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# EXISTENCE AND GOD: ON AQUINAS–KERR'S METAPHYSICAL ARGUMENT*

## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Gaven Kerr, O.P., in his excellent book *Aquinas's Way to God*: *The Proof in De Ente et Essentia* (2015), reconstructs, in a supportive manner, St. Thomas Aquinas's metaphysical argument for the existence of God from the work *De Ente et Essentia*. This argument, although less discussed than his *five ways*, expressed the most important and original principles of Aquinas's metaphysics. Kerr's book has two advantages, namely (i) it is based on meticulously analysed source texts written by Thomas, and (ii) it consistently defends his main ideas in the context of problems discussed in contemporary analytic metaphysics. Thanks to this, the reader is presented with Aquinas's authentic argument, which can be at the same time treated as a serious and up-to-date metaphysical proposal.

Nowhere does Kerr summarize Thomas's argument in a more formal way. Being based on Kerr's book (cf. KERR 2015, e.g. 92, 148), however, Aquinas–Kerr's argument can be easily (although with a certain degree of simplification) outlined in the following way:

(1) There are things in which the real distinction and composition of essence and *esse* occurs.
(2) If there are things in which the real distinction and composition of essence and *esse* occurs, then each of these things needs a distinct cause of its *esse*.

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(3) There are things, each of which needs a distinct cause of its *esse.* [2, 1 by Modus Ponens]
(4) The causal series (i.e. the series of causes) of *esse* is an essentially ordered series, i.e. a *per se* or one-many series.
(5) If the causal series is a *per se* series, then it must terminate in a primary cause, i.e. there is such a cause.
(6) The causal series of *esse* must terminate in a primary cause of *esse,* i.e. there is such a cause. [5, 4 by Modus Ponens]
(7) If there is a primary cause of *esse*, then it is identical with the thing which is '*esse tantum*, a cause that is not conditionally primary, but rather is absolutely primary' (KERR 2015, 143) and can be called God.
(8) There is a thing which is (identical with) *esse tantum* and can be called God [7, 6 by Modus Ponens]

As seen from the above, Aquinas–Kerr's argument needs to defend the following metaphysical principles (from which the other theses follow):

(1) — the principle of real distinction and composition;
(2) — the principle of causality in its existential version;
(4), (5) — the principle of the finiteness (or the terminating in the first element) of the causal series of *esse* as a *per se* series;
(7) — the principle of the distinguished status (or character) of the primary cause of *esse.*

In chapters 1–3 Kerr defends principle (1), in chapter 4 — principle (2), in chapter 5 — principles (4)–(5), while in chapter 6 (and in a part of chapter 5)—he does the same with reference to principle (7). The latter is supplemented with chapter 7, concerning the relation between God and the created world — the relation which is independent of the occurrence of or a lack of the temporal beginning of the world.

Below I will present, critically or complementarily, certain remarks on the principle of distinction and composition (1), the principle of the causal series of *esse* as a *per se* series (4–5) and the principle of the distinguished status of the primary cause of *esse*, which is *esse tantum* (7). I omit the principle of causality (2) since I almost entirely agree with Kerr's views on the subject and I expressed my position on this issue elsewhere (WOJTYSIAK 2007). I will express my objections to the existential version of this principle in the discussion on the principle of the causal series of causes of *esse* as a *per se* series.[1]

[1] In the present text, I also omit (with small exceptions) terminological and logical issues concerning the ways of using the terms of *be*, *exist* etc.

## THE REAL DISTINCTION AND COMPOSITION

Gaven Kerr (2015, 5–30) begins his book with a reconstruction of Aquinas's argument for the real distinction of essence and *esse*. He interprets this argument as having two stages: (i) first, it is shown that understanding what something is does not suffice to assert its existence; (ii) second, it is remarked that if the essence of a given thing did not really differ from its *esse*, then such a thing would be exactly one (while we see the multitude of things in the world).

