

THOMISTIC METAPHYSICS: CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATIONS

ÁNGEL LUIS GONZÁLEZ

It is nearly impossible to produce an adequate historical balance of the various contemporary interpretations of the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas. The article pays special attention to the numerous studies recently published concerning the Thomistic doctrines of being, personal being, participation, and the metaphysical concept of creation.

Keywords: Thomas Aquinas, Thomism, metaphysics, being, person, participation, creation.

INTRODUCTION

It is notorious that extensive sectors of contemporary philosophy and culture have proposed minimizing the importance of metaphysics, if not eliminating it altogether, dethroning it from its status as the culmination of knowledge, where it serves as the root or foundation of all other sciences. Metaphysics is conducted “in the past tense,” so to speak; as Habermas has said, we are today in a postmetaphysical tense.

On the other hand, the encyclical *Fides et ratio* by John Paul II is also famous for proposing a reawakening of philosophy with a metaphysical dimension. This document proposes that philosophy in the strict sense, and not merely a look-alike, is an indispensable necessity, if we desire in reality a process of thought which may in some manner solve the general crisis in philosophical, scientific

and cultural thinking. It is only the search for an ultimate truth (which to a great extent corresponds to metaphysics, the science pursued since Aristotle) which can suppress or prune back contemporary mistrust in reason. Thus a truly metaphysical philosophy is necessary —as John Paul II affirms— in order to pass beyond empirical data, in order to arrive, in its search for truth, at something absolute, ultimate and fundamental. The Pope does not indicate any particular metaphysics, out of the many which have been produced throughout history; rather, his call is directed towards the realization, construction or revitalization of a philosophy of being, i.e. a metaphysics which has transcendental and transcendent reach. The affirmation of the possibility of a return to metaphysics cannot be rejected out of hand as being utopian or illusory. In addition, in the same document the Pope speaks of the “permanent novelty of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas.”¹ I believe this proclamation is something that can be responded to; it should be responded to by philosophers of differing schools and interests, since the proclamation is not merely rhetorical, nor simply a declaration of good intentions.

1. THE DIFFICULTY OR NEAR IMPOSSIBILITY OF A HISTORIOGRAPHIC BALANCE CONCERNING THE METAPHYSICS OF THOMAS AQUINAS IN THE 20TH CENTURY

The paradox is obvious; during moments in which many believe that metaphysics is useless, if not nonexistent, in this so-called post-metaphysical age, it is very difficult, not to say almost impossible, to find a suitable balance that can minimally synthesize the contemporary interpretations of the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas. He is surely the author about whom the most has been written during the 20th century, and on whom the most activity has

1. The ideas discussed here can be found, among other places, in paragraphs 5, 55, 83, etc., of the Encyclical *Fides et ratio*.

been focused in philosophical forums and philosophical/scientific activities.

It is necessary to take into account, first of all, that Thomas is not only his philosophy, but also his theology, and his mysticism, and so on. The intermingling of the philosophical, theological, exegetic and mystical aspects of his thought has given rise to different Thomisms, and even to various non-Thomistic readings of Thomism. But there is no doubt that the relevance and quantity of the studies published in recent years about Thomistic philosophy reveal the vitality of a tradition of thought which draws its life from those roots.

Although an extensive bibliography could be mentioned here, I will indicate only five recent books simply as examples which touch upon our topic: those of Bonino,² Davies,³ Kerr,⁴ Prouvost,⁵ and Shanley.⁶ Quite surprisingly, some of these attempts at interpretation, which refer to the history of Thomism or which claim to offer an overall vision of contemporary Thomism or Thomisms, do not acknowledge the best results of other interpretations and their authors.

In my view, a potential synthesis also should have to include the results of that splendid method of philosophical investigation that consists of the comparison of philosophers with each other.

2. S. T. BONINO, *El tomismo hoy. Perspectivas caballeras*, Escuela de Teología San Dámaso, Madrid, 2002, which contains interesting observations on the life and death of the neo-Thomist project in the 20th century, the defense of an open Thomism, etc. In addition, his article *Être thomiste*, in *Thomistes ou de l'actualité de saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Namur, 2003, pp. 15-26. This book, as well, contains various studies on philosophy, theology, history of Thomism, etc.

3. B. DAVIES (ed.), *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, Oxford, 2002.

4. F. KERR, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism*, Oxford, 2002. It is necessary to also mention another book, also edited by Kerr, *Contemplating Aquinas: On the Varieties of Interpretation*, London, 2003, which contains excellent studies by authors such as M. D. Jordan, R. te Velde, and A. Williams.

5. G. PROUVOST, *Thomas d'Aquin et les thomismes. Essai sur l'histoire des thomismes*, Paris, 1996.

6. B. J. SHANLEY, *The Thomist Tradition*, Kluwer, Dordrecht-Boston, 2002.

Here, the bibliography would branch out still more; indeed, Thomas Aquinas has been compared with almost every other author, although the most abundant bibliography corresponds to comparisons of Aquinas with Descartes, Kant, and Heidegger (in this regard the well-known works of Max Muller, Siewert, Caputo and Hemming should be remembered); even Heidegger himself, as is notorious, in *Grundfrage der Philosophie* (vol. 45 of his complete works) emphasized the unthinkably amazing agreement between Thomas and Nietzsche in their explanation of the Aristotelian assertion that truth is mainly in the intellect. We must not forget to mention, even if briefly, the school which has called itself the “school of Transcendental Thomism” (Maréchal, Rahner, Lonergan) and the so-called Analytical Thomism (whose best-known representatives are perhaps Geach and Anscombe along with Kenny and Haldane;⁷ here the number of authors is far too many to mention more than only a few.

Given the *impossibility* of a historiographic and speculative synthesis, I will only refer to a limited selection of the questions and authors of the 20th century.⁸ Historiography is of interest to me, but I must candidly admit that the speculative dimension is more interesting. While one must adequately recognize the invaluable advances in historiography, I prefer to focus on advances or deepening in speculative discovery.

The well-known work of Agustín Nifo, in his 13th disputation on Book VII of the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle says:

7. I omit here works by authors already cited. In order to give a brief panorama of Anglo-American Thomism, I note the following works, certainly differing greatly among themselves: F. KERR, “Thomas Aquinas: Conflicting Interpretations in Recent Anglophone Literature,” in *Aquinas as Authority: A Collection of Studies Presented at the Second Conference of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht*, Leuven, 2002, pp. 165-186; B. J. SHANLEY, “Analytical Thomism,” in *The Thomist*, 63/1 (1999), pp. 125-137; G. A. MCCOOL, *The Neo-Thomists*, Milwaukee, 1994. A critique of McCool is found in J. F. X. KNASAS (ed.), *Thomistic Papers*, vol. 6, Notre Dame, 1994.

8. A brief panorama of the history of Thomism can be found in R. CESSARIO, *Le thomisme et les thomistes*, Paris, 1999.

“Expositor Thomas raro aut nunquam dissentit a doctrina peripatetica, fuit enim totus peripateticus et omni studio peripateticus, et nunquam aliud voluit nisi quod peripatetici.”

I think that it must be recognized that the Thomistic body of doctrine is closely related to that of Aristotle; to forget this or ignore it, at least in core areas of philosophy, leads to taking mistaken paths in the interpretation of Thomas Aquinas as a speculative thinker. Nevertheless, this is not an obstacle to recognizing at the outset that Aquinas goes beyond the Stagirite in the central aspect of all metaphysics, namely the question of being. Thomas is Aristotelian, but not merely Aristotelian. In mentioning this, I intend to underline both the influence of the Stagirite as well as the originality of Thomism.

Thomistic metaphysics, as Geiger has indicated, is not merely a baptized Aristotelian metaphysics. In this sense, Thomas is not Aristotle-plus-the-doctrine-of-creation. The “progress” of the metaphysics of Thomas over that of Aristotle is undeniable in many different areas. I agree with the conclusion of Geiger, who—in his extensive work on the comparison of both metaphysicians—⁹ establishes a conclusion which is modest but very useful, namely, that it is wise not to read Aristotle by means of St. Thomas, or vice-versa, instead restoring to each author his own particular identity. I would also advise, in addition, the wisdom of not underestimating the influence of Aristotle in Aquinas.

Certainly, an exploration of the diverse interpretations of Thomistic metaphysics could be achieved via other excellent

9. L. B. GEIGER, “St. Thomas et la métaphysique d’Aristote,” now in *Penser avec Thomas d’Aquin*, Fribourg, 2000, a recompilation of studies of L. B. Geiger published by R. IMBACH. In this book there are, in addition to the complete list of publications of the great Thomist Geiger, some of his most well-known and best works; among them, “Les idées divines dans l’oeuvre de S. Thomas”; “L’homme image de Dieu, à propos de Summa Theologiae, I, 93, 4”; “Abstraction et séparation d’après S. Thomas in De Trinitate q. 5, a. 3”, articles which have represented a discovery or rediscovery of some aspects of Thomism. I will refer to some of these later.

topics, such as participation, the doctrine of the transcendentals, or analogy, the existence and nature of God, etc., but all of these ultimately attain their authentic meaning, and consequently display a particular metaphysics, based on the conception which they have about being.

