

Providence College

DigitalCommons@Providence

Theology Graduate Theses

Theology

2022

Active Participation in the Two Direct Points of Contact with God within the Thomistic Metaphysics of Human Nature

Richard. R. Palin Jr.
Providence College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/theology_graduate_theses



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

Palin, Richard. R. Jr., "Active Participation in the Two Direct Points of Contact with God within the Thomistic Metaphysics of Human Nature" (2022). *Theology Graduate Theses*. 22.
https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/theology_graduate_theses/22

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theology at DigitalCommons@Providence. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theology Graduate Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Providence. For more information, please contact dps@providence.edu.

Active Participation in the Two Direct Points of Contact with God
within the Thomistic Metaphysics of Human Nature

A Master's Thesis Paper

Submitted to the Thesis Committee
Of the Providence College
Theology Department
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts in Theology
With a Concentration in Aquinas Studies

By Richard R. Palin, Jr.

Under the Direction of
Thesis Advisor Dr. Raymond Hain
And
Thesis Readers Dr. Paul Gondreau and Dr. Gary Culpepper

Table of Contents

Introduction

Chapters:

I. The Active Intellect: Human Nature and Thomistic Psychology

1.1 Our End is in God

1.2 Human Nature Defined

1.3 Philosophical Psychology and Epistemology

1.4 Active Intellect, Cognition, and a Direct Point of Contact with God

1.5 Locating the Self and Consciousness in St. Thomas' Philosophical Psychology

1.6 The Cognitive Mechanics of the Soul Knowing Itself and Knowing the Self

1.7 The Conscious Self and Active Participation in the Active Intellect

1.8 Summary

II. The Primacy of *Esse* in Human Nature and The Active Exercise of One's *Esse*

2.1 *Esse's* Relation to Human Nature

2.2 The Primacy of *Esse* in Metaphysics as Passive Participation

2.3 *Esse* as a Direct Point of Contact with God

2.4 Active Participation in *Esse* Through Virtual Quantity in Operations

2.5 Intentional Participation in *Esse*: Exercising the One Power of an Emergent
Esse in Operations

2.6 *Esse* as Deeply Personal: Considered Now as Immediate, not Operational

2.7 Summary

Conclusion

Bibliography

Introduction

In St. Thomas Aquinas' corpus he indicates that God has two special points of contact with every human person: one in the intellect and one at the very center of one's being. It is fascinating that every human person, believer or non-believer, has two very specific points of contact with God whether that person believes He exists or not. This is a claim from St. Thomas who does theology "from the top down," from God's perspective. However, the premises he uses to arrive at this conclusion are drawn from principles of natural theology as well as revealed theology. Furthermore, the use of premises and conclusions implies that he is using a philosophical method to arrive at certain theological conclusions. The governing principle is ultimately Scripture (divine revelation), but St. Thomas' method is best described as philosophical theology since he employs philosophical methods and natural theology to better understand what conclusions ought to be drawn from the teachings of revealed theology.

This Thesis paper explores St. Thomas' teaching that there are two specific direct points of contact with God in every human person and considers whether there can be active and conscious participation in these points of contact. I seek to assemble a comprehensive Thomistic understanding of human nature that includes not only a detailed exploration of St. Thomas' definition of human nature, but also includes the relationship between human nature and St. Thomas' metaphysics of being. I include a few key Biblical passages in this study. In particular, I use 1 Cor 13: 12a, "Now we are seeing a dim reflection in a mirror; but then we shall be seeing face to face (Jerusalem Bible)." Seeing God face to face is an overarching governing end for all human persons revealed in Scripture (cf. 1 Jn 3:2 as well as 1 Cor 13:12) and therefore St. Thomas includes this end in his definition of human nature. In short, this paper's topic and method answers the call issued by Reinhard Hütter.

The loss of a theology of beatitude has greatly impoverished contemporary theology. In order to succeed and flourish, theology must recover a sound teleological orientation. In order to recover a sound teleological orientation, theology must recover metaphysics as its privileged instrument. Thomas Aquinas provides a still pertinent model for how theology might achieve these goals in a metaphysically profound theology of beatitude and the beatific vision.¹

So, in the spirit of St. Thomas' method of scholasticism of the both/and method of combining metaphysics and theology, and not the nominalist method of either/or, this Thesis paper will explore the two direct points of contact with God and one's active participation in them by using Scripture and philosophical theology as well as incorporating man's designated end, the Beatific Vision.

The term "active participation" as I use it in this Thesis will need clarification so as to properly adhere to Thomistic metaphysics. My Thesis includes exploring the two direct points of contact, the active intellect and *esse*, one's act of being. Metaphysically, *esse* comes before the active intellect in that you have to have existence before you have an essence or a nature. "The first of created things is *esse*" (*De Causis*, Proposition 4). Experientially, however, the intellect first perceives *ens* (facticity of being) before it perceives *esse* (the act of being). This is following the principle of St. Thomas' epistemology which employs the axiom *ens primum cognitum*. Being, *ens*, is the first object of the human intellect.² So, methodologically, I am beginning the paper the active intellect following St. Thomas' axiom of being, *ens*, as the first object of the intellect. Ultimately "St. Thomas finds thought in being."³ Therefore, we must adhere

¹ Reinhard Hütter, *Bound for Beatitude: A Thomistic Study in Eschatology and Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 2.

² See *De Ente* prooemium; *De Veritate* q. 1, a. 1; ST I-II, q. 94, a. 2; ST I, q. 87, a. 3, ad 1; ST I, q. 5, a. 2; and *In Met* 4, lec. 6, no. 605. Note to the reader: all translations of the original sources of St. Thomas come from the translators cited in the bibliography.

³ Etienne Gilson, *Methodical Realism* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 1990), 73.

procedurally with the human intellect apprehending *ens*, that I exist, before the discussion about perceiving *esse*, one's own act of being. Once this method is perceived, the question of this Thesis is, Can one actively and consciously participate in these direct points of contact with God, first in the active intellect, then in *esse*?

The focus of this Thesis is on the natural points of contact with God and how they serve as ontological components for the experience of the Beatific Vision. Hütter continues to describe doing theology in two different ways. There is sacred theology based on revelation and the infused theological virtue of faith, which has no reliance on metaphysics. Then there is sacred theology as a discursive science in which metaphysics is an instrument of theology. Now the sciences are uniquely related.⁴ It is beyond the scope of this Thesis to explore the workings of grace on the human *esse*. For example, St. Paul writes, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17a, RSV). To which St. Thomas would say that “grace is also said to be created inasmuch as men are created with reference to it, i.e., are given a new being (*novo esse*)...”(ST, I-II, q. 110, a.2, ad 3). Or when St. Paul writes, “It does not matter if a person is circumcised or not; what matters is for him to become an altogether new creation” (Gal 6:15, Jerusalem Bible). To which St. Thomas would say that, “God created natural existence without the mediation of an efficient cause, but not without the mediation of a formal cause... Likewise He bestows graced existence (*esse gratiae*) through an added form” (*De Caritate*, a. 1, ad 13). Rather, this Thesis explores how these two natural points of contact serve as a foundation for a higher, elevated contact or union with God in the Beatific Vision.

⁴ Hütter, *Bound for Beatitude*, 102-103.

In chapter 1 I will explore St. Thomas' definition of human nature, paying particular attention to the active intellect as a direct point of contact with God. I will identify where the self and consciousness are in his system of philosophical psychology. I will then discuss the mechanics of knowing one's self and how directing one's attention to knowing one's self, and any other subject matter, is actively participating in the activity of the active intellect.

In chapter 2 I turn to the very center of one's being, what St. Thomas calls one's *esse*. I will show how St. Thomas includes *esse* in his definition of human nature. I will discuss the primacy of *esse* in St. Thomas' over all teaching and how *esse* also is a direct point of contact with God. I will argue that participating in one's *esse* is deeply personal because each person's *esse* is unique. Although *esse* is one's act of being and is experienced in the active operations of one's nature, it is also experienced as an immediate act itself once the mind is quieted in silence whether in the quiet of prayer with eyes closed or in the quiet of nature while viewing a vast mountainous landscape.

In the conclusion I will show how some scholars argue that the two points of contact are really one. They further show how the primacy of *esse* prevails here too. There is really one point of contact and it is through the *esse* as an intellectual act of existence. The consciousness of perceiving one's *esse*, whether occurring while performing an operation of one's nature or in a quieted mode of silence, is a concurrent act with God Who is revealing the knower to him or herself through the activity of the possible intellect. As discussed in chapter 1, the possible intellect receives intelligible forms as part of the process of intellection. In the Beatific Vision, God's essence becomes

the intelligible form (cf. ST I, q. 12, a. 5) in the possible intellect. Conscious awareness and active participation in God's contact with us is a process and a journey that begins here and now, a seeing of one's self dimly, but when seeing God face to face, "then I will become known as I am fully known" (1 Cor 13:12b, Jerusalem Bible).

Chapter One: The Active Intellect: Human Nature and Thomistic Psychology

This chapter discusses how we can actively and consciously participate in the active intellect, a specific power within our intellect, which is part of our human nature according to Aristotle and St. Thomas. This discussion is placed within the overall understanding of human flourishing that finds its end in the Beatific Vision according to St. Thomas (cf. 1 Jn 3:2). Therefore, we must first briefly discuss who God is as our end and then what human nature is. This is consistent with St. Thomas' own method in the *Summa theologiae* (ST) in which the first treatise is on God (I, qq. 2-43) and shortly thereafter comes the treatise on human nature (I, qq. 75-102). To arrive at the concept of active and conscious participation in the active intellect, I need to first outline how the parts of human nature work, specifically the parts that comprise the human intellect. It is here we encounter the active intellect and how St. Thomas' claim that it is in direct contact with God. In turn, an active and conscious participation requires a conscious act by me. Therefore, we must locate "me", or the self, and consciousness within this philosophical psychology. We then need to discuss how we attain to self-knowledge. After having identified the parts in human nature and in the intellect, the self, consciousness and self-knowledge, we will be in a position to discuss the self's active and conscious participation in the active intellect.

1.1 Our End is in God

In accepting the proposition that our end is in God, or that our end in God is in the form of experiencing the Beatific Vision, it behooves us to know something more about Him. This directive is issued at the beginning of the *Summa theologiae* when St. Thomas writes, "Because man is directed to God as to an end...the end must first be known" (ST I, q. 1, a. 1).

Notwithstanding the difficulties there are in coming to know Who He is, or Who He is not,

questions addressed in ST I, qq. 12-13, St. Thomas still employs positive words to explore the greatness of God in Himself (qq. 3-11): St. Thomas describes Him as simple (not a composite being), the greatest perfection, and the greatest good. He further describes God in terms of His infinity and immutability, His eternity and His unity of being. From these words and descriptions, we begin to see that He is the greatest good and the greatest truth; that God will only contemplate the highest truth (cf. *Summa contra gentiles* (SCG) I, 47-48) and only desire the greatest good, which, in both cases, is Himself (cf. SCG I, 72, 74, and 80); therefore, He knows and loves Himself. St. Thomas ends the treatise on God in Himself by concluding that “there cannot be anything better than God” (q. 25, a. 6, ad 4). By coming to know the amazing qualities of God as St. Thomas enumerates them in his *De Deo Uno*, one can see that God is not only the greatest Being, but also our greatest end. In this way we can accept the proposition that He created us to be with Him as our end.

As the greatest Good, St. Thomas taught that God is our beginning by employing the Pseudo-Dionysian teaching that goodness is self-diffusive (cf. ST I-II, q. 1, a. 4, ad 1). He created us to share in His goodness and in Himself for all eternity. Therefore, He is our designated end. As such, He is our beginning and our end, our happiness, and our beatitude. Now beatitude is “the perfect good of an intellectual nature” ... and “beatitude belongs to God in the highest degree” (ST I, q. 26, a. 1). However, God allows us a share in His beatitude. “Beatitude...is the supreme good absolutely, but...in beatified creatures it is their supreme good, not absolutely, but in that kind of goods which a creature can participate” (ST I, q. 26, a. 3, ad 1). So, our end in God is not some vague notion, but rather articulated as a sharing in the most perfect goodness of God.

Furthermore, although St. Thomas is emphatically clear that our end in God is our good, our perfection, our complete satisfaction, our fulfillment of who we are, that is, of our nature (cf. ST I-II q. 1, aa. 5 and 6; q. 5, aa. 1 and 4, ad 1), this is not something impersonal. To say that God is our fulfillment is also something deeply individual and personal such that the beatific experience can be different for different persons depending on their degree of charity and virtue (cf. ST I, q. 12, a. 6; q. 95, a. 4; and SCG III, 58). So our end is not only in the experience of God as our beatitude, but also in the experience of ourselves within that experience of God. St. Paul writes, “Now we are seeing a dim reflection in a mirror; but then we shall be seeing face to face. The knowledge that I have now is imperfect; but then I shall know as fully as I am known” (1 Cor 13: 12 Jerusalem Bible). And to include ourselves in this process is not being self-centered, egotistical, or narcissistic, but rather to recognize the good of ourselves, for “man’s self, is best in him” (ST I-II, q. 3, a. 5). Our end is in knowing God (cf. Jn 17:3). But in pursuing this End, through Him we come to know ourselves.

We learn that God is our end not only by natural theology, as demonstrated in ST, I-II, qq. 1-5 and in SCG III, 17-19, and 25, but also in revelation as a whole; that our personal completion is accomplished in God. An intriguing example is in James 1:3-4. In this text St. James says that faith produces steadfastness and steadfastness has the effect of making the believer perfect (*teleioi*) and complete (*holokleroi*) (RSV). In verse 4 he writes, “that you may be perfect and complete.” To personalize the thought, St. James wishes that we may be made complete. This is also the prayer of St. Paul. According to some translations it reads, “What we

pray for is your completion (*katartisin*⁵)”(NAV, NKJV)(2 Cor 13:9). St. Paul also writes, “Become complete (*katartizesthe*)” (NAV, NKJV) (2 Cor 13: 11). But this begs the question: what does it mean to be made complete? And what can we do to assist this process of completion? I submit that the answer involves knowing what human nature is.

1.2 Human Nature Defined

To accept the proposition that our end as humans is in God as our completion and fulfillment, we need to know the other corollary, namely, what it means to be human. The topic of human nature is covered in St. Thomas’ treatise on man in ST I, qq. 75-102, with a further elaboration of the sensitive appetite in ST I-II, qq. 22-48. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on certain questions within the treatise on man, namely ST I, qq. 75-88, to get a basic description of human nature.

St. Thomas selectively accepted the received tradition of Aristotle’s conception of human nature as described in Aristotle’s *De Anima* (DA). This is a hylomorphic conception; that is, a body and soul composite in which the soul is the form of the body (DA II, 1), the actuality of the body (412a20-21), the life of the body (DA II, 2; 413a21). Soul, as the principle of life, is in plant, animal and man (DA II, 3; 414b33), which are three distinct types of soul. For our purposes we will be concerned with what Aristotle calls the “thinking soul” (DA III, 4; 429a28) the rational soul. Aristotle’s teaching is that there are basic powers of life in the plant called vegetative powers. These powers are contained in the next level of living beings, the animals. In addition, the animal has locomotive, sensitive, and appetitive powers derived from having a body

⁵ This is neither a far-fetched exegesis nor an attempt at eisegesis according to a reading of the article on *katartisin* in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* by Gerhard Delling, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), Vol. 1, 475-476.

with legs and bodily organs. All of these powers are contained in man with the addition of the intellectual powers. So, man has within him the vegetative, locomotive, sensitive, appetitive, and intellectual powers in his one soul. Man is further described as having two appetitive powers, one sensitive, as shared with animals because we have a body, and one intellectual, in the will. Therefore, man's soul has five powers: vegetative, for procreating and sustaining himself; locomotive, for physical movement; sensitive, which includes five exterior senses to apprehend external stimuli, and four interior senses to collect, order, remember, and process the external stimuli; appetitive, for moving toward the good of his nature and avoiding what is harmful to it; and finally intellectual, which contains the power of reasoning and an intellectual appetite, a will, for choosing and acting upon the sensitive and/or intellectual apprehension of the good or evil. These are the five powers of the human soul that make up human nature according to the Aristotelian, Thomistic tradition. We must now see how these parts work together.