I believe that neither this argument nor other Thomistic arguments (cf. FESER 2014, 241–6) suffice to show the real difference between the essence and existence (of beings other than God) because these arguments are sound only on the grounds of the Thomistic account of being and existence. On the grounds of other accounts, these arguments are either close to the categorical mistake or they cannot be the basis for proving the existence of God. For example, within the post-Fregean framework it is not at all possible to construct the concept of a thing whose essence is its existence since the essence is a set of first order properties, while existence is a second order property. Therefore, an advocate of this framework would say that the difference between essence and existence is conceptually trivial; however, this difference does not have any *real* metaphysical consequences.[2]

I therefore consider section 3.2. to be crucial to Kerr's book. There, complementing the intrinsic-Thomistic argument, he confronts the Thomistic conception of *esse* with other accounts of existence. In that section, Kerr aptly outlines the opposition between the Thomistic conception and the predominant trends found in contemporary reflection upon existence. To be more exact, Kerr opposes the following[3]:

(i) possibilism — since 'Aquinas does not envisage the distinction and composition of essence and *esse* as that between [possible] *esse essentiae* and [actual] *esse existentiae*' (KERR 2015, 67);

[2] Using a certain remark by D. Oderberg (2007: 122), who defends this real distinction (cf. ibid: 121-125) in an original manner, it can be said that capturing the essence corresponds to the sentence 'possibly there is a form *F* which is instantiated'. Therefore, the statement of something's existing would correspond to the sentence: there is an instantiation of a form *F*. However, how does one state in this language the existence of a being whose essence is existence? Consistently, it should be said that: necessarily, (i) there is a form *G* which is instantiated, (ii) there is an instantiation of a form *G*, (iii) (*x*) (*x* is a form $G \equiv x$ is an instantiation of a form *G*). Unfortunately, (iii) neither expresses Thomistic intuitions nor is it acceptable on the grounds of the standard languages of logic.

[3] In certain cases I suggest my own terminology as shown below.

(ii) minimalism — since 'Aquinas's account of existence (*esse*) does not confine it to [for example] the instantiation of some general concept, properties, description etc.' (KERR 2015, 70);

(iii) indexalism and subjectivism — since 'the Thomist recognises that discussion of the actual world designates the subject's world, but he also recognises that the actual world would be actual irrespective of such talk' (KERR 2015, 78, cf. 80–1);

(iv) reductionism — since 'there is nothing more basic that can be used to analyse *esse*; rather, *esse* will ultimately be involved in the analysis of everything else, and this represents the ultimate unifying principle of Aquinas's metaphysics' (KERR 2015, 83–4).

Kerr's analyses confirm that it is difficult to find a criterion which would decide between the competitive accounts of existence. The situation is rather that our initial intuitions lead us towards a definite account. The intuitions that lead towards the Thomistic account I would express (being inspired by the above quotations from Kerr's book) in the following way:

(i') actualism: it is not that what exists is a special variety of what is possible; rather, what is possible is determined by what exists;

(ii') maximalism (fundamentalism): the verb *exist* refers to the fundamental factor in being and not to the (purely formal) relation of instantiation, identity, location etc.[4]

(iii') objectivism (realism): a given entity exists or not — this fact is, however, independent of anybody's point of view (in the metaphysical sense) and neither is it relativised to any context;

(iv') primitivism: existence is the primitive factor in being which cannot be reduced to any other factors; existence cannot be defined — it can only be stated (or assert) and descriptively approximated by certain analogies.

To answer the question about what analogies are meant I would add another intuition:

(v') dynamism: the proper analogies which approach existence have a dynamic, and not static character — existence is similar to such *things* like power, energy, activity or action.

[4] In other words, the predicate *exists* — if it can be treated as a predicate — is a special, though basic, predicate and not a formal or redundant one. Cf. Williams (1995, 149–50), who treats predicate *exists* through an analogy to the predicate *is true* according to the minimalist conception of truth. In reality, however, the specific — as it were hiding behind other predicates (being a *medium quo* for them) — predicate *exists* contrasts an entity with nothingness.

Thomists theoretically develop intuition (iv'), presenting the essence–*esse* composition as a borderline case of the potency–act composition. Kerr is clearly in favour of the compositional model of the relation essence–*esse.* What does such a model, however, consist in?

