



*Serie Investigación*

CONVERSATIONS  
WITH FR. DEWAN  
CENTRAL METAPHYSICAL TOPICS  
WITH LAWRENCE DEWAN, O.P.

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Liliana B. Irizar - Lawrence Dewan O.P.



UNIVERSIDAD  
SERGIO ARBOLEDA

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**with Fr. DEWAN.**

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With the collaboration of  
Carlos Domínguez and Laura Camila Barragán

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*“... the philosophy in which I have come to believe:  
I will not call it my philosophy; for I did not make it.  
God and humanity made it; and it made me.”*

**G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy***



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I would like to express my gratitude, first of all, to Fr. Dewan for his generosity and patience. Little by little we have become familiar with his unique way of reading and understanding Saint Thomas. He has enabled us to read Aquinas without previous schematicisms, which usually prevent a suitable understanding of Saint Thomas, in other words, reading Saint Thomas *from* Saint Thomas. If that were not enough, Fr. Dewan took care to revise these conversations himself.

Besides, I would like to give very special thanks to Professor Stephen L. Brock, who encouraged us to read and contact Fr. Dewan, and he constantly has given us his most generous and unwavering support. I am also deeply grateful to professors Mark Johnson and Peter Kwasniewski, who have helped us in different ways so that the *Dewan Project* could proceed.

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**Liliana B. Irizar**

January 28, 2015

*Feast of Saint Thomas Aquinas*



## Abbreviations

*EE= De ente et essentia*

*DP= Quaestiones Disputatae De Potentiae*

*DV= Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*

*In De Caelo= De caelo et mundo expositio*

*In Metaph.= Sententia libri Metaphysicae*

*Qq de anima= Quaestio disputata de anima*

*SCG= Summa contra gentiles*

*Sent = Scriptum Super Sententiis*

*ST= Summa theologiae*



## Introduction



As is generally known, Lawrence Dewan is one of the most prominent figures of contemporary Thomism. He is especially known for having stressed the importance of form in metaphysics; notwithstanding, his presentation of Thomas Aquinas' *esse* doctrine has often been misunderstood. This is the reason why I felt that it would be very useful to publish some conversations I have been privileged to have with him which came about due to concerns that arose once I had begun to read his writings.

I should note that Lawrence Dewan's approach to Thomas Aquinas' metaphysics, especially his presentation on the relationship between form and being, has changed our insight into Thomas's metaphysics subtly but decisively. Therefore, I am conscious of the novelty of his approach and the difficulties this novelty could cause. I can add to this the great influence that Etienne Gilson has had on Spanish-speaking Thomists.

It could be said that there are three central issues which provide a break between the readings of Aquinas by Gilson, on the one hand, and by Dewan, on the other. These include the sources of *esse* and creation doctrines, and the relationship between form and being.

First, there is the issue of the sources of the doctrine of the act of being in Saint Thomas. One of the marks that characterizes Gilson's metaphysical analysis is his efforts to show the discontinuity between the Aristotelian view of the *ens* with respect to that offered by Thomas Aquinas.



As a result, this view affected his own view of sources of the creation doctrine. As is well known, he emphatically refused to believe that one of these sources was Aristotle<sup>1</sup>. Dewan, in total disagreement with the French professor, believes, instead, that Aquinas explicitly acknowledges his debt to Aristotle (and even to Plato) for these two really critical issues within Thomism: the doctrine of the act of being and that of creation.

Second, we find a central theme in Dewan's thought and, therefore, in these "Conversations," namely, the form-*esse* kinship. It seems that the fact of having emphasized predominantly the *esse* through the background of a struggle against rationalisms led Gilson to shift the form from the core of the metaphysical thought of Thomas Aquinas. If so, the novelty of Dewan's approach lies primarily in having given form back the genuine place it deserves in metaphysics.<sup>2</sup>

In Gilson's scheme the essence or form, outside its condition of an imperfect component of the *ens* and of assuming a *secondary* role, tends to be presented as something abstract, as that just apprehended by intelligence. Its relationship with the *esse* would seem to be addressed from a purely logical perspective and, therefore, as it were, is static, which is to be expected with all existential weight having been attributed almost exclusively to the *esse*.

Dewan's vision, instead, is *more existential*, that is to say that form is viewed as playing, together with the *esse*, the ontological role it deserves, as a principle of being, of *virtus essendi*, thanks to the influence of divine causality. Otherwise, as Dewan warns, the risk of incurring into a logicist conception is always there. In fact, this abstract, conceptualist view of the essence started to affect Étienne Gilson's own perception.

Thus, for those who have been formed under Gilson's metaphysical view, it is certainly not easy to avoid misinterpreting Dewan's approach<sup>3</sup>. This is

<sup>1</sup> GILSON, Étienne. *God and Philosophy*. New Haven: Yale-University Press, 1941, pp. 33-34.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that, in relation to the causal role of the form, Lawrence Dewan considers John Capreolus and his presentation of the doctrine of the *esse* of Saint Thomas as one of his main sources of inspiration. C.f. especially. L. Dewan, *Capreolus, St. Thomas, and Being*, published in French: 'Capreolus, saint Thomas et l'être', in *Jean Capreolus et son temps 1380-1444, Colloque de Rodez*, (special number, #1 of *Mémoire dominicaine*, Paris, 1997: Cerf, pp. 77-86). The *colloquium* took place on Sept. 2-4, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> In fact, it should be mentioned that Fr. Dewan was himself a student of Gilson at the

why, since I started to read Fr. Dewan's intellectual production, I felt the need to maintain a constant dialogue with him to solve the doubts which appeared while reading his work. "*Conversations with Fr. Dewan*" is the fruit of these dialogues I have been had with him, both personally and by email, from January 2008 to December 2014.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, the publication of these conversations is intended to help someone else solve the same kind of doubts and concerns that I myself had after reading Dewan's writings for the first time. Another objective, perhaps not the least, is putting on the table some of Dewan's nuclear issues in his thinking that question some interpretations that have been made regarding Aquinas. These perhaps have been accepted without subjecting them to analysis and a more rigorous discussion. However, it is important to clarify that the style of this writing only superficially enunciates some topics Dewan has dealt with extensively in other places mentioned herein. Hence, I have gathered these conversations and grouped them into the different topics covered with Fr. Dewan. Even so, I think that our conversations have always revolved around the relation between form and being. Indeed, the following sentence, with which Fr. Dewan opened one of his first emails, defines his intellectual route: "My interest has been from the start much inspired by the teaching of St. Thomas that *esse per se consequitur ad formam*"<sup>5</sup>.

Obviously, all the interest of these "*Conversations*" lies in the always masterful answers provided by Fr. Dewan. I have just wanted to help readers focus on the more salient topics in Lawrence Dewan's approach to Saint Thomas.

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Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto ca. 1954-1957, he began his doctoral thesis work for the University of Toronto under Gilson, and finished it under Fr. Joseph Owens (once Gilson retired). His doctoral thesis was on the doctrine of *esse* as taught by Johannes Capreolus, the "Thomistarum princeps." He has criticized Prof. Gilson in, among other papers, "Etienne Gilson and the *Actus Essendi*" (revised version of 1999 publication), *International Journal of Philosophy* [Taipei] 1 (2002), pp. 65-99. He also has expressed his admiration for Capreolus on *esse* in "Capreolus, saint Thomas et l'être," in *Jean Capreolus et son temps 1380-1444 Colloque de Rodez* (special number, #1 of *Mémoire dominicaine*, Paris, 1997: Cerf, pp. 77-86).

<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, our *conversations* were not as frequent as I would have wished. Sometimes, these were interrupted because Fr. Dewan's state of health or due to both his and my own, academic commitments.

<sup>5</sup> L. Dewan, O.P., *Comunication via e-mail*. January 9, 2008.



To him I express my total gratitude for his patient and wise attention to my concerns and questions throughout all these years. I will never be able to pay this intellectual debt: that of an enriching metaphysical learning beside a *direct disciple of Saint Thomas Aquinas*.<sup>6</sup>

### “Conversations with Fr. Dewan” at February 2015

*Dear reader,*

*By the time that this book has become a physical reality and reaches your hands, Fr. Dewan has already passed away.*

*I would simply like to say we make take much comfort in knowing that his work predicts springtime for Thomism. Those of us who are fortunate enough to regard ourselves as Fr. Dewan’s disciples have a demanding and wonderful challenge before us: we must continue his fascinating manner to ‘doing Metaphysics’ and also imitate his genuinely Thomistic attitude. Certainly, like his Master, he never sought to be famous or to be quoted or appear in the media. As he, himself wrote to me once: “Dear Liliana, I am quite willing to write a brief forward for the book... The reason I have not referred to the letter before is simply that I was a little overwhelmed that you have actually undertaken a book about my work. I really am very grateful.”*

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<sup>6</sup> I dare say this on the basis of the following Fr. Dewan’s answer. In March 2008, I asked him: “I would need to know if you are the only or the first author who has taken this approach regarding the relationship between form and being.” Fr. Dewan said: “*I worked it out myself from texts of St. Thomas, and someone else could well have done so independently.*” [Italics mine].

<sup>7</sup> L.Dewan, O.P., *Communication via e-mail*. August 14, 2008. (In a previous email I had asked him if he could write the foreward to “*Tras las huellas del sentido: Sabiduría y felicidad en Lawrence Dewan*”).

## 1. About the Kinship between Form and Being



1. **Liliana Irizar:** I have the impression that your proposal involves, at least, two basic statements. The first and fundamental statement is the relevant role form plays in constituting created being in St. Thomas's metaphysics. I cannot understand being properly if I do not give form the metaphysical importance that it has.

As I have understood it, your point is that *it would be folly for us*<sup>8</sup> to emphasize *esse* in such a way that form is neglected. On the contrary, both being and form are crucial realities of which the second throws light on the first and makes this intelligible for human intellect. In other words, "form is the visibility of *esse*"<sup>9</sup>. ("*Aristotle as a source...*"). [Cf. also *ST* 1-2.85.4 (ed. Ottawa 1179a)]

Precisely for this reason, you defend the view that the connection between Aristotle and St. Thomas concerning the doctrine of the nature of created being is closer than that which has been generally thought

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<sup>8</sup> I should mention that I had originally used the following words: "As I have understood it, your point is that *we are not allowed* to emphasize *esse*...", but Fr. Dewan after reviewing the text in December 2014 suggested this expression: "*it would be folly for us* to emphasize *esse*..."

<sup>9</sup> DEWAN, Lawrence, O.P. Aristotle as a Source for St. Thomas's Doctrine of *esse*. Recovery from the web page of Maritain Center: Thomistic Institute <http://www.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/ti00/schedule.htm>.

(In my opinion it is clear, especially in “*Aristotle as a source...*” and “*Saint Thomas and Form as Something divine...*”).

Comment: First of all, I would like to tell you that your approach on Saint Thomas’s *esse* doctrine convinces me more than others I have studied so far.

My question is: Do you not think that *traditional* Thomism would say that your approach “forgets” Thomas’s strong insistence on affirming *esse* (which is act, and in this way Aquinas clearly gives more relevance to *esse* than *essentia*)?

**Lawrence Dewan:** I would say that I **do** give full credit to the *actus essendi*. In writing the *Form as Something Divine* paper I happened upon the text which seems to me to clear up any ambiguity. The difficulty I had seen was that, **on the one hand** there is a great insistence on form as the principle of being (which makes it seem *greater* than *esse*, because, as is said in *In De caelo* 1.6 (62 [5]):

[Averroes] was deceived in this respect, that **he thought the power to be [virtutem essendi] to pertain only to passive potency, which is the potency of matter; whereas it rather pertains to the potency of form [potentia formae]: because each thing is through its form.** Hence, so much and for so long [*tantum et tamdiu*] each thing has of being [*habet ... de esse*], viz. just so much as is *THE POWER OF ITS FORM* [*quanta est virtus formae eius*]. And thus, not only in celestial bodies but also in separate substances there is the power to be always [*virtutem essendi semper*].

**On the other hand**, I know that *esse* is the actuality of all acts, even of the forms themselves. [*ST* 1.4.1.*ad* 3.] Thus, the forms of created things are *potential* relative to *esse* [*ST* 1.3.4] in a way which makes them *subservient*.

In order to understand this “power of the form,” I should note two texts, as follows; first *ST* 2-2.23.2.*ad* 3:

Ad tertium dicendum quod caritas operatur formaliter. ***Efficacia autem formae est secundum virtutem AGENTIS qui inducit formam.*** Et ideo quod caritas non est vanitas, sed facit effectum infinitum dum coniungit animam deo iustificando ipsam, hoc demonstrat infinitatem virtutis divinae, quae est caritatis auctor.

[... Charity operates formally. Now, the ***efficacy of form is in function of the power of the AGENT which introduces the form*** [into the thing].

And therefore the fact that charity is not emptiness, but rather brings about an infinite effect, inasmuch as it conjoins the soul to God by giving it righteousness, demonstrates the infinity of the *divine* power, which is the *author* of charity.]

This I take in conjunction with the doctrine of *DP 7.2.ad 10*. It will be remembered that the objector holds there that God cannot be *ipsum esse* because “*esse*” is essentially an *effect*: every being *through its essence* has *esse*.

