

## THOMISTIC EXISTENTIALISM AND THE SILENCE OF THE QUINQUE VIAE

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### I.

In the wake of Pope Leo XII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* ((1879), which enjoined Catholic intellectuals to return to a study of Thomas Aquinas, the twentieth century produced an abundance of intriguing interpretations of Aquinas' metaphysics. One of these interpretations is that of Canadian philosopher, Father Joseph Owens, C.SS.R. Contributing his own exhaustive scholarship and penetrating philosophical acumen, Owens brings to full flower the seminal ideas about Aquinas contained in the works of Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson.<sup>1</sup>

Owens repeatedly hammers out the thesis that the *sine qua non* of Thomistic metaphysics, both for understanding its subject matter and for seeing how it reaches God as the cause of that subject matter, is the *esse* of sensible things. This *esse* is originally grasped in an intellectual activity technically called judgment.<sup>2</sup> To look at things in the light of their *esse* assures a fix upon things that is distinct from other scientific considerations. Moreover, this is a fix on an aspect so fundamental that the cause of *esse* can only be the creative God.

Owens translates Aquinas' term "esse" as "existence" and as "being." Hence, Owens speaks of Aquinas' "existentialism."<sup>3</sup> By "existence," is meant a unique act and principle in any created existent. Existence is the thing's *very* act. As such, existence makes the thing more than nothing. Because of existence, the thing is denominated "*ens*," or "a being." As it translates "*esse*," "existence" signifies a principle most intimate and deeply set in the thing.<sup>4</sup>

Owens marshalls text after Thomistic text to support his thesis. Yet to some Owens' efforts lead only to decreasing returns. The more successful Owens is in establishing the thesis of the centrality of *esse* in Thomistic

'Cf., "[Owens] acknowledges, as well, his indebtedness to M. Gilson's interpretation of St. Thomas (IX). It is impossible to look upon his work as other than an interpretation of St. Thomas. There is no Denzinger circumscribing a philosopher's endeavor. No one can say that it is impossible to interpret the metaphysical writings of St. Thomas in this way. Fr. Owens has done it." Thomas C. O'Brien, "Review of Owens' *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*," *The New Scholasticism*, 38 (1964), pp. 270-73. For the connection between Owens' existential interpretation and Gilson and Maritain, see also Owens' *St. Thomas and the Future of Metaphysics* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1973), p. 74, n. 24. For an Owens bibliography complete through 1983, see Lloyd P. Gerson, *Graceful Reason. Essay in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy Presented to Joseph Owens*, C.S.s.R. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1983), pp. 419-33. Owens critically situates his interpretation of Aquinas' metaphysics in relation to the participationist and transcendental interpretations in "Aquinas on Knowing Existence," edited by John R. Catan in *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: Collected Papers of Joseph Owens* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), pp. 20-33. For Owens on the role of natural philosophy in Aquinas' metaphysics, see his "A Note on the Approach to Thomistic Metaphysics" *The New Scholasticism*, 28 (1954), 454-76.

"On these points Owens makes these remarks. "The subject of Thomistic metaphysics is, of course, the composite of essence and existence; for that is what holds the priority in the genesis of human thought. But that subject is constituted as such by the existential act. Existence as such because it is not known directly as a nature, cannot be the subject of the science. Yet existence remains the aspect from which things are treated in Thomistic metaphysics." *St. Thomas and the Future of Metaphysics*, p. 49. Also, "The being that places a thing under the subject of metaphysics is the being that is immediately known in sensible things through each ordinary, everyday judgment, and that is everywhere universalized by the ordinary man in a subsequent concept. . . . Rather, [being] is what is first grasped through judgment in the concretion of the sensible thing, as the thing is immediately known in sensible experience. It is not something esoteric or farfetched, but is familiar to everyone in every cognitive act." *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1963), pp. 370-71. Also, see Owens on "common being" as the subject of

metaphysics, *ibid.*, pp. 59-60. For Owens' presentation of the Thomistic demonstration of God from judgmentally grasped *esse*, see his "The Causal Proposition—Principle or Conclusion?" *The Modern Schoolman*, 32 (1955), pp. 323-39; *Elementary*, ch. 5; *An Interpretation of Existence* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1968), pp. 77-85.

"Existence" is used in *Interpretation*; "being" is used in *Elementary*. Owens explains the application of "existentialism" to Aquinas' metaphysics this way: "What is meant exactly by the existential interpretation of St. Thomas' doctrine? The term "existential" is quite evidently borrowed from the trend in modern thought that commenced with Kierkegaard and is so well known today through the work of men like Heidegger, Jasper, and Sartre. As in these writers so in St. Thomas existence is seen in contrast to essence, and as having the absolute primacy over essence. However, in St. Thomas this contrast does not fall between subjectivity and objectivity. Rather, the existence first known is that of external sensible things. Existence is in this sense fully as objective as essence, and essence likewise pertains as much to the subject as to the object. In other words, "existence" in the Thomistic doctrine bears no intrinsic resemblance at all to what is meant by the same term in the modern existentialists. The only analogy that allows the same name to denote both types of thinking is that, in each, existence is given an absolute priority over essence. Accordingly, the standard themes of modern existentialism, anguish, nausea, frustration, despair, and so on, need not be looked for in the development of Thomistic thought." *St. Thomas and the Future of Metaphysics*, pp. 36-37.

