

JOHN F.X. KNASAS

THE ANALYTICAL THOMIST
AND THE PARADOXICAL AQUINAS:
SOME REFLECTIONS ON KERR'S
*AQUINAS'S WAY TO GOD*¹

Gaven Kerr's, *Aquinas's Way to God: The Proof in De Ente et Essentia*, is a breath of fresh air in Thomistic discussion. Despite St. John Paul II's call in his 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (para. 97) for Aquinas's "metaphysics of being based upon the act of being," few Thomists have responded. In works published subsequently Thomists have focused upon either natural philosophy or upon utilization of techniques of analytical philosophy. Neither interest focused attention upon Aquinas's understanding of existence as a distinct *actus (esse)* of its own.² Kerr rightly champions Aquinas's act-view of existence over the predominate fact-view,³ and he is rabid in his pursuit of its place in Aquinas's philosophical demonstration of God.

JOHN F.X. KNASAS — Professor Emeritus, from 1983 to 2018, professor at the Center for Thomistic Studies, University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas, USA; address for correspondence — email: jknasas@stthom.edu; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7417-0211>.

¹ Gaven KERR, *Aquinas's Way to God: The Proof in the De Ente et Essentia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

² See Benedict ASHLEY, *The Way Toward Wisdom: An Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Introduction to Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); Ralph M. MCINERNEY, *Praeambula Fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006); Brian DAVIES, "Aquinas, God, and Being," *The Monist* 80, no. 4 (1997): 500–20; Wayne HANKEY, "From Metaphysics to History, from Exodus to Neoplatonism, from Scholasticism to Pluralism: The Fate of Gilsonian Thomism in English Speaking North America," *Dionysius* 16 (1998): 157–88.

³ On p. 59, Kerr expresses particularly well the character of *esse*: "Far from being a nice catchphrase [act of all acts], the latter indicates that *esse* is the primary actuality of a thing, the basic principle by means of which a thing is differentiated from nothing; all other actualities of a thing flow from its having *esse*, and without *esse* a thing would be precisely nothing."

I am an Existential Thomist. Thomistic Existentialism became popular in the 1950's. Jacques Maritain suggested it when in *Existence and the Existence* (1948) Maritain compared Thomism to Sartre's existentialism as the true existentialism that not only exalts existence but also preserves essence.⁴ Broadly speaking, the phrase means the interpretation of Aquinas that sees as central to his metaphysics the act of being, or of existence – *esse* or *actus essendi*. Hence, to be a being, or an existent (*ens* or *existens*) is to be a possessor of *esse*. As an Existential Thomist, I am in great sympathy with Kerr's trumpeting of *esse* and his understanding that Aquinas philosophically proves God in the *De Ente et Essentia*. Kerr's work just precedes my similar publication, *Thomistic Existentialism and Cosmological Reasoning*.⁵ I, however, come at the *De Ente* reasoning discussed by Kerr from the *duplex operatio intellectus* approach to *esse*. This was the approach of leading figures at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto. The case could be made that the Toronto approach self-destructed. Armand Maurer argued that the *De Ente* reasoning focused upon by Kerr was not a Thomistic proof for God and that such was also the eventual opinion of Etienne Gilson.⁶ Only Joseph Owens continued to maintain the thesis that the *De Ente* reasoning was a proof of God and that the philosophical access to *esse* was the two intellectual operations.⁷ Owens's approach, however, was eclipsed by John

⁴ Jacques MARITAIN, *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantieri and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 3. In the 1950 Marquette University Aquinas Lecture, Robert Henle uses "existential Thomism": "The metaphysics to which I refer is existential Thomism, the metaphysics of being (*ens*) and existential act (*esse*)." *Method in Metaphysics* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 6. Also, Joseph Owens explicitly answers the question "What is existential Thomism?" in his 1957 Marquette Aquinas Lecture, *The Future of Thomistic Metaphysics* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1973), 36–48. Owens provides abundant textual references. Gerald A. MCCOOL, *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 182–6, and Benedict ASHLEY, *The Way Toward Wisdom*, 49–50, continue the terminology. In deference to Aquinas' ascription of a knowledge of *esse* to Aristotle, Ralph MCINERNEY, *Praeambula Fidei*, ch. 13, speaks of "Aristotelian existentialism."

⁵ John F. X. KNASAS, *Thomistic Existentialism and Cosmological Reasoning* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019).

⁶ See Maurer's introductory comments to his translation of Aquinas's *On Being and Essence* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1968), 25–7.

⁷"The cogency of the argument is accordingly seen by Aquinas in the manner in which it falls into the framework of the first and third 'ways,' which in turn is that of *On Being and Essence* and the commentary on the *Sentences*." Joseph Owens, "Aquinas and the Five Ways," ed. John R. Catan, *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: the Collected Papers of Joseph Owens* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), 137. In "Stages and Distinction in *De Ente**: A Rejoinder," *The Thomist* 45 (1981): 110–17, Owens was still maintaining, *contra* Maurer, that Gilson did not deny that the *De Ente* reasoning was a proof of God.

