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THE METAPHYSICAL ARGUMENT FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

In his book, *Aquinas's Way to God: The Proof in "De Ente et Essentia",* Gaven Kerr proposes a detailed explanation and defence of the argument for the existence of God presented in Thomas Aquinas's early work *De Ente et Essentia.* In this paper, I will provide an exposition of Kerr's account, followed by a short discussion of Kerr's approach and defence of Aquinas's metaphysical principles.

In a nutshell, Aquinas's argument can be presented in the form of the following syllogism:

MINOR PREMISE: Everything whose act of being (*esse*) is distinct from its nature must have *esse* from another.

MAJOR PREMISE: Everything that has *esse* from another is caused (as by its *first* cause) by something that has *esse* through itself.

CONCLUSION: Everything whose *esse* is distinct from its nature, is caused (as by its *first* cause) by something that has *esse* through itself (as pure *esse* — *esse tantum*).

The original aspect of this argument is that its minor premise assumes one of the most important theses of Aquinas's metaphysics, namely the real distinction between the act of being (*esse*) and the essence or nature of a given being. Moreover, the conclusion describing God as a "pure being" (*esse tantum*) arrives immediately at what is considered a focal point of Aquinas's philosophical theology. Accordingly, Kerr's book not only analyses and defends the premises of the proof but also shows its metaphysical presuppositions and consequences for natural theology.[1]

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[1] This is reflected in the structure of the book which is divided into two parts: 1. *Essence-Esse*

My paper will consist of five sections. The first four will present the account of Saint Thomas's argument as outlined in *Aquinas's Way to God*. Thus, I will discuss (1) the reasons for focusing on the *De Ente* argument; (2) Kerr's account of Aquinas's doctrine of *esse*; (3) the author's analysis of Aquinas's argument for the existence of God; (4) Kerr's account of Aquinas's doctrine of God as pure being and of creation. In the last section (5), I propose a brief evaluation of Kerr's arguments for the essence-*esse* distinction.

1. THE CHOICE OF THE ARGUMENT

In the preface, the author explains why he chose this particular argument instead of the much more famous Five Ways from the *Summa Theologiae*. For Kerr, the main advantage of the argument presented lies in the fact that in *De Ente et Essentia* Saint Thomas provides an exposition of the metaphysical presuppositions of his argument in its immediate context, especially the real distinction between essence and *esse* in beings other than God (KERR 2015, ix). Moreover, although the *De Ente* argument itself does not reappear in Aquinas's later writings, it can be shown that throughout his career Thomas uses the same philosophical principles and basic structure of the proof as it can be found in *De Ente et Essentia* (KERR 2015, ix–xi).[2]

Discussing the position of the argument in the context of other arguments for God's existence, Kerr claims that the *De Ente* argument does not fit into the traditional typology which distinguishes between the ontological, cosmological and design arguments. One may assume that *De Ente* argument can be classified as a cosmological argument. However, cosmological arguments try to infer God's existence as the cause of the cosmos, understood as the physical universe, whereas the argument in the *De Ente* considers eve-

Distinction and Composition; 2. *The Proof of God*. The first one is dedicated entirely to the discussion of Aquinas's metaphysical presuppositions. The second analyses the proof itself and gives a sketch of Aquinas's teaching on God and creation.

[2] Kerr shows that the reasoning similar to the one given in *De Ente et Essentia* appears for example in *SCG* I, cap. 15 (argument for God's eternity) and *ST* I, q. 3, a. 4 (argument for God's simplicity). To these passages we should definitely add *De Pot.* q. 3, a. 5, where the existence of God is taken for granted. The question under discussion is the scope of God's creative action: i.e. whether *everything* is created by God. Aquinas argues that since every being other than God is a being *per aliud*, it has to be ultimately caused by God who exists *per se*. This change of starting point, however, does not modify the gist of the argument which consists in distinguishing between God who is pure act of being and finite beings that possess the act of being only through participation. Interestingly, in *De potentia* Thomas ascribes this argument to Avicenna.

rything that exists, be it a part of the physical universe or something extra-cosmical like angels.[3] Thus, according to Kerr, the best way to classify the *De Ente* proof is to regard it as a *metaphysical* argument.

2. METAPHYSICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS OF THE ARGUMENT

In this section I will present Kerr's exposition of Aquinas's doctrine of being, proceeding in the following order. First, I will discuss Kerr's interpretation of Saint Thomas's argument from *De Ente*. Second, I will show what I take to be the characteristic points of Kerr's account of the relationship between essence and *esse*. Finally, I will present the most important arguments given by Kerr to defend Aquinas's doctrine against alternative philosophical views.