1.3 Philosophical Psychology and Epistemology

Our psychology, or the working of the aforementioned powers of the soul as a comprehensive whole, is such that man's lower powers of the body are ordered towards his higher powers of the intellect. In this ordering of powers, he can properly utilize all of his powers for the highest good of his highest power: the intellect contemplating truth for its own sake (ST I-II, q. 3, a. 5). The lower powers are meant to obey the higher powers so that human action can be accomplished and directed to its proper end, the good of human nature. Since the lower powers in man are ordered to the higher powers, we turn next to the operations of the intellect to understand how the rational soul knows.

St. Thomas discusses the workings of the human intellect in his treatise on man in ST I, qq. 79 and 84-88. Our knowledge always starts with sense knowledge. We gather information with our sensitive powers that work with bodily organs and our five exterior senses of sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch. The sensory information is then processed by our four interior senses: sense imagination, sense memory, common sense, and the cogitative power, also known as the particular reason.⁶ Our cogitative power delivers the sense information to the intellect. In order for the sense information to get into our intellect, which for Aristotle and St. Thomas is a power without a corresponding organ, the material, external world must be made immaterial and internal in our minds.

According to Aristotle, the material world, that is all physical things, are made up of matter, the physical stuff, the material; and substantial form, an immaterial principle of being and unity of the matter, determines the matter's genus and species, in other words, its essence. Human knowledge is accomplished by the act of abstraction, a function of the active intellect, whereby substantial forms of physical things are conveyed to the intellect by means of immaterial images called phantasms. In this way the outside, material object is now inside our mind immaterially. By this process knowledge is gained, a process called adaequation (cf. *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 1), whereby the reality outside the mind accurately corresponds to the reality inside the mind by a kind of equalizing process, an equation, an adaequation. This is a process whereby the physical thing's substantial form outside the mind is conveyed to the mind by means of an image, a phantasm, which contains the information of the object's universal essence,

⁶ Since the cogitative power is also called the passive intellect (cf. SCG II, c. 73 and *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, a. 9), I will not use the term passive intellect as an interchangeable term for the possible intellect.

or intelligible species.⁷ The process of abstraction to accomplish adaequation involves two parts of the intellect: the active intellect and the possible intellect. The active intellect, which is in act, reduces the possible intellect, which is in potency, to act by delivering the intelligible species to the possible intellect. The intelligible species, or essence or quiddity of things, become the form of the possible intellect. Hence, now it is informed. It is from here that the possible intellect can now formulate concepts, words, propositions, meanings, etc. Aristotle called this part of the intellect the possible intellect because it can receive any kind of intelligible form, or information. It is like a clean slate and is in potentiality to any and all intelligible things (DA III, 4: 429b29-430a1).

It is the possible intellect that performs discursive thinking or reasoning. Reasoning has two expressions which are determined by their object: the practical intellect and the speculative intellect. The active intellect empowers the possible intellect to go in either of the following two directions depending on the subject matter: the practical intellect works on objects of operations and particular actions, like building and creating physical things. The speculative intellect works on objects of universal truth, like perceiving generalizations and laws of nature. Furthermore, the lower speculative reason is an application of discursive reasoning giving way to sciences like physics and mathematics. The higher speculative reason is an application of discursive reasoning to objects of knowledge of eternal things giving way to sciences like philosophy and theology. Moreover, the higher speculative reason houses the contemplative intellect, that operation of the speculative intellect that contemplates truth for its own sake and ultimately receives the Beatific

⁷ Cf. Paul J. Glenn, *A Tour of the Summa* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Company, 1963), 70.

Vision (cf. *De virtutibus in communi*, a. 7, ad 4).⁸ This is the state of mind of the blessed whereby “the essence of God Itself becomes the intelligible form of the intellect” (ST I, q. 12, a. 5).

This is why it matters that we understand Aristotelian psychology and epistemology before considering St. Thomas’ account of human nature. St. Thomas can offer a consistent explanation of how the human intellect operates from an infant’s first moment of gathering sensible data, to the adult process of intellection, and to the ultimate end for which the human intellect was created, to experience the Beatific Vision. For St. Thomas “a vision of God is the culmination of our intellectual orientation.”⁹ All these lower processes are to serve and find fulfilment in this final intellectual process (which is reason and will, knowledge and love), the experience of the Beatific Vision. During his time in history, St. Thomas was not simply going with the current fad of adapting Aristotelian philosophy to Catholic theology. He saw in Aristotelian epistemology the very means to explain the most important phase in a human person’s life, his or her completion in the Beatific Vision.

I see an argument in support of the construction of the intellect according to Aristotle in relation to the Beatific Vision in St. Thomas’ Commentary on *De Anima*. “Since the intellect has no organ that could be injured by an excess of its appropriate object, its activity is not, in fact, weakened by a great intelligibility in its object” (88). Clearly, the greatest intelligible object is

⁸ The term speculative intellect can be interchangeable with the term theoretical intellect and even with the term contemplative intellect. But because St. Thomas uses the term speculative intellect in ST I, q. 79, a. 11 in his general discussion of the intellect, and uses the term contemplative intellect in his specific discussion on the Beatific Vision in *De virtutibus in communi* as cited above, I will not use the terms speculative intellect and contemplative intellect interchangeably.

⁹ Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 288.

God's essence "seen" at the Beatific Vision. Moreover, it is by way of Aristotelian psychology that St. Thomas boldly theorized Christ's mind and its inner workings as covered in ST III, qq. 9-12. St. Thomas accepted Aristotle's form of philosophical psychology as an accurate reflection of the inner workings of the human mind and used it as part of his theological project. We must now take a closer look at the active intellect.

1.4 Active Intellect, Cognition, and a Direct Point of Contact with God

I would like to explore further the principle briefly mentioned above and that is how the active intellect is in act and empowers the passive intellect. St. Thomas accepted Aristotle's description of the process of change by the use of the concepts of act and potency (cf. *Metaphysics*, Book 9). Something that changes is in potency to that change. However, what is in potency to change or alteration does not bring the change about by itself, but rather by something that is already in act. Often times it is some exterior force that acts upon something else that is in potency to a change. However, the human intellect contains both elements of act and potency within itself. "In the human intellect there is an active and a passive power" (*In De Trinitate*, q. 1, a. 3). For Aristotle (*DA III*, chapters 4 and 5), the human active intellect, or agent intellect, is always in act (cf. *In DA*, lect. 10, 741). St. Thomas indicated that the active intellect is a part of the human soul and is in act (cf. ST I-II, q. 50, a. 6, ad 2). Or put more precisely, "the active intellect for its own part is always in act" (*SCG II*, 76).

To better understand this principle, Aristotle refers to the active intellect as light (*DA III*, 5, 430a730). It is here where St. Thomas attributes this constant light as having its source from

God. “We must say that in the soul is some power derived from a higher intellect, whereby it is able to light up the phantasms. Wherefore, the human soul derives its intellectual light from Him” (ST I, q. 79, a. 4). He indicated that “the intellective power is some kind of participated likeness of Him and is called an intelligible light, as it were, derived from the first Light” (ST I, q. 12, a. 2). More pointedly, “the light of the agent intellect...is caused immediately by God” (*Disputed Questions on Spiritual Creatures* (QSC), a. 10). Furthermore, “the intellectual light itself which is in us, is nothing else than a participated likeness of the uncreated light” (ST I, q. 84, a. 5). Thus he explains “the light of the active intellect” (ST I, q. 84, a. 6, ad 1) whereby “all knowledge derives from the uncreated light” (*De Potentia*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 18).

What I wish to draw attention to is what it means for us as humans to have a constant light in us by way of the active intellect. We do not have the power to keep the active intellect always in act, so the power must come from an exterior source. “This light of the agent intellect comes to the soul...especially from God as from its first source” (*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 6). However, it is not a power of what to think, but a power to be able to think. The following axiom would apply here. “Although the first cause has the greatest influence on the effect, its influence, nevertheless, is determined and specified by the proximate cause (*De Potentia*, q. 1, a. 4, ad 3). Having an active intellect as a constant light is simply having the power to think. “God is always the cause of the soul’s natural light” (*In De Trinitate*, q. 1, a.1, ad 6). By way of an illustration, the classic example used is the analogy between physical sight, light, and intellectual understanding. Seeing is to the eye as understanding is to the intellect. “We often use the idea of vision either in reference to eyesight or in reference to the mind’s understanding. Thus, we use

expressions, for example, ‘the light of truth illuminates the mind.’ ”¹⁰ This analogy of seeing with the mind’s eye as a way of being enlightened by the truth is a major Biblical theme that puts the verse from the Book of Wisdom about analogy into practice.¹¹ Old Testament examples are, “In Your light we shall see light,” (Ps 36:9) or “Send forth Your light and Your truth, let them guide me,” (Ps 43:3) or “Your words give light” (Ps 119: 130). In the New Testament this theme is continued: “have the eyes of your heart enlightened,” (Ep 1:18) or “Christ shall give you light” (Ep 5:14). But this theme is particularly used in the Johannine texts: “I am the light of the world,” (Jn 8:12) or “God is light” (1 Jn 1: 5). In continuance of this study on ‘light,’ I would like to focus on St. Thomas’ interpretation of John 1:4, “In Him was the life, and the life was the light of men.”

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (Jn 1: 1-4, RSV-CE). In St. Thomas’ *Super Evangelium St. Ioannis Lectura*, lecture 3, he comments on verse 4b, “and the life was the light of men.” He indicated that “for in whatever way the name ‘light’ is used, it implies manifestation, whether that manifesting concerns intelligible or sensible things. Light is discovered first in sensible things, sensible light before intelligible light” (96). In this interpretation he remained consistent with the method of gaining knowledge from the visible

¹⁰ Alberto Strumia. “Analogy.” INTERS – Interdisciplinary Encyclopedia of Religion and Science, Edited by G. Tanzella-Nitti and A. Strumia. Accessed 11/4/2014 at www.inters.org, 4.

¹¹ Wisdom 13:5 “For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator” (RSV-CE). Or, from the Jerusalem Bible, “Since through the grandeur and beauty of the creatures we may, by analogy, contemplate their Author.”

to the invisible, from the material to the immaterial. But an interior, immaterial event also occurs in the process of gaining knowledge, not just a physical one.

For the eyes know external light as an object, but if they are to see it, they must participate in an inner light by which the eyes are adapted and disposed for seeing external light. The light of men (*lux hominum*) can also be taken as a light in which we participate. For we would never be able to look upon the Word and light itself except through a participation in it; and this participation is in man and is the superior part of our soul, i.e., the intellectual light (101).

St. Thomas also addressed John 1:4b in SCG IV, 13:

God by His intelligence is the cause not only of all things that subsist in nature, but also of all intellectual knowledge. It follows, therefore, that the Word of God, Who is the idea of the divine intellect, must be the cause of all intellectual knowledge. Hence it is said: *The life was the light of men* (John 1:4), because like a light the Word, Who is life, and in Whom all things are life, reveals truth to men.

The assertion here is that even in the natural method of adaequation, the Word is the light of men, making known even created truth. Put simply, to think is to have God's power in us. "God is constantly at work in the mind, endowing it with its natural light and giving it direction."¹² So the mind, as it goes about its work, does not lack the activity of the first cause" (*In De Trinitate*, q. 1, a. 1, ad 6). In other words, "whenever we come to know or understand anything whatsoever, God is at work in us. In every single act of thinking, God is present."¹³ Therefore, the active

¹² The phrase "giving it direction" may give the impression of telling the mind what to think. However, in ad 8 this phrase is to be interpreted as directing the mind to the truth. It reads, "Because God causes the natural light within us by conserving it, and directs it in order that it might see, it is clear that the perception of truth should principally be ascribed to Him."

¹³ Peter Kreeft, *Practical Theology: Spiritual Direction from Saint Thomas Aquinas* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2014), 143.

intellect by its constant light is a direct connection to God, from Whom it gains its constancy.

The active intellect is a metaphysically participated light, and a direct point of contact with God.

This direct point of contact in the active intellect is not a conscious one.¹⁴ There is the general contact of our existence, which is always in act and will be taken up in chapter 2 regarding *esse*. Although there are many points of contact that God has with us, not all of them are always in act. One type is mentioned in the doctrine of divine concurrence under the third aspect of this doctrine, in human action. Divine concurrence is God's action in creation, conservation in being, and in human action, which is a simultaneity of divine action in human action. In Acts 17:28 St. Paul captured these types of concurrence by quoting Epimenides of Cnossos' phrase obtained from his poem *Cretica*, "In Him we live, and move, and have our being."

Another point of contact can be the conscience. Some may say that it is God Who is speaking directly to us in our conscience. This is more properly identified in Thomistic anthropology as *synderesis*. But according to *De Veritate*, q. 16, a. 1, sc 5 and ST I, q. 79, a. 12, *synderesis* is a natural habit, and it is situated in the practical reason (cf. *De Veritate*, q. 16, a. 1). And since there are no habits in the active intellect (cf. *De Veritate*, q. 16, a. 1, ad 13) because "the active intellect is active only, and in no way passive" (ST I-II, q. 50, a. 5, ad 2), *synderesis* is in the possible intellect (again, specifically situated in the practical reason). Another type is the contact with God in His bestowal of grace, especially considering the indwelling (John 14: 23). However, according to ST I-II, q. 110, a. 2, ad 2, grace is a supernaturally added accidental form.

¹⁴ The active intellect is not grasped consciously because, as will be discussed below, consciousness is an act of the possible intellect.

Therefore, it is the active intellect which is always in act due to its direct contact with God. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the part of the human person that is always in act, not habits or accidental forms or occasional concurrent points of contact.

Of all the enumerated parts of human nature and of the intellect thus far discussed, there is only one that is always in act, the active intellect. For St. Thomas, it is God who keeps this part of the human person always in act as the light of reason and is a power always there for the human person to use. But now that we have discussed some of the workings of the intellect, let us now explore the second component of 1 Co 13:12's knowledge at the Beatific Vision, which is to approach knowing one's self as it is fully known by God. We must locate the self in St. Thomas' systematic anthropology.

1.5 Locating the Self and Consciousness in St. Thomas' Philosophical Psychology

Amazingly enough it is precisely in the psychic location¹⁵ of the intellect, the contemplative intellect, where the recognition of self is, and the very location where the Beatific

¹⁵ Psychic location is a phrase I am using from Bonnie Kent's book *Virtues of the Will* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), p. 199, who put the term location in parentheses. Raymond Hain has mentioned to me in conversation that the reason why Kent put the term location in parentheses is to avoid any semblance of spatial location with respect to the soul. I have found it helpful in understanding all of the components and terms used to describe human nature by drawing out a descriptive diagram of a human figure. A diagram can be used to better understand the virtues because the virtues perfect the powers of the soul (cf. ST I-II, qq. 55-56). Similarly, to better understand the virtues Peter Kreeft recommends that, "it is a useful exercise to make a little map" (*Practical Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014, p. 112)). On page 200 of her book, Kent indicates where to place the virtues when she writes, "Aquinas taught that justice lies in the will; temperance and courage lie rather in the sense appetite. Part of the scholastic debate turned on Aristotle's remarks on the location of the virtues." This language is echoed by Leslie Brown in her Introduction to Aristotle's *The Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xiii, where she writes, "the virtues of character – whose locus is the appetites." Kent also refers to the functions of the powers as the "psychological division of labor" on pages 223-224, which is helpful to plot out on the diagram which power does what. I also use a diagram to plot out all of the complexities of the intellect itself, especially the possible intellect. Specifically as it relates to the Beatific Vision as discussed earlier, Reinhard Hutter writes in *Bound for Beatitude* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of

Vision takes place in the human person. The location of self becomes most evident in St. Thomas' article on happiness in ST I-II, q. 3, a. 5 and in his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE) Books IX and X. In the article on happiness, St. Thomas takes another cue from Aristotle. Happiness is man's highest operation, an operation of the speculative intellect, which is man's highest power because it can contemplate the highest object, divine things. Then St. Thomas says "*that* seems to be each man's self" (ST I-II, q. 3, a. 5). The "that" is the speculative intellect in general, but the contemplative intellect in particular because of the act of contemplating. In the article, St. Thomas refers the reader to NE Books IX and X. In his commentary on these Books, namely, Lecture IX of Book IX, St. Thomas indicates that man ought "to love the most dominant element in himself, the intellect" (1869) and "a man truly loves himself who loves his intellect" (1870). In Lecture X of Book X, St. Thomas indicates that the highest form of intellectual activity is contemplative activity. "Perfect happiness consists in the activity of contemplative virtue" (2086); "the highest of human activities is contemplation of truth" (2087). So, when combining St. Thomas comments from ST I-II, q. 3, a.5 on the identification of the speculative intellect and one's self, and his commentaries on the NE, there is

America Press, 2019), p. 65 that "the essential actualization of beatitude occurs in the theoretical intellect." Even the general question about the active intellect and its whereabouts is addressed by Robert Pasnau in *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 311 on his commentary on ST I, q. 79, a. 4 which addressed the question, "Where is the agent intellect located?"