Thomas’s reply shows why *esse*, in creatures, has to such a degree the role of an *effect*. He says that the order of ends corresponds to the order of agents, in such fashion that to the first agent corresponds the ultimate end, and the other ends are proportionate to the other agents. *Esse*, which is the proper effect and the end corresponding to the operation of the *first* agent must, then, have the role of *ultimate end*. But the end, though first in intention, it is last in the operation, and is *the effect of the other causes*. Therefore, *esse* was created, which is the proper effect corresponding to the first agent and is *caused* by the other principles, though the first principle, i.e. God, is the first cause of *esse*.<sup>10</sup> Thus, Thomas provides us with a vision of the essence and of the form of the thing as *causal* relative to the *esse* of the thing. These should be considered as ***instruments*** of the first principle, i.e. God himself.<sup>11</sup> The created *esse* has the role of *final* cause.

All of this picture, with God as the efficient cause giving power to the form, explains why, though the potency of form is a *receptive* potency [*ST 1.104.4.ad 2*], it can be active. I see this same sort of thinking in the explanation of how the agent intellect, though the most noble of powers, can flow from the essence of the soul. [*ST 1.79.4.ad 5*]

I should recall, in this present context, the argument of Thomas that God must be the cause of the forms by which things are distinguished from each other. God is the cause of being, *esse*. And *esse* is through form and not

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<sup>10</sup> *De Potentia* 7.2.ad 10.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. also St. Thomas, *De veritate* 27.1.ad 3 (ed. Leonine, t. 22\3, lines 182-186):

... God causes in us natural *esse* by creation, without the mediation of any efficient cause, but nevertheless through the mediation of a formal cause: because natural form is the principle of natural *esse*...

through matter. Hence, God must be the cause of form. [SCG 2.43.8 (ed. Pera, #1200)]:

Adhuc. Sicut esse est primum in effectibus, ita respondet primae causae ut proprius effectus. Esse autem est per formam, et non per materiam. Prima igitur causalitas formarum maxime est primae causae attribuenda.

[Just as *esse* is first among effects, so also it corresponds to the first cause as its proper effect. But *esse* is through form and not through matter. Therefore, the first causality of forms is most of all to be attributed to the first cause.]

*Esse* follows upon form, but this presupposes divine agency: *ST* 1.104.1.*ad* 1: “... esse per se consequitur formam creaturae, supposito tamen influxu Dei, sicut lumen sequitur diaphanum aeris, supposito influxu solis.”

Again, with regard to the question as to **whether I am downgrading the esse**, the act of being: rather, it should be clear from the paper on “The Distinction between Form and Esse in Caused Things” that the very distinction is being understood by contrast between the *esse* as **most noble** and the form of the effect as **less noble**.

I say:

This is why we must distinguish between the *form* of the lower thing and the *esse* of the lower thing. The *esse*, i.e. the being actually, of the caused (or lower) thing pertains to the caused thing’s participating in the perfection *proper to the nature of the higher thing*, the nature of the *efficient cause as such*. The form of the lower thing, on the other hand, pertains to the *nature proper to the lower thing*.<sup>12</sup> The two natures being different, so also the *esse* and the form of the caused thing must be different from each other, the *esse* being the *actuality* even of the form.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Thus, if we envisage a *hierarchy* of efficient causes, each one has a composition of *form* and *esse*, precisely inasmuch as it has above it a higher cause. In demonstrating that one *cannot go to infinity* in ascending an efficient causal hierarchy, one demonstrates that there must exist a cause which is first by nature, and so a thing in which form and *esse* are identical. And this is God. - This is, of course, the argument of the “second way” in *ST* 1.2.3.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. DEWAN, Lawrence, O.P. *Form and Being. Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics*. Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, Vol. 45, p. 201.

**2. L.I.:** Perhaps some Thomist philosophers would say that “it sounds like Platonism.” Even though I don’t think so, this could be a possible objection (after reading *Aristotle as a source*... I understand the last objection is not a problem for you because, there, you just affirm a certain type of relationship between Saint Thomas and Plato).

**L.D.:** **I do not think it really sounds like Platonism.** It is after all the doctrine that form is the principle of being. This is the doctrine of Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 7.17 [Thomas, *In Metaph.* 7.17: 1678-80] and in book 8. If you like, it can be related to Plato, just as Aristotle, in *Metaphysics* 8, does so relate it (see Thomas, *In Metaph.* 8.3 [1712-14]).

**3. L.I.:** Another important statement is that to rightly understand St. Thomas’ participation doctrine and the nature of created being, it is necessary to understand the relationship between God and created being. And this should be understood by taking into account both the creaturely act of being and the role form plays in that relationship.

As I see this, you propose that the kinship between God and creatures is explained and understood better from form and creation as participation by *likeness* of the divine being (e.g., *De Verit.*, q. 22, a.2, ad.2 and *C.G.*, II, 53). According to this, form (more than *esse*) is, on the one hand, something that looks like God (because it is the finite way to have being and so to be like God in being). On the other hand, form establishes the infinite difference between God and creature, because creatures have a particular nature or form, different from the nature of being; while in God, form and being are identical.

Comment: Thus, I think that your proposal is of decisive importance to enlighten the *Ipsum esse* doctrine. Question: Do you consider I have rightly understood the point that you make?

**L.D.:** **I do not like the expression: “more than *esse*” in the above.** While “form” and “likeness” go together, as we see in *ST* 1.4.3, still the *likeness* in that same text is explained in terms of “sicut *ipsum esse* est commune omnibus.” We must not forget that *esse* is “maxime *formale* omnium” [*ST* 1.7.1]. – We need both form and *esse*.

In this line you might read my paper which is chapter 3 in the *Form and Being* book, on the seed of metaphysics, especially at the end. I see our knowledge of *esse* as needing consideration of the sort of form which is other than *esse*, but it is because our intellect has an order to a lower mode of being than e.g. the divine intellect has [cf. *ST* 1.12.4].

A valuable text concerning the finite modes of *esse* in creatures is *De substantiis separatis* c. 8 [para. 88]:

Sed considerandum est, quod ea quae a primo ente esse participant, non participant esse secundum universalem modum essendi, secundum quod est in primo principio, sed particulariter ***secundum quemdam determinatum essendi modum*** qui convenit vel huic generi vel huic speciei. Unaqueque autem res adaptatur ad unum determinatum modum essendi ***secundum modum suae substantiae***. Modus autem uniuscuiusque substantiae compositae ex materia et forma, est ***secundum formam***, per quam pertinet ad determinatam speciem. Sic igitur res composita ex materia et forma, ***per suam formam*** fit participativa ipsius esse a Deo secundum quemdam proprium modum.

[But it is to be considered that those things that participate being from the first being do not participate being in the universal mode of being, the way it is in the first principle, but particularly, **in some determinate mode or measure of being** which befits this genus or this species. Now, each thing is adapted to one determinate mode of being **in accordance with the mode of its own substance**. And the mode of each substance composed out of matter and form is **according to the form**, through which it pertains to a determinate species. Thus, therefore, a thing composed out of matter and form **through its form** is rendered participative of being itself by God according to some proper mode.]

This works in well with *ST* 1.14.6 (Ottawa ed. 97b6-31): all that has the character of *perfection* within the creature, and not just its *esse* relates to the divine *esse*:

Supra enim ostensum est quod quidquid **perfectionis** est in quacumque creatura, totum praeexistit et continetur in Deo secundum modum excellentem. Non solum autem id in quo creaturae communicant, scilicet ipsum esse, ad perfectionem pertinet; sed etiam ea per quae creaturae ad invicem distinguuntur, sicut

vivere, et intelligere, et huiusmodi, quibus viventia a non viventibus, et intelligentia a non intelligentibus distinguuntur.

**Et omnis forma, per quam quaelibet res in propria specie constituitur, perfectio quaedam est.** Et sic omnia in Deo praeexistunt, non solum quantum ad id quod commune est omnibus, sed etiam quantum ad ea secundum quae res distinguuntur.

[For it was shown above that whatever of **perfection** there is in any creature, the whole of it preexists and is contained in God in the mode of excellence. Now, it is not only that which creatures have in common, viz. being, that pertains to perfection, but also those through which creatures are distinguished from each other, such as to live, and to understand and the like, by which living things are distinguished from non-living things and intelligent things from non-intelligent ones. **And every form, through which every thing whatsoever is constituted in its own species, is some perfection.** And thus all preexist in God, not merely as regards what is common to all, but also as regards those items according to which things are distinguished].

Concerning the above, it shows that when Thomas calls *esse* the perfection **of perfections**, he means every word he uses. [DP 7.2.ad 9: *perfectio omnium perfectionum*]

Also, I would say that God is both his being and his form (and they are identical). In the *Summa contra gentiles* we read:

... those things which in creatures are divided are unqualifiedly one in God: thus, for example, in the creature essence and being [*esse*] are other; and in some [creatures] that which subsists in its own essence is also other than its essence or nature: for this man is neither his own humanity nor his being [*esse*]; but God is his essence and his being.

And though these in God are one in the truest way, nevertheless in God there is WHATEVER PERTAINS TO THE INTELLIGIBLE ROLE [*ratio*] of the subsisting thing, or of the essence, or of the being [*esse*]; for it belongs to him not to be in another, inasmuch as he is subsisting; to be a what [*esse quid*], inasmuch as he is essence; and being in act [*esse in actu*], by reason of being itself [*ipsius esse*].<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> SCG 4.11 (ed. Pera #3472-3473).



**4. L.I.:** When you say that “The likeness of creatures to God is a case of having in common the *SAME FORM*, but not according to the same *ratio*”<sup>15</sup>, do you mean community as to *natura essendi*?

**L.D.:** Yes, this is the doctrine of *Summa theologiae* 1.4.3: all likeness is through having form in common. The “form” Thomas speaks of in that article as common to God and creatures is: “sicut *ipsum esse* est commune omnibus.” Thomas is treating *esse* as *formal*: it is “maxime formale omnium” (1.7.1); it is the actuality of all things, even of the very forms, and is formal with respect to everything in the thing, including the particular forms. (1.4.1.*ad* 3). – The community is not a univocal one, but analogical, i.e. according to priority and posteriority. In *Sent.* 2.1.1.1, which I quote near the beginning of the “Being as a Nature” paper, Thomas called the act of being “*natura entitatis*.”

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<sup>15</sup> See DEWAN, Lawrence, O.P. Thomas Aquinas and Being as a Nature. *Acta Philosophica* 12 (2003).

## 2. Understanding and Misunderstanding Form



**5. L.I.:** Why is it important to stress the role of form? In other words, which consequences for metaphysics and philosophy can be derived from affirming the role of form in the way you do so?

**L.D.:** It occurs to me that one might start with the text (already quoted) from *SCG* 4 on the three targets of metaphysical attention.

*SCG* 4.11 (ed. Pera #3472-3473) is a passage from St. Thomas which shows the ineluctable variety of intelligible roles of the *three* items in the metaphysical analysis:

... it has been shown in the First Book (ch. 31) that those things which in creatures are divided are unqualifiedly one in God: thus, for example, in the creature ESSENCE and BEING [*esse*] are other; and in some [creatures] THAT WHICH SUBSISTS in its own essence is also other than its essence or nature: for **this man** is neither his own **humanity** nor his **being** [*esse*]; but God is his essence and his being.

And though these in God are one in the truest way, nevertheless in God there is whatever pertains to the intelligible role [*ratio*] of [1] the subsisting thing, or of [2] the essence, or of [3] the being [*esse*]; for it belongs to him not to be in another, inasmuch as he is subsisting; to be a what [*esse quid*], inasmuch as he is essence; and being in act [*esse in actu*], by reason of being itself [*ipsius esse*].



We need to study all three. The task is to understand the proper roles of all three. Then one can ask whether this person or that person obscured something.

I would say that in general they [Gilson and Owens, in particular] erred by having a too Avicennian doctrine of *esse*. One of my main criticisms of Gilson concerns his presenting God as “beyond essence” whereas for St. Thomas essence is most truly essence in God. Fr. Owens, with his view of the accidentality of *esse*, certainly was not adequately honoring Thomas’s doctrine of “*esse per se consequitur ad formam*.”<sup>16</sup>

I would also say that their approach leads to a misunderstanding of the relation of Thomas to Aristotle, and a failure to appreciate Thomas’s own reading of Aristotle. This has some connection with the idea of creation, and the doctrine of Christian philosophy.

My own lines of thinking have developed from the need to take seriously “*esse per se consequitur ad formam*” as used in the argument for immortality of the human soul.

It has also been a product of taking Thomas’s Aristotelian *Commentaries* seriously, and taking seriously Thomas’s attributing a doctrine of creation to the philosophers.

All the business of my pushing form really relates to taking “the *per se* connection” between form and *esse* seriously. Thus, I speak of a “kinship” between form and *esse*.

**You ask what is the importance of “the role of form.”** I ask what is the role of *each* of the items in the ontological analysis. Unless the role of each is understood, one does not understand things from the viewpoint of being.

