of saying that they might not exist; but, if they are actually produced by their cause, they do exist, and what they are in themselves is being. The primacy of existence means precisely that the radical contingency of finite beings has been overcome, and once it has been overcome, we should no longer worry about it.28

In other words, the esse component in existing things signals not a created participation in God's existence, but a created imitation of that existence. Through esse we are related to Him (because we image Him in our existence) while remaining independent of Him (we have our own principle of being).

It is here that Gilson speaks of a second transformation undergone by Aristotelian substances, in which Aristotle's "dynamism of the form" becomes, in Thomas' hands, a "dynamism of esse (to be)."29 Esse is thus both the "supreme act of creatures" (first act) and the "active energy through which the corresponding essence shall progressively receive all its determinations."30 Esse is the energy which underwrites all of an existing thing's operations (second act). Just as we have our own principle of being, so do we have our own ability to function causally.31

Once again, however, the Aristotelian substance remains intact even as it is transformed. It remains intact, for it exercises in second act the same range of formal operations and moves toward the

28Ibid., pp. 178-179.
29Ibid., p. 185.
30Ibid., p. 182.
31Ibid., p. 186.
same level of formal completion and perfection in a Thomist universe as it did in Aristotle's. Furthermore, it does so by a principle of energy intrinsic to itself as a concrete being. As Gilson says, "the actual perfecting of essences is the final cause of their existences, and it takes many operations to achieve it. Existence can perform those operations." From the substantial point of view, therefore, Aristotelian substances as existing beings are both intact and autonomous, proceeding on the basis of an energy source which is within them and performing those natural operations which Aristotle had already defined and which constitute the proper object of science.

From the existential point of view, however, the Aristotelian substance is transformed from a concrete thing having its own intrinsic source of energy into an essence which must acquire that source of energy from a correlative principle (esse). "Instead of a self-achieving end, form becomes an end to be achieved by its own esse, which progressively makes it an actual being." Thus, whereas science need consider Aristotelian substances solely as existing things, metaphysics must distinguish between those substances as existing things and as essential natures. They remain, however, just as autonomous and as complete in philosophical as in scientific hands, thanks to esse, which, because both irrevocable gift to and immanent principle within existing things, makes them to be in themselves and to operate in a purely Aristotelian manner.

This analysis by Gilson of the role played by Aristotelian substances in a Thomist universe is precisely the type of analysis which

32 Ibid., p. 184.
33 Ibid., p. 186.
prompted the earlier-cited question by Carlo, "Is essence indifferent to being eternal or created?" This question of indifference is a good one, and directly challenges the notion that Aristotelian substances can enter Thomas' world with as much ease as Gilson suggests they can. For they enter that world not as things, but only as principles of things, and this fact alone should give us pause before we endorse the Gilsonian view.

Apart from the obvious incongruity of separating at the level of human knowledge (physics and metaphysics) what is not separable in things themselves (essence and esse), there are a great many difficulties with Gilson's position, difficulties which resolve into three fundamental problems. These problems correspond to the threefold order which Gilson understands ultimately to exist in the Thomist universe: 1) the problem of substance (physics), 2) the problem of esse (metaphysics) and 3) the problem of creation (the supernatural). The remainder of this chapter will concern itself with those three problems.

The Problem of Substance (Physics)

Gilson's statement with regard to Thomism that "The world of Aristotle is there whole in so far as reality is substance"34 pinpoints the problem of substance with regard to the relationship between the Aristotelian and Thomist worlds. If Thomas' transformation of Aristotle is a genuine transformation, it is difficult, if not impossible, to see how this statement can be true. Since substance in Aristotle is either the concrete thing (form/matter) or that thing's essential

34 Ibid., p. 166.
nature (form), substance in either sense can enter Thomas' world only as a principle in existing things, never as an existing thing itself. As a principle, that substance must enter into correlation with esse in order to enter into Thomism. As de Raeymaeker points out,

... the act of being, esse, is distinct from the substance. That is to say, in material beings, esse is distinct from the substance composed of prime matter, the principle of individuation, and of substantial form, the principle of specific perfection; and it is to this substance, taken in its entirety, that there corresponds an esse as an act to its potency.  

If this means anything at all, it means that Thomas' existential being can never be identified with Aristotle's essential substance. Gilson's view, therefore, that Aristotle's world is wholly present in Thomism "in so far as reality is substance" can only mean that Aristotle's world simply isn't wholly present in Thomism. It is present in potentiality, but not in actuality.

The fact that Gilson is able to speak of it as though it were present is a function of the fact that Gilson inadvertently falls into the very error which Thomas himself had already fallen into, the error of treating a principle as though it were a thing. In this case, it is the error of looking at beings as though they were Aristotelian substances. Actually, Gilson is not unmindful of the fact that Thomas himself did this. "Each time Thomas Aquinas himself is looking at being as at a substance, he thereby reoccupies the position of Aristotle, and it is no wonder that, in such cases, the distinction between essence and existence does not occur to his own mind."  

Gilson, as Thomas before him, supposes that the real world does

36 Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, p. 158.
offer a perspective from which things may be understood correctly without advertence to the real distinction.

It is the world of science, eternal, self-subsistent and such that no problem concerning existence needs nor can be asked about it. It is one and the same thing for a man in it to be "man," to be "one" and "to be." ... Physics is that very order of substantial reality in which existence is taken for granted. 37

The analogy which he borrows from Thomas to illustrate the relationship between esse and the Aristotelian substance lends support to the notion of such a substantial order of things. For, we are told, the Aristotelian substance (as essence) is like the air which receives its light (esse) from a source outside itself. This analogy is unfortunate, however, for it suggests that the Aristotelian substance, apart from esse, is already a thing in its own right, just as air, apart from light, is a thing in its own right. It suggests, furthermore, that the Aristotelian substance is an already constituted subject which then receives esse. Hence, this analogy supports Gilson's supposition that, although existence does not take root in Aristotelian substances, nevertheless those substances can be regarded as everlasting in "their own right." 38

He states that "if you look at simple substances such as they actually are, it is obvious that they are made to endure." 39 Here we can see the source of the problem. Simple substances as they actually are can only be existing substances. They are simple substances only in an Aristotelian world in which substance and existence identify. In a Thomist world, they are composite substances (esse/ 37 Ibid., p. 166.
38 Ibid., p. 163.
39 Ibid., p. 164.
essence) and that complexity rules out our capacity to identify automatically and a priori their endurance with their essential principles.

Aristotle's view that "man," "one man" and "one existent man" all refer to the same thing or reality stems directly from his identification of substance and existence. To suppose, as does Gilson, that such a perspective remains possible in a universe in which such an identification is no longer possible is to suppose that an accurate knowledge of things can arise from an inaccurate presumption about their structural principles. Yet the air/light analogy, whatever its other drawbacks, demonstrates very clearly the misleading character of such a supposition. For, if one need make no distinction between air (substance) and light (esse), one will be led to assume that air, by definition, is bright or luminous. While it might be argued that the failure here is not a failure of supposition, but of the analogy itself, two facts nevertheless remain: 1) the Aristotelian substance as principle is much more difficult to isolate in a Thomist world than the Aristotelian substance as concrete thing is in Aristotle's world, and 2) an understanding of that principle is as crucial to accurate scientific knowledge in a Thomist world as is understanding the concrete thing in an Aristotelian world.

Both Thomas and Gilson fail to recognize that, while logic and ontology identify in Aristotle, they do not in Thomism, where essences and actually existing things no longer are the same.

... when esse is taken to be the correlative of essence, as act to potency, substance and essence are no longer the same; substance is then not constituted by essence, but by the correlation of essence, as potency, with esse, as act. The actuality of

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40 Metaphysics, IV, 1003b27-33.
substance is then not included within the necessary intelligibility of essence, for essence is only the potential correlative of the act-potency correlation which constitutes substance: essence is potential, but not actual, substance. No necessary understanding of actual substance is any longer possible; such an understanding is only of potential substance and is not an actual understanding. 

As Owens points out, "Only as already having real being in the outside world, or as having cognitional being through the act of being known, can the essence function as a direct object of intellectual consideration." In a Thomist world, therefore, "man," "one man" and "one existent man" can never refer to one and the same thing. "Man," "one" and "existent" refer respectively to essence, the existing being and esse. The Aristotelian substance survives only as the essence in such a world, and therefore can never be known both "in its own right" and as actually existing simultaneously.

Instead, we have in Thomism a kind of metaphysical uncertainty principle. Aristotelian substances can either be positively known in their own right but then only as uncreated (potential), or they can be negatively known as actually existing correlative principles of esse. To presume that their logic coincides with their ontology is to deny the real distinction, because it is to presume that esse has no discernible (intelligible) impact on reality as we know it. It is, in

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41 Keefe, Thomism, pp. 55-56.

42 Owens, St. Thomas and the Future of Metaphysics, pp. 43-44.

43 The analogue for such a metaphysical uncertainty principle is, of course, the scientific uncertainty principle associated with the physicist Werner Heisenberg, which states the impossibility of determining simultaneously both the speed and the location of subatomic particles. Just as the quantum physicist must choose between knowing the speed or the location of subatomic particles, so the Thomist metaphysician must make a similar choice regarding Aristotelian substances between knowing them logically (potentially) or ontologically (actually). Possible and actual knowledge do not coincide.
short, to presume that Aristotle's essentialist account of the world's intelligibility was entirely correct. But such a presumption is, in fact, an even greater problem than the problem of substance.

The Problem of Esse (Metaphysics)

According to Gilson, "As soon as existence no longer is taken for granted, metaphysics begins." In other words, the principle of esse is what warrants the independence of metaphysics from science. "And this discovery of the act of existing—esse—is the moment of discovery of metaphysics." Herein lies the source of Thomism's claim to be the one genuine existential philosophy, namely, in its positing of "existence in being, as a constituent element of being." Heidegger's critique of Western thought for having forgotten being is met by the Thomist counter-assertion that Thomas, and Thomas alone, did not forget.

... it would be vain for us to go farther back into the past than the time of Thomas Aquinas, because nobody that we know of has cared to posit existence in being, as a constituent element of being. And it would be no less vain to look in the more immediate past for a more modern expression of the same truth, because, paradoxically enough, what was perhaps deepest in the philosophical message of Thomas Aquinas seems to have remained practically forgotten since the very time of his death.

As a result, Gilson concludes that "Thomistic metaphysics is existential in its own right."

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44 Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, p. 166.
45 Klubertanz, Introduction to the Philosophy of Being, p. 50.
46 Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, p. 154.
48 Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, p. 154.
49 Ibid., p. 167.
We have already seen how Carlo and other Esseist Thomists presume the existentialism of Thomism to be so powerful a break with previous Greek essentialist thinking as to signal an end to the Greek essence altogether. They presume this, because, identifying the principle of esse with Ipsum Esse who is also Ipsum Intelligere, they see no way to avoid the conclusion that all of existence, including its intelligibility, must be reduced to esse. No positive role, therefore, remains for the essence to play.

Gilson, on the other hand, presumes that Aristotelian essences (substances) not only play an important role in Thomas' universe, but also reflect "in their own right" the real order to such a degree that science need look no further than them to understand the physical nature of the world. Only when one moves 'beyond' physics is it necessary to take their existential component into consideration. Clearly Gilson is working with a very different notion of esse than are Esseist Thomists.

Broadly speaking, there are two major areas of disagreement between Gilson and Carlo. First, while Carlo identifies intelligere with esse, Gilson refuses to esse any notion of formal causality whatever. A thing's formal determinations, every one of them according to Gilson, arise solely from the side of essence. Esse is an act without a form, and to the extent that Thomas ever refers to esse as formal, he is to be understood as meaning no more than that esse stands in the same relationship to essence as form does to matter. Therefore, Gilson can maintain that "existence does not monopolize the whole actuality of existing substance. Rather, just as essence is in potency to the act of its own existence, so also is the act of existence in
potency to the formal act of its own essence."\textsuperscript{50} In other words, so
important is essence to actually existing things that esse itself is
dependent upon the essential structures of the thing for its own
presence. As Thomas noted (and Gilson quotes him), "esse in re est,
et est actus entis, resultans ex principiis rei, sicut lucere est
actus lucentis."\textsuperscript{51} Gilson, in fact and as already noted (see pp. 144,
156-157) goes Thomas one step better, maintaining, as Thomas never did,
that esse is in potency to its own essence. As a result, Gilson con-
cludes that the intelligibility of the existing thing lies with essence,
the act or actuation of that thing with esse.\textsuperscript{52} Hence the Aristotelian
substance remains intact within Thomism.

The second major disagreement between Gilson and Carlo, a corollary
to the first, has to do with the nature and importance of participation
in Thomas. Because Carlo defines creatures as existential quanta, he
is forced to a notion of creaturely participation in divinity which
comes perilously close to pantheism. Gilson, on the other hand, so
emphasizes the positive role of Aristotelian substances in a Thomist
world that he necessarily associates esse much more with the Aristotelian
substance esse actuates than with the divine source which produces that
esse. Hence, he is driven to the opposite extreme from Carlo, that of
ignoring participation \textit{or} of reducing it to nothing more than a created
imitation of the divine existence.

According to Gilson, existing things can be said to exist for two
reasons—first, by virtue of an extrinsic efficient cause that produces

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., p. 171.

\textsuperscript{51} In III Sent., d. 6, q. 2, a. 2; Being and Some Philosophers, p. 174.

\textsuperscript{52} Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, p. 175.
them, and, secondly, by virtue of an intrinsic principle which is constitutive of them. This immanent principle not only confers being upon things, but also makes things to be beings. Therefore, things as beings can be proper objects of the intellect apart from the extrinsic cause which makes them beings. Hence, the world can be understood as autonomous with reference to God, inasmuch as participation in God does not make things dependent on Him, but rather effects a kind of transfer of some of His attributes to the creature. Just as God exists, so does the creature. And just as God exercises efficient causality, so does the creature. Thus, Gilson can say that "To be' is to be cause, that is, both immanent cause of its own being and transitive cause of other beings through efficient causality." The creature therefore does not so much participate (share) in the nature of God as imitate His nature. All creatures, therefore, and not just man, may be said to image God existentially.

All beings, from the most exalted to the humblest ones, are just as really distinct and as ultimately alike as the children of the same father; for, indeed, they all have the same Father, and He has made them all in His image or resemblance. They act because they are, and they are because His name is He Who Is. Just as the enormous problem with Carlo's interpretation of Thomism lies on the side of essence, in his notion that essence is reducible to esse, so Gilson's problem lies, as one might expect, on the side of esse, first, in his notion that, insofar as science is concerned, esse is reducible to essence, and, secondly, in the unmistakable impression he gives, insofar as metaphysics is concerned, that esse is an accident of Aristotelian substances. It is this latter which will be explored

53 Ibid., p. 186.
54 Ibid., p. 187.
in some detail, since once one has reduced esse to accident, it is but a small step to eliminating it altogether.

In examining Gilson's treatment of esse as accident, it should first be noted that such a treatment is not original with him. In his 1958 article, "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being in the Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas," Joseph Owens discovers in Thomas' writings a series of texts which indicate that Thomas himself understood being to be in some sense accidental, as well as substantial.

It is the same being, in a word, that is both accidental and essential to creatures. It is the act of being that results from the principles of the essence by way of formal causality, yet only when it is caused efficiently by a different and external agent. It is the act in regard to which every nature is essentially a being, and yet it is identified as a nature only with the divine essence. In all other natures it is an accident, though it is not subsequent to the essence like predicamental accidents, but prior to it. It is accordingly both accidental and essential.55 Although Gilson carefully avoids the use of the word accident with regard to esse, his arguments depend directly upon those texts in Aquinas which treat esse as an accident, and it is therefore not unreasonable to suppose that, to the degree that Thomas understood esse as accident, so does Gilson.