Problems with presenting and accepting the compositional model come from the fact that the typical composition we deal with is the part–whole composition, where the parts can be, even for a short time, separated from the whole. The essence–*esse* composition is of a completely different character. To expound this, we can compare this composition — thus complementing Kerr's discourse — to a more familiar *subject–property* composition. We cannot separate a (given) property from the subject and the subject from (any) property. It is rather the case that a property determines the subject to be *such,* and the subject (in itself) is a determinable substratum of being *such.* The same can be said, though with proper changes and with greater subtlety, about the *matter–form* composition (especially in reference to the prime matter and the substantial form). Within this framework, the indeterminate substratum (of transforming entities) gets determined to be the generic being *this.* In turn, the essence–*esse* composition would be a borderline case of this array of *substratum–determinant* compositions. This borderline character means that in this case *the substratum* is somehow nothingness, which thanks to *esse* becomes *defined* or *determined* as a certain (existing) essence or from which, thanks to *esse*, this essence is as if drawn out. This borderline case is difficult to describe since we concern ourselves with something metaphysically primitive or primal, something which simply separates being from non-being. (As Kerr says (2015, 89): *esse* is something 'without which there is nothing, and so *esse* is unanalysable in terms of anything other than itself'). On the other hand, however, this case shows most emphatically that the *substratum–determinant* composition can be best described by involving different interrelated meanings of the terms *potency–act*. After all, existence seemingly activates the (passive, limited) essence and in some way enables it, complements or perfects it to the state of being. *Esse* would then appear, besides matter and form (or rather: above them), as a third intrinsic cause (or factor) of being. However, *esse*'s ultimate or proper extrinsic cause, if it should be accepted according to the steps of Aquinas–Kerr's proof, can be reduced neither to an ordinary efficient cause nor to an ordinary final one.[5]

[5] Let us note here two possible objections: (i) accepting the essence-*esse* composition leads to the *regressus ad infinitum*; (ii) strictly speaking, *nothingness* is not any potency and cannot be

## THE CAUSAL SERIES OF *ESSE*

If we are convinced that each entity known to us is composed of essence and *esse* and that the *esse* of each such an entity has its own cause, then — ruling out the vicious circle of causation — two metaphysical possibilities remain to be viewed, namely (i) either the causal series of *esse* does not have the first element; or (ii) the causal series of *esse* has the first element.[6] Gaven Kerr (2015, 135–46) shows that possibility (ii) takes place since every *per se* series of causes has its first element, and the causal series of *esse* is just a *per se* series. I have no objections to the argumentation for the first part of this thesis. Kerr clearly explicates the difference between a *per se* (ordered) series and a *per accidens* (ordered) series, showing that in the former 'without the presence of the primary cause to the members of the series […] those members would be causally inefficacious' (KERR 2015, 139). However, the question arises as to whether the causal series of *esse* is a *per se* series.

There are two ways to search for the answer to this question. The first way is to study the empirically familiar, paradigmatic case which can be treated as causing *esse.* The causal relation of procreating is such a case. Unfortunately, a series of such relations are commonly regarded as a typical example of a *per accidens* series because one's ability to procreate is independent of the current life of one's parents. In such a situation, the second option chosen by Kerr remains. This option is based on the metaphysical analysis of the notion of causing *esse*. In accordance with this analysis, '*esse* is not only caused but also sustained in essence–*esse* composites', the consequence of which is that 'the being of the effect (the essence/*esse* composite) cannot outlast its cause (of *esse*)' (KERR 2015, 144); with this being just the property of the causal *per se* series.

The difficulty which I see in the solution proposed by Kerr is that it is only an explication of a certain metaphysical concept while not taking into

any substratum. Ad (i). The components of the essence-*esse* composition are not distinct entities which can be further divided (cf. FESER 2014, 246–7). Ad (ii). *Nothingness* in itself is not any potency, but in a sense it is a relative kind of potency in the aspect of unrealized (a) ideas in God's mind, (b) logical possibilities, and (c) potentialities determined by already existing beings. Certain other objections against the compositional model will be discussed later.

[6] Strictly speaking, the possibility of many causal series of type (i) or type (ii) should be taken into consideration. However, if there is the primary cause of *esse* and if it is the unique *esse tantum*, then this primary cause constitutes the primary cause (the first element) for each causal series of *esse*.

account the empirical data. The question, how do you know that each essence–*esse* composite has its cause and that the series of its causes is a *per se* series?, seems to be answered by Kerr in the following way: I know this because the *esse* of thing as a factor of the essence–*esse* composite does not belong to its nature and thus it needs something which causes and sustains it. Kerr, however, does not give any empirical example of something that causes and sustains the *esse* of a thing. It can be even said that within the metaphysical conception defended by him such an empirical example cannot be given since the unique being which causes and sustains *esse* in the strict sense is God as *esse tantum.* (After all, Kerr himself notices this (2015, 181) while writing: 'a creature does not cause *esse*, but presupposes it passing it along to other creatures'). If this is so, then the defended theory is only of a speculative or conceptual character.

