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HOW SAVE AQUINAS'S
“*INTELLECTUS ESSENTIAE* ARGUMENT”
FOR THE REAL DISTINCTION
BETWEEN ESSENCE AND *ESSE*?

Aquinas' so-called “*Intellectus essentiae* Argument” for the distinction between being and essence is notoriously suspect, including among defenders of Aquinas' distinction. For this volume, I take as my starting point the recent defense of the argument by Fr. Lawrence Dewan. Dewan's papers on topics such as individuation, divine names, and formal causality are magisterial, unsurpassed in the literature. By contrast, I shall argue, Dewan's two papers defending Aquinas' arguments for the real distinction between *esse* and essence are unsuccessful. Nevertheless, pointing out some shortcomings in his readings will allow me to take up his call to highlight the “formal” or “quidditative side” of Aquinas' metaphysics, in this case in regard to the proofs of the “real distinction.” Accordingly, the second half of this paper sets forth a way in which the famous “*Intellectus essentiae* Argument” of *De ente et essentia* 4 can succeed as a proof of the real distinction. If Aquinas' reasoning in this most contentious of his proofs can be saved, so, perhaps, can most of his other proofs.

I. DEWAN ON THE REAL DISTINCTION
AND FORMAL CAUSALITY

The most recent of Dewan's two papers, published in *Gregorianum* 1999, presents Dewan's favorite way of establishing the real distinction. I can at-

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test to this enduring favoritism based on many long discussions with him on the topic, the last at Fordham in 2010. The *Gregorianum* paper proposes “to explain”¹ the real distinction between form and being: how we know they are really distinct, given that they are related so closely that they are—and should be (p. xi)—easily confused (188). The paper is a meditation on passages from Aquinas, especially these three: *Exposition on Boethius’ De hebdomadibus 2*, *Summa contra Gentiles 2.52* (n. 6 Amplius. Substantia), and *Quodlibetal Questions 12.4.1*. Dewan finds the extended argument in the *Exposition BDH*, which turns on the simplicity of *esse* first seen in predication, to be excessively dialectical or logical, removed from things in their real being (196). To compensate, Dewan invokes, as the proper context for reading this argument, the causal relation between creature and creator. Two principles (from two texts), in particular, support this “move” (190–91): (1) only in *caused* or *created* things are form and being distinct (cf. *Quaestiones de Quolibet 2.2.1*); (2) it belongs to the very notion of a *caused* thing to be composed of essence and *esse* (cf. ST I.3.7 ad 1).² Hence, Dewan sets out to find how form and being (which are already from the outset evident to the intellect, even if only in a confused way [191–92]), are understood as really distinct once understood in light of superior causes. The result amounts to a rereading of Aquinas’ “Effect to Cause Argument”³ for the real distinction (202), the fifth of the seven arguments offered in CG 2.52, in light of Dewan’s favorite text on the issue (202–204): *Quodlibetal Questions 12.4.1*. In fact, Dewan isolates a proof of the real distinction not previously identified, which has been dubbed the “Causal Hierarchy Argument.”⁴

In what follows, I lay out Dewan’s “Causal Hierarchy Argument.” Observe, first, that Dewan’s argument is a “God to Creatures Argument” for the

¹ I cite the slightly expanded version, Lawrence DEWAN, “St. Thomas and the Distinction between Form and *Esse* in Caused Things,” in IDEM, *Form and Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics*, (Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy) (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 188–204 at 199; reprinted from *Gregorianum* 80 (1999) 353–70.

² Dewan gives an expansive reading to the text. For him, to be caused or created consists in and reveals being composed of essence and *esse*. Aquinas’ point is that things are caused only because they are composite, not that being caused is the reason for their composition, or for our knowing their composition.

³ I have named it thus in my catalogue of Aquinas’ nine arguments; David TWETTEN, “Really Distinguishing Essence from *Esse*,” in Peter KWASNIEWSKI (ed.), *Wisdom’s Apprentice: Thomistic Essays in Honor of Lawrence Dewan, O.P.* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 40–84 at 62–4.

⁴ Gregory TRAYLOR, “Causal Arguments, Ontological Distinctions: Lawrence Dewan and the Argument for the Real Distinction” (forthcoming).

real distinction, an argument form ascribed to Aquinas in Leo Sweeney's catalogue of the early arguments. The argument form has been given favored status by authors of the stature of Fr. Owens⁵ and Msgr Wippel.⁶ The version favored by Dewan, however, is based on *Quodlibet* 12.4.1.

