

MACIEJ WAŚ

“THERE IS AN ‘IS’”: INTUITION OF BEING  
IN THE THOUGHT AND WRITINGS  
OF GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON  
(A MARITAINIAN PERSPECTIVE)

The speculative value of Gilbert Keith Chesterton’s literary heritage does not cease to provoke controversy, or even confusion among specialists in the field, with the judgments varying from straightforward affirmation to spiteful mockeries. The purpose of this text is to contribute to the question, if only a little, and to provide a certain path to understanding Chesterton’s writing themselves as well as (in a sense at least) the controversy they cause by demonstrating that their metaphysical potential rests upon metaphysical intuition of being, and metaphysical intuition of being only.

The inquiry shall open with very brief considerations about metaphysical intuition of being as such, pointing to certain essential traits due to which its presence might be identified, which are going to be followed by a short interpretative procedure aimed at localizing these traits in Chesterton’s writings, and end with a handful of conclusions about the possible benefits resulting from this sort of inquiry. The basis for considering metaphysical intuition of being is going to be found in the books penned by an unmatched expert in the field, a French Thomist Jacques Maritain (most notably *A Preface to Metaphysics* and *Existence and the Existent*), whereas in the case of Chesterton’s heritage — chiefly in *Orthodoxy* and *The Everlasting Man*, and — of course — *Saint Thomas Aquinas*.

First things first, then; let us consider metaphysical intuition of being as such.

---

Mgr MACIEJ WAŚ — Uniwersytet Śląski, Wydział Filologiczny, Instytut Kultur i Literatur Anglojęzycznych; adres do korespondencji: ul. Stefana Grota-Roweckiego 5, 41–200 Sosnowiec; e-mail: [maciej.was@interia.pl](mailto:maciej.was@interia.pl); ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0941-2469>.

What is intuition? *Słownik-przewodnik filozoficzny (The Philosophical Dictionary-Guide)*, edited and published by Polish Thomas Aquinas' Association, defines it as “non-discursive, penetrating vision, introductory in relation to further knowledge (reasoning) or crowning it.”<sup>1</sup> According to this definition then, intuition of being should at least constitute a direct, deep and penetrating perception, in a flash of which human mind grasps being precisely *qua* being, abstracted from any possible content and exigencies of more particularized objects; and indeed, it is precisely this. Intuition of being, as Maritain writes in *Existence and the Existent* (1947), grants the thinking subject an access to being that is not “the *vague* being of common sense, nor the *particularized* being of the sciences and of the philosophy of nature, nor the *de-realized* being of logic, nor the pseudo-being of dialectics mistaken for philosophy. It is being disengaged for its own sake.” (MARITAIN 2015, 16). What does it mean *precisely*, however? What is this “being disengaged for its own sake”? Probably the fullest answer to that question can be found in an earlier book by Maritain, one called in English *A Preface to Metaphysics* (1934). In this work, Maritain explains that what this intuition enables the subject to grasp the *object* (being *qua* being) itself (MARITAIN 1943, 63), alongside with “certain exigencies and certain laws” that being itself implies (ibid., 92), with the most important of these being, of course, the first principles, of which the French philosopher names four: “identity, sufficient reason, finality and causality” (ibid., 91) (thus also, in a different place, Maritain writes about “the intuition of being *and* first principles, [cursive mine — M.W.]” (MARITAIN 1931, 126) clearly indicating that the intuitive preception of the latter is just an unfolding or, in a sense, revelation of the “diversity and riches contained in the primary intuition of being as such” (MARITAIN 1943, 75)).

So far so good; however, there is another problem. For how to verify if Gilbert Keith Chesterton had this intuition (as we maintain) or not? Jacques Maritain himself thought it possible to assert, at least in certain cases (like for example in the case of the unfortunate Immanuel Kant<sup>2</sup>), its presence or absence in the mind of the other, so such a procedure seems to be at least not impossible in itself. How? The French *maitre*, clarifying the matter in *A Preface to Metaphysics*, writes that the intuition of being as such, the authentic and “intensive” perception of this object, involves two “lights,” one

<sup>1</sup> S.v. “intuicja”: “ogład niedyskursywny, dogłębny, wstępny w stosunku do dalszego poznania (rozumowania) lub zwięczający je.”