Concerning the first point, the preliminary task is to answer the question of how Kerr understands Aquinas's notions of *esse* and essence. Presenting the former, Kerr explains that it is "a real principle of act of a finite existent irreducible to anything more fundamental, such that the thing would not exist unless it has such a principle and without it there would be nothing *simpliciter*" (KERR 2015, 8). Kerr stresses that *esse*, when understood in such a way, is something radically different from what is meant by the term "existence" in contemporary philosophical language. This is the reason why Kerr uses the Latin term "*esse*" throughout his book. However, the sense of "existence" as used in ordinary language is sufficient for the understanding of Aquinas's argument for a real distinction (KERR 2015, 8). The metaphysical correlate of *esse* is essence, which Kerr defines as "the definitional content of the concrete substance signifying that the substance is of one particular kind of thing rather than another" (KERR 2015, 39). This "content" of a thing has to be understood as an ontological principle for material thing composed of its form and matter (KERR 2015, 39–41).

In *De Ente et Essentia* Aquinas gives an argument for the real distinction between essence and *esse* in the context of the discussion with "universal hylomorphism." This theory held that all substances, including the spiritual ones (but except God), had some material component which accounted for their potentiality. Arguing against this theory, Aquinas maintains that in the

[3] Kerr clarifies that the conclusiveness of Aquinas's argument is not dependent on existence of extra-cosmical beings. The metaphysical character of argument means merely that if there are such beings, their existence is also to be caused by God.

creature we can find an instance of act-potency composition more basic than form-matter composition. This is the composition consisting of the being (*esse*) and the essence of the thing. Aquinas's argument consists of two parts. In the first, Aquinas starts with the fact that one can have an understanding of the essence of a thing without knowing whether it exists, inferring from this that the *esse* of the thing is distinct from its essence or quiddity. He adds, however, that there may be a thing whose quiddity is its *esse*. With this addition, the second part of the argument begins. In this part Aquinas argues that there can be only one thing whose quiddity is its *esse*.[4] Given the tacit premise that there are many immaterial intellectual substances (*intelligentiae*), their *esse* have to be distinct from their quiddity or essence (*De Ente et Essentia*, cap. 4, p. 376-377, lines 94-126).

Kerr interprets this twofold division of Aquinas's reasoning as two stages of the same argument. Kerr holds this view because, in his opinion, the first section fails to establish the distinction which would not be merely conceptual and because the last sentence of this section can be read as a transition between the two stages (KERR 2015, 16–17). The first part cannot be successful, since it proceeds not from real essence (matter and form for material beings, form alone for immaterial ones) but from the "understanding of essence" (*intellectus essentiae*) that is the conceptual content of our mind whereby we grasp the deep structure of the thing. As a result, the first stage of the argument can only establish a conceptual distinction between our understanding of a thing as actual and as displaying certain characteristics. This causes a need for the second stage of the argument in which Aquinas moves from the conceptual to the real order (KERR 2015, 15–16). According to Kerr, Aquinas succeeds in this step, as can be seen by means of the modal argument. Since the impossibility of p entails the actuality of -p (in S5), from the conceptually shown impossibility of the multiplication of pure *esse* and given that there are multiple beings in actuality, one can infer that all actual beings (except possibly one) are not pure *esse* (KERR 2015, 29–30).

If there is a real distinction in things between essence and *esse*, what is the relation between these two principles? In his account of Aquinas's response to this question, Kerr underlines the fact that Aquinas considers the essence-*esse* relation in terms of participation. I recognize two important points in Kerr's interpretation. First, essence and *esse* are mutually depend-

[4] By quiddity (*quidditas*) Aquinas means essence taken as the foundation of the definition of the thing (*De Ente et Essentia*, cap 1, p. 370, lines 49-50).

ent. *Esse* actualises the essence, whereas the essence is responsible for the individuation of *esse*. Given the first aspect of this dependence, Kerr classifies the participation of essence in *esse* as the participation of an effect in its cause. Second, Kerr argues that the fusion of the Platonic notion of participation and the Aristotelian distinction of act and potency enables Aquinas to show that essence and *esse* are two irreducible metaphysical principles and not two things. While the former underlies the distinction between discussed principles, the latter safeguards their unity in one substance (KERR 2015, 59–66). Moreover, Kerr proposes an account of our knowledge of essence and *esse*. Since *esse* is something primitive, it cannot be grasped through concepts, since conceptual knowledge involves the reduction of a thing to something more basic. Thus, *esse* cannot be grasped through simple apprehension, but only through judgement (KERR 2015, 84–87).