I reduce Dewan's reasoning to the following premises:

THE CAUSAL HIERARCHY ARGUMENT

- (1) Creatures 'actually are' through an *esse* that participates in and has an analogous commonality with the divine subsistent *esse*.⁷

⁵ "[T]he real distinction between essence and existence cannot be known prior to the demonstration of the existence of God. Being has to be established as a real nature before its real distinction from the quiddity it actuates can be proven." Joseph OWENS, "Quiddity and Real Distinction in St Thomas Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies* 27 (1965): 1–22 at 19. See also IDEM, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1963), 70–1, 101–8; IDEM, *Aquinas on Being and Thing* (Niagara Falls, N.Y.: Niagara University Press, 1981), 11; revised version: IDEM, "Aquinas on Being and Thing," in *Thomistic Papers*, vol. 3, ed. Leonard Kennedy (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1987), 3–24, at 13; IDEM, "Stages and Distinction in *De ente*: A Rejoinder," *The Thomist* 45 (1981): 99–123, at 109–10; IDEM, "Aquinas' Distinction at *De ente et essentia* 4.119–123," *Mediaeval Studies* 48 (1986): 264–87, at 285, n. 42. For Owens, Gilson was the first commentator to see that Aquinas' metaphysics differs from all others by taking existence to be known first only in judgment, and by drawing out the consequences (IDEM, *Aquinas on Being and Thing*, p. 18n). Any other reading (Wippel's and Fabro's are mentioned in this context) results in *esse*'s being conceived as a "thing" really distinct from essence (IDEM, "Aquinas' Distinction," 284–5), a view cogently criticized by Suárez (IDEM, *Aquinas on Being and Thing*, 13, 19). For Fabro's denial that *esse* is known in judgment, see Cornelio FABRO, *Participation et causalité selon S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain: Publications universitaires de Louvain, 1961), 56, 61–3, and 75–6. See also IDEM, "La problematica dello esse tomistico," in IDEM, *Tomismo e pensiero moderno* (Rome: Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1969), 103–33, at 103; reprinted from *Aquinas* 2.2 (1959) 194–225.

⁶ Wippel gives a central, though, unlike Owens, not exclusive, role to "God to creatures" reasoning, highlighting, of course, the value of the hypothetical variation of such reasoning: the reasoning proceeds under the *hypothesis* that something whose nature is *esse* itself (God) exists, as is found in "stage 2" of Aquinas' argument in *De Ente* 4; John WIPPEL, "Essence and Existence in the *De ente*, Ch. 4," in IDEM, *Metaphysical Themes in St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 107–32 (substantially revised from IDEM, "Aquinas's Route to the Real Distinction: A Note on *De ente et essentia*," *The Thomist* 43 [1979]: 279–95). For Scott MACDONALD, "The *Esse/Essentia* Argument in Aquinas's *De ente et essentia*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 22 (1984): 157–72, the second stage is to be understood as a sub-argument of the first stage, a third disjunct to be excluded. Nevertheless, for MacDonald, unlike for Wippel, the first stage succeeds in showing the real distinction for every case except that of something whose essence is identical to existence. It should be noted, however, that MacDonald denies that there is an independent "*Intellectus essentiae* Argument" in the *De ente*.

⁷ See DEWAN, "St. Thomas and the Distinction between Form and Esse," esp. 201, 203–4.

- (2) But creatures in the causal hierarchy are *what* they are through a form or essence that is radically other than the *divine* essence, which is subsistent *esse*.
- (3) Therefore, in creatures, *esse* and essence are really diverse.