Wippel. Though a proponent of Aquinas's view of existence as *actus essendi*, Wippel did not regard the two operations of the intellect as providing a sense of existence greater than the fact of the essence.⁸ His denial of the metaphysical resources of judgment, the *secunda operatio*, was taken as a mortal blow to the Toronto approach.

Because of an agreement with Wippel at a crucial point, Kerr has scant reference to the *duplex operatio intellectus*.⁹ Kerr employs analytic techniques. In my opinion, this hermeneutical decision is fateful. It can lead to a mindset that will privilege clear and distinct solutions to metaphysical and epistemological issues. The mindset engendered by the *duplex operatio* is more tolerant and appreciative of paradox in our understanding of reality. Often times it is both/and rather than either/or. My comments on Kerr will illustrate these claims. In this article I will focus my comments on chapter one, "The Argument for the Real Distinction in *De Ente*, Cap. 4." I will make passing comments on chapters 4 and 5. First, I will enumerate what I understand to be Kerr's key claims. Second, I will probe each of these claims from philosophical and Thomistic viewpoints.

1. In what Thomists call the first stage of the chapter four *De Ente* reasoning, Aquinas makes the famous remark that I can know what a man or a phoenix is and not know if they have existence (*esse*) in reality. Aquinas goes on to claim that it is then clear that existence (*esse*) is other than essence. Kerr understands Aquinas's reflection to establish at least a conceptual distinction between existence in the *actus* sense and essence. In his commentary, Kerr regards the mention of the phoenix as essential for Aquinas's conclusion. Kerr starts with the conceptual content of the matter/form composition. He explains that the composition does not include real existence because if it did, then it would not be common to phoenixes which do not really exist.¹⁰

⁸ "Does [Aquinas] simply intend to signify by *esse* the act that something actually exists (its facticity)? Or does he also have in mind the thing's distinct intrinsic act of being (*actus essendi*)?" John WIPPEL, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 31. On pp. 32–34, Wippel goes on to give four reasons for the facticity interpretation of judgmentally grasped existence.

⁹ Like WIPPEL, Kerr seems to restrict judgment to grasping the facticity sense of *esse*: "When it is affirmed in judgment that such a grasp is correct, it is realized that what has been understood is in fact the case." KERR, *Aquinas's Way to God*, 87.

¹⁰ "This entails, then, that understanding the matter and form and thereby the essence of a thing does not entail the understanding of a thing's *esse* — otherwise the essence of a phoenix

Hence, what Aquinas earlier in the *De Ente* calls the “absolute consideration” of essence does not include existence. But by “existence” Kerr insists that Aquinas means existence in reality. The absolute consideration of essence cannot abstract from a mental existence for four reasons.¹¹ First, Aquinas’s very language of absolute “consideration” indicates that we are in the mind. Second, otherwise we would be absurdly saying that we are knowing something that is nothing. Third, also otherwise we would be getting into a Meinong’s nether world of things that have being but not existence. Finally, otherwise Aquinas would have to presuppose God and his power in order to deal with the possibility of non-existing possibles. In sum, for Kerr the absolutely considered essence is a second intention, a mental existent.

2. Kerr goes on to insist that the absolutely considered essence may be only conceptually distinct from essence, i.e., distinct owing to the workings of the mind. Hence, Kerr goes on to reference the reasoning of John Wippel. Wippel argues that in the second stage of the *De Ente* reasoning Aquinas demonstrates the real distinction from the conceptual distinction. Aquinas uses the concepts of essence and existence to entertain the hypothesis of an essence that intelligibly includes its existence. Such a hypothetical being could be only one and unique. Kerr spends some time arguing that this conclusion is not the result of an inductive survey of possible ways of multiplying something. Consequently, actual multiplicity of beings is a surefire indication of a real distinction between essence and *esse*. Kerr summarizes Wippel this way: “. . . it is impossible for there to be more than one pure *esse*, in which case, if there is any at all, there is never actually more than one pure *esse*. Consequently, multiplicity is a sign of non-identity of essence and *esse*, and if one grants that there exist multiple things, then one must grant the non-identity, or distinction, of essence and *esse* in such things.”¹²

3. Kerr is aware that in the second stage reasoning, Aquinas is using “existence” at least in the sense of a conceptually distinct act of the thing. Consequently, Kerr brings up that criticism of David Twetten that Aquinas’s first stage reasoning for the distinction between essence and existence would not impress an Aristotelian.¹³ Twetten argues that the real existence of the matter/form composition could be understood as just the fact of that compo-

could not be understood. Consequently, a thing’s *esse* does not enter into the understanding of essence and is thereby not identified with the essence.” KERR, *Aquinas’s Way to God*, 12.

¹¹ Ibid., 13.

¹² Ibid., 29.

¹³ Ibid., 31.

sition. So my ignorance of the existence of the man is an ignorance of simply whether the composition is in reality, or is a fact.