Some examples of location from St. Thomas himself would be: "the sensitive appetite wherein concupiscence resides" (ST I-II, q. 9, a. 2 sc), or "the reason, in which resides the will" (ST I-II, q. 9, a. 2, ad 3). From SCG II, c. 73, St. Thomas writes, "...the powers in which the phantasms reside – namely, those of the imagination, memory, and cogitation." "The habit of science is not in the passive intellect, but rather in the possible intellect." "There is formed in the imagination a phantasm." Furthermore he writes, "The will exists in the reason" (*Disputed Questions on the Soul* (QDA), q. 13, ad 12). "Esse is in the form" (QDA q. 14). In QDA, q. 10, St. Thomas reiterates the teaching that "the whole soul is in every part of the body," but also indicates that "a soul is in a particular part of its body according to that power only which is directed towards the operations which the soul carries out through that part of its body." Which is to say, the locomotive power is located in the legs, or the nutritive power is located in the stomach, etc. So, although indicating spatial locations of the soul's powers is not completely accurate because of its immateriality, indicating a psychic location is helpful in placing a certain function within a certain power.

an explicit identification and connection made between the highest power in the intellect and the self. As Aristotle puts it, “For, though this (the intellect) is a small part of us, it far surpasses all else in power and value; it may seem, even, to be the true self of each.”¹⁶ Thus we have located the self.

The *Nichomachean Ethics*’ discussion of being a lover of self, due to one’s speculative intellect, and the discussion that happiness, which consists in the operation of the speculative intellect by way of contemplation, are concepts of self and the contemplative intellect joined together. Moreover, what seems to be joined in these powers is the objective sense of self in speculative intellect whose object is universal being and truth. But there is also the subjective sense of self in the contemplative intellect that carries a singular, personal, reflective experience of being and truth.¹⁷ Synthetically and personally, it is because of the contemplative power that the speculative intellect is most properly what each of us is and whereby each of us comes to know one’s self.

Now, due to the hylomorphic theory of human nature in general, and to the intellect’s grasping of singulars in particular, like the self, we have to address St. Thomas’ teaching that the intellect grasps only universals. So how can the intellect, an immaterial power concerned with only universals, come to know a self, a particular and singular reality? Once answered, we can then turn to the more modern question of the consciousness of self, which comes from the workings of both the internal senses and the contemplative intellect.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* X, 7, trans. C.J. Litzinger, O.P. (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1993), 627.

¹⁷ This observation of the objective perception from the speculative intellect and the subjective perception from the contemplative intellect was made by Jere Stone during a private presentation of St. Thomas’ description of the parts of the intellect in diagram form.

The most compelling difference that elevates the human being from an animal is that the human soul's highest power is the intellect, a power that does not have a corresponding organ. Animal-sense power can grasp the particular, material realities around it through the external and internal senses. These are powers we share with animals. But the human intellect is designed to know the universal, immaterial realities such as universal truth and universal moral principles (cf. ST I-II, q. 76, aa. 1 and 2). Now the purpose of knowing universals is ultimately so that the human being can know God. "Their inclination [intellect and will] to universal truth and goodness creates an opening upon the infinite."¹⁸ The intellective power is to grasp universal being (cf. ST I, q. 78, a. 1). More pointedly, "the possible intellect's...final stage of actualization...will be to understand the highest intelligible reality, and this is the divine essence (QDA, q. 16, ad 3). Therefore, as a composite being we have two forms of apprehension, sensitive apprehension through the external and internal senses and intellectual apprehension through the intellect. "Man knows through two powers, that is, sense and intellect" (QDA, q. 20, ad 17). "Sense [or sensible knowledge] has singular and individual things for its object and intellect [or intellectual knowledge] has the universal for its object" (ST I, q. 85, a. 3). In the composite, the two sources of apprehension have to work together.

But within the intellect itself, there are other powers at play. There is "the light of the agent intellect, whereby knowledge is caused in us when we descend through the application of universal principles to some special points..." (QSC, a. 9, ad 7). It is here where "our intellect knows directly the universal only, but...by a kind of reflection, it can know the singular" (ST I, q. 86, a. 1.). So, the purpose of being able to know universal truth, which is ultimately to be able to know God, Who is immaterial, must be coupled together with the purpose of this chapter: to

¹⁸ Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 393.

know one's self, which is a singular. This is achieved by another power, the power of reflection performed in the possible intellect and the cogitative power. The power of reflection is enacted by the will choosing what to reflect upon. "To apply the attention [of the mind] to something or not to apply it is in the power of the will" (*De Malo*, q. 3, a. 10). It is a voluntary act of the will directing this power. Now, "acts are concerned with things singular" (ST, I-II, q. 6 prologue). Commenting on St. Thomas' *De Malo*, q. 6, Pinckaers writes, "The essential note of voluntary action consisted in this: the intellect's apprehension of the good was universal in character, engendering in the will an inclination to the good in all its universality, while the action itself was singular and individual."¹⁹

The possible intellect is the intellectual power at play in grasping singulars based on the following quotes from two of St. Thomas' opuscula. "The possible intellect...is determined by the knowledge of a specific object..." (QDA, q. 5). "The action of the possible intellect is the act of considering" (QSC, a. 10). "When a soul is joined to its body, it knows the singular by means of its intellect, not indeed directly, but by a kind of reflection" (QDA, q. 20, sc ad 1). "We are made knowing and understanding through the possible intellect" (QSC, a. 9). But as an immaterial power, "the possible intellect [can] reflect upon itself" (QSC, a. 9, ad 6). St. Thomas also holds that "the intellect can carry out this reflective activity only by making use of the cogitative power" (QDA, q. 20, sc ad 1). Therefore, these powers of the human being, interior sense and intellect, and in the intellect itself, the two powers of active intellect and possible intellect, are all working in concert to perform one act of understanding. So, in this way, all the powers are working in concert such that it is "the composite itself, that is man, that understands" (QSC, a. 2, ad 2). Or in modern terms, the person understands.

¹⁹ Ibid., 393.

The modern concern for the consciousness of self, applied in terms of Thomistic psychology, emerges from both the internal senses and the contemplative intellect. Two internal senses play pivotal roles in consciousness, the common sense and the cogitative power. As discussed earlier, the external world is first apprehended by the external senses and processed by the internal senses. In particular, the multiple pieces of data collected from external stimuli gather into the common sense to be coordinated and ordered into a comprehensive whole, a *gestalt*. In man, this gathering of data includes the reflective knowledge that the data is actually being collected, and therefore a distinction is made between the collector of the data and the data itself. There is a sense that I am collecting this data from my perspective, a phenomenology of perception, as it were. In this way, the common sense is not reflecting on itself, but rather on the acts of the senses. “Common sense is the sense by which man senses that he senses.”²⁰ This is the subjective meaning of the gathering of sense data. “The sense powers of man are instruments of a rational soul and are, by that very fact, elevated above the limited operational dimensions of pure sensitivity.”²¹ This is the beginning of a sense cognition leading to a sense consciousness²² contributing to a sense of self. “Our external senses are rooted in common sense and thus participate in its life of consciousness.”²³ For the human being, this is a consciousness that has

²⁰ Michael Stock, O.P., “Sense Consciousness According to St. Thomas,” *The Thomist* Volume 21, Number 4 (October, 1958): 419.

²¹ Robert Edward Brennan, O.P., *Thomistic Psychology* (Tacoma, WA: Cluny Media, 2016), 107.

²² Of the three scholars I looked into to address this element of consciousness from the internal senses, I have chosen the term sense consciousness from Michael Stock, O.P.’s article, “Sense Consciousness According to St. Thomas,” 1958, over the term sensible consciousness from Deborah Black’s article, “Consciousness and Self-Knowledge in Aquinas’s Critique of Averroes’s Psychology,” 1993, and over the term sensitive consciousness from Juan Jose Sanguinetti’s article “The Ontological Account of Self-Consciousness in Aristotle and Aquinas,” 2013.

²³ Brennan, *Thomistic Psychology*, 107. See also Glenn, *A Tour of the Summa*, 64 where he refers to the common sense as consciousness.

some similarities to an animal experiencing awareness, but in man, a sense consciousness combines with intellectual consciousness. Now it must be said that:

Aquinas does not have a theory of consciousness. But neither does he make the false assumption that there is some one place where consciousness happens. The soul's different capacities play different roles, and what we take to be unified functions, such as consciousness, are actually distributed over several capacities, working in tandem. The common sense is not the magic place where consciousness happens, because consciousness happens all over the mind.²⁴

And to this point of the soul's several capacities, the cogitative power also plays a role in the consciousness of self, but in a peculiar and distinctive way because of its link to the intellect. Once the common sense organizes the sense data, the cogitative power discursively determines the information to be good or bad for the organism (called the estimative power in animals). Because of this discursive activity about particular sensible data performed by the cogitative power, it has a peculiar similarity to what the universal reason does. Therefore, St. Thomas also gives the cogitative power the name "particular reason" (ST I, q. 78, a. 4). "The role of the cogitative, or particular reason, is of critical importance in understanding human knowledge and human consciousness, both because it is the peak of sense activity and because it forms the nexus between the orders of sense and intellect."²⁵ For the human organism, "the special discursive activity of particular reason terminates in what Aquinas calls an *experimetum* [sic]—the highest type of sensitive experience possible to man."²⁶ Although we share the same sense powers with animals, due to our rational nature, these same powers are more excellent in man in that they do not remain on the level of pure sensitivity as noted above. "The estimative power in man is

²⁴ Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 198.

²⁵ Stock, "Sense Consciousness," 434.

²⁶ Brennan, *Thomistic Psychology*, 104.

linked up immediately with his intellect and takes on something of a rational nature and so Aquinas calls it cogitative power or particular reason.”²⁷ St. Thomas himself indicates that “the passive intellect, that is the cogitative power...somehow participates in reason...” (QSC, a. 9). The cogitative power’s function contributes to the concept of the experience of being a separate entity, a sense of self. “The *experimentum* may be said to have its origin in a kind of discourse, exercised by particular reason working under the guidance and control of [the] intellect.”²⁸ This sense of self as a separate, individual entity derived from the activity of the interior senses, but through the specific activity of particular reason, is significant because of particular reason’s link to the possible intellect, where ideas are generated. For Brennan, “since an idea is a second self, inasmuch as it is a self in thought, it should possess the same oneness that characterizes the self which, for the moment, it is identical.”²⁹ The self exists in the composite whole, but can be cognized by reflecting on one’s self as in an intelligible mode of being in the contemplative intellect, which has its beginning and continuity in the cogitative power.

The combination of the elements of consciousness that come from the internal senses and the reflexivity of the possible intellect constitute human consciousness and the self. Sanguineti argues that animals have sensitive consciousness, but that this form of consciousness cannot be really called self-consciousness.³⁰ The issue here is distinguishing the experience of sense consciousness as a sentient being versus as a rational being whose self reaches to the level of being called a person. In this way we have “the personal experience of consciousness”³¹ or more

²⁷ Ibid., 103.

²⁸ Ibid., 113.

²⁹ Ibid., 133.

³⁰ Juan Jose Sanguineti, “The Ontological Account of Self-Consciousness in Aristotle and Aquinas,” *The Review of Metaphysics* Volume 67, Number 2 (December, 2013): 315, footnote 12.

³¹ Deborah L. Black, “Consciousness and Self-Knowledge in Aquinas’s Critique of Averroes’s Psychology,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Volume 31, Number 3 (July, 1993): 363.

specifically “the personal experience of intellectual self-awareness”³² where “self-identity [is] exhibited in self-consciousness.”³³ It is the human being that experiences the two sources of consciousness to form one experience of himself. Ultimately, “consciousness reaches its perfection when the knower is revealed to himself.”³⁴ Consciousness is a constitutive element of the human person needed for and perfected in the experience of the Beatific Vision.

Therefore, in the hylomorphic conceptualization of human nature, there are two dimensions of one’s self that are experienced as one. There is a development of the sensitive self from the activity of the common sense and of particular reason. However, through particular reason’s link to the possible intellect, there is the experience of the self in the contemplative intellect to form one comprehensive experience of one’s self that joins the material and immaterial aspects of one’s self.

In the Aristotelian, Thomistic tradition, not only is human nature precisely articulated, labeled, and defined, but also the workings of the human intellect by way of philosophical psychology. The intellect is also precisely articulated, labeled, and defined to make clear how the intellect works within human nature and the presence of a psychic location of the self within this system, which ultimately culminates in the contemplative intellect. I am focusing on the location and the term contemplative intellect because the term speculative or theoretical intellect does not contain a personal connotation. For example, in St. Thomas’ commentary on Boethius’ *De Trinitate*, question 5, he discusses the “speculative sciences,” the natural sciences, like physics, mathematics; and the divine science or theology. In article 1 he writes, “The theoretical or

³² Ibid., 379.

³³ Sanguineti, “Ontological Account,” 335.

³⁴ Stock, “Sense Consciousness,” 417.

speculative intellect is properly distinguished from the operative or practical intellect by the fact that the speculative intellect has for its end the truth that it contemplates...” But when the self becomes the object of contemplation, it becomes “personal knowledge, not theory.”³⁵ So let us turn now to the mechanics of how the soul not only knows itself as a soul, but as a self. This is important because this knowledge of self helps us see how the self can consciously participate in the part of its intellect that is in constant contact with God.

1.6 The Cognitive Mechanics of the Soul Knowing Itself and Knowing the Self

To engage in the study of the human intellect is not just to explore what it can know outside of itself, but to explore how it can know itself. Therefore, we must also explore what it means for the rational soul to know itself. How does the soul know itself? This is an important question because we want to know if we can actively participate in something that is a central part of our rational soul, the active intellect. So, we have to turn in on it to know what it is and ask whether one can have personal awareness and conscious contact with the active intellect. How the intellect knows itself is directly addressed in ST I, q. 87; *De Veritate* q. 10, a. 8; *De Veritate* q. 2, a. 2, ad 2; and in SCG IV, 11.

In question 87 of the *Prima pars*, St. Thomas establishes one of the characteristics of being hyloformic. Due to its reliance on sense knowledge and discursive reasoning, the human intellect cannot know itself through itself, or, in other words, by its own essence,³⁶ as St.

³⁵ Kreeft, *Practical Theology*, 69.

³⁶ This is unlike separated substances (and God, see ST I, q. 14, a. 2) who are made up of pure intellect. The teaching is that a being of pure intellect can know itself by its own essence because its immateriality is automatically self-reflexive. This topic is taken up in St. Thomas’ *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, Propositions 13 and 15.

Thomas puts it. Rather it comes to know itself in the reverse order of perceiving its acts on exterior objects, then its powers, then its essence. In this way it knows itself by its own presence. As it understands an exterior object, it comes to also understand itself.