'On Owens' interpretation Aquinas is not one of the "metaphysicians of Being" holding the existence-as-attribute view so effectively criticized by Alfred Jules Ayer. For the criticism, see Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1952), pp. 42-43.

"The doctor of Catholic truth ought not only to instruct the proficient, but also to teach beginners. As St. Paul says, *As unto little ones in Christ, I gave you milk to drink, not meat* (1 Cor. iii, 1-2). For this reason it is our purpose in the present work to treat of things which belong to the Christian religion in such a way as befits the instruction of beginners." Prologue of *Summa Theologiae*, as edited by Anton C. Pegis in *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Random House, 1945), I, p. 4.

metaphysics, the more embarrassing become the *quinque viae*. The *quinque viae* are five brief *demonstrations* for God presented by Aquinas in the *prima pars* of the *Summa Theologiae* at question two, article three. The *viae* occur in a work dedicated to beginners in theology, *incipientes*. The *Summa* will also seek to avoid producing weariness and confusion in the minds of these beginners.<sup>5</sup> Yet, no apparent reference to *esse* or to judgment is found in the *quinque via*. For some this absence stands as an irremovable affront to the accuracy of Owens' thesis. How can it be that the judgmental grasp of *esse* is so central for the subject of metaphysics and the starting point of the proof for God and yet not even a hint of these points can be discovered in the *via*? Is this any way to write for beginners? Is this any way to avoid confusion in their minds?

But if the words of the *quinque viae* fail to express Aquinas' existentialism, neither do they deny it. Hence, Owens has gone on to write a number of extensive articles on the *prima via*. Despite appearances to the contrary, Owens claims that the life-blood coursing through the *prima via* is Aquinas' metaphysics of *esse*. Though Aquinas is talking Aristotle, he is thinking his own metaphysics of *esse*. Specifically it is the term "*actus*" that is being given an existential filling. In an Aristotelian context "*actus*" means form, in a Thomistic context "*actus*" means *esse*. For the latter point, a mountain of texts is again forthcoming.<sup>6</sup> Despite this Owens admits that his argument for the implicitness of *esse* in the *prima via* is indirect. Owens remarks, "True, Aquinas nowhere writes that he is proceeding in this manner." Once again some wonder whether the problem still stands. If "*actus*" means *esse*, why did Aquinas fail to mention this in the *prima via*, a text especially written for beginners in theology?

The purpose of my article is to remove this hindrance some find in Owens' position. My thesis is that hesitancy with accepting Owens' position arises from a misunderstanding about the nature of the *Summa Theologiae*. Those who use the silence of the *quinque viae* about *esse* to question Owens' interpretation of Aquinas' metaphysics assume that the *Summa* was merely to be read by the *incipientes*. Rather, Aquinas intended that the *Summa* be presented to beginners through a teacher, a *magister*. The issue then becomes whether Aquinas gives ample indication of the existentialism of the *viae* to a *magister*. Pursuit of this question reveals a clear path to Aquinas' metaphysics of *esse*.

## II.

The prologue to the *Summa* makes clear that it is a work to be taught. It is not a work to be tackled by the student alone. Rather, a study of the text was to be undertaken under the tutelage of a *magister*. In the prologue Aquinas writes,

*Thomistic Existentialism and the Silence of the Quinque Via*  
John E. X. Knasas

Students in this science have not seldom been hampered by what they found written by other authors, partly on account of the multiplicity of useless questions, articles, and arguments; partly also because the things they need to know are not taught according to the order of learning (*secundum ordinem disciplinae*), but according as the plan of the book might require or the occasion of disputing (*disputandi*) might offer; partly, too, because frequent repetition brought weariness and confusion to the minds of listening students.

Anxious, therefore, to overcome these and other obstacles, we will try, confident of divine help, to present those things pertaining to sacred doctrine briefly and clearly insofar as the matter will permit.<sup>8</sup>

In his *The Setting of the Summa Theologiae of Saint Thomas*, Leonard Boyle remarks:

Yet although the subject of this part of the prologue is “*ea quae scripta sunt a diversis*” and not, if it were teaching, “*ea quae traduntur*,” there is a possible ambiguity in the passage, as though Thomas were speaking on two levels at once. For his complaint against the longueurs and disorder in the writings on theology in question ends with a seeming reference to classrooms and teaching (“*eorumdem frequens repetitio et fastidium et confusione generabat in animis auditorum*”) rather than, as one would expect, to reading and studying.<sup>9</sup>

Another indication that the *Summa* was to be a classroom text is furnished by James Weisheipl. In his *Friar Thomas D'Aquino*, Weisheipl indicates that Aquinas took up the writing of the *Summa* as a result of unsuccessfully teaching his commentary on Lombard's *Sentences*.<sup>10</sup> It seems Aquinas wished to replace one classroom text with another more suitable.