<sup>2</sup> MARITAIN 1943, 48: “Kant never had it.” Simple and communicative.

on the side of the knowing subject, the other on the side of the object itself. This subjective “light” is simply a *habitus*, “internal virtue of knowledge and judgment in the intellect” (as Maritain defines it in another book (MARITAIN 1944, 69)) by the means of which “the intellect is proportioned to a given object” (MARITAIN 1943, 45), or — in other words — can “deal” with the object in question, can examine it effectively, learn the truth about it and — finally — explain it, present it to others in a form most suited to its essential exigencies. Objective “light” is what Maritain calls the “*ratio formalis sub qua*,” rendering an object present in the intellect and knowable for it, a means by which a given aspect of reality itself enters the spiritual life of man and becomes unified with it (*ibid.*). Objective light, “prior in the ontological rank,” is here the principle and the cause, *habitus* — only a “reaction,” so to speak, a “recipient” (*ibid.*); or, in other words, object plays the role of the formal cause, human mind — material one (MARITAIN 2011, 124–125).<sup>3</sup> Now, taking this into consideration, is it not possible that this higher and constitutive light could thus manifest itself *separately* from the lower light it effectuates, not in the order of existence of course — but in the order of operation? It certainly does not seem *im*-possible. “What then is time? If no one asks me, I know: if I wish to explain it to one that asketh, I know not,” says St. Augustine<sup>4</sup>; and if the almost infinite supremacy of the form in relation to matter (GILSON 2015, 196)<sup>5</sup> is taken into account, this historical testimony — great as it is — becomes even more profound. It is quite possible to understand an object, even profoundly to understand it, without possessing the *science* of it, and without being able to speak of it in a specialized manner. And this is precisely what this work is going to focus on; the aim is not to find in Chesterton any metaphysical language, but — let us repeat that, for it is important — metaphysical understanding.

First things first, then, and as to the object itself; to the perception of being as being in its intelligible purity. Did Chesterton know know it for what it is — and did he express this knowledge in some manner? Is it possible to find it in his writings?

<sup>3</sup> Of course, Maritain takes great caution to underline the fact that *species* does not “inform” or “determines” the mind “as form determines a matter or a subject,” yet still the question of “informing” (and thus matter-form relationship) remains, rendering the analogy applied here quite justified.

<sup>4</sup> AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, book IX.

<sup>5</sup> Gilson goes as far as to proclaim that although it is matter that serves as the principle of individuation, the *form* (concretely — the *soul*, for the chapter is dedicated to the Christian concept of man) is the proper “cause of individuality.” Essential superiority of formal order to material order could not be asserted with greater might.

Obviously, never *explicite*; however, as it was said, we are not looking for explicit formulations and professional analyzes, but with the signs of *understanding* the subject in question. What is the nature of this subject, then? To phrase it as briefly as possible, in the light of the perennial philosophy, being is: essentially analogical, composed of two elements: essence and existence,<sup>6</sup> with existence serving here as the constitutive factor, an act, and essence — only potency.<sup>7</sup> This is the proper “definition” of being.

In relation to the first of these elements, the essence-existence relation, it is best to begin by examining an original passage, one contained in Chesterton’s probably most strictly philosophical book, *St. Thomas Aquinas* (1933), a treaty of an amateur that “awed Etienne Gilson himself” (WAŚ 2016, 40) (which is, in the case of GKC, so characteristic). In this book, Chesterton, while describing the quarrel between different philosophical schools, writes:

When a child looks out of the nursery window and sees anything, say the green lawn of the garden, what does he actually know; or does he know anything? [...] St. Thomas Aquinas, suddenly intervening in this nursery quarrel, says emphatically that the child is aware of *Ens*. Long before he knows that grass is grass, or self is self, he knows that something is something. Perhaps it would be best to say very emphatically (with a blow on the table), ‘There is an *Is*.’ That is as much monkish credulity as St. Thomas asks of us at the start. Very few unbelievers start by asking us to believe so little. And yet, upon this sharp pin-point of reality, he rears by long logical processes that have never really been successfully overthrown, the whole cosmic system of Christendom. (CHESTERTON 2007, 81).

Of course, this quote contains many different motives that could be here analyzed. Incidentally, for example, it implicitly states that being (“*Ens*”) is the ultimate and primary object of thought, connatural to the mind (MARITAIN 1931, 109–110), coextensive with the whole field of knowledge, with other objects being but this very object “narrowed down” (so to speak) to a certain aspect (MARITAIN 1943, 25–26) (being “aware of *Ens*” means being aware that “something is something,” with this “something” distinguished from “grass” or — “self,” so from any kind of “particularized being,” whether material or

<sup>6</sup> “[I]n virtue of its essential structure the concept of being also includes in itself indissolubly — as every degree of its polyvalence, and whichever kind of being we are considering, throughout its entire extent, the boundless field it can cover — these two linked and associated members of the pair essence-existence, which the mind cannot *isolate* in separate concepts.” MARITAIN 1943, 65.