Aquinas's metaphysics is quite unusual in comparison with contemporary views. Accordingly, Kerr aims to show the advantages of Saint Thomas's doctrine in any discussion with alternative accounts of essence and existence. With regard to the essence, he discusses modal essentialism which holds that the essence of the thing can be reduced to a set of essential properties exhibited by the thing in all possible worlds. Aquinas, by contrast, is committed to the thesis that the essential properties of the thing (if there are any) are ontologically posterior to the essence of the thing. Against the modal version of essentialism, Kerr asks the question of whether the modal essentialists discern the essential properties before or after the identification of the thing in possible worlds. If the determination of essential properties is given before the transworld identification, modal essentialism collapses into a non-modal view of essence. In such cases it becomes question begging or nugatory and the reference to possible worlds does not give any illuminative account of the essence. If, on the other hand, this determination is made after the transworld identification, modalism faces some fatal drawbacks. Firstly, it can only appeal to the use of terms, which is both insufficient to deal with ontological questions and arbitrary. Secondly, it commits modal essentialism to a kind of Platonism in which objects are quality-less bearers of universal properties (KERR 2015, 46–51). However, as Kerr insists, Platonism is not the only option available for somebody who wants to account for the truth of sentences that ascribe properties to objects. Aquinas used a semantic framework which clearly distinguished between the sense and reference of terms. This in turn enabled him to endorse moderate realism with regard to universals, claiming that particular, actually existing things have common natures

which determine their properties and on the basis of which they can be grasped through the concepts (KERR 2015, 52–54).

Defending Aquinas's notion of *esse*, Kerr adopts a twofold strategy. First, he defends the real distinction from an objection formulated within the context of scholastic philosophy. Second, he tries to show the shortcomings of alternative, present-day accounts of existence. The first task is undertaken in discussion with "Aristotelian Question-Begging Objection" against the real distinction proposed by David Twetten in his article "Really Distinguishing Essence from *Esse*" (TWETTEN 2007). This objection, made from an Aristotelian standpoint, claims that all of Aquinas's arguments for the real distinction beg the question since they begin with a tacit assumption that *esse* should be regarded as a metaphysical principle. Twetten detects the alleged fallacy in both stages of the *De Ente* argument. In the first, the ignorance of whether man or phoenix exist need not be interpreted as ignorance of whether the essence of man or phoenix possess some principle of actuality, but rather as ignorance of whether there are instances of such species as 'man' or 'phoenix.' As for the second stage, Aquinas overlooks the possibility in which the identity of essence and *esse* in a given thing is interpreted as this thing's being pure essence. In his reply, Kerr claims that we need to introduce another principle of actuality apart from form, since form taken as such – that is as the structuring principle of matter—does not exist by itself, and matter as principle of pure potentiality cannot serve as a principle of actuality (KERR 2015, 31–34).

In the second part of his defence Kerr discusses five groups of contemporary accounts of existence. His aim is to show that each of them fails to capture some important aspect of existence which, on the contrary, can be explained on the grounds of the Thomistic doctrine of *esse*: 1. The Meinongian theory distinguishing between existence and subsistence. Here Kerr just states that this theory is not acceptable for a Thomist. 2. The Frege-Russell-Quine view, reducing existence to instantiation. This view is insufficient since instantiation of concepts presupposes the existence of individuals which instantiate those concepts. Now, the existence of individuals cannot be eliminated nor reduced to instantiation. 3. David Lewis's "Indexical-Possibilist" account, which (a) takes possible worlds as the point of departure and (b) which holds that the actuality of the world is determined by the utterance of its actuality by the subject. Kerr's objection is how to account of the actuality of a given world before coming to be of the subject that utters its actuality. Now, there should be some account of it, since the world in which the subject is born must be actual before the subject comes into being.