But if Aquinas intended his *Summa* to be taught, there is also indication that he intended it to be taught by a *magister* familiar with his previous writings.

<sup>8</sup>“The Starting Point of the *Prima via*, in Catan, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-91 and “Actuality in the *Prima via* of St. Thomas,” in Catan, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-207. For a summary of how the *prima via* would be read existentially, see my “Aquinas: Prayer to An Immutable God,” *The New Scholasticism*, 57(1983), pp. 205-07.

<sup>9</sup>“Aquinas and the Five Ways,” in Catan, *op. cit.*, pp. 134. Outside the *quinque viae*, however, Owens documents Aquinas seeing “in the acquiring of existence the probative force of the arguments of other thinkers...” *loc. cit.*

<sup>10</sup>As translated by James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino His Life, Thought, and Work* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), p. 218. In *Basic*

The previous theological texts with which Aquinas was dissatisfied obviously included his own previous writings. Otherwise Aquinas would have taught them and not have begun the *Summa*. These previous works included: *Commentary on the Sentences* (1252-6), *De Ente et Essentia* (1252-6), *De Principiis Naturae* (1252-6), *In De Hebdomadibus* (1256-9), *De Quodlibetales* (1256-9), *De Veritate* (1256-7), *In De Trinitate* (1258-9), *Summa Contra Gentiles* (1259-64), *De Potentia* (1265-6), and *De Malo* (1266-7). Also, all of these works fail to be systematic, brief and clear expositions of sacred doctrine for the instruction of beginners in theology. The *Contra Gentiles* is a possible exception. But the welter of arguments each of its chapters contains appears to make it an undesirable text.

No induction exists that Aquinas considered the seminal ideas of these works philosophically and theologically inadequate. Rather, the inadequacy was in the arrangement of the material. The arrangement was not *secundum ordinem disciplinae*.

If the *Summa* was intended to be presented to students through the medium of a *magister* familiar with Aquinas' other works, then it is no surprise that its texts can be elliptical and enigmatic, especially to the novice. The texts were not meant to stand alone. They were to be accompanied by the exposition of the teacher. The exposition would appropriately draw upon the wealth of insight and argumentation contained in Aquinas' more elaborate discussions.

The silence about *esse* in the *quinque viae* must be taken up in this context. Aquinas' failure to call attention to *esse* in the *quinque viae* would be inexcusable if the *viae* were to be read by the beginner on his own. But for the *magister*, supposedly familiar with Aquinas' other writings, the silence about *esse* in the *viae* may be the teacher's opportunity to introduce existential considerations that Aquinas is quite adamant about elsewhere. The question becomes, “What would the *magister* find by studying Aquinas' other texts on knowing God?”

### III.

The *quinque viae* occur as the third and concluding article of question two. The preceding articles are obviously introductory to the third. The first article takes up whether “God exists” is a self-evident proposition. Aquinas' conclusion is that this proposition is self-evident in itself but not to us. Rather, we know its truth through a demonstration starting from God's effects (*per effectus*). The second article goes on to delineate the type of demonstration meant. Finally, the *quinque viae* themselves appear in article three. What would a *magister* find if he consulted Aquinas' more elaborate discussions of these introductory points?

Earlier in his *De Veritate* at question X, article 12, Aquinas also discusses whether “God exists” is *per se notum*. Here too the conclusion is made that “God exists” is not self-evident to us, yet the proposition is known by demonstrations taken from God’s effects (*ex effectibus*). But, most importantly, to the tenth objection of the second set, Aquinas specifies what he is understanding by effects. He says:

God is known not only in the effect of justice, but also in his other effects: whence given that God is not known by someone as just, it does not follow that he is not known in any way. It is impossible that none of his effects are known, since his effect is common being (*ens commune*), which is not able to be unknown.<sup>12</sup>

Even though God’s justice may not be evident, his effect of *ens commune* cannot be unknown.<sup>13</sup> From common being, if not from divine justice, God can be demonstrated to exist. What is *ens commune*, this effect that provides an unmistakable starting point for demonstrating God?

In the very first article of the *De Veritate*, Aquinas takes great pains to spell out his understanding of *ens*. Is there any reference to *esse*? He says that the intellect conceives *ens* as most known (*notissimum*) and as that into which it resolves all its concepts. For every nature is essentially a being. Aquinas further concludes that other concepts add to being, not by bringing in something extrinsic, but by expressing something already implicitly contained; within the meaning of *ens*.

This expression takes two general forms. First, certain special modes of *ens* can be what is expressed. Examples are the diverse genera of things (*diversa rerum genera*), namely substance and the various kinds of accidents, such as quantity, quality, relation, action, and so forth. Both substance and accidents express special regions within the larger notion of *ens*.