Returning to Aquinas' man/phoenix example, Kerr's reply is that "there is nothing about this form that signifies the actual existence of a phoenix; what signifies the actual existence of a phoenix is there actually existing a thing that is such." Otherwise, "all forms would self-exist." So, "Consequently, there is room here for an actualizing principle of form, the possession of which signifies the existence of forms such as cat, dog, human, and horse, and the lack of which renders forms such as phoenix, phlogiston, and hippogryph, nonexistent, yet conceptually possible. And this actualising principle is Thomist *esse*."¹⁴

4. With the real distinction established, Kerr goes on to show that the distinction leads to knowledge of causality. In chapter four, Kerr notes that in the third stage of the *De Ente* reasoning, Aquinas begins by saying: "What belongs to a thing is caused either by the principles of the thing or by something else." Kerr characterizes Aquinas's assertion as a form of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR).¹⁵ This pedigree becomes crucial when Kerr addresses the objection that a thing's *esse* could belong to the thing as an uncaused property. Kerr admits that as act of the essence, *esse* is primitive and so could be an uncaused property. Nevertheless, the composition of *esse* with the thing is not primitive. Here the PSR comes in. The PSR cannot tolerate *de facto* togetherness. Hence, Kerr says, "Even though *esse* is primitive and there is nothing more fundamental than *esse*, its being composed with some essence is not primitive; and since the essence with which it is composed does not possess such *esse* essentially, it possesses it from without. So why does it thus possess *esse*? What is the cause of the essence's *esse*?"¹⁶

Later, Kerr defends the PSR. The defense seems to be through the method of retorsion. In this method, one proves the truth of an assertion by illustrating that the assertion is implicitly used in the very doubting of it. Hence, the doubt cannot be real and the proposition must be asserted. Kerr says, "Rather, the judgment could be made that whilst such notions are essential to thought, if the world were not in itself as such it could not be thought, in which case these modal notions, whilst indispensable to thought, are revelatory of the world that is thought."¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid., 33–4.

¹⁵ Ibid., 94.

¹⁶ Ibid., 102.

¹⁷ Ibid., 112.

5. Kerr does not think that Aquinas immediately identifies the cause of contingent *esse* with a thing that does not have *esse* as a property, that is, a thing that is *esse tantum*. Hence, in chapter five Kerr argues that Aquinas must first discredit the possibility of identifying the cause with an infinite regress of things each of which have *esse* as a property. Using a *modus tollens* framework, Kerr argues that Aquinas's third stage claim that what is through another (*per aliud*) is reduced to what is through itself (*per se*) is possible only if the infinite regress has been discredited.¹⁸ By *modus tollens* the negation of the consequent should entail the negation of the antecedent. Hence, if the antecedent is the *per aliud* assertion and if the consequent is the denial of the infinite regress, then the possibility of an infinite regress entails the denial of the *per aliud* assertion. So, the third stage of the *De Ente* reasoning requires a philosophical dismissal of an infinite regress. Aquinas fails to elaborate this dismissal at the third stage of the *De Ente* reasoning. In his chapter five Kerr does attempt the elaboration. Hence, Kerr defends Aquinas's *De Ente* conclusion of a thing that is *esse*.

The above five topics far from exhaust the content of *Aquinas's Way to God*, but I believe that they express the central matter and isolate the reasons that Kerr offers for them. In the remainder of my reflections I want to provide assessments of these five central points.

On 1. Though I concur with Kerr that Aquinas's absolute consideration of essence is existence neutral, I disagree with Kerr that this neutrality is in respect only to real existence, that is, existence apart from human consideration. As I noted, Kerr makes the absolutely considered essence a second intention, or a mental existent. The *De Ente* text on absolute consideration of essence, partially cited by Kerr on p. 13, n. 9, distinguishes two senses of *esse* (*duplex esse*): an *esse* in singular things and an *esse* in the soul (*esse in singularibus et in anima*). Essence must abstract from both under pain of one denying the other. For example, if to belong to real things were proper to essence, then essence would not exist apart from things as it does when it exists in the soul. In the following paragraph Aquinas describes the mental existence as the essence when it is formally a genus or species and undergoes predication. On the other hand, if it were proper to absolutely considered essence to exist apart from things, in other words to exist in the soul, then essence would never exist in things. Hence, absolutely considered essence abstracts from every *esse* (*ad quodlibet esse*).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

Kerr's mentioned four reasons for a second intention understanding of absolutely considered essence do not conclude. First, it is not crazy to maintain that with the absolutely considered essence we are knowing something that is nothing, as Kerr mentions in his first reason. Existence is involved, but existence is not in the object of absolute consideration. Existence is involved in the data that prompts the mind to the essence. That data is the essence as it is in reality and in the mind. There is nothing absurd in this way of knowing something that is nothing. It is a case of knowing something on the basis of knowing something else. This manner of knowing is found all the time. For example, weather men forecast hurricanes on the bases of current conditions and detectives solve murders on the bases of forensic evidence.