In the particular case of form, I say, for instance, that the doctrine that “being follows upon form because of what form is” is important for the proof of the immortality of the soul, **but prior to that**, it is the central doctrine of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*’ “central books,” 7 and 8: form is the cause of being as

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. DEWAN, Lawrence, O.P. Being *per se*, Being *per accidens*, and St. Thomas’ *Metaphysics. Science et Esprit* 30 (1978): 169-184. Cf. Also chapter 9 in my book, *Form and Being*: “St. Thomas, Metaphysical Procedure, and the Formal Cause.”

being; Aristotle teaches, and Thomas agrees, that metaphysics demonstrates primarily by the formal cause. [Chapter 8 in *Form and Being* book is on this.]

I might add, here, that one's metaphysical vision would be imperfect if one could not appreciate the use of the notion of form in a text such as *ST* 1-2.85.6, as to whether death is natural. That is why, in my Marquette Aquinas lecture, I used that as a "beacon text," taking us beyond mere mathematical form. I would say that many of those who do not appreciate the role of form in existential metaphysics suffer from a merely mathematical conception of form. And what do they make of *ST* 1.80.1, where Thomas teaches that "some inclination follows upon every form": do they think that this link between form and inclination is a mere arbitrary juxtaposition, a *per accidens* association?

**6. L.I.:** Your conception of substantial form is more existential because it considers the principle of the act of being under divine efficacy. With this vision of form, we understand that form can cause being and, at the same time, have the role of active potency related to *esse* (act). Question: Do you think Thomism's approach to form offers a more-or-less rationalistic view of form (form as a concept)? In other words, if form is not understood in an existential way, could we run the risk of interpreting form in a rationalistic<sup>17</sup> manner?

**L.D.:** In the above nos. 1 and 3 we were speaking of the act of being but viewed as something formal in things. Nevertheless, we have to distinguish within the thing between that act of being and the *particular* form of the thing; thus, as Thomas says, in every material thing we find *three* items: matter, form, and *ipsum esse*. [cf. *Quaestiones de anima*, 6:]

In substantiis enim ex materia et forma compositis **tria** invenimus, scilicet **materiam** et **formam** et **ipsum esse**. Cuius quidem principium est forma; nam materia ex hoc quod recipit formam, participat esse. Sic igitur esse consequitur ipsam formam. Nec tamen forma est suum esse, cum sit eius principium.

[... In substances composed out of matter and form we find three [items], viz. matter, and form, and, [as a] third, *esse*, whose principle is form. For matter, by

<sup>17</sup> Lawrence Dewan's addition in December 2014: "I could add here that what you mean by "rationalistic" is what I was getting at above with the word "mathematical."

the fact that it receives form, participates in *esse*. Thus, therefore, *esse* follows upon form itself, nor nevertheless is form its own *esse*, since it is its principle (*cum sit eius principium*).]<sup>18</sup>

On the one hand the form is **potential** relative to the *esse* (cf. *ST* 1.3.4); on the other hand, the form is the **cause** of the *esse*. These two points had always seemed to me somewhat at odds with each other, until I noticed the text of *ST* 2-2.23.2.*ad* 3, that the form gets its power from the agent which instills it (and in this case of causing form and *esse*, the cause is God).

What about “more existential” presentation? – Again, I would say that our first task is to understand the role of the act of being [*actus essendi*] in the presentation of the finite being. Why is there a distinction, a real distinction, between the form and the act of being in caused substances? Certainly, to bring out the point that form is the cause of *esse*, the formal cause of *esse*, brings out the “existential” character of form itself. When I want to focus on the “existential” role of form, I regularly refer to *ST* 1-2.85.6, on whether death is natural; remember the teaching:

... corruptions and defects of things are natural, not according to the inclination of form, which is *the principle of being and perfection*, but according to the inclination of matter....

And he continues:

... And though *every form intends perpetual being as much as it can*, nevertheless no form of a corruptible thing can achieve its perpetuity, other than the rational soul, by the fact that it is not altogether subject to corporeal matter as are the other forms.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> I translate “*cum*” here as “since” rather than “though”, because a few lines below it twice clearly means “since”.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas, *ST* 1-2.85.6:

... corruptiones et defectus rerum sunt naturales, *non quidem secundum inclinationem formae, quae est principium essendi et perfectionis*; sed secundum inclinationem materiae...

Et quamvis *omnis forma intendat perpetuum esse quantum potest*, nulla tamen forma rei corruptibilis potest assequi perpetuitatem sui, praeter animam rationalem, eo quod ipsa non est subiecta omnino materiae corporali, sicut aliae formae.

Thomas had already taught, in *ST* 1.80.1, that “some inclination follows upon every form whatsoever” [... *quamlibet formam sequitur aliqua inclinatio...*]. He also taught, in *ST* 1.42.1 ad 1, that the two *effects of form* are being [*esse*] and operation [*operatio*].

Nevertheless, one must be careful of the whole idea of “existentiality” of the doctrine. It *can* mean the very dissociation between form or essence and existence that I am criticizing. I see both Gilson and Owens as having succumbed to the fault that Thomas accuses Avicenna of having committed, viz. placing the act of being in an accidental connection with the essence. Cf. Thomas, *In Metaph.* 4. 2 (558):

... [Avicenna] seems not to have spoken rightly [concerning being]. For the *esse* of the thing, though it is other than [the thing’s] essence, nevertheless is not to be understood as something added on after the manner of an accident; rather, it is in the role of something constituted by the essential principles [*quasi constituitur per principia essentiae*].

**7. L.I.:** Is there a way to summarize why Gilson and Owens fell into the same error as Avicenna?

**L.D.:** I will suggest at least one possible reason. First of all, I think that it involves confusion between the “*esse*” which expresses the “*actus essendi*” and the “*esse*” which signifies the truth of propositions. We see this confusion discussed in *ST* 1.3.4.ad 2; the objector has argued against the identity of essence and *esse* in God, on the grounds that we know that God is or exists, but we do not know what God is. Thomas’ reply is that in one use of the word “*esse*” it signifies the act of being; in another, it signifies the truth of propositions expressed by the soul in conjoining the subject to the predicate. Thomas says that we do not know the *actus essendi* of God, just as neither do we know his essence: thus, we do not know the *esse* of God. It is only in the truth meaning that we know the *esse* of God: we know that the proposition we form concerning God, when we say: “God is,” is true, and this we know from his effects.

Now, this “is”, the “is” of truth, is important, as it expresses our testimony *about extra-mental reality*. This is so whether we are speaking of there being a dog in front of me or there being blindness in some person’s eye. Blindness,

of course, has no “act of being,” yet we say that it *exists*, it is *really to be found*, in this or that person. [Cf. my paper: “Which *esse* Gives the Answer to the Question: ‘is it?’ for St. Thomas,” *Doctor Communis*, N.S. 3 (2002), pp. 80-97.]

In a similar way, we can conclude that the infinite act of being exists, though we cannot conceive of that infinite act of being.

I say all this as a lead up to the fact that my teachers had had to battle against various forms of idealism: Cartesian, Kantian, etc. One of the glories of Thomism, as we learnt it, was its epistemological realism. Thus, the “existence” of things, “outside the mind,” was very important.

I conjecture that this battle with idealism encouraged a sort of focus on “existence” that led to confusion of the two meanings of “*esse*.”

I see this situation in quite another setting with such people as Anthony Kenny and Norman Kretzmann; the latter says that existence is “too thin” a predicate to be *what* anything is; thus, one cannot say that it is the essence of God. To such people, “existence” is what we say about anything that exists, even blindness. (Cf. My paper: “St. Thomas, Norman Kretzmann, and Divine Freedom in Creating”, *Nova et vetera* [English language ed.], Vol. 4, No. 3 (2006): pp. 495-514, at pp. 510-511.)

What I do to focus on St. Thomas’s doctrine of the act of being, *actus essendi*, is to consider *the terminus of generation*. Thus, *esse* is the actuality of the *nature*. This is a very different “existence” than the “existence” of blindness.<sup>20</sup>

I reproduce here a paragraph from my paper on “Kenny on Being”:

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. *SCG* 1.26.6 (Pera #242): Item. Generatio per se loquendo est via in esse, et corruptio via in non esse: non enim generationis terminus est forma et corruptionis privatio, nisi quia forma facit esse et privatio non esse; dato enim quod aliqua forma non faceret esse, non diceretur generari quod talem formam acciperet.

Si igitur deus sit omnium rerum esse formale, sequetur quod sit terminus generationis. Quod est falsum: cum ipse sit aeternus, ut supra ostensum Est. [Generation, speaking properly, is the approach to being, and corruption the approach to not being; for form is not the terminus of generation and privation that of corruption, save because form brings about being and privation not being; for, given that some form did not bring about being, that which received such a form would not be said to be “generated.” Therefore, if God were the formal being of all things, it would follow that he is the terminus of generation. Which is false, since he is eternal, as was shown above.]

He [Kenny] does not see form as the cause of *esse simpliciter*, but only of *esse quid*, relative to the matter. [cf. note 11, p. 31; the Latin is Kenny's] Already from the point of view of vocabulary this view of Kenny's is alarming. Thus, in the early treatise *De principiis naturae*, c. 1, Thomas explains:

Be it known that something can be though it is not, whereas something else is. That which can be is said to "be in potency"; that which already is, is said to "be in act". But being [*esse*] is twofold: viz. *the essential or substantial being of the thing*, as for example: *being a man*; and this is "being" in the unqualified sense [*esse simpliciter*]. The other is accidental being, for example, that the man is white; and this is "being something".<sup>21</sup>

For Thomas, "being a what" and "being unqualifiedly" go together: i.e. *esse quid* is *esse simpliciter*. I would say Kenny fails to grasp the existential importance of generation and hylomorphism; a thing that is corrupted ceases to *be*. Yes, matter is "incorruptible", but only in the way that matter "is" at all.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *De principiis naturae*, c. 1:

Nota quod quoddam potest esse licet non sit, quoddam vero est. Illud quod potest esse dicitur esse potentia; illud quod iam est, dicitur esse actu. Sed duplex est esse: scilicet ***esse essenziale rei, sive substantiale ut hominem esse, et hoc est esse simpliciter***. Est autem aliud esse accidentale, ut hominem esse album, et hoc est esse aliquid.

And we see this in many texts throughout Thomas's career. Cf. *ST* 1.5.1.ad 1:

... cum ens dicat aliquid proprie esse in actu; actus autem proprie ordinem habeat ad potentiam; secundum hoc simpliciter aliquid dicitur ens, secundum quod primo discernitur ab eo quod est in potentia tantum. Hoc autem est esse substantiale rei uniuscuiusque; unde per suum esse substantiale dicitur unumquodque ***ens simpliciter***.

And *ST* 1.76.4:

... ***forma substantialis*** in hoc a forma accidentali differt quia forma accidentalis non dat esse simpliciter, sed esse tale, sicut calor facit suum subiectum non simpliciter esse, sed esse calidum. ... ***Forma autem substantialis dat esse simpliciter***, et ideo per eius adventum dicitur aliquid simpliciter generari, et per eius recessum simpliciter corrumpi.

<sup>22</sup> Indeed, while Thomas appeals to the incorruptibility of matter when arguing that God will not annihilate things (cf. *ST* 1.104.4), it is also part of that picture that matter can only be incorruptible as participating in actuality through a form: cf. *ST* 1.46.1.obj. 1 (if you have matter, you must have form and a world), and *DP* 5.7.in toto and ad 11.



The question for me is what Kenny means by “*esse simpliciter*”, such that he distinguishes it from “*esse quid*”? In the main text which his note 11 complements, Kenny writes:

When Aquinas says that form gives *esse* to matter, all that he can mean is that form makes matter to be the kind of thing it is; he cannot mean that it brings matter into existence. When a substantial change takes place, no new matter enters the world, but matter that already existed under one form begins to exist under another. [p. 31]

What this suggests to me is that Kenny’s word “existence” really refers to the answer to the question: “does it exist?” rather than to the act of being [*actus essendi*].<sup>23</sup>

Thomas’s word “*esse*”, though it does the work of signifying the answer to the question: “does it exist?” (thus signifying the truth of propositions), also signifies the thing’s own act which is “to be”, as meaning the perfection which terminates a thing’s generation.<sup>24</sup> It is what characterizes, we may also say, the effect of an efficient cause, which, in giving form to matter, gives the thing its peculiar existence.<sup>25</sup>

[End of excerpt]

**The short answer to your question, Liliana, is that I think the doctrine of existence of some Thomists has been infected by the need to fight for the extramental existence of things against idealists. This has led to a confusion between the two meanings of “*esse*” given in *ST* 1.3.4.ad 2.**

**8. L.I.:** I think that to stress only the primacy of *esse* can lead to an abstract and logicist view of form (this is in contrast with some present-day philoso-

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *ST* 1.3.4.ad 2. I notice in the above-mentioned review by Jörgen Vijgen that at p. 217 he criticizes Knasas for insufficiently distinguishing “between *esse* as actual existence and *esse* as the intrinsic act of being (*actus essendi*).” Without making any judgment here about Knasas, I would insist that the word “existence” is ambiguous, and must be used at times not only for the answer to the question “does it exist?” but also for the intrinsic act of being. My point is that K uses the word “existence” exclusively for the answer to the question “does it exist?”