Second, some of our concepts can express different meanings true of every being. These are general modes of being. These general modes are of two kinds:

<sup>12</sup>Cf., “Now with these considerations we dispose of the error of those who because they noticed that evils occur in the world, said that there is no God. Thus Boethius introduces a certain philosopher who asks, If God exists whence comes evil? But it could be argued to the contrary: If evil exists, God exists. For there would be no evil if the order of good were taken away, since its privation is evil. But this order would not exist if there were no God.” Aquinas, *S.C.G.* III, 71. *Per haec autem*; trans. by V. Bourke, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith* (Garden City, NY, 1956), III, pt. I, pp. 340-41. On how this thought redefines the problem of evil, see Frederic Copleston, *Aquinas* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1961), pp. 149-50; James Collins, *God in Modern Philosophy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1978), pp. 395-96.

<sup>13</sup>“*ens sumitur ab actu essendi sed nomen rei exprimit quidditatem vel essentiam ensis*” *De Ver.* I, 1c; Leonine ed., p. 5

<sup>14</sup>“*cum dicitor ‘diversum est esse et quod est’ distinguitur actus essendi ab eo cui ille actus convenit; nomen autem ens ab actu essendi sumitur, non ab eo cui convenit actus essendi*” *De Ver.* I, 1, ad 3m of the second set; Leonine ed., p. 7

<sup>15</sup>That for Aquinas the various accidental natures have their own *esse*, see Joseph Owens, “Actuality in the *Prima via* of St. Thomas,” in Catan, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-96.

those true of every being of itself and those true of every being in its relation to another. As regards meanings true of every being in itself, Aquinas says that we can speak affirmatively or negatively. Affirmatively speaking, essence is found in every being. At this point Aquinas makes some remarks about *ens* that draw upon his existentialism. Aquinas distinguishes the meanings of the terms *ens* and *res* in the following manner.

... *being (ens)* is taken from the act of being (*actus essendi*) but the name of *thing (res)* expresses the quiddity or essence of the being.<sup>14</sup>

What is meant by *actus essendi* here? Aquinas’ reply to the third objection of the second set is relevant. There Aquinas says:

In the statement, “To be (*esse*) is other than that which is (*quod est*),” the act of being (*actus essendi*) is distinguished from that to which that act belongs. But the name of being (*ens*) is taken from the act of existence (*actus essendi*), not from that whose act it is.<sup>15</sup>

By *actus essendi* Aquinas means *esse*. *Esse* is the act of the *quod est* to which *esse* belongs. The *quod est* is what he called quiddity or essence and with which he identified thing (*res*). This leads to an important conclusion. The terms *ens* is given to the various genera of things (*diversa rerum genera*), for example, substance and accident, on the basis of the *esse* that belongs to them. In other words, by *ens* Aquinas is referring to a composition of *essentia* and *esse* that can be specialized into compositions of substance and *esse* or the various accidents and their *esse*.<sup>16</sup>

A look at *De Ver.* I, 1c indicates that by *ens commune* Aquinas is referring to this large field of existential composites. From within this field one can find starting points for demonstrating God.

#### IV

Yet if the above is what Aquinas means by *ens commune*, what is the explanation of how we form this meaning? As “*commune*” *ens* must be a meaning grasped in some multiplicity.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, since *ens* is a composition of *essentia* and *esse*, the many in which it is spied must be individual compositions of *essentia* and *esse*. The question about the formation of *ens* reduces to the issue of how a multiplicity of existential composites is brought before the conceptualizing capacity of the intellect.

Earlier in his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, Aquinas briefly indicated how something is grasped as a composition of *quidditas* and *esse*.<sup>18</sup> There is what he calls the two-fold operation of the intellect (*dupliciter*).

*operatio*). A summary of this position is the following. The first activity is given a number of names indicating its recognition by philosophers. Aristotle called it the understanding of indivisibles. Among Moslem philosophers it was called *formation* and *fides*.<sup>18</sup> According to Aquinas, this first operation does not grasp the *esse* of the thing, but the thing's simple quiddity.

The procedure Aquinas has in mind is detailed in the *De Ente et Essentia*, a work from the same period as his commentary on the *Sentences*. There is what is called the absolute consideration of the essence. This consideration abstracts from every *esse* that the essence may have.<sup>19</sup> The movement of the intellect's attention is from some multiple existential instances of the essence. For example, the meaning of "man" existing in reality in Tom, Dick, and Harry, and in the mind in the specific concept. From this observation Aquinas concludes that to man as such neither real existence nor cognitional existence can belong. Hence, he says, "I can know, for instance, what a man or a phoenix is and still be ignorant whether it has being in reality."<sup>20</sup>

What should be noted is that though Aquinas runs through absolute consideration with the meaning of "man" as the example, the same can be done using

<sup>18</sup>The common nature is the object of the intellect's absolute consideration; for the texts, see Joseph Owens, "Common Nature: A Point of Comparison between Thomistic and Scotistic Metaphysics," *Mediaeval Studies*, 19 (1957), pp. 6-7. Yet absolute consideration always works from a multiplicity; see *infra* nn. 18-21.

<sup>19</sup>In *I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad 7m, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, Solut. Also *De Trin.* V, 3c. For a more protracted description of the two-fold operation of the intellect, see my "Esse as the Target of Judgment in Rahner and Aquinas," to be published in the 1985 *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*.