According to Thomas, esse is an accident only in the larger sense of the word 'accident,' not in its proper sense. "An accident means in a wide sense everything that is not part of the essence; and such is the character of being [esse] in created things. . ."56 Thomas drew this distinction between a proper and a wider sense of the term 'accident' because the traditional (proper) use of the term made no allowances for a substantial principle of being as accident.


56 Quodl. XII, 5 (English translation from Owens, An Elementary Christian Metaphysics, p. 71n).
The proper sense of accident, in the tradition that lay behind the mediaeval metaphysical controversies, would be understood as denoting the accepted Aristotelian meaning of a predicamental accident. But the substantial being of a thing can hardly be a predicamental accident. A predicamental accident supposes its substance already complete as substance, and is added to a so completed subject. Without substantial being, however, there is simply no subject to which an accident could be added.\(^{57}\)

What Thomas was searching for and found in Hilary was a notion of accident which could accommodate esse as a principle in existing things and yet outside the essence of those things. As Thomas saw it, "quidquid est in aliquo praeter essentiam ejus, inest ei accidentaliter."\(^{58}\)

What Thomas really sought, as Owens argues, was a way of accommodating the Aristotelian notion that the essence is the source of its own existence. As Thomas expressed it in *In III Sent.* (a well-known text employed by Gilson and cited earlier, pp. 145, 157), "et hoc quidem esse in re est, et est actus entis resultans ex principiis rei, sicut lucere est actus lucentis."\(^{59}\) The point is made more strikingly in *In IV Metaph.*, where Thomas writes,

\[
\text{Esse enim rei quamvis sit aliud ab ejus essentia, non tamen est intelligendum quod sit aliquod superadditum ad modum accidentis, sed quasi constituitur per principia essentiae.}\]

On the other hand, Thomas wants to insist simultaneously that esse is not a predicamental accident. For esse must be understood as somehow prior to the essence of which it is an accident. It must, in other words, be understood as a substantial principle as well.

In order to accommodate both notions, Thomas had recourse to

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\(^{57}\) Owens, "Accidental and Essential Character," p. 11.

\(^{58}\) *Comp. Theol.*, c. LXVI.

\(^{59}\) *In III Sent.*, d. 6, q. 2, a. 2.

\(^{60}\) *In IV Metaph.*, lect. 2.
reciprocal causality to explain them. In the order of efficient causality, esse is prior to essence and efficacious on the substantial level. In the order of formal causality, however, esse is subsequent to essence, a product of the principles the essence exercises as formal cause.

Herein lies the clear-cut distinction between efficient and formal causality which Gilson understands to be central to the Thomist transformation of Aristotelianism. Owens agrees. After noting the "radical change" which the separation of act (esse) and form (essence) produces with regard to Aristotle, who understood act and form to identify, Owens goes on to point out that the separation of efficient from formal causality allows Thomas to make a distinction between esse as essential and as accidental.

If the form is the cause of being in its own special way, that is, as formal cause, it will in its own order necessarily determine the essence to being. Formal causality is a necessary type of causality. All formal results follow necessarily from their formal causes, as may be seen in the procedures of mathematics. If its form determines every nature to be a being, then every nature is essentially a being. There is nothing in the form itself, however, that requires its submission to any efficient causality. That it is acted upon by another efficient cause does not follow with necessity from its own formal nature. If its act of being has to be given in this way by an external efficient cause, that act can only be accidental to it in this order of causality. 61

When we ask the question, why is it necessary for Thomas to find a way to accommodate esse as accident, the answer seems fairly obvious. Thomas sums it up twice in the Summa Theologiae, when he says, "esse secundum se competit formae" 62 and "esse per se consequitur forman

62 ST I, 50, 5 ad 3.
creaturae."\(^63\) As Owens notes, "This is reminiscent of the Aristotelian doctrine that form is the cause of being."\(^64\) In other words, esse as accident is the manner in which Thomas attempts to get Aristotle's essentialist metaphysics into his own world intact. Inasmuch as Thomas himself developed both the notion of form as the realm of intelligibility and necessity and the notion of an existence which "belongs to" that form, it is little wonder that Gilson is able to interpret Thomas in such a way as to speak of science as having to inquire no further than the realm of Aristotelian substances. Esse can have no empirically discernible effect upon Aristotelian substances once they have become that 'thick.' For the same reason, one can see why Gilson insists that revelation (Ex 3.14) and not human reason is the source of our knowledge of the existential character of reality. Only a revelation could cut such essences down to size.

The question remains, nevertheless, as to whether Aristotle's world can be accommodated to that of Thomas by the use of principles so much at variance with Aristotelianism as are Thomas' notions of esse as 1) substantial and accidental and 2) a non-predicamental accident which is both prior to and creative of its subject. In the final analysis, it is a question about substance once again. For, in fact, whenever esse is spoken of as an accident, essence is treated as though it were a substance (concrete thing). Owens comments that the doctrine of esse as accident "is intended as a defence of the Aristotelian teaching that the addition of the participle 'being' does not denote

\(^63\) ST I, 104, 1 ad 1.

anything new in the thing, and that every substance is of its very nature a being.\(^{65}\) Here is the source of Gilson's view that "one," "man" and "to be" refer to the same thing. But is not the doctrine of the real distinction designed to combat just that very Aristotelian teaching? Isn't the Thomist transformation of Aristotle a transformation of just such a notion of substance?

Unfortunately, the central problem lies in Thomas himself, in his desire to have Aristotle and to transform him too. The possibility that these two projects are mutually incompatible seems never to have occurred to him. Hence, he tried to introduce into his world the very same twofold notion of substance which Aristotle had employed before him.

Like Aristotle, Aquinas uses substance in a double sense. It is in the first place the individually existing thing, i.e., that which can really be said to exist in the usual sense. Properties and definitions, which can only be said to exist through the substance, are then accidents. In that case the difference is in the manner of existence. Substance may also be identified with the essence of a thing, and is then equivalent to essentia or natura. Everything added to, but not part of, the definition of the essence of a thing are then accidents.\(^{66}\)

This was not, in itself, a decision which would necessarily lead to any problems. The problems arose when the primary Thomist sense of substance (esse/essence) came to be identified with the primary Aristotelian sense of substance (form/matter). For, by this identification, the Thomist existential substance was reduced to the Aristotelian essential substance.

Thomas himself opened the way to such a reduction when he drew a distinction in the notion of abstraction which Aristotle had not drawn

\(^{65}\)Ibid., p. 20.

(his system had neither the need nor the capacity for accommodating such a distinction). According to Thomas, essence may be abstracted either with or without precision from being (esse). In the former case, the essence one abstracts is the principle which correlates with esse to constitute a being; in the latter case, it is the concrete existing thing itself. 67

Whatever Thomas' reasons for drawing the distinction, a point to which we shall return in the sixth chapter, the distinction itself makes it possible for Thomists such as Gilson and Owens to identify Aristotle's essential substances with Thomas' existing things. For Aristotle's substances can enter Thomas' world only on the essence side of the real distinction. The Aristotelian substance can go no further than the Thomist essence is able to take it. As long as essence remains only a principle of being, Aristotle's world of essential substances can be retained as potential principles, but not as actual realities. Once, however, the essence is capable of being identified with the existing thing itself, which is precisely what the notion of abstraction without precision makes possible, the Aristotelian world is able to gain that substantial toehold in Thomism which essentialist substances can on no grounds of their own claim in an existentialist universe. Because they get into that universe by virtue of a principle of abstraction which allows their existence (esse) to be reduced to their essential nature (essence), they can be understood as indifferent to esse at the level of physics and as only accidentally modified by esse at the level of metaphysics.

67 For discussion of this, see Owens, "Accidental and Essential Character," pp. 31ff.
That this process of reduction is at work in Thomas himself is apparent when Thomas speaks of esse as "resultans ex principiis rei." There he clearly identifies the thing with its essence. And when he employs the air/light analogy to illustrate the relation of esse to essence, he only succeeds in twice compounding the error, treating essence as a thing (air) and its potency to being (diaphaneity) as an aptitudinal (predicamental) accident which requires but an extrinsic efficient cause to effect its accidental modification from potential to actual being. Gilson, in choosing these texts to argue for an intact Aristotelian substance in an existential Thomist world, gives the medieval error a modern blessing.

The problems on the side of essence, because they ultimately reduce the existential substance of Thomas to the essentialist substance of Aristotle, necessarily make themselves felt in equally severe problems on the side of esse. The first problem is that esse, far from dominating essence and its act, as Gilson maintains elsewhere, becomes only an accidental component vis a vis that essence. Nowhere is this made more apparent than in the fact that esse never rises, in Gilson's account of it, above the status of a servant to essence. For, while Gilson does indeed speak of esse as "the supreme constituent of 'being'" and as the "supreme act of creatures," the fact remains that its role never goes beyond the bounds of supplying "the active energy through which the corresponding essence shall progressively

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70 *Idem.*, *Being and Some Philosophers*, p. 182.
receive all its determinations.\textsuperscript{71} By drawing an absolute distinction between act (esse) and form (essence), esse can be the source of all perfections only as the act which "realifies" them. It cannot be the source of any of the positive perfections which are thus realified. Those belong to Aristotle's essence which, in Thomas' world as in Aristotle's before him, commands the entire spectrum of intelligibilities. It is the job of esse simply to transform that spectrum of potential intelligibilities into real things.

... this transition from the merely possible to the actual is simultaneously a transition from the non-perfect to the perfect, from what is without value and worth to what is valuable and worthwhile. Because it does contribute perfection, value and worth to existents, then, actual existence is the factor which makes them real. Despite what radical essentialist may say, it does not nullify, but literally realifies them. It does not detract from, but adds to them. It does not lessen, but enhances them.\textsuperscript{72}

As Owens puts it, esse "is the core of all else, the axis around which all the rest revolves, even though it is not part of the thing's nature. From within, however, it is actuating everything in the nature.\textsuperscript{73} According to such a view, therefore, the proper product of creation is not esse, but essence, because only essence is a nature.

Existence as a nature cannot be bestowed on anything. ... A thing whose existence is caused, then, inevitably must be of a different nature from existence itself. The characteristic effect of subsistent existence, it is true, cannot be other than existence. But is the new existence what is produced? No. What is produced is a galaxy, a metal, a tree, an animal, a man. To issue from subsistent existence, the new existence has to be the existence of a finite thing such as these. Each new existence, accordingly, involves a potency that limits it and remains other than it. The potency is the thing that is produced.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{72} Sweeney, Authentic Existentialism, p. 81.


\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p. 106.
The dynamism, the driving force, of created things therefore lies on the side of esse; but the specific perfections which that energy underwrites lie on the side of essence. As Gilson says with regard to human beings, "the question never is for a soul to become what it is (it is such qua form) but to become that which it is. In other words, a human soul has more and more to actualize its very definition."\(^{75}\) Hence esse is that principle which first actualizes the Aristotelian substance and then provides the energy for those operations which are proper to that substance, all with a view to achieving a series of perfections which are specified entirely from the side of the Aristotelian substance (essence). Esse exists for the sake of essence, not the reverse.

Gilson speaks of how Thomists betray Thomism "first, and only too often, by presenting it as a philosophy occupied principally with forms, whereas it never speaks of them save as of constituent elements of actual beings."\(^{76}\) But does not his own preoccupation with formal causality to the point of treating esse as accidental to existing things (metaphysics) or identical with them (physics) constitute precisely the kind of betrayal to which he refers? On the other hand, if this be betrayal, might not Thomas himself be partially to blame for the situation, with his insistence that esse is, from the point of view of formal causality, accidental to essence?

Owens asks with regard to esse as accidental, "Is this distinction of a proper and a wide sense of accident merely an ad hoc invention?"\(^{77}\)

\(^{75}\)Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, p. 181.

\(^{76}\)Idem., *Christian Philosophy of Aquinas*, pp. 34-35.

\(^{77}\)Owens, "Accidental and Essential Character," p. 11.
The answer, it would appear, must be yes if one accepts Owens' interpretation of it. For, according to Owens, it complements Thomas' distinction between abstraction with and without precision. If the two distinctions are related to one another, as Owens supposes, then both serve the single purpose of accommodating Aristotle's world to that of Thomas. As a result, "a fundamental equivocity in the basic notion of being" enters his system, producing an ambiguity which, as Owens goes on to say, "may be expected to follow through in all subsequent metaphysical thinking." 78 This ambiguity is simply one more example of the tension between thick and thin essences, now manifesting itself as a tension between accidental and essential esse. The more accidental the esse, the thicker the essence. Gilson has chosen those texts which Carlo ignores, just as Carlo has chosen those which Gilson ignores.

The texts which Gilson ignores point to the second major problem in his interpretation of esse. And that is the almost total absence in Gilson of the notion of participation, a notion which, as one writer puts it, "occurs almost on every page" 79 of Thomas' writings. Just as Gilson's contention that Aristotelian substances enter Thomism intact depends heavily upon those texts in Thomas which treat esse as accident, so does Gilson's defense of the world's autonomy depend just as heavily on avoiding those texts which deal with participation. Gilson uses instead only those texts which treat esse as act or actuality, while suggesting, as we have seen, that Thomas is "merely following his

78 Ibid., p. 40.

pen" when he speaks of every being as participating in the nature of existence.  

Thomas does make a distinction between esse as nature in God and as actuality in existing things. He writes, on the one hand, that "Oportet quod hoc quod est esse, sit substantia vel natura Dei," and, on the other, that "Esse est actualitas substantiae vel essentiae." The difficulty with the latter statement, however, is that it seems to suggest that essence or substance is a complete entity in its own right (the intact Aristotelian substance) which receives from esse only its actualization. The essential component in things, however, is not a complete essence, it is an essential principle; it is not a complete nature, but only the principle of such a nature. By the same token, esse is not God's nature, but a created participation in His nature. Thus, Owens is correct when he says that "Existence as a nature cannot be bestowed on anything." But is not the same thing true of the Aristotelian substance when it becomes the Thomist essence? As an Aristotelian substance in an Aristotelian world, it can be identified with the thing itself. But in a Thomist world, how can essence be bestowed on existing things as their complete nature, when it, like esse itself, is only the principle of a nature? In other words, in Thomism, don't creatures constitute the point at which an existential principle drawn from the divine nature correlates with an essential principle drawn from Aristotle's physics?

80 See page 146.
81 De Pot., VII, 2.
82 ST I, 54, 1.
83 Owens, An Interpretation of Existence, p. 186.
If this be the case, then Thomas' notion of participation as the possession of a nature higher than one's own \(^{84}\) or a share in an act higher than one's own \(^{85}\) would seem to reflect more accurately the relationship of essence to esse than does the notion of esse as no more than the simple actualization of an essential nature. For Gilsonian Thomists, the major problem in viewing the esse/essence correlation as the participation of a lower nature in a higher nature is clear. Owens states it well.

In its application to being, the doctrine of participation has to be purged of any aspect of formal causality. In no sense can you say that part of being goes to each of its recipients. There is here no form to be divided among different subjects. If being as a nature may be called a form, it is a form that is entirely indivisible and unable to be shared as a nature with anything else. As the first efficient cause it can just make other natures be. In this communication of being, on the side of the first cause, there is no trace of strictly formal causality whatsoever. Being is imparted, from that viewpoint, to creatures only through efficient causality. The finite nature is made to exist, without any addition at all in the order of nature. Nothing of formal nature is shared when being is participated.\(^{86}\)

If Owens and Gilson are right, however, two questions immediately arise, and they are both theological. The first is the question of grace itself. If Owens is correct in saying that "If being as a nature may be called a form, it is a form that is entirely indivisible and unable to be shared as a nature with anything else," how are we then to account for the theological doctrine that human beings are, by grace, raised by God to a share (participation) in the divine nature? Secondly, how are we to avoid the naturalizing of God's creative activity? If being, as the first efficient cause, "can just make other natures be,"

\(^{84}\) Comment. in Ad Coloss., c. 1, lect. 4.
\(^{85}\) Quodl., XII, q. 5, a. 5.
does this not subordinate the higher principle of esse to the lower principle of essence, reducing both God's activity as Creator and esse as the intrinsic existential component in existing things to the confines of an essentialist Aristotelian universe?