<sup>7</sup> “Made real by the act of existing — that is to say, placed outside the state of simple possibility — [essences] are really distinct from it as potency is really distinct from the act that actuates it.” MARITAIN 2015, 26.

immaterial, known scientifically or only *via* the common sense; it is the usual literary method of Chesterton, consisting in — basically — communicating very elevated content through simple, trifle even, forms (WAS 2016, 45)<sup>8</sup>; it is a fascinating subject, about which something will have to be said here later); incidentally, it seems to boarder on the brink of specialist Thomist distinction between *ens ut existens* and *ens ut quid essenziale*, being as existing, as exercising its act of existing or at least capable of exercising it (being as a subject) and being as certain intelligible determination, a network of laws, exigencies, aspects, perceived by the intellect in a quidditative manner (albeit only analogically) (MARITAIN 1943, 92–93). The most important element of this passage, however, lies somewhere else; and is so small, so trifle one even might say, that could be attributed to a mere accident or a slip of a tongue, if not for the profound meaning it conveys, much too elevated to be a result of chance. “There is an Is” — this sentence reveals all that is necessary.

For we might wonder — why is it phrased like this? Why did Chesterton not stop at “something is something” (the simplest and clearest possible formulation of the principle of identity, to which we shall pass in due time), but thought it necessary to make this addition, and — moreover — thought it necessary to render what he had in mind by using such an unusual lexical device, a verb transformed into a noun? Now, obviously nothing here is “certain” in the sense contemporary world seems to ascribe to this word most commonly (and which boarders on the brink of sheer impossibility), yet it seems only probable (or even more than probable) that such a procedure would never take place had Chesterton not needed a special mean of expression, corresponding, doubtless, to the mystery or depth of the reality he tried to describe. What is, in turn, the dominant “moment” of this mean? Indubitably — the fact that it stresses activity and dynamism — and activity and dynamism that transcend, mind, the realm of a simple “something” mentioned just before (so being taken as subject), something undoubtedly connected to it (for it is taken here as a part of the same logical structure) and yet different, at least in a sense, from it, something much more mysterious and elevated (the use of the capital letter also brings some elements into play). Now, does the Everlasting Philosophy distinguish such an element of reality, a part of that would fit this description? The answer is obvious enough; and it is clear almost beyond any doubt that what Chesterton conveys under this phrase is the *act of existing* purely and simply, an “act *par excellence*,” an act of all acts, that which is “most actual and most formal” in

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf. also WILLIS 1961, 48.

all things (MARITAIN 2015, 26), different, infinitely different, of course, from all “secondary acts” committed by creatures in the order of action (MARITAIN 1943, 111)<sup>9</sup> (the capital letter, again, saying more than words<sup>10</sup>) — which all the more stresses the appropriateness of this Chestertonian solution; “it evidently serves a metaphor,” the frequently cited unpublished paper states in its simple and brief manner, “expressing the basic Thomist idea that the act of being (‘Is’) is not identical with essence (‘something that is’)” (WAŚ 2016, 40). And obviously, for — as we have seen, Chesterton sees most clearly both aspects of the problem and expresses them, so to speak, at one blow; there is “a something” and there is “an Is” — and the two form, together, the basic object of the mind, connatural to it, the object *par excellence* — being *qua* being, reality as reality; thus “something is something,” the Chestertonian formulation of the principle of identity, as if “doubles itself” (obviously only in logical implications, which is in itself a proof that thought transcends language), revealing its two-dimensional depth, at once “‘essential’ or ‘copulative’ (‘every being is what it is’), but also and primarily existential (‘that which exists, exists’)” (MARITAIN 2015, 35, endnote 13) which serves as a neat recapitulation and summary of the present deliberations (not to mention that the use of “an Is” is simply a translation of the original Thomas’s *esse* (ŚWIEŻAWSKI 2002, 44–46) — which only demonstrates the complexity of expression, the dense network of allusions Chesterton’s texts are wreathed in).

By a fortunate twist of events, this whole analysis proves the second effect of the intuition of being listed above; for Chesterton, in his concise phrase, not only affirms that being has two inseparable aspects, essence and existence, but that existence takes precedence before essence, serves as its principle, form and supreme act, a certain “energy” vivifying and penetrating whole reality; it is just a logical implication of what has been said hitherto about the problem. Thus, while affirming the intrinsic analogy (proportionality) of being, Chesterton affirms its existential character; “a thing can ‘be’ intelligible and yet not ‘be’ at all” (CHESTERTON 2007, 71) — it is rather clear which one of these senses is here supreme.