<sup>20</sup>For the texts of Averroes and Avicenna, see M. D. Chenu, "Un Vestige du Stoïcisme," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 27 (January, 1938), 63-68.

<sup>19a</sup>"Natura autem vel essentia sic accepta potest duplice considerari. Uno modo, secundum naturam et rationem propriam et haec est absoluta consideratio ipsius. Haec autem natura habet duplex esse unum in singularibus, aliud in anima; et secundum utrumque consequantur accidentia dictam naturam. Et sic in singularibus habet multiplex esse secundum, diversitatem singularium; et tamen ipsi naturae, secundum propriam considerationem, scilicet absolutam, nullum istorum esse debet." *De Ente* V, 3; Marietti ed., p. 14.

<sup>20</sup>"Possum enim intelligere quid est homo vel phoenix, et tamen ignorare an esse habeant in rerum natura." *De Ente* V, 3; Marietti ed., p. 16.

the individual. Not only is man found in an existential multiplicity, so too is Tom. Tom is found really existing and cognitively existing. How is this multiplicity of instances set up? One starts with the awareness of the really existing thing. Then through an act of reflection, one turns to an awareness of one's awareness of the really existing thing. In other words, one secondly grasps the really existing thing existing in one's awareness. This reflective object is not the image of the existent. It is the real existent itself that is reflectively grasped as in cognition. For Aquinas no image is employed in external sensation. The sensible thing is known in itself.<sup>21</sup> In its activities of imagining, conceptualizing, and judging the human knower will go on to express in cognitional likenesses the objects grasped in these activities. These cognitional likenesses are respectively: the image, the concept, and the proposition.<sup>22</sup> These cognitional likenesses are grasped by other and different reflective acts than the one of which I am now speaking. At the present time the reflectively grasped object existing in cognition is some real thing itself. "Cognitional existence" is, then, ambiguous. And the various meanings should be kept carefully distinguished. "Cognitional existence" refers both to the presence of reality itself in the act of cognition and also to the presence of cognitional likenesses.

Hence, one produces the multiplicity of the really existing thing and the really existing thing existing in cognition. Thanks to the erecting of this multiplicity, a first act of the intellect can commence. Here the intellect picks out the thing itself as the commonality. Because the thing is grasped, on the one hand, as really existing and, on the other hand, as both really and cognitively existing, our cognitive attention is focused upon the thing itself. It stands out as the commonality in the instances. The commonality is not the really existing thing. More precisely, the commonality is just the thing itself.

The first operation of the intellect is a penetration into a number of existential instances. It is not for nothing that Aquinas elsewhere refers to the first operation as *intellectus*.<sup>23</sup> In penetrating the multiplicity before it, the first operation grasps some thing as the commonality. To do this it leaves behind peculiarities found back in the instances. These peculiarities are the real and cognitional existence. The attained object is grasped as abstracting from every *esse*—as, one might say, existentially neutral.

Yet after reaching this point, the intellect does not rest content with an absolutely considered quiddity. There follows the second operation. The intellect's second operation grasps distinctly the *esse* of the thing. Aquinas says that the second operation consists in the composition and division of a proposition. This formula of "composition and division of a proposition" for the second operation can be confusing. Forming propositions is one thing, grasping the

thing's *esse* is something else.<sup>21</sup> One is aware that he can form the proposition "The weather is sunny" in the midst of a thunder storm. Though the second operation may involve the construction of propositions, it is something more than that. If a penetrative grasp of a commonality in a number of existential instances is characteristic of the intellect's first act, then a reflection back upon the instances in which the commonality was grasped is characteristic of the second act. In this rebound of the intellect's awareness, the *esse* left out in the intellect's first operation is recovered. In this way the intellect grasps the *esse* of the thing.<sup>22</sup> This second act of the intellect is also called judgment.<sup>23</sup>

Most important to realize is the compositeness of the object of the intellect's second operation. It is not just the *esse* of the thing, nor just the thing. The object is, for example, the thing-with-its-real-*esse*. What was first given to the intellect as an existing thing is at the term of its two-fold operation appearing as a thing *with* existence. To use a photography analogy, the picture has gone from glossy to grainy. What appeared as one, now manifests parts.

In other words, in the second act of the intellect, the original multiplicity given to the intellect is once again set up, but in a far richer fashion. Before the gaze of the intellect is not just a real and cognitional thing, but a thing with real and cognitional *esse*. Rather than merely a multiplicity of wholes, there is now a multiplicity of composites. A multiplicity of *habentia esse*.

The stage is set for a further act of conceptualization. Its object is *ens*, *habens esse*. As mentioned, the intellect now has before it a line of composites

<sup>21</sup> Forming propositions indicates a more fundamental composing activity of the intellect. "Voces significant conceptiones intellectus ut dicit Philosophus in I Perit. Sed in vocibus est compositio et divisio, ut patet in propositionibus affirmativis et negativis. Ergo intellectus componit et dividit" (ST I 85, 5. *Sed contra*; Ottawa ed., p. 531a-b).