In *De Veritate* q. 10, a. 8 he indicates two kinds of the knowledge of self, habitual knowledge (*habitualem cognitionem*) and actual knowledge (*actualem cognitionem*). In habitual knowledge there is a knowledge of one's existence; and, as it were, a relationship with one's self. "One knows in its singularity what goes on in his soul. It is according to this knowledge that the soul is said to be habitually known through its essence" (Ibid., ad 2). In ST I, q. 87, a. 1 he describes this knowledge as "the mere presence of the mind; it perceives itself; to know itself by its own presence." Because of our being composed, there has to be a twofold manner of knowledge of ourselves. "Our mind cannot so understand itself that it immediately apprehends itself. Rather, it comes to a knowledge of itself through the apprehension of other things" (*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 8). This is St. Thomas accepting Aristotle's teaching when Aristotle says that the intellect "is itself intelligible like other intelligible objects" (DA III, 4; 430a2). As composite beings made of body and soul, our knowledge is gained by the use of our external senses, which are oriented to the outside world. Therefore, knowledge of the inside world is not immediately accessible to us.

Human knowing is through the senses. "We know the nature of the soul through species which we abstract from the senses" (*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 8). Here is a topic where St. Thomas is using St. Augustine as his authority; however, without a direct rebuttal, gently corrects him by making a distinction. "Thus it is clear that our mind knows itself in some way through its essence, as Augustine says [*De Trinitate* IX, 9], and in some way through an intention or

species” (Ibid., a. 8). In the *Book of Causes* Proposition 13, the author makes it very clear that only separated substances, both God and angels, can know themselves through their essence because they have no matter. St. Thomas accepts this proposition. “Thus in this way the higher separate intellects, inasmuch as they are close to the first cause, understand themselves both through their essence and through participation in a higher nature” (*In De Causis*, Prop. 13, 82). In ST I, q. 87, a. 1 St. Thomas indicates that God knows Himself by His own Essence because He is Pure Act. The angels know themselves by their essence because their intelligence is act. But “the human intellect is only a potentiality in the genus of intelligible beings.” Therefore, “the soul is said to be habitually known through its essence” (*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 8, ad 2).

St. Thomas’ distinction from St. Augustine is that this “some-way-through-its-essence” concept is that “in its essence the human mind is potentially understanding. Hence it has in itself the power to understand, but not to be understood;...it understands itself according as it is made actual by the species abstracted from sensible things” (ST I, q. 87, a. 1). St. Thomas taught that ultimately we need to pursue actual knowledge of our selves “according to which the soul perceives its existence only by perceiving its act and object” (*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 8, ad 5). We can know ourselves by ourselves, but we come to know ourselves better and more completely by another object. Therefore, in the strictest sense, “the intellect knows itself not by its essence, but by its act” (ST I q. 87, a. 1). To further elaborate, he added that, “an angel apprehends his own essence through itself; not so the human mind” (Ibid., ad 2). St. Thomas sees some truth in St. Augustine’s wording that *in some way* the mind knows itself through its essence, but with the distinction of habitual knowledge. In the strict sense of knowing oneself through one’s essence, this is an actual knowledge only attainable by higher intelligences.

Now it is totally valid, legitimate, and essential that “the mind knows itself through itself, since from itself the mind has the power to enter upon the act by which it actually knows itself” (*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 8, ad 1 in contra). This form of self-knowledge has an enormous purpose and place. However, “the mind can perceive what its nature is only from the consideration of its object” (Ibid.) “Although our soul is most like itself, it cannot be the principle of knowing itself” (Ibid., ad 6 in contra). “The soul is present to itself as intelligible, in the sense that it can be understood, but not in the sense that it is understood through itself, but from its object” (Ibid., ad 4 in contra). So, for the human mind, it has to work backwards to know itself: object, act, essence.

St. Thomas went into greater detail about actual self-knowledge in *De Veritate* q. 2, a. 2, ad 2 where he outlined a three-step process of how the soul knows itself. Firstly, there is *actus ab ipsa exiens*, a going out of the soul and a stop at the object. Secondly, there is *reflectitur super actum*, when one reflects upon this act of intentional focus. Thirdly, there is *reflectitur supra essentiam*, when one reflects upon one’s own essence after accomplishing the first two steps. In these three steps it is “in the *reditio* (the return) in which the human mind comes to know itself.”³⁷ These three steps of the mind looking out of itself, stopping at another object, and then reflecting on the other object and on itself, is when the human person comes to know himself by actual knowledge. Notice that in these three steps there are the two circles. There is (1) the “intellect...present to itself through this return, it knows its act as distinct from its object.”³⁸ But also in this reflexive act there is (2) “the specific mode of man’s complete return. For Thomas,

³⁷ Philipp W. Rosemann, *Omne Agens Agit Sibi Simile*, A “Repetition” of Scholastic Metaphysics (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1996), 255.

³⁸ Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, Wm. Dych, S.J., trans. (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 227.

human knowledge means a complete return, but essentially in such a way that this coming-to-onself is a coming-from-another.”³⁹ For Aristotle, this element of a return upon oneself is a kind of reflexivity where self-identity is a relation.⁴⁰ He described it as “when we say that a thing is the same as itself; for we treat it as two.”⁴¹ St. Thomas uses this same quote in defending the term relation as real, and not only as conceptual, as an idea. But as an idea, he writes, “as when we say a thing ‘the same as itself.’ For reason apprehending one thing twice regards it as two; thus it apprehends a certain habitude of the thing to itself” (*ST I*, q. 13, a. 7). Self-identity by way of reflexivity and as relation to self is best exemplified by self-talk, which is taken up further below. In self-talk, it is as if you are talking to yourself as another self, but really there is only one self involved.

Pseudo-Dionysius wrote similarly when he taught that “the soul has a circular movement by an introversion...which gives it a kind of fixed revolution, and...draws it together first to itself” (*Divine Names*, IV, 9). So, there has to be two circles, as in the imagery of Ezekiel’s vision of the wheels of the chariot of Yahweh. “As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction: their appearance was like the gleaming of a chrysolite; and the four had the same likeness, their construction being as it were *a wheel within a wheel*” (Ezekiel 1:16, RSV-CE).

Therefore, the take-away from these two thoughts in *De Veritate* contained in q. 10 and q. 2 is that “the soul is apprehended as subsisting in itself. As such it is present to itself...but only as a sentient knower, it is present to itself only over against another, only thus does it accomplish a return to itself in the proper sense...it comes to itself from sensibility.”⁴² As a composed being

³⁹ Ibid., 229.

⁴⁰ Cf. Rosemann, *Omne Agens Agit Sibi Simile*, 50.

⁴¹ *Metaphysics V*, 9, 1018a9.

⁴² Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, 235.

of matter and intellectual form, a chief characteristic of the human person is not only that it can intellectually return to itself, but it also needs an added dimension in the necessity of mediation by another for a complete return. It is only after going through this process as outlined above that the human person perceives of their individuality as a separate existent. But can the process get more personal than this? We shall look to SCG IV, 11 for the answer.

St. Thomas' theory of human self-knowledge is the topic of Therese Scarpelli Cory's book *Aquinas on Human Self-Knowledge* in which she focuses predominantly on *De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 8 and ST I, q. 87, a. 1, and explores the theme of self-opacity in SCG III, 46.⁴³ She explores quidditative self-knowledge, meaning a knowledge that the soul exists and a knowledge of its essence. She also explores self-awareness, a more personal exploration of the human person as an "I". By analyzing only these two articles, she is following a scholarship that focuses on answering the question of self-knowledge by the human cognitive process of sense information, phantasms, and the hylomorphic dilemma of the body/soul composite which limits self-reflexivity.

I was surprised that Cory did not explore the other way of self-knowledge in St. Thomas' corpus, a self-knowledge by way of words and concepts. In SCG IV, 11 St. Thomas focuses on the intelligible objects of the interior word and idea or concept. He uses the inner working of the human intellect to understand itself as the basis for the Father begetting the Son as the Word. For the human examples here are some isolated passages:

Our intellect, in understanding itself, remains within itself.

⁴³ Admittedly as a Master's-degree student I am not qualified to comment on a professor's book. Cory cites a lot of scholarship that focuses on self-knowledge limited to the two primary sources in St. Thomas' corpus, *De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 8 and ST I, q. 87, a. 1.

In the man who understands himself, the inwardly conceived word...is a man understood.

The intellect by understanding conceives and forms...[an] idea which is the interior word.

What I found lacking in Cory's book was the omission of the role of higher intellectual functions in acquiring self-knowledge. As an intellectual soul, "from sense-findings the soul arises, by use of its power and faculty of mind...to supra-sensible knowledge – to ideas, judgments, discursive thought."⁴⁴ In other words, "from sense-findings the intellect gains concepts."⁴⁵ Or as Pasnau so eloquently writes:

Aquinas seems to believe that thought is both pictorial and linguistic. On one hand, he believes that the intellect cannot actually understand anything without turning to phantasms. On the other hand, the intellect forms a mental word whenever it understands.

When viewed in full, Aquinas' theory of cognition no longer appears to have various discrete modules, working in isolation. Instead, the whole works together. 'A human being's natural manner of cognition is to cognize simultaneously through its mental power, intellect, and its bodily power, sense' (In 2 Cor 12.1). As befits a genuinely unified substance, the soul's various capacities and the body's various organs collaborate in seamless fashion.⁴⁶

Cory indicated that since we do not understand ourselves by our essence due to our composite nature, there is also the component of using discursive reasoning to arrive at self-knowledge and overcome self-opacity. "It (the four-stage schema of quidditative self-knowledge: object, act of understanding, the power of the intellect, its essence) reveals what is missing from self-awareness and left to reason to discover."⁴⁷ This is consistent with St. Thomas when he writes,

⁴⁴ Glenn, *A Tour of the Summa*, p. 62.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴⁶ Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 292. Interestingly enough, this book is in Cory's bibliography on page 230.

⁴⁷ Therese Scarpelli Cory, *Aquinas on Self-Knowledge* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 179.

“There are also certain intelligible matters which our intellect does not know naturally, but comes to know by reasoning. The concepts of these things are not in our intellect naturally, and it has to make an effort to seek them” (SCG IV, 11).

However, I contend that self-awareness, which always has a self-opacity to overcome due to our composite nature, is not necessarily overcome by using phantasms as Cory insists. “Actual self-awareness depends on the intellect’s actualization by a species abstracted from sense. Once the intellect is in operation, the obstacle to self-awareness is removed, and self-consideration is now entirely in my power, so that I cognize myself ‘by myself’.”⁴⁸ Indeed, she rightly indicates that “the complete return is achieved by reasoning discursively”,⁴⁹ or reflectively. But she does not mention the explicit process of the step by step discursive-reasoning process to produce understanding via concepts and unuttered, unspoken, interior words as the intelligible form to actual self-knowledge. I believe that what is omitted is what St. Thomas refers to as a “mental discussion, as Dionysius says (*Div. Nom. VII*)” (ST I, q. 79, a. 8). She expresses well that the difficulty in understanding the soul and ourselves is “the immateriality of the soul [which] is inaccessible to direct perception.”⁵⁰ Indeed, the possible intellect needs a form, an intelligible species or an intelligible object, whether that be an idea, a concept, or interior words (all of which are covered in SCG IV, 11) or a series of words, in order to be actualized and for understanding to occur. And, as Cory well knows, there is more that goes on in the possible intellect than the processing of phantasms and intelligible species. In the possible intellect there is a double composition of activity, forming propositions and comparing principles with

⁴⁸ Cory, *Aquinas on Self-Knowledge*, 127.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

conclusions (cf. *De Veritate*, q. 15, a.1, sc 6). But Cory seems to focus only on mere self-awareness. “There can be a properly explicit self-awareness in which I become the object of my own cognitive acts. When I think about myself, I am the object of my own cognition in the sense of being the terminus of attention.”⁵¹ However, Cory does leave the door open to insert my thought about using more intelligible objects than phantasms when she writes, “Aquinas does not mean to say that we can only cognize things that can be sensed.”⁵² See, for example, *De ente et essentia* 77 regarding the idea of a being that does not really exist, as in a phoenix.

What I am suggesting is that there are more ways to know one’s self in St. Thomas’ thought than by only using phantasms as put forth by Cory. St. Thomas allows for all sorts of intelligible objects in the production of personal self-knowledge, not just quidditative self-knowledge. When one closes one’s eyes, one is making a deep interior turn of attention and now relying on one’s own imagination and self-talk to arrive at a deeper sense of self. First there is the “word of the heart,” which is “the word conceived by the intellect...then there is the interior word” (*De Veritate*, q. 4, a.1). It is by this way that “one can manifest something to oneself by means of the word of the heart” (*Ibid.*, ad 5). This is further explored in *De Potentia*. “When our intellect understands itself there is in it a word proceeding” (q. 2, a. 1). “When the intellect understands itself it forms a concept of itself. Now this concept of the intellect is called an interior word” (q. 9, a. 5). And “in a discursive intellect, word proceeds from word” (q. 9, a. 9, ad 1), thereby producing self-talk. In this kind of self-talk one can experience not only the facticity of one’s existence, but of the “me” experiencing myself as an object or form in the possible intellect; or more specifically, in the contemplative intellect. An example would be when a

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 218.

tragedy occurs in one's life and you are working through your emotions and thinking things through. During this process you are talking to yourself and upon reflection learning about yourself. Another example would be the elation experienced in earning a Master's Degree after all the discipline that goes into composing a Thesis paper. The discipline and sacrifice of time for love of the topic requires a lot of self-talk to make the decisions necessary to complete the paper. This would be a growth in self; a growth and strengthening of one's personality and character.

The use of the power of the active intellect empowering the possible intellect in producing various forms of self-talk is to be aware of and to explore a personal self, not simply an impersonal awareness of being an individual existent. One's self becomes the object of thought; one's self becomes the intelligible form. "When the mind understands itself, the mind is not itself the form of the mind, because nothing is its own form. But it does follow the manner of form: the action by which it knows itself terminates at itself" (*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 8, ad 16).

This thought is explored even further again in *De Potentia*:

Now when the intellect understands itself this same word or concept is its progeny and likeness. And this happens because the effect is like its cause in respect to its form, and the form of the intellect is understood. Wherefore, the word that originates from the intellect is the likeness of the thing understood, whether this be the intellect itself or something else" (q. 8, a. 1).

This process of self-knowledge is like the process of any other kind of knowledge in that phantasms, with which the process starts and is maintained, makes possible higher forms of cognition. "For Aquinas the level of phantasms captures only part of our full cognitive process. Conceptual, intellectual thought is not itself conducted in images, but does constantly make use

of images.”⁵³ Or, in direct reference to the powers, “First the agent intellect forms some crudely confused ideas about the general features of our sensory environment. Then the possible intellect takes those confused ideas and works with them, through the process of discursive reasoning, until concepts emerge...”⁵⁴ So, although Cory’s emphasis on phantasms is understandable, she does not develop their presence in higher cognition. “All ideas are, in last analysis, acquired by abstraction from phantasms. Even ideas acquired from other ideas have to be traced back to the action of senses to start with.”⁵⁵ However, “the human intellect rises from sense-findings to concepts.”⁵⁶

I agree with Cory in certain particulars. I am in search of the personal self within the framework of Thomistic psychology and epistemology that can consciously and actively participate in the active intellect. It is a quest for “the intelligible entity [that] I call myself.”⁵⁷ It is here that we are trying to stretch St. Thomas’ thought to adapt to a modern concern, because “Aquinas is not looking for a psychological self, but it is there.”⁵⁸ It is where “the thinking intellect itself...becomes the object of its own attention”⁵⁹ whereby “my attention terminates intra-mentally in myself.”⁶⁰ Here Cory does focus on words and concepts to grasp an “explicit self-awareness...; that I first generate the interior word or concept ‘I’. This experience is the springboard for further inquiry...”⁶¹ “An explicit self-awareness in which I become the

⁵³ Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas On Human Nature*, 294.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 328.