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Sent.* 1.33.1.1.ad 1on meanings of “*esse*”. For the connection of the act of the essence with terminus of generation, cf. e.g. *SCG* 2.52 (para. 7; ed. Pera, #1279) and 1.26 (para. 6; ed. Pera. #242).

<sup>25</sup> DEWAN, Lawrence, O.P. “On Anthony Kenny’s Aquinas on Being,” *Nova et Vetera* [English Language edition] 3 (2005), pp. 335-400, at pp. 339-341.

phers, who say that to enhance form is a logicist approach to Saint Thomas' metaphysics).

**L.D.:** Yes, real “existentiality” of the form is had by stressing its kinship, its *per se* connection, with *esse*.

**9. L.I.:** When you say that to bring out form involves viewing things from the point of view of being, do you mean that when we enhance form we enhance the real character of the kinship between form and being, so by understanding the role of form we understand being in its entire significance? In other words, we need to understand the role of these targets of metaphysical attention if we want to understand things as beings. I am asking this because one could think that to remark that the role of form would lead us to see things *from the point of view of form*. **(I am sure this is wrong but I would like to know what you mean)**.

**L.D.:** All this discussion reminds me of the question: are we seeing the glass with the water in it as “half full” or “half empty”? - It is true that the substantial forms of creatures are other than their act of being. The substantial form is *potential* relative to the act of being. However, its mode of potency to *esse* is not the same sort of thing as matter's mode of potency towards form and *esse*.

In fact, in Thomas's *In De caelo* 1.6 [dated by Weisheipl as “Naples 1272-1273”] we have this:

... [Averroes] manifestly has spoken against Aristotle who below, in this very book, locates in perpetual things a power to be always [*virtus ad hoc quod sint semper*]. But [Averroes] was deceived in this respect, that he thought the power to be [*virtutem essendi*] to pertain only to passive potency, which is the potency of matter; whereas it rather pertains to the potency of form [*potentia formae*]: **BECAUSE EACH THING IS THROUGH ITS FORM**. Hence, so much and for so long [*tantum et tamdiu*] each thing has of being [*habet ... de esse*], viz. just so much as is THE POWER OF ITS FORM [*quanta est virtus formae eius*]. And thus, not only in celestial bodies but also in separate substances there is the power to be always [*virtutem essendi semper*]. [*In De caelo* 1.6 (62 [5])]

This is a doctrine regularly featured by Thomas, and especially in proving the incorruptibility of pure subsisting forms such as the angels and the human soul: cf. especially *ST* 1.50.5, but also in many places. Thus, proving that God the creator must be the first cause of the *forms* of things, Thomas argues that God is the cause of *esse*, and ***esse is through form!*** [*SCG* 2.43 (#1200)]; cf. also *DP* 7.2.*ad* 10.

How can one understand the being (*esse*) of things if one does not understand its principle, which is form? [“... All *esse* is *considered* through form...!”] *ST* 1-2.85.4: Omne enim esse et bonum *consideratur* per aliquam formam, secundum quam sumitur species.

Perhaps this text from *De substantiis separatis* c. 8 will help:

Sed considerandum est, quod ea quae a primo ente esse participant, non participant esse secundum universalem modum essendi, secundum quod est in primo principio, sed particulariter secundum quemdam determinatum essendi modum qui convenit vel huic generi vel huic speciei. Unaquaeque autem res adaptatur ad unum determinatum modum essendi secundum modum suae substantiae. ***Modus*** autem uniuscuiusque substantiae compositae ex materia et forma, ***est secundum formam***, per quam pertinet ad determinatam speciem. Sic igitur res composita ex materia et forma, per suam formam fit participativa ipsius esse a Deo secundum quemdam proprium modum.

Invenitur igitur in substantia composita ex materia et forma ***duplex ordo***: unus quidem ipsius materiae ad formam; alius autem ipsius rei iam compositae ad esse participatum. Non enim est ***esse*** rei neque forma eius neque materia ipsius, sed ***aliquid adveniens rei PER formam***.

Notice this, the very presentation of esse as “something coming to the thing ***through the form***.” This, of course, is St. Thomas’s constant doctrine, and the one I have been insisting on. If one starts with the *De ente et essentia*, the very word “*essentia*” is explained as relating to the fact that “in it and through it the being has being, [Sed “*essentia*” dicitur secundum quod ***per*** eam et in ea ens habet esse].

Notice this introductory passage in the *De ente et essentia* which speaks of the hierarchy of being to be discussed. Thomas explains:

... But because “*ens*” is said absolutely and primarily of substances, and posteriorly and in a somewhat qualified sense of accidents, thus it is that *essentia* also properly and truly is in substances, but in accidents it is in a certain measure and in a qualified sense. But of substances, some are simple and some are composite, and in both there is *essentia*; but in the simple in a truer and more noble degree [*ueriori et nobiliori modo*], inasmuch as they also have more noble *esse*; for they are the cause of those which are composite, at least [this is true of] the first simple substance which is God.<sup>26</sup>

This picture of “truer and more noble” essence in separate substance, and “more noble *esse*” as related to causal hierarchy, means that *the nature of essence and form* is found more truly the *higher* one goes in reality: far from holding that God is “beyond essence” (as Gilson wanted Thomas to say), essence is *most truly essence* in God, where essence is identical with *esse*!

This is why I insist on the text in *SCG* 4.11:

... those things which in creatures are divided are unqualifiedly one in God: thus, for example, in the creature essence and being [*esse*] are other; and in some [creatures] that which subsists in its own essence is also other than its essence or nature: for this man is neither his own humanity nor his being [*esse*]; but God is his essence and his being.

And though these in God are one in the truest way, nevertheless in God there is WHATEVER PERTAINS TO THE INTELLIGIBLE ROLE [*ratio*] of the subsisting thing, or of *the essence*, or of the being [*esse*]; for it belongs to him not to be in another, inasmuch as he is subsisting; to be a what [*esse quid*], inasmuch as he is essence; and being in act [*esse in actu*], by reason of being itself [*ipsius esse*].<sup>27</sup>

I think we should underline that forms and essences are imitations of the divine essence.

*DV* 2.1:

... quaelibet res imitatur aliquo modo deum, sed imperfecte; unde et diversae res diversimode deum *imitantur*, et secundum diversas *formas* representant unam simplicem dei formam, quia in illa forma perfecte unitur quidquid *perfectionis* distinctim et multipliciter in creaturis invenitur...

<sup>26</sup> *De ente et essentia* [henceforth “*EE*”] c. 1 (ed. Leonine, lines 53-63).

<sup>27</sup> *SCG* 4.11 (ed. Pera #3472-3473).

Cf. also *ST* 1.14.6:

Non solum *autem id in quo creaturae communicant*, scilicet ipsum esse, ad perfectionem pertinet; *sed etiam ea per quae creaturae ad invicem distinguuntur, sicut vivere, et intelligere, et huiusmodi, quibus viventia a non viventibus, et intelligentia a non intelligentibus distinguuntur*. Et omnis forma, per quam quaelibet res in propria specie constituitur, perfectio quaedam est.

I think that the great thing is to avoid the accidentality of *esse* that Thomas criticized in Avicenna. Cf. *In Metaph.* 4.2 (558):

Sed in primo quidem non videtur [Avicenna] dixisse recte. *Esse* enim rei quamvis sit aliud ab eius essentia, *non tamen est intelligendum quod sit aliquod superadditum ad modum accidentis*, sed quasi constituitur *per principia essentiae*. Et ideo hoc nomen ens quod imponitur ab ipso esse, significat idem cum nomine quod imponitur ab ipsa essentia.

We should ask ourselves *what is the nature of form as such*, that it is able to fulfil the role of *completing the proper subject of the act of being*. Cf. *SCG* 2.54 [ed. Pera #1291]:

Deinde quia ad ipsam etiam formam comparatur ipsum esse ut actus. *Per hoc* enim in compositis ex materia et forma *dicitur forma esse principium essendi*, quia est *complementum substantiae, cuius actus est ipsum esse*: sicut diaphanum est aeri principium lucendi quia facit eum proprium subiectum luminis.

Cf. also *ST* 1.104.1.obj. 1 and *ad* 1.

**10. L.I:** Could we say that for Gilson essence is *passive* potency? Even though I don't have found this precise expression in him, I think it could be deduced that this was the idea that he had in mind.

**L.D.:** I would not say "passive potency," but rather the picture of essence he (Gilson) eventually comes to stresses its **finitude** - **I wonder if you have ever seen the script of the radio program I gave concerning Gilson as "a 20th century**

apostle”<sup>28</sup>? I will attach a copy. We see there how Gilson gradually makes essence what makes possible the existence of beings distinct from God.

Thomas’s doctrine, on the other hand, has essence most truly essence in God. This is the message of *SCG* 4.11.

**11. L.I.:** If form is active power, how come it contains all the potencialities of entity? Because, in fact, St. Thomas says that the human soul is the cause of its powers, but is human soul perfected by its powers (which are accidents) or is it because of matter?

**L.D.:** Clearly, we have to consider *ST* 1.77.6: the powers of the soul flow from the essence of the soul. Cf. also 1.79.4.*ad* 5. Perhaps most especially [the following is taken from my Marquette lecture]:

It is the divine influence which makes possible the causal role of the form. As we read in a passage concerning the causal role of the virtue of charity:

. . . *Charity* operates formally. *Now*, the efficacy of form is in function of the power of the agent which introduces the form [*into the thing*]. *And therefore the fact that charity is not vanity, but rather brings about an infinite effect, inasmuch as it conjoins the soul to God by giving it righteousness, demonstrates the infinity of the divine power, which is the author of charity*<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> DEWAN, Lawrence, O.P. *Émission radiophonique sur Étienne Gilson dans la série: “Penseurs et apôtres du 20e siècle”*. [Published in print as “Étienne Gilson”, in Jean Genest (ed.), *Penseurs et Apôtres du XXme Siècle*, (Montreal), Fides, 2001, pp. 170-182.] There Fr. Dewan says : “. . . Gilson devient tellement impressionné par la doctrine de l’acte d’être, en contredistinction d’avec l’essence, que l’essence commence à souffrir. Gilson continue d’insister qu’une métaphysique doit apprécier l’essence, et pas seulement l’existence, mais on voit qu’il conçoit l’essence comme *incluant la finitude*. Gilson aurait aimer lire chez saint Thomas une doctrine qu’il trouve chez le philosophe arabe ou perse, Avicenne (mort en 1037 après le Christ), à savoir que Dieu *n’a pas d’essence*. Dire que Dieu est l’acte pure d’être serait dire que ce que nous appelons “essence” dans les créatures ne se trouve vraiment pas en Dieu.”

<sup>29</sup> *ST* 2-2.23.2.*ad* 3:

Ad tertium dicendum quod caritas operatur formaliter. *Efficacia autem formae est secundum virtutem agentis qui inducit formam*. Et ideo quod caritas non est vanitas, sed facit effectum infinitum dum coniungit animam deo iustificando ipsam, hoc demonstrat infinitatem virtutis divinae, quae est caritatis auctor. [Italics mine]

The “vanity” of the creature is, of course, a recourse by the objector to the language of

In the light of this divine influence we can see why the form of the creature, though as other than being it is necessarily potency with respect to the act of being, is nevertheless “efficacious” with respect to that act. The situation also recalls **how the agent intellect, though a participation in superior intellect, nevertheless can flow from the essence of the soul as do the other powers. Thomas teaches:**

... since the essence of the soul is immaterial, created by the supreme intellect, nothing stands in the way of the power which is participated from the supreme intellect, [the power] by which it abstracts from matter, proceeding from its essence, just as the other powers.<sup>30</sup>

[End of excerpt]

I am also reminded that I have a treatment of the soul and the powers flowing from it in my paper on “nature as a metaphysical object.” I don’t know whether Liliana has this. I will send a copy.<sup>31</sup>

**12. L.I.:** I have been rereading Forment’s Comment on *De ente et essentia*.<sup>32</sup> Whereas I understand that for you BOTH *esse* and form ARE PERFECTIONS OF *ENS* [yes!: read **ST 1.14.6, quoted above**],<sup>33</sup> in Forment’s comment we can read: “In its maxima perfection, being is always limited or diminished by essence which expresses this limitation grade. If two entities differ

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e.g. *Psalm* 38.6, characterizing the creaturely substance, and man in particular, as a mere shadow. Cf. Thomas, *In psalm.* 38.4, where many Biblical parallels are given.

<sup>30</sup> *ST* 1.79.4. *ad* 5.

<sup>31</sup> DEWAN, Lawrence, O.P. “Nature as a metaphysical object”. This paper was written for and read at the Summer Thomistic Institute, Maritain Center, University of Notre Dame (Indiana, U.S.A.), July 13-20, 2001. It was published first on their web page. It now appears as Ch. 12 in my book, *Form and Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics*, Washington, D.C., 2006: CUA Press.

<sup>32</sup> FORMENT, Eudaldo. Traducción, estudio preliminar y notas a Tomás de Aquino: *El ente y la esencia*. Pamplona: EUNSA, 2002.