One can certainly recognize in this argument the metaphysical wisdom of Aquinas, as well as some of Dewan's characteristic teachings: first, *esse* names a quasi-common nature or intrinsic "formality" in things by which they are; and second, the formal cause of that *esse* in creatures is essence, whereas its efficient cause is God.⁸ Dewan himself highlights these features in his own 2006 introduction to this paper and its reasoning:

My contention is that a healthy conception of form should *tend to confuse it* with the act of being; this is precisely because of the kinship between the two, i.e. the intimate relationship I have been stressing in . . . preceding papers. It is only by appreciating the implications of efficient causal hierarchy that the *necessity to conclude* to a real distinction between form and *esse* in caused things is rightly seen.⁹

Still, does Dewan's "Causal Hierarchy Argument" succeed? My concern is a simple one: does not this argument beg the question by presupposing in Premise (1) that creatures have *esse* in them as a really distinct component? Premise (1) states: Creatures 'actually are' through an *esse* that participates in and has an analogous commonality with the divine subsistent *esse*. In other words, creatures 'actually are' through an *esse* that resembles but is not God's *esse*. If one denies that things have what I call "Thomistic *esse*", even while affirming form, matter, and essence, as would Averroes and Suárez, then Premise (1) is either false, or "esse" in Premise (1) *may* refer to the same component as does Premise (2), in which case the conclusion does not follow. In other words, if as for Premises (1) and (2), that *by which* creatures actually are can also be that by which they are *what* they are (as an Averroes or a Suárez might hold), then the argument is inconclusive. The argument points to grounds for thinking that creatures' *esse* is other than divine *esse* and that creatures' essence is other than divine essence, but it does not yet give

⁸ Dewan, of course, emphasizes those texts of Aquinas indicating that form is a cause of *esse*. The act of being *results from*, is "through form," and should not be thought of primarily as the cause of form. See especially Lawrence Dewan, "St. Thomas, Metaphysical Procedure, and the Formal Cause," in IDEM, *Form and Being*, 168–70 (reprinted from *The New Scholasticism* 63 [1989]: 173–82). There can be no question that this claim, for Dewan, is consistent with the fact that God, subsistent *esse*, is the efficient cause of all creatures' *esse*.

⁹ DEWAN, *Form and Being*, xi (emphasis mine).

grounds for thinking that creatures' *esse* is other than creatures' essence. One could add premises stating, as is true for Thomas: what holds for essence, holds for *esse*, which is the act by which the essence actually is. And so, if creatures have finite essences, they also have finite *esse*. But nothing in the argument yet shows that this *esse* is other than essence.

Suppose, on the other hand, one accepts Premises (1) and (2) as affirming extramentally distinct principles in creatures in the way needed for the argument to succeed. Is one not, in fact, accepting as a *per se* known or self-evident proposition Premise (4):

- (4) The *esse* by which creatures actually *are* is other than the essence by which they are what they are.

Perhaps Premise (4) states something as evident as this: just as it is self-evident that the number 2 is not the number 3, and a triangle is not a square, it is self-evident that *esse* is not essence. Ironically, this is precisely what Dewan had defended in his first paper on the real distinction, published in *Modern Schoolman* 1984: namely, that it is a *per se notum* that a creature's *esse* is other than its essence.¹⁰ The claim that the real distinction in creatures is grasped as a *per se notum* helps me make my point in what I call the Question-Begging Objection. For, if the *esse*-essence real distinction creatures is grasped in a *per se notum* in Premises (1) and (2), it would be circular to use this fact to prove creatures' real distinction.

Of course, Dewan himself by 1999 has dropped his reading of the real distinction as *per se* known. The main point of the 1984 paper, in any case, is to argue against Fr. Owens' claim that the first stage of *De ente* 4's famous argumentation, the "*Intellectus essentiae* Argument," is intended by Thomas as establishing nothing more than a conceptual distinction. What is meant by *esse* (as in Premise [1]) is not what is meant by essence (as in Premise [2]). The concept of one is not in the concept of the other: they are conceptually diverse. Fr. Dewan argues, and I shall agree, that the first stage affirms a real or extramental distinction (or "composition," as Owens prefers). Dewan's most important point is that the subsequent second and third stages *both* require a notion of *esse* such as is supplied alone by reasoning to a real and not to a mere conceptual distinction. These stages are: (2nd stage) the proof that were there, *ex hypothesi*, a being lacking the "real distinction,"

¹⁰ Lawrence DEWAN, "St Thomas, Joseph Owens and the Real Distinction between Being and Essence," *The Modern Schoolman* 61 (1984): 145–56, esp. 152–3.

there could be only one such being; and (3rd stage) the proof that there is a being whose essence is *esse*, so that all other beings, including angels, must receive their *esse* from the one subsistent *esse*. Dewan argues, in effect, that these two stages fail if they use something like Suárez' notion of *esse* as only conceptually distinct from essence (see esp. 153). If *esse* signifies essence, for example, as Thomas himself sometimes elsewhere admits it can, it cannot be concluded that there is or can be only one thing whose *esse* is identical to its essence.¹¹