An Italian author, G. Ventimiglia, has produced an outstanding and profound *status quaestionis* on the studies of Thomistic metaphysics centered on the problem of being, as introduction to an excellent and novel investigation. I agree with his general viewpoint, while having a few reserves on the author's own doctrine in the central part of his magnificent book,¹⁰ the discussion of which I will not venture into here; nevertheless, I will follow his introduction in order to highlight what I consider to be the most relevant of the Thomistic interpretations on being and the person. Ventimiglia considers that, in regards to the history of the problem of being in Aquinas in the 20th century, there exists a division into three great areas. He emphasizes that this corresponds to three generations of philosophers, although from my point of view, it is not really appropriate to speak of generations, because the representatives can belong to different eras; nevertheless the division is very useful for capturing the great lines of effort at systematizing or synthesizing the problem.

In the first place, in the 20th century, at least until approximately the 1930's, being in Aquinas was considered to be that of Aristotle (Manser may be considered the most important representative of this current, in his influential book the *Das Wesen des Thomismus*);¹¹ secondly, beginning with the works of Gilson¹² and

10. G. VENTIMIGLIA, *Differenza e contraddizione. Il problema dell'essere in Tommaso d'Aquino: esse, diversum, contradictio*, Milano, 1997.

11. G. M. MANSER, *La esencia del tomismo*, 2nd ed., Madrid, 1953.

12. The contribution of E. Gilson to the renewal of Thomistic metaphysics is exceptional. This affirmation also applies to many topics in the first science, as well as to the differentiation between Aristotelian form and Thomistic being. Even if on this point the evolution was slow, nevertheless it was achieved by the beginning of the 1940's, with the 2nd ed. of *L'être et l'essence* and the 4th edition of *Le thomisme*. A good study of the totality of his work is that by R. ECHAURI,

Fabro,¹³ in the 1930's and 1940's, "being" in St. Thomas was considered to be the notion of being as act, which constitutes a profoundly original idea, very different from the Aristotelian notion. Finally, in the 1960's, a third current arose that considers the Thomistic notion of being to be neither original, nor Aristotelian, but simply Neoplatonic. This third current was originated by Cornelia de Vogel, but is also represented by Hadot and in part by D'Ancona Costa; it is important to emphasize that this current is primarily dedicated, with exemplary research, to the study of Neoplatonism—the most distinguished representative of this school is W. Beierwaltes—; they only make reference to the concept of being in Aquinas in a collateral, if sometimes extreme, fashion; this is especially true of Kremer.¹⁴

My readers will pardon my insistence that historiographic explanations are certainly necessary, so that thought does not lose its way and philosophy does not become simply poetry. While we depend on historiographic data, which certainly will always have to be pursued, it is necessary to go beyond the data by means of speculative thought, thereby extending the data. I will allude briefly to both types of question in the course of this article.

El pensamiento de Etienne Gilson, Pamplona, 1980. See also the references there to the many Gilsonian works.

13. I consider C. Fabro to be the most complete Thomistic thinker of the 20th century, both for his decided renewal of fundamental points of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, as well as for his prodigious knowledge about modern and contemporary metaphysics. It is impossible to do justice here, even minimally, to the enormous relevance which this author has had in the areas stated, with his 30 extensive books and nearly 900 articles. Recently, his *Opere complete* have begun to be edited by EDIVI, Roma, 2004.

14. See G. VENTIMIGLIA, *op. cit.*, pp. 5 ff. In large part I have accepted the ideas of the *status quaestionis* which this author presents. I recommend the reading of the entire book, although it will be seen later on that I do not share all of his points of view. In this book there will be found references to the works of the authors I cite, as well as a more precise study of the successive phases of the problem of the comprehension of the Thomistic notion of being.

2. THE QUESTION OF BEING: THOMISTIC ARISTOTELIANISM

The question of being in Thomas Aquinas has brought with itself a great proliferation of works, impossible even to enumerate within the framework of this conference, beginning in the first decade of the 20th century, when Garrigou-Lagrange timidly began to indicate that Thomistic doctrines to a great extent were fossilized and that it would be necessary to investigate new senses and aspects of the Thomistic notion of being. That author, and many others (Olgiate, Masnovo, Sertillanges, Ramírez, Forest) who performed excellent work, paid attention to this topic and opened the door to further research. However, the renewal of Thomism, and in particular our topic area, a notion of being not identified with Aristotelianism, was late in flourishing, in particular until the studies of Maritain, Gilson and Fabro, whose works nevertheless are different in many ways. Many other authors, indebted to those we have mentioned, and specially to Fabro, have discovered or rediscovered accents and perspectives in the treatment of the question of being, which implied a radical course change initiated, as I said, in the 30's.¹⁵

The greatest metaphysical discovery of Aristotle, the notion of act, ends precisely there: in the concept of activity or perfect act;¹⁶

15. In addition to the references to the authors alluded to in the book by Ventimiglia, one may encounter a succinct and clear portrait of the most relevant Thomistic authors of the 20th century in B. MONDIN, *La metafísica de San Tommaso d'Aquino e i suoi interpreti*, Bologna, 2002. The first part of this book, entitled *Le interpretazioni della metafisica tomistica nel ventesimo secolo*, briefly studies the contributions of Grabmann, Garrigou-Lagrange, Masnovo, Olgiate, Sertillanges, Vanni Rovighi, Gilson, Maritain, Fabro, Forest, de Finance, Raeymaeker, Giacon, Lobato, etc. Also in this book one will encounter the most important bibliographical references for each author.

16. In this regard, among the lengthy bibliography which is available, I refer to the relevant articles by L. Polo, who has written, in my opinion, highly illuminating pages on the notion of act and its various senses in Aristotle; See L. POLO, *Curso de Teoría del conocimiento*, vol. 1, 2nd ed., Pamplona, 1987, lesson 1, and the corresponding chapters in IDEM, *Presente y futuro del hombre*, Madrid, 1993, and of his *Introducción a la filosofía*, 3rd ed., Pamplona, 2002. See

for this reason, while even the Stagirite recognized that the existence of any essence must be an act, he did not even glimpse the real distinction between being as act and essence, nor that essence in act, while active temporally speaking, is equivalent rather to dynamism or essential potency; essences would be modes of actuality. The closest that Aristotle came, in my opinion, to anticipating the Thomistic doctrine is in the well-known expression: “being is never the essence of anything; thus being is not a kind”; some of the first great Thomists of the 20th century, e.g. Raeymaeker and especially Manser, interpreted this text in the Thomistic way, when —as is well known nowadays— what Aristotle was emphasizing in that text of the *Posterior Analytics* is that no being has an essence that consists of being, but rather that of being such-and-such a being; the essence of things does not consist of *being things*, but of being *such things*; any distinction between the being (*einai*) of a being, on the one hand, and what that being is, or its essence (*ousía*) on the other hand, does not exist in the work of Aristotle, and therefore it is not possible to speak of a real distinction between being and essence in the Aristotelian ontology.¹⁷ The foundation of this affirmation rests on the Thomistic inquiries into being and the consequent real distinction. Being understood, in the manner of Thomas, *per modum actualitatis absolute*, reaches a theoretical development which was unknown to the Stagirite. As is known, for Fabro this new manner of understanding being, as an emergent act of reality, constitutes the theoretical originality of Thomist speculation with respect to classical thought, both Platonic and Aristotelian, as well as Patristic thought and the contemporary doctrines of other schools.¹⁸

also the excellent work by R. YEPES, *La doctrina del acto en Aristóteles*, Pamplona, 1993.

17. R. ECHAURI, “Esencia y existencia en Aristóteles”, in *Anuario Filosófico*, (1975), pp. 119-129. See also the chapter on Aristotle in E. GILSON, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed., Toronto, 1949.

18. C. FABRO, *Tomismo e pensiero moderno*, Roma, 1969, p. 103. In this book, a recopilation of several articles, two are especially relevant to our

In my opinion, it is much more clear that there is an overcoming of Aristotelianism on the part of Thomas in the problem of developing a considered metaphysical conception of the person. The notion of personal being requires an intensification of the concept of being, as Thomas developed it, especially concerning the ascent to a supraformal ambit.

3. THE THOMISTIC ORIGINALITY CONCERNING BEING AND ITS EXTENSION OR APPLICATION TO PERSONAL BEING

Let us recall several well known ideas: being is the act of the forms themselves, says Thomas Aquinas; for that reason, grasping the notion of being is possible only if the formal order is surpassed and the real order is reached, in which being realizes the forms themselves, insofar as it is their act.¹⁹ The originality of the Thomistic position—as de Finance has said—can be expressed by saying that the positive pole of the real moves from the form to being, with the latter acquiring the supreme relevance in the metaphysical order, up to the point that, so long as being is not conceived as devoid of formal content (precisely because it transcends all content), one has not reached the deep metaphysical originality of Thomas Aquinas; and, in addition, one has not surpassed the logical-formal order. The overcoming of formalism can only be obtained in a metaphysical doctrine that conceives being as act, and which considers it, precisely because it is, as the archetype of actuality.

topic: “Dall’ente di Aristotele all’esse di S. Tommaso” (pp. 47-103) and “Il problema dell’esse tomistico” (pp. 103-134).