It is true that sometimes we do use a cognitional species to consider something that does not exist. Both the imagination and intellect do this. Not every case of intellectual knowledge, however, proceeds through a species, or intention, formed by the mind. At *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 53, *Uterius*, Aquinas distinguishes such a species from "the intelligible species that actualizes the intellect, and that we must consider the principle of intellectual operation." The former allows the intellect, like the imagination, to consider both a present and an absent thing but also "to understand the thing as separated from material conditions, without which a thing does not exist in reality." Hence, the latter should be an intelligible species that stays intimate to the data. It is this latter more fundamental species that I am understanding as the absolutely considered essence of the *De Ente*.

Obviously, then, there is no necessity to adopt Meinong's interpretation of essence in order to talk about essence. Thomistic essence can be absolutely neutral existentially speaking and not lose our attention. It can be an object of attention without being a being in some sense. The existence required for an object of attention can be back in the data that prompts attention to essence. The required existence need not be proper to the absolutely considered essence.

Finally, Kerr's fourth reason was that his interpretation of absolute consideration of essence allows one to speak of possibility without presupposing God's power. My interpretation of the same, however, does likewise. Aquinas refers to possibility not according to any power, either active or passive, as the absolutely possible.¹⁹ Aquinas says that something is absolutely possi-

¹⁹ *Summa Contra Gentiles* II, 37, *Ex hoc*; *Summa Theologiae* I, 46, 1, ad 1m. For further discussion of modality and absolute consideration, see KNASAS, *Thomistic Existentialism and Cosmological Reasoning*, 63–7.

ble when the terms of a proposition have to each other no opposition. The lack of a power for the absolutely possible indicates that by the terms of a proposition, Aquinas means the absolutely considered natures of the *De Ente* that *abstrahit ad quodlibet esse*. The same doctrine is indicated by Aquinas's claim in *De Potentia Dei*. III, 14, that something diverse in substance and caused by God can exist eternally." Absolutely speaking (*loquendo absolute*), no opposition exists between the notions (*rationes*) *esse semper*, *esse ab alio*, and *diversum in substantia*. This way of speaking echoes my interpretation of absolute consideration in the *De Ente*. In contrast, Kerr's interpretation in which cognitional existence is proper to the absolutely considered essence would not be absolute possibility but possibility according to passive potency.

Paradoxically, our attention in the manner of absolute consideration does not invest the essence with an *esse in anima*. As mentioned, Aquinas insists that *esse in anima* is one of the two senses of *esse* from which the absolutely considered essence abstracts. If the reader does not remember this, then talk of "consideration" becomes a trap into which one can easily fall. Absolute consideration is, then, a paradoxical phenomenon. Unlike other forms of knowing which, according to Aquinas, consist in the known coming to exist in the knower, absolute consideration frees the very thing known from *esse in anima*. If this exception is not caught by the reader, then the reader will not appreciate the totality of essence's potentiality to *esse*, or conversely, the radical character of *esse* as act. In fact, would not Kerr's second intention understanding of the absolutely considered essence make the essence itself in some sense existence positive and consequently existence negative to being in things, as Aquinas says?

On 2. Elsewhere I have written about Wippel's attempt to augment a conceptual distinction between *esse* and essence into a real distinction.²⁰ Let it suffice for me to repeat the following. First, if an intelligible merging of *esse* and essence destroys multiplicity, as Aquinas argues in the second stage of the *De Ente* reasoning, then a conceptual distinction will save multiplicity. That a conceptual identity is also a real identity does not guarantee that in things that lack a conceptual identity we also have a real distinction. The thoroughly existence neutral status of essence means that while remaining conceptually distinct from essence, *esse* could actuate essence either by *de facto* merging with it or by remaining distinct from it. As Aquinas points

²⁰ See John F.X. KNASAS, "The Intellectual Phenomenology of *De Ente et Essentia*, Chapter Four," *The Review of Metaphysics* 68 (2014): 141-5.

out, while remaining conceptually distinct from the genus, the differences are *de facto* merged with it in reality. This is another paradoxical situation. Items that are intelligibly distinct in the reality are *de facto* merged in the reality. In this case “conceptually distinct” does not mean distinct only in the mind. Items can be different in reality without being really distinct.

Second, there are hermeneutical problems. Aquinas’s second stage is introduced by the thought that essence and existence are distinct in everything unless there is a reality whose essence is its existence because this reality is unique and primary (*una et prima*). The second stage proves only that *esse subsistens* is unique. For the primacy of *esse subsistens* the reader must continue to the third stage that presents the causal reasoning for *esse tantum* as first cause (*prima causa*) of *esse*. The characterization of *esse tantum* as both unique and primary suggests that Aquinas’s reasoning is not complete until the third stage. That would leave the real distinction unproved until stage three. Only if caused *esse* were really distinct would *esse tantum* as *prima causa* have *esse* as its proper effect.