Note: I would like to mention that our questionings regarding Forment’s analysis on the relationship between form and being in no way should be understood as casting doubt on our gratitude and appreciation of Professor Forment, who is one of the most important contemporary Thomists as well as an excellent person.

<sup>33</sup> Fr. Dewan’s added note.

it is because the own being of one of them is limited in certain measure and another's being in another. So, if one of them has more perfection *it is not because of its essential specification* but because its being is less limited (less imperfect).<sup>34</sup>

**[This is not so. The higher essence or form is INTRINSICALLY a higher principle of *esse*. The *esse* is less limited because it is the *esse* had *through such an essence*.]**<sup>35</sup>

Next Forment quotes Domingo Báñez:

Even though *esse* itself, as being received in essence composed by essential principles, is specified by them, nevertheless *esse* in being specified does not receive any perfection, rather it is demoted and downgraded to a relative being, such as being a man or an angel which are not absolute perfection.<sup>36</sup>

**L.D.:** It is certainly true that *esse* is not participated by the creature ***as having the universal mode that it has in God***. Created *esse* is ***proportioned*** to the mode of the created substance. This is said in the passage from the *De substantiis separatis* I quoted earlier. And it is certainly true that the *esse* is not receiving its perfection from the essence, as from an *efficient* cause. Nevertheless, [*De potentia* 7.2.ad 10] the essence or form is the instrument of the first principle, God, in providing an act of being. The power of the form is the power of the *agent* providing the form. Cf. recall the following (that I used in the Marquette paper):

<sup>34</sup> “En su máxima perfección, el ser siempre es limitado o imperfeccionado por la esencia, que expresa esta medida grado de limitación. Si dos entes difieren es porque el ser propio de uno está limitado en una determinada medida, y el ser del otro está restringido en distinto grado. Y si uno de ellos posee una mayor perfección *no es por advenirle una determinación esencial*, sino porque su ser está menos imperfeccionado.” FORMENT, Eudaldo. Traducción, estudio preliminar y notas a Tomás de Aquino: *El ente y la esencia*, p. 78. [Italics mine].

<sup>35</sup> Fr. Dewan added this note after reviewing “Conversations” in December 2014.

<sup>36</sup> “Aunque el mismo ser, al recibirse en la esencia compuesta de principios esenciales, sea especificado por ellos, sin embargo, en esto que es especificado ninguna perfección recibe, sino más bien es deprimido y rebajado a ser relativo, como el ser hombre, el ser ángel, que no son una perfección absoluta.” BÁÑEZ, Domingo. *Scholastic Commentaria in primam partem Summa Theologicae*. Madrid: Ed. L. Urbano, 1934, Vol. I, p. 141a. Quoted by Forment at p. 79.



.... Charity operates formally. Now, the efficacy of form is in function of the power of the agent that introduces the form [into the thing]. And therefore the fact that charity is not vanity, but rather brings about an infinite effect, inasmuch as it conjoins the soul to God by giving it righteousness, demonstrates the infinity of the divine power, which is the author of charity.<sup>37</sup>

We are always supposing the divine influence as efficient cause; *esse* follows upon form, supposing the divine influence: *ST* 1.104.1ad 1.

**13. L.I.:** I should mention that Forment's commentary adds that: "Essential principles in specifying being limit its perfections. These principles do not give being any perfection. Since that limited *esse*, which is in *ens*, is an act, the first actuality, it is not able to receive anything."<sup>38</sup> And, in order to uphold his statement, Forment quotes the following Saint Thomas' text:

Illa vero quae tantum sunt, non sunt imperfecta propter imperfectionem ipsius esse absoluti: non enim ipsa habent esse secundum suum totum posse, sed participant esse per quendam particularem modum et imperfectissimum. *S.C.G.* I. 28.

**L.D.:** Notice that this text is not speaking about all levels of created being. It is answering an implied objection to the doctrine that God is "not other than his *esse*." The objection is understanding this doctrine as putting God on the level of the things that *merely are*, as contrasted with those that *are and live*. (See the opening words of *SCG* 1.28.) Thomas, having explained the perfection involved in God as *ipsum esse*, concludes the lesson by pointing out that what "merely is and does not live" is participating *esse* in the *most*

<sup>37</sup> *ST* 2-2.23.2.ad 3:

Ad tertium dicendum quod caritas operatur formaliter. *Efficacia autem formae est secundum virtutem agentis qui inducit formam.* Et ideo quod caritas non est vanitas, sed facit effectum infinitum dum coniungit animam deo iustificando ipsam, hoc demonstrat infinitatem virtutis divinae, quae est caritatis auctor. [Italics mine]

<sup>38</sup> "Los principios esenciales al especificar al ser lo que hacen es limitar sus perfecciones. No le comunican ninguna perfección. El ser ya limitado, que es el que incluye el ente, no ha podido recibir nada porque es acto, la primera actualidad." FORMENT, Eudaldo. Traducción, estudio preliminar y notas a Tomás de Aquino: *El ente y la esencia*, p. 79.

*imperfect way.* – I.e., other creatures participate *esse* in more perfect ways, but obviously all creatures fall infinitely short of the divine perfection.

I would caution that one should not envisage the divine “*ipsum esse subsistens*” as “*esse without essence.*” Rather, as Thomas says, in e.g. *ST* 1.3.2, God is “*per essentiam suam forma.*” And as I pointed out earlier, the divine essence is most truly essence.

**14. L.I.:** Let me tell you my own reading of both positions (Forment and yours). I think that to say form means “perfection” and say form means “imperfection” do not imply a contradiction. It depends on that what we mean by imperfection in each case. Certainly, you assume (with Saint Thomas) that in comparing form to *esse*, form is a potentiality and therefore involves imperfection. But it is necessary to emphasize why form is also “perfection.” It is something which you do, but most Thomists do not. As I see it, we need to understand the kinship between form and being in a more balanced way, a way which entails admitting being as *perfectissimum omnium* and without demoting form but recognizing how form contributes to *ens*’ perfection under another aspect, viz., “to see form is to see totality, completeness...” Form provides *identity* for being. **But I do not know whether I am right.**

**L.D.:** I would say that you are quite right. A good text, too, is in the *Q.D. de immortalitate animae: De immortalitate animae ad 17*, viz. that “form” and “act” are among the things predicated analogically of diverse things: “... forma et actus et huiusmodi sunt de hiis que analogice predicantur de diversis.” (ed. Kennedy, p. 222). This is to say that the *nature of form as form* is found more truly in the higher, more perfect realizations.<sup>39</sup>

However, since this is so, I would not say that “form means imperfection.” Of course, everything is “imperfect” relative to the divine perfection. Created form falls short of the perfection to be attributed to created *esse*; this is not because it is form, but because it is “such” form. [Cf. Saint. Thomas saying that some form cannot exist except as perfecting matter, but this is not true of it “as form” but as “such form”].

<sup>39</sup> Cf. KENNEDY, Leonard A. (Ed.). A New Disputed Question of St. Thomas Aquinas on the Immortality of the Soul. In *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge*. N° 45 (1978): pp. 205-208 (introduction) and 209-223 (text).

I wonder whether you have ever seen my paper “against metaphysical materialism.”<sup>40</sup> It was supposed to be in the *Form and Esse* book, but the editor cut it. I will add a copy to this email.

**15. L.I.:** Some Thomists like to compare *esse* with a liquid which fills different recipients. The shape of each recipient is *form*. But the relevant point here is that the recipient is created as the liquid fills it. This picture tries to represent the idea that the total actuality of form comes from *esse*. Thus, the entire entity of form comes from *esse* for which form is the recipient. So, form can only become a recipient of *esse in so far as* form receives *esse*.

**L.D.:** I notice your teacher’s expression: this picture tries to represent the idea that the total actuality of form comes from *esse*. Thus, the entire entity of form comes from *esse* to which form is a recipient.

The question is whether one envisages *esse* as “giving its actuality” to the form, or whether *esse* “is the actuality of form.” I would stress the latter.

I have nothing against speaking of a reception of *esse* by form; a very good text is *Qq. de anima* 6.ad 10:

... agens per motum reducit aliquid de potentia in actum; **agens** autem sine motu non reducit aliquid de potentia in actum, sed **facit esse actu quod secundum naturam est in potentia ad esse**, et huiusmodi agens est creans.

[... that which acts through movement reduces something from potency to act, but **that which acts** without movement does not reduce something from potency to act, but rather **makes to be in act that which according to its own nature is in potency towards being**; and an agent which creates is of this sort.]

It occurs to me that you might be helped in all this by a paper I wrote on Capreolus and being. I will attach a copy of the English translation (it was published in French).

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<sup>40</sup> Fr. Dewan is referring to the paper St. Thomas Aquinas against Metaphysical Materialism. En *Atti del’ VIII Congresso Tomistico Internazionale*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. V (1982): pp. 412-434.

I would say that the great thing to avoid in conceiving of the composition of form or essence and *esse* is making the *esse* an *efficient* cause of the essence (as Gilson explicitly did in his book *Being and Some Philosophers*. Here is a note I wrote in the Capreolus paper:

We might recall that Gilson, in *Being and Some Philosophers*, p. 172, actually presented the substantial *esse* of the creature as a sort of intrinsic efficient cause. He said:

... Actual existence, then, is the *efficient cause* by which essence in its turn is the formal cause which makes an actual existence to be “such an existence” [my italics].

*BSP* dates originally from 1949, with a second edition “corrected and enlarged” in 1952 (from which 2<sup>nd</sup> edition the above quotation comes); the Cajetan paper was published in 1953. In the later paper, “Virtus Essendi”, *Mediaeval Studies* 26 (1964), pp. 1-11 (in French), at p. 5, he seems to be correcting this view of his own. This latter paper deserves severe criticism as well (though the mentioned correction is welcome), but that is for another occasion.

[End of Capreolus paper excerpt.]

Another thing that I am trying to combat is the Gilson idea that “essence” means something found only in creatures. That is why I stress the text from *SCG* 4.11:

... those things which in creatures are divided are unqualifiedly one in God: thus, for example, in the creature essence and being [*esse*] are other; and in some [creatures] that which subsists in its own essence is also other than its essence or nature: for this man is neither his own humanity nor his being [*esse*]; but God is his essence and his being.

And though these in God are one in the truest way, nevertheless in God there is WHATEVER PERTAINS TO THE INTELLIGIBLE ROLE [*ratio*] of the subsisting thing, **or of the essence**, or of the being [*esse*]; for it belongs to him not to be in another, inasmuch as he is subsisting; **to be a what [*esse quid*], inasmuch as he is essence**; and being in act [*esse in actu*], by reason of being itself [*ipsius esse*].<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *SCG* 4.11 (ed. Pera #3472-3473).

“Essence” does not name something *secondary*. If it did, it would not be found in God in its own intelligible role.

Rather, as I use a text in the *De ente et essentia* to argue, essence is found *most truly* in God. Essence is other than *esse* only inasmuch as it is “such” essence:

Thomas explains:

... But because “*ens*” is said absolutely and primarily of substances, and posteriorly and in a somewhat qualified sense of accidents, thus it is that *essentia* also properly and truly is in **substances**, but in accidents it is in a certain measure and in a qualified sense. But of substances, some are simple and some are composite, and in both there is *essentia*; but **in the simple** in a **truer** and more noble degree [*ueriori et nobiliori modo*], **inasmuch** as they also have more noble *esse*; for they are the cause of those which are composite, **at least [this is true of] the first simple substance which is God.**<sup>42</sup>

Here, essence, *esse*, and efficient causality are in a parallel hierarchy with God at the summit.

It does not just “happen” that essence and *esse* are identical in God. One cannot *do without the notion of essence* if one wants to speak truly of God’s *esse*. Thus, in the question as to whether “*Qui est*” is the primary divine name, we are told:

... hoc nomen « qui est » triplici ratione est maxime proprium nomen Dei. Primo quidem, propter sui significationem. Non enim significat formam aliquam, sed ipsum esse. Unde, cum esse Dei sit ***ipsa eius essentia***, et hoc nulli alii conueniat, ut supra ostensum est, manifestum est quod inter alia nomina hoc maxime proprie ***nominat*** deum, unumquodque enim denominatur a sua ***forma***. [*ST* 1.13.11 (ed. Ottawa, 89a20-30)]

“Who is” does not signify “formam aliquam”, i.e. a *particular* form, but rather signifies “ipsum *esse*” which is his *essence*: a name expresses the essence or form of a thing. The middle term here is precisely the notion of essence or form. We cannot go “beyond form,” “beyond essence.”

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<sup>42</sup> *De ente et essentia*, c. 1 (ed. Leonine, lines 53-63).

Another line of consideration I note from the text ST 1-2.85.4: *Omne enim esse et bonum consideratur per aliquam formam, secundum quam sumitur species.*

To consider *esse*, one must consider the form that it perfects. This reminds me again of the error of which I accused Antony Kenny. He wanted to distinguish between “being a what” and “simply being.” Essence would supply “being a what” but existence would provide that whatness with “unqualified being.”