4. Nathan Salmon's "Indexicalist-Actualist" account, which maintains that (a) the utterance of actuality of the world is indexed to the world in which it occurs and (b) it is not the utterance which determines the actuality of the world but the actuality which determines the utterance. Kerr's objects that in this case the utterance of the actuality of the world consists simply in recognition of its existence. But this does not answer the question of *what is that which is recognised*. In other words, what is about this world that it is actual and not merely possible? This is the question that the indexicalist account cannot answer, but which can be solved by reference to *esse.* 5. Non-indexical actualist accounts, which (a) treat the actual world as the only world and conceive of possible worlds as ways in which the actual world may have been and (b) adopt the quantification over possible worlds in order to account for the truth of counterfactual propositions. According to Kerr, this approach, despite its initial focus being on actuality, ultimately takes possibility to be ontologically more primitive than actual existence (KERR 2015, 66–84).[5]

3. THE EXPLANATION AND DEFENCE OF THE *DE ENTE* ARGUMENT

After the clarification and defence of the metaphysical presuppositions of the argument, Kerr discusses Aquinas's proof itself. He reconstructs it as follows:

1. There are features of a thing that result from the thing's intrinsic principles and those caused by extrinsic principles.

2. *Esse* cannot be caused by intrinsic principles because that would entail that thing preceded itself in existence. Therefore, *esse*, when distinct from the essence of a thing, results from extrinsic principles.

3. That which results from extrinsic cause is ultimately reducible to what is in itself. This must be the case, as otherwise (3.1) an infinite regress of causes results.

4. Therefore, there must be something that is *esse* by itself and that is the cause of *esse* in all essence-*esse* composites. (KERR 2015, 92)

[5] Kerr admits that setting actuality against the background of possibility can be regarded as a way of grasping something more basic through something derivative but easier to understand. However, it would be a heuristic approach not an account of reality.

Kerr discusses the argument in chapters 4 and 5 of his book. Chapter 4, entitled *The Causal Principle*, defends the claim that in the things composed of essence and *esse*, their *esse* is caused by some extrinsic principle. In Chapter 5, entitled *The Per Aliud Principle and Infinite Regress*, Kerr argues for the claim that extrinsically caused features must ultimately derive from a cause which possesses given feature essentially (premise 3). According to Kerr, this claim is based on the negation of an infinite regress in (some) causal series (premise 3.1).

The first point to note about Aquinas's understanding of the causal principle is that Saint Thomas accepts its narrow interpretation, namely that every essence-*esse* composite needs a cause. Aquinas is not committed to a broad principle of causality according to which every being requires a cause. Commitment to the latter would undermine the argument, since in such a case God would be also placed in the scope of the principle (KERR 2015, 119). Defending the claim that the *esse* of each composite being must have a cause, Kerr addresses two types of difficulties. The first type is put forward from inside the Thomistic framework, while the second sets Aquinas's argument against the central tenets of modern philosophy. From the Thomistic standpoint one can question the exhaustiveness of the distinction in premise (1) and argue for some *uncaused* features of things. The result for the argument for God is that if *esse* is one of such features, it cannot be a starting point for an argument based on causality. Discussing this difficulty, Kerr remarks that the uncaused feature of a thing must be something ontologically primitive. Now, given that *esse* is ontologically primitive, it is a good candidate for an uncaused feature. Kerr answers that although *esse* is ontologically primitive, its composition with essence does not have such a character. Consequently, *esse* as composed with essence must be caused. Although this answer does not rule out the possibility of uncaused features, it is sufficient for the needs of the argument since it makes the quest for the ultimate cause of *esse* possible (KERR 2015, 101–102).

The second type of difficulty questions Aquinas's account of causality itself. Modern philosophy rejected the view that refers to acts and potencies of substances and introduced the account of causality in terms of the regularity of events. If the latter account is more accurate, causality cannot be a basis for the proof of God since it does not establish an *ontological* dependence of effects on their causes. Here Kerr discusses four arguments: (1) and (2) are well-known arguments against traditional notion of causality advanced by Hume, (3) is a contemporary version of Humean critique and (4) is Barry