---

<sup>9</sup> Maritain, it is useful to note, seems to contradict this thesis by placing *actus secundus* “over and above the simple fact of existing,” but obviously it is only an appearance, for the French philosopher explicitly uses here the word “*fact* of existence,” meaning the natural existence of things apprehended empirically — not existence in its transcendental richness.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. WAŚ, 2016, 60–62 and the analysis of the weather-metaphor from *What’s Wrong with the World* (1910).

That is all that can be said, for now, about the *object* of the intuition of being as such; let us proceed to the first principles. The principle of identity, the most important of all first principles, to which other ones can be reduced (MARITAIN 1943, 101),<sup>11</sup> has largely been covered in this text in the analysis of the passage from *St. Thomas Aquinas*. What is left to do then, in such a preliminary text, is to limit the analysis as much as possible, and proceed to examining two more of the first principles, the most essential besides this of identity — the principle of sufficient reason and of finality, as the *Preface*... lists them.

Principle of sufficient reason consists in realizing, to formulate it as briefly as possible, that being is not nonsensical, or — as Maritain phrases it — that being is “grounded in being,” that it has a real ontological *structure*, the sign of which is the fact that it satisfies the intellect, with being forming a hierarchy of interrelations culminating in the complete aseity of God, who is the supreme Reason of Himself, an infinite Intellection (transcending the duality of the knower and the known) (*ibid.*, 99–101). Sufficient reasons, being definitely real, necessarily point to the Ultimate Reason, which is the reason of them all individually and *in toto*; for the sake of brevity, we shall limit ourselves to this one key aspect.

Can such an intellectual assertion be found in Chesterton’s writings? To establish that, I would propose a procedure that could be deemed as quite risky, yet — I think — worthy of a try. In *Orthodoxy* (1908), perhaps the most *fundamental* of all Chesterton’s book (one that sealed, so to speak, his intellectual crystallization (ODDIE 2010, 10)), we find a passage that runs as follows:

All the towering materialism which dominates the modern mind rests ultimately upon one assumption; a false assumption. It is supposed that if a thing goes on repeating itself it is probably dead; a piece of clockwork. [...] This is a fallacy even in relation to known fact. For the variation in human affairs is generally brought into them, not by life, but by death; by the dying down or breaking off of their strength or desire. [...] The sun rises every morning. I do not rise every morning; but the variation is due not to my activity, but to my inaction. Now, to put the matter in a popular phrase, it might be true that the sun rises regularly because he never gets tired of rising. His routine might be due, not to a lifelessness, but to a rush of life. The thing I mean can be seen, for instance, in children, when they find some game or joke that they specially enjoy. A child kicks his legs rhythmically through excess, not absence, of life. Because

<sup>11</sup> Albeit only negatively; Maritain proves, for example, the validity of the principle of sufficient reason on the strength of the fact that to negate it means to negate the principle of identity.

children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, "Do it again" [...]. It is possible that God says every morning, "Do it again" to the sun; and every evening, "Do it again" to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we. The repetition in Nature may not be a mere recurrence; it may be a theatrical *encore*. (CHESTERTON 2012, 37).

I have just said the procedure is going to be quite risky, though it is perhaps not the best way to phrase it; for it is not the procedure in which the risk lies — but the quote; it comes from the chapter "The Ethics of Elfland," perhaps the most important part of the book, one very much appreciated (included, for example, in the book *Great Essays in Science* in 1957 (JAKI 2001, 14), but also very much misunderstood as to its philosophical value (ibid. 12), and so typically Chestertonian that in itself extremely prone to — in the case of certain temperaments — reactions of spontaneous repulsion and ridicule. One of the best examples (one explaining everything) of such a case is provided by Hugh Kenner in his admirable piece of critical work, *Paradox in Chesterton* (1947; "admirable" not at all meaning "perfect" or "complete" — but definitely pioneering), where he records the surprising hostility with which Maurice Evans treated Chesterton's playful discourse on the American spirit and denounced it as a piece of merely illogical verbalism, based on taking metaphors (or other stylistic tropes) literally (characteristically, Kenner does not waste too many words on such diagnoses, but decidedly — and at the same time delicately — proceeds to the essence of such criticisms: "Mr. Evans does not realize that he has been told a parable") (KENNER 1947, 111). Now, if we follow Kenner's advice, and for a moment suspend our judgment of the Chestertonian form and style (which to me, by the way of parenthesis, seems quite inspiring) to proceed directly to the metaphysical insights contained in his works (focus not on Chesterton's "writing" but Chesterton's "seeing") (ibid., 103) we shall notice that what Chesterton really tries to communicate is the fact that the unceasing activity and order of the world requires God as its sufficient reason; that it is not explicable by itself alone, and therefore points the Transcendence, the Reason of all reason, the fullness of intelligibility. "The sun rises every morning. I do not rise every morning; but the variation is due not to my activity, but to my inaction" — obviously, this is a joke, but a joke communicating a very important metaphysical truth; the truth that the world — as it is — does not explain itself. Of course, Chester-