<sup>22</sup> At ST I 85, 5c the intellect has perfect knowledge when it "intelligunt propriae et accidentia et habitudines circumstantes rei essentiam." These are found in the singular thing. But at 86, 1c the singular is known "indirecte autem et quasi per quandam reflexionem." When this test also says that "Unde intellectus noster directe non est cognoscitivus nisi universale," this should not be taken as contradicting what has been said about the absolute consideration of the individual. Aquinas is speaking of what the intellect knows "*in rebus materialibus*." If the field of cognition is added to this field as Owens points out (*Supra*, n. 20) then the individual itself can be picked out as the commonality. For other texts on the reflexive na-

ture of the intellect's second act see Robert J. Henle, *Method in Metaphysics* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), pp. 69-72, n. 26.

<sup>23</sup> Owens has noted the ambiguity of "judgment": "judgment has two meanings that require careful distinction. In one meaning it is the dynamic intellectual act by which synthesizing existence is being grasped. In the other meaning, it is the static, frozen representation of that action's cognitional form." "Judgment and Truth in Aquinas" in Catan *op. cit.*, p. 47. Also, "Accordingly, judgment" in its technical sense of knowing existence is a different activity from the constructing of propositions" Owens, *Interpretation*, p. 22.

Cf. Jacques Maritain: "C'est après cela [the act of judgment] qu'un retour de la première opération de l'esprit sur ce qui a été ainsi vu (mais pas par elle) en produira une idée un concept en verbe mental qui le désignera et sera maniable au discours. *Approuches sans Entraves* (Paris: Fayard 1973), p. 265.

It is, for example, Tom-with-real-*esse*, Tom-with-cognitional-*esse*, Dick-with-real-*esse*, Dick-with-cognitional-*esse* and so forth. This multiplicity is reduced to unity in a new first act of the intellect. This new first act grasps *ens* as the commonality present in the multiplicity. *Ens* is a commonality that cannot be grasped until the intellect has first gone through one cycle of its two-fold operation. *Ens* cannot be grasped until the *esse* of a number of things has been distinguished from them. Things have first to be set up, not simply as existing, but as *with esse*. The composite of *ens*, that is, *essentia plus esse*, can then follow.<sup>24</sup>

## V.

Aquinas' delineation of *ens* in the *De Veritate* I, 1c is for the most part just a reading off of what he sees in the original multiple of sensation and reflection reconstituted by the intellect's two-fold activity. From the height provided by the two-fold operation of the intellect, Aquinas has the viewpoint to survey the terrain of *ens*. From this lookout he sees *ens* divide into its special modes of substance and accident and common modes of *essentia*, *res*, *unum*, *verum*, and *bonum*. Substance and accident are just various ways in which real *esse* is had. Just as a substance can be grasped as composed with its *esse* in the intellect's two-fold activity, so too can an accident. Each then emerges as two ways in which *ens*, or *habens esse*, can be realized. Likewise, *essentia*, or *ens*, emerges as something common in every being. It is what is common to substance and accident and enables each to be a haer of real *esse*. *Unum* is certainly true of each *ens*. The second activity of the intellect grasps each *esse* as the fusing of a number of natures. For instance, man and white in Tom, man and black in Dick. Moreover, by its intrinsic oneness each *ens* is seen as distinguished from others. Each is an *aliquid*.

Yes, Aquinas does admit that the details of *ens* take time to sketch out. All the wrinkles in the notion are not obvious at first. For example, to understand *ens* as *verum* and as *bonum* presupposes certain reasoned conclusions about the nature of the human soul.<sup>25</sup> But there is little doubt that the starting point for his delineation of *ens* is the multitude of sensation and reflection grasped in the two-fold activity of the intellect. Through the two-fold activity each item of this multitude has been rendered a composition of an essence and its *esse*. The exposition of *ens* starts from there.

What should also be noticed is how Aquinas' understanding of *ens* is at once as original and yet so Aristotelian. Aquinas' understanding comes equipped with a non-Aristotelian component. That component is *esse*. Aquinas' innovation was soon noticed by the Latin Averroist, Siger of Brabant.<sup>26</sup> Like a good

Aristotelian, Siger admitted not knowing of what Aquinas was speaking. Despite the otherness of *esse* from substance, for example, Aquinas says in puzzling fashion that every nature is essentially a being, *ens*.

The identity between substance and being is straight Aristotelianism. Aristotle remarked that being means substance and that there is no difference in meaning between a man and an existing man.<sup>10</sup> Averroes would reiterate this point when criticizing Avicenna for saying that something is a being by reason of an addition to it.<sup>11</sup>

So how can Aquinas say that *esse* is other than substance and substance is essentially a being? Is not predication on the basis of what is other than the thing talked about an accidental predication? For example, when one says "Tom is a musician," "musician" is predicated accidentally because the ability to perform musically does not belong to Tom's essence. Rather, it is something acquired through practice. Why does this not hold of the prediction of *ens* whose basis is *esse*, something other than essence?