Also, if Wippel is correct, then why stage three? According to Wippel’s interpretation, stage two seems sufficient to meet Aquinas’s current purpose, namely, to establish a real complexity in finite intelligences. Finally, in the second book of his commentary on the *Sentences*, d. 1, q. 1, a. 1, and using just stages one and three of the *De Ente* reasoning, Aquinas proves something that is its *esse*.²¹ The uniqueness of such a being is mentioned but after the conclusion of its existence was made. Evidently, the conceptual distinction suffices for causal considerations and should mean that a real distinction has not been reached in stage two of the *De Ente* reasoning.

On 3. Unfortunately, I believe that Kerr’s reply to Twetten is unconvincing. Twetten could reply that the further condition which form requires is not a principle intrinsic to the matter/form reality but an extrinsic efficient cause. In the *De Principiis Naturae* Aquinas looks at the matter/form composition. All that Aquinas gets out of the matter/form composition, and I be-

²¹ “For the nature of being [*natura entitatis*] is found in all things, in some more noble [*nobilis*] and in some less. So nevertheless that the natures of things themselves are not this being [*esse*] that they have. Otherwise being would be of the intellection [*de intellectu*] of each quiddity which is false since the quiddity of each thing is able to be intellected not understanding about it whether it is. Therefore it is necessary that from something they have being, and it is necessary to come to something the nature of which is itself its being. Otherwise, one would proceed to infinity. This is what gives being to all. It is not able to be except one, since the nature of entity is of one notion [*unius rationis*] in all according to analogy [*secundum analogiam*]. For unity in the caused requires unity in the *per se* cause.”

lieve correctly, is the need for an efficient cause that is the generator that causes the thing by bringing about the form to be in matter.²² The efficient cause is not a further component distinct from the matter and form. At *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 13, *Quod autem necesse*, Aquinas further argues for a sustainer of the form in matter, but Aquinas does that from the eternity of generators back into the past. Again, the sustainer is not a component of the substance. It is an ungenerable and incorruptible body that Aquinas identifies with a celestial sphere. Nothing of Aquinas's distinctive *actus* sense of the thing's existence is reached from hylomorphism.

Twetten's objection does raise the problem with the *intellectus essentiae* approach to the essence/*esse* distinction. Does the approach show *esse* to be even a conceptually distinct act? Does not the knower's return to reality only reveal the fact of some essence in some individual? Legions of readers of Aquinas have taken the man/phoenix remark as asserting an ignorance of existence not in the *actus essendi* sense but in the sense of the fact of the essence. Here too I have spoken elsewhere. I have tried to show that before the *intellectus essentiae* argument a proto-abstraction of the individual, the singular essence,²³ from the multiplicity of the individual's existence in reality and in sensory cognition occurs. Here sense realism has a crucial role to play. In sum, the real thing cannot also cognitively exist unless the real thing of itself is not real.

This reflection can also be conducted in the light of the Aristotelian mechanics of sense cognition. Hence, one will say that the form of the reality cannot come to exist in the knower if the form of itself was real. This multiplicity of the real form versus the real form cognitively existing seems to have been missed because of Aquinas's many remarks that not the stone, for example, but its species is in the eye.²⁴ Hence, what is cognitively existing cannot be the very form of the thing itself. It is a likeness of the form in a way similar to the picture being a likeness of the subject. This interpretation of the stone example is not necessary. By the example Aquinas need mean only that the stone does not physically move from reality into the

²² THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Principiis Naturae*, ed. John J. Pauson (Louvain: Editions: E. Nauwelaers, 1950), 87.

²³ At *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 65, *Item, Cognitis*, Aquinas distinguishes the singular essence (*singularis essentia*), for example, Socrates, from the universal essence (*universalis essentia*), for example, man. This ambiguity of essence is hardly reflected in the *De Ente et Essentia* which mainly speaks of universal essence.

²⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate* 2, 3, ad 1m, and 10, 8, ad 2m (to the contraries); *Summa Theologiae* I, 85, 2, ad 1m.

knower. That interpretation leaves the status of the species still undetermined. Is, then, the species like the picture or something else? To determine the answer, Aquinas doctrine of formal reception of form due to the knower's own amplitude and extension of form needs to be considered. At *Summa Theologiae* I, 14, 1c, Aquinas modulates this amplitude and extension of the knower's form to understand both sensation and intellection. It is important to understand the role of formal amplitude and extension in hylomorphic composites that are knowers.²⁵ When a form is received materially, the received form is at best only like the form of the agent. Consider how the form of the son is only like that of the father. What causes this distinction is the fact that the form of the agent is received by the distinct matter of the patient. What would result if the form of the agent is not received by the matter of the patient but by the form of the patient? Would not the result be that received form stays the very form of the agent? In this case the received form would not be a representation of the form of the agent but a re-presentation of the form of the agent. This tweaking of hylomorphism beautifully accommodates the fact of sense realism and also indicates Aquinas' adherence to sense realism.