Why then do most Thomists agree that the “*Intellectus essentiae* Argument” fails to establish a real distinction? Let's remind ourselves of the argument. I quote the text of *De ente* 4's first stage, inserting the premise numbers that I then itemize below:

[Premise (1)] Whatever does not belong to the understanding of an essence or quiddity [**a**] comes to it from outside and enters into composition with the essence [and hence **[b]** is other than the essence]; for **[Premise (1.1)]** no essence can be understood without its parts. **[Premise (2)]** But every essence or quiddity can be understood without understanding anything about its being (*esse*). I can understand, for instance, what a man or a phoenix is and still be ignorant whether it has being in reality (*esse in re*). **[Premise (3)]** Therefore, it is clear that [**a**] being is other than essence or quiddity. Unless perhaps there is a thing whose quiddity is its very being . . .”

THE “*INTELLECTUS ESSENTIAE* ARGUMENT”

- (1) Whatever does not belong to the understanding of a thing's essence must (a) enter into composition with it [as (b) distinct from that essence] [whether the feature is caused by the essence itself or comes to it from without].
 - (1.1) For, no essence can be understood without its parts (just as triangle cannot be understood without ‘three-sided’).
- (2) But one can understand what is a human or a phoenix (or an eclipse; *Sent.* 2, d. 3.1.1) without knowing whether it has ‘to be’ (*esse*) in reality.
- (3) Therefore, the ‘to be’ of an essence [that exists] must (a) be distinct from that essence.

¹¹ If Dewan's succeeds in putting Owens' interpretation in doubt, it also succeeds in putting into doubt Wippel's reading on which the second stage, not the first, establishes the real distinction between *esse* and essence; see n. 6 above.

The problem here is that Thomas apparently emphasizes our *understanding* of essence and our understanding of a thing's being. The objector points out that it is illicit to infer from features of our understanding, such as that it abstracts from existence, to features of reality. The fact that we consider what something is without judging that it is tells us little correspondingly about its ontological status. Dewan (1984), in my view, does not manage to meet this objection. He grants (p. 149) that the real distinction is in the first stage only "confusedly or imperfectly known." He admits that it is characteristic of our abstractive knowledge that essences are grasped without grasping actual existence. But to admit this is to read the "*Intellectus essentiae* Argument" epistemologically, and to fail to read it, as Dewan himself proposes to do, "as quidditatively as possible."

II. PROPOSAL: TWO NEW PREMISES FOR THE PROOFS OF THE "ESSENCE-ESSE" REAL DISTINCTION

In what follows, I propose a still more quidditative reading of *De ente* 4 than Dewan's. I draw attention, in effect, to two premises that Aquinas presupposes in the "*Intellectus essentiae* Argument." In fact, if these premises are true, nearly all nine of Aquinas' proofs for the real distinction, as catalogued by me in 2007 (based on the work of Cornelio Fabro, Leo Sweeney, and John Wippel) succeed, avoiding the Question-Begging Objection. In other words, they succeed if we read them as quidditatively as possible, not allowing one's "existential Thomism" to prescind from an authentic essentialism. The reader will recognize my contribution as a sympathetic development of Dewan's thought.

A. PREMISE A: IN CREATURES THERE IS A REAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN ESSENCE AND SUPPOSIT.

One will read each of Aquinas' proofs of the famous real distinction quidditatively when one sees that they presuppose a prior not-so-famous real distinction: that between essence taken with precision and the whole individual substance or supposit. Let me begin by making a historical point. I must admit that one cannot prove textually that the *De ente* presupposes this distinction. It is implicit in *De ente* 2 and 3, and *De ente* 4's reasoning does not succeed without it. But we should recall that Aquinas knows this distinction very well from the works of Albert, including from the *Divine*