19. See among many other studies, A. L. GONZÁLEZ, *Ser y participación*, 3rd ed. Pamplona, 2001; A. LLANO, “Actualidad y efectividad,” in his book *Metafísica y lenguaje*, 2nd ed., Pamplona, 1997; G. E. M. ANSCOMBE; P. T. GEACH, *Three Philosophers*, Oxford, 1973. See also A. J. P. KENNY, *Aquinas on Being*, Oxford, 2002; J. F. X. KNASAS, *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists*, New York, 2003.

If we apply these ideas to the conception of the person, one can see the enormous difference between Aristotelianism and Thomism. In the classic and well-known Aristotelian doctrine of the senses of “being,” what sense of being characterizes the person? A suitable, deep answer, in the Aristotelian line, will conclude that within the many ways of attributing being, the person must occupy a preferred place, since “to be” is most properly and truly said of subsistent individuals: being is properly and truly of the subsistent subject, as Thomas says in a well-known text. Being belongs to primary substance first because it is the real subject; the person *is* in a primary sense; the proper subject of being.

While the substantial sense of *person* is certainly reasonable and true, and thus not only not to be rejected, but also indispensable for an explanation of the person, it does not thereby have to be the final explanation in the speculative order. In addition, this does not, I believe, require abandoning the substantial explanation of the person, based ultimately on an explanation of subsistence. Through continuing the Thomistic conception of being, there is space for an ultrasubstantial explanation of the person which does not reject its substantial character.

The formalism, real or presumed, of some interpretations of Thomism on this point, can only be surpassed by going beyond the predicamental order, through the surpassing of the formal order, with the notion of supraformality, with an adequate intensification of the real distinction between essence and being. Applying this to our topic, this means that the substance or form, so to speak, is not lowered in its category, it is not “discounted”; rather, its height and dignity are increased by its being integrated into being, which—as Thomas Aquinas said—is the form of forms. Being confers a higher unity, it is—if it can be expressed in this way—maximally integrative. Being, considered in a supraformal manner, unites or integrates the forms, the formal differences. And for this reason, as I see it, the static and dynamic visions of the person are only two aspects of the same reality.

As Fernando Haya has excellently shown, St. Thomas achieves a speculative perspective that overcomes formalism in his

consideration of the person via his real distinction between essence and being: “While it is certain that Thomas expresses his thought in formal terms, that is, considering being itself as form of forms, or as the most formal of all ... one must bear in mind ... that the notions of essence and act are not only not incompatible, but are *transcendentally harmonious* or *complementary*. In this context the notion of *supraformality* was formulated, as that of complete being of form in identity: a consideration of being that is essential, but not essentialist.”²⁰ Using ideas of Haya himself, I will highlight that the person is constituted in the ambit or plane of act; the person is (personal) being; the person is act, a (created) act, and therefore only within the conceptual horizon of Thomism can it be understood, explained and displayed in the dimension of act (of being); the person cannot be explained in the ambit or plane of potency, which pertains or corresponds to the essence with reference to the being which it receives, and concerns the capacity of the essence (potency of being) insofar as it manifests the need for formal specificities and the subsequent differentiation of the essential form. This act of being cannot be more than nonidentical with respect to the potency of being or essence. And all that there is in a being must be configured and considered as coming from its radical principle, which is being.

There is included here also all that refers to creaturely dynamism. Action prolongs being and therefore the creature is, at its base, dynamic. Being is not the operation, but the operative dynamism does not exist, is not produced, without being, which founds, aids and accompanies the dynamism of the person. We return again to the same place: being is not of itself constrained by the essence; or better, the determination of the potency of being

20 F. HAYA, *El ser personal. De Tomás de Aquino a la metafísica del don*, Pamplona, 1997. I permit myself to emphasize that this book is excellent from many points of view: for its high philosophical speculation, and for the force of its theoretical argumentation, originality, and clear proof of what can be done, in our day and age, with a vigorous advance in the metaphysics of St. Thomas, directed precisely by his reliance on analogy. See also, by the same author, *Tomás de Aquino ante la crítica. La articulación trascendental de conocimiento y ser*, Pamplona, 1992.

does not constrain the act of being to the point that it becomes crystallized. Being, so to speak, overcomes or overflows this constriction or determination, and continues accompanying its multifaceted operations (and without forgetting that being is distinct from them, given that—in all that which is created—it is nonidentical with all that is not itself).

The consideration of the person in the horizon of being, in the line that we are indicating, leads to the conclusion that the structuring of the person is not the person; or said in another way, the person “is structured by means of an essential configuration which is not properly the person himself, but rather his most intimate possession or gift.”²¹ I will emphasize this point a bit more, following the investigations of Haya, which ultimately have their inspiration in the philosophical doctrines of Leonardo Polo (Haya affirms that this author’s doctrine is a splendid philosophical gloss on the condition of the human person as creature of God).

Following the strict doctrine of St. Thomas, being cannot be considered a tearing apart, striking or throwing-off of the divine creative action. The creature is not a part, nor does it separate itself from the Absolute, “but rather it is a reality that is given. This giving is as radical as reality. For this reason he says that the creature is not presupposed: it is created from nothing.”²²

Taking into account the great Thomistic discovery of the real distinction between essence and being, whose deepening and continuation are being spoken of here, it is difficult to propose an essentialism which adequately explains the essential perfecting of the human being; essential perfecting is only possible if there is a superior instance to that which is constituted by the essence. Being

21. F. HAYA, *El ser personal* cit., p. 296. See section 3 (“La persona en el orden del *actus essendi*”) of the fifth chapter (“La persona a la luz de la distinción real de esencia y ser”) of the cited book, pp. 276-298. From these pages I have taken, on occasion with my own perspective, some ideas or expressions

22. L. POLO, “Tener y dar,” in *La existencia cristiana*, Pamplona, 1996, p. 131.

is that superior instance to the essence.²³ “Therefore *the being of the human person* —says Haya— *is not already given*. If we propose being as something given, constituted, we do not move out of dependence upon the essential conditions of the operative dynamism. The antecedence of being in change is of a different sort than that of the essence. In order to explain human perfecting ... it is necessary to consider that in the human person, apart from that which is given, there is the personal dimension, or better the person, to whom it has been given. That which has been given to the human person, that which is already given, is the essence.”²⁴ The human being is not definable in this conception, which in my judgment extends Thomist conceptions, by his capacity to have, but rather by his capacity to give; the human being is a personal being, which ultimately is constituted as intimacy. “The human being is a personal being because he is able to give. From the perspective of the person, giving signifies contributing. Contributing makes having possible.”²⁵

The person is constituted more by self-giving than by having. Precisely —and here I follow the excellent explanations of Falgueras—, if being consists in donation, in giving, there is space for an explanation that is much more adequate than other at the speculative level, since if that which specifies being is not having but rather giving, that which the human being has been given can only be completed in gift, in self-giving: to be is to give.²⁶

23. Haya remarks, concerning the comparison of the Thomist conception of the person with that of Hegel: “Why is it necessary that something *manifest itself* when it is definitely *already in existence*? It seems to me that in the Hegelian philosophy this may be the point most difficult to respond to: the colossal self-movement of the Hegelian absolute towards its own self-realization does not finally have more reason to be than *being thus*, or that which is *in itself* over that which provides this realization *for itself*. But this is nothing more than a great circle without explanation.” F. HAYA, *El ser personal* cit., pp. 306-307.

24. F. HAYA, *El ser personal* cit., p. 307.

25. L. POLO, “Tener y dar,” cit., p. 132.

26. See I. FALGUERAS, *Crisis y renovación de la metafísica*, Universidad de Málaga, Málaga, 1997, p. 84. This book not only offers a magnificent exposition of Thomistic doctrine, but also a proposal for continuing the intellectual project of

In order to finalize these quick allusions to one of the most interesting metaphysical fields, speculatively speaking, among that which follows from the Thomist doctrine, I include a further quotation from Haya. If it is recognized that “definitively, the real distinction between being and essence is also the principle of its operative dynamism ... the being of the human being is not given ... is it then still to be achieved? This can be a manner of expressing the immanent finality of personal action in its confluence towards being itself, which is its ultimate and radical principle. But it should not be thought that this means a subordination of the metaphysical priority of being to that of action. Quite the contrary: precisely because being is metaphysically primary, it is not possible to reach it by any action or operation, which belongs strictly to the order relative to essence. Action, including immanent action, even if it were perfective of the essence, does not achieve the rank of complete identity with that which is principal.”²⁷

Certainly that which has just been said does not lead to a disconnection between being and action; without ignoring the real distinction between being and essence, which is the Thomistic discovery *par excellence*, in this interpretation the aforementioned connection is produced by means of the habits, as L. Polo has highlighted with profusion and profundity, as well as other authors who, each in his own way, have been inspired by Polo’s thought and frequently follow him;²⁸ the proposal of Polo concerning habit

Aquinas. I would like to especially underline the high intellectual quality of this book.