Let us add that if Kerr adopts the speculative option, he does not need to get involved in disputes on the finiteness or infiniteness of the causal series of *esse*. Against him, the whole proof for the existence of God can be simplified to the following form:

(1) There are things in which the real distinction and composition of essence and *esse* occurs.
(2') If there are things in which the real distinction and composition of essence and *esse* occurs, then each of these things exists *per aliud*.
(3') There are things, each of which exists *per aliud* [2', 1 by Modus Ponens]
(5') If there are things which exist *per aliud*, then there is a thing which exists *per se*.
(6') There is a thing which exists *per se*. [5', 3' by Modus Ponens]
(7') If there is a thing which exists *per se*, then it is identical with the thing which is *esse tantum* and can be called God.
(8) There is a thing which is (identical with) *esse tantum* and can be called God [7', 6' by Modus Ponens]

It can be seen that the principle of causality (2) and the principle of the finiteness of the series of causes of *esse* (4)–(5) are replaced in (2') and (5') by the *per aliud* principle (cf. KERR 2015, 121–2) or a principle related to it.[7] On the other hand, the *per aliud* principle (or a related principle) can be derived from the principle which I would name the Platonic Principle of Participation (PPP) and formulate as follows:

[7] Thus, step (4) can be omitted and it does not need a substitute.

(PPP) For every thing *x*, (i) either *x* possesses (in a limited degree) *F*, or *x* is (identical with) the pure *F*; (ii) if *x* possesses (in a limited degree) *F*, then it possesses *F per aliud*; (iii) if *x* possesses *F per aliud*, then it possesses *F* through the thing which is (identical with) the pure *F*, i.e. the thing which is *F per se*.

Substituting *F* with *esse*, we obtain the Thomistic (or existential) version of the principle (PPP):

(TPPP) For every thing *x*, (i) either *x* possesses (in a limited degree) *esse* [constituting the essence–*esse* composite], or *x* is (identical with) the pure *esse* [called *esse tantum*]; (ii) if *x* possesses (in a limited degree) *esse*, then it possesses *esse per aliud*; (iii) if *x* possesses *esse per aliud*, then it possesses *esse* through the thing which is (identical with) the pure *esse*, i.e. the thing which is *esse per se*.

With such a speculative view, Thomists could limit their argumentation to Platonic arguments for (PPP) and try to show that its Thomistic substitution — (TPPP) — is justified. It is disputable if such a move would reflect the thought of St. Thomas himself. However, this shows the tension between the Aristotelian causal model and the Platonic participation model.[8] The echo of this tension is frequently repeated in Kerr's book.

Anyone who does not want to make the aforementioned move must return to Kerr's argument. However, one should then give empirical examples of causes of *esse* which form a *per se* series. Such an approach can be defended by emphasizing that according to our empirical knowledge, the occurrence and persistence of the existence of any being (empirically known to us) is conditioned by a number of factors. These factors include the fact that the ceasing of their existence or activity leads to the ceasing of the existence of the being in question. For example, our organism cannot live without oxygen in the gaseous state and this state cannot occur without a definite temperature, which itself is dependent on the current presence of the proper amount of kinetic energy, and so on. Such examples may illustrate the thesis that any series of causes of *esse* is a *per se* series and it requires a primary cause. Further metaphysical analyses would show that this primary cause cannot be identified with any material (or broader: contingent) entity but with some-

[8] It most frequently happens that Thomists who prefer the first model refer to Thomas's first two (or three) ways, while Thomists who prefer the second one refer to *the fourth way.* While introducing the question of a chain of causes to 'the argument from the real distinction', most interpreters come closer to the first and not to the second model.

thing that ultimately is not conditioned by anything and can provide *esse* since it is *esse* itself.

## *ESSE TANTUM*

Gaven Kerr, after Thomas, identifies the primary (or proper) cause of *esse* (of the things known to us) with the being which is *esse tantum*. He responds aptly to the objections suggesting '(i) that the very notion of *esse tantum* is unintelligible; and (ii) that this is not what we understand God to be' (KERR 2015, 150). Despite the answers to those objections, the following questions can still be put:

(Q1) on the grounds of the compositional model, is it admissible to accept the existence of a being where there is no real difference between the essence and *esse* (and if so, how should this being be understood)?
(Q2) without getting involved in difficulties, how should one understand the relation between the *esse tantum* and the *esse* of the other beings?