Stroud's contemporary argument based on Kantian principles. (1) The first Humean argument challenges Aquinas's account of causality, claiming that there is no necessary connection between a particular cause and a particular effect. In his reply, Kerr tries to defend the necessary connection between cause and effect. He argues that although particular cause and particular effect are indeed separable notions, this does not concern cause and effect as such. (2) The second Humean argument points to the fact that the connection between cause and effect cannot be experienced. Kerr answers that this argument presupposes empiricism (which is later questioned by Kerr) and neglects the possibility that the relation of causality is simply of a different nature than empirically detectable cause and effect. (3) The contemporary Humean argument dismisses causality understood as a feature of extra-mental reality as an obscure notion and proposes a reformulation of causal explanations in terms of first-order quantificational logic. Kerr rejects this argument by questioning its empiricist presuppositions. He claims that empiricism undermines the very existence of the objects it is meant to explain. Moreover, empiricism is self-destructive since it regards sense data as totally deprived of conceptual content and at the same time makes them the basis of all judgements about the experienced reality. (4) The Kantian argument begins with the claim that the fact that causality is indispensable to our thought does not entail that it is a feature of the world. In other words, the causal character of reality is not an analytical truth. However, it cannot be proven by an appeal to experience either since any judgement on this question would be made by the mind working in the framework of causality. In his reply, Kerr argues that the very fact that the world can be thought of at all reveals that it has inherent modalities, with a necessary connection between cause and effect included. Moreover, Kerr points out that Stroud's argument is based on an unwarranted assumption that, in order to make an objective judgement, the mind should be free of concepts (KERR 2015, 105–113).

The acceptance of the causal principle makes it possible to establish a starting point for the proof of God. Any being composed of essence and *esse* needs an external cause. This cause is either pure *esse* or essence-*esse* composite. If the former is the case, the argument reached its goal. If the cause is itself an essence-*esse* composite, it requires itself the cause of its existence and the whole procedure repeats. Now, the question arises whether this procedure can go on infinitely or has to stop at some point (KERR 2015, 118). This leads us to the next step of Aquinas's reasoning, discussed by Kerr in Chapter 5, entitled *The Per Aliud Principle and Infinite Regress*.

Kerr begins his discussion with an exegetical question. The major premise of Aquinas's argument (premise (3) in Kerr's reconstruction) states that a feature possessed by a thing in a derivative way (*per aliud*) is ultimately caused in this thing by something that has a given feature by itself (Kerr calls it "*per aliud* principle"). To this premise Aquinas adds the rejection of the infinite regress in causal series (premise 3.1). Now, is the rejection of infinite regress merely rhetorical reinforcement or else a necessary ground of premise (3)? Kerr argues for the second option. He points out that Aquinas introduces the rejection of the infinite regress of causes by using the term *alias* ("otherwise"). Thus, Aquinas seems to be committed to the thesis: "if the *per aliud* principle does not obtain, then an infinite regress of causes does obtain" (KERR 2015, 124). Moreover, Kerr is dissatisfied with the justifications for the *per aliud* principle given independently from the negation of the infinite regress of causes (KERR 2015, 124–127). This leads Kerr to an important conclusion concerning the conclusiveness of Aquinas's argument. Since in *De Ente* Aquinas does not make a case for the denial of the infinite regress of causes, the argument as it stands in the original work is not conclusive. However, the denial of the infinite regress of causes can be defended on the basis of Aquinas's other writings (KERR 2015, 127) and this is precisely the task which Kerr undertakes. First, he distinguishes between accidental and *per se* series of causes. In the former, the causal activity of a given member is independent from the causal activity of earlier members of the series. In the latter, the causal activity of a given member is dependent on the causal activity of its predecessor (KERR 2015, 129). What is crucial is that a *per se* causal series is necessarily finite. This is because the rejection of the first member of this series entails the rejection of the causal activity of all subsequent members of the series. Then, Kerr tries to show how the cause of *esse* applies to the causal series *per se.* In order to achieve this Kerr has to establish two theses: "(i) that *esse* is a causal property of a *per se* causal series […] and (ii) that *esse* is a causal property leading to a primary cause that is *esse tantum*, a cause that is not conditionally primary, but rather absolutely primary" (KERR 2015, 143). The second point is important since normally the first member of causal series *per se* has to be first only with respect to a feature it causes. However, there can be other aspects in which this thing can be dependent on other beings. But in the argument for the existence of God, one searches for a cause which is first in all respects. As for (i) Kerr argues that since *esse* does not follow from the essence, it has to be caused not only at the moment of thing's coming to be but also as long as it actuates

the essence. Thus, the cessation of the causal activity of the cause leads to ceasing to be of its effect. And this is precisely the case which requires causal series *per se*. As for (ii) Kerr points out that *esse* is ontologically basic. Therefore, there is no respect in which the ultimate cause of *esse* would be in potency with respect to some other perfection. As a result, Kerr can affirm that there is (i) the first cause of *esse* of essence-*esse* composites which is pure *esse* (*esse tantum*) and which (ii) is absolutely first in every respect (KERR 2015, 142–147).