I wrote:

[Kenny] does not see form as the cause of *esse simpliciter*, but only of *esse quid*, relative to the matter. ... Already from the point of view of vocabulary this view of Kenny’s is alarming. Thus, in the early treatise *De principiis naturae*, c. 1, Thomas explains:

Be it known that something can be though it is not, whereas something else is. That which can be is said to “be in potency;” that which already is, is said to “be in act.” But being [*esse*] is twofold: viz. *the essential or substantial being of the thing*, as for example: *being a man*; and this is “being” in the unqualified sense [*esse simpliciter*]. The other is accidental being, for example, that the man is white; and this is “being something”.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *De principiis naturae*, c. 1:

Nota quod quoddam potest esse licet non sit, quoddam vero est. Illud quod potest esse dicitur esse potentia; illud quod iam est, dicitur esse actu. Sed duplex est esse: scilicet ***esse essenziale rei, sive substantiale ut hominem esse, et hoc est esse simpliciter.*** Est autem aliud esse accidentale, ut hominem esse album, et hoc est esse aliquid.

And we see this in many texts throughout Thomas’s career. Cf. *ST* 1.5.1.*ad* 1:

... cum ens dicat aliquid proprie esse in actu; actus autem proprie ordinem habeat ad potentiam; secundum hoc simpliciter aliquid dicitur ens, secundum quod primo discernitur ab eo quod est in potentia tantum. Hoc autem est esse substantiale rei uniuscuiusque; unde per suum esse substantiale dicitur unumquodque ***ens simpliciter.***

And *ST* 1.76.4:

... ***forma substantialis*** in hoc a forma accidentali differt quia forma accidentalis non dat esse simpliciter, sed esse tale, sicut calor facit suum subiectum non simpliciter esse, sed esse calidum. ... ***Forma autem substantialis dat esse simpliciter***, et ideo per eius adventum dicitur aliquid simpliciter generari, et per eius recessum simpliciter corrumpi.

For Thomas, “being a what” and “being unqualifiedly” go together: i.e. *esse quid* is *esse simpliciter*. I would say K. fails to grasp the existential importance of generation and hylemorphisme; a thing that is corrupted ceases to *be*. Yes, matter is “incorruptible”, but only in the way that matter “is” at all.<sup>44</sup>

What is special in creatures is not that they *have* an essence and an act of being, but that these two must be distinct, and that the essence or form must be potential relative to the act of being.

[I might add here a reminiscence of Thomas’s *De ente et essentia*, Ch. 1 [ed. Leonine, lines 49-52], as to the word: “essence”. He says:

“Quiditatis” vero nomen sumitur ex hoc, quod per diffinitionem significatur. Sed “essentia” dicitur secundum quod *per eam et in ea ens habet esse*.

**16. L.I.:** It is correct to say that form and being are *co-principles* or are they simply *principles* of *ens*?

**L.D.:** I would shy away from calling form and *esse* “co-principles of *ens*.” I recall the doctrine of *De potentia* 7.2.ad 10, where it is explained why *esse* has the role of *effect* of the other causes. I think, also, that calling *esse* a “principle” leads to a depreciation of Thomas’s doctrine that “*esse per se consequitur ad formam*.” Form is the principle of *esse*. (C.f. among other texts, Aquinas, 1996, *Qq. de anima* 6):

In substantiis enim ex materia et forma compositis tria invenimus, scilicet materiam et formam et *ipsum esse*. *Cuius quidem principium est forma*; nam materia ex hoc quod recipit formam, participat esse. Sic igitur *esse consequitur ipsam formam*. Nec tamen forma est suum esse, *cum sit eius principium*. Et licet materia non pertingat ad esse nisi per formam, forma tamen in quantum est forma, non indiget materia ad suum esse, *cum ipsam formam consequatur esse*; sed indiget materia, cum sit talis forma, quae per se non subsistit.

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<sup>44</sup> Indeed, while Thomas appeals to the incorruptibility of matter when arguing that God will not annihilate things (cf. *ST* 1.104.4), it is also part of that picture that matter can only be incorruptible as participating in actuality through a form: cf. *ST* 1.46.1.obj. 1 (if you have matter, you must have form and a world), and *DP* 5.7.in *toto* and *ad* 11.

[In substances composed out of matter and form we find three [items], viz. matter, and form, and, third, **being** [*esse*], **of which [being] the principle is form**. For matter from the fact that it receives form participates in being. Thus, therefore, **being follows upon the very form**, nor nevertheless is the form its own being [*suum esse*], **since it is its principle**. And though matter does not attain to being except through form, form, nevertheless, inasmuch as it is form, does not need matter for its [form's] being, **since being follows upon form itself**; but it needs matter since it is such form [*talis forma*] as does not subsist by itself.]

Form and *esse* are hardly “co-principles”, in that one is the principle of the other; notice that in the foregoing Latin text the word “*cum*” has the sense of “since.”

Moreover, I would follow Capreolus:

*Esse* is not to be conceived as something which has [...] *esse*, nor as a principle of *esse* or of a being, but as the disposition and the act of a being inasmuch as it is a being.<sup>45</sup>

I discuss this in my paper: “Capreolus, saint Thomas et l’être,” in *Jean Capreolus et son temps 1380-1444 Colloque de Rodez*, pp. 77-86).

**17. L.I.:** Would it be correct to say that the goodness of a being is in its form?

**L.D.:** You ask whether it would be correct to say that the goodness of a being is “in its form.” I would say that the goodness is in whatever pertains to the perfection of a thing: thus, in *ST* 1.5.5, while form is on the scene, still the form presupposes some things and some things follow when the form is present. Thus, the modus, species, order triad is a better presentation of goodness, than just the form.

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<sup>45</sup> *Esse enim non debet concipi per modum alicujus habentis realitatem vel esse, nec per modum principii essendi vel entis, sed per modum dispositionis et actus entis in quantum ens. (Defensiones Theologiae Divi Thomae Aquinatis I, 328a).*



Also, it looks as though many of your concerns stem from the question of the distinction between *esse* and form. A good place to consider would be *ST* 1.6.3.

Another, I repeat, is *ST* 1-2.85.4:

Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut in Primo dictum est, **modus, species et ordo consequuntur unumquodque bonum creatum inquantum huiusmodi, et etiam unumquodque ens.**

**Omne enim esse et bonum consideratur per aliquam formam,** secundum quam sumitur **species.**

Forma autem uniuscuiusque rei, qualiscumque sit, sive substantialis sive accidentalis, est secundum aliquam **mensuram**, unde et in VIII *Metaphys.* dicitur quod formae rerum sunt sicut numeri. Et ex hoc habet **modum** quendam, qui mensuram respicit.

Ex forma vero sua unumquodque **ordinatur** ad aliud.

Sic igitur secundum diversos gradus bonorum, sunt diversi gradus modi, speciei et ordinis. Est ergo quoddam bonum pertinens ad ipsam substantiam naturae, quod habet suum modum, speciem et ordinem, et illud nec privatur nec diminuitur per peccatum. Est etiam quoddam bonum naturalis inclinationis, et hoc etiam habet suum modum, speciem et ordinem, et hoc diminuitur per peccatum, ut dictum est, sed non totaliter tollitur, etc.

### 3. Aristotle, the *Esse* and the Form



**18. L.I.:** Some Thomists say that Aristotle's notion of form does not go beyond the predicamental level. In this level, form is, indeed, what makes something a specific thing. In this regard, we can say that form "gives *esse*". But on the transcendental level, form receives *esse* and is an active potency which receives its entire actuality from *esse*. On this level, it is *esse* which makes something a specific thing because *esse* is the most intimate item in the created thing. I suspect that, some Spanish Thomists differ significantly from you regarding this last point.

Thus, some professors assert that for Saint Thomas, *esse* has *ABSOLUTE priority on form*. If God's form is identical to his *esse*, it is just because the form which "specifies" God is his own *esse*. For them, this confirms, once again, to what extent *esse* is *more relevant than form*.

**L.D.:** There is no doubt that the act of being, *esse*, is "*perfectissimum omnium*." (*ST* 1.4.1.ad 3); "... hoc quod dico 'esse' est *inter omnia perfectissimum*: quod ex hoc patet quia actus est semper perfectio potentia. Quaelibet autem forma signata non intelligitur in actu nisi per hoc quod esse ponitur." (*DP* 7.2.ad 9).

That is why I am so happy to find the text I use in the Marquette "Form as something divine" paper, the text from *ST* 2-2.23.2.ad 3: here is what I say, and where I conclude with that 2-2 text:



The form, just as it mediates *creation*, mediates the divine influence which *conserves* the creature throughout its existence. As Thomas says:

... the act of being accompanies the form of the creature, supposing nevertheless God's influence, just as illumination follows upon the transparency of the air, supposing the influence of the sun.<sup>46</sup>

It is the **divine influence** which makes possible the causal role of the form. As we read in a passage concerning the causal role of the virtue of charity:

...*Charity* operates **formally**. Now, **the efficacy of form is in function of the power of the agent which introduces the form** [*into the thing*]. And therefore the fact that charity is not vanity, but rather brings about an infinite effect, inasmuch as it conjoins the soul to God by giving it righteousness, demonstrates the infinity of the divine power, which is the author of charity.<sup>47</sup>

In the light of this divine influence we can see why the form of the creature, **though as other than being it is necessarily potency** with respect to the act of being, is nevertheless “efficacious” with respect to that act.

[End of excerpt]

As for the limiting of form's contribution to the “predicamental” as distinct from the “transcendental” I would like to see the text of Thomas on this. We certainly have Thomas in such texts as I quoted earlier:

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<sup>46</sup> *ST* 1.104.1.ad 1:

... esse per se consequitur formam creaturae, supposito tamen influxu dei, sicut lumen sequitur diaphanum aeris, supposito influxu solis.

<sup>47</sup> *ST* 2-2.23.2.ad 3:

Ad tertium dicendum quod caritas operatur formaliter. *Efficacia autem formae est secundum virtutem agentis qui inducit formam*. Et ideo quod caritas non est vanitas, sed facit effectum infinitum dum coniungit animam deo iustificando ipsam, hoc demonstrat infinitatem virtutis divinae, quae est caritatis auctor. [Italics mine]

The “vanity” of the creature is, of course, a recourse by the objector to the language of e.g. *Psalm* 38.6, characterizing the creaturely substance, and man in particular, as a mere shadow. Cf. Thomas, *In psalm*. 38.4, where many Biblical parallels are given.

St. Thomas, *De veritate* 27.1.ad 3 (ed. Leonine, t. 22\3, lines 182-186):

... God causes in us natural *esse* by CREATION, without the mediation of any efficient cause, but nevertheless through the mediation of a formal cause: because natural form is the principle of natural *esse*. . . .

A discussion of creation sounds “transcendental” to me. And recall *De potentia* 7.2.ad 10, also discussed earlier.

Also there is the text *SCG* 2.43.8 (ed. Pera, #1200) quoted earlier: to say that since *esse* is the proper effect of the highest cause, i.e. God, he must be the first cause of the forms, because *esse* is through form, is hardly a consideration at a “predicamental” as contrasted with a “transcendental” level.

**19. L.I.:** Could we say that Thomists, in general, “have forgotten” form? If so, does it have some relationship with the topic of the sources for Saint Thomas’ doctrine of *esse*?

**L.D.:** One can say that *some* Thomists have “demoted” form, taken from its crucial role in the being of things.

There is a relation to the topic of the sources of *esse*. I would say that the focussing upon creation, and a particular imagining of creation, in the interests of presenting Christianity as making a revolutionary contribution to metaphysics, led to a failure to appreciate how “already existential” the ancient Greek interest in form was. (That is somewhat the line in my paper on Aristotle as a source of Thomas’s doctrine of *esse*.)

**20. L.I.:** I think that the “forgetfulness” of form would not have been so relevant if, especially in the case of Gilson, these Thomists would not have had so much influence in some Thomistic circles. I say this because I was educated in Argentina (where Thomism has received a great influence from Gilson and Maritain) and in Barcelona University (both thinkers have been greatly revered in the Thomist circle there). Thus, it is not strange that my professors emphasized *esse* quite exclusively.

Now, it is necessary to let you know that, at least in the case of my professors, I never heard them saying that the connection between form and *esse* was *per accidens*. However, they have always stressed *esse* in such a way that one, as a student, ends up underestimating form.

**L.D.:** It is true that the explicit “*per accidens*” doctrine is from Joseph Owens; he probably had less influence in Latin America, but his influence was quite considerable in the USA and in Toronto. (He was a Gilson student, and it is possible that the student make explicit what is implicit in things said by the master, but which the master would not have liked to say.) [On Owens, see the papers referred to above in n. 16]

Maritain was less inclined to depreciate essence than was Gilson; he worried about Gilson going too far in that direction.

**21. L.I.:** I would like you to read this quotation I obtained from another book by Forment:

Saint Thomas’s doctrine of *esse* as an act is based on Aristotle’s doctrine of act, but the first doctrine involves a deep transformation in respect to the second. For Thomas, essence is not only an essential act, but it is a potency or ability in respect to *esse* which is, consequently, its actuality; a constitutive act not of essence but *ens*. This potency-act relationship between essence and *esse* does not have the same meaning for Saint Thomas as for Aristotle, because for the former this relationship is analogical but for the latter it is univocal. Essence and *esse* do not have the same kind of relationship as matter and form or substance and accidents. These two entities’ constitutive items are not only different but they also belong to a diverse order.<sup>48</sup>

I would be very grateful if you could to clarify this.