Names paraphrase that Thomas copies by hand circa 1250, perhaps a year before composing the *De ente*. In fact, all of the early thirteenth century Parisian masters held the distinction, which is nothing but Boethius' distinction between *quo est* and *quod est*: essence is the *quo est*, whereas the *quod est* is the supposit. Albert follows these masters, as Roland-Gosselin has shown.¹² In a co-authored piece in the Brill companion to Albert, I show that Albert holds this not-so-famous distinction even when he denies the famous real distinction between being and essence.¹³ We find the extra-mental distinction in texts from Aquinas's Commentary on the Sentences written immediately before and after the probable date of composition of *De ente*. Aquinas writes, for example: "In creatures essence differs really from the supposit." (*SN* 1, d. 5.1.1c; see also 3, d. 5.1.3c). So, it is very plausible that Aquinas' mental picture of creatures in *De ente* include the "essence-supposit" real distinction. Contemporary Aquinas scholars, myself included, have often missed this real distinction under the influence of twentieth-century teaching traditions such as found in existential or purely Aristotelian versions of Thomism. Thomas appeals to Avicenna as the source for this distinction (see *SN* 3, d. 5.1.3c; and Avicenna, *Metaphysics* of *al-Shifā* 5.8).

But fortunately we find in Aquinas, not only statements of, but also a proof of the "essence-supposit" real distinction. Although there are parallels, the best formulation of the proof is found in Aquinas' discussion in the *Tertia Pars* as to whether the incarnation involves union with a divine person [or supposit] rather than with the divine nature. Again, I identify the essential premises in the text and itemize them below.

Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III.2.2c: "[P]erson signifies something other than nature. For, nature signifies the essence of the species that the definition signifies. And, if, in fact, nothing else could be found adjoined to what pertains to the notion of the species, *there would be no necessity to distinguish nature from the supposit of the nature* – which is the individual subsisting in that nature. For, **[Premise (3)]** [otherwise,] each individual subsisting in a nature would be entirely the same as its nature [so, that all individuals of the same nature would be the same individual]. However, **[Premise (2)]** in certain subsisting things there does happen to be found something that does not pertain to the notion of [their] species, namely, [their] accidents and individuating principles, just as is especially apparent in these things that are composed of matter

¹² Marie-Dominique ROLAND-GOSSELIN, *Le 'De Ente et Essentia' de S. Thomas d'Aquin: texte établi d'après les manuscrits parisiens* (Paris: Vrin, 1948), 172–84.

¹³ Rosa VARGAS and David TWETTEN, "Albert on Being and Beings: The Doctrine of *Esse*," in *A Companion to Albert the Great: Theology, Philosophy, and the Sciences*, ed. Irven M. Resnick (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 627–48 at 646.

and form. And, for this reason, [**Premise (4) in such things, nature and supposit differ even in reality, not as if they are entirely separate,**¹⁴ but because [**Premise (1): Essence Realism**] **the very nature of the species is included in the supposit**, and certain other things are superadded that are apart from the intelligibility of the species."¹⁵

AQUINAS' PROOF OF THE "ESSENCE-SUPPOSIT" REAL DISTINCTION

- (1) [Essence Realism:] Two different substances that are the same in kind must have something in them that makes them the same – by which we name them and know them.
- (2) There is something in extramental things that is individual (e.g., individuating principles such as prime matter under quantity, individual attributes, etc.) that does not belong to the essence of a thing as such.
- (3) Otherwise, each individual subsisting in a nature would be entirely the same as its nature, so
 - (3.10) all individuals of the same nature would be the same individual.

¹⁴ "Not as if they are entirely separate" can be expanded by Aquinas' teaching elsewhere, e.g., *De potential Dei* 9.1c: "**The essence in material substances is not the same with them in reality, nor is it absolutely diverse, since it stands as a formal part.**" [Essentia vero in substantiis quidem materialibus non est idem cum eis secundum rem, neque penitus diversum, cum se habeat ut pars formalis].