4. GOD AS SUBSISTENT *ESSE* AND CREATOR

The argument proposed by Aquinas in *De Ente* concludes that God exists and that he should be understood as pure act of being (*esse tantum*). In the final two chapters of his book, Kerr proposes a closer look at the nature of God and his relation to creature. In his account of divine nature Kerr aims to show that the notion of God as subsistent *esse* is meaningful and compatible with the image of God revealed in the Bible. What is important here is that pure *esse* is not a pure property but a concrete individual. It is an individual because of its metaphysical uniqueness and not by means of the possession of individuating principles (as it is in case of finite individuals). Moreover, although existence is a property, it differs fundamentally from other properties because it is not built on an existing subject, but it is what constitutes the subject. Consequently, nothing stands in the way of recognizing the personal character of the independent existence (KERR 2015, 165–166). Finally, Kerr notes that the total dependence of creatures on subsistent *esse* allows us to recognize the biblical vision of God's love in Aquinas's philosophical theology: the existence of everything is a gratuitous gift of God. As a result, *esse tantum* is worth of being worshipped, because the creation of the world and man is an act of the most perfect, loving generosity (KERR 2015, 170–172).

In his account of creation, Kerr considers two interrelated topics: (1) the defence of the doctrine of creation against contemporary naturalism; (2) clarification and deepening of the relationship between God and creature. Concerning the first point, Kerr questions a popular view that identifies creation with the beginning of the existence of the universe. He explains that the latter means the *time* of the thing's coming to be, while the former means the *mode* of its coming to be. Thus, the question about creation is not a question of the beginning of the universe but of its actual existence and one who

wants to negate the act of creation has to show that the universe is either (1) causally irrelevant or (2) can be accounted for only by appeal to natural causes (KERR 2015, 189–190). Concerning the relation between God and creature, Kerr insists that the passive potency of creatures to exist is not metaphysically prior to creation but is a result of it: "the possibility of creature must be located in God's *esse*" (KERR 2015, 187). Moreover, Kerr claims that relation between Creator and creature can be best explained in terms of participation, in which beings who only have *esse* are dependent on being which *is* pure *esse* (KERR 2015, 191–193). Joining both aspects of the Thomistic account of creation, Kerr concludes that the contemporary argument for the existence of God should not consist in seeking God in the boundary conditions of the universe. A theist should rather show that created beings have such characteristics that require a cause from the outside of the order of the universe, which possesses these characteristics essentially (KERR 2015, 194).

5. DISCUSSION

Here I propose a critical look at Kerr's account of the real distinction between the act of being and essence. This will involve Kerr's interpretation of Aquinas's argument from the *De Ente et Essentia* as well as his reply to "Aristotelian Question Begging Argument." I will adopt a more "Aristotelian" approach to Aquinas. This approach underlines (1) the distinction between *esse* as an act of being and *esse* as the truth of a proposition, (2) the role of form as a principle of being (*principium essendi*) in Aquinas's philosophy.

Throughout his career, Aquinas distinguishes between *esse* understood as an act of being that is the metaphysical correlate of the essence of the thing, and as a copula expressing the truth of the proposition. In the second sense, *esse* both composes the subject and the predicate in a proposition and serves as a sign of assertion that the form signified by predicate actually belongs to the thing signified by the subject term (WEIDEMANN 1986, 194). This distinction is often used to undermine Aquinas's argument from *De Ente* (e.g. KENNY 2002, 35–36). The point is that the *esse* used in the *Intellectus Essentiae* Argument is not the *esse* as an act but merely the *esse* as truth. In this case we can know the meaning of the words "man" or "phoenix" without knowing that there are things of which these terms can be truthfully predicated in our mind-independent reality. This, however, is not sufficient to establish an irreducibility of the act of being and essence within the thing it-

self. In this context the interpretation presented in *Aquinas's Way to God* gives a promising perspective. Kerr regards Aquinas's argument as involving two stages, where the first one establishes a conceptual distinction, while the second one a real distinction. In this case, the objection in question seem to be blocked by conceding that the first stage of the argument does not establish the real distinction and, at the same time, affirming that the second stage provides a solution for the passage from the conceptual to the real level. It seems to me, however, that this strategy does not succeed. This is because for the conclusiveness of the *De Ente* argument to be assured, in both stages the term "to be" (*esse*) should be used in the same meaning. But while it is plausible that the *esse* in the sense of truth is employed in the first stage, it cannot be the case in the second stage. For the hypothetical being whose essence is identical to its *esse* considered at the second stage would be something like a "concept whose content includes that it is truly predicated of some individual." This, however, hardly makes any sense. If the argument is to be conclusive, *esse* should be understood as act of being also at the first stage. In this case, to know the essence of man or phoenix and simultaneously to ignore their existence is to know the essential traits of entities that have existed in some point of time without knowing whether they are still alive. In this case, the function of the second stage of the argument would consist in establishing that the distinction between the act of being and essence applies also to immaterial beings (DEWAN 2005, 350–355).[6]