The Problem of Creation (The Supernatural)

The temptation to naturalize creation is, in metaphysics, the temptation to rationalize it. Since, in Thomist metaphysics, the introduction of an existential component at the esse/essence level constitutes the primary transformation of Aristotle's necessary world into Thomas' created world, the temptation to rationalize creation is the temptation to rationalize esse. Leo Sweeney goes about as far in that direction as one can when he says,

... although a theologian originated the notion of esse as the actualizing component within creatures, still that doctrine does not belong of its very nature to theology. It is not a strict mystery, transcending the grasp of human reason. That is to say, the illumination which Thomas experienced while reflecting upon Exodus 3. 14 did not superimpose any intelligible content upon the data already gained from material existents through direct experience. Rather, its function was to enable him to see what actually was already contained within that data but heretofore overlooked by previous thinkers.87

Although Gilson is unwilling to grant that the notion of esse is available to the metaphysician qua metaphysician, he goes nearly as far in his assertion that the primacy of esse overcomes the contingency of the world. Because the world's contingency has been overcome, the created character of reality (i.e., its relationship to God) can safely be ignored by both science and metaphysics.

This error is not the property of 'thick' essence or Gilsonian Thomists alone. It is shared by Esseist Thomists, whose rationalization

87 Sweeney, Authentic Existentialism, p. 74.
of esse, as we have already seen, consists in reducing created esse to hierarchized quantifications of the divine Intelligere. Nor is this error the property of modern Thomists alone. It goes back to Thomas himself, in his association of essences with the Divine Ideas, an association which, by replacing the ex nihilo of revelation with the divine essence as source of created Intelligibilities, moved creation from the theological to the philosophical realm, where esse was reduced to serving (actualizing) the necessary structures of Aristotle's essential universe.

... the essentialist and necessitarian ontology of Aristotle was converted to a creationist viewpoint without ceasing to be committed to the intrinsic rationality of finite reality. The major difference is that such rationality is now seen, from the Thomist stance, to be contingent. Logic is thereby freed from necessity without ceasing to be rigorous. From being closed upon essence, it is converted to openness upon existence.

That openness was not seen in the thirteenth century to be theological; creation was then taken to be a "natural" truth, a matter of correct inference from common-sense experience.88

This reduction of creation to the natural realm produced a corresponding relegation of grace to the accidental order.

This identification of grace as an ontological accidens is the consequence of the cosmological supposition that substantial contingency, creation, is 'natural'; the only level of gratuity then remaining is the accidental, to which all supernatural efficacy is then reduced.89

There are indications among Thomists, however, that the situation may not be quite as straightforward as their own metaphysics suggests. Owens, for example, while denying that esse may be regarded as formal or natural, concedes that "there is one viewpoint from which the act of


89 Ibid., p. 37.
being may be thought of as a nature that is participated,"\(^{90}\) while Gilson himself speaks of the very different view one gets of the world when one looks at it in terms of participation and analogy:

... to the Christian mind the physical world in which we live offers a face which is the reverse of its physicism itself, a face where all that was read on the one side in terms of force, energy and law, is now read on the other in terms of participations and analogies of the divine Being. For whoever understands this, the Christian world takes on the character of a sacred world with a relation to God inscribed in its very being and in every law that rules its functioning.\(^{91}\)

Many Thomists are not at all reluctant to speak of the mystery which attaches to esse and the real distinction. Kopaczynski sums up the situation very well:

Father Cornelio Fabro tells us that Thomism is difficult and paradoxical. Etienne Gilson speaks of the "mystery of actual existence," Fr. Gerald Phelan likewise notes the "mystery of the being of creatures." Father W. Norris Clarke sees Thomas' essence-existence theory as one of "extraordinary daring, paradox, and mystery" which "stretches the resources of language up to, if not beyond, their limits." Jacques Maritain defines reality in one place as "intelligible mystery" and goes on to claim that a philosophy not aware of mystery is not worthy of the title "philosophy."

Fr. Owens, while rejecting in one sense the puzzling label he terms the "mystery of being"... does observe that "real mystery, notwithstanding, is encountered when one reaches subsistent existence.... The nature of existence, in a word, is shrouded in mystery, even though the occurrence of existence in observable things is obvious."... and Father Copleston contends that the paradoxical character of metaphysical utterances serves the valuable purpose of shaking us up, forcing us to ask ourselves: Why do metaphysicians talk like this? Why do they say the strange things they do?\(^{92}\)

Kopaczynski himself goes on to remark that "the very existence of creatures as well as their metaphysical composition is ultimately a

\(^{90}\) Owens, "Accidental and Essential Character," p. 18.

\(^{91}\) Gilson, The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy, p. 100.

\(^{92}\) Kopaczynski, Linguistic Ramifications, pp. 150-151.
mystery hidden in Ipsum Esse, God."\(^93\)

In fact, Copleston's question, "Why do metaphysicians talk like this? Why do they say the strange things they do?" becomes even more relevant, especially to the theologian, when a philosopher such as Gerard Smith, in his book on natural theology, describes creation in terms of love.

If God loves creatures, yet not as means or ends, there must be that about His love whereby it is of things which have absolutely no reason in themselves why they are loved. The name of such a love is infinite generosity. All love is generous; only God's love is generous to the point of arranging for the presence of a reception committee [esse] at the receiving end of an act [esse] which would be infinite love even without the committee. Here then, the adage, good is self-diffusive, describes that characteristic of love, in all cases generous, by which, in the divine instance, love is purely gratuitous.\(^94\)

Or when a philosopher such as W. Norris Clarke describes God's creative act as "an efficacious act of intentionality, of willing-to-share, of willed self-communication"\(^95\) and asks,

And is it not as it should be that the truly ultimate mystery of the universe, that which illumines all else, should turn out to be the mystery of self-communicating love? There is no further explanation possible for anything, if "God is Love," as St. John says.\(^96\)

Or when a philosopher such as Louis de Raeymaeker describes every existing being as "a pure gift of the Absolute, on which it depends completely, and it cannot do otherwise but reveal, in the measure of its reality, the value of being of the absolute principle in which it participates."\(^97\)

\(^93\) Ibid., p. 152.

\(^94\) Smith, Natural Theology, p. 219.

\(^95\) Clarke, "What Cannot Be Said," p. 31.

\(^96\) Ibid., p. 35.

\(^97\) de Raeymaeker, The Philosophy of Being, p. 287.
Since these are the kinds of terms in which theologians today are wont to speak of God's grace, the above-noted Thomists might easily give the impression that grace is substantial by virtue of the absolute gratuity of God's creative act in which he communicates something of Himself to His creation. Until, that is, one realizes that the mystery to which they refer is, in their judgment, a "natural mystery," just as the gift is "the supreme gift in the natural order," making metaphysics, in its turn, "the highest natural gift of God to men." E. Mersch, in describing the notion of God's self-communication in Western theology, points out that, according to that theology, the first of these, in Thomism, is the 'natural' gift of esse by which things are made themselves, the second is the 'supernatural' gift of sanctifying grace by which they are 'accidentally' elevated to union with God. The critical theological question which this dual notion of gratuity raises is whether or not the gift of God's self-communication can ever be understood as 'natural.' With regard to Thomist methodology, this means asking whether or not esse can be regarded as a 'natural' principle in existing things. In short, can esse be understood as confined to specific dimensions determined entirely from the side of essence, or must esse be understood as the principle of a 'higher' nature or

100 Owens, St. Thomas and the Future of Metaphysics, p. 61.
a 'higher' act which itself elevates the essential principle in an existing thing to a level inaccessible to that essential principle in an Aristotelian world. On the answer to this question hinges the proper correlation of nature and grace in an Aristotelian act/potency methodology as transformed by the real distinction. In order to answer this question, we must examine more carefully the notion of participation with regard to the principles of essence and esse, with a view to establishing the proper Thomist, as opposed to Aristotelian, notion of substance.
We have argued thus far that Thomas' fundamental intention was to employ an Aristotelian metaphysics in the service of Christian theology. We have argued further, however, that his attempt to use the Divine Ideas to ground the 'thick' essences of such a metaphysics introduced into his work a Platonic element which could not but clash with the methodology he had taken over from Aristotle. As a result, two conflicting streams of texts can be found in his writings, those which underwrite a 'thick' essence and those which deny such a notion of essence. Gilson has rightly understood Thomism to be a correlation of Christianity and Aristotelianism. He has also rightly understood that such a correlation requires us to understand essence as providing within things a positive notion of intelligibility distinct from esse. His zeal for establishing the genuinely Aristotelian character of Thomism, however, led him to subordinate the theological elements of the correlation to the Aristotelian ones, a subordination nowhere more apparent than in his treatment of esse as having no discernible impact upon the Aristotelian essence.

In order to avoid Platonizing Thomas, Gilson thought it necessary to avoid the notion of participation in Thomas. On the surface, this seems quite plausible, not only because the notion of participation is so clearly linked with Platonism but also because, as we have seen, those Thomists who emphasize participation are also led to emphasize
the fundamentally Platonic character of Thomism, particularly in their reduction of essence to esse. However, there are three reasons for refusing the path which Gilson took. First, such a path leads to a reading of Thomas which denies the genuinely radical character of his transformation of Aristotelianism (essence) by theology (esse). Secondly, the real surd in Thomas' thought is not the notion of participation, but, as has been repeatedly pointed out, the Platonic Forms introduced as the Divine Ideas. Finally, while it is clear that the restriction of Thomism to a single order of participation (existential) has the effect of turning Thomas into a Platonist, it is by no means clear that such a restriction is either consistent with Thomas or valid in itself.

L.-B. Geiger, as we have already seen, insisted upon the need to maintain in Thomism two orders of participation, participation by composition and participation by formal hierarchy. In this way, Geiger sought to preserve the positive character of essence (participation by composition) without denying the function of limitation exercised by that essence on esse (participation by formal hierarchy). Unfortunately, Geiger's attempt to trace the intelligibilities found in created essences directly to God, while loyal to Thomas' notion of the role played by the Divine Ideas, also served to underscore the fundamental irrationality of trying to ground the esse/essence distinction found in things in the absolute unity of Ipsum Esse.

Cornelio Fabro, recognizing the impossibility of deriving from Ipsum Esse two transcendental orders of participation, withdrew to lower ground, seeking instead a single order of transcendental participation.

\[1\] See pp. 48-49.
buttressed by a second order of "predicamental" participation.

The first and most fundamental division of participation is into transcendental and predicamental. The former is concerned with esse, with the pure perfections that are directly grounded in it; the latter is concerned with univocal formalities, such as genera with respect to species and species with respect to individuals. With regard to this second order of participation, Fabro points out that "as far as their ontological content is concerned, genera and species are present in their respective subjects and must therefore be predicated essentially (secundum [per] essentiam) and not by participation (per participationem)." What Fabro is trying to salvage here, as he himself goes on to say, is "the Aristotelian doctrine of immanence," i.e., the notion that true substance resides in the concrete singular and not in the genus or species in which that concrete singular is said to 'participate.' This differs from transcendental participation, in which the divine nature which is being participated remains itself whole and intact.

... whereas in the quantitative and material order participation attains directly to the object inasmuch as a certain "whole" is being divided and distributed in its parts, in the moral and in the strictly metaphysical order participation concerns properly speaking the mode of having and receiving, in the sense that the "whole" remains intact and undivided, while an aspect or form of the object is being participated.

This relegation of essential participation to the logical order does not, however, work. First, it runs counter to Thomas' understanding

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., p. 453.
of predication and participation and of the relationship between the
two. For, as Thomas says,

Something is predicated of a subject in two ways: in one way by
essence, in the other by participation; for light is predicated
of an illuminated body by participation, but if there existed
some separated light it would be predicated of it by essence.6

In other words, something exists in a subject either per essentiam or
per participationem. To treat per essentiam predication as though it
were "predicamental participation" is to introduce a rift between onto-
logy and logic.

The situation is a very difficult one. For, on the one hand, Thomas
points out that "That which is totally something does not participate
it but is by essence identified with it."7 No specific perfection, there-
fore, can be predicated per essentiam of any created thing. That is to
say, no material singular can be identified with the genus or species
which is predicated of it, for it would then be the sole member in that
genus or species. On the other hand, "What, however, is not totally
identified with something but has something else joined with it is
properly said to participate."8 Hence, some form of participation would
seem to be required for the essence as well as the esse in created things,
inasmuch as the doctrine of the real distinction prohibits our being able
to identify any existing thing exclusively with either its essence or
its esse. However, no 'essential or specific perfection can be predicated
per participationem in God, for God's nature cannot be identified, per
essentiam, with the perfection of any created essence (this is the

6 Quodl. II, 2, 3.
7 In I Metaph., lect. 10, n. 154.
8 Ibid.
ultimate reason why the Divine Ideas, whether singular or plural, do not work).

Secondly, this relegation of essential participation to the logical order does not solve anything. To place essential perfections within concrete singulars, while simultaneously denying the intactness and undividedness of the genera and species to which those intelligibilities are attributed, can ultimately result in one of only three positions: 1) nominalism, in which genera and species are understood to be merely mental categories within which we organize the data of our experience, 2) Esseism, in which the intelligibilities in things are simply reducible to the divine Esse, or 3) Exemplarism, in which the essential intelligibilities are traced to the Divine Ideas. Fabro himself takes the third way out.\(^9\)

But this third way, as has been shown, is simply a half-way house to Esseism, a stopping-place for those who are not entirely willing to abandon the notion of essence as positive but who can find no locus other than Ipsum Esse in which to ground its intelligibility. As O'Grady points out,

\[\ldots\] the object of Thomistic metaphysics tends to remain Aristotelian, somehow completely defined by the third degree of abstraction rather than by actus essendi, by modes of being that can be and be thought without matter rather than by the very act of being itself.

The question then that needs to be asked again is whether, for Thomistic metaphysics, there is any principle of perfection, any energizing, determining act in any being other than esse. Is there an act in any being other than esse that gives it the degree of perfection that it has above non-being.\(^{10}\)


O'Grady himself has no use for such a stopping-place. Since esse is the fullness of perfection, O'Grady maintains that "the total perfection and the esse of a creature are one and the same." This being the case, it then becomes necessary to deny the act/potency character of the real distinction.

... one cannot, then, identify essence and potency in any being. Potency is not act; perfection is act, and essence is perfection. Composition in creaturely being must be affirmed, but composition of act and potency cannot be equated with the real composition of esse and essence. The only conclusion one can reach is that "forma est esse." In O'Grady, we see a man explicitly willing to accept the full implications of Esseist Thomism, in its denial of any distinct, positive, essential intelligibilities. However, this denial of positive essential intelligibilities is ultimately difficult for any Thomist, even a Gilson, to avoid entirely. In The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, Gilson writes,

Indeed, the essence of a finite act-of-being consists in only being such or such an act-of-being (esse), not the pure, absolute and unique Esse we have spoken about. The finite act-of-being, then, is specified by what it lacks so that here it is the potency which determines the act, at least in the sense that its proper degree of potentiality is inscribed in each finite act-of-being. ... Each essence is set up by an act-of-being which it is not and which includes it as its own determination. Outside the pure act of existing, if it exists, nothing can exist save as a limited act-of-being. It is therefore the hierarchy of the essences which establishes and governs that of beings, each of which expresses only the proper area of a certain act-of-being.