Ad (Q1). It is characteristic that both Aristotle and Thomas allow in their compositional model for an exception. This is the non-complex being, which is the pure act itself. In the case of Thomas, this act is the perfect act of existence (or better: the act-existence), that is *esse tantum*. This may seem doubtful. After all, potency and act, and especially essence and *esse*, are correlative factors: act actualises (realizes, fulfils, defines, determines, etc) some potency, while *esse* is the *esse* of something — something which thanks to *esse* becomes actualised into being an existent. Is it possible to sensibly think of the pure act — an act which, taken in itself, does not actualise nothing but itself?

The systemic motif for a positive answer to this question is the metaphysical supremacy of act over potency. It is act which realizes or defines potency. Without act, potency is *in a given aspect* nothing, and without act-*esse* potency-essence is *completely* nothing. Therefore, although potency (essence) cannot be admissible without act (*essence*), act (*esse*) can be admissible without potency (essence). The argument from *De Ente et Essentia* assumes such an exceptional possibility and shows that if this is not the fact, then *esse* of things from the essence–*esse* composition (and hence, *esse* not contained in essence and not derived from it) cannot be explained.

How does one understand such an exceptional and non-complex being? Problems with understanding it come from the fact that we do not have an

empirical access to it and it is just the unique being (the being *sui generis*), incomparable with any other being. It can be said, however, that — speaking more strictly — this being does not so much actualise (realize, define etc.) itself but it is something so fully actual (realized, defined) that there is nothing to actualise in it. The consequence of this fact is that this being has the power to actualise (realize, define) anything outside of itself.

Referring to this exceptional being, Kerr (2015, x, 3, 5, 6, 8, 18, 22, 23 etc.) uses (frequently in the vein of Aquinas) various terms. I would divide them into two groups:

a) terms related to *esse* ('*esse tantum*,' '*esse* alone,', 'pure *esse*,' 'subsistent *esse*,' '*ipsum esse*,' '*esse* itself,' and 'the very fullness of *esse*');
b) terms related to a being or its essence ('a being whose essence is its *esse*,' 'something whose quiddity is its *esse*,' 'a thing that is its own *esse*,' and a 'self-subsistent being').

Let us add that Kerr (2015, 32), in his discussion with David Twetten, rejects, though without directly explaining *why,* the term 'pure essence'. (Let us explain: pure essence is pure potentiality but pure potentiality cannot be or do anything without act). On the other hand, FESER (2014, 245–6) critically refers to the term 'something whose […] existence is *part* of its essence' since this term would suggest a dependence of the existence of the whole being upon the other parts of its essence.[9]

As for the terms from group (a), as preferred by Kerr, I believe that they are an example of a mental leap. The fact is that the entity spoken about here is the very act-*esse* but there is not, contrary to what these terms might suggest, act-*esse* itself found beyond any being. If the aforementioned exception is 'an individual that subsists […] an *ens*, and «that which is»' (KERR 2015, 154), it is better not to call it 'pure *esse*' etc., but 'a thing (or a being) that is its own *esse*' or — if 'essence' means what being is — 'a being whose essence is its *esse.*' Therefore, the terms from group (b) would be more appropriate. The term '*esse tantum*' might remain provided it is understood as a shortcut of the term 'a being (a thing) that is (whose essence is) *esse tantum*' or 'such a thing that «a thing's *esse* is itself the entire essence of the thing»' (MacDonald 2002, 149).[10]

[9] I think that one could speak here about the co-occurrence or co-dependence of existence and the other parts of the essence of being. Existence as act cannot, however, be equal to something that is not act.

[10] There is a dispute whether God is '«a being» alongside other beings […] even an especially impressive one' or 'rather Being Itself or Pure Actuality' (FESER 2015, 197; cf. WOJTYSIAK

Ad (Q2). The relation between *esse tantum* and *esse* of the other things is called participation. If I understand Kerr's text correctly, his model of participation looks as follows:

- the essence of a given thing participates in its individual *esse* (cf. KERR 2015, 63, 115, 144);
- the individual *esse* of a thing participates in *esse commune* — 'the collective totality of all the individual acts of existence possessed by essence-*esse* composites' (KERR 2015, 62, cf. 115);
- '*esse commune* participates in *esse divinum* [*esse tantum*]' (KERR 2015, 162, cf. 154, 184).