27. F. HAYA, *El ser personal* cit., p. 308.

28. In addition to other books already noted, I reiterate the relevance for this topic of: L. POLO, “Tener y dar,” cit.; ID., “El conocimiento habitual de los primeros principios,” in *Nominalismo, idealismo y realismo*, 2nd ed., Pamplona, 2001, pp. 171-188 (especialmente las secciones intituladas “La consideración de los hábitos intelectuales desde el acto de ser” y “El hábito de los primeros principios como conocimiento del *actus essendi*”). See also J. F. SELLÉS, *Hábitos y virtud*, Cuadernos de Anuario Filosófico. Serie Universitaria, Pamplona, 1998, 3 vols. Concerning the relevance of this topic, see the broad and well-documented

is both new and original, based on Thomistic thought, but continuing and broadening it. To uphold that the connection or articulation alluded to is carried out by the habits not only does not weaken or eliminate the real distinction between essence and being in the human being, but in fact confirms the creaturely non-identity: the creaturely condition of the human being, once given, is irrevocable.

I, person, being. With incisive interpretation of the Thomistic texts, within this same interpretative line, we find investigations such as those of Ignacio Falgueras (*Crisis y renovación de la metafísica*), the two cited books of Fernando Haya (*Tomás de Aquino ante la crítica*, and *El ser personal*), the work of Juan Fernando Sellés (*La persona humana*, 3 vols.), whom I will cite later, and in part that of Miguel García-Valdecasas (*El sujeto en Tomás de Aquino. La perspectiva clásica ante un problema moderno*), to whom I will allude below; in addition, there are many other splendid works by authors such as Juan García,²⁹ José Ignacio Murillo,³⁰ Salvador Piá,³¹ etc. It is clear that these latest contributions correspond to a many-hued and multiform intensification in that most original notion of being held by Thomas Aquinas, and which go beyond, in my opinion far beyond, the splendid affirmations and consequences highlighted by Gilson, Geiger and especially by Fabro (it will be sufficient to recall the definition of the human being which Fabro proposed in *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione*,³² following St. Thomas in his

study by S. COLLADO, *Noción de hábito en la teoría del conocimiento de Leonardo Polo*, Pamplona, 2000.

29. J. GARCÍA GONZÁLEZ, *Teoría del conocimiento humano*, Pamplona, 1998.

30. J. I. MURILLO GÓMEZ, *Operación, hábito y reflexión. El conocimiento como clave antropológica en Tomás de Aquino*, Pamplona, 1998.

31. S. PIÁ TARAZONA, *El hombre como ser dual. Estudio de las dualidades radicales según la Antropología de Leonardo Polo*, Pamplona, 2001.

32. See C. FABRO, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo San Tommaso d'Aquino*, Torino, 1950, p. 337, and the explanations which are offered there.

doctrine, when he notes that the real human *ens* is an originating possibility).

The new discoveries or deepenings in certain aspects do not imply necessarily a lessening in value of the preceding doctrines: in that manner, the previous affirmations of renowned interpreters of Thomas —some of which I have mentioned before— could come to be considered as inexact. Nevertheless, the explanation or intensification of being is, and will always continue to be, a motive for deepening, expanding and development, first, in the widely varied problems of metaphysics, and also, in accordance with these findings —which cannot anchor themselves alone—, in the application to diverse metaphysical topics, and thus to the other philosophical domains. The interpretations and proposals here alluded are some of those which are possible, not the only ones, as should be clear. An open and living Thomistic metaphysics must irremediably be plural in its intensification via its ultimate principles, since it is precisely this life and openness that prevent Thomism from crystallizing into a dead system.

The findings of Thomas Aquinas, now rediscovered and profoundly investigated by illustrious Thomists (I must mention, among others, Montagnes,³³ Owens,³⁴ Cardona,³⁵ Elders,³⁶ González Álvarez,³⁷ García López,³⁸ Clavell,³⁹ Sanguineti),⁴⁰

33. B. MONTAGNES, *La doctrine de l'analogie selon Saint Thomas*, Louvain, 1963.

34. Cf. J. OWENS, *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: The Collected Papers of Joseph Owens*, Albany, New York, 1980; IDEM, *Aquinas on Being and Thing*, Niagara, New York, 1981; IDEM, *An Interpretation of Existence*, Milwaukee, 1968; IDEM, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, 3rd ed., Toronto, 1978.

35. Cf. C. CARDONA, *La metafísica del bien común*, Madrid, 1966; IDEM, *Metafísica de la opción intelectual*, Madrid, 1973; IDEM, *Metafísica del bien y del mal*, Pamplona, 1987; IDEM, *Memoria y olvido del ser*, Pamplona, 1997.

36. Cf. L. J. ELDERS, *The Philosophical Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Leiden, 1990.

37. Among the numerous works by A. GONZÁLEZ ALVAREZ, it is pertinent to cite here *Tratado de metafísica*, vol. 1: *Ontología*, 2nd ed. repr., Madrid, 1987; vol. 2: *Teología natural*, Madrid, 2nd ed., 1986. See also his "Santo Tomás de

require in the present day, and will always require, further development. Metaphysics always will be the “sought-for science.” The interpretation that I have noted in a particular subject, such as the person,⁴¹ seems to me to be quite relevant (mainly for its consequences in anthropology and ethics),⁴² but is only one of various possible interpretations. For this reason also I hasten to emphasize that, for instance, the notion of subsistence in the definition of the person is not illegitimate. On the contrary, it is necessary to count on that which is, and which presupposes subsistence, but—in my opinion—if it is considered in an isolated manner it will be insufficient. There should be continued treatment and speculative broadening (not personalist, as that term is understood currently within the so-called personalist movement, despite being of interest for other reasons) of the person as intimacy and all that which this carries with it. As L. Polo has

Aquino y el pensamiento contemporáneo”, in *Tommaso d’Aquino nel suo settimo centenario*, vol. 1, Napoli, 1975, pp. 129-136.

38. See by J. GARCÍA LÓPEZ, among others, his extensive and systematic treatise *Metafísica tomista: ontología, gnoseología y teología natural*, Pamplona, 2001. See also his *Estudios de metafísica tomista*, Pamplona, 1976.

39. Cf. L. CLAVELL, *El nombre propio de Dios según Santo Tomás*, Pamplona, 1980.

40. Cf. J. J. SANGUINETI, *La filosofía de la ciencia según Santo Tomás*, Pamplona, 1977.

41. The specific bibliography on the person, from a metaphysical perspective, is impossible to cover fully. I cite here a few studies, with differing structures and aims, which I consider to be excellent in their field: E. FORMENT [among whose systematic works I note] “La persona humana,” in A. LOBATO (ed.), *El pensamiento de Sto. Tomás para el hombre de hoy*, vol. 1, Valencia, 1995, pp. 685-883; T. MELENDO, *Introducción a la antropología de la persona*, Madrid, 1995; J. MARTINEZ PORCELL, *Metafísica de la persona*, Barcelona, 1992; See also, from a more theological perspective, J. M. GARRIGUES, “La personne humaine dans sa réalité intégrale selon saint Thomas,” in S. TH. BONINO (ed.), *Thomistes ou de l’actualité de Saint Thomas d’Aquin*, cit., p. 99-111.

42. See also, among many other works which could be cited on this subject, that of A. M. GONZÁLEZ, *Moral, razón y naturaleza: una investigación sobre Tomás de Aquino*, Pamplona, 1998. An excellent comparison between Scheler and Aquinas is provided by M. G. SANTAMARÍA GARAI, *Acción, persona, libertad. Max Schler - Tomás de Aquino*, Pamplona, 2002.

noted in his *Antropología Trascendental* one should not consider the subsistence as consummated in itself or without self-revelation.⁴³

4. THE THOMISTIC NOTION OF BEING AND THE PRESUMED (OR REAL) NEOPLATONISM OF THOMAS AQUINAS

“This which I call being”—says Thomas Aquinas, in my opinion conscious of the reach of his discovery— “is the most perfect of all, the actuality of all acts; nothing can be added to it which is more formal or which determines it.” This famous text of *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 2 ad 9, finishes, as is known, by affirming that “for this reason Dionysius says that, while that which lives is nobler than that which exists, nevertheless being is nobler than life, because that which lives not has life only, but it has being with its life.”⁴⁴ This quote of Pseudo-Dionysius enables me to allude — only an allusion— to the excellent research produced in recent years, making reference —in favor of and in opposition to— Thomas’s presumed absence of originality in his doctrine of being.

As is well-known, the influence of Neoplatonism in Thomas has been demonstrated, progressively more and more, by various authors (I include myself among them, if I am allowed a bit of vanity, because I wrote on this topic many years ago, following Fabro). It seems opportune not to forget that, in general, for many

43 See L. POLO, *Antropología trascendental*, vol. 1: *La persona humana*, 2nd ed., Pamplona, 2003; vol. 2: *La esencia humana*, Pamplona 2003. Along the same lines, See the three books by J. F. SELLÉS, *La persona humana*, vol. 1: *Introducción e historia*, Bogotá, 1998; vol. 2: *Naturaleza y esencia humanas*, Bogotá, 1998; vol. 3: *Núcleo personal y manifestaciones*, Bogotá, 1999. By the same author I must also mention *Conocer y amar. Estudio de los objetos y operaciones del entendimiento y de la voluntad según Tomás de Aquino*, 2nd ed., Pamplona, 2000. See also de J. GARCÍA GONZÁLEZ, “Metafísica y Antropología: la noción moderna de sujeto,” in J. GARCÍA; T. MELENDO (eds.), *Actualidad de la metafísica*, Contrastes. Suplemento 7, Málaga, 2002, pp. 93-103.