As Helen James John points out,

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., p. 290.
13 Ibid., p. 283.
14 Gilson, Christian Philosophy of Aquinas, p. 36.
From this text, which gives perhaps the clearest explanation of Gilson's view of the relation of essence and esse, it appears that essence is a name given to the finite act-of-being considered precisely as self-limiting. Our author nowhere gives evidence of having seen to what extent this explanation raises the question of the meaning of a real distinction; and the passages in which he stresses its reality seem to regard it simply as a metaphysical expression of the contingency of creatures. 15

For those who wish to retain the Aristotelian elements in Thomism, the issue at stake is whether or not essence can be understood as contributing its own positive note of intelligibility to existing things. "The problem is to provide it with positivity without encroaching upon the positivity of being." 16 The problem is simultaneously that of essential participation and that of Aristotelian methodology. As a problem of essential participation, it is a question of locating in the essential realm that "whole" intelligibility which "remains intact and undivided" even as it is participated. As a problem of Aristotelian methodology, it is the question which Aristotle himself confronted when he denied the Platonic Forms, namely, the question of substance or of the "really real," and of where it is to be found if one denies that it lies outside the material realm. In the final analysis, as this chapter will attempt to establish, these two problems are the same.

Aristotelian Methodology: The Problem of Substance

To ask "What is being?" is, Aristotle tells us, the same as to ask "What is substance [ousia]?." 17 The question of substance is the question of being. Furthermore, the question of substance is also the

16 Hawkins, Being and Becoming, p. 56.
17 Metaphysics, VII, 2, 1028b3-4.
question of form. "By form I mean the essence of each thing and its primary substance."\(^{18}\) This seems straightforward enough. Substance means the form within a concrete thing. Unfortunately, this is the point at which Aristotle's thought on the matter ceases to communicate itself with perfect clarity. For while he does say that substance is the form, he also identifies substance as both the 'substratum' and the 'shape' of a thing.\(^{19}\) But what does 'substratum' mean? Does it mean 'matter' or does it at least incorporate the notion of matter into the notion of substance? If so, then in what sense is substance identical with material reality? If not, then what sort of relationship exists between substance as the form in things and the universal as the intelligibility abstracted from things?

These are not easy questions to answer. As Geach has pointed out, "there is hardly a statement about form in the Metaphysics that is not (at least verbally) contradicted by some other statement."\(^{20}\) As for the relationship between form and universal, Ross notes that "Aristotle is not very successful in solving the problem,"\(^{21}\) while Lacey maintains that he "never makes unequivocally clear just what is the difference between form and universal.\(^{22}\)

The fact that Aristotle speaks of substance in various ways is, in

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\(^{18}\) Ibid., VII, 7, 1032b33.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., V, 8, 1017b23-25.


itself, not a problem. For it is generally recognized that he understands substance to be a *pros hen* equivocal. As he says in the *Metaphysics*,

There are many senses in which a thing may be said to 'be', but all that 'is' is related to one central point, one definite kind of thing, and is not said to 'be' by a mere ambiguity. Everything which is healthy is related to health, one thing in the sense that it preserves health, another in the sense that it produces it, another in the sense that it is a symptom of health, another because it is capable of it.  

The problem arises when one tries to locate the one definite and central notion of substance which controls all of the others.

No general agreement exists among students of Aristotle as to where he located primary substance. Three possibilities recommend themselves. The first of these is the concrete singular thing. As Owens says, "There is not the least doubt that the singular sensible composite is truly *ousia*, substance for the Stagirite." This seems, on the surface, the most plausible answer to the question. The obvious antithesis to the Platonic *Form* is the concrete thing. This answer, however, is not without its problems, for it would seem to place an abyss between the real and the intelligible. For we know the universal, not the singular.

The second candidate for primary substance is the form within concrete things. Owens points out that the formal element in things is also, in Aristotle's view, correctly designated as substance. "Within the sensible composite it [substance] has form as its primary

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23 *Metaphysics*, IV, 2, 1003a32-1003b5.

instance. The matter and the composite itself are secondary instances."\(^{25}\)
The matter and the composite are, in other words, pros hen equivocals.

One commentator on Aristotle, E. S. Haring, tries to include within
the notion of substance both the form in the thing and the thing itself.
Distinguishing between the form per se and the form expanded-in-a-
milieu, she notes that "matter's role is to afford form an expansion."\(^{26}\)
In the final analysis, however, she falls back on form per se as primary
substance.

Substantial form is ousia because, real though an individual be,
that reality is mainly derivative from form. Form is the ousia
of such derivative ousiae, and, in the doctrine presented in Z
[Book VII of the Metaphysics], form is the chief meaning of the
term 'ousia.'\(^{27}\)

According to this reading of Aristotle, "Essence, form, is independent
of matter."\(^{28}\) It is also independent of the universal, since form is
not the common nature, but the "ground of the common nature."\(^{29}\) As
Owens puts it, "apparently, though itself neither singular nor universal,
it is the cause of both individuality in the singular thing, and
universality in the definition."\(^{30}\)

If the form itself is primary substance, however, this raises the
difficulty of how it is to be distinguished from the universal. If no
such distinction is possible, then substance would appear to be no more

\(^{25}\) Ibid.

\(^{26}\) E. S. Haring, "Substantial Form in Aristotle's Metaphysics Z,"
Review of Metaphysics 10 (1956-7):485 (hereafter cited as Haring, "Sub-
stantial Form").

\(^{27}\) Ibid., p. 309.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., p. 500.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 482.

\(^{30}\) Owens, Doctrine of Being, p. 382.
than Plato's Form revisited. If such a distinction is possible, it is not easy to determine the relationship between form and intelligibility. In response to an article on substance in Aristotle by W. Sellars, Albritton points to the confusion in Aristotle himself.

... Professor Sellars seems to me to be mistaken in his confidence that "if anything is clear about an Aristotelian form it is that its primary mode of being is to be a this... as contrasted with a universal." The evidence is rather that just this is the point of unclarity and conflict in the Metaphysics, not fully resolved even in the special case of animate things.31

Lacey points to what may well be the source of that confusion, when he writes, "I find it difficult to grasp how the form can be 'not as such universal' but yet have universality as the form of all As..."32 It is not impossible that Aristotle himself had the same problem.

Understating the situation, perhaps, when he speaks of the Aristotelian form as "located in a very unsatisfactory setting," Owens points out that

It is not an Idea. It is in sensible things and nowhere else. But these things are of their very nature changeable. The unchangeable form has therefore to be prior to them, yet to be within them and to be identical with them per se. It cannot be a universal, and yet it has to be the basis of the specific identity of the singular things. It cannot be singular, yet it has to cause the individual unity in the sensible thing.33

One way out offers itself.

Under all these limitations, can the sensible form be the absolutely primary instance of Entity? Or does it not by its very nature prompt the search for a higher type of Entity than the sensible?34


32 Lacey, "ouo/a and Form in Aristotle," p. 61.

33 Owens, Doctrine of Being, pp. 376-377.

34 Ibid., p. 377.
This possibility, immaterial or separate substance, is the third contender for the designation of primary substance. Owens himself believes that this is, in fact, what Aristotle ultimately concluded. Separate entity is the prime analogate of Being, sensible things are all pros hen equivocals by reference to it.

Being - the divine - eternal duration - life - act, all these in their highest expression are synonymous with separate Entity. Being is derived to all other Entity and all other Beings according to the degree in which the actual permanence of the separate Entities is shared or imitated. All sensible things strive to attain as best they can that actual permanence. They are Being according to the degree in which they attain that perpetuity. 35

According to Owens, this is the means by which Aristotle is ultimately able to bring together substance and intelligibility. For pure act at this level is identified with pure thinking or knowing.

... form and knowledge, despite the priority of form from the viewpoint of human science, turn out in their highest instances to be absolutely identical. The Aristotelian form, when found separate from matter, is actual in the highest degree. It is a 'knowing' - for to know is to have a form without matter; and what it knows is itself - for it has and is itself without matter. It is a 'knowing' of 'knowing.' There is nothing in any way whatsoever passive in it from either the viewpoint of Being or of Knowledge. It is all act. 36

Anscombe also has noted how Aristotle is able to join substance and intelligibility in this notion of pure act as mind.

Why, we may ask, does Aristotle suppose that this being, which absolutely 'cannot be otherwise' than it is, is a mind? This appears to be because of his identification of form without matter with thought. Then that which has no matter or potentiality at all is an eternal mind which always thinks. Thus there is a singular connexion between Aristotle's philosophy of logic, epistemology, and theology. 37

36 Ibid., p. 458.
37 Anscombe, Three Philosophers, p. 59.
This notion of pure act as mind is what Woodbridge also has in view when he says that, according to Aristotle, "what nature really is, is mind or intelligence in operation." 38

The Problem in Aristotle: Theological or Methodological?

Christian theologians have always recognized Aristotle's notion of primary substance, whichever of the above it might be, as inadequate for their purposes. Unfortunately, they have misunderstood the fundamental character of that inadequacy. They have supposed that the primary problem lies in Aristotle's failure to provide for any notion of divine exemplarism.

Though he often considers the immaterial immanent forms in things, it cannot be said that there is a doctrine of divine exemplarism in Aristotle's philosophy. The exemplary cause is met only where he treats of human products of art. This deficiency in Aristotle's philosophy has been called by St. Bonaventure, "the error of Aristotle" and was somewhat of a scandal to the Augustinians of the Middle Ages. 39

It is not surprising that the Augustinian tradition should find the absence of divine exemplarism problematical. Their essentialist theologies absolutely require some means of accounting for a formal participation of creation in the divine essence. The reason why this lacuna in Aristotle should be the object of Thomist concern as well is perhaps less obvious, inasmuch as the esse/essence transformation of the Aristotelian act/potency schema gives Thomists a means of relating creation to Ipsum Esse by means of esse instead of essence.

In point of fact, the absence of divine exemplarism has made


itself felt for Thomists in epistemology much more than in ontology. This, above all, explains why Thomists have, by and large, been content to treat the question of essential participation as "predicamental" or logical rather than as ontological. The Divine Ideas have been called upon primarily to ground the intelligibilities in created things rather than to account for the participation of those things in Ipsum Esse. The burden of accounting for the latter has fallen, for the most part, on esse.

What Thomist theologians (going back to Thomas himself) have failed to realize is that the fundamental inadequacy in Aristotle lies not in his failure to meet the demands of Christian theology, but in his failure to meet the demands of his own methodological project. The central problem is not his failure to provide a doctrine of divine exemplarism; quite the opposite, the central problem lies in his failure to provide a notion of substance which can account for the intelligibilities in sensible things without recourse to a Platonic-type immaterial or separate entity. It was precisely this failure which led Thomas to reintroduce the Platonic Forms in order to ground the intelligibilities in creation. It is precisely this failure which has yet to be overcome in contemporary Thomism.

Thomism does not require an Aristotelianism which, in itself, meets the theological exigencies of Christian revelation. The esse/essence transformation of Aristotle is sufficient in itself for introducing the required elements into Aristotle's system. What Thomism does require is an Aristotelian method which offers a genuine alternative to the Platonic notion of immaterial exemplarism. To introduce such an exemplarism into Aristotle, on the one hand, and then to transform Aristotle
by the real distinction itself, on the other, is to gild the lily, leaving Thomism to struggle for seven centuries with an existential participation that is epistemologically irrelevant and an essential participation that is ontologically irrelevant. In other words, Thomism has been forced back into the very situation in which Platonism found itself, unable to reconcile ontology and logic. For logically, the individual, according to Thomists, participates in a specific perfection, but ontologically that same person participates only in absolute perfection (Ipsum Esse). As a result, the world itself, like Plato's, has, existentially speaking, lost all essential integrity. Essential substance (specific perfection) has been shattered by existential (individual) substances.

The Problem in Aristotle: The Failure to Locate Material Substance

If Aristotle located primary substance either 1) in the separate entities or b) in the formal element within things, it remains to be shown why this was, methodologically speaking, a failure to carry out his own project. In order to do this, we must examine Aristotle in light of the Platonic doctrine of immaterial Forms which Aristotle opposed.

Plato's Forms served not only the epistemological purpose of accounting for how we can know immutable truth in a constantly changing world, but also the ontological purpose of providing a source for such truth. For Plato, therefore, the "really real," substance itself, could reside only in the Forms. As Keefe points out,

One may, with Plato, refuse to find any permanent, fixed intelligibility within the temporal and spatial order of historical change, growth and decay, and therefore transfer the object of the ontological quest or eros to that which transcends these limitations: the One or the Good, in whose intelligibility and
value material things participate, but by a means which imports a diminution and a failure of true reality, and a consequent necessity to recover from that degradation of materiality by striving for reunion with the One where alone is true reality and intelligibility.\textsuperscript{40}

Aristotle's rejection of the Forms was itself a refusal to go the route of Plato. As Aristotle saw it, such a decision denied the only reality in which we are truly interested. "And in general the arguments for the Forms destroy the things for whose existence we are more zealous than for the existence of the Ideas..."\textsuperscript{41} It was Plato's separation of substance and material reality which most disturbed him. "Above all one might discuss the question what on earth the Forms contribute to sensible things..."\textsuperscript{42}

At the same time, Aristotle was by no means willing to reject Plato's notion of substance entirely. Substance as the source of permanent, universal intelligibility played as important a role in Aristotle's thinking as it had in Plato's. As Hawkins points out, "Aristotle remains half a Platonist\textsuperscript{43} because he takes the universal for granted. The Aristotelian project, therefore, is a search for substantial intelligibility in material reality. "The Aristotelian attitude is a reversal of the Platonic, but only in its insistence upon the substantiality of temporal and spatial being.\textsuperscript{44} The Aristotelian methodology, therefore, is based on a different notion of the relationship between form and matter. Matter, instead of fragmenting the form,

\textsuperscript{40}Keefe, \textit{Thomism}, p. 10.

\textsuperscript{41}\textit{Metaphysics}, I, 9, 990b18-19.

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., I, 9, 991a8.

\textsuperscript{43}Hawkins, \textit{Being and Becoming}, p. 76.

\textsuperscript{44}Keefe, \textit{Thomism}, p. 10.
provides the condition of possibility for there being formal intelligibilities. Form provides the condition of possibility that material reality be itself intelligible. Form and matter compose, they do not conflict. Their composition is, in fact, the condition of possibility for the reality of the sensible realm.

Neither matter nor form have any reality in this understanding except as in union with one another, and hence their union is not understood as a temporal coming together, but rather as the condition of possibility of a fact in being. 45

Given this act/potency composition of form and matter at the heart of Aristotelian methodology, it would seem that the Aristotelian primary substance must be composite and material.

The situation takes on additional complexities, however, once Aristotle posits an Unmoved Mover as the ultimate cause of movement in the material realm. As Lacey notes, a contradiction appears to enter his thinking at this point with regard to the form/matter relationship.

On the one hand he realises that a spirit such as the Unmoved Mover cannot be the form of a body, which raises the question what it is the form of, and on the other he wants his Unmoved Mover to be supremely actual, and so free from matter, and so pure form. 46

The problem then arises as to how pure form, apart from its material counterpart, can be actual. As Lacey goes on to point out, "he should surely admit that if he gets rid of matter the notion of form, in the sense in which it was correlated with that of matter, becomes inapplicable." 47 Owens grants that the pure form to which Aristotle gets is quite different from those forms found in sensible things and, in fact,

46 Lacey, "ousia and Form in Aristotle," p. 67.
47 Ibid.
views this as one of Aristotle's genuine achievements contra Plato.