⁵⁵ Glenn, *Tour of the Summa*, 71.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁵⁷ Cory, *Aquinas on Self-Knowledge*, 85.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 172.

object”⁶²; “I am the terminus of attention.”⁶³ It is in this process of explicit self-awareness that the human person sees the emergence of the psychological self. Overall I think Cory limits her work to a few restricted passage from St. Thomas’ work which truncates the topic. At the end of her book she does broach avenues of self-knowledge outside of the selected texts, but does not expound or interrelate or cite supporting texts like SCG IV, 11.

At his point I would like to explore a further implication derived from the process of human intellection that Cory discusses; namely, the process of how the knower becomes known only when the knower is thinking about something extra-mental. I would like to explore this process in relation to the experience of the Beatific Vision. Again, it begins with St. Thomas’ acceptance of Aristotle’s teaching that the intellect “is itself intelligible like other intelligible objects” (DA III, 4; 430a2). The human intellect is both act, in the active intellect, and potency, in the possible intellect. Since the intellect is not completely actual, it cannot have a complete return to itself; to know itself by itself, by its own essence. There needs to be an extra-mental form in the possible intellect to actualize the possible intellect thereby allowing the object and the intellect to become intelligible. This is known as “dependent self-knowledge,”⁶⁴ or as “the dependence of all actual self-knowledge on cognition of extra-mental objects.”⁶⁵ Cory makes another reference to “DV 10.8, where he refers to acts of ‘considering oneself’ as dependent on the intellect’s actualization in cognizing an extra-mental object.”⁶⁶ This is also “what we call the ‘duality of conscious thought’: namely, intellectual acts are ‘bipolar,’ co-manifesting both the

⁶² Ibid., 203.

⁶³ Ibid., 204.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 38.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 133.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 163, footnote 81.

thinker and the extra-mental object of thought in relation to each other.”⁶⁷ I would argue that this is the basic operation at work in the experience of the Beatific Vision that supports the process outlined in 1 Co 13:12: “but then we shall be seeing face to face. The knowledge that I have now is imperfect; but then I shall know as fully as I am known [by God]” (Jerusalem Bible, cf. fn d.). Reinhard Hütter puts it this way:

Humans have at their disposal two kinds of *operatio*. The first kind, transitive action (*actio transiens*) aims at a *telos* exterior to the human agent. The second kind, intransitive action (*actio immanens*) is the kind of activity that is its own [the human agent’s] immanent *telos*. In its highest form, this kind of activity is realized in the knowledge of truth, in the knowledge of an object that is not merely practical or instrumental, but intrinsically meaningful. The ultimate end of the intransitive action [of the human agent], its perfection, is the unitive knowledge of God, the beatific vision.⁶⁸

We will be “seeing” God as an extra-mental reality whereby “the essence of God itself becomes the intelligible form of the [possible] intellect” (ST I, q. 12, a. 5), but in the process, we will be coming to know ourselves based on this divinely designed, natural process of the duality of conscious thought, an intransitive or immanent act finding its fulfillment in the experience of the Beatific Vision.⁶⁹

1.7 The Conscious Self and Active Participation in the Active Intellect

⁶⁷ Ibid., 135.

⁶⁸ Reinhard Hütter, *Bound for Beatitude: A Thomistic Study in Eschatology and Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 13-14.

⁶⁹ I think it must be said that the distinction between transitive and immanent acts is not an original thought from St. Thomas. In my view, it is misleading not to cite Aristotle and thereby seeming to give the credit to St. Thomas. Hütter should have indicated the source of the idea. In fact, when St. Thomas discusses the two-fold properties of action, he made sure he gave credit where the credit was due: to Aristotle. See ST I, q. 18, a. 3, ad 1 where he cites MET IX, 16.

By way of an overview, we have covered human nature; the intellect, specifically the active intellect, which is in direct contact with God, and the contemplative intellect, which has the major, not the only, location of self and consciousness; and the mechanics of knowing the self. Now we are prepared to discuss the active and conscious participation in the active intellect. But one more step must be taken. I need to clarify my use of the technical term “participation”.

During the Leonine Thomistic revival of the 20th century, it was well documented that one of St. Thomas’ major contributions was to provide an answer to the ancient question about the One and the Many by his ingenious synthesis of the Aristotelian concept of act and potency, the Platonic and Neoplatonic concept of participation, and his own definition of *esse*.⁷⁰ In that discussion, when the terms *participatio* and *virtus essendi* are referred to, it is generally in reference to the metaphysics of ontological structures, namely, the hierarchy of being. The idea is that all creatures are participating in being as given them by the Creator and that their power of being is derived from within the hierarchy of being, be that existent a stone, a plant, an animal, a human being, or an angel. Being, therefore, is participated being. “For to participate is nothing else than to receive partially from another” (*In De Caelo et Mundo*, c. 12, lect. 18, n.8). “To participate is to receive as it were a part; and therefore when anything receives in a particular manner that which belongs to another in a universal manner, it is said to participate it” (*In Boeth. De Hebdom.*, lect 2). The concept of the hierarchy of being permeates his *Commentary on the Book of Causes*. Examples of some modern commentaries on this topic are John F. Wippel’s *The*

⁷⁰ See Cornelio Fabro “The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy, The Notion of Participation,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (March, 1974): 449-491; Fran O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), Chapter 6; and W. Norris Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), Chapter 4 The Limitation of Act by Potency in St. Thomas: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism? To name but a few works.

Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas, From Finite Being to Uncreated Being. This exhaustive work on St. Thomas' thought on being is about the structure of being or about "being as being."⁷¹ This is also true for Fran O'Rourke's *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas*. In particular, in chapter 6 on virtual quantity (pp. 155-187), the majority of the discussion is on the virtual quantity of being in general. The power of participated being within the hierarchy of being is a major theme in Thomistic metaphysics.

However, I am using the term "participation" in the sense of an agent's movement towards its own perfection. In the terms of the causality of action, there is a formal cause, "every agent acts through its form" (ST I, q. 42, a. 1, ad 1). But there is also the efficient cause, the agent's actual operation. "The role of an efficient cause actualizes the potentiality" (SCG II, 78). I am making a distinction between metaphysical, passive participation and efficient, active participation. For example, in *The Disputed Questions on Virtue*, the *De Virtutibus in Communi*, a. 11 St. Thomas writes:

Now, to change from having an incomplete to having a complete form is just for the subject to be brought further into actuality, since form is actuality. Therefore, for the subject to *participate in the form more* is just for it to be brought further into the actuality of that form. And just as an agent brings something from pure potentiality into the actuality of form, so likewise it is *an agent's action* that brings it from incomplete actuality into complete actuality.

⁷¹ John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 11.

Another example of efficient or active participation in one's own perfection is to use the concept of moving from *actus primus* (form) to *actus secundus* (operation) as taken from the first three introductory chapters of SCG III:

C. 1 Each thing attains its end by its own action.

C. 2 Those which act by intelligence act for an end, since they act with an intellectual preconception of what they attain by their action, and act through such a preconception.

C. 3 All action and movement is for some perfection. For if the action itself be the end, it is clearly a second perfection of the agent.

Further along in Book III, in chapter 147, St. Thomas is discussing how human persons “attain to a higher participation of the end...by their operation.” The key sentence in chapter 147 of course is, “man cannot attain to his last end by his own operation...unless *his operation* be enabled by the divine power to bring him to it.” It is still the person's own operation, but with a divine, concurrent operation. “God operates in the operations of nature” (*De Potentia*, q. 3, a.7).

Here are other primary sources I rely on to support my use of the term active or dynamic or efficient participation:

Now the perfection of a form may be considered in two ways: first, in respect of the form itself: secondly, in respect of ***the participation of the form by its subject***. ...But in so far as we consider ***the perfection of a form in respect of the participation thereof by the subject***, it is said to be "more" or "less"(ST I-II, q. 52, a. 1).

For we said that increase and decrease in forms which are capable of intensity and remissness, happen in one way not on the part of the very form considered in itself, [but] through ***the diverse participation thereof by the subject***. Wherefore such increase of habits and other forms, is not

caused by an addition of form to form; but **by the subject participating more or less perfectly, one and the same form**. And...so, **by an intense action of the agent**, something is made more hot, as it were **participating the form more perfectly**, not as though something were added to the form (ST I-II, q. 52, a.2).

The comparative greatness of virtues can be understood in two ways. First, as referring to their specific nature: and in this way there is no doubt that in a man one virtue is greater than another, for example, charity, than faith and hope. Secondly, it may be taken as referring to **the degree of participation by the subject**, according as a virtue becomes intense or remiss in its subject (ST I-II, q. 66, a. 2).

Active, dynamic participation is distinct from passive, metaphysical participation in that I am not referring to the hierarchy of being, but rather to the human person's action in pursuing one's own completion and perfection.

Applied to theology, this principle of active participation is most evident in the doctrine of salvation where St. Thomas accepts St. Augustine's teaching that God created us without us, but He will not save us without us (St. Augustine's *Sermo* 169, 11, 13). This is evidenced not only in St. Thomas' theology of grace in that he includes operating and *cooperating* grace (ST I-II, q. 111, a. 2), and the effect of grace in justification and *merit* (ST I-II, qq. 113 and 114), but also in his theology of satisfaction in which satisfactory acts by the penitent are necessary.⁷² But even "in the work of justification, man does something" (*De Potentia*, q. 3, a. 4, ad 8). This is consistent with St. Peter who, while teaching that the acceptance of divine power enables us to become partakers of the divine nature, also exhorts us *to make every effort* to supplement faith with virtue, etc. (2 Peter 1: 4-7). In this chapter, I extend the meaning of active participation as a

⁷² See SCG III, 158, 160, and 162; ST III, qq. 85, 89, and 90; and Supple., qq. 12-15.

conscious and active engagement in cooperating with the power from one's own active intellect in a concurrent manner.

This active sense is consistent throughout St. Thomas' corpus in that God requires an agent's active participation through its operations as in his axiom "the purpose of everything is its operation (ST I, q. 105, a. 5). Being reduced from potency to act requires the operation of the agent. Actualization is the activity whereby one engages the power available to it by its operation. Nothing in potency can be reduced to act unless there is something already in act. In the human person, the active intellect is always in act. Conscious active participation in the active intellect is a conscious active participation in divine concurrence whereby the habitual knowledge of divine concurrence is made actual knowledge by turning one's attention to this concurrence by the action of the contemplative intellect. Conscious active participation is to know actually and cooperate consciously with the Power behind the power of the intellect.

I submit that philosophical psychology (Aristotelian psychology) is successfully able to articulate and label the parts of the intellect. Once the parts are labeled and their functions known, one can come to know not only the intellect in abstraction or in general, but one's own intellect and its operations. "Once one's own possible intellect is activated, one is witnessing and perceiving the activity of one's own agent intellect"⁷³. And my point is that when one is doing this, one is actually perceiving the existence of one's agent intellect by one's contemplative intellect, that reflective and reflexive power.

⁷³ Cory, *Aquinas on Self-Knowledge*, 146.

Furthermore, by actively furthering one's thought-process in discursive reasoning, one is actually cooperating with this direct point of contact with God in the intellect. "For, in every act by which man understands, the action of the agent intellect and that of the possible intellect concur" (*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 8, ad sc 11). This is right in line with the general doctrine of concurrence. We do not perceive God's action in conservation and concurrence in our human action, but He is certainly there providing the power to our existence and action (cf. *De Potentia*, q. 3, a. 7; and SCG III, 64-70 and 77). I submit that the same is true for the active intellect.

We do not have direct conscious access to the active intellect, but only indirectly once the possible intellect is activated. The active intellect is always in act, a feat we as humans cannot accomplish. But it is always there as a power source. And again, like in the specific doctrine of the concurrence of human action, the agent intellect is an energy source as a cause, which does not determine the effect. "Aquinas insists that the divine light itself plays no role other than the uncreated source in which the human agent intellect participates".⁷⁴ But through discursive reasoning and reflective processes, we can 'see', with the mind's eye, with a non-visual conscious awareness, that when we are thinking, God is providing the power to think. God is active in our thinking. "From Him proceeds all intellectual power" (ST I, q. 105, a. 3). And as we further the thought process, say by deductive reasoning, we are then actively cooperating and actively participating with the active intellect.

Although we do not have direct conscious access to the "perpetual shining of the agent intellect..., in every intelligible, the light of the agent intellect is seen" (In I Sent. d. 3, q. 4, a. 5). And as in the divine concurrence of human action, in our act of thinking, we can 'see' the

⁷⁴ Ibid., 146, footnote 33.

invisible active intellect at work and actively participate in its light by our consciousness and conscious awareness. Moreover, we cooperate with this divine power source by proceeding in the step by step process of discursive reasoning, all the while knowing where the power source of our active intellect comes from. By this practice we are not only actively following the operations of the parts of the intellect, but actively participating in being self-aware by our contemplative intellect.

Active participation is a matter of engaging what already is in act in order to act or operate. Since humans are endowed with free will, the will is part of this actualization for the operations to engage. In terms of the general operations of the intellect as an apprehensive power, “the will is moved by the intellect” (ST I-II, q. 9, a. 3, ad 3), or “the movement of the will follows the movement of the intellect” (ST I-II, q. 10, a.1 sc). But more specifically St. Thomas indicates that “man’s proper operation is intelligence, the first principle of which is the active intellect which produces intelligible species to which the possible intellect is passive in a sense, and this being made actual moves the will” (SCG II, 76). But we can also enact the active intellect. “The active intellect for its own part is always active, but that the phantasms are not always made actually intelligible, but only when they are disposed to it. Now, they are disposed to it by the act of the cogitative power, the use of which is in our power” (SCG II, 76). This is what I am calling active participation with the active intellect. “The active intellect makes the species to be actually intelligible not so that it itself may understand by them, since it is not in potency, but so that the possible intellect may understand by them. Therefore, it does not make them otherwise than required by the possible intellect so that it may understand” (SCG II, 76). Just as the will can engage the person to pursue a good action once apprehended by the practical intellect, so can the will engage the person to pursue a good of something apprehended by the

speculative intellect. “The will is moved...by the universal good apprehended by the reason” (ST I-II, q. 10, a. 3, ad 3). Active participation with the active intellect is not a static, metaphysical participation, as in the hierarchy of being, but rather a dynamic participation by the possible intellect brought into act by its intentionality, empowered by the active intellect, and then focused by the will to engage in operations to a specific end.

1.8 Summary

In summary, I am using Thomistic psychology to name and situate the parts of human nature and of the human intellect to draw attention to the active intellect that is always in act as a participated light in the divine light and how the human person can use the reflective and reflexive power of the contemplative intellect to not only be aware of the power of the active intellect, but also to actively and consciously participate in its power. As a composite creature, to know is to use our physical eyes which are always looking away from us. All our knowledge begins with the senses, sensing things outside ourselves. To have self-knowledge there must be knowledge of what the rational soul is. In the process of acquiring any knowledge, there is always a return to ourselves in a way that is conscious and involves active participation in being self-aware and involves being in touch with one’s self. “Only in reference to an inside can there be an outside.”⁷⁵ Self-awareness is accomplished by way of engaging the power of the active intellect by focusing one’s attention with one’s contemplative intellect on the reality of one’s self. This engagement of power is a kind of active participation like a surfer riding the power of a wave. The surfer is working with the energy of the wave to accomplish his activity.

⁷⁵ Josef Pieper, *Living the Truth: The Truth of All Things* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1989), 82.

We too work with the energy of the active intellect to accomplish our intellectual activity in the contemplative intellect, which is a concurrent⁷⁶ active participation in that power. The contemplative intellect that contemplates God is the very same psychic location for knowing one's self. Because it occurs in the very same psychic location, beatified knowledge is a knowledge of God and self (cf. 1 Co 13:12) This beatified process starts now by our active participation in the light of the active intellect and then in the light of glory (cf. ST I, q. 12, a. 6).