I believe that this model unnecessarily complicates the matter by introducing an intermediary element, with this being *esse commune.* Indeed, the created things or their particular *esse* participate in *esse commune;* however, this is a conceptual participation and not a real one. Simply put, the notion of *esse commune* is a conceptual abstraction denoting together all individual *esse*. Hence, the statement that *esse commune* participates in *esse tantum* is a shortcut to the statement that each individual *esse* of a created being participates in *esse tantum.*

If the above model is excessively rich, maybe it should undergo a radical reduction. For example, Marek Piwowarczyk (2017, 76) examined the standpoint (attributed to Henry of Ghent), according to which 'the existence of a thing is its transcendent relation to the Absolute.' In this view, not only *esse commune* but also the individual *esse* of a definite created thing cannot be a part of real participation since this *esse* appears *de facto* to be a relational item extrinsic to the thing. Such a view, however, undermines the earlier adopted intuition that existence is an intrinsic and irreducible factor of being. What is more, this view makes the independence (given to us empirically) of a thing disputable. It is doubtful whether a given thing can be called a separate being if its existence consists exclusively in a relation to something metaphysically distinguished, which is beyond itself.

In such a situation, the optimal model of participation must be regarded to be a model in which each essence of a created thing participates in its individual *esse*, and each such *esse* — without a real mediation of *esse commune* — participates in *esse tantum.* This model is intermediate or moderate in relation to the other models. Someone might, however, accuse such a mo-

2017b, 294–300). I would say that God is 'a being' but this is an exceptional or borderline being, both in its structure (it is a non-complex act-*esse*) and in relation to other beings (it is a necessary condition of the existence of all other beings).

del of unnecessarily duplicating acts. On the one hand, an internal act of a given being is its individual *esse*, while on the other, this *esse* requires an external act, i.e. *esse tantum*, for its occurrence.

The above objection loses its strength if we draw attention to the fact that the external and internal acts of a given being fulfils various functions. To give an example, in the process of heating or dyeing we deal with the actualisation of some entity to the internal *being-in-act* of a given aspect (being heated or dyed) by something external, which is already in this aspect *in-act* (is sufficiently warm or covered with dyes). This means that one thing is the *being-in-act* of the heating or dyeing entity, and another thing is — obtained thanks to this *being-in-act* of the heating or dyeing — the *being-in-act* of something just being heated or dyed. Similarly, in creation the act-*esse* of the creator is something different from the internal (although obtained thanks to the creator) act-*esse* of the created being. In both cases (heating and creation), something obtains actuality thanks to an external act. In the first case, this is only actuality in a given aspect which requires the former existence of a subject in certain potentiality, whereas in the second case we are dealing with complete actuality — the existential actuality of *esse* — for which there is no previous substratum for actualisation unless we consider nothingness to be such a substratum.[11]

The above difference is connected with the fact that, as I mentioned earlier, the essence–*esse* composition is a borderline case of the potency–act composition. The consequences of this borderline character are the difficulties found in understanding how act–*esse* may actualise something that, without this act–*esse*, does not exist at all. What is more, it is hard to conceive how essence can be a correlate of *esse*,[12] if essence is nothing without *esse*. This all shows that the relation of individual *esse* to the essence of the created being has a special, unrepeatable character. However, if we take into consideration the fact that the condition of this relation is the participation of this *esse* in *esse tantum*, the above issues become clearer. If 'to participate is to take a part in some reality' and 'the reality that is participated in must be unlimited in itself and limited when realised in its participants' (KERR 2015: 59), then the limited character of the *esse* of the created being is a consequence of its position in participation — its being a participant, and not being the fullness of the participated reality. In such a view, to use Kerr's words

[11] See footnote 5.

[12] And even how essence — like Aquinas and Kerr frequently say in a metaphorical way — can limit or receive *esse*.

(2015, 61, cf. 88–9), maybe against his intentions, essence is 'a particular [and limited] way in which *esse* could be realised', a way which can be contrasted either with another way of realisation or simply with nothingness.