... the procedure of the Primary Philosophy gives to Being a nature that is utterly alien to the Platonic Dialectic. . . . What the Primary Philosophy studies is a nature different from the nature of any sensible thing. The Platonic conception provides no such nature among its Forms. The Platonic Forms are merely sensible natures plus the characteristic 'eternal.' The nature of separate Entity, which is the Being studied by the Primary Philosophy, is nowhere to be found in the Platonic world. 48

If one is a Thomist and has the Christian conception of a God altogether 'other' than His creation in mind, such a notion of Being might well look like a happy achievement on Aristotle's part. The only element then missing would be the Divine Ideas by which one could link such an entity to the sensible world. The fact that Aristotle fails to provide for any link between the intelligibility of primary substance and the intelligibilities of its pros hen equivocals could be regarded as a genuine failure. For it is precisely at this point that the Aristotelian project, if it indeed locates primary substance either in separate entities or in the forms of things considered apart from their composition with matter, does genuinely fail to answer Plato. For it fails to provide a source for the intelligibilities of the material realm. The separate entities may account for motion, and the forms within things may account for our ability to derive immutable truth from sensible things, but neither of these theories even attempts to account for the source of materialized intelligibilities.

One can say, as in fact many commentators on Aristotle have said, that the source of material intelligibilities simply did not arise as a problem for him. As Grene puts it,

48 Owens, Doctrine of Being, pp. 471-472.
Things as he saw them sorted themselves out in defiance of the philosophers. The Forms of the Platonists and the invisible atoms of Democratius were for him unnecessary. The Forms were verbiage, a superfluous addendum to the order inherent in the perceptible world.⁴⁹

Owens takes much the same position, seeing here the significance of Aristotle's notion of pros hen equivocity.

Unlike a Christian and unlike an Idealist, the Stagirite was under no obligation to posit a strict unity as the all-embracing foundation of things. He saw a plurality of forms and categories, and reduced them to a ἀρχή ἕν πάντα, unity. That unity was consequent, not prior. The derivation of plurality from unity does not appear as a problem in Aristotle. The problem is merely to reduce the plurality to a unity sufficient for a science.⁵⁰

To say that Aristotle did not see this problem would appear, however, to be tantamount to saying that he did not properly understand the notion of primary substance. For the problem is precisely that of unifying in a single notion of substance both intelligibility and reality. To suppose that he understood the "really real" to be beyond intelligibility and the material intelligibilities to be only pros hen equivocals of the "really real," would not only mean that he failed to provide, contra Plato, an alternate source for material intelligibilities, it would also seem to mean that he fell into the very error which he had attributed to Plato, namely, that of denying as "really real" the only reality which we are really interested in, the material realm. It is very difficult, therefore, to disagree with Lacey when he says that the search for the "really real" in Aristotle "does not lie in the direction of pure form."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Owens, Doctrine of Being, p. 468.
⁵¹ Lacey, "ousia and Form in Aristotle," p. 69.
The possibility still remains, however, that Aristotle actually located primary substance in the concrete sensible singular. Since Thomism also, on grounds that it is following Aristotle in this matter, recognizes the concrete singular, at least in the material realm, as the primary analogate of substance, we must next consider why this third candidate for primary substance also fails to meet the demands of Aristotelian methodology.

The Problem of Material Substance in Aristotle and Thomas: The Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness

Both Aristotle and Thomas agree that a substance is "an essence or thing to whose nature it is proper that it should not exist in a subject." Substance is a subject; it therefore cannot exist in another subject. Both Aristotle and Thomas also agree that the starting-point of metaphysical inquiry is the sensible realm itself. If substance is a subject and sensible things are the starting-point, the obvious conclusion to be drawn is that concrete singulars are the primary substances, at least in the sensible order. This conclusion both Aristotle and Thomas drew.

The world of our experience is a world of definite, concrete individual things which act and react upon one another. St. Thomas does not challenge the objective reality of this datum of spontaneous perception. Rather, with Aristotle, he accepts it and employs it as one of the corner stones of his system. Throughout his philosophy the fundamental assumption runs that whatever is actual or capable of actual existence is singular. Singularity, particularity and not universality must characterize being if it would exist other than as a mere representation of the mind.52

Both Aristotle and Thomas are, however, at least as much interested

in universal intelligibility and our knowledge of it as they are in concrete singulars, and so a problem immediately arises, the problem of relating concrete singulars (ontology) to universal knowledge (logic). As Ross points out with regard to Aristotle, and the same holds truth for Thomas,

"The primacy of individual substance is one of the most fixed points of Aristotle's thought—the point at which he most clearly diverges from Plato's doctrine. But while primary substance is for him the most real thing, secondary substance, and in particular the infima species, is the central point of his logic."53

As a result, the notion of species, and particularly the notion of an eternal duration of the species, assumes central importance to Aristotle. What Haring calls "the career of a form," its incarnate existence through time, is possible only because of the ongoingness, so to speak, of the species. Hence the disproportionate attention which Hart sees Aristotle giving to the species over the individual54 is a product of Aristotle's logical concerns. For, as Grene points out, "Only the fixity of each ontogenetic pattern through the eternity of species makes Aristotelian nature and Aristotelian knowledge possible."

This concern for epistemology leads both Aristotle and Thomas to forge a close identity between the individual and the universal, expressed in the 'two-substance' doctrine adopted by both.

"First" substance is the singular substance which exists as such in the real order (George Washington, the Charter oak). First substance is never a predicate; it is not in a subject but is the subject itself. . . . "Second" substance is the substance


55 Grene, A Portrait of Aristotle, p. 137.
which is a predicate (man, oak); it does not exist as such in the real order. It is called "second" substance, because it presupposes the existence of first substances in the real order of which it can be predicated.\textsuperscript{56}

This dual notion of substance leads Grene to assert "a glaring contradiction at the head of the [Aristotelian] logic itself."\textsuperscript{57} What is perhaps not so apparent is that such a dual notion of substance introduces a contradiction into Aristotle's metaphysics as well. As Keefe points out with regard to Thomism, and it can be said equally of Aristotelianism,

The unity of men in the human species is then a necessity of logic, of essence, which is contradicted in existence, for existing men are substantially separate entities.\textsuperscript{58}

Where Aristotle is concerned, this means that the essential unity of the specific form is fragmented in its individuation by matter. Where Thomas is concerned, it means that the essential unity of the specific form is fragmented by existence itself. Act and potency no longer can be understood as composing in the real order; instead, they oppose. The Aristotelian act/potency method has been exchanged for the Platonic. The Platonic elements in Thomas and in some of his most recent interpreters have, in fact, their roots back in Aristotle himself, who was never successfully able to locate that concrete primary substance which could offer a genuine alternative to Plato's Forms.

Primary Substance in Aristotelian Methodology

The problem for Aristotelian methodology is to locate substance in the concrete realm in such a way as to avoid fragmenting the essential substance.

\textsuperscript{56} Klubertanz, Introduction to the Philosophy of Being, p. 251.

\textsuperscript{57} Grene, A Portrait of Aristotle, p. 25.

\textsuperscript{58} Keefe, Thomism, p. 87.
or intelligible integrity of that realm. As Haring notes, "Living individuals are the natural world, in a way, but only if they are seen non-atomistically, as parts of a genetic continuity." Owens also underscores the importance of such genetic continuity, when he points out that, for Aristotle,

It is the species that is divine and eternal. The singular thing does not matter in itself. It is only on account of the species; its every act naturally strives to perpetuate its species. That is the goal of itself and of all its activity. It is divine, as best it may be, by being perpetual in its kind. As Aristotle says, perpetual coming-to-be is "the closest approximation to eternal being." Thus Haring speaks of the species as "supra-individual binders."

The series - matter, individual form - is a sequence in the direction of superior whatness; it is also a sequence in the direction of greater binding force. Matter is a diffusion determined within the individual; the living individual is a brief existent connected with others through form.

To regard the concrete singular or individual as primary substance in the material realm is to overlook the essentially incomplete character of such individuals.

... individual members of a species cannot be substantially complete; they are not indivisum in se et ab omni alio, for their actuality is achieved in common; considered as divisum ab omni alio, they are not actual, but potential. As members of a finite species or substance, they participate in existence by participating in the existential actuality of the species, and not otherwise. Otherwise stated, human or potential persons participate in existence secondarily, by means of

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60 Owens, Doctrine of Being, p. 461.
the primary participation of the species. Only the latter partici-
cipation is properly substantial.63

Only an identification of substance with the species can account for
the essentially incomplete character of the individual and provide for
a substantial reality which is transcendent without being separate or
immaterial. As Keefe points out, "this transcendence is accounted for
by attributing continual and unending duration to the collective species,
in which collective the individual members come into being, persist in
being for some finite period of time, and then cease their participation
in the species."64

The primary reason for refusing to identify substance with the
species centers upon the question of unity. Only pure form or the
concrete singular would seem to provide the necessary unity required
by primary substance. Substantial form, as the specifying difference
in concrete things, would appear to exemplify the purest notion of
unity, even though not actual apart from matter. The concrete singular
would appear to exemplify the most actual or real kind of unity possible,
even though composite. However, as Haring points out, the species does
enjoy a type of unity by virtue not of the form per se, but by virtue
of the form expanded-in-a-milieu.

The complexity of genus-plus-difference is the necessary con-
comitant of form's having a formal effect in a domain. The
peculiar unity of the genus-difference complex does reflect
the unity of pure form.65

In fact, as she points out, the unity in species is a unity precisely
because "its generic and differential parts stand to one another as

63 Keefe, Thomism, p. 85.
64 Ibid., p. 10.
65 Haring "Substantial Form," p. 701.
Aristotle's notion that form and matter compose rather than oppose provides his methodology with the means of locating within the material realm precisely that substantial unity which Plato's methodology, with its notion that form is opposed by matter, can never find. Aristotelian substance, therefore, if it is to offer some genuine alternative to the Platonic Forms, i.e., if it is to be found in the material realm rather than in the realm of pure form, must consist of some type of form/matter unity.

To suppose, however, that such unity is found in its primary instance in the concrete singular is to fall back into a Platonic notion of matter as that which atomizes the formal unity of the species. This an Aristotelian methodology cannot permit. To isolate the individual from the species is to cut the individual off from being. As Keefe notes, with regard to the Aristotelian notion of being,

What is insisted on is that the individual participates in being, that it has intelligibility, though participate and finite, and that the immanence of its form, or its intelligible component, in potentiality, or matter, does not eliminate intelligibility, but rather provides a composite, act-potency intelligibility corresponding to the composite structure of logical understanding. This insistence is identical with Aristotelian ontology. It states the isomorphism of intelligibility and intellection—intelligibile in actu est intellectus in actu—and postulates the intelligibility of material reality.67

Contemporary participationist Thomists tend to relgate all essential participation to the logical or predicamental realm. Hart maintains that "The Thomist participation is the participation in the

66 Ibid., p. 700.
67 Keefe, Thomism, p. 19.
perfection of existence rather than in the eternal Ideas."  

Lindbeck agrees, suggesting that categorical participation "has a purely cognitive, almost logical, significance."  

John, in reviewing Fabro's work in this area, notes that the only value which predicamental participation has stems solely from the order of transcendental (existential) participation, because "it is the act of being, received into the essence, which is in the finite being the source not only of its factual existence but of its value and intelligibility."  

There are indications, here and there, however, that predicamental participation needs to be taken more seriously. First, there is Aristotle's own view, shared by Thomas and Thomists, that metaphysics and logic enjoy an isomorphic relationship with one another. As Copleston points out with regard to Aristotle's doctrine of the categories:

From the logical viewpoint the Categories comprise the ways in which we think about things—for instance, predicating qualities of substances—but at the same time they are ways in which things actually exist: things are substances and actually have accidents. The Categories demand, therefore, not only a logical but also a metaphysical treatment. Aristotle's Logic, then, must not be likened to the Transcendental Logic of Kant, since it is not concerned to isolate a priori forms of thought which are contributed by the mind alone in its active process of knowledge. Aristotle does not raise the "Critical Problem": he assumes a realist epistemology, and assumes that the categories of thought, which we express in language, are also the objective categories of extramental reality.

Secondly, there are suggestions in Thomas himself, as we have already

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68 Hart, Thomistic Metaphysics, p. 92.

69 Lindbeck, "Participation" (June 1957), p. 112.


71 Copleston, Greece & Rome (part II), p. 21.
seen,\textsuperscript{72} that existing things participate not only in esse, but in something else as well.

Finally, among contemporary Thomists who emphasize the importance of participation in Thomas, Louis de Raeymaeker, though denying full ontological value to the realm of essential participation, has accorded it a significance conspicuously absent in most other Thomists. De Raeymaeker points out that

No one man is identified with the whole human species, for there are other men who possess human perfections which this man has not; and by this very fact every individual is limited in the species, but the ensemble of all possible men embraces all, unlimited, unbounded human perfection.\textsuperscript{73}

This makes it impossible for us to understand any man apart from his membership in the species.

By reason of the particular way in which the material individual possesses its formal perfection, it is limited by reference to other individuals that resemble it specifically. This is why it is essential to it to be referred to them, that is, to form a part of the order or the specific unity which the complexus of these individuals constitutes. Hence, it is impossible to explain any of these material beings without giving the explanation of the whole species to which they belong. Thus, we cannot offer an explanation of one individual man without explaining humanity.\textsuperscript{74}

We have here in de Raeymaeker's notion of the individual as understandable only by reference to the specific complexus of individuals to which it belongs something similar to, if not identical with, Aristotle's notion of \textit{pros hên} equivocity. In de Raeymaeker's case, however, it is the "complexus" which constitutes the primary referent, the individual being understood only by reference to (\textit{pros hên}) that complexus.

\textsuperscript{72}See pp. 68-69.

\textsuperscript{73}de Raeymaeker, \textit{The Philosophy of Being}, p. 70.

\textsuperscript{74}Ibid., p. 253.
Charles Hart, in discussing those attempts periodically made by philosophers to deny the reality of substance, points out that such efforts invariably lead to a substantializing of all accidents. . . . the intellect unconsciously assigns to the accident the role of substance. Thus instead of the one substance giving unity to the being, we end up with a multitude of substances in the being, and thus with the destruction of the being's unity.75

Mutatis mutandis, the same sort of process has dogged the Aristotelian/Thomist tradition throughout its history. Attempts to deny the substantial reality of the species have necessitated a substantializing of the individuals within the species, with a corresponding destruction of the essential or substantial integrity of the material realm.

**Substantial Cause: Aristotle and Thomas**

"We say we know each thing only when we think we recognize its first cause," Aristotle tells us.76 "Whatever is found in anything by participation, must be caused in it by that to which it belongs essentially," St. Thomas adds.77 The species, as primary substance in Aristotle, is transcendent by virtue of its unlimited actuality.

This actuality, the total immanent activity of material being, pervades all of space and time and escapes all spatial and temporal limitation: it is pure act, immanent in all of matter and limited by no matter. It has nothing to overcome, thus no potentiality.78

This pure act, causative of all participated being in Aristotle, must be identified with the agent intellect "or, in modern terminology, the

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76 *Metaphysics*, I, 3, 983a25.
77 *ST* I, 44, 1.
absolute subject." Because this cause is both transcendent and implicated in material reality, it serves as the Aristotelian substitute for God.

This total cause, because enclosed in the world, is not God, but the essentialist surrogate for God. This surrogate transcends the individual, but does not transcend the human species; it is the formal cause of the species, immanent in the species, and in the human community.