In sum, just as, for example, the coffee of itself must be thoroughly temperature neutral if it is both hot and cold and its temperatures to be discerned as acts of the subject, so too an individual thing must be thoroughly existence neutral if it is to be both really and cognitively existing and its existences to be discerned as acts of it. In this context of multiple existences for the thing and *contra* Twetten and Kerr, the *duplex operatio intellectus* vindicates itself as the initial confrontation of the mind with Aquinas's *actus essendi* sense of the existence of a thing.²⁶

On 4. As mentioned, to deal with the possibility of *esse* being an uncaused property, Kerr advances the PSR and moves the focus of the *De Ente*

²⁵ For a more enlightening commentary on formal reception of form and its Aristotelian roots, see Joseph OWENS, "Aristotle: Cognition a Way of Being," in *Aristotle: The Collected Papers of Joseph Owens*, ed. John R. Catan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 74–80; Joseph OWENS, *Cognition: An Epistemological Inquiry* (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1992), chapter two.

²⁶ "In fact, one may claim that it is exactly this double existence of the same thing, say the Parthenon or a man or a horse, that enables metaphysics after Avicenna to get off the ground. The one thing is found to exist in two different ways. This shows that the thing itself is not the same as either existence, thereby setting up the basic problem of metaphysics, namely being *qua* being in contradistinction to the things that have being." Joseph OWENS, "The Range of Existence," *Proceedings of the Seventh Inter-American Congress of Philosophy* (Québec: Les Presses de L'Université Laval, 1967), 57.

reasoning off of *esse* and to the contingent relation between *esse* and the thing. We have a *de facto* togetherness that is intolerable to the PSR. I would not want to follow Kerr. In my opinion, William Rowe has decisively criticized the intolerability claim.²⁷ What of Kerr's retorsion defence? As Rowe points out, it may be indicative simply of how we have to think rather than the way reality has to be.

Hence, worth noting is that in Aquinas's opening line, the third stage is concerned with accidents of the thing. As indicated by the examples of risibility and the light in the air, accidents are to what the words "what belongs to a thing" are referring. In the Aristotelian tradition, accidents are *ipso facto* dependent items, for they exist as in and of a subject. True, this is material causation and not efficient causation, but one leads to the other. Because of its respective accident neutrality, no subject precisely as subject completely accounts for dependent accidental act. This thought leads to the thought of something that is actual in the appropriate respect. As the *De Ente* reasoning enumerates, this something is either the subject in some other respect than subject or another subject. In one of these forms we will complete the explanation required by *ipso facto* dependent accidental act. In this reasoning the operative nerve is the *ipso facto* dependency of the accidental, or of properties as Kerr refers to them. That dependent status is what provokes explanation. I do not see any focus on the contingent relation between properties and things which would issue in the PSR claim.

What Aquinas does in the remainder of stage three is to apply the above thinking to the existence of a thing. As *esse*, or *actus essendi*, existence too can be understood as a dependent accidental act.²⁸ In my opinion, this construal of *esse* originates in the above mentioned dual existence of the thing. The thing both really and cognitively exists. Hence, just as the temperature multiplicity provoked the mind to apprehend the temperatures as accidents, so too the existence multiplicity provokes the mind to do the same for exist-

²⁷ William ROWE, *The Cosmological Argument* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 75–83.

²⁸ Aquinas refers to *esse* as an accident in the following text. His reason is that of absolute consideration of the essence: "An accident means in a wide sense everything that is not part of the essence and such is the character of being in created things." (*Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, XII, 5) Its *sui generis* character as a prior accident is expressed in other texts: For example, "esse est accidens, non quasi per accidens se habens, sed quasi actualitas cuiuslibet substantiae." (Ibid., II, q. 2, a. 1, ad 2m). At *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, XII, q. 5, a. 1, the priority of angelic *esse* to the angel itself is used to deny that *esse* is an ordinary accident: "quia accidens intelligitur inesse alicui praexistenti. Angelus autem non praexistit ipsi esse."

ence. Hence, like an accident, *esse* manifests itself as dependent at least upon its subject *qua* subject. This categorization of *esse* as an accident, like that of the risibility and illumination, is what gets the idea of dependency going. With *esse*, however, there is decisive evidence that the complete story of its dependency does not lie in the thing of which it is an accident. The thorough existence neutrality of the subject requires an efficient cause other than the subject in some other respect than subject. To cause an accident the subject must be able to be envisaged in some other respect than subject. For example, because I can be envisaged as existing without the ability to laugh, then there is the possibility that I can be envisaged as cause of that ability from that respect. But without *esse*, the thing is envisaged only as existence neutral. There is simply nothing else left of the thing to which to appeal to finish the explanation of *actus essendi*. So *esse* is dependent and is dependent upon something other than the thing.