¹⁵ *Summa theologiae* III.2.2c: "[D]icendum quod persona aliud significat quam natura. Natura enim significat essentiam speciei, quam significat definitio. Et si quidem his quae ad rationem speciei pertinent nihil aliud adiunctum inveniri posset, nulla necessitas esset distinguendi naturam a supposito naturae, quod est individuum subsistens in natura illa, quia unumquodque individuum subsistens in natura aliqua esset omnino idem cum sua natura. Contingit autem in quibusdam rebus subsistentibus inveniri aliquid quod non pertinet ad rationem speciei, scilicet accidentia et principia individuancia, sicut maxime apparet in his quae sunt ex materia et forma composita. Et ideo in talibus etiam secundum rem differt natura et suppositum, non quasi omnino aliqua separata, sed quia in supposito includitur ipsa natura speciei, et superadduntur quaedam alia quae sunt praeter rationem speciei. Unde suppositum significatur ut totum, habens naturam sicut partem formalem et perfectivam sui. Et propter hoc in compositis ex materia et forma natura non praedicatur de supposito, non enim dicimus quod hic homo sit sua humanitas. Si qua vero res est in qua omnino nihil est aliud praeter rationem speciei vel naturae suae, sicut est in Deo, ibi non est aliud secundum rem suppositum et natura, sed solum secundum rationem intelligendi, quia natura dicitur secundum quod est essentia quaedam; eadem vero dicitur suppositum secundum quod est subsistens. Et quod est dictum de supposito, intelligendum est de persona in creatura rationali vel intellectuali, quia nihil aliud est persona quam rationalis naturae individua substantia, secundum Boetium. Omne igitur quod inest alicui personae, sive pertineat ad naturam eius sive non, unitur ei in persona. Si ergo humana natura verbo Dei non unitur in persona, nullo modo ei unitur. Et sic totaliter tollitur incarnationis fides, quod est subruere totam fidem Christianam. Quia igitur verbum habet naturam humanam sibi unitam, non autem ad suam naturam divinam pertinentem consequens est quod unio sit facta in persona verbi, non autem in natura."

- (4) Therefore, essence and supposit, the individual substance as a whole [Socrates' humanity and Socrates] are really distinct insofar as the former excludes what individuates.

The reasoning is clear enough *if* one accepts Premise (1).¹⁶ The reasoning is based on the so-called “phenomenon of sameness and difference” in things, and specifically on their individuating differences. Here is the point: Socrates and his humanity are really distinct (Premise A), since human-ness is in him [Premise 1], and human-ness excludes what makes him an individual [Premise 2]; otherwise either essence would not be common [contrary to Premise 1], or Socrates and Diotima would be the same human [Premise 3].

B. PREMISE B: ACCORDING TO A MEDIEVAL SEMANTIC RULE, THE PREDICATE “ACTUALLY IS” MUST BE SAVED BY SOMETHING IN THE THING THAT ACTUALLY IS.

Before I put on display the implications of Premise A, let me introduce the second premise, again beginning with an historical remark. The most important new resource for the historical understanding of Aquinas' philosophy, besides his dependence on Arabic philosophy, is the deepening appreciation of the thirteenth-century logic in which he is steeped. If it makes no sense to use Gredt as the guide to the metaphysics of the historical Aquinas, Thomists have been slow in refusing twentieth-century manuals as a guide to Thomas' logic. It is instructive to see the evolution evident in Irene Rosier's recent paper on thirteenth-century grammar in Robert Pasnau's 2010 *Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*. If fifteen years ago Rosier called Thomas a “pre-modist,” she now prefers simply to speak of him as a modist.¹⁷ If Kilwardby, Albert and Roger Bacon are modists, it might be said that Aquinas is the greatest philosopher in the modist tradition. To know Aquinas' logic, one must read these modist contemporaries, but especially Peter of Spain, William of Sherwood and Lambert of Lagny. Thomistic scholarship prior to or independent of the pioneering work of Lambertus De Rijk in the 1950s has little chance of getting Aquinas' philosophy of language right.

¹⁶ I argue for this premise dialectically in another paper, “A Defense of Classical Essentialism behind the Essence-*Esse* Real Distinction: Aquinas' Doctrine of Being.”

¹⁷ Irène ROSIER-CATACH, “Grammar,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Robert Pasnau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), vol. 1, pp. 197–207, at 203–6.

Among the remarkable papers of Gyula Klima of Fordham is "The Semantic Principles Underlying Saint Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics of Being." Klima seeks to lay out, after the manner of Carnap, a series of semantic rules (in fact, five) for the thirteenth-century inherence theory of language. Take a look at Rule 2:

(SR2) A concrete common term P is true of a particular thing u iff the form (ultimately) signified by P is actual in u.¹⁸

This is merely a technical expression of Aquinas' observation that predications "*per informationem*" (v. "*per identitatem*") are true when the predicate signifies a form seen in (or not in) the subject (*SN* 3, d. 5, q. 3, a. 3 *expositio*). *Mutatis mutandis*, predications of "actually is" can be seen as signifying formalities belonging to the subject (or, rather, in a unique development in Aquinas: all predicates can be seen as *esse* judged to belong to a subject.¹⁹ Klima's discussion suggests a further corollary semantic rule:

(SR2.1) All true affirmative predications of something in extramental reality must be made true by something inherent in some way in the thing, or must be reducible to some such inherent component(s).