⁷⁶ I am using the term and concept of “concurrency” as the operative and controlling term, based on St. Thomas’s use of the term in *De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 8, ad sc 11, to describe the kind of active participation in the active intellect. This is in contrast to the term “exercise” used to describe the kind of active participation in *esse*, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: The Primacy of *Esse* in Human Nature and The Active Exercise of One's *Esse*

A prominent contribution that St. Thomas made in the field of philosophical theology was to expand on the doctrine of the real distinction between essence and existence. Real distinction is the distinction between essence or nature, what an entity is, and existence, that an entity is. However, St. Thomas made a further distinction between being as *ens*, the facticity of being, that an entity is, and being as *esse*, the power of existence or the act of being. Of special note for this Thesis, St. Thomas includes this distinction in his description of human nature.

The real distinction in created beings is not an original Thomistic thought. St. Thomas is adapting this doctrine from its appearances in Plotinus' (204-270 AD) *Enneads*, Proclus' (412-485 AD) *Elements of Theology*, in Boethius' (480-524 AD) *De Hebdomadibus*, and finally from circa 9th century AD in the *Book of Causes*, especially at Proposition 9. But it was St. Thomas who wove the real distinction throughout his work. In describing the structure of the human person, St. Thomas includes the concept of existence-by-participation (*participet esse*, ST I, q. 75, a. 5, ad 4) and that the rational soul subsists in *esse* (ST I, q. 76, a. 1, ad 5). It is within these opening articles in St. Thomas' treatise on human nature that he makes his unique contribution to ontology: that being, *esse*, is an act, an act of being (*actus essendi*). "Now the first among all acts is existence (*esse*)" (ST I, q. 76, a. 6). He continues this discussion in the *Tertia pars*. "Being (*esse*)...belongs to the person by reason of the nature. For being (*esse*) belongs to the very constitution of the person" (ST III, q. 19, a. 1, ad 4). By insisting on the real distinction between essence and existence, St. Thomas added to Aristotle's couplets of form and matter, act and potency, and substance and accidents, that makes up the essence of an existent.

It behooves us to understand the importance of this distinction because in our modern times Popes St. Paul VI in *Lumen Ecclesiae* (15) and St. John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio* (97) both encourage us to study St. Thomas' philosophy of being.

In this chapter I will discuss St. Thomas' emphasis on the primacy of being as *esse*, the act of being, as it is situated in human nature, how it is a received *esse*, describe how it is a direct point of contact with God, and again, return to the discussion of active participation, but this time with respect to one's own *esse* as a deeply personal power. Therefore, I will begin by discussing *esse* in relation to human nature.

2.1 *Esse's* Relation to Human Nature

I have found it rare for an author to include *esse* in the discussion of human nature.⁷⁷ However, I do understand why. To begin with, in *De Ente et Essentia*, particularly paragraphs 77-81, St. Thomas makes it very clear that in created beings, a distinction must be made between essence, or nature or form or quiddity, and existence, or *esse*. For there is only one being whose existence is its essence, which St. Thomas calls First Being or First Cause or God (80). Now essence and existence belong to each other; in fact, one cannot be without the other. In paragraph 80 St. Thomas indicated that "whatever belongs to a thing is either caused by the principles of its nature...or some extrinsic principle." He argues that its existence cannot be from the principles of its own nature for it "would bring itself into existence, which is impossible." Therefore, its "existence, of which is other than its nature, must have its existence,

⁷⁷ Notable exceptions are Joseph Torchia, O.P. *Exploring Personhood: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Human Nature*; W. Norris Clarke, S.J., *Person and Being*; Horst Seidl, "The Concept of Person in St. Thomas Aquinas"; and Robert A. Connor, "Relation, The Thomistic *Esse*, and American Culture: Toward a Metaphysic of Sanctity." Cf. Thomas Petri, O.P., *Aquinas and the Theology of the Body*, p. 214 where he quotes Fr. Torchia's inclusion of *esse*, but does not expound on this himself.

from some other thing.” He reasons that if each existent has its existence from another, there would be an infinite regress of the causality of existence. So, there has to be a Being whose existence is its essence, and all other beings receive their existence from that Being.

For St. Thomas, when discussing being, there is an order of causality. “It follows that *esse* is intelligible only in the light of the affirmation of *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*, that upon which all being depends. Just as nature is nothing apart from *esse*, *esse* is nothing apart from *Esse Divinum*.”⁷⁸ To promote the metaphysics and the theology of the real distinction is to recognize that “existence is a nature,”⁷⁹ but that “only God can be understood as identical with His nature.”⁸⁰ Existence is either “a nature or part of a nature in the thing.”⁸¹ Furthermore, in paragraph 81 of *De Ente*, St. Thomas makes it clear that whatever receives something from another is in potency to what is received; therefore, “what is received into it is its act.” Hence, existence, or *esse*, is the creature’s act of being received directly from God, Who is Being Itself (cf. Exodus 3:14).

However, in making this distinction in the *De Ente*, St. Thomas also indicates that “every essence or quiddity [or nature] can be understood without anything being understood about its existence (*esse*)” (77). Put in another way, “existence (*esse*) is not included perfectly in the essential nature of any creature, for the act of existence of every creature is something other than its quiddity. Hence, it cannot be said of any creature that its existence (*eam esse*) is immediately evident even in itself” (*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 12). And this is true with the study of

⁷⁸ Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, “The *Triplex Via* and the Transcendence of *Esse*,” *The New Scholasticism*, 44, (1970), 230.

⁷⁹ Joseph Owens, “Stages and Distinction in *De Ente*: A Rejoinder,” *The Thomist* 45 (1981):117.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

man. So, one can focus on delineating the components of human nature as enumerated in the powers of the soul, and yet never mention man's *esse*, the human *esse*.

Joseph Owens explains the real distinction by describing *esse* as both accidental and essential to a nature.⁸² He distinguishes between efficient causality as the cause of being and formal causality as the cause of nature or essence.⁸³ "If the nature has to be produced through efficient causality, that formal determination will not be actual itself, but only through the work of an agent other than itself. Its actuality will be other than itself, and so will lie outside its essence or nature. Its act of being will from this point of view be accidental to it."⁸⁴ But "the form is of its very nature a potency to being. Its direction is essentially towards being."⁸⁵ Form (as nature), in receiving being, determines what nature the existent is. In other words, form determines being. "As essentially the determinative principle of being, it exercises this formal causality upon an act that is added to it and is other than it."⁸⁶ Owens concludes by writing:

Being in creatures is neither just accidental nor just essential. It is both. It has to be viewed from both standpoints, if the doctrine of St. Thomas is to be understood. Created essence is of its own very nature an order to being, and so far as it itself is concerned being is essential to it. But 'as far as it itself is concerned' is not enough. In order to be, it also has to be produced efficiently by something other than itself, and from that viewpoint its being is accidental to it. Neither of these viewpoints can be dispensed with, and neither can be reduced to the other. They stand as ultimate, irreducible ways in which finite being is caused.⁸⁷

⁸² Joseph Owens, "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being in the Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas," in *Etienne Gilson Anniversary Studies* Volume XX, (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto, Canada, 1958), 1-40.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 19-22.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 39-40. Cornelio Fabro explained the real distinction differently. My principle source for the following is from Jason A. Mitchell, L.C.'s dissertation "Being and Participation" (PhD diss., Pontificii Athenaei Regina Apostolorum, 2012), p. 471, footnote 95. Fabro wrote that, "in the predicamental order, St. Thomas can bring *forma* and *esse* together up to the point of an immediate correspondence and, therefore, up to the point of affirming the intrinsic derivation of *esse* from the form; in the transcendental order, on the other hand, the situation is reversed: in

While acknowledging the accidental character of *esse*, that its cause is outside itself, which is the efficient cause of one's human nature, I wish to highlight the essential character of *esse*, that nature is in potency to being, within the description of human nature.

To include *esse* in the definition of human nature is to present the unity of the human being. This unity comes from a hierarchical order of parts that are distinct, but harmonize into a whole composite. This is unlike the divine nature, whose essence is its existence, a simple being, not a composite being (cf. ST I, q. 3, a. 7). This composite unity can be termed substantial unity.

In providing commentary on St. Thomas' use of Dionysius' axiom that love is a unitive force (*Divine Names* IV) in the discussion of self-love, Anthony Flood characterized the phrase "a man is one with himself" (ST II-II, q. 25, a.4) as man having a "substantial unity."⁸⁸ I find that St. Thomas also expresses this thought as substantial identity such that "a man is identical with himself" (*De Potentia*, q. 7, a. 11, ad 3). "In terms of Aquinas' metaphysics, we find this notion [of unity] expressed in terms of the idea of oneness (*unum*) as constituting a transcendental property of being itself. Aquinas defines 'one' as 'undivided being' (ST I, q. 11, a. 1)."⁸⁹ However, further on in Flood's discussion of substantial unity⁹⁰ he includes *De Veritate*, q. 23, a.7, "Every being has the act of existing..."⁹¹ Victor Salas, Jr. is much more

the creature, *forma* and *esse* are as potency and act that are really distinct; form exists in virtue of its participation of *esse* which it receives in itself." *Participation and Causality*, p. 349. Mitchell expounds: "The synthetic approach to Thomistic metaphysics reveals that there is...a twofold order of act and, therefore, two participations: 1) *predicamental* (emphasis his) participation which concerns the structure of essence with respect to form; 2) *transcendental* participation which concerns the constitution of *ens* with respect to *esse*" (p. 534).

⁸⁸ Anthony Flood, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Love: Aquinas on Participation, Unity, and Union* (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 12.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 12

⁹⁰ Flood, *The Metaphysical Foundations*, 23.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 22. *Tantum enim unumquodque habit est esse...*

explicit as he comments on III Sent., d. 6, q. 2, a.2 which reads, “It is impossible that something should have two substantial beings (*duo esse substantialia*), since unity is founded upon being (*ens*).”⁹² Salas explains that “a *suppositum* is a complete whole, which is to say a single substance subsisting through itself. Now, that in virtue of which a *suppositum* is a substance, Aquinas maintains, is its *esse*, specifically that *esse* which brings about its *substantial unity* (emphasis his) (to which he [St. Thomas] refers to as a substantial *esse*...).”⁹³

In conclusion, St. Thomas indicates that, “if we speak of substantial existence (*esse substantiae*), then existence is not described as an accident as though it were in the genus of accident (for it is the act of an essence)” (*De Potentia*, q. 5, a. 4, ad 3). Therefore, since the human person’s “metaphysical anthropology”⁹⁴ includes a substantial unity as part of his composite make-up, to consider human beings most fully, we must consider the act of being that is present in every individual human being alongside that person’s human nature strictly speaking. We might even use the phrase “the substantial unity of human nature.”⁹⁵ Now let’s first explore the accidental character of one’s *esse*, that its cause is not from itself, its location in human nature, and how each human *esse* is unique. We will then discuss *esse* as a direct point of contact with God.

⁹² Victor Salas, Jr., “Thomas Aquinas on Christ’s *Esse*: A Metaphysics of the Incarnation,” *The Thomist* 70, no. 4 (2006), 585.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 585

⁹⁴ Mitchell, “Being and Participation,” 633.

⁹⁵ Servais Pinckaers, *Christian Ethics*, 438. Pinckaers is not making the argument that *esse* is to be included in the definition of human nature as I am. He is drawing attention to St. Thomas’ teaching of the human person possessing one soul, not three. So I am admiring and expanding on his phrase so that one “sees” *esse* in the term substance or substantial, which really refers to nature per Aristotle’s *Categories*. I am arguing that one perceives or “sees” *esse* right into the definition or concept of substantial unity while maintaining the real distinction.

2.2 The Primacy of *Esse* In Thomistic Metaphysics as Passive Participation

St. Thomas joined the effort of the neo-Platonists to reconcile the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. The task was to smooth out “the radical opposition between Platonic participation and Aristotelian causality.”⁹⁶ For the most part the neo-Platonists resolved the differences in favor of Plato’s system. This resolution greatly influenced the Christian West in figures like St. Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius. However, influenced by the work of the Roman philosopher and theologian Boethius (480-524 AD), St. Thomas created his own notion of participation by giving a central role to the concept of *esse* as the act of being. However, “this [real] distinction plays a considerable role in the Thomistic doctrine, where it receives another and deeper meaning than it had in the doctrine of Boethius.”⁹⁷ Cornelio Fabro wrote, “It is from this concept of *esse* as ground-laying first act that Thomas develops his own notion of participation and his entire metaphysics.”⁹⁸ For St. Thomas the notions of *esse* and participation become critical and become areas of synthesis.

There are three distinct uses of the term *esse*. There is *esse commune*, the act of being that is in all creatures. There is *Esse subsistens*, which is God Himself. And then there is *actus essendi*, the act of being which is realized within a particular participant.⁹⁹ Furthermore, in *De Principiis Naturae* St. Thomas indicated that *esse* in the individual is twofold: substantial *esse*, that a thing has existence, and accidental *esse*, like a thing is white (Chapter 1, 1). Moreover, in SCG IV, 11, St. Thomas indicates that within the rational supposit there is the *esse intentionis*,

⁹⁶ Cornelio Fabro, “The Notion of Participation,” *The Review of Metaphysics* Vol. 27, No. 3 (March, 1974): 457.

⁹⁷ Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, ID: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), 32.

⁹⁸ Fabro, “The Notion of Participation,” 463.

⁹⁹ Cf. John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 120-121.

the being of an idea, and *esse intellectus nostri*, the being of our intellect, *esse verbi interius*, the being of the interior word, and finally *esse intentionis intellectae*, the being of the intelligible species. For our purposes, the focus will be on *esse substantiale* in which “participation” has a twofold meaning: in the active sense, it is to take an active part in something through one’s proper operations; and in a passive sense, “to receive that which belongs to another in total.”¹⁰⁰ Passive, or metaphysical, participation occurs in three ways: logical participation as the particular participates in the universal; ontological participation as the subject participating in its accidents; and transcendental participation¹⁰¹ as an effect participating in its cause.¹⁰² For the study of *esse*, transcendental participation has the controlling sense because every *esse* is a created *esse* and receives its existence from *Esse subsistens*. St. Thomas’ contribution to the synthesis of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle is his application of the doctrine of act and potency to the real distinction of existence and essence along with his description of *esse* as a participated *esse*.

St. Thomas was not describing the mere facticity of an existent’s existence, notated in Latin by the term *ens*, but reaching for the very center of the existent, its very act of being, notated in Latin by the term *esse*. “Being” can be discussed as *ens* or *esse*. In other words, using the English language in referencing “being” is not precise enough to know whether one is discussing *ens* or *esse*.¹⁰³ The term “existence” can have this same problem as well. So the Latin term *esse* has taken on a tradition of its own. “Aquinas’ discovery of *esse* was a philosophical

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 96.

¹⁰¹ Cf. John F. Wippel, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas II* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 285.

¹⁰² Cf. Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 97.

¹⁰³ See Etienne Gilson’s interesting comments on his frustration regarding this matter in *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 29.

breakthrough of quite a different order from Aristotle's delineation of the basic ontological categories...whereby *esse* became a distinct ontological category."¹⁰⁴ The term *esse* can be used to simply mean "being" or "to be" or "is." But St. Thomas' specific contribution is at times to use it to mean "the act of being" or *actus essendi*. "Esse is not just an abstract fact but a concrete act, not just a state of being there but the dynamic event that creates that state. It is more like energy than like matter."¹⁰⁵

Since *esse* is act, *esse* is in the form of the particular being (cf. ST I, q. 75, a. 6). As applied to the human person, whose form is the rational soul, *esse* is in the soul (cf. ST I, q. 76, a. 1, ad 5). It is not as if the form contains *esse* for the soul is itself a composition of form and *esse* according to Leo Sweeney's reading of In II Sent., d. 16, q.1, a. 2, ad 5. "*Esse* is that by which the soul is and lives, and yet it is not itself a form or any part of the soul's essence."¹⁰⁶ In other words, "in existents which are essentially composite, *esse* is really different from essence because *esse* is itself simple, whereas the essence is composed of matter and form."¹⁰⁷

The ontological location of *esse* is in the soul. For St. Thomas "the Creator gives being to the soul" (*De Potentia*, q. 3, a. 9, ad 20).¹⁰⁸ He further states that, "unity follows being. Therefore, just as the body gets its being from the soul, as from its form, so too it [*esse*] makes a unity with this soul to which it is immediately related" (*In De Anima* II, lec, 1, 234). It is what

¹⁰⁴ David B. Burrell, CSC. *Aquinas: God and Action* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Press, 1979), 44.