ton speaks predominantly in a hypothetical manner; “it is *possible* that God says every morning, ‘Do it again’”; “it *may not* be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike”; but it is for rhetorical purposes only. The idea, like in the case of his verbal paradoxes, for instance, though in a different way, is to stir the mind of the reader, to “overcome mental laziness” (ibid., 56), to make him admit *the possibility*, the general logical validity of the judgment — and through this, hopefully, help to kindle in him a spark of metaphysical meditation necessary to attain the primary truths about the world.

So much about the principle of sufficient reason; let us now proceed thus to the principle of finality, one Maritain seems to have treated with special attention (in his *Preface*, at least in the edition used here, the analysis of the principle of finality covers 27 pages, and has a whole chapter devoted solely to itself — a luxury that no other of the first principles was endowed with).

Why so long? Obviously, it is quite difficult to guess the motives of the author, but the probable cause of that seems to be (quite paradoxically) a simple fact that it is the *most obvious* element of this intuition, and one closest to the world of *empiria*. As Gilson observes in one of his books: wherever is the tiniest spark of philosophical reflection, the idea of finality is also present (GILSON 2009, 156–157).<sup>12</sup> “It can most truly be said that the bird flies because it possesses wings, because it is a bird. But what then is it to be a bird? It is to be determined to fly” (MARITAIN 1943, 119) writes Maritain in his *Preface...*, and the striking simplicity of this phrase is enough to shock the mind for a day. Finality is the question of the most conspicuous relations in things that immediately strike not only the intellect — but almost rather the eyes; in order to “observe” finality it is enough too look out the window.

Now, how is it with Chesterton? Again, let us examine but one quote from *The Everlasting Man* (1925) and commentary shall become almost totally superfluous.

Looking around him by this unique light, as lonely as the literal flame that be alone has kindled, this demigod or demon of the visible world makes that world visible. He sees around him a world of a certain style or type. It seems to proceed by certain rules or at least repetitions. He sees a green architecture that builds itself without visible hands; but which builds itself into a very exact plan or pattern, like a design already drawn in the air by an invisible finger. It is not, as is now vaguely suggested, a vague thing. It is not a growth or a grop-

<sup>12</sup> Obviously, Gilson does not phrase it exactly like that, but he clearly demonstrates that it takes a great effort to deny the principle of finality, and that those who deny it usually end up denying the reality of certain natural facts.

ing of blind life. Each seeks an end; a glorious and radiant end, even for every daisy or dandelion we see in ‘looking across the level of a common field. In the very shape of things there is more than green growth; there is the finality of the flower. It is a world of crowns. (CHESTERTON 2010, 174).

Essentially, all the elements of the original, primordial even we might say, intuition of finality (interwoven in the intuition of being and constituting merely its natural unfolding) are captured here. Intuition of finality is an intellectual intuition, a “spark” of the “unique flame” burning in the souls of men (that is, precisely: intellect, reason), piercing through the curtain of sensible phenomena and attaining essences, the intelligible pattern of things, a “style or type” of the world — and yet, it is also very simple, immediate, intimately connected with sense-perception, a direct intellectual reflection forcing itself upon the mind after it comes into contact with very basic natural facts (is it not telling, besides everything else, that Chesterton — while speaking about the uniqueness of human intellect and trying to find an appropriate example of its workings — chose, naturally, almost automatically — precisely this?). It perceives that every existing object is ordained, by its very nature, to a certain end, which is the fullest possible flowering of its being (“finality of the flower,” “a glorious and radiant end,” “a world of crowns” — a world seeking completion in the final natural perfection of beings that constitute it) — and yet, it also grasps the internal, inherent dynamism of this ordination, the fact that it is no mechanical repetition, no passive transmission of movement from one dead piece of extension to another, but an effect of the own, ontic energy of things, of “green architecture” that “*builds itself* with invisible hands,” that is — in its very essence and existence — equipped with a certain *quantum* of energy that serves as the principle of this movement towards supreme actuality (hence the metaphors of “radiance” and “glory,” in themselves grounded in the theme of energy and light)<sup>13</sup>; and is it possible not to associate such a notion with the concept of the radical love Maritain writes about?