44. *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9.

medieval philosophers, the symbiosis of Plato and Aristotle was a common assumption; as Girgenti has shown,⁴⁵ medieval philosophy is based on diverse forms of mediation between Plato and Aristotle; indeed we may even speak (if in a somewhat extreme fashion) of a *platonized Aristotelianism* and an *aristotelianized Platonism*.

Let us remember, in addition to Fabro and Geiger themselves, who must be considered as being pioneers in the recognition of this influence, the works of Henle⁴⁶ and Little,⁴⁷ in addition to the well-known works of Norris Clark.⁴⁸ There are authors, nevertheless, in the wake of the current begun by Cornelia de Vogel,⁴⁹ who emphasized the Platonic and Neoplatonic character of Thomistic philosophy; I indicate only a brief selection: Faucon,⁵⁰ Hankey,⁵¹ O'Rourke.⁵² On the one hand, in the earliest research during the 1950's, it is possible to say that, while recognizing the Platonic influence, the researchers had a tendency to minimize it or limit it to certain areas of Thomas's philosophy. On the other hand, in some of the more recent authors that I have mentioned one sees the other extreme, where the researchers assert that the philosophy of St. Thomas is almost entirely Platonic or Neoplatonic. In this

45. See G. GIRGENTI, "La metafísica de Porfirio como mediación entre la henología platónica y la ontología aristotélica, base del neoplatonismo medieval", in *Anuario Filosófico*, 38/1 (2000), pp. 151-162.

46. R. J. HENLE, *Saint Thomas and Platonism. A Study of the "Plato" and "Platonici" Texts in the Writings of St. Thomas*, 2nd ed., The Hague, 1970.

47. A. LITTLE, *The Platonic Heritage of Thomism*, Dublin, 1950.

48. Among others, W. N. CLARK, "The Problem of the Reality and Multiplicity of Divine Ideas in Christian Neoplatonism," in D.J. O'MEARA (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, Albany, 1982, pp. 109-127. In the same book, pp. 97-108, there is also a study by C. FABRO, "The Overcoming of the Neoplatonic Triad of Being, Life and Intellect by Thomas Aquinas."

49. By C. DE VOGEL, in addition to other older and well-known works, see *Rethinking Plato and Platonism*, Leiden, 1986.

50. P. FAUCON, *Aspects néoplatoniciennes de la doctrine de saint Thomas*, Paris, 1975.

51. W. J. HANKEY, *God in Himself*, Oxford, 1987.

52. F. O'ROURKE, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, Leiden, 1992.

respect it is possible to emphasize, as has been mentioned, that authors like Hadot⁵³ and Ruffinengo, along with others, affirm that the Thomistic notion of intensive being is already in Porphyry, and that the identification of Subsistent Being with God is in many Neoplatonic authors.⁵⁴ (It is also necessary to recall that in the search for where Thomas Aquinas could have encountered the notion of being, there have been postulated many different authors as the possible source —e.g. Boethius, the School of Chartres, etc. However, on this point, in reference to intensive being, I consider the affirmations of E. Alarcón to be better grounded.⁵⁵ He demonstrates that the fundamental nucleus of the doctrine of being according to Aquinas can be found in his master, Albert the Great.

One of the most relevant lines of research concerning the Neoplatonic interpretations about our topic is based on studies of the *Liber de Causis*.⁵⁶ The author who has studied this issue in greatest depth,⁵⁷ and in general is the most even-handed researcher on the Platonism of Aquinas, is Cristina D'Ancona Costa.⁵⁸ She demonstrated, and I believe that adequately, that the identification

53. Among the many historical investigations by P. HADOT, I highlight *Porphyre et Victorinus*, Paris, 1968.

54. A synthesis of the development of these studies, their authors and their corresponding bibliographic references can be found in the cited work by G. VENTIMIGLIA, pp. 22-33. See especially the bibliographic references in the book to works by W. Beierwaltes, P. Hadot, P. P. Ruffinengo, etc.

55. E. ALARCÓN, "San Alberto Magno y la 'Epistola Alexandri de principio universi esse'," in *Actas del I Congreso Nacional de Filosofía Medieval*, Zaragoza, 1992, pp. 181-192.

56. See the Thomistic commentary in a recent edition: TOMÁS DE AQUINO, *Exposición sobre el "Libro de las causas"*. Introducción, traducción y notas de J. CRUZ CRUZ, Pamplona, 2000.

57. See a partial compilation of the articles on this topic in C. D'ANCONA COSTA, *Recherches sur le "Liber de Causis"*, Paris, 1995.

58. A splendid summary of the Platonic influence in the Medieval era, and on Thomas Aquinas in particular, with a very complete reference, in two appendices, of all the relevant studies published on the topic, can be found in the work of IDEM, "Historiographie du platonisme médiéval: le cas de Saint Thomas," in S. TH. BONINO (ed.), *Saint Thomas au XX siècle, Actes du colloque du Centenaire de la "Revue thomiste" (25-28 mars 1993 -Toulouse)*, Paris, 1994, pp. 198-217.

of God with being was encountered by Thomas in the *Liber de Causis* and in the *De divinis nominibus* of Dionysius. These texts—she emphasizes—imply that the Platonic doctrine was not entirely admitted. Ventimiglia, summarizing the position of D’Ancona Costa, emphasizes the fact that Thomas knew clearly that the *Liber de causis* was not an Aristotelian work, but also noted that this does not mean that the *Liber* was a pure Platonic commentary on the *Elementatio theologica* of Proclus, as can be easily seen by simply checking the frequent allusions to the thesis of *De Divinis nominibus*. Against the thesis of a Porphyrian origin, D’Ancona Costa⁵⁹ notes that the doctrine of Thomas appears to have a Dionysian origin.

I am inclined to note that research will provide more fruitful results along these lines. The historical researches undertaken by recent authors on this question are of high quality. Among these, the most relevant, I believe, is Aertsen, and particularly his recent study on the transcendentals,⁶⁰ even if I do not share his thesis of a Thomistic distancing with respect to certain capital points of Platonism.

The current focus of research upon the transcendentals is resulting, indeed, in an excellent crop of research, and has resulted in recent books of high quality. To limit ourselves to the Spanish-speaking world, it is necessary to highlight the two volumes

59. See C. D’ANCONA COSTA (ed.), “Introduzione,” in TOMMASO D’AQUINO, *Commento al “Libro delle cause,”* Milano, 1986, p. 7-164. In this work one will encounter the ideas highlighted above. In addition, I have more than once drawn expressions and ideas from G. VENTIMIGLIA, *op. cit.*, pp. 34 ff.

60. See J. AERTSEN, “The Platonic Tendency of Thomism and the Foundations of Aquinas’s Philosophy,” *Medioevo*, 18 (1992) pp. 53-70, and above all his *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas*, Leiden, 1996, recently translated to Spanish in the Colección de Pensamiento Medieval y Renacentista, Pamplona, 2003. Among the excellent treatments of this area of ontological problems, should be noted certain chapters of the posthumous book by E. GILSON, *Las constantes filosóficas del ser*, also recently published in the same book series, Pamplona, 2005.

written on this subject by Antonio Millán-Puelles⁶¹ and some of the works of Leonardo Polo.⁶²

I share the posture of Ventimiglia in this respect, when — in his book entitled *Differenza ed essere*— he highlights that ultimately the ontological conception of Thomas is not only not completely reconcilable with Neoplatonism, but that Thomas himself consciously elaborated certain essential aspects of this doctrine precisely while attacking it.⁶³ These investigations certainly imply an advance over that which Fabro had written in his day, when the first voices about excessive “Neoplatonizing” in St. Thomas began to be heard. I am referring to his well-known work, *Platonism, Neo-Platonism, and Thomism: Convergencies and Divergencias*.⁶⁴ In sum, in my view, in Thomistic metaphysics the influence of Neoplatonism is in general inferior to that of Aristotelianism, and particularly regarding the subjects I have mentioned here: Being and God.

Going beyond the historiographic point of view, I allow myself to emphasize the speculative content that, in my opinion, is found in Thomas: the Platonic subsisting separation of the Idea is criticized in many places by Thomas Aquinas. The various formal perfections of things do not need to be attributed to a separated first principle, but rather since all belong to the perfection of being it is necessary to establish a separated Principle that is Being, and

61. A. MILLÁN-PUELLES, *La lógica de los conceptos metafísicos*, vol. 1: *La lógica de los conceptos trascendentales*, Madrid, 2002; vol. 2: *La articulación de los conceptos extracategoriales*, Madrid, 2003.

62. There can be cited here, in this regard, the numerous references to the topic in L. POLO, *Curso de Teoría del conocimiento*, Pamplona, 1998-2005, 4 vols., and especially volume 1 of his *Antropología trascendental*, already mentioned.

63. G. VENTIMIGLIA, *Differenza e contraddizione* cit., p. 36. I cannot allude here to other derivations and discussions on this topic, despite their interest. For further information on the highly relevant contributions by authors such as Berti, Aertsen, etc., see *ibidem*, pp. 37-45.