Again Aquinas' approach to *ens* through the two-fold activity of the intellect provides the answer. In the intellect's second operation of judgment, the *esse* of the thing is appearing as other than the thing but in the manner of the thing's very act. Apart from *esse* the thing is nothing.<sup>12</sup> This means that *esse* is essential

<sup>10</sup>For example, "Sed non tamen oportet ut quicunque intelligat rationem entis intelligat veri rationem." (*De Ver.* I, 1, ad 3m; Leonine ed., p. 7) For the argumentation necessary to understand the nature of the soul so that *verum* can be grasped, see *De Ver.* I, 10, 8c. Also, it is possible through argumentation from natural philosophy or philosophical psychology that the notion of being is realized to outstrip the material order. See James A. Weisheipl, *The Relationship of Medieval Natural Philosophy to Modern Science: "The Contribution of Thomas Aquinas to its Understanding,"* *Manuscripta*, 20 (1976), p. 194. Thomas C. O'Brien, however, claims that reasoning from natural philosophy not only demonstrates the immaterial but also gives the distinction between essence and existence that sets up *ens*. "Negatively, this is the understanding that to be is not necessarily to be material and changeable. The occasion for such a realization is the discovery that there are beings, existent things, that exist, and are not material" *Metaphysics and the Existence of God* (Washington: The Thomist Press, 1960), p. 160 and also 162. The problem that I find in O'Brien's position is this. If *esse* is not already distinctly appreciated before the demonstration of the immaterial, then how does such a demonstration say anything about *esse*? Does not the de-

mension only show that our concept of substance is not identical with body? It seems so. Rather, our initial notion of *ens* is formed thanks to the distinct judgmental grasp of the *esse* of material things. This notion is later broadened when immaterial existents are demonstrated. It is worth noting that Aquinas lists *ens* along with substance at *De Trin.* V, 3c. But our initial grasp of substance surely does not wait upon a demonstration of the immaterial. Likewise for *ens*.

<sup>11</sup>For Siger's criticism of Aquinas' view of *esse*, see Armand Maurer, "Esse and Essentialia in the Metaphysics of Siger of Brabant," *Mediaeval Studies*, 8 (1946), p. 71.

<sup>12</sup>For Aristotle's texts, see Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), pp. 158-59.

<sup>13</sup>Maurer, *op.cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>14</sup>*De Pot.* VII, 2, ad 9m and *S.T.* I, 4, 1, ad 3m

<sup>15</sup>It could also be noted that Aquinas' understanding of *esse* is not bothered by Aristotle's strictures against a science of the accidental. Because in its own way *esse* is also essential to things, *esse* permits necessary conclusions about things. A science of things in the light of their *esse* is assured. For a discussion of this point and a listing of the Aristotelian texts, see Owens, *Interpretation*, p. 33, n. 16.

to the thing not because it is included in the thing's essence but because without *esse* the thing is nothing. As the first article of the *De Veritate* said, *esse* is *actus essendi*. This clearly indicates the presence of the intellect's act of judgment in which *esse* appears precisely as such an act. In its turn, the actuated nature appears as essentially a being. Again, why? The denomination of the thing as a being is made on the basis of its *esse*, and *esse* in a sense is essential to the thing. In what sense? By being other than the thing as the thing's very act, *esse* is essential to the thing through its importance for the thing. *Esse* is both accidental and essential.

The importance of this view of *esse* is that it allows Aquinas to express his own metaphysics through Aristotle. Because the terminology continues to be Aristotle's, Aristotle is presented as the one doing the speaking. By retaining the Aristotelian expressions of being but making the meaning his own, Aquinas presents an Aristotle who ultimately gives utterance to a view of reality compatible with the Christian faith. In this light, it is no surprise how Aquinas can say at *Contra Gentiles* I, 13: "We shall first set forth the arguments by which Aristotle proceeds to prove that God exists."<sup>13</sup>

## VI.

Such is Aquinas' thinking on the formation of what he calls *ens*. Yet as noted, Aquinas insists that *ens* is an effect from which God is known. Does Aquinas ever explain how God is demonstrated from *ens*? Yes. In well-known works previous to the *De Veritate*, Aquinas demonstrates God from the *esse* component of *ens*. These texts are in the commentary on the *Sentences* and in his *De Ente et Essentia*. Owens has provided Thomistic scholars with profound studies of these texts.<sup>14</sup> For my purposes a presentation of the reasoning of the texts is not required. It will suffice to point out that judgmentally grasped *esse* propels their reasoning. Grasped in the intellect's operation of judgment, the thing's *esse* manifests a characteristic relation to the thing. The *esse* is both distinct from the thing, or accidental, and prior to the thing it is actuating. This two-fold status means that *esse* is fundamentally dependent upon some other thing. Only a thing whose *esse* is not accidental and prior but identical with the thing ultimately explains dependent *esse*. Such a thing is subsistent existence. It is apparently identical with the God of Jewish and Christian Scripture who revealed his name to Moses as "I am who am."