This surrogate for God is humanity itself, the primary substance by reference to which all other material realities are pros hen equivocals. For intelligibile in actu is intellectus in actu by reference to the agent intellect immanent in the human community.

It is precisely this ability of Aristotelian methodology to locate an order of essential participation in material substance itself which allows for its conversion by Thomas into a methodology which can serve the Christian theologian.

When the essentialist act-potency method of correlation is itself correlated, according to its own understanding of correlation, to the Christian revelation to form the Thomist method, Christ is understood as the existential actuality, the formal existential cause, of a humanity otherwise confined to essential immanence.

The surrogate God of Aristotle becomes Christ, the God-man, present within His creation as the formal cause of all its essential perfections.

To speak of Christ as formal cause is, however, to tell only half of the story. For the esse/essence transformation which Thomas effects in Aristotelian methodology makes primary substance existential rather than essential, and introduces an existential order of participation which is distinct but inseparable from that of essential participation.

79 Ibid., p. 83.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid., p. 5.
As noted in chapter 3, it is the need within Thomist methodology to locate for these two orders of participation a substantial cause that is itself single and yet genuinely composite which requires us to identify Christ as both existential (divine) and formal (human) cause of creation. Christ's substantial causality, therefore, is both existential and essential in character.

Creation in Christ, as was noted earlier, forces two transformations of the traditional Thomist notion of substance: first, that such a notion of substance be identified with humanity, not with the concrete singular, and secondly, that such a notion of substance allow for substantial as well as accidental grace. The question was raised as to whether or not the Aristotelian notion of substance could play any role in Thomism under these circumstances. A re-evaluation of the Aristotelian primary substance indicates that, far from being ruled out by the Thomist transformation, it is essential to it. For the Aristotelian primary substance, properly understood, is the human community and not the individual.

Since, however, this notion of substance serves as a surrogate God in an essentialist universe, we might expect it to fare less well as a correlative principle of esse in a Christian universe. In order to understand why the Thomist primary substance must be understood as graced and how the Aristotelian primary substance is transformed by its correlation with esse, we shall next examine existential participation in Thomism.

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82 See pp. 135-136.
CHAPTER 6

EXISTENTIAL PARTICIPATION AND THOMAS: SUBSTANTIAL GRACE

The genuinely existential character of Thomist metaphysics lies in the real distinction, whereby the Aristotelian substance (form/matter) is transformed into an essential principle (potency) requiring a further correlation with esse (act). By means of this new act/potency correlation, the Aristotelian essential substance (form/matter) becomes the Thomist existential substance (esse/essence). As Hart points out, Thomist metaphysics is "a true metaphysics of being as existing in contrast to that of Aristotle, which is a metaphysics of being as substance with existence completely ignored." 1

Gilson insisted, as we have already seen, 2 that Thomism's claim to be the one authentic existentialist metaphysics rests upon the fact that Thomas alone posited "existence in being, as a constituent element of being." 3 Fabro maintains that this immanence of esse within concrete things is precisely that element in Thomism which makes it a genuinely participationist metaphysics.

Thus the authentic notion of Thomistic participation calls for distinguishing esse as act not only from essence which is its potency, but also from existence which is the fact of being and hence a "result" rather than a metaphysical principle. 4

2 See p. 155.
3 Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, p. 154.
What, however, is the significance of esse as a metaphysical principle? Is it the principle of all intelligibility in existing things, as Esseist Thomists maintain, such that esse is form? Or does it contribute nothing to the intelligibility of things, so that as Geach maintains, "Aquinas's doctrine of esse really adds nothing over and above his doctrine of form." Translated into methodological terms, the central question is one of causality. Is esse an extrinsic or an intrinsic cause? This is a critical question with regard to how one views Thomist substances, for the notion one has of that substance will control the notion one has of the causality exercised by esse vis a vis that substance. Although both Esseist and Gilsonian Thomists have recognized the existential character of Thomist substances, neither group has recognized the methodological implications which such a view of substance requires in the realm of causality.

The difficulties associated with understanding esse and its relationship to essence in existing things arise from the fact that the Aristotelian act/potency methodology is not equipped, on its own merits, to handle the notion of esse, because that methodology has no way to deal with a non-formal act. In Aristotle, form and act are inextricably linked, not only to one another, but to intelligibility as well. An act is always the act of a form, and as such its causality makes itself felt in intelligible effects. The intelligibility of a substance,

5 Geach, Three Philosophers, p. 92.

6 We see here further evidence of the fact that Thomism must be treated as a methodology rather than as a metaphysics. It is primarily because Thomists fail to pursue the methodological questions that they fail to come to grips with the central problems of Thomism.
therefore, is directly and entirely traceable to the formal element within that substance. As Farrer points out with regard to the Aristotelian substance, "Whatever in the history of a substance belongs to it as a substance of such a character, is referable to the influence of its form."  

When we move from the Aristotelian substance (form/matter) to the Thomist substance (esse/essence), however, the situation changes radically. We now have a non-formal act (esse) which lies outside of the formal act (essence) of a thing, but within the thing itself (substance). The necessary relationship which Aristotle understood to obtain between form and act has been severed. But what about the relationship between act and intelligibility? Has that been severed as well? In short, does the intelligibility of a thing in the Thomist universe continue to be identified with its formal component (as Aristotle supposed) or does that thing now derive its intelligibility from its existential component? Esseist and Gilsonian Thomists give diametrically opposed answers to this question.

Thomists such as Carlo and Clarke, by reducing essence to esse, identify form with esse. In so doing, they re-establish the Aristotelian link between act and form, as well as the relationship of both act and form to intelligibility, but they do so at the price of the real distinction between esse and essence. Essence itself becomes severed from form and intelligibility, and, as such, no longer has any positive function to play within Thomism. As a result, the Aristotelian act/potency methodology no longer has any role in Thomism either.

Gilsonian Thomists (and all other Thomists as well who understand the Aristotelian notion of act/potency and the esse/essence distinction to be central in Thomas' thought) continue to identify the intelligibility in things with essence. Since all formal causality is thus identified with essence, they are left with the problem of accounting for the type of causality which esse can be understood to exercise in this situation.

Their task is not an easy one. Since esse is intrinsic to existing things, it would seem that the causality exercised by esse must be of a type compatible with intrinsic causality in general. In an Aristotelian methodology, however, all intrinsic causes are either formal or material. The notion of a non-formal act having never entered his mind, Aristotle made no provision for it. Since esse is clearly not a material cause, on the one hand, and is just as clearly not the formal principle within a thing, on the other, some third type of causality must be assigned to it. Thus, Gilsonian Thomists conclude that esse operates as an efficient cause. Here again we see the sharp distinction which Gilson draws between the orders of efficient and formal causality, a distinction which he understands to be demanded by the esse/essence distinction in things.

A problem immediately presents itself, however. Efficient causes are extrinsic causes. As Hart points out, "The efficient cause of a being is never part of its intrinsic constitution but is extrinsic to it." This being the case, how can esse as intrinsic to substance nevertheless serve as an extrinsic, efficient cause of substance?

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8 Hart, Thomistic Metaphysics, p. 95.
The answer is not long in coming. Although esse cannot be regarded as extrinsic to an existing thing, it can be regarded as extrinsic to the essential principle with which it is correlated. As Hart puts it, "existence is given to that nature or essence, that is, it is caused in it. Therefore it must be an extrinsically added perfection."9 What we have here in Hart is a notion of efficient causality which corresponds to the light/air analogy employed by Gilson (and by Thomas). Esse is like the light which comes to the air as an extrinsic principle exercising efficient causality. As such, esse (like the light) cannot be regarded as rooted in that to which it comes as an external perfection. The only difference between Hart's position and that of Gilson is that Hart understands this extrinsic character of esse to be the fundamental principle underlying the doctrine of participation in Thomas.

It is generally stated: A being that does not have its full intelligibility in itself (since existence, which is the supreme source of intelligibility is not intrinsic and proper to it) must have its intelligibility (and therefore its source of existence) outside itself. Such a being is called a "participated being," that is, a being possessing a degree of existence. Therefore, as we have seen, we may state the principle: Participated beings must be efficiently caused.10

Unfortunately, however, this notion of esse as extrinsic principle forces Hart, as it forced Gilson, to an essentialist notion of substance. For the statement that existence is not intrinsic and proper to "a being" (i.e., a substance or a concrete thing) can only mean that we have returned to that "substantial" point of view of which Gilson

10Ibid., p. 263.
speaks, from which existing things can be treated as Aristotelian substances (form/matter) to which esse is added. This is tantamount to treating the essential component in an existing thing as though it were the thing itself, a process already noted with regard to the light/air analogy, in which air (a substance in its own right) is understood to be modified by the light which comes to it ab extrinsec. Instead of understanding existing things as constituted by two correlative principles, this type of Thomism is forced to treat those things as Aristotelian substances accidentally (extrinsically) modified by esse.

At the same time, however, this 'thick essence' interpretation of Thomism (i.e., that interpretation in which all intelligibilities are attributed to essence) cannot altogether ignore the intrinsic character of esse with regard to existing things. Therefore, some role must be found for it beyond the simple actualizing of essence. For that reason, most 'thick essence' Thomists speak of esse as performing two functions from within the existing thing. First, it is the energy source (first act) which grounds all of a thing's operations (second act). We have already seen how Gilson speaks of the "dynamism of esse" in this regard. 11

Secondly, esse as intrinsic to things is said to establish those things as autonomous or independent vis a vis God. Even those participationist Thomists who regard esse as that principle whereby all created things participate in Ipsum Esse also attribute to created things an autonomy by virtue of the fact that, by means of esse, they are beings in their own right.

11 See p. 148.
To the extent that a created substance is composed of essence and esse, it is as far removed from God, the esse subsistens, as it can possibly be, and in this respect the terms "creature" and "God" admit of no measure or comparison. But since the essence of a creature has also its own participated act of being (actus essendi), its actualization is not merely a relation of extrinsic dependence; rather, it is based on the act of esse in which it participates and which it preserves within itself and is the proper terminus of divine causality.\(^{12}\)

For Fabro, therefore, participated existence and autonomous existence (that being which existing things preserve within themselves) are simply two sides of the same coin.

This ability of esse to overcome, as Gilson puts it, the radical contingency of finite beings\(^{13}\) lies at the heart of the distinction which Thomist metaphysics has repeatedly drawn between the metaphysical and the supernatural realms. It is the reason why Western theology and philosophy has, as Mersch has pointed out, understood God to communicate being to His creatures in two different ways, first in a manner tailored to their natures (natural existence or esse) and secondly in a manner which communicates His own way of existing to them (supernatural existence or grace). This allows Mersch to speak of two creations of the world. "In creating it the first time, He gave existence to things; but the second time, He places His own existence in it."\(^{14}\)

What Mersch has in mind here is a distinction between two orders, one an ad extra order, the other an ad intra order. As Mersch describes them, these two orders correspond to the exitus/reditus structure so often attributed to the Summa Theologiae. They also correspond to the

\(^{12}\)Fabro, "Intensive Hermeneutics," p. 482.

\(^{13}\)Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, pp. 178-179.

traditional distinctions made between nature and grace and between creation and re-creation.

In itself, creation is the production of the order ad extra. By creation God produces the creature in its own subsistence, outside of Himself, and gives existence to a being that is not Himself. The Incarnation, on the contrary, is the taking up of a creature into the Word ad intra, so that it may subsist not in itself but in Him, and that through His subsistence it may be the human nature of God. As regards the distinction between ad intra and ad extra, the direction of the two works is diametrically opposed. The first has an external terminus, the second has an internal terminus; the first causes the order ad extra, the second causes, not the order ad intra, which would be an absurd conception, but the order of that which is "interiorized," if we may use the expression; that is, the order of what, left to itself, would undoubtedly be ad extra but which God causes to subsist in His Word ad intra, and which in this sense is ad intra.  

Esse and grace, therefore, are the principles of two different types of interiority. "When God has communicated Himself to a thing by the being that is interior to the thing, He can still communicate Himself by the being that is interior to Himself." Esse is the principle of an autonomous interiority whereby, as Fabro puts it, things preserve within themselves their own acts of being. Grace, on the other hand, is the principle of that type of interiority which is made available to us by virtue of the Incarnation and which makes it possible for us to enter into that being which constitutes God's own interior life.

This notion of two orders of being in created things, one existential and the other graced, recommends itself highly to Thomist philosophers intent on defining a domain for themselves which lies beyond the natural (which is meta-physical, in other words) without lying simultaneously 'above' the natural (the super-natural). This

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15 Ibid., pp. 372-373.
16 Ibid., p. 460.
is a difficult task, even at the linguistic level, since 'metaphysics' would seem to be nothing more than a Greek way of referring to what the Latin calls the 'supernatural'. Metaphysically, such a domain seemed plausible by virtue of esse, a principle which Thomas and all of his followers have understood to lie somewhere between the natural (essence) and the supernatural (grace).

Methodologically speaking, however, such a notion of esse would appear to be impossible to support, first, because it places the real distinction itself in jeopardy, and secondly, because it cannot be made coherent within an Aristotelian act/potency methodology. In order to see more clearly the methodological problems which arise, we shall consider first, the relationship of esse to creation, and secondly, the relationship of esse to intelligibility.

Esse and Creation

The problem which arises when one treats esse as efficient cause, existential cause, actualizer, energizer and autonomizer of existing things is that one has still not provided esse with any function which would require its presence as a constitutive principle of existing things. If what one is seeking is nothing more than a way to account for how God could create the universe, the positing of God as efficient cause would appear to be all that one requires. Descoqs recognized this more than fifty years ago, calling the esse/essence distinction "une vraie superfetation" precisely because it is not needed to account for creation.

This fact has not gone unnoticed even by such Thomists as Owens and Gilson. Owens points out that "Many Christian thinkers, who readily admit that all things in the created world receive their being from God, and regard it as contingent to their natures, do not hesitate to deny any real distinction between those things and their being," while Gilson expressly denies the need for such a distinction to account for creation:

... in a created universe, existence must come to essences from the outside and, therefore, be superadded to them. Any metaphysics or theology that recognizes the notion of creation necessarily agrees on this point. All Christian theologies in particular expressly teach that no finite being is the cause of its own existence, but this does not imply that existence is created in the finite substance as a distinct "act of being" (esse) added by God to its essence and composing the substance with it.

Thus, when a Thomist such as Maritain calls the real distinction "a thesis of extreme boldness" because it posits over and beyond esse "an act of another order which adds absolutely nothing to essence as essence, intelligible structure, or quiddity, yet adds everything to it in as much as it posits it extra causas or extra nihil," the boldness to which he refers would appear to lie in the positing of a superfluous act which adds nothing beyond what God as efficient cause can accomplish without it.

**Esse and Intelligibility**

To treat esse as an act which, because non-formal, has no intelligible impact upon the existing things within which it is a constitutive

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principle presents two immediate problems within the Aristotelian act/potency methodology which Thomas adopted. The first of these arises from the fact that pure act in God is identical with infinite intelligibility. While it is true that Thomas says, "even though the rest of things were to receive a form that is absolutely the same as it is in God, yet they do not receive it according to the same mode of being;" it is by no means equally clear that the reception of esse in a different mode than that enjoyed by God requires us to suppose that such a mode deprives it of all causal ability to make an intelligible impact upon those things of which it is a constitutive principle. Furthermore, the notion that esse does no more than actualize or existentialize things tends to reduce God to Pure Being or Pure Existence devoid of intelligibility. As Geach points out,

... Aquinas holds that God's nature and God's esse are identical. On the view that the distinction between nature and esse is to be explained in terms of the difference in meaning between the questions 'quid est?' and 'an est?' this would commit him to saying that in God's case the two questions have the very same answer—that to know or state that God exists is the same thing as knowing or stating what God is. In addition, the notion common among participationist Thomists that we can participate in Ipsum Intelligere by virtue of esse without that participated existence exercising any intelligible impact upon us only reinforces the tendency to think of that Being in which we participate as itself severed from intelligere.