64. C. FABRO, “Platonism, Neo-Platonism, and Thomism: Convergencies and Divergencias”, in *The New Scholasticism*, 44 (1970), pp. 69-100.

which is the cause of being and therefore of all the other perfections possessed by a being and which follow upon being.

The Platonic “real separation” is criticized by Aristotle, but because he did not take into account the *via resolutionis* from *ens* into *esse*, Aristotle did not arrive at the consideration of the Subsistent Being. The recognition of being *qua* being undercut the possibility of establishing the subsisting separation of the Platonic forms, and on the other hand, the vertical ascent does not lead to a Form, but to the Subsisting Being itself. Regarding this point it is sufficient to allude to the convergence, harmony or superior agreement, that Thomas indicates in the third chapter of *De substantiis separatis*, that bears the significant title “*In quo convenient positiones Platonis et Aristotelis*”. In the separated All, as Fabro and his disciples noted with precise designation, being is encountered *simpliciter et uniformiter*, precisely as non-participated, while on the other hand its causality becomes obvious as a result of its transcendental participation. Precisely, once more, the notion of being and the doctrine of the real distinction provide pertinent solutions to the difficulties and theoretical obstacles which occur in the metaphysical problem of creation, and in the difference between the finite and the infinite. Here, in addition, as in the previous case alluded to, concerning personal being, the speculative intensification produces original explanations of the problems without needing to consider as inexact earlier explanations. Metaphysics —as it seems to me St. Thomas understood it— is always open and worthy of being extended, broadened and continued.

Moving forward from doctrines found in current scholars, it is necessary to emphasize that created being is different from the being which is the Creator, and that means that the former is not identical, or what is to say the same thing, that it is neither an identity nor pure act. The distinction between being and essence is not mutual opposition, but difference; created being is different with respect to identity, essence is different with respect to created being. The priority between the two is hierarchical, not

temporal.⁶⁵ Reality is not identical, it is non-identical, and from the perspectives described here, that is to say, from the rejection of an essentialist vision, it is necessary to highlight that if being is person, then its non-identity brings with it the fact that the “I” is more than itself: the personal nucleus is not facticity, but rather ascension, ascendant reality, operative dynamic.⁶⁶ Thus it must be emphasized, in order to avoid mistakes, that the difference which non-identity carries with it, i.e. composition, does not weaken the unitary reality of the creature, as Thomas Aquinas frequently notes.

In my opinion, all that has been said up to now does not nullify a correct understanding of the doctrine of participation. As it is notorious, some authors, based on the previous way of explaining things, or in similar ways, relegate the metaphysical doctrine of participation to a secondary plane. In the Thomistic doctrine, participation appears in such abundance and in such a multitude of topic areas that it is impossible to explain Aquinas’s philosophy without referring to it. This doctrine is primary and not secondary in Thomas, that is to say, it extends to the fundamental nucleus of metaphysics, and it is not, on the contrary, a doctrine of merely explanatory character.

I consider that the doctrinal explorations of Fabro (*La nozione metafisica di partecipazione, Partecipazione e causalità*) and of Geiger (*La participation dans la philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin*) continue, as a whole, to be valid; in my opinion, participation by composition and participation by similarity are not incompatible; the emphasis in the former (Fabro) does not negate participation by similarity (Geiger). Both can be followed and be deepened in some of their elements without weakening the principles which they attain to; both conceptions (and not only participation by composition) can give intensity to what we might call the active or dynamic “seal” of similarity. This concept also

65. The ideas contained in this paragraph are taken from the work already mentioned by I. FALGUERAS, *Crisis y renovación de la metafísica*, pp. 85 ff. See also section IV: “La distinción real como diferencia intrínseca,” and section V: “El *esse* y el *habens esse*,” pp. 85-100.

66. See F. HAYA, *El ser persona* cit., pp. 316 ff.

belongs to the explanations of Fabro, of course including his later consideration of exemplarism with respect to efficiency. This exemplarism is certainly fulfilled between the Creator and the created being, inasmuch as the Absolute *is* Being and that which is finite *has* being; but this very similarity bears within itself the greatest possible dissimilarity, not of degree but of order.⁶⁷ Exemplarism is a consequence of transcendental participation.⁶⁸ The similarity must be transcendental in order to be able to express the transcendence of God, since the clear Thomistic formulations in this respect cannot be forgotten: of that which is predicated both of God and of creatures, is predicated of God essentially, and of creatures by participation.⁶⁹

But from there, in my opinion, the questions which I mentioned before can and must be explained, since it affects the dynamic slope of the concept of participation by similarity, as the studies alluded to that bear a different interpretative “seal”. One of them is the consideration that creation as participation in divine being implies that participation is assimilation. This assimilation is an active reception, not passive: to be is to receive; and this is perhaps the only case where this reception is not produced *ad modum recipientis*, but rather *ad modum dantis esse*, which implies not a

67. See on this point F. OCÁRIZ, “Cuestiones de metafísica tomista en torno a la creación,” in *Divus Thomas*, (1974), pp. 403-424. See also C. CARDONA, *Olvido y memoria del ser*, Pamplona, 1997, pp. 412 ff.

68. Regarding to this topic in general, allow me to refer once again to my book *Ser y participación*, 3rd ed., Pamplona 2001. On the metaphysical problem of creation in Aquinas: J. M. ARTOLA, *Creación y participación*, Madrid, 1998; IDEM, “Consideraciones sobre la doctrina de Santo Tomás acerca de la creación,” in *Ciencia Tomista*, (1990), pp. 213-229; an overall view by the same author: IDEM, “Creación y gobierno,” in V. RODRÍGUEZ; ET AL., *El pensamiento de Tomás de Aquino para el hombre de hoy*, vol. 2, Valencia, 2001, pp. 325-415; P. MAZZARELLA, “Creazione, partecipazione e tempo secondo S. Tommaso d’Aquino,” in *Studia Patavina*, (1982), pp. 309-335; A. GHISALBERTI, “La creazione nella filosofia di S. Tommaso d’Aquino,” in *Rivista di Filosofia Neoscolastica*, (1969), pp. 202-220; A. MOLINARO, “La nozione di creazione,” in *Studia Patavina*, (1965), pp. 175-206, 401-444; I. GUIU, “Metafisica de la creación según Santo Tomás,” in *e-aquinas*, 1/8 (2003), pp. 28-43.

69. See, among other passages, *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 7, ad 2.

descent but rather an elevation.⁷⁰ The relation of dependence produced by creation, according to the Thomistic doctrine, does not imply that it be a passion; and certainly similarity cannot carry with it community of nature, since in that case the finite and the infinite would be intermixed, which would be a pantheism in one of its various modalities.

This speculative consideration of the Thomistic elements with which creation is considered bring with them a wealth of formulations and expressions, which important present-day interpreters have developed, and in which even the notion of participation itself appears to be excluded (although here too, in my opinion, the exclusion is not necessary, or rather, there is room for a purified metaphysical doctrine of participation). I refer to the metaphysical explanations, which could be labeled as “donative,” to which I have sufficiently alluded above in reference to the metaphysical comprehension of the person. The author most relevant in this respect is Ignacio Falgueras,⁷¹ who has in one way or another been followed in these points by F. Haya, and also by J. Pérez Guerrero in certain of his explanations. Also relevant are the works of J. García, J. F. Sellés, J. I. Murillo and other authors already cited above. It seems to me to be only fair to recognize the

70. This is the thesis of the article by J. PÉREZ GUERRERO, *La creación como asimilación a Dios. Un estudio desde Tomás de Aquino*, Pamplona, 1996. Based on texts of Aquinas focusing on similarity, and on the work of Leonardo Polo, this book stands out among recent publications. I do not share all his conclusions: in my opinion, there is too strong a separation between the so-called participation by composition and participation by likeness. As I noted above in the main text, exemplarity is not eliminated by constitutive or causal transcendental participation.

71. Not being able myself to shortly explain his conception in a manner that does it justice, I provide here a short quotation, and suggest again that readers should read the text itself: “... creation is a donation in which God, the pure act of being, gives a pure or total gift; that is, in creation God gives that which gives, i.e. the act of being. The creature, gift of creation, is also a giver, but not, like the creating existence, a giving of giving, but rather a repeater or a giver of gifts. Only God is capable of giving giving, the creature gives gifts which are not, in their turn, able to give. In the creature, giving and that which is given, do not coincide, while in the Creator, they do. The pure identity gives giving, the pure difference gives gifts.” I. FALGUERAS, *Crisis y renovación de la metafísica* cit., p. 84.

influence, on the one hand, of the metaphysical doctrine of Leonardo Polo in these authors, and to underline that, from here on, these works have their own originality in the speculative interpretation of the topics treated.

The critiques of the doctrine of transcendental participation by Rudi te Velde⁷² and of Pergamino,⁷³ who note certain deficiencies in the treatment of that doctrine, either inadequacy or insufficient thought in certain points in respect to the Thomistic texts, do not eliminate in my view the speculative strength nor the nuclear elements of Thomistic participation as understood by the Italian thinker. That in certain occasions Thomas's exposition might be "coarse," or inadequate, does not thereby invalidate the entire doctrine. The important thing is to improve upon it or to continue it. (In fact, Rudi te Velde and Teresa Bergamino, whose works are certainly excellent, follow quite in the wake of Fabro's studies, reiterating to a great extent the position of that great Thomist).