By her way of parenthesis, just to end things with opening rather than a closure, it is interesting to note that by keeping fidelity to the original simplicity of this intuition, Chesterton manages to “translate” it in the existential terms; for there is also another aspect of the principle of finality, one

---

<sup>13</sup> Cf. MARITAIN 1965, 57. Maritain also connects the proper understanding of the fifth proof of the existence of God, by final causes, with overthrowing Descartes’s mechanism and adopting the view of the world as the “republic of natures,” each of which is the principle and center of its proper activity.

omitted in the foregoing analysis — the question of the ordination of the lower orders of beings to the higher orders of being. It is a rather complex idea and it would be unwise to enter into this domain in any other manner than by the way of simple mentioning. In *Preface...* Maritain deals with this question by writing:

[God] does not first will man, then physical world for man’s sake. Nor does He first will the acts of seeing, being aware, or moving, and then the animal for their sake. Nor does He first will His goodness and its communication, then creatures for its sake. He will the physical world *should exist* for man, that the animal world should exist for the acts of seeing, being aware and the like. And he wills that creatures should exist for His goodness and its communication. *Vult ergo hoc esse propter hoc; sed non propter hoc vult hoc.* He wills the former should exist for the sake of the latter, but not for the sake of the latter does he will the former. (MARITAIN 1943, 122).

Now, the principal meaning of this passage seems to refer to the question of the intrinsic value of things — and to warn any potential (or actual) metaphysician not to make the ontological good of any creature hang by the thin thread of its subordination to other orders of being (in other words: to recognize that every creature is, as such, good). But what chiefly interest us here is the fact that this teleological subordination of beings is of radically existential nature (so is not inscribed in the essence of things, but proceeds from the character of real relations of the real world). God wills that the physical world “*should exist*” for the sake of man, that the animal order “*should exist*” for the sake of its actions etc. Does not Chesterton formulate it in a strikingly similar way? He does not say a lot, but when he says something, he definitely tries to explain the man-world relationships in the terms of existence. God “built up the hills and woods for their coming and had kindled the sunrise against their rising, as a servant kindles a fire.” In other words: he wished that the hills and woods and the sun *should exist* for their sake.

How much is here any real connection and how much a mere coincidence? It is a question for another time.

Anyhow, in this case, one might reckon, Chesterton — not like himself at all — speaks almost plainly; and the teleological aspect of his thinking is simply undeniable. Just like any other realist element of it (by the way of parenthesis). The conclusion forces itself on the mind and should not be unnaturally suppressed, let us voice it then: Gilbert Keith Chesterton *had* the true and lively intuition of being.

However, the question does not end here; for if the reader followed the cited Chesterton's passages, he most surely noticed at least one thing; that Chesterton never speaks *metaphysically*. That his expression lacks something. That he never spoke in a way proper to the elevated subject in question. Why is that? The answer is simple; and it has already been given in the first paragraphs of this paper. Chesterton, although he possessed a tremendously intensive intuition of being, never cared to develop the *metaphysical habitus* to a grade corresponding to this intensity; in other words: he left his metaphysical habitus "be," was content to possess it in an embryonic form — and never allowed this embryo to, never wanted it to, become a fully developed organism.

He seldom used scholastic vocabulary, and if ever — he did with great caution, and (like in his last book published during his lifetime, *The Well and the Shallows*) almost timidly, never — moreover — with connection to the proper object it was invented to explain and signify (CHESTERTON 2006, 30–31). Chesterton's language, as Stanley Jaki relates (not without anger) was often the cause of disregard and neglect (William Auden, a great admirer of Chesterton's work, for example, never managed to realize the metaphysical value of *Orthodoxy* and writes that in his "The Ethics of Elfland" Chesterton was most enjoyable because "at his silliest" (JAKI 2001, 12)); on the other hand, Stanley Jaki himself (among others) would always, as it was already demonstrated, accentuate the high philosophical quality of Chesterton's heritage, and praise his deep understanding of metaphysical realism. How could two intelligent and well-educated critics differ so much in so fundamental a case? Now, this discrepancy (being also a justification of the unjustifiable generalization from the beginning of this paper) can be easily explained: it results precisely from the fact that Chesterton, although he must have possessed the metaphysical habitus alongside with the intuition as such, never decided to make use of it properly speaking — and thus his literature, though exhibiting a deep understanding of the metaphysical matter, exhibits it only *indirectly* and through the distant influence on other "habituses," especially this that is responsible for journalist writing (WAŚ 2016, 120–121). Discovering the metaphysical profundity of his views requires certain effort and knowledge; and often so it happens that we are capable of thanking Chesterton for what he did years later — when we are able to pierce through the layer of their formal organization, and consciously grasp their intellectual essence that was communicated to us obscurely even during the first reading. We did not know it at the moment — but it *worked*.