This current conclusion is heavily based upon *esse* as a *sui generis* accident. It is a distinctive accident because of its radical priority to the thing. Kerr describes this priority well in terms of *esse* as “primitive.” For some reason, however, Kerr views this primitiveness as a threat to causal reasoning and so spends some time trying to exorcise the possibility of a non-dependent property.²⁹ In other words, I understand him to say that *esse* is so primitive that it stops explanation rather than allows it to continue to an efficient cause as in the *De Ente* reasoning. Has not Kerr forgotten that the *esse* that he is correctly calling primitive is the *esse* that is still an accident? In its priority to its subject, *esse* does not lose its status as an *actus*. Also, as an *actus*, *esse* does not become something subsequent to its subject as all other accidents do. Here we have another paradoxical thesis in Aquinas that is crucial for the development of his metaphysical God proof. Its truth, despite its difficulty, has been duly noticed and flagged.³⁰ By refocusing on the con-

²⁹ KERR, *Aquinas's Way to God*, 100–105.

³⁰ “The notion that there is an accident prior to substance in sensible things is repellent to the ingrained human way of thinking. Yet the effort has to be made for the metaphysical understanding of existence. Not substance, but an accident, being, is absolutely basic in sensible things. This has to be understood, however, in a way that does not make being function as the substance. Strictly, it is not the being that is there, but the substance that has the being. The nature cannot take on an adverbial relation to its being. Man cannot be regarded as basically a certain portion of being that exists humanly, or a horse as another portion of being that exists equinely. The man and the horse are not portions of being, but substances that have being. They, and not their being, have to be expressed substantively, even though their being is prior to their natures. Not the subject, but the predicate, is absolutely basic.”³⁰ Joseph OWENS, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1985), 75. In contrast, “Given what I have been

tingency between a thing and its *esse* and so ushering in the PSR, Kerr appears to have forgotten the paradoxical nature of Thomistic existence.

Finally, it is true that at *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 15, *Amplius*, and II, 15, *Praeterea*, Aquinas, like Kerr, seems to focus on the contingent relation between the thing and its *esse*. In the first Aquinas says that the thing is equally (*aequaliter*) related to *esse et non esse*. In the second, he says that considered in itself the thing is related to both (*in se consideratum ad utrumlibet*). Hence, this gap requires a cause to determine the thing to one. These words can be seized upon to argue that Aquinas is a proto-proponent of the PSR. According to the PSR contingent relations between things require something outside themselves to bridge the gap. *De facto* togetherness is intolerable. But the *Contra Gentiles* texts can be brought back to the third stage reasoning from accidents by pointing out that Aquinas' talk of the thing as equally disposed to *esse et non esse* and as considered in itself is talk of an absolute consideration of the thing. That move would tie the *Contra Gentiles* texts into the first stage of the *De Ente* reasoning. The texts could continue to be read by the other stages. Appearances aside, Aquinas is continuing to reason from *esse* as a *sui generis* accident. Again, the major premise in the third stage *De Ente* reasoning is: "What belongs to a thing is caused."

On 5. As mentioned, Kerr argues that the *De Ente* reasoning cannot immediately reach *esse tantum*, something in which *esse* is not an accident or property, but must first destroy the possibility of an infinite regress of causes each of which has *esse* as a property. In other words, Aquinas's third stage claim that the *per aliud* must be reduced to the *per se* is dependent upon the denial of an infinite regress. He employed a *modus tollens* argumentation such that the negation of q (the denial of infinite regress) would be a denial of p (the reduction of the *per aliud* to the *per se*). My question to Kerr is, "In the light of the priority of *esse*, that is, *esse* as the act of all acts, how can you affirm the negation of q?" The affirmation of the negation of q is the affirmation of an infinite regress. But from *esse* as the act of all acts, how can you go to anything except *esse* in a non-accidental configuration? The regress is a fantasy. It cannot be built up even as a possibility. If focus is kept on the priority of accidental *esse*, no other thing except *esse tantum* is

saying, Aquinas's teaching on *esse* is decidedly matter of fact and even pedestrian." Brian DAVIES, "Aquinas, God, and Being," *The Monist* 80, no. 4 (1997): 514, and "Aquinas's doctrine of *esse* really adds nothing over and above his doctrine of form." Peter GEACH, *Three Philosophers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961), 92.

around to account for *esse*. One has to conclude to a thing that is *esse tantum* (the *per se* claim), not because an infinite regress is impossible (the denial of q), but simply because there is nothing else around. Likewise, how many 0's does one have to add before one realizes that $0+0=0$? In this case *modus tollens* reasoning fails to work. It creates the false impression that the negation of q delivers a possibility with which one must deal.

Without this focus on *esse* it becomes plausible, as Kenny recounts,³¹ to account for attributes by causes that lack the attributes. For example, the rubbing hands produce the heat. In this case, the heat is an accidental effect of a *per se* line of causality which is the locomotion of the hands to a place. But as primitive or prior, *esse* cannot be the accidental effect of another line of causality. There is nothing else to which to relate *esse* because everything else is only existence neutral.

The immediate reduction of *esse* to *esse tantum* does not cause the problem of presupposing what one is trying to prove, as Kerr worries.³² Only if one remains in the context of the PSR and its focus on the contingent relation between essence and existence does the idea of something other than *esse tantum* being the cause of the relation become plausible. If one's focus is *esse* both as prior and as act, then *esse* as subsistent is straight away the conclusion.