The second problem with such a notion of esse arises from the fact,

21CG I, 32.

22Geach, Three Philosophers, p. 89. Geach himself tries to resolve the dilemma by attributing 'intensive magnitude' to esse. This does not solve the problem, however, since intensive magnitude can be handled under the rubric of accidental change.
previously alluded to, that in Aristotle act and intelligibility go hand in hand. Furthermore, any act intrinsic to things is understood by him to exercise formal causality. Although the esse/essence distinction forces upon Aristotelian methodology the notion of an act which is no longer linked to form, there is no reason at all to suppose that this severance of act from form also forces a severance of act from intelligibility. In fact, quite the opposite. Not only the Aristotelian notion of act as that which exercises an intelligible impact upon things, but the Thomist notion of Ipsum Esse as Ipsum Intelligere, would seem to require us to identify act and intelligibility. Maritain is quite right when he says,

In the verb exists we have the act of existing, or a super-intelligible. To say that which exists is to join an intelligible to a super-intelligible; it is to have before our eyes an intelligible engaged in and perfected by a super-intelligibility.23

Here in Maritain we have something which comes surprisingly close to Thomas' own notion of participation as the possession of a nature higher than one's own or as a share in an act higher than one's own. Maritain himself, as we have seen, refuses to suppose that esse has any intelligible impact upon essence, but he has come closer than a good many 'thick essence' Thomists to recognizing the pure intelligibility which is indissociable from esse, even in the mode in which we find it in created things.

Esseist Thomists are correct in refusing to deny to esse an intelligible impact on existing things. Thomism's transformation of Aristotle's act/potency methodology by means of the esse/essence distinction does signal a corresponding break with the notion that all

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23 Maritain, Existence and the Existent, p. 44.
intelligibility is "formal" intelligibility. As Grene notes in her study on Aristotle,

In Aristotelian terms, in terms of a non-created universe, to say that a man 'is' offers no information of scientific import beyond the statement what it is to be a man. If there is creation, to say that a man exists informs us of something over and above his 'what'. 24

But they are wrong in supposing that no intelligible content can any longer be assigned to the essential principle in things. For such a supposition destroys both the real distinction and the act/potency methodology which Thomas employed.

'Thick essence' Thomists, on the other hand, are right to insist upon essence as a positive principle in existing things, but wrong to dissociate esse from all notion of formal causality. Helen James John is correct when she speaks of "the 'immanence' of the transcendental perfections in the finite creatures whose structure is constituted by the union of essence and participated esse." 25 Essence, however, cannot on its own bear the burden of explanation for transcendental perfections immanent in creatures whose ultimate participation in being is a created participation in uncreated esse.

Hawkins has pointed out that the esse/essence composition does not function like other act/potency compositions in Thomism, inasmuch as here all determinations fall on the side of potency (essence) rather than act (esse). He therefore counsels Thomists to treat the esse/essence distinction first "for its own sake and in its own terms and only later, when the ordinary meanings of potency and act can be appropriately introduced, to consider how far and in what way these

notions can be applied to it."26 It would seem more advisable, however, to reexamine the relationship between esse and essence in light of the ordinary meanings of act and potency in Aristotle. For, in so doing, Thomists would have to reconsider the connection which Aristotle makes between act and intelligibility in light of the connection which Thomism makes between esse and Ipsum Intelligere.

Reference was made in chapter 427 to the distinction which Thomas drew between abstraction with and without precision to being. Although this distinction allows Thomists such as Gilson and Owens to identify Aristotelian substance (form/matter) with Thomist substance (esse/essence), the distinction itself may signal a realization on Thomas' part that an abstractive process which prescinds from being, however appropriate it might be in an Aristotelian world of essential substances, cannot ultimately be made to apply in a Thomist world of existential substances. He may well have realized that there is an intelligibility associated with esse which makes it impossible for us to prescind from it.

Certainly he recognized, as we have already noted,28 that whatever is associated with esse must lie outside of (praeter) the essential principle of a thing. Therefore, whatever is associated with esse can never be reduced to essence. Further, there are several indications that he understood esse to lie above (supra) the essential principle of a thing. He speaks of esse as a good and a perfection,29 as the

26 Hawkins, Being and Becoming, p. 105.
27 See pp. 163-164.
28 See p. 160.
29ST I, 20, 2.
perfection of all perfections,\textsuperscript{30} as indeed the most perfect of all things.\textsuperscript{31} Everything noble in a thing belongs to it in proportion to its esse.\textsuperscript{32} There are also indications that he understood esse to function formally within things. He speaks of esse as the most formal of all things\textsuperscript{33} and as that which is "most interior to anything, and which inheres more profoundly than anything else, since it is formal in relation to all those [principles] which are in the thing."\textsuperscript{34}

Finally, Thomas speaks at least twice of esse as that principle whereby creatures participate in the nature of being (naturam essendi).\textsuperscript{35} Elsewhere he notes that every being composed of act and potency participates in a higher act than its own, adding that things especially become actual by participating in pure act or subsistent esse by similarity.\textsuperscript{36} Hence, it is impossible to dissociate esse first, from perfection, and secondly, from participation in an act which lies not only outside of (praeter) essence but also above (supra) essence. In fact, it is impossible to dissociate esse from that principle whereby we share per participationem in the divine nature which is God's per essentiam.

Since grace is understood to be that principle whereby we are raised, in the words of St. Cyril of Alexandria, supra naturam, it

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30}De Pot., 7, 2 ad 4.
\item \textsuperscript{31}ST I, 4, 1 ad 3.
\item \textsuperscript{32}CG I, 28.
\item \textsuperscript{33}ST I, 7, 1.
\item \textsuperscript{34}ST I, 8, 1.
\item \textsuperscript{35}ST I, 3, 4; 45, 5 ad 1.
\item \textsuperscript{36}Quodl. XII, 5, 5.
\end{itemize}
becomes increasingly difficult to know how esse can be dissociated, as it is in Thomism, from grace. Especially when one considers first, the close relationship, if not identity, which exists between essence and nature, and secondly, the fact that, for Thomas and Thomists in general, esse perfects essence and grace perfects nature. Clearly Thomism is working with a notion of nature which permits it to understand esse as a 'natural' principle in things. We must therefore examine just what notion of 'nature' is operative here and whether or not such a notion is, methodologically speaking, applicable to esse.

**Esse and Nature**

Since Thomism builds on the Aristotelian notion of nature, we must consider first what Aristotle understood nature to be. He examines the question of nature most thoroughly in Book IV of the *Metaphysics* and Book II of the *Physics*. In the *Metaphysics*, he summarizes the various uses which philosophy has made of this term, concluding, as Marling points out, that 'nature' is used in six different ways: 1) the genesis of growing things, 2) that part of a thing from which its growth proceeds, 3) the inner principle of movement in a thing, 4) the primary matter of which a thing consists, 5) the essence of a thing as that term of its process of becoming (this would include both matter and form), and 6) the essence of a thing, whether resulting from natural or artificial production. In the *Physics*, he distinguishes between nature and art, and considers nature in its two primary meanings, as 1) "a source or cause of being moved and of being at rest in that to which it belongs primarily, in virtue of itself and not in

virtue of a concomitant attribute,"38 and 2) the shape or form of those thing which have such a source of motion. 39 These meanings are, of course, very broad and encompass, in the final analysis, everything in the material realm (apart from artistic productions). Since Aristotle recognized no existential principle in things which is not identical with their essences, existence (esse) in such a world can only be 'natural'.

Texts on nature abound in Thomas' writings and reveal his debt to Aristotle in the use he makes of the word. In one text from the Summa Theologiae, for example, Thomas defines nature variously as 1) birth, 2) principle of begetting, 3) principle of generation, 4) any intrinsic principle of motion (both formal and material), 5) form, 6) matter, 7) the essence of the species and 8) the quiddity or 'whatness' of a thing. 40 Since Thomas assumes esse to be natural, we must presume that he understands it to fall under one of the above meanings, but there is nothing in the text itself to indicate which one he is associating it with.

In a later article of the same question, however, he gives two indications of how esse might be regarded as falling within the category of the 'natural'. There, in answer to the question of whether or not the grace of Christ can be understood as 'natural' to Christ, he answers,

According to the Philosopher (Metaph., V, 5), nature designates, in one way, nativity; in another, the essence of a thing. Hence natural may be taken in two ways:—first, for what is only from

38 Physics, II, 1, 192b22-23.
39 Ibid., 193b4-5.
40 ST III, 2, 12.
the essential principles of a thing, as it is natural to fire to
mount; secondly, we call natural to man what he has had from
birth, according to Eph. 2.3: We were by nature children of
wrath; and Wisd. xii. 10: They were a wicked generation, and
their malice natural. Therefore, the grace of Christ, whether
of union or habitual, cannot be called natural as if caused by
the principles of the human nature of Christ, although it may
be called natural, as if coming to the human nature of Christ
by the causality of His Divine Nature. But these two kinds of
grace are said to be natural to Christ, inasmuch as he had them
from His nativity, since from the beginning of His conception
the human nature was united to the Divine Person, and His soul
was filled with the gift of grace. 41

Since anything is natural to a man which he has had from birth, and
since esse is something which a man does have from birth, it is easy to
see how esse can be regarded as a natural principle in things.

The second indication comes in the answer he gives to the third
objection raised at the beginning of the same article, namely, that
the grace of Christ cannot in any way be regarded as natural, for if
it were, then it would belong to all men. To this Thomas responds,
"The grace of union is not natural to Christ according to His human
nature, as if it were caused by the principles of the human nature,
and hence it need not belong to all men." 42 Here an identification is
made between that which is natural and that which is common. As Keefe
notes, "Thomas appears to regard that which is universal in all men as
'natural'." 43 It would seem, therefore, that Thomas' assumption that
esse is natural 44 arises from the fact that it is common to all things
and present from birth.

41ST III, 2, 12.
42ST III, 2, 12 ad 2.
43Keefe, Thomism, p. 69.
44The fact that this is an assumption must be stressed. Nowhere in
his writings does Thomas explicitly analyze the relationship between
esse and nature.
Out of this assumption arises the notion that the created order is a natural order, complete in itself, to which the supernatural must come as a second and different type of order. As Mersch puts it, "God is pure Being; to possess Him truly a man must exist otherwise than by his natural existence; he must receive and possess a new way of existing." The natural order of existence comes into being by virtue of God's activity as Creator, first cause and exemplar of all things. The graced order of existence comes into being by virtue of "the mystery by which God Himself has entered into the world and into humanity." The distinction between natural and supernatural corresponds to a distinction between the God of philosophy and the God of revelation. As Mersch sees it, we can only determine the supernatural by distinguishing two aspects in God.

The first of these aspects is God such as He is known in philosophy; God as the cause and exemplar of everything; God as imitated and expressed in His works; hence God as conceivable to some slight degree in function of His works, plus the simultaneous denial of any relation on His side with these works, since He is the Absolute. Envisaged in this way, God is "known as though unknown," He is God such as He appears in the mirror of creation, in something that is not He, God in His external effects. As such, God is the foundation of the natural order.

The second aspect is God as He is in Himself, within the Godhead: the inner life of God, not merely the external effects; Deus prout est in se, not merely Deus prout relucet in creaturis.

Since the natural order encompasses both the existential and the essential principles in things, it follows that material substances, however one defines them, are natural as well. As a result, grace can enter such an order only by way of the accidental. As Thomas says,

45 Mersch, Theology of the Mystical Body, p. 621.
46 Ibid., p. 457.
"Whatever comes to a subject after the latter is constituted in existence, can come only as an accident, unless it should be drawn into communion with the already constituted existence" (he has in mind here the human nature of Christ which is drawn into the already-constituted existence of the Word).  

It also follows that grace comes as an essential (formal) rather than an existential principle. As one writer puts it,

Any created reality is a participation in being, the ultimate perfection of which is realized in the absolute being; but grace is more than this for it is a formal sharing in the nature of God, the Absolute. God becomes the "form" or determining principle of the being and operation of the nature that is "graced."  

Grace is therefore "a formal participation in the divine nature" which, because formal, exercises formal causality in elevating the person to higher levels of existence and activity.

These notions of esse as natural and of grace as an accidental, formal elevation of natural existence have been accepted by Thomism for seven centuries. Yet the methodological problems which they create are severe, if not insurmountable. Among these problems, three require our attention with regard to esse. The first of these has to do with the distinction made between God's creative (natural) activity and His Incarnational (graced) activity. The supposition that there is an aspect of God that can be known naturally or philosophically "in the mirror of creation" is itself based on an a priori assumption that God's creative activity is noetically available to us apart from His

48ST III, 2, 6 ad 2.


50Ibid.
explicit revelation of Himself as Creator.

This would seem to violate the distinction which Thomas himself tells us exists between those things which are 'naturally' knowable and those things which require revelation. With respect to the latter, he insists that "such things as spring from God's will, and beyond the creature's due, can be made known to us only through being revealed in the Sacred Scripture, in which the Divine Will is made known to us."\(^{51}\) Since the decision to create springs from the Divine Will, and, since prior to the actual creation of anything, there are no entities or creatures to whom anything can be "due", the fact that the world is created would seem to require a revelation.\(^{52}\)

Methodologically, it is the problem of determining how an analytical methodology employing the notions of act and potency to account for the conditions of possibility of the reality which confronts us is able to discern, solely on the basis of that reality, the will of God. It is also the problem of determining how that same methodology is able to give an account of the world as a "mirror" of God, in light of the fact that 1) creation is \textit{ex nihilo} (that is, not available to rational inquiry apart from God's revelation) and 2) we know ourselves to image God only because He has revealed this to us. To suppose that we can know either of these things apart from His revelation is to suppose that creation is necessary and that it must image God. It is, in other words, to suppose that the Divine Will can be known because God has no other choices to exercise than those which the revelation tells

\(^{51}\) \textit{ST} III, 1, 3.

\(^{52}\) The fact that the best pagan minds were unable to arrive at the notion of a Creator God would lend support to this.
us He has in fact exercised. All of this exemplifies that rationalization of creation and of esse to which reference has already several times been made.

Where esse itself is concerned, however, the difficulties in viewing creation as naturally or philosophically available to us do not end there. For if, as Thomists such as Gilson and Owens tell us, there is no need to posit a real distinction between esse and essence in order to account for God's creative activity, then we are confronted, in the creative act itself, with a divine gratuitousness which the mere positioning of creatures ad extra would not require. Under these circumstances, the significance of esse cannot be that of simply actualizing or realizing things. God as efficient cause can do that without the help of esse. The significance of esse must lie in the fact that it is constitutive of us precisely as that principle which enables us to possess, per participationem, the divine esse which is God's per essentiam.