On this subject, although I cannot develop my remarks too extensively, I consider that the best and most up-to-date exposition of the doctrine of participation is that proposed by Wippel, who is also in my opinion the best English-speaking expositor of the whole of the Thomistic metaphysics.⁷⁴ On the one hand, this author shares even-handedly in the contraposition between the doctrines of participation by composition of Fabro and that of participation by assimilation, imitation or formal hierarchy, as expounded by Geiger.⁷⁵ In addition, he opens a perspective which is certainly interesting and relevant on the possible delimiting of

72. See R. A. TE VELDE, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, Leiden, 1995.

73. See F. BERGAMINO, "La necessità assoluta nell'essere creato in Tommaso d'Aquino. Sintesi ragionata di *Contra Gentiles* II, c. 30," in *Acta Philosophica*, 8 (1999), pp. 69-77.

74. Amongst the many works of J. F. WIPPEL it is necessary to cite: *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, Washington, 2000; *Metaphysical Themes in Aquinas*, Washington, 1984; and *Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, Toronto, 1993.

75. See IDEM, "Thomas Aquinas and Participation," in *Studies in Mediaeval Philosophy*, Washington, 1987, pp. 117-158.

the metaphysical doctrine of participation: he adduces texts (frequently applied to other matters or referred to and explained in the interior of a determined systematization) which seem to refer to being as the direct object of participation in each thing: the things have or possess being in a partial manner (that is, they participate in their being). This would be a distinct manner of understanding participation, which it seems to be does not eliminate others, and to which attention should be paid. When St. Thomas affirms that “*quaelibet res participat suum esse creatum*”,⁷⁶ and in other similar texts, he uses the term “participate” with “being” as direct object.⁷⁷

It cannot be forgotten that Thomas Aquinas, for example when explaining the fourth way, the metaphysical manner *par excellence* of ascending to the existence of the Absolute, speaks of grades of being, and not of grades of essence; the —to speak of it thusly— *natura essendi* is excluded by transcendental participation, as I have intended to explain elsewhere.⁷⁸

Returning to take up the previous ideas within this interpretative framework, it is necessary to reiterate that only the Absolute Creator can provide being, create, precisely because He is Being, *simpliciter*, without restriction. It is even necessary to note that, for Thomas Aquinas, “creator” is a name of God in a consequential sense. The Absolute is Being, and because He is Being, if He wishes, He creates. And that which He creates are beings, *supposita* or beings comprised of essence and being; but, as is notorious, creation refers properly to being, and via being it also

76. THOMAS AQUINAS, *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 2.

77. “On still other occasions, when Thomas refers to such entities (or natures) as participating in *esse*, he seems to have in mind immediately the *esse* which is realized within such entities as their particular acts of being (*actus essendi*). While this usage may strike Thomas’s reader as unusual, it may be helpful to recall that frequently in such contexts Thomas uses ‘participate’ (*participare*) as a transitive verb with *esse* as its direct object.” J. F. WIPPEL, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* cit., p. 121; See the entire section (“Participation in *esse*”), pp. 110-124, and the following discussion on participation, composition and limitation (pp. 124-131).

78. See A. L. GONZÁLEZ, *Ser y participación* cit., pp. 105-132, 218 ff.

concerns or reaches essence.⁷⁹ The well-known formulate of *De causis*, which Thomas makes his own, indicates that “the first of the things created is being.” According to the Thomistic doctrine, the essence is created, precisely because being attains to, is attributed to, the essence, and not vice versa.

It seems to me, given these affirmations, that it is not necessary to insist that the ontological primacy of being does not damage, or better yet, does not involve denigration of the essence, which is not limit, negativity, deprivation, or much less negation, in the Spinozan sense, insofar as it involves a determination of being. Nevertheless, I consider it worthwhile to highlight that the positivity of essence, in Thomistic metaphysics, must always be preserved.⁸⁰ The only error, on this point, derives from the mistake, despite all that I have just emphasized, of understanding being simply as the actuality of the essence, without noting that in this way it is conceived in function of the essence and not the other way around, a point which is one of the most important aspects of the Thomistic speculative discovery.

The positivity of essence brings with it, among other things, that the composition of essence and being must also be seen from a positive perspective. This composition does not prejudice the unity of beings; for that reason, the real distinction is not a defect or factor causing multiplicity in beings, but rather the axis on which its unity is based, as has been astutely pointed out by García-Valdecasas.⁸¹ Although I cannot develop this idea further here, the deepening and speculative development of the real distinction of essence and being constituted, in my view, the most adequate and

79. Among the numerous texts which could be listed here, see *In III Sent.*, d. 11, q. 1, a. 2 ad 2: “creatio non respicit naturam vel essentiam, nisi mediante actu essendi; qui est primus terminus actus creationis.”

80. Concerning essence, see F. UGARTE, *Metafísica de la esencia. Un estudio desde Tomás de Aquino*, Pamplona, 2001. See also the introductory study by E. FORMENT in TOMÁS DE AQUINO, *El ente y la esencia*, Pamplona, 2002.

81. See M. GARCÍA-VALDECASAS, *El sujeto en Tomás de Aquino. La perspectiva clásica sobre un problema moderno*, Pamplona, 2003.

congruent treatment that can be brought to the philosophical problem of identity and difference.⁸²

A last clarification: although it might not be necessary, I would like nevertheless to insist that the dependency of the finite upon the infinite does not result in a devaluation of the finite; this latter exists in a positive way, with its own exclusive being. God does not create *ex se* his own being. The being of the created thing is not *difference* from the pure Identity in which the Absolute consists: it is *different*. For that reason there is no place for a supposed *reditio* (of God to God). Finite subjectivity, because it is founded, cannot fulfill any absolute *reditio* (Eckhart, Cusa). The pure Identity does not refer to creation, inasmuch as God is independent of the created thing, He does not move towards the finite thing. It is the other way around: the finite thing *is* because it is created. There cannot be any *deus creatus*, or *deus occasionatus* (Cusa).⁸³ The being of the Absolute is identical with himself; the finite being is non-identical in and of itself, as soon as it is created. Because it has been created, it is affected by or received in an essence. The Thomistic doctrine, tested and later continually deepened and made more profound, of the real distinction of essence and existence, derived from Thomas's original conception of being, provides a metaphysical explanation of the relations between the finite and the infinite.

In the doctrine of Thomas, so far as I understand, if creation is creation of being, and is performed without motion, that which is implanted in reality is dependent being; dependence unequivocally defines creation, according to Aquinas. Given this, as Falgueras has brilliantly and opportunely noted, dependence on the Pure

82. See I. FALGUERAS, *Crisis y renovación de la metafísica* cit., and especially chapter 3, "Consideraciones filosóficas en torno a la distinción real *esse-essentia*," a work which in my opinion constitutes one of the most lucid contributions to the interpretation and extension of Thomism.

83. See A. L. GONZÁLEZ, "La articulación de la trascendencia y de la inmanencia del Absoluto en 'De visione Dei' de Nicolás de Cusa, introduction to the Spanish translation of NICOLÁS DE CUSA, *La visión de Dios*, 4th ed., Pamplona, 2001, pp. 9-58.

Identity which is God “requires enjoying autonomy, since the more the being depends on God, the more free it becomes”.⁸⁴ Falgueras also notes pertinently that the unconditioned simplicity in which the Absolute consists, implies that its creative act is also simple and unconditioned. But to depend on a simple and unconditioned act is not to lack unity, nor autonomy nor power, but rather to have in a guaranteed fashion one’s own unity and power.⁸⁵ Being which has been given, has been given in “free and private property.” The creature is pure dependence, and in respect to the creature God is absolute transcendent.⁸⁶

It should be remembered that Thomas Aquinas defined on one occasion the creation as pure dependence: “Creation is not movement, but rather the very dependence of the created being on the principle by which it is constituted”.⁸⁷ Creation, he also affirms, “is not properly a mutation, but rather a certain relation with respect to the creator in consonance with its dependent being”.⁸⁸ The total dependence which is called creation —says Rassam— is unilateral, and expresses an ascending orientation relative to the Absolute, but does not authorize a descending dialectic, given that the Absolute is transcendent, and is not numbered among relative beings.

On this great metaphysical inquiry depends a correct articulation of immanence and transcendence of the Absolute in regards to that which is created, which is the metaphysical problem *par excellence*. From a Thomist perspective, and with applications to all modern metaphysics, thanks to the metaphysical concept of expression, there have been developed interesting explanations

84. See FALGUERAS, I., *Crisis y renovación de la metafísica*, cit., p. 88. See also his article *Realismo trascendental*, in *Futurizar el presente. Estudios sobre la filosofía de Leonardo Polo*, Málaga 2003.

85. I. FALGUERAS, *Crisis y renovación de la metafísica* cit., note 152.

86. See, among other texts of L. POLO, *La libertad trascendental*, Pamplona, 2005, p. 35.

87. *Summa contra Gentiles*, II, 10.