At the beginning, I said that the analytically trained philosopher is so habituated to precision that he can too quickly dismiss paradox. That would not be so dangerous if paradox were absent from the most important things. One of those things is philosophical knowledge of God. In the case of Aquinas's *De Ente* reasoning for God as *esse tantum*, at least three paradoxes emerge. The first is the existential neutrality of essence when absolutely considered. This is paradoxical because it appears to claim that we can consider something that is nothing. One might try to dismiss the paradox by saying that it belongs to what we are considering at least to exist in the mind. Of course, the paradox returns if one is reading Aquinas. He insists that the consideration "abstrahit ad quodlibet *esse*." If the reader can tolerate Aquinas's insistence, the reader will be rewarded with the explanation for Aquinas's paradoxical understanding of absolute consideration. It is the twofold existence of the essence that supports our consideration of essence as existence neutral. Somewhat similarly, it is the multiplicity of complexions that supports our consideration of an individual as complexion neutral.

³¹ Anthony KENNY, *The Five Ways: St. Thomas Aquinas' Proofs of God's Existence* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 21–2.

³² KERR, *Aquinas's Way to God*, 102–3.

Duplex esse, however, may also be a paradox. Does not a thing have only one existence—its real existence? Aquinas’s borrowing of Aristotle’s *De Anima* doctrine of formal reception of form throws light on this paradoxical union of the real and the cognitional. Reception into matter produces another individual that is perhaps at best like the agent. Formal reception, then, should render the very agent itself present to the knower. Every morning, then, when we open our eyes, we double the existence of the world. This doubling is pregnant with implications. It drives us to understand the world to be of itself not real and allows judgment, the *secunda operatio*, to return to sensation and to grasp existence as an *actus* of the thing.

The third paradox follows and is crucial for knowing God. If the thing of itself is existence neutral, then its act of existence, *esse* or *actus essendi*, cannot be understood except as basic and fundamental to it. Unlike other acts of the subject *esse* is not in a subsequent and posterior relation to the subject. Yet for all that *esse* remains the *actus* and the thing the subject. The mentioned complexions are posterior to me, for example, because I as real am common to them. *Esse* is prior because I as existence neutral am common to the *duplex esse*. This duly noted paradoxical character of existence is crucial for knowing that the thing in some other respect than subject does not account for its *esse* and that the cause of *esse* is *esse tantum*.

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THE ANALYTICAL THOMIST AND THE PARADOXICAL AQUINAS:
SOME REFLECTIONS ON KERR'S *AQUINAS'S WAY TO GOD*

S u m m a r y

My article critically evaluates five key claims in Kerr's interpretation of Aquinas's *De Ente et Essentia*, ch. 4, proof for God. The claims are: (1) the absolutely considered essence is a second intention, or cognitional being; (2) à la John Wippel, the real distinction between essence and existence is known before the proof; (3) contra David Twetten, Aristotelian form is not self-actuating and so requires *actus essendi*; (4) the *De Ente* proof for God uses the Principle of Sufficient Reason; (5) an infinite regress must be eliminated before concluding to God. This author wonders if these questionable claims are traceable to the mindset of analytic philosophy which values precision and discreteness and so can fail to appreciate crucial paradoxes in Aquinas's metaphysics.

ANALITYCZNY TOMISTA I PARADKOKSALNY AKWINATA:
REFLEKSJE NA KANWIE *AQUINAS'S WAY TO GOD* KERRA

Streszczenie

Artykuł krytycznie ocenia pięć kluczowych twierdzeń w interpretacji *De ente et essentia* (rozdz. IV, dowód na istnienie Boga), jakie proponuje Kerr. Twierdzenia te są następujące: 1) istota rozpatrywana sama w sobie jest wtórną intencją lub bytem poznającym; 2) twierdzenie *à la* John Wippel — realną różnicę między istotą oraz istnieniem poznajemy przed dowodem; 3) wbrew Davidowi Twettenowi Arystotelesowska forma nie jest samoaktualizująca się, domaga się zatem *actus essendi*; 4) dowód na istnienie Boga z *De ente* stosuje zasadę racji dostatecznej; 5) należy odrzucić nieskończony regres przed dojściem do istnienia Boga. Autor zastanawia się, czy wątpliwe twierdzenia związane są z nastawieniem filozofii analitycznej, która preferuje precyzję i tendencję do wyodrębniania, a zatem może nie doceniać istotne paradoksy metafizyki Akwinaty.

Przełożył Jan Klos

Key words: absolute consideration; *esse*; real distinction; Principle of Sufficient Reason; infinite regress; sensation; judgment.

Słowa kluczowe: absolutna uwaga; *esse*; realna różnica; zasada racji wystarczającej; nieskończony regres; odczucie; osąd.

Informacje o Autorze: JOHN F.X. KNASAS — Professor Emeritus, od 1983 do 2018 profesor w Center for Thomistic Studies, University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas, USA; adres do korespondencji — email: jknasas@stthom.edu; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7417-0211>.