That is the final touch upon the thesis of this text.

What does it change? Does this rather extensive analysis is in any way beneficial for the Chestertonian studies, or for humanities in general?

Hopefully, at least certain possibilities of such a positive influence can be discovered here. Firstly, then, this approach makes it possible to solve certain problems of what might be called the “main tradition” of Chestertonian criticism while keeping closely to its essential elements. Many Chestertonian critics, as it was summarized in an earlier work, referred to Chesterton’s metaphysical insights by using certain better or worse metaphors; they would talk about Chesterton “seeing” the universe in the same way as Aquinas did, about intellectual “sympathy” or other things of that type — yet they would never explain clearly what they had in mind, rendering their analyzes at least rather suspicious to the neutral reader (*ibid.*, 38–39). Now, this line of thought can find its explanation — and a form more satisfactory to more inquisitive minds. Chesterton possessed intuition of being and clearly understood the object it communicated — but for some reason (ultimately known only to himself) he chose to speak and think about it without developing the intellectual *instrumentarium* most suited to its exigencies. Thus at the same time he was a philosopher and was not a philosopher — depending on what meaning we decide to ascribe to the term.

Secondly, it can turn the attention of the critics to certain particular elements of Chesterton’s style and form. As it was said, Chesterton’s writings *work*; they try to communicate the intuition of being as much as it is possible — their main aim being, at least in the fragments devoted to the subject, like in the cited passage from *Orthodoxy*, to “prepare” the reader for achieving this intuition, to create in him a spiritual “space” wherein being as such, the most profound ontological mystery of reality, could reveal itself. It is a difficult matter, no doubt — but it might be supposed that examining Chesterton’s formal devices from this perspective might shed on them some fresh light, and place them in a new context, one allowing for a fruitful and fascinating research.

Thirdly — it can contribute much to understanding Chesterton’s political views. It is a rather complex topic, and it is better not to go too deep into it at the end of this already too long text, but it might be suspected that examining distributism, with all its personalist elements (*ibid.*, 69–72), in the light of this metaphysical foundation may create an interesting, new perspective — and who knows what thrilling discoveries await the researchers at the end of the road? Chesterton was a fascinating political thinker (in fact he dealt with politics much better, technically, than with metaphysics — and *this* habi-

tus was in him certainly fiery and burning bright) — but his political thought would have been nothing without the intuition of being that allowed him to grasp the truth about human personality, and indirectly — yet very visibly — transfigured all the political notions (such as of the general will) that he inherited from other traditions of thought, rendering him a unique political philosopher, most suited to the complex and difficult demands of the present day.

Lastly, this analysis proves something not about Chesterton, but about someone else (and may I be allowed to say that it is, for me, a source of special joy and pleasure); about Jacques Maritain, the writings of whom served here as the methodological basis. Well, hopefully this whole procedure proved that they actually *can* serve as the basis for such analysis — and with good results. If so — what could probably serve as a reason for not using them in the analysis of some other piece of literature? Are they suited to examine one writer — and one writer only? Maritain was a brilliant mind; a complete thinker, able to equip the contemporary humanities with the background necessary for dynamic unity and systematic reconstruction. Why should it be neglected? Why cannot we have not only the Maritainian philosophical analysis, but also Maritainian theory of culture or Maritainian philology? The possibilities are simply uncountable, all the roads open — and they await those who are willing to take them.

#### REFERENCES

- AUGUSTINE. 2002. *Confessions*, book IX. Translated by Edward Bouverie Pusey. Project Gutenberg. Accessed 1 January 2018. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3296/3296-h/3296-h.htm>.
- CHESTERTON, Gilbert Keith. 2012. *Orthodoxy*. United States: Popular Classic Publishing.
- CHESTERTON, Gilbert Keith. 2010. *The Everlasting Man*. Mansfield Centre CT: Martino Publishing.
- CHESTERTON, Gilbert Keith. 2007. *St. Thomas Aquinas*. Teddington: The Echo Library.
- CHESTERTON, Gilbert Keith. 2006. *The Well and the Shallows*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- GILSON, Etienne. 2015. *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*. Translated by A. H. C. Downes. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- GILSON, Etienne. 2009. *From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again*. Translated by John Lyon. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- JAKI, Stanley L. 2001. *Chesterton: a Seer of Science*. Michigan: Real View Books.
- KENNER, Hugh. 1947. *Paradox in Chesterton*. New York: Sheed & Ward.
- MARITAIN, Jacques. 1931. *The Angelic Doctor*. Translated by J. F. Scanlan. New York: The Dial Press.
- MARITAIN, Jacques. 1944. *The Dream of Descartes*. Translated by Mabelle L. Andison. New York: Philosophical Library.