88. *Compendium Theologiae*, c. 99.

concerning the relations of the finite and the infinite.⁸⁹ As is well known to anyone who has studied metaphysics, Thomas Aquinas provides reasonable arguments for the compatibility of ontological transcendence with the gnoseological immanence of the Absolute, the compatibility of the supreme superabundance of divine being with its presence through essence in everything which is not Him, without mediation, whether dialectic or of any other kind.

And here also interesting comparisons can be made between the vision of creation of Thomas with other metaphysical doctrines of creation, such as the rationalist theory of Leibniz, which constitutes, as is well known, the paradigm of an essentialist vision of creation.⁹⁰ The comparison of one doctrine with the other constitutes a fruitful method of research, which produces patent and unequivocal results, since it underlines aspects which in themselves would be difficult to draw out. This comparative analysis, as has already been mentioned, has been performed among St. Thomas and a large part of the authors prior to and posterior to him, on this topic and on others, resulting in a huge bibliography, impossible to summarize here.

Creation is not the actualization of any *possibilia*. In God, creation is God, and in that which is created, creation is being. In contrast, the rationalism of Leibniz, in saying that all the relevance of metaphysics falls upon the essence, arrives to *possibilia* or to essences without making any reference to their being, and even to assert that God is bound to choose the best among the *possibilia*. In

89. See M. J. SOTO, *Expresión. Esbozo para la historia de una idea*, Cuadernos de Anuario Filosófico, Serie Universitaria, nr. 15, Pamplona, 1994; an essay later broadened and published with the title of *La recomposición del espejo. Análisis histórico-filosófico de la idea de expresión*, Pamplona, 1995. For a comparison between Aquinas and Spinoza on this key point of the relations between finite and infinite, and a pertinent critique of the Spinozian doctrine from a Thomistic point of view, cf. A. L. GONZÁLEZ, *El Absoluto como causa sui en Spinoza*, 3rd ed., Pamplona, 2000.

90. For a comparative viewpoint between Thomas Aquinas and Leibniz with respect to the elements which intervene in the metaphysical explanation of the notion of creation, see my article "Presupuestos metafísicos del Absoluto Creador en Leibniz," in *Las demostraciones de la existencia de Dios según Leibniz*, 2nd ed., Pamplona, 2005, pp. 17-41.

a metaphysics of being, in contrast, this makes no sense, not only because the freedom of God cannot be limited by anything, but also because essence is understood as something unavoidably referred to being, and in addition it is not essence but rather being which is the *proper* term of the divine creative action. That which is created certainly is everything, but creation has as its primary object the *influentiam essendi*, and by means of being, the thing (essence) created. God, in giving being, produces that which receives being, as Thomas Aquinas stated in a splendid expression. But it is necessary to distinguish with all caution—as Gilson elegantly emphasized—between the essential possibility and the existential possibility. The latter is not reachable via the former, but rather vice versa:

“Many metaphysicians seem to imagine that an essence cannot exist until it has received all its determinations, and as soon as it has received them, it must burst out into existence, or at the very least, receive it. So, a double error is responsible for this illusion. The first is not to see that being complete in the order of essence does not bring the essence an inch towards existence. A completely perfect possible continues to still be a pure possibility. The second error is to forget that the essence of a possible being necessarily includes possible existence, by means of which it achieves its essential determination.”⁹¹

Essence or the possible is not the highest metaphysical grade, through which we should understand all the other concepts of reality. In addition, Leibniz emphasized that creation is *ex nihilo*, while still presupposing possibles or essences. It is not clear how both assertions can be made compatible. It seems rather that the philosopher from Hannover falls into the difficulty already rejected by St. Thomas, when he affirmed that it is an error to think that the fact that God *can* create something in some way is equivalent to something *being able to be* created by God, since if things were so,

91. E. GILSON, *El ser y los filósofos*, Pamplona, 1979, pp. 270-271.

there would either exist an eternal potential for the creature, or else God could not create anything.⁹² Against the Leibnizian optimism, it is necessary to note, with Aquinas, that God *can* make better things than that which he actually makes, given that he does not need anything in order to create out of his infinite active potency.

I consider that Thomistic metaphysics, with the perspective I have alluded to here, can continue exploring new paths, continually intensifying and deepening, which reveal themselves to the speculative investigation. I take the risk here of mentioning two large areas which will be promising and beneficial for speculative investigation: the theory of the divine names, which certainly includes the doctrine of divine ideas⁹³ (in theodicy), and the articulation of the modal concepts of possibility, existence, necessity and contingency (in ontology). The great metaphysical problem of modal ontology, of the concept of possibility, contingency and necessity, is its “conjugation,” or if preferred, the articulation and unfolding of each modality based on the first, since it is clear that a hierarchical structuring of modality exists, which later can be extended to problems in theodicy. Generally speaking, Thomistic modal metaphysics is still nearly unknown, although there exist excellent monographs, such as that which was recently published by S. Argüello.⁹⁴

92. See THOMAS AQUINAS, *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 10, ad 2: “Unde non sequitur quod Deum creare posse aliquid idem sit quod aliquid posse creari ab ipso: alias, antequam creatura esset, nihil creare potuisset, nisi creaturae potentia praexisteret.” That which I note in this text is further developed in my study *Presupuestos metafísicos del Absoluto Creador en Leibniz* cit., and in my article, which is also a comparison between Thomist and Leibnizian doctrines, “Lo meramente posible,” in *Anuario Filosófico*, (1994), pp. 345-364.

93. See, among other studies, and besides those cited by Geiger and Wippel, that of V. BOLAND, *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas. Sources and Synthesis*, Leiden, 1996.

94. See S. ARGÜELLO, *La posibilidad y el principio de plenitud en Tomás de Aquino*, Pamplona, 2005. There is in this work a pertinent and updated bibliography concerning modal metaphysics and Thomism. See also, in regards to the logical-metaphysical problem of modality, A. LLANO, *Metafísica y lenguaje*, 2nd ed., Pamplona, 1997.

CONCLUSION

The contemporary crisis of metaphysics, which has lasted two centuries now, ever since Kant, was —as is well known— diagnosed splendidly by Hegel. As E. Alarcón has noted,⁹⁵ “if in two centuries metaphysics has not resolved its crisis, it is obvious that the way of confronting it has been ineffective. With the permission of Lampedusa, something has to change so that everything does not stay the same,” and if a metaphysics is possible which is a genuine science, such change cannot take place in its object, but only in its method.⁹⁶ My proposal is even prior to the consideration of method, and is surely not very speculative. It consists simply of adopting a mood or attitude: that of anchoring ourselves in that optimism of *Fides et ratio*, outlined for us in paragraph nr. 56:

“I must enliven the philosophers, Christians or not, to trust in the capacity of human reason and not to fix goals which are too modest for their philosophy.”

And in paragraph 95 we read:

“The truth never can be limited by time or culture: it is known in history, but it surpasses that very history.”

To trust in the power of reason: let us remember that famous passage of the Thomistic commentary on the Book of Job (certainly very much in the style of the so-called *post-Auschwitz* thought): “*cum Deo disputare cupio*” (“*I desire to argue with God*”). Thomas begins by emphasizing, in his glosses, that such an affirmation seems to be an illegitimate boldness, but he follows by saying that the difference between the interlocutors does not have any effect upon the truth of what they say. If what one says is truth, nobody can prevail over him, whoever may be his opponent in the discussion. This text is included in *The Thomism*, by Gilson; I am

95. E. ALARCÓN, “Sobre el método en Metafísica,” in J. ARANGUREN; ET AL. (eds.), *Fe y razón*, Pamplona, 1999, pp. 267-277.

96. *Ibidem*.

in agreement with his comment that we must “participate in the admiration that Saint Thomas himself experienced when faced with a reasoning whose truth is so absolutely certain that it could be affirmed even before God Himself, because the principles on which it is nourished are the same in the creature and the Creator. One cannot imagine a more surprising expression of confidence in the power of God”.⁹⁷

We are called to trust in truth and in reason, without fainting nor being overcome by fear, because with respect to the truth, there is no such thing as exaggeration in its pursuit.⁹⁸ I consider that the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas can help in this, since it unites the characteristics that are essential for this task: speculative precision and rigor, confidence in reason and courage in the search of truth, with exquisite attention to the immensity of new and uninvestigated problems, which arise continually with any new progress in any of the various areas of philosophy. The great philosophers are always our contemporaries. As Thomas Aquinas has said, “*diversitas temporum significatorum non diversificat veritatem.*”⁹⁹ Metaphysics offers us this metacultural scope of truth.

Ángel Luis González
Departamento de Filosofía
Universidad de Navarra
E - 31080 Pamplona, Spain
email: algonzal@unav.es

97. See E. GILSON, *El tomismo*, 4th Spanish ed., Pamplona, 2002, p. 44.

98. Splendid considerations on truth, along the indicated lines, can be found in L. POLO, “La verdad como inspiración,” in *La persona humana y su crecimiento* cit., pp. 197-206. See also E. ALARCÓN, “El debate sobre la verdad,” in P. PÉREZ-ILZARBE; R. LÁZARO (eds.), *Verdad, bien y belleza*, Cuadernos de Anuario Filosófico, nr. 103, Pamplona 2000, pp. 35-62.

99. *In Sent.*, lib. IV, d. 2, q. 2, a 1.