It can be seen that approaching the nature of *esse* (also in relation to essence), the nature of *esse tantum*, as well as the nature of the relation between these aforementioned items requires reference to both the compositional model and the model of participation. According to Kerr (2015, 66) 'Platonic participation and Aristotelian composition […] go hand in hand in such a way that neither Plato nor Aristotle would have recognised'. Drawing attention to the interaction of both models (e.g. through treating causality as a variety of participation) is one of the most interesting suggestions in the book currently under discussion. This suggestion deserves further and more detailed examination and development.

## CONCLUSION

In the present text, I complemented, critically at times, Gaven Kerr's proposal with the following elements: (i) a summarization of the viewed argument in a more formal manner; (ii) a specification of the main presuppositions of the Thomistic conception of existence; (iii) a drawing of attention to the fact that the essence–*esse* composition is a *borderline* case of the array of potency–act compositions; (iv) a distinguishing of the empirical (connected with the problem of the *regress*) and speculative (deprived of such a problem) interpretations or versions of Aquinas's argument; (v) a clarification of what is the Divine exception from (or the exceptional realization of) the essence–*esse* composition; (vi) a distinguishing the three models of participation and a defence of the moderate model.

In my reflections, two threads — directly or indirectly — were found to recur constantly, namely: (i) an overlapping of the two metaphysical approaches in the analysed argument — the Aristotelian compositional (and causal) model and the Platonic model of participation; and (ii) a defence of the Thomistic conception of the essence–*esse* composition. The original argument of Aquinas has a chance to win provided it is shown that (i') the aforementioned approaches are complementary, and (ii') the discourse on the essence–*esse* composition is of a 'realistic' character and it is not only an 'instrumentalistic' shortcut to the statements of this type: the things known to us exist but might not exist.

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## EXISTENCE AND GOD: ON AQUINAS–KERR'S METAPHYSICAL ARGUMENT

### Summary

In this paper, I discuss, as carried out by Gaven Kerr, a reconstruction of Aquinas's argument for the existence of God from his work *De Ente et Essentia*. My analysis leads to complementing Kerr's proposal with the following elements: (i) a summarization of the presented argument in a more formal manner; (ii) a specification of the main presuppositions of the Thomistic conception of existence; (iii) a drawing of attention to the fact that the essence–*esse* composition is a *borderline* case of the array of potency–act compositions; (iv) a distinguishing of the empirical (connected with the problem of the *regress*) and speculative (deprived of such a problem) interpretations or versions of Aquinas's argument; (v) a clarification of what is the Divine exception from the essence–*esse* composition; (vi) a distinguishing of the three models of participation and a defence of the moderate model. I regard the following two issues to be of key importance for the argument under discussion: the relation between the Aristotelian compositional model and the Platonic model of participation as well as the defence of the Thomistic conception of the essence–*esse* composition.

## ISTNIENIE I BÓG: O METAFIZYCZNYM ARGUMENCIE AKWINATY–KERRA

### Streszczenie

W niniejszym tekście dyskutuję, dokonaną przez Gavena Kerra, rekonstrukcję Akwinaty argumentu za istnieniem Boga z dzieła *De ente et essentia*. Moja analiza prowadzi do uzupełnienia

propozycji Kerra o następujące elementy: (i) bardziej formalne streszczenie rozpatrywanego argumentu; (ii) wyszczególnienie głównych założeń Tomistycznej koncepcji istnienia; (iii) zwrócenie uwagi na to, że kompozycja istota–*esse* jest *granicznym* przypadkiem ciągu kompozycji możność–akt; (iv) odróżnienie empirycznej (związanej z problemem *regressu*) oraz spekulatywnej (pozbawionej tego problemu) interpretacji argumentu; (v) precyzacja, na czym polega wyjątek od kompozycji istota–*esse*; (vi) odróżnienie trzech modeli relacji *esse* stworzonego do *esse tantum*. Za kluczowe dla dyskutowanego argumentu uznaję dwie kwestie: relacji między Arystotelesowskim modelem kompozycyjnym a Platońskim modelem partycypacyjnym oraz obrony Tomistycznej koncepcji kompozycji istota–*esse*.

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**Key words:** the theistic argument from *De Ente et Essentia*; existence; the essence-*esse* composition; God as *esse tantum*; participation.

**Słowa kluczowe:** teistyczny argument z *De ente et essentia*; istnienie; złożenie z istoty i *esse*; Bóg jako *esse tantum*; partycypacja.

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