Whereas blindness in Stevie Wonder names a privation, his jive is reducible to dispositions and habits, his Afro is reducible to the quality of his hair, and his "actually being" is saved by *esse* inherent in him, if it cannot be reduced to essence (as we have seen Aquinas argue). In contrast with the medieval theorizing, modern and contemporary semantics worries little about what within individuals in extramental reality makes true predications true; about truthmakers in within our world. Given this implicit semantic rule, Aquinas is on the hunt for what in a thing saves its *esse*.

C. RETURN TO THE "INTELLECTUS ESSENTIAE ARGUMENT."

In what follows, I reread the problematic "*Intellectus essentiae* Argument" in light of Premises A and B, premises presupposed by Aquinas.

¹⁸ See Rosa VARGAS, *Thomas Aquinas on the Apprehension of Being: The Role of Judgment in Light of 13th C. Semantics*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Marquette University, 2013, chap. 4.

¹⁹ Gyula KLIMA, "The Semantic Principles Underlying Saint Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics of Being," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 5 (1996): 87–141, at 115.

- (1) Humans and flamingos²⁰ both actually are.
 - (1.1) ‘Actually to be,’ whatever it is, must be saved by something in humans and flamingos alike. [from (SR2.1)]
- (2) Humans and flamingos have within them a feature really distinct from themselves as a whole by which they are what they are: their humanity and flamingo-hood [from Premise A and the Proof of the “Essence-Supposit” Real Distinction].
- (3) Humanity and flamingo-hood contain nothing more than what belongs to their definition, and hence do not contain “actually to be.”
 - (3.1) Thus, one can understand humanity or flamingo-hood without conceiving these as existing.
- (4) Therefore, humanity in existing humans and flamingo-hood in existing flamingos is other than their actually existing.

In effect, what I have done is replace the first premise in *De ente* 4’s proof with determinations of Premises A and B. Premise A (In creatures there is a real distinction between essence and supposit) allows me to read the argument quidditatively. The predicates human and flamingo are purportedly saved by the quiddities humanity and flamingo-hood within their supposits: for Aquinas, humanity and flamingo-hood are truth-makers in their respective species. Essences or quiddities within the supposits ground the reasoning, not mental acts in us by which we understand the essence. The epistemological act of understanding the essence can be relegated to a consequence that provides supporting evidence, that is to Premise (3.1). In short, the “*Intellectus essentiae* Argument” is misnamed.

Premise B (according to a medieval semantic rule, the predicate “actually is” must be saved by something in the thing that actually is) allows the argument to avoid any appearance of question-begging. We need not assume thomistic *esse* as a component feature, but rather only something inherent as a ground of the true propositions: humans and flamingos actually exist by “actually being.” But “actually being” cannot be reduced to essence, since *esse* belongs to the whole, of which essence is only a part — a part that does not contain *esse*.

²⁰ I replace the phoenix with the flamingo; Klima has observed that the medievals thought phoenixes were real, although suspect; in some parts of the world, a flamingo might be the equivalent. See Gyula KLIMA, “On Kenny on Aquinas on Being: A Critical Review of Aquinas on Being by Anthony Kenny,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (2004): 567–580, at 579.

CONCLUSION

If the proof of the “essence-*esse*” real distinction is as easy as that—if even the “*Intellectus essentiae* Argument,” once read quidditatively, establishes a real distinction, why have these proofs caused such consternation among Aquinas scholars? The fact is that most of us, steeped from childhood in a scientific culture and its attendant philosophy—disparate shards of classical thought inherited, in the manner of Leibowitz, by through the moderns—have not learned to worry about semantic rules: what in reality saves the truth of our predications? Most of us, even most of Aquinas scholars, are presumptive nominalists about real essences, and we associate “Essence Realism” with Scotus, not Aquinas. Or, if we affirm it, we do not appeal to Aquinas’ proof of essence realism, or of the “essence-supposit” real distinction, as a foundation for the “essence-*esse*” real distinction. My conjecture is that in the enthusiasm for existentialism, which helped Gilson and Fabro correctly rediscover *esse* in a 20th-century context, they also adopted, perhaps unwittingly, an anti-essentialism that makes the “fundamental claims” of Aquinas’ philosophy difficult to defend. An anti-essentialist will sometimes deny, for example, that God has an essence, thinking that essences are finite.²¹ Similarly, an anti-essentialist reading takes Thomas to hold that essence in itself is just nothing, since in itself it has no being (*actus essendi*).²² Engaging with contemporary semantics helps one understand the advantages of moderate realist essentialism. Encouraged by Dewan’s quidditative ‘existentialism’ and equipped by some thirteenth-century semantic principles, one may appropriate “the foundational truth of Judaeo-Christian-Arabic philosophy,” to paraphrase Cajetan, Del Prado and Gilson: the real distinction between *esse* and essence in all things but one.²³