The second argument for the real distinction is proposed by Kerr in his discussion with "Aristotelian Question-Begging Objection." The objection to Aquinas's metaphysics that could be made from an Aristotelian standpoint

[6] Here the problem is caused by the notorious example of a Phoenix. Did Aquinas mean here a mythical bird or an actual rare and unusual creature? Three points should be noted here. (1) In *III Sent.*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 1, Aquinas speaks about not knowing about the *esse* of a phoenix as ignorance about its act of being (*Esse autem secundum quod dicitur res esse in actu*). (2) In his late commentary to *Posterior Analytics*, Aquinas accepts Aristotle's doctrine that strictly speaking there is no essence of a non-being. Thus we cannot search for the essence of imagined things as "stag-goat" but only for a nominal definition of such terms. (*Exp. lib. Post.* II, l. 6, p. 194, lines 12-26). (3) Aquinas himself gives uncontroversial examples of things whose essences can be known without knowing their act of being. These are cases of (possibly) extinct species (SCG I, cap. 66). Thus the question of whether Aquinas himself understands the first stage of the argument as pertaining to conceptual or real order, as well as the question why Thomas does not repeat the *Intellectus Essentiae* Argument in his later writings (did he regard it as invalid or simply not respecting the closeness between essence and act of being) are irrelevant to the claim that it is possible to defend Aquinas's argument on his own principles as also referring in the first stage to the real order.

can be summarised in the question why there is a need for introducing new metaphysical principle of actuality apart from substantial form. Kerr's reply underscores the non-existential character of form. He writes that "form *qua* form, that is, *qua* structuring principle of matter, does not entail actual existence" (KERR 2015, 33). The core of his argument is that if form were "so construed as to be not only a structuring principle of a thing but also a principle of existence of a thing, then all forms would self-exist, since if form and existence are identical, than the form (of whatever kind) must exist" (KERR 2015, 33). The most striking difficulty that threatens this reply concerns the meaning of "existence." Apparently, it cannot mean "act of being." Since the question is precisely about the principle of existence, the identification of "act of being" with "existence" would mean that the act of being is a principle of itself. If so, "existence" in question must be understood as "being as truth." There are two problems with this second option. First, the act of being in this case is a principle of existence in a sense that Socrates's act of being makes true the proposition "Socrates exists."[7] This, however, cannot be the basis for the distinction between act of being and form. Secondly, "form" as a correlate of being as truth is not a structuring principle of a thing that is an individual form existing *in rerum natura*, as for example human soul, but a universal which exists in the mind. In this case, however, the non-existence of a form is nothing other than lack of instances of a given nature. We are, therefore, back in Twetten's criticism of the first stage of the *intellectus essentiae* argument.

The interpretation of the *Intellectus Essentiae* Argument as pertaining to the real order and the troubles with the notion of "principle of existence" in Kerr's reply to the Aristotelian Question Begging Objection show that the conclusiveness of arguments for the real distinction depend on the prior recognition of actual existence as act. That it can be done in a way that does not involve question begging can be shown precisely in the passages in which Thomas's account of *esse* is closest to Aristotle's doctrine. First, Aquinas states that a thing's "being unqualifiedly" (*esse simpliciter*) is the

[7] Aquinas regards the relation between act of being and being as true as causal in the sense that the act of being causes the truth of the proposition. Thus "existence" whose principle is act of being cannot be but being as truth. In *Meta.*, V, lect. 9, n. 896: *Sciendum est autem quod iste secundus modus comparatur ad primum, sicut effectus ad causam. Ex hoc enim quod aliquid in rerum natura est, sequitur veritas et falsitas in propositione, quam intellectus significat per hoc verbum est prout est verbalis copula*. In *Metaphysica*, V, lect. 9, n. 896.

same act as its "substantial being" (*esse substantiale*).[8] Second, Thomas regards form as a principle of being (*principium essendi*) through which matter receives *esse*.[9] As Lawrence Dewan explains, *esse* so understood is what we grasp as the terminus of the substantial generation (DEWAN 2005, 359).[10] Thus an act of being is not something that has to be sought for as a principle or cause of the actual existence. What needs be argued for and what distinguishes Aquinas from the pure Aristotelian, is *whether the act of being is identical with form*. This may be a difficult task, but since the act of being is recognised in a way that should be acceptable to the follower of Aristotle, the latter cannot accuse the defender of the real distinction thesis of begging the question.