- MARITAIN, Jacques. 2011. *The Degrees of Knowledge*. Translated under the supervision of Gerald B. Phelan. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.
- MARITAIN, Jacques. 1943. *A Preface to Metaphysics*. [Translator unknown.] London: Sheed & Ward.
- MARITAIN, Jacques. 2015. *Existence and the Existence*. Translated by Lewis Galantieri and Gerald B. Phelan. New York: Paulist Press.
- MARITAIN, Jacques. 1965. *Approaches to God*. Translated by Peter O’ Reilly. New York: The Macmillan Company.
- ODDIE, William. 2012. *Chesterton and the Romance of Orthodoxy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Słownik-przewodnik filozoficzny*. 2012. 1<sup>st</sup> Edition. Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu.
- ŚWIEŻAWSKI, Stefan. 2002. *Święty Tomasz na nowo odczytany*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Polskiej Prowincji Dominikanów “W drodze”.
- WAŚ, Maciej. 2016. “‘Our Little Lives’: Gilbert Keith Chesterton as the Precursor of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Christian Personalism.” Unpublished MA Thesis. University of Silesia.
- WILLIS, Gary. 1961. *Chesterton: Man and Mask*. New York: Sheed & Ward.

„JEST JAKIEŚ ‘JEST’”: INTUICJA BYTU  
W MYŚLI I PISARSTWIE GILBERTA KEITHA CHESTERTONA  
(PERSPEKTYWA MARITAINOWSKA)

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest wykazanie, że Gilbert Keith Chesterton miał prawdziwą intuicję bytu, taką jak zdefiniował ją tomista francuski, Jacques Maritain, niemniej niemalże bez towarzyszącego jej metafizycznego *habitusu*. Tekst rozpoczyna wyjaśnienie używanych pojęć i krótki wykład teorii intuicji bytu. Następnie następuje próba dowiedzenia przyjętej tezy na podstawie materiału dowodowego dotyczącego trzech zasadniczych skutków rzeczony intuicji: jej właściwego przedmiotu (do którego „funkcjonalnie” należy włączyć także zasadę tożsamości), zasady racji dostatecznej i zasady celowości. Następnie dowodzi się, że choć Gilbert Keith Chesterton wykazywał wysoki poziom zrozumienia powyższych zagadnień, nigdy nie mówił o nich w sposób ściśle metafizyczny — co wskazuje dokładnie na brak odpowiedniej dyspozycji umysłowej — z jednocześnie próbą zarysowania skutków tego stanu rzeczy. Tekst wieńczy garść praktycznych konkluzji, jakie można z niniejszych rozważań wyprowadzić.

“THERE IS AN ‘IS’”: INTUITION OF BEING  
IN THE THOUGHT AND WRITINGS OF GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON  
(A MARITAINIAN PERSPECTIVE)

Summary

The aim of the paper is to demonstrate that Gilbert Keith Chesterton possessed the genuine intuition of being as defined by the French Thomist, Jacques Maritain, albeit almost without the proper metaphysical *habitus*. It opens with some explanations of the terms used, and with a short extrapolation of the theory of the intuition of being. Next it proceeds to proving the thesis assumed by the means of demonstrating that Chesterton exhibited the intuition of being as to three most important elements: its proper object (with the principle of identity included), the principle

of sufficient reason and the principle of finality. Next it attempts to demonstrate that despite that understanding, he never spoke in a properly metaphysical manner, the fact that points to the lack of metaphysical *habitus*, and to establish certain consequences of this state of things. The text ends with a list of practical conclusions that could be drawn from an analysis such as this.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Gilbert Keith Chesterton; Jacques Maritain; intuicja bytu; tomizm; habitus; *ratio formalis sub qua*.

**Key words:** Gilbert Keith Chesterton; Jacques Maritain; intuition of being; Thomism; habitus; *ratio formalis sub qua*.

**Information about Author:** MACIEJ WAŚ, MA, PhD student — University of Silesia, Department of Philology, Institute of English Language Cultures and Literatures; address for correspondence: ul. Stefana Grota-Roweckiego 5, 41-200 Sosnowiec; e-mail: maciej.was@interia.pl; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0941-2469>.