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²¹ Etienne GILSON, *Elements of Christian Philosophy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960), 134.

²² Joseph OWENS, “Thomistic Common Nature and Platonic Idea,” *Mediaeval Studies* 21 (1959): 211–23, at 220–1; cf. FABRO, Cornelio. *Participation et causalité* 35.

²³ I would like to thank Greg Doolan for very helpful corrections and comments, Dustin Trampe for research assistance, as well as my 2015 audience in Ottawa for their probing questions.

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HOW SAVE AQUINAS' "INTELLECTUS ESSENTIAE ARGUMENT"
FOR THE REAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN ESSENCE AND ESSE?

S u m m a r y

Aquinas' so-called "Intellectus essentiae Argument" for the distinction between being and essence is notoriously suspect, including among defenders of Aquinas' distinction. For the paper in this volume, I take as my starting point the recent defense of the argument by Fr. Lawrence Dewan, O.P. Fr. Dewan's project is unsuccessful. Yet, pointing out some shortcomings in his readings allows me to take up his call to highlight the "formal" or "quidditative side" of Aquinas' metaphysics, in this case in regards to the proofs of the "real distinction." Accordingly, the second half of this paper sets forth a way in which the famous "Intellectus essentiae Argument" of *De Ente et Essentia* 4 can succeed as a proof of the real distinction. Aquinas' argument presupposes the prior real distinction between essence and supposit or individual substance. Esse is the ontological component that makes true our judgments that substances actually are: Obama exists. By contrast, this "truth-maker" cannot be predicated of humanity, although it is in Obama as really distinct from him. If Aquinas' reasoning in this most contentious of his proofs can be saved, so, perhaps, can most of his other proofs.

JAK OCALIĆ AKWINATY „ARGUMENT INTELLECTUS ESSENTIAE”
ZA REALNĄ RÓŻNICĄ MIĘDZY ISTOTĄ I ESSE?

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Tak zwany argument *intellectus essentiae* Akwinaty za realną różnicą między bytem a istotą jest powszechnie podawany w wątpliwość, w tym także w kręgu obrońców tego rozróżnienia Akwinaty. W artykule zawartym w niniejszym tomie za punkt wyjścia biorę ostatnią obronę tego argumentu przez o. Lawrence'a Dewana OP. Projekt o. Dewana kończy się niepowodzeniem. Wskazanie pewnych niedociągnięć w jego twierdzeniach pozwala mi podjąć jego wezwanie do podkreślenia „formalnej” lub „istotnościowej” strony metafizyki Akwinaty, w tym przypadku w odniesieniu do dowodów za „realną różnicą”. Druga część tego artykułu przedstawia, w jaki sposób słynny „argument *intellectus essentiae*” z *De ente et essentia* 4 może zostać uznany za dowód realnej różnicy. Argument Akwinaty zakłada wcześniejszą realną różnicę między esencją i *suppositum* lub pojedynczą substancją. *Esse* jest składnikiem ontologicznym, który potwierdza nasze osądy, że substancje faktycznie są: Obama istnieje. Z kolei ów „uprawdziwicz” nie może być przypisany ludzkości, chociaż w Obamie jest tak naprawdę czymś odrębnym od niego. Jeśli rozumowanie Akwinaty w tym najbardziej kontrowersyjnym z jego dowodów może zostać ocalone, być może ocalić można także wiele innych jego dowodów.

Przełożył Stanisław Sarek

Key words: Aquinas; "Intellectus essentiae Argument"; esse; essence; Lawrence Dewan.

Słowa kluczowe: Akwinata; „argument *Intellectus essentiae*”; esse; istota; Lawrence Dewan.

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