It is by focusing on the *esse* component of *ens* that Aquinas can say that from *ens* one demonstrates God. That God is reached from *ens* is Aquinas' constant assertion. As mentioned, at *De Veritate* X, 12, we find *ens* specified as the effect from which God is demonstrated. This is repeated in the commentary

on the *De Trinitate* of Boethius, written prior to the *De Veritate*. Aquinas says:

Philosophers, then study these divine beings [God and the separate intelligences] only insofar as they are the principles of all things. Consequently, they are the objects of the science that investigates what is common to all beings, which has for its subject being as being (*ens in quantum ens*).<sup>36</sup>

In the *prima pars* of the *Summa*, question 44, article 2, the point is reiterated:

Then others advanced further and raised themselves to the consideration of being as being, and who assigned a cause to things, not only according as they are *these* or *such*, but according as they are *beings*. Therefore, whatever is the cause of things considered as beings (*in quantum sunt entia*), must be the cause of things, not only according as they are *such* by accidental forms, nor according as they are *these* by substantial forms, but also according to all that belongs to their being in anyway whatever. And thus it is necessary to say that also primary matter is created by the universal cause of things.

Finally, in *proem* to his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Aquinas once more says:

So it must belong to the same science to investigate the separated substances [that is, God and the Intelligences] and being in general [*ens commune*], which is the genus of which the above mentioned substances are the common and universal causes.

In the light of these assertions, which temporally speaking bracket the *quinq̄ue viae*, the reasonable conclusion is that Aquinas thought that God is demonstrated only from the *esse* of things, from *ens*.<sup>37</sup>

True, the above first and third texts go on to describe the meaning of *ens* as found in material things but able to be apart from material things. For example, *ens* is a meaning that can be realized in angels. But Aquinas' need to speak of *ens* in this fashion is unconnected to cogent reasoning for God

<sup>36</sup>See especially Owens' "The Causal Proposition—Principle or Conclusion?" (*The Modern Schoolman*, 32[1955], p. 329). Also, Owens' *Elementary*, ch. 5 and *Interpretation*, pp. 77–85.

<sup>37</sup>In *de Trin.* V, 4c; trans. by Armand Maurer, *The Division of Methods of the Sciences* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1963), p. 44.

<sup>38</sup>At *S.T.* I, 44, 2c, the Aristotelian approach from substantial form fails to reach a cause of things *qua "entia."* The difficulty of the Aristotelian attempt to reach the First Cause of *ens* can be seen in Averroes. For a description of

Averroes' difficulties, see my "Making Sense of the *Tertia Via*," *The New Scholasticism*, 54 (1980), 509–09.

<sup>39</sup>Joseph Owens, "Aquinas as Aristotelian Commentator" in Catan, *op. cit.*, pp. 4–10.

<sup>40</sup>Weischeipl, *Friar*, p. 130, records that Aquinas' notoriety lead to a request for a text for the instruction of missionaries at the Dominican *studium arabicum* in Barcelona. The text Aquinas composed was his *Summa Contra Gentiles*. It would seem, then, that my above line of reasoning would also explain the silence about *esse* in the *viae* of *C.G.* I, 13.

Reflection upon the texts in which Aquinas argues for God from *esse* shows that Aquinas' reasoning is based not upon the immateriality of *esse*. It is based upon the otherness of *esse* from the thing, from the accidentality of *esse*. Sufficient to grasp this otherness is the activity of judgment. Owens points out that Aquinas' concern to have a notion of *ens* wider than the material is tied to Aquinas' wish to formulate an understanding of the subject of metaphysics compatible with Aristotelian terminology and yet excluding the divine as it is in itself.<sup>38</sup> In this way Aristotle is laundered for Christian theological concerns and the autonomy of sacred theology is also assured.

## VII.

The question "If Aquinas was using *esse* in the *quinq̄ue viae*, why did he not tell us?" has its answer in the reply "Evidently Aquinas thought he did tell us." Writing for *magistri* who would teach the *Summa* bearing in mind his more involved discussions, Aquinas could believe that he gave sufficient indication of his existentialism elsewhere. When Aquinas remarks that the truth of "God exists" is known by demonstration from God's effects and in an earlier parallel text specifies the effects in terms of *ens commune*, he gives unmistakable expression to his existentialism. The faithful *magister* need only follow through with further reading to lay this existentialism bare. The discussion of *ens* and its distinctive note of *esse* at *De Ver.* I, 1c cannot be missed. The claim that the *esse* of the thing is picked out in the intellect's second act had already been made in the commentaries on Lombard's *Sentences* and Boethius' *De Trinitate*. Finally, the explanation of how the *esse* of things leads to *esse subsistens*, the God who gave his name to Moses as I am who am, was set out in the *De Ente et Essentia*. Aquinas marked his trail well. One must, however, realize that there exists a trail to be followed. Understanding that the *Summa Theologiae* was intended to be taught by *magistri* familiar with Aquinas' other texts provides this realization. In conclusion, the silence about *esse* in the *quinq̄ue viae* is no reason to hesitate giving the existential interpretation of Aquinas' metaphysics the full consideration it deserves.<sup>39</sup>