¹⁰⁵ Peter Kreeft. " 'Thomersonalism' or Thomistic Personalism (or Personalistic Thomism): A Marriage Made in Heaven, Hell, or Harvard?" Paper presented at the 30th Annual Aquinas Lecture at the Center for Thomistic Studies, University of St. Thomas, Houston, TX, January 27, 2011, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Leo Sweeney, S.J., "Philosophical Problems," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* Volume 37 (1963), 129.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁰⁸ *Creans dat esse animae.*

Pamela Reeve calls, “the *esse* of the soul.”¹⁰⁹ Patrick Lee writes that “the soul possesses its own act of existing.”¹¹⁰ Cornelio Fabro writes, “Being endowed with an operation of its own that transcends the body, the human soul is a self-subsistent form to which *esse* belongs directly.”¹¹¹ All of these references seem to be in line with St. Thomas when he writes that, “the soul’s...participated existence (*esse participatum*) necessarily co-exists (*simul*) with the soul’s essence” (ST I, q. 90, a. 2, ad 1). And therefore it is the human “form...[that] receives the *actus essendi*.”¹¹²

St. Thomas taught that “*esse* is the most perfect of all things...it is that which actuates all things, even their forms” (ST I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3). The primacy of *esse* affected his whole body of work. It is in this sense that “St. Thomas placed an emphasis on the role of the act of being (*esse*) within the metaphysical structure of finite being.”¹¹³ Therefore, at the essential level form is primary and matter receives form, but at the existential level *esse* is primary and form receives *esse*.

It is most often indicated that the center of the human person is the *ego*, the “I” or “me”. But for St. Thomas, *esse* is at the center of the center. For St. Thomas, there is a primacy of *esse* because the act of being is the act of all acts, the ultimate act of all reality (c.f. *De Veritate*, q. 11, a. 3).

¹⁰⁹ Pamela J. Reeve, “The Metaphysics of Higher Cognitive States in Thomas Aquinas,” in *Essays in Medieval Philosophy and Theology in Memory of Walter H. Principe, CSB*, ed. James R. Ginther and Carl N Still (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1988), 113.

¹¹⁰ Patrick Lee, “St. Thomas and Avicenna on the Agent Intellect,” *The Thomist* Volume 45, No. 1 (January 1981), 61.

¹¹¹ Cornelio Fabro, “The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy, The Notion of Participation,” *The Review of Metaphysics* Vol. 27, No. 3 (March, 1974), 466.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 474.

¹¹³ John Wippel, *Metaphysical Themes*, 238.

In these next series of quotations, we will see that for St. Thomas the *esse* is that irreducible center of the human person. “Nothing is more formal and simpler than *esse*” (*SCG I*, 23). “*Esse* is that which is more intimate to anything, and what is most profound in all things” (*ST I*, q. 8, a. 1, ad 3). “*Esse* is the actuality of all acts and because of this is the perfection of all perfections” (*De Potentia* q. 7, a. 2, ad 9). Robert Connor expresses this primacy by saying that “the *prius* of *esse*...is the ontic center of the person in substantiality.”¹¹⁴ Therefore, one could say that St. Thomas took Aristotle’s thought regarding form and went even deeper into form to find *esse*.

As noted above, each individual has an *esse*, and it is referred to as one’s *actus essendi*. Each human person has his own unique *esse* which was created and is sustained by God. As Scripture says, “You love all that exists...for had You hated anything, You would not have formed it. And how, had You not willed it, could a thing persist, how be conserved if not called forth by You? (Wis 11: 24-25 Jerusalem Bible). The human *esse* is a created *esse*. It is a participated *esse* that is received directly from God and as such is an effect passively participating in its Cause. For the human person then, he is not only “a human material substance as simply the result of *esse* operating upon a particular human essence and a particular human designated matter,”¹¹⁵ but also “participates in its created *esse* by which it formally exists” (In I Sent., d. 19, q.5, a. 2). In other words, “the participant is participating in its own source.”¹¹⁶ And again, despite it being a created and participated *esse*, it is one’s own *esse*. “God alone is His *esse*. Other things only have their *esse*. But the *esse* that they have is

¹¹⁴ Robert A. Connor, “Relation, the Thomistic *Esse*, and American Culture,” *Communio* 17 (Fall, 1990): 458.

¹¹⁵ J. Christopher Mahoney, “*Esse* in the Metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas,” *The New Scholasticism* Vol. LV, No. 2, (Spring 1981): 169.

¹¹⁶ Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 117.

truly *their own* (emphasis mine) inhering in them.”¹¹⁷ Therefore, every “creature has its own participated *actus essendi*.”¹¹⁸ And each *esse* is unique. “Thus, when seen from this metaphysical aspect of reality, Peter and Paul participate equally in human nature, that is, each one shares humanity in his own way, inasmuch as each one has a different *esse*.”¹¹⁹ St. Thomas indicated that “the reason for this is that, since two things must be considered in a being, namely, its nature and its *esse*, there must be in all univocal things a community of nature, but not of *esse*, for any one *esse* is only in one thing. Hence human nature is not in two men according to the same *esse*” (In I Sent., d. 35, q.1, a. 4). Gilson taught that “corporeal beings owe matter their individuation; they are indebted to their to be (*esse*) for their individuality.”¹²⁰ St. Thomas seems to go out of his way to promote uniqueness when he writes in *De Ente et Essentia*:

Everything which is in a genus must have a quiddity which is other than its existence (*esse suum*). And this is so since the quiddity or nature of a genus or species, in the case of those things which have a genus or species, is not multiplied according to the intelligible content of the nature; rather, *it is the existence (esse)* (emphasis mine) in these diverse things which is diverse (89).

And this is why, as has been said, there is not found among such substances a multitude of individuals in one species, with the exception of the human soul on account of the body to which it is united. And although its [the soul’s] individuation depends on the body as upon the occasion for its beginning because it does not acquire *its individuated existence (esse individuum)* (emphasis mine) except in the body of which it is the actuality...(93).

¹¹⁷ Stephen L. Brock, “Harmonizing Plato and Aristotle on *Esse*: Thomas Aquinas and the *De hebdomadibus*.” *Nova et Vetera* Vol. 5, No. 3 (2007): 488.

¹¹⁸ Fabro, “Participation,” 487.

¹¹⁹ Fabro, “Participation,” 485.

¹²⁰ Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1949), 186.

So, in the larger scope of St. Thomas's metaphysics that has synthetic elements of Plato and Aristotle, but favoring Aristotle, there is a twofold potency and act composition: matter is in potency to form, which both combined constitute essence; but essence, or nature, is in potency to its unique *esse*. St. Thomas enhanced Aristotle's thought by indicating that "the form itself is in act insofar as it is actualized by its corresponding act of being."¹²¹ And as this teaching is applied to the human person, each human *esse* is a unique act of being. This received and unique act of being has the property of not only having been created out of nothing by God, it also has the property of being directly conserved by God. It is this direct act of the conservation of *esse* by God that we shall now discuss.

2.3 *Esse* as a Direct Point of Contact with God

God not only creates, but also holds or conserves all things in being. "God's work whereby He brings things into being must not be taken as the work of a craftsman who makes a box and then leaves it; because God continues to give being" (*De Potentia*, q. 3, a. 14, sol. 10). In other words, "God does not create things by one action and preserve them by another. God's action, which is the direct cause of a thing's existence, is not distinct as the principle of its being and as the principle of its continuance in being" (*De Potentia*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 2). Creatures receive this act of God, and therefore it is a passive reception of being created and being conserved.

In the act of creating, the axiom that every agent causes something similar to itself applies. But for God, of course, this applies analogically (cf. ST I, q. 4 a. 3). We start with the fact that God's most proper name is He Who Is (*Qui Est*), as indicated in Exodus 3:14 (cf. ST I, q. 13, a. 11). Therefore, our first similitude to God is in being (*esse*), for He is *Ipsum Esse Subsistens* (ST I, q. 11, a. 4). It is the first thing God gives in creation. "He created all things

¹²¹ Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 274.

that they might be (*essent*)” (Wisdom 1:14 RSV).¹²² St. Thomas insists that “God is the direct cause of existence” (*De Potentia*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 4).¹²³ Now, according to Genesis 1:28, we are created in God’s image and likeness, and this particularly applies to being. Having a created *esse* means that “*esse* itself participates in the divinity in the sense of being a partial likeness of it.”¹²⁴ Put bluntly, “by participating *esse*, a creature also participates God.”¹²⁵ And, despite the fact that for the human person one’s *esse* is truly one’s own *esse*, one’s own *actus essendi*, the human *esse* still serves as an image of God. “If a creature is said to participate in the divine *esse*, this is because a likeness or similitude of the divine is in some way produced in the creature.”¹²⁶

In this sense our *esse* is the most intimate point of contact with God. St. Thomas writes, “God causes natural existence in us by creation without the intervention of any agent cause, but nevertheless with the intervention of a formal cause” (*De Veritate*, q. 27, a. 1, ad 3). Fabro expounds: “Every essence, although an act in the formal order, is created as potency to be actualized by the participated *esse* which it receives, so that its actuality is ‘mediated’ through the *esse*. *Esse* is the act that constitutes the proper terminus of transcendent causality [creation, conservation] and it is by virtue of this *direct causality* (emphasis mine) of *esse* that God operates immediately in every agent.”¹²⁷ In commenting on St. Thomas’ *esse* within ST I, q. 8, a. 1, Wolfgang Smith writes, “it is the innermost element [which] constitutes *the point of contact* (emphasis mine), as it were, between created being and its uncreated Source, which is

¹²² Creavit enim ut essent omnia (Vulgate).

¹²³ *Deus autem per se est causa essendi.*

¹²⁴ Brock, “Harmonizing,” 483.

¹²⁵ Sweeney, “Philosophical Problems,” 124.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹²⁷ Fabro, “Participation,” 474.

God.”¹²⁸ Fabro continues: “Since the essence of a creature has also its own participated act of being (*actus essendi*), its actualization...is based on the act of *esse* in which it participates...and is the proper terminus of divine causality.”¹²⁹ In seeing the human person within the model of St. Thomas’ metaphysics, God is with us at the very center of ourselves empowering our very existence as a direct point of contact. “Wherever being is to be found (*quocumque est invenire esse*), there also is God present” (SCG III, 68).

We received being at our creation, and we continue to receive being in the form of conservation. All of which is one divine act then and now. However, our metaphysical participation in being does not have to remain at the level of a passive participation. Although that passive participation will always remain, we can have an active participation in being.

2.4 Active Participation in *Esse* Through Virtual Quantity in Operations

We have established that for St. Thomas the principle name for God is I AM, or Being, and that therefore for Him, His existence and His essence are the same. However, this is not so for His creatures whose existence and essence are really distinct. Nonetheless, for St. Thomas, there is a primacy of existence over essence especially because existence has a particular similitude to Him. And it is this primacy of being that should be reflected in one’s definition of human nature. Now it is a distinct characteristic of the human being that it has control over its own acts (cf. ST I-II prologue). At this point I want to take a second look at three passages I referenced in section 1.7 that I am relying on to establish St. Thomas’ use of the idea of acts or operations as active participation in the power or energy of the substantial form. And, since *esse*

¹²⁸ Wolfgang Smith, “From Schrödinger’s Cat to Thomistic Ontology,” *The Thomist* 63 (1999), 59.

¹²⁹ Fabro, “Participation,” 482.

is in the form (cf. ST I, q. 75, a. 6), I will then add two other passages to consider active participation in *esse*.

Here are the three passages regarding active participation in the form of a subject.

Now the perfection of a form may be considered in two ways: first, in respect of the form itself: secondly, in respect of *the participation of the form by its subject*. ...But in so far as we consider *the perfection of a form in respect of the participation thereof by the subject*, it is said to be "more" or "less"(ST I-II, q. 52, a. 1).

For we said that increase and decrease in forms which are capable of intensity and remissness, happen in one way not on the part of the very form considered in itself, through *the diverse participation thereof by the subject*. Wherefore such increase of habits and other forms, is not caused by an addition of form to form; but *by the subject participating more or less perfectly, on one and the same form*. And...so, *by an intense action of the agent*, something is made more hot, as it were *participating the form more perfectly*, not as though something were added to the form (ST I-II, q. 52, a.2).

Now, to change from having an incomplete to having a complete form is just for the subject to be brought further into actuality, since form is actuality. Therefore, for the subject to participate in the form more is just for it to be brought further into the actuality of that form. And just as an agent brings something from pure potentiality into the actuality of form, so likewise *it is an agent's action* (emphasis mine) that brings it from incomplete actuality into complete actuality (*De virtutibus in communi*, a.11).

Here are the two passages regarding active participation in *esse* and about quantifying one's virtual quantity by one's proper actions or operations.

Quantity is twofold. There is quantity of "bulk" or dimensive quantity, which is to be found only in corporeal things, and has, therefore, no place in God. There is also quantity of "virtue," which is measured according to the perfection of some nature or form. Now this virtual quantity is measured firstly by its source... Secondly, virtual quantity is measured by the effects of the form. Now the first effect of form is being, for everything has being by reason of its form. The second effect is *operation*, for every agent acts through its form. Consequently virtual quantity is measured both in regard to being and in regard to action. (ST I, q. 42, a. 1, ad 1).

In God there cannot be quantity except quantity of power; and since equality is noted according to some species of quantity, there shall be equality only

according to power.... It is possible to consider power of a thing in all the ways in which it happens to reach its end. But this happens in three ways: firstly, in its *operations* (*virtutem ad operandum*) in which it happens that grades of perfection are found... Secondly, also in regard to *esse* itself (*ipsius esse*) of a thing insofar as the Philosopher also says that, “a thing has power so that it always exists.” Similarly [thirdly], according to the fullness of perfection in regard to *esse* itself (*ipsius entis*) insofar as *it attains* the end of its nature (*In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 3, a. 1).¹³⁰

From these passages I wish to draw attention to St. Thomas’ use of the term “participation” in an active sense whereby the emphasis is on the operation of agent. Since *esse* is united to the form and gives power to the form, I will be focusing on active participation in *esse*.

It is the intent of this chapter to include the two dimensions of the term participation with respect to *esse*. The passive conception of participation that considers *esse* as a participated *esse* is when we consider an existent as it derives its being from another. The active conception of participation is when the human agent operates by its own power. In other words, in operating, the human agent is actively participating in the power of its *esse*. Furthermore, as a rational creature, I argue that the agent can consciously participate in the virtual quantity of its *esse*. In the exploration of these specific thoughts, I submit that through an intimate contact with one’s interiority as an act of the contemplative intellect, the human person can be consciously aware of one’s *actus essendi* as a power such that one can intentionally harness and channel the power of *esse*, one’s *virtus essendi*, to feed off that power, and to approach a greater active participation to increase the accessibility to one’s quantity of *esse*, one’s virtual quantity (*quantitas virtualis*).

¹³⁰ The translation is from my fellow student Valerie Uhlig.

In his article discussing the increase of habits and dispositions, Vivian Boland makes an interesting observation in his commentary on our second highlighted passage of St. Thomas, namely ST I-II, q. 52, a. 2, on the participation in form.