CONCLUSION

We can find two main points in Kerr's account of Aquinas's argument. First, Kerr stresses the metaphysical character of Aquinas's argument and his doctrine of creation. The existence of God is not a response to a particular feature of the physical universe but can be found on the basis of the very being of the world. Second, Kerr underlies the role of participation in the relation between an act of being and essence, as well as in the relation between God and creature. On the other hand, I have tried to raise some objections to Kerr's arguments concerning the distinction between essence and an act of being. The account of the first stage of Aquinas's argument as pertaining to conceptual order makes the argument vulnerable to the charge of the fallacy of equivocation. Moreover, Kerr's response to the Aristotelian Question-Begging Argument seem to overlook Aquinas's distinction between *esse* as the act of being and as the truth of the proposition, as well as downplaying positive metaphysical role of the substantial form.

[8] *De Principiis Naturae,* n. 1, p. 39, lines 4-8: *Sed duplex est esse: scilicet esse essentiale 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.*

[9] *De Anima*, q. 6, p. 51, lines 229-235.

[10] I do not want to reduce the cause of *esse* to the cause of becoming here (this would undermine the argument for God's existence). My point is that at the end of becoming a new particular entity begins to exist in a strong sense of Thomist *esse*.

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METAPHYSICAL ARGUMENT FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

Summary

In this paper, I present main theses of *Aquinas Way to God: The Proof in the De Ente et Essentia* by Gaven Kerr. The book in question is a contemporary interpretation and defence of Thomas Aquinas's argument for the existence of God, based on the real distinction between the essence of the thing and its act of being. I stress the fact that Kerr underlines the metaphysical character of Thomas's argument and the role of participation in Aquinas's understanding of the act of being. In the last part of the article, I discuss Kerr's interpretation of Aquinas's argument for the real distinction between essence and an act of being, as well as Kerr's own argument. These arguments are of particular importance since they provide metaphysical presuppositions for the argument for God's existence considered in Kerr's book. As for the first argument, I argue that the first part of Aquinas's argumentation (the so-called *Intellectus Essentiae* Argument) pertains to the real order rather than conceptual. Concerning the second argument, I attempt to highlight the difficulties of Kerr's understanding of Thomist *esse* as a principle of the existence of a thing.

ARGUMENT METAFIZYCZNY NA ISTNIENIE BOGA

Streszczenie

W niniejszym artykule przedstawiam główne tezy książki Gavena Kerra *Aquinas Way to God: The Proof in the De Ente et Essentia*, będącej współczesną interpretacją i obroną Tomasza z Akwinu argumentu za istnieniem Boga z realnej różnicy między istotą a aktem istnienia. Zwracam uwagę na podkreślanie przez Kerra metafizycznego charakteru Tomaszowego dowodu oraz na rolę partycypacji w rozumieniu przez Akwinatę aktu istnienia. W końcowej części artykułu podejmuję dyskusję z przedstawioną przez Kerra interpretacją Tomaszowego argumentu za realną różnicą istoty i aktu istnienia oraz nad własnym argumentem Kerra. Argumenty te są szczególnie ważne, gdyż dostarczają metafizycznych podstaw rozważanemu w książce argumentowi za istnieniem Boga. Jeśli chodzi o pierwszy argument, bronię tezy, że pierwsza część Tomaszowej argumentacji (tzw. argument z rozumienia istoty) dotyczy porządku realnego, a nie pojęciowego. W odniesieniu do drugiego argumentu staram się wskazać na trudności wynikające z rozumienia przez Kerra Tomaszowego *esse* jako zasady istnienia rzeczy.

Key words: argument for God's existence; Thomas Aquinas; essence; act of being; metaphysics; participation.

Słowa kluczowe: argument za istnieniem Boga; Tomasz z Akwinu; istota; akt istnienia; metafizyka; partycypacja.

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