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<sup>48</sup> “La doctrina del ser como acto se basa en la del acto de Aristóteles, pero implica una profunda modificación. Se comprende la esencia no sólo como acto esencial, sino también como potencia o capacidad con respecto al ser, el cual es así su acto, un acto no constitutivo de la esencia sino del ente. Esta relación potencial-actual entre la esencia y el ser no tiene un significado idéntico a la potencia y acto aristotélico, porque no se toma en un sentido unívoco sino análogo. La esencia y el ser no se relacionan igual que la materia y la forma, ni como la substancia y los accidentes, porque los dos constitutivos del ente no sólo son diferentes, sino que además pertenecen a un orden distinto”. FORMENT, Eudaldo. *Medieval Personalism*, Madrid, EDICEP, 2002, p. 186.

**L.D:** I will only give a few indications. I start from a trust in Thomas's own reading of Aristotle. Thus, in *De substantiis separatis* Thomas attributes to Aristotle and to Plato a distinction between potency and act in immaterial substances, taking them as they issue from the first principle. Now, this is what Thomas calls the distinction between the nature of the thing and its act of being. That is why Thomas attributes to both of them (Plato and Aristotle) a doctrine of creation.

So I say that, in discussing the differences between Aristotle and Thomas, one should take into account what Thomas saw himself as saying, and that he saw the same thing in Aristotle. This does not mean that it is as clearly said there (in Aristotle), but it does affect one's view of both authors.

Here I refer to a passage in my paper: "Thomas Aquinas, Creation, and Two Historians", *Laval théologique et philosophique* 50 (1994), pp. 363-387.] I am discussing Thomas's *De substantiis separatis*:

The second area of agreement [between Plato and Aristotle] discussed by Thomas is what he calls "the condition of the natures" [... *ad conditionem naturae ipsarum* ...] of the substances under discussion. What Thomas means by their "condition" is to be gathered from the context. Whereas "*modus existendi*" concerned the question of origin, i.e. having one's being "measured" by a relationship to an efficient cause,<sup>49</sup> "*conditio naturae*" looks within the substance itself, probes its intrinsic ontological density, if one may so put it. Both Plato and Aristotle, Thomas tells us, held that all such substances are altogether immune from matter. Nevertheless, they are not altogether immune from the composition of potency and act. For the case of Plato, Thomas points out that when something is received in a being as a participated feature, it has the role of act vis-à-vis the participating substance. Hence, in the doctrine of Plato, all the substances other than the supreme are potency/act composites. And it is necessary to say the same thing according to the doctrine of Aristotle.<sup>50</sup> Aristotle holds that the intelligible aspects expressed by the terms

<sup>49</sup> On the relation called "measure of being and truth", see Thomas's *In Metaph.* 5.17 (Cathala #1003); on "*modus*" (i.e. "measure"), as pertaining to a thing's being proportionate to its efficient cause, see *ST* 1.5.5 (31a39-42). As Thomas says in *In Metaph.* 5.17 (Cathala #1027), summing up the discussion of "measure of *esse*": "Everything is measured by that on which it *depends*"; this is clearly not "measure" in the properly quantitative sense, but demands a conception of ontological hierarchy, and an appreciation of the extent to which the cause, as cause, is principle of knowledge ("measure") of the effect.

<sup>50</sup> Here we have another instance of the expression: "*secundum sententiam Aristotelis*", which

“true” and “good” are to be attributed to what he calls “*act*”: hence, the primary true and the primary good must be *pure act*, and whatever fall short of this must have an admixture of potency.<sup>51</sup>

This passage is interesting in that we clearly have to do with the ontology of separate substance, not with questions pertaining to operation. Does Thomas attribute to Plato and Aristotle a doctrine of composition out of “essence and existence” (to use the terminology of the controversies in later centuries)? At this point in the text, he uses a more general vocabulary. However, what we should especially note is the way Thomas exploits the content of discussion in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* 9, chapters 9 and 10, tying it to the views of books 2 and 12: Thomas is telling us how *he* reads Aristotle.<sup>52</sup>

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is generally of importance for our discussion.

<sup>51</sup> *SS* 3, Leonine lines 22-39 (tr. Lescoe, pp. 30-31).

<sup>52</sup> See my paper, “The Number and Order of St. Thomas’s Five Ways,” *Downside Review* 92 (1974), 1-18 (especially pp. 11-17), for an indication of the importance for Thomas of the presentation of act and potency in Aristotle’s *Metaph.* 9.6 and 9.8-10.

## 4. More Metaphysics...



**22. L.I.:** When we explain the sources of Thomas' *esse* doctrine, now, after reading your work, I understand that Plato and Aristotle are two primary sources. But, my question is: what is the role of Avicenna in this history? In fact, my professors taught me that Thomas, on this topic, had received direct influence of Avicenna. Saint Thomas would have found the *esse* doctrine in Avicenna.

**L.D:** There is no doubt that St. Thomas learned much from Avicenna. As I say in my paper: "Discussion: On Anthony Kenny's *Aquinas on Being*" (pp. 336-337):

In general, it has seemed to me that Thomas was always fundamentally Aristotelian, and that, if anything, he became more thoroughly so as he went along; that he benefited from the work of Avicenna and Averroes in this respect, and that he exercised critical discernment about them all. In his earlier work Avicenna is very prominent: he notably criticizes Avicenna in *DP* in favour of Averroes, as to some creatures having absolutely necessary being (*DP* 5.3. *in corp.* and *ad* 12); but while Avicenna is criticized as regards the accidentality of the act of being in *In Metaph.* 4.2 (556 and 558) he is praised in the same *In Metaph.* re the inclusion of matter in the essence of material things, and thus as having the authentic view of Aristotle *In Metaph.* 7.9 (1469). Averroes, while he is praised for his view of the existence of necessary beings in *DP*, is criticized in *In Phys.*<sup>53</sup> for his failure to understand Aristotle on the cause of being as being (*In Phys.* 8.2, ed. Maggiolo, #974 [4] - 975 [5]).<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Aquinas (1954). *In octo libris Physicorum Aristotelis expositio*.

<sup>54</sup> C.f. also *In De caelo* 1.6.5, where Averroes is seen to misunderstand





We must certainly ask ourselves why the line of argument concerning essence and *esse* so famously present in *De ente et essentia* and *In Sent.* is not repeated in later works, and notably not in *SCG* 2.52.

[End of excerpt]

[In the last words above I am referring to the so-called “*intellectus essentiae*” argument.]

What is most important in Thomas’s criticism of Avicenna is Thomas’s rejection of the accidentality of *esse* in creatures. I think that this Avicennian doctrine affected seriously Fr. Owens reading of St. Thomas.

**23. L.I.:** You say that God causes the *nature* of being, and thus the essential properties of that nature (the necessary and the contingent, the corruptible and the incorruptible, the fallible and the infallible). Question: Are these not the properties of every mode of being, for example, the properties of every created essence? I do not understand what you could mean by *nature of being* without the presence of *form*.

**L.D.:** I mean that Thomas treats the act of being, *ipsum esse*, as a nature or form. One can see this in *ST* 1.4.2 (second argument in the body of the article), where *ipsum esse* is compared to heat. The idea is that a nature has proper differences. The example for this is **whole number**: because of the very nature of whole number, it is necessary that a whole number be **either odd or even**. These follow from what it is to be a whole number. Thomas is saying that there are differences that pertain to what it is to be a being. Thus a being is either corruptible or incorruptible, i.e. is such that it can be or not be, or else is such that it cannot not be. It is because God is the cause of the nature of being that he is the cause of things being necessary in their substantial being (like the human soul) or merely possible regarding substantial being (any corruptible substance). [Notice e.g. *ST* 1.48.2 where it is mentioned that these grades are found “in ipso esse.”]

You say “without the presence of form.” Did I speak of *esse* without form being present? Not that I know of. In fact, they are indissociable; they are identical in the case of God; they are “akin” in creatures; my point in the

the potentiality which belongs to form with respect to being.

“Being as a Nature” paper was that even if one isolates the act of being for consideration, one is forced to speak of “its own nature” and what belongs to that nature, i.e. as properties. Thus, “nature” has a “transcendental” role in our discussion of being.

**24. L.I:** Another important point deals with the difference between *esse* and *existence*. Regarding this, one was taught that the right translation of *esse* is *being* but not *existence* because, for Saint Thomas, existence is a mere effect of *esse* (it means “to be out of causes”, *ex-sistere*). Now, all beings are “out of causes,” from an angel to a stone. Only *esse* makes the difference between created beings and puts each of them in a specific category on the scale of being. Because of this, we should translate *being* in place of *esse* but not of *existence*. My question is: Is this true? If so, where does Saint Thomas mention this?

**L.D.:** No, this is not true. However, the real situation is complex. Quite apart from translation, “*esse*” has **three** different meanings. Cf. St. Thomas, *In 1 Sent.* 33.1.1.*ad* 1: Sometimes it means the essence of the thing, sometimes the truth of the proposition, sometimes the actuality of the essence:

Sed sciendum, quod “esse” dicitur tripliciter. [1] Uno modo dicitur “esse” *ipsa quidditas vel natura rei*, sicut dicitur quod “definitio est oratio significans quid est *esse*,” definitio enim quidditatem rei significat. [2] Alio modo dicitur “esse” *ipse actus essentiae*; sicut vivere, quod est esse viventibus, est animae actus; non actus secundus, qui est operatio, sed *actus primus*. [3] Tertio modo dicitur “esse” quod significat *veritatem compositionis in propositionibus*, secundum quod “est” dicitur copula: et secundum hoc est in intellectu componente et dividente quantum ad sui complementum; sed fundatur in esse rei, quod est actus essentiae, sicut supra de veritate dictum est, dist. 19, quaest. 5, art. 1.

In many places Thomas indicates the two meanings: the “actus essentiae” or “actus essendi”, on the one hand, and the truth of the proposition, on the other hand. Less often does he mention the third meaning, i.e. the essence itself.

Notice the following passage from my Marquette lecture, *Form as Something Divine in Things* [in the real text ca. note 97]:

So considering the situation one could call the form itself the “being” of the resulting thing, and that is exactly how Aristotle speaks in *Metaph.* 8:

Clearly, then, the word “is” [*to esti*] has just as many meanings; a thing *is* a threshold because it lies in such and such a position, and its being [*to einai*] means its lying in that position, while being ice means its having been solidified in such and such a way.<sup>55</sup>

As St. Thomas notes, “being” in such a text refers to the proper intelligible character of the thing. We read:

[Aristotle] says, firstly, that because the aforementioned differences are constitutive of the things spoken of above, it is evident that the “being” [*ipsum esse*] of the aforementioned things is said in as many ways as there are differences. For the difference completes the definition signifying the being [*esse*] of the thing. For such an item is a threshold because it is so positioned. And thus its being so positioned is its being [*esse ipsius*], that is, its proper intelligible character [*propria eius ratio*]. And similarly, the being of ice is the very having been so solidified.<sup>56</sup>

I point this out, not only to recall that Thomas himself indicates here and elsewhere this use of the word “*esse*,”<sup>57</sup> but to insist that there is good

<sup>55</sup> ARISTOTLE. *Metaph.* 8.2 (1042b25-28) (italics in the Ross tr.).

<sup>56</sup> THOMAS, *In Metaph.* 8.2 (1894):

Dicit ergo primo, quod quia praedictae differentiae sunt constitutivae rerum de quibus supra dictum est, manifestum quod ipsum esse praedictarum rerum toties dicitur quot sunt differentiae. Differentia enim complet definitionem significantem esse rei. Limen enim est huiusmodi, quia ita ponitur. Et ipsum sic poni est esse ipsius, idest propria eius ratio. Et similiter esse crystalli, est ipsum taliter inspissari.

<sup>57</sup> *In Metaph.* 7.3 (1310):

But it must be known that in all the following, by the expression “being this” [*hoc esse*] or “being for this” [*huic esse*], he means the *quod quid erat esse* of that thing: for example, “being for man” [*homini esse*] or “being man” [*hominem esse*]: he means that which pertains to the “what is man.”

At *Sent.* 1.33.1.1.ad 1 [ed. Mandonnet, pp. 765-766], three meanings of “*esse*” are given: the nature of the thing, the act of the essence (as “living” is the being of living things), and the truth of propositions. These meanings are given again in *Sent.* 3.6.2.2 [ed. Moos, #79, p. 238].

reason for such usage, and that it reflects the *intimacy* of the relation between the form and the act of being, i.e. the act which Thomas teaches is *not* to be identified with the form.

[End of excerpt]

Now, for the purposes of your question we can set aside “*esse*” as meaning the essence, and concentrate of “*esse*” as meaning the act of being, and as meaning the truth (cf. especially *ST* 1.3.4.*ad* 2 and 1.48.2.*ad* 2 [which is about “*ens*” but is the same point].)