The second problem which confronts us, methodologically speaking, is that of grace as accidental. There are two elements to this problem. The first is the difficulty of explaining how grace, as supernatural, can be correlated to a natural act of existence. As Keefe points out,

The primal reception of the revelation cannot be conceptual; it cannot be infused into an already constituted person, for such an infused grace would either inhere in the intellect as a conceptual specification inadequate to an apprehension of the prime truth, or it would inhere in the substantial soul, which then, being elevated in the order of substance, would by supposition be transcendentally correlated to a purely natural act of existence, of esse. But this is impossible: essence, as a limitation of esse, cannot transcend that which it limits.54

53 Ockham's razor has its uses.

54 Keefe, Thomism, p. 106.
The second element, a corollary to the first, stems from the fact that it is "impossible to correlate a supernatural accident and a natural substance, for substance is the prius of accidents." Most Thomists attempt to circumvent these problems by speaking of grace as a "unique" accident, unlike any other accident. In so doing, they seem to leave themselves open to the charge of using the term 'accident' in a nominalist way. Whether or not this be the case, the methodological problem remains. Potency and act are not real apart from their correlation. To suppose that grace as accident is somehow exempt from this methodological principle is to suppose that accidental grace is a thing in itself, requiring no correlating principle to account for its reality.

The third problem which confronts us is that of grace as formal. On the one hand, it is not surprising that Thomism understands grace to be formal. After all, grace is understood to exercise a formal impact on those who receive it. Therefore, as we have seen, grace must be associated with the essence of a thing, not with its esse. On the other hand, however, there is something surprising in the notion that the Being of Ipsum Esse, communicated via the substantial principle of esse, is unable to exercise the intelligible impact on things which that same Being, communicated via the accidental principle of grace, is able to exercise on them. Since God is Pure Act, it is difficult to understand how His communication of Himself as pure act (esse) is of a lower order (the natural order) than is His communication of Himself under the modality of formal grace (the supernatural order). Mersch attempts to get around this by supposing that grace can be viewed from two different directions.

55 Ibid., p. 67.
... grace, regarded as an assimilation to God, is a new act rather than a new form, for God is act, not form. However, in accord with the point of view that regards grace as something in man, we may admit that it is a form; but we should add that it actuates more than it informs, and that it imparts fuller being rather than another kind of being.56

Since everything that Mersch says here can be made to apply as much to esse as it does to grace, it is not easy to see how these two views of grace clarify the situation at all.

Since esse is a constitutive principle immanent within things, it is difficult to avoid the notion that it exercises something akin to formal causality. Since it is, furthermore, not only a principle which lies outside of (praeter) but also above (supra) its correlative principle, it is difficult to understand how it could be regarded as 'natural'. Finally, since its placement within things is not required to account for creation ad extra, it is very difficult to dissociate it from creation ad intra and therefore from grace. For, by it, we are granted a share in the divine Esse which is God.

Esse and a New Ontology

The supernatural has been defined as a "participation in the divine good, in a good that naturally pertains to God alone."57 Since esse subsistens, pure act, is the good which naturally, i.e., per essentiam, pertains to God alone, it would seem impossible to avoid the conclusion that the principle of esse, whereby we participate in Ipsum Esse, simultaneously constitutes our participation in that which is supernatural to us. Far from constituting us as autonomous, esse places

56 Mersch, The Theology of the Mystical Body, p. 621.
57 Schema constitutionis dogmaticae secundae de fide, c. 3. Cf. ST I-II, 110, 1.
contingency at the root of our being.

The fact that Thomism has not recognized this lies, in large part, in a methodological misunderstanding at the center of the Thomist enterprise. Thomists have, by and large, made the assumption that our imaging of God must be a formal imaging. When they found this imaging absent from Aristotle, they experienced a strong felt need to supply it. Hence the Divine Ideas. But the assumption that our imaging of God must be formal is a Platonic assumption, based on the view that material reality is substantial only to the degree that it participates in the primary substances, the Ideal Forms. If one makes this assumption, then one is led to suppose that the relation of the world to God and its dependence on Him are inherent in the formal structures of the world. Formally speaking, therefore, the world cannot be understood apart from God. Hence, the world can be made autonomous only if it is supplied with some further non-formal element which it can then be understood to preserve within itself.

If, however, as we have argued, the Aristotelian project is precisely that of providing an alternative to the Platonic notion of divine exemplarity, then the Aristotelian primary substance is, by definition, formally autonomous. Such a notion of substance, converted by Thomas into the essential principle in existing things, grounds not their contingency or dependence on God but their otherness or distinctiveness vis a vis God. The correlation of esse with such a notion of essence then provides the means by which creatures are understood to be contingent and related to God. Esse, therefore, far from overcoming the contingency of the creature, establishes the creature as contingent in every respect. The esse/essence distinction is the methodological
statement of this contingency. As Keefe notes,

The act-potency method of this [Aristotelian] ontology, which concludes to an understanding of being as immanent essence, permits this essentialist understanding of the world to be itself in potency to a theological understanding. This was the insight of St. Thomas. 58

If this is the case, Thomism cannot be a metaphysics in search of a middle ground between nature and grace. On the contrary, "Thomism is a supernaturalism, for it seeks to understand, not the necessity of essential nature, but the possibility of a gratuity which is not implicit in essence." 59 This gratuity is expressed by the esse/essence correlation.

Mersch has raised the question of how a man who has his own form, that form which in fact makes him a man, can nevertheless be understood as capable of undergoing a formal change which does not undermine his own nature.

... how can a man in any true sense put on a form that will divinize him? He already has his form, and that is what makes him man. How can he receive another form that will make him divine, without ceasing to be human? And how can he introduce into his form the modifications that are needed to make it divine and that have to be so great as to be almost infinite, without stretching it well beyond the necessarily narrow limits capable of admitting accidental changes, and without bursting it asunder? 60

He concludes that we must seek a "new ontology" in order to account for this.

Such an ontology already exists in Thomism insofar as it adheres to the principles of its own act/potency methodology. For, within such a methodology, existential grace does not threaten essential integrity by entering into the already constituted limits of a finite nature.

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59 Ibid., p. 48.
60 Mersch, The Theology of the Mystical Body, p. 617.
Rather, it composes with its correlative essential principle in such a way as to exercise a non-formal but intelligible impact upon the existential substance which it helps constitute.

... there is in each man an existential gratuity, a grace more fundamental than any other, which is his substantial being, the correlation between his essential, potential being, and his gratuitous existence. In this correlation he subsists; it is his substantial actuality, a continuum of existential actuation of essential potentiality, which is the substantial prius of all his accidental manifestations of his being. This gratuity must be denominated sufficient grace. It is supernatural, in the strict sense of non-essential, and is prior in being to all other grace. 61

In such a methodology, no purely natural substances can exist. For substance is existential (graced), not essential (natural). Pure nature is therefore potential, not actual. Herein lies the significance of esse as immanent within created things. For within an act/potency methodology transformed by the esse/essence distinction, no essence can exist apart from its correlation with esse. In other words, the Aristotelian essential universe is not only uncreated in Aristotle, it is uncreatable in Thomism. This uncreatability, however, is systematic, not doctrinal. As Keefe notes with regard to Thomist methodology, the Aristotelian essence is "uncreated and uncreatable insofar as the system is concerned." 62

61 Keefe, Thomism, p. 64.

62 Keefe, "A Methodological Critique," p. 36. Keefe notes, in the same article (p. 32) that "In von Balthasar's hands, and in this he is seconded by Karl Rahner and Henri de Lubac, grace remains grace only if there exists alongside it concrete natural reality: e.g., concrete human nature. . . . The nerve of this argument is that the divine freedom to create man without calling him to a supernatural destiny must be systematically maintained, and that only in this simultaneity of natural and supernatural reality, which cannot be made systematically coherent, is the divine transcendence given a real theological recognition." The difficulty here of systematic incoherence can be overcome by recognizing the distinction between theological and systematic necessities.
being submitted to a Thomist act/potency analysis remains a possibility. It simply means that God is capable of creating a non-Thomist universe.

If 'pure nature' is, as Keefe says, "a counterconcept, a possibility of thought whose reification is always a falsification," it follows that the notion of double gratuity also has no place in a Thomist methodology. For, theologically speaking, existential grace, as a participation in the life of God, is indissociable from gratia Christi. And, methodologically speaking, existential grace is inseparable from our essential participation in the human species, whose formal cause, as we have seen, must be Christ, the God-man, in Whom alone existential and formal causality can be understood as distinct but inseparable.

There is then no basis for the notion, time-honored in Catholic theology, of a 'double gratuity,' the one of nature, the other of grace: the ex nihilo of creation in Christ is precisely the ex nihilo of gratia Christi, the Gift of the Spirit which is the purpose of the Father's sending of the Son, and which is inseparable from the Incarnation as it is from the Eucharistic worship of the Church.

In order to account for substantial grace within a Thomist act/potency methodology, however, some means must be provided to account for 1) a union of the divine and human which is substantial, not accidental, 2) pure nature as potential, not existential and 3) esse as not only actuating but exercising intelligible impact upon existential substance. Happily, the means to do so are already in place in Thomas himself, in his account of the Incarnation.

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63 Idem., Thomism, p. 84.

Esse and the Incarnation

The esse/essence distinction, used by Thomas to account for the createdness of things, is also employed by him to account for the Incarnation. The correspondence between creation and Incarnation is, therefore, already present in Thomism. As Keefe points out,

Beginning with the contingent existence of the created universe, he [Thomas] was led to stating an act-potency correlation unknown and unnecessary to the Aristotelian essentialism, that of existence as the substantial actuation of essence. This new application of the Aristotelian act-potency correlation at once gave an ontological basis for the dogmatic fact of creation, and made it possible and necessary to place an ontological distinction between human nature and its final, personal actuation, without depriving that nature of its essential activity or operation. Thus, an ontological understanding of the Christological dogma was provided: God, the Creator, must be understood as unlimited actuality, as Ipsum Esse, and in the Person of the Logos, must be understood methodologically or ontologically as the existential actuality of the humanity of Jesus the Christ, Who is thus the existential, substantial union of God and man in one divine Person.65

That the union is substantial is very clear in Thomas' writings. "Now divine and human nature, though infinitely diverse, are nevertheless brought together in the mystery of the Incarnation in one ontological subject; and neither of them pertains to this subject in an accidental way, but rather substantially."66 Furthermore, their union in the Person of the Word requires that, in Christ, there be only one act of existence.

... a human nature is united to the Son of God hypostatically or personally, and not accidentally. Consequently, with his human nature he does not acquire a new personal existence, but simply a new relation of his already existing personal existence to the human nature. Accordingly, this person is now said

65 Keefe, Thomism, p. 45.
66 ST III, 16, 1 ad 1.
to subsist not only in divine nature but also in human nature.⁶⁷

Hence, we are able to say that "The eternal existence of the Son of God which is identified with the divine nature becomes the existence of the man inasmuch as the human nature is assumed by the Son of God into the unity of his person."⁶⁸

This substantial communication of His existence by the Person of the Logos to the human nature is precisely what Fr. de la Taille understands to be the one new element provided by the Incarnation.

So then, the communication of the Word's own being is something created, although the being of the Word is uncreated. And there is the new element introduced by the Incarnation; new, no less than created; truly positive; no mere amputation; new and positive, but also substantial: and this is what we now have to note. It is substantial forasmuch as the communication of the Word's existence to the soul and body is the actualization (supernatural, of course) of the human nature as a potency in regard of being. The actualization of such potency is something in the substantial order; not anything that could be reduced to mere accident. Indeed, it is the most substantial actuality of all: although it is no part of the nature thus actuated: but it is what we call substantial existence.⁶⁹

This communicated existence as substantial, not accidental, is important, to our purposes, in two ways. First, it makes clear that this union of divine and human does not present us with the problem of accounting for how divinity is able to squeeze itself, so to speak, into the finite limits of an already-constituted (i.e., existing) human nature. As Mascall notes with regard to modern English theological discussions about the Incarnation,

⁶⁷ ST III, 17, 2.

⁶⁸ ST III, 17, 2 ad 2.

They take as their starting-point human nature as it is known to us, and then in effect inquire what must happen to the divine Word if he is to be compressed within its limits; they hardly ever start by considering the mode of existence of the divine Word and then ask what must happen to human nature if it is to be united to him.\footnote{E. L. Mascall, Christ, the Christian and the Church (London: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1946), p. 15.}

Rather, the question which confronts us is how the human nature can be disposed to receive the divine existence. For the change which takes place here, as Thomas points out, is on the side of the human nature, not on the side of the Person of the Logos.\footnote{ST III, 2, 7.} The change in question must be some sort of adaptation of the human nature to the Logos, a perfecting of the human nature precisely in and through its union with the Logos.

\ldots this perfection must be a transcendent actuation brought about by union with the pure Act; it can be nothing else than a pure adaptation, a pure assimilation and participation of one of the two natures with reference to the other. But only the human nature can be thus adapted.\footnote{Mersch, The Theology of the Mystical Body, p. 214.}

This brings us to the second aspect of this communicated existence which is important to our purposes. This perfection or adaptation does not come \textit{ab extrinsec\textsc{o}} to an already-constituted human nature. It comes to it immanently, from the union itself of divine and human. Therefore, the causality which brings about this change in the human nature cannot be regarded as in the order of efficient or external causality.

The perfecting we wish to speak of is not and cannot be in the order of effi\textsc{c}ient causality that brings about the union, however slight the efficient causality may be; the union would in that case lose its transcendence. The perfection does not pre-dispose to the union, does not prepare for it, does not facilitate it. The perfection comes into being through the union, not vice...
versa; it is the union that explains the perfection, not the perfection that accounts for the union.

We may say that the perfecting causes the assumed human nature to be the human nature of God and that it adapts the human nature for the union. It does so, however, not in the way of an efficient cause, but in the way of a quasi-formal cause.\(^{73}\)

Although M. de la Taille refuses to designate this causality as in any way "formal," he acknowledges that we must understand a "dispositive" causality to be at work here.\(^{74}\) Hence, we have in the Incarnation a situation in which the divine Esse operates substantially and existentially not as an efficient cause but as a "quasi-formal" cause exercising an intelligible impact on the human nature which it actuates, adapting and perfecting that nature from within the union which it effects between itself and that nature.

We have here also a situation in which human nature is a substantial principle, not a substance in its own right. As a result, the intelligibility which it has as an existential substance cannot be attributed entirely to those formalities arising from its essential principle. The intrinsic dispositive causality of the divine Esse contributes its own intelligibility to the existential substance which arises from the union of the Person of the Logos with the human nature. Consequently, the human nature, as existential, acquires a perfection which is extrinsic to it as essential principle (i.e., supernatural), but intrinsic to it as existential substance (i.e., substantial grace). Thus, we have in the Incarnation two immanent causal principles, one existential, the other essential, distinct when considered with regard to the divine and human natures, yet inseparable in their union in the Person of the

\(^{73}\) Ibid., p. 208.

\(^{74}\) de la Taille, The Hypostatic Union, pp. 30-31.
Word, both of which are necessary to understand the elevation of Christ's human nature to a participation in the divine Esse. As Mersch says with regard to that elevation,

Undoubtedly the transcendental aspect that makes it a divinization and the human aspect that makes it an exaltation of the human nature are strictly inseparable; only the strict unity of the person with the two natures accounts for its existence. Yet the two aspects are distinct, with a distinction derived from that of the natures which are united. . . . Accordingly what is usually presented in theology as a divinization appears to be primarily a realization of the ultimate perfections human nature is capable of and, if we may say so, a transcendent "humanization." 

In the Incarnation, we are presented with a concrete instance, because the union is substantial not accidental, in which the esse which perfects the essence is identically the grace which perfects the nature. Therefore, the real distinction is not only, methodologically speaking, a way of stating the gratuity of creation; it is also a way of stating the gratuity of Incarnation. Might we not also expect it to be a way of stating the gratuity of our own existence? Mersch tells us that we would do well to contemplate the divinization of Christ's humanity, for it is "the divinization of all humanity." If this be the case, we might well expect the esse/essence correlation to be a kind of methodological shorthand for our own creation in Christ.

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75 Mersch, The Theology of the Mystical Body, p. 205.
76 Ibid., p. 618.