The “*esse*” of truth is related to the question: “does it *exist*?” or “*Is* there any such thing?” This “*esse*” is thus said *even of blindness*, which has no essence and no act of being (cf. *ST* 1.48.1). What one should notice is that in its respect the word “*exist*” is very readily used: “does the bad *exist*?” “Does evil *exist*?” “*Is* the bad found in things?” – I would say that it is this sense of “*exist*” that is most often meant in English; notice that people involved in English analytic philosophy, such as Peter Geach, Antony Kenny, Norman Kretzmann, are unable to accept Thomas saying that God’s essence is “*ipsum esse subsistens*”, i.e. “the subsistent act of being”, because they see this as saying God is “pure existence” and they take “existence” as answering the question: “does X *exist*?” They thus say that “*esse*” is “too thin a predicate” to be *what* anything is. [I mentioned this earlier.]

**Thus, there is no doubt that “being” or “the act of being” is the best translation of “esse” when “esse” is synonymous with “actus essendi” (ST 1.3.4.ad 2). (And, generally, “being” is the best translation, always, for the Latin “esse.”)**

Now, all of the discussion with Gilson and Owens and Maritain relates to the *actus essendi*, also truly called the *actus essentiae* (cf. *De potentia* 5.4.ad 3). – And I am afraid that they are confusing it with the “being” or “exist” that signifies the truth of the proposition. (which makes it accidental).

Thus, for your question of translation, I would translate “*esse*” by “**being**” as much as possible. I say this about all three cases that Thomas speaks of. It is the most fundamental word in English.

Nevertheless it can also be translated as “existence.” **We see this in St. Thomas’s own usage.** Take, for instance, *ST* 1.14.3, as to whether God comprehends himself:

Manifestum est autem quod Deus ita perfecte cognoscit seipsum, sicut perfecte cognoscibilis est. Est enim unumquodque cognoscibile secundum modum sui actus, non enim cognoscitur aliquid secundum quod in potentia est, sed secundum quod **est in actu**, ut dicitur in IX *Metaphys.*. Tanta est autem virtus Dei in cognoscendo, quanta est **actualitas eius in existendo**, quia per hoc quod actu **est**, et ab omni materia et potentia separatus, Deus cognoscitivus est, ut ostensum est. Unde manifestum est quod tantum seipsum cognoscit, quantum cognoscibilis est. Et propter hoc seipsum perfecte comprehendit.

There, Thomas is using the verb “*existere*” in place of “*esse*,” and is applying it to God himself. (Obviously, for Thomas, “*existere*” does not imply being “outside its cause.”)

Again, take *De substantiis separatis* c. 14:

Amplius. Sicut causa **est** quodammodo in effectu per sui similitudinem participatam, ita omnis effectus **est** in sua causa excellentiori modo secundum virtutem ipsius. **In causa** igitur prima omnium, quae Deus est, oportet omnia eminentius **existere** quam etiam in seipsis. Quod autem **est** in aliquo, oportet quod in eo **sit** secundum modum substantiae eius. Substantia autem Dei est ipsum eius intelligere. Oportet igitur omnia quae **quocumque modo sunt** in rebus, in Deo **intelligibiliter existere** secundum eminentiam substantiae eius. Necessae est igitur Deum perfectissime omnia cognoscere.

Clearly, here “*existere*” is being used as synonymous with “*esse*.”

The point about “*existere*” and “out of a cause”, as though to say “to exist” is for a thing “to stand outside its cause”, **extra causas sistere**: I have heard this said, but it does not seem to be in St. Thomas’s line of thinking. (I could find no such statement from Thomas using a search engine.) He uses the word as synonymous with “*esse*” even when speaking about the being of God. [*ex stare* is the true etymology of the word “exist,” but the etymology is not necessarily the meaning of the word.]<sup>58</sup>

<sup>58</sup> I am reminded of a remark of G.K. Chesterton, in the Preface to his book, *Alarms and*

Nevertheless, my general practice is **to use the words pertaining to the verb “to be”** as much as possible in translating “*esse*.” Save “exist” for when it is similar in Latin: “*existere*.” “*Ens*” I translate as “a being” because in English we do not have a concrete word as “ens” is used in Latin (“ens” can be translated as “an entity” sometimes, but of course, there is the Latin “*entitas*” to distinguish from “*ens*”).

**25. L.I.:** Explaining substance you say that “substance is an object of mind.” We don’t catch it by senses. My question is: if we affirm that substance is different from the sensible unity which is captured by senses, would we not be identifying substance and essence? If so, why do we say that substance has *esse* and essence?

**L.D.:** I take it that you are asking about my saying that “substance is an object of mind” or intellect. It would help to know just where you are reading me saying this. Still, surely to know a substance *as a substance* is to grasp the thing *from the viewpoint of being*. A dog or a cat does know substances, but *not as such*. The best they can do, I would think, is to grasp them in function of some sort of object of the *vis aestimativa*. [e.g. “the source of food” or “shelter”]

With the human being one has to move first to the doctrine of the *vis cogitativa*, the prelude to the universal; but still, it is only after the fully universal notion has been obtained by the intellect that *one turns back* to the sense powers to view *the universal as existing in the particular* (*ST* 1.84.7 and 1.86.1). I would say that what you have in mind as “the substance” is the subsisting thing, which of course is an individual, a particular. If you then form the proposition: “Peter is a being”, surely “being” there means “substantial being”, not something in a category of accident.

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*Discursions*, New York, 1911: Dodd, Mead and Company, p. v:

If I were constrained to put my moral philosophy in one sentence, I could not do it more satisfactorily (to myself) than by saying that I am in favour of alarms and against alarms. It is vain to tell me that these two words were the same once and come from a common derivation. The people who trust to derivations are always wrong: for they ignore the life and adventures of a word, and all that it has done since it was born. People of that sort would say that every man who lives in a villa is a villain. They would say that being chivalrous is the same as being horsey.

**26. L.I.:** Saint Thomas's definition of *essentia* in the *Ente et Essentia* is as follows: "Sed essentia dicitur secundum quod per eam et in ea ens habet esse." Could we say that this definition can be divided in two parts?

- "Per eam" would mean the essence as a cause of esse.
- "In ea" would mean the essence as a principle of permanence and conservation of esse.

I don't know if this interpretation is correct.

**L.D.:** Yes: I think that the "in ea" is making the same point as Thomas makes in the *SCG* 2.54.para. 5 (ed. Pera #1291):

Per hoc enim in compositis ex materia et forma dicitur *forma* esse *principium essendi*, quia est *complementum substantiae*, cuius actus est ipsum esse: sicut *diaphanum* est aeri principium lucendi *quia facit eum proprium subiectum* luminis.

Cf. also *ST* 1.104.1.ad 1.

**27. L.I.:** Does God continue creating reality? (as the Roman Canon says), or did He create things one way and they developed because of "seminal reasons" which run through the whole creation? Where does Saint Thomas say this?

**L.D.:** St. Thomas is generally inclined to find all subsequent acts of creation (even that of individual human souls) somehow reducible to the work of the six days (and seventh day) of Genesis. Consider *ST* 1.73.1.ad 3 (and the whole article). Read also 1.73.2.

**28. L.I.:** During our talks in Ottawa, I understood that, according to you, Metaphysics is not necessarily in the third level of abstraction. Even though, Saint Thomas in the Comment of Boecio's *De trinitate* situates Metaphysics there, you told me, as far as I remember, something like we should consider the context in which Thomas said it. I would be very grateful if you could explain what that point is here. I have to put this in the book, in the part where I must explain Aristotle's definition of Metaphysics as a science which studies the separated and immobile substances.

**L.D.:** I certainly follow St. Thomas in distinguishing three modes of abstraction (as regards the first operation of the intellect.). On this the text I follow is *ST* 1.85.1.*ad* 2.

The third mode, abstracting from all matter, is proper to the metaphysical objects such as being, unity, act and potency. One cannot do metaphysics without using such notions. However, they are primary for the human mind. This is expressly so as regards “being”, as I have argued in such papers as “St. Thomas and the Seed of Metaphysics” and “St. Thomas, Physics, and the Principle of Metaphysics,” which are Ch. 3 and Ch. 4 in the book *Form and Being*.

Thomas expressly teaches that the terms of the primary axioms belong to metaphysics or *wisdom*<sup>59</sup>.

It is not necessary to know of the existence of immaterial being in order to perform such an abstraction.

I will send you, also, a copy of an as yet unpublished paper, criticizing Ralph McInerny’s conception of the entry into metaphysics. The paper, which I gave at the American Maritain Assn. meeting at Notre Dame in 2007<sup>60</sup> (though the paper is somewhat expanded), explains how I treat the concept of *ens* as primary.

**29. L.I.:** I am doing research into the Metaphysical foundation of human dignity. I have been reading your paper on dignity. This is very helpful, but I have some questions: some Thomists say that the foundation of human dignity is the “personal being.” This is its “formal constituent” (*constitutivo formal*) what distinguishes person from mere nature. Could you tell me, please, what do you think about this?

**L.D.:** A problem I see in looking at “personal being” as the answer is that this expression: “**personal** being” itself requires explanation. When we look for the explanation, we find that we are sent to “having some *dignity*”<sup>61</sup>, and the “dignity” is there explained in terms of “subsisting in *the rational nature*.”

<sup>59</sup> C.f. *ST* 1-2.66.5.*ad* 4.

<sup>60</sup> Fr. Dewan is referring to the paper: “First Known Being and the Birth of Metaphysics”.

<sup>61</sup> C.f. *ST* 1.29.3.*ad* 2.



There are many expressions used in that article that are extremely helpful. Notice, e.g., this in the *ad 1* (*ST* 1.29.3):

Ad primum ergo dicendum quod, licet nomen “**personae**” in Scriptura veteris vel novi testamenti non inveniatur dictum de Deo, **tamen id quod nomen significat, multipliciter** in sacra Scriptura **invenitur assertum de Deo**; scilicet **QUOD EST MAXIME PER SE ENS, ET PERFECTISSIME INTELLIGENS.**

It seems to me that one is driven back to what one finds in the same article, in the answer to objection 2, i.e. that we start with the “famous men” that are represented in dramas, i.e. in tragedies and comedies; and then move to those humans in general who “have dignity”, i.e. we might say “are *really somebody*.” And we come to this:

Propter quod quidam definiunt personam, dicentes quod “persona est hypostasis proprietate distincta ad **dignitatem** pertinente.” Et quia **magnae dignitatis** est **in rationali natura subsistere**, ideo omne **individuum rationalis naturae** dicitur “**persona**,” ut dictum est. Sed dignitas divinae naturae excedit omnem dignitatem, et secundum hoc maxime competit Deo nomen “personae.” (*ST* 1.29.3.*ad 2*).

So we come to the question: what is so special about intelligence?

I would move from there to such an article as *ST* 1.14.1 and thus in general to the **immateriality** of some forms. That hierarchy of grades of immateriality of forms is a good place to be. This will also take you to q. 18, especially aa. 2-4, on the **life** of the intelligent being.

To bring “esse” more into the discussion, a very good text is *ST* 1-2.18.1.

Another relates to the human soul and its various modes of esse. But ultimately we must look at *ST* 1.5.1. I would say that the **ad 1** of 1.5.1 is **the best lesson** on the relation between “good” and “being”.

Also we must look at **modus species and ordo**, (*ST* 1.5.5) where one sees something about the implications of form; and 1-2.85.4 regarding form and *esse* in that context.

## Conclusions



Throughout Fr. Dewan's answers we can confirm the idea that the relation between form and being is actually complex. In fact, being, form, divine causality, nature, existence, are all primary notions before which mind has to make the effort to understand them articulately, i.e. as they are given in reality.

What makes Lawrence Dewan's approach especially attractive is his brilliant effort to show the existential articulation between notions which, due to the habit of studying them separately, we may understand as being separate in reality. It may be stated, then, that his view about those notions is, therefore, more existential. They are all studied and analyzed from "the viewpoint of being." Thus, the risk of showing them from a somewhat rationalistic standpoint is not so great.

It is not the case that other Thomists have not been trying and are still also trying to get an existential grasping of being, as well as of form and *ens*. What happens is that Dewan's insistence on approaching things from the viewpoint of being is something that really characterizes and enlightens all his metaphysical thought.

So, rather than taking sides for whichever Thomistic school one wishes to 'fight' for, the spirit guiding the publication of these conversations is to show the broad-mindedness and greatness of views that invite us and challenge us again and again in the philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas, a philosophy as splendid and dynamic as is reality itself.



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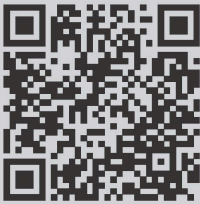


## CONVERSATIONS with Fr. DEWAN

*Central Metaphysical Topics with Lawrence Dewan, O.P.*

For those who have been formed under Gilson's metaphysical view, it is certainly not easy to avoid misinterpreting Dewan's approach. This is why, since I started to read Fr. Dewan's work, I felt the need to maintain a constant dialogue with him to solve the doubts which appeared during the reading. *"Conversations with Lawrence Dewan"* is the fruit of these dialogues I have been having with him, both personally and by email from January 2008 to December 2014.

This work is a result of *Dewan Project in Spanish* which is developed since 2008 by *Lumen* Research Group, led by Liliana Irizar, Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities, Sergio Arboleda University, Bogotá, Colombia.



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