He suggests we think of dispositions objectively and subjectively. Knowledge objectively considered can grow in extension. There can be more of it. But subjectively considered knowledge will vary according to the diverse aptitudes of the different subjects who participate more or less in it. In this sense a disposition grows not by addition but by the subject participating more or less perfectly in the form.¹³¹

From Boland's distinction of the objective and subjective senses of a disposition, I would like to make the same distinction as applied to *virtus essendi* (power of *esse*) and *virtualis quantitas* (quantity of power). In passive participation, as it relates to the hierarchy of being, there is an objective *virtus essendi* and *virtualis quantitas*. But I propose that as it relates to the human subject's active participation in form, on the substantial level, or *esse*, on the existential level, there is a subjective experience of one's *virtus essendi* (power of *esse*) and a subjective experience of one's *virtualis quantitas* (quantity of power). I am using the term experience because I am adding a dimension not covered by Boland, the dimension of conscious awareness as an act performed by the contemplative intellect. Through my contemplative intellect I can be consciously aware of my existence and concurrently perform an action and know that I am acting by the power of my *esse*. The surfer knows that he exists and knows that he is surfing by the power of the wave.

¹³¹ Vivian Boland, O.P. "Aquinas and Simplicius on Dispositions—A Question in Fundamental Moral Theology," *New Blackfriars* Vol. 82, Issue 968 (October, 2001), 469.

However, we are met again with self-opacity as was discussed in Chapter 1 relative to one's self, but now with respect to one's *esse*. For *esse*, as the act of being, one cannot have a sensible apprehension. Our *esse* or power of *esse* does not seem to come into conscious awareness by itself; it does not appear as self-evident. This kind of conscious awareness requires a focused attention.

Some would say that this self-opacity as it relates to one's one *esse* is a problem that cannot be resolved. Fran O'Rourke opines that "*esse* belongs to an utterly different order from that of essence; there is an intransgressible distance between the orders of *esse* and *essentia*."¹³² Or as Phillip Rosemann opines, "God is that which, in each of us, is our deepest and truest self; which, however, our creaturely condition renders inaccessible. As the path of return to God is barred, the circle of interiority must turn into a circle of exteriority; the 'other' within the self or, indeed, the other as the self, must be sought outside of self."¹³³ He goes on and writes that "all the dynamisms of creation, all its life, arises from the irreducible split, which characterizes it: a split whereby the principle and 'origin' of the created being remains barred, hence becoming the object of an interminable quest."¹³⁴ I ask, How is it that our *esse* has been created in the image of The *ESSE* and is presently sustained in us by Him, such that "in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28)¹³⁵ and yet we do not have a conscious, interior accessibility or sensitivity to this power? Moreover, Rosemann indicates that the "creaturely split" reduces the creature to a vague and unattainable awareness of God by

¹³² O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 181.

¹³³ Rosemann, *Omne Agens Agit Sibi Simile*, 30-31.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 342.

¹³⁵ *In ipso enim vivimus et movemur et sumus* (Vulgate).

equating it to the example St. Thomas gives in discussing the Apostles' Creed¹³⁶ regarding the creation of things "visible and invisible". In *Symbolum Apostolorum*, a. 1 St. Thomas writes, "If a person, upon entering a certain house, should feel a warmth at the door of the house, and going within should feel a greater warmth, and so on the more he went into the interior, he would believe that somewhere within was a fire, even if he did not see the fire itself which causes this heat he felt." Is this how we are to relate to our *esse*, the most intimate and profound part of us (cf. ST I, q. 8, a. 1, ad 3), the act of all acts and the perfection of all perfections in us (cf. *De Potentia* q. 7, a. 2, ad 9)?

At this point I am reminded of a conviction articulated by W. J. Hankey as he discusses our striving to know God's *Esse*. I would like to re-state this conviction in relation to knowing our own *esse*. Hankey writes, "The intention of that knowledge of His existence should be the beginning of the unfolding for us of His nature, not that we should be left knocking our heads vainly against the blank wall of this *esse*."¹³⁷ My conviction is that we should not be left knocking our heads against the blank wall of our own *esse*. It seems to me that the passages from St. Thomas cited above on pages 64 and 65 referencing the active sense of participation in form and in *esse* would not reduce the human person to what seems to be a blindness to the reality of one's own *esse*.

Not only did Jacques Maritain agree with St. Thomas' distinction between essence and existence, he opined that there is a direct relation:

Essence is potency in relation to existence, to the act of existing, which is act and perfection *par excellence*. Essence is form or act in a certain order (the order of specification), but potency or capacity in another (the order of exercise) or in relation to *esse*. Between essence and existence

¹³⁶ Rosemann, *Omne Agens Agit Sibi Simile*, 309.

¹³⁷ W.J. Hankey, *God In Himself: Aquinas' Doctrine of God as expounded in the Summa Theologiae*. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2004), 74.

there is a relation analogous to that which we observe between the intelligence and the act of intellection, the will and the act of volition.”¹³⁸

Maritain not only emphasized the distinction between essence and *esse*, but also emphasized “the necessity of distinguishing between existence as received and existence as exercised.”¹³⁹ *Esse* is in relation to essence “as an exercised act. Existence is not only received, it is also exercised. And this distinction between existence as received and existence as exercised is central for the philosophical theory of subsistence.”¹⁴⁰ He goes on to say that, “in the act of exercising existence...it is the supposit that exercises existence—its own substantial *esse* and the accidental *esse* of its operations.”¹⁴¹ Furthermore, in “the exercise of *esse*...St. Thomas establishes a relation of analogy between the couple essence and *esse* and the couple active potency and operation, and we have stated that *it is the supposit or person that exercises existence* (its own substantial *esse*) *and exercises its operations* (emphasis mine), as well as the accidental *esse* proper to them.”¹⁴² I submit that Maritain does not believe we are left with a vague sense of our being, but rather we have a direct working relation to our own *esse* such that we exercise our own *esse* and do so differently than other creatures.

My argument is that the difference from other creatures lies in our contemplative intellect. By engaging the contemplative intellect to consciously focus one’s attention on one’s *esse*, we are not only aware of a virtual quantity, a quantitative power of being within us, but also that we can actively participate, in a conscious way, in that virtual

¹³⁸ Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, Gerald B. Phelan, trans. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1959), 436.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 436.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 436.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 436-437.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 439.

quantity by exercising our *esse* through our operations, operations we know we are performing, and we know the power source of those operations.

St. Thomas teaches that although we can know many things at the same time, we cannot understand many things at the same time (cf. ST I, q. 85, a.4 and q. 86, a. 2, ad 3). His source is in Aristotle's *Topics* II, 10: "Understanding is of one thing only, knowledge is of many" (cited in q. 85, a. 4 *sed contra*). We can have knowledge of many things contained within us in the form of habitual knowledge, but understanding requires actual knowledge in the forefront of our consciousness. And since we can be conscious of only one thing at a time, we can only understand one thing at a time. But in *De Potentia* St. Thomas proposes a solution to this limitation that I suggest applies to our ability to be conscious of both our *esse* and our conscious participation in it through our operations. He writes, "One power can exercise two operations at the same time, if one of these is referred and ordered to the other; thus it is evident that...the intellect at the same time understands the premises and the conclusions through the premises." Further on he writes, "And when of two actions, one is the reason of the other or is ordered to the other, both of them can be exercised at once by the same power" (q. 4, a. 2, ad 10). So, as was said in 2.1 above, that while discussing the concept of human nature that concept is to include two thoughts at the same time; namely, existence and essence together, now we are putting together simultaneously two acts. The act of existence and operations are as one ordered to the other, as form ordered to being, and through its operations, the existent may have fuller being. Therefore, as ordered acts, we can be consciously aware of *esse* and operations working together simultaneously.

To further elaborate and apply the active participation in *esse* to St. Thomas' teaching of performing two operations at the same time as one ordered to the other, we can use Maritain's terminology. In the conscious exercise of one operations of nature, we are simultaneously and consciously exercising *esse*. As I am in the act of writing this Thesis I am consciously aware of my act and at the same time, with some focused attention, can be consciously aware that the power of my act is coming from the power of my *esse*. Furthermore, in this act that I am directing, I am consciously harnessing this power from my *esse* through my operations to complete an end, albeit a secondary end. Now, we cannot always be consciously aware of the power of our operations coming from the power of our *esse* which in turn is empowered by God. St Thomas finds this impossible. "It is not possible always to be thinking about God, for this characterizes the perfection of our heavenly homeland" (*De Caritate*, a. 11, ad 2). But there are moments when, again, with focused attention and mindfulness, we can order these thoughts and awarenesses and grasp the depth of the simultaneity of the acts.

The active participation in our journey to greater being through the operations of our nature is a secondary end for the believer, the *viator*. And as such, the last end is virtually contained in the secondary end.¹⁴³ In other words, active participation in

¹⁴³ St. Thomas discusses virtual intentionality in *De Caritate* when he writes, "It must be understood that just as in efficient causes the power of the primary cause remains in all the subsequent causes, so also does the intention of the principal end virtually remain in all the secondary ends. Thus, whoever actually intends some secondary end, virtually intends the primary end. In the same way, he who orders himself to God as to an end, in all things which he does for his own sake, the intention of the final end, which is God, remains virtually" (a. 11, ad 2). The same thought is expressed in the *Prima Secunda* without the technical language where he writes, "One need not always be thinking of the last end, whenever one desires or does something: but the virtue of the first intention, which was in respect of the last end, remains in every desire directed to any object whatever, even though one's thoughts be not actually directed to the last end. Thus while walking along the road one needs not to be thinking of the end at every step" (q. 1, a. 6, ad 3). And the phrase "virtually contained" I am getting from ST I-II, q. 3, a. 6 where he writes, "We must observe that the consideration of a speculative science does not extend beyond the scope of the principles of that science: since the entire science is virtually contained in its principles."

greater being has the Beatific Vision virtually contained in this active participation. As previously discussed, our soul has an active principle and a passive principle, but it is an active principle that we enact or harness. In what Hütter calls “the psychology of beatitude,”¹⁴⁴ he insists that

Beatitude is the perfection of the rational soul and that perfection is the maximal realization of the rational soul’s higher faculties, intellect and will. And because the soul is an active (and not just a passive) principle, the maximal actualization is not an actualization simply by another, but rather a self-actualization. Although, it will become apparent that Aquinas thinks that such a self-actualization presupposes an antecedent as well as a concomitant divine help, grace, in order to enable and sustain the rational soul’s self-actualization in the *viator* and in a special way in the *comprehensor*. It is by now clear that Aquinas thinks of happiness, the subjective attainment of the objective ultimate end, as the perfect actualization of being human and hence an activity. It is ‘being in act’.¹⁴⁵

Hütter insists that in Beatitude there is active participation by what he labels “self-actualization,” a self-actualization that includes a perfection of *esse*, or of “being in act.”

Another way to express active participation in being is by using what Etienne Gilson calls “becoming through *esse*”.¹⁴⁶ For the human person there is the possibility of a conscious participation in the process of becoming. “The very first thing which ‘to be’ does, is to make its own essence to be, that is, to be a being. The next thing which ‘to be’ does, is to begin bringing its own individual essence somewhat nearer its completion. The actual perfecting of essences is the final cause of their existences, and it takes many

¹⁴⁴ Hütter, *Bound for Beatitude*, 31.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁴⁶ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 183-184.

operations to achieve it.”¹⁴⁷ This innate movement to completion in the human being would seem to include a consciously intentional process to an end. This is an interior process of cooperating with a power, like the surfer, to allow oneself to be “actively built up by its own *esse*.”¹⁴⁸ This is the act of harnessing a power that has final causality built right into it. It is a matter of not only cooperating, but actively participating to further the process as an intentional process to an end, to its completion.

2.5 Intentional Participation in *Esse*: Exercising the One Power of an Emergent *Esse* in Operations

Of the five opening passages in the above section 2.4, I would like to leave aside the ones about active participation in form and focus on the ones about *esse*, namely ST I, q. 42, a. 1, ad 1 and In I Sent. d. 19, q. 3, a. 1.

In q. 42 St. Thomas is measuring virtual quantity (*quantitas virtualis*) by the perfection of form, and the two effects of form in the substantial order; namely, *esse et operatio*.¹⁴⁹ Of these three components (form, *esse*, and operations), only one affects the way to perfection by the agent, namely the operations of nature. As we know, in Aristotelian and in Thomistic metaphysics, operations lead the agent from *actus primus* to *actus secundus*, the operations that perfect the agent (cf. ST I, q. 76, a. 4, ad 1 and for immanent acts, cf. ST I, q. 18, a. 3, ad 1). In the human person, operations and activities are not only intentional (one acts for an end), but can also be conscious of these operations.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 184.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 186.

¹⁴⁹ See also ST I-II, q. 111, a. 2.

In the commentary on In I Sentences, d. 19, we begin to see the concept of the emergence of *esse* introduce itself. Emergence in this sense is defined as one power being the source of other powers such that the other powers arise from that one power. In the text, St. Thomas lists three ways to attain perfection; however, I will change the order of appearance in the text for my own purposes. First, there is the power to exist from *esse* itself. In the *Summa*, St. Thomas refers to this perfection as something “according to the constitution of its own being” (ST I, q. 6, a. 3) Secondly, the power to attain to its ultimate potential within its own nature. A guard dog barking at a stranger is the dog moving towards its ultimate potential. And thirdly, for a being to attain to the different degrees of perfection it does so through its operations. By way of an entity’s operations, it moves to overcome whatever imperfections it has to move to a greater perfection of its nature.¹⁵⁰ From this passage, the power of operations is directly derived from the power of being. This is an example of the classic scholastic axiom *operatio sequitur esse*. “The mode of action in every agent follows from its mode of existence” (ST I, q. 89, a. 1). In other words, the action in every agent emerges from its existence or *esse*. Operations, as acts of active participation, are in fact an active participation in *esse*.

From this concept of emergence, the powers of the soul are derivative from the power of the *esse*, from the *virtus essendi*. Gilson describes *esse* as “the primary energy of a being and from it all operations proceed.”¹⁵¹ Wolfgang Smith identifies *esse* “as

¹⁵⁰ I find it reassuring that Aristotle sees perfection as a movement in degrees such that when “things which are said to be perfect in themselves...admit of no further degree...” (*Metaphysics*, Book V, chapter 16. 3, trans. John P. Rowan in *St. Thomas Aquinas: Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1995), 365.

¹⁵¹ Etienne Gilson. *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), 371.

radiating outwards, through the substantial form, to the very accidents.”¹⁵² And Mitchell writes, “*esse* is the first act because the other acts pertain to it.”¹⁵³ In Norris Clarke’s analysis of *esse* as the act of being, being is “exercising the act of being, not as a static state... St. Thomas does not hesitate to call it the *virtus essendi*, or power of being, terming the act of existence the first act of a being, and the action which flows from it, its second act.”¹⁵⁴ Clearly this is *virtus essendi* in its active sense in that in *actus secundus* there is active involvement described as one power flowing from the principle power.

As virtual quantity relates to both being as received and being as exercised, to interpret *virtus essendi* solely as a component within the description of the hierarchy of being, or solely as an objective, passive virtual quantity, as being as received, seems to be guilty of what Fabro calls metaphysical formalism. This truncation of being is to miss active participation in being, the subjective sense of virtual quantity. He writes that:

Avicenna thus has become, with his master Alfarabi, the one responsible for metaphysical formalism, that is, for the uprooting of man from direct contact or essential connection with being and of being from man, which forms the constitutive principle of consciousness as capacity for presence.¹⁵⁵

But Fabro is now making another bold proposition: that the human *esse* also empowers the power of consciousness; which, from our study, is not a farfetched leap. As

¹⁵² Smith, “From Schrödinger’s Cat,” 59.

¹⁵³ Mitchell, “Being and Participation,” 787.

¹⁵⁴ W. Norris Clarke, S.J. *The One and the Many. A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 51.

¹⁵⁵ Cornelio Fabro, “The Transcendentality of *Ens-Esse* and the Ground of Metaphysics,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 6, Issue 3 (September 1966): 406-407. See also page 413 where he calls the same concept “formalistic scholasticism.”

discussed earlier, if all the powers of the soul derive from the power of *esse*, then the contemplative intellect, where consciousness occurs, is empowered by *esse*. I believe this assertion is supported by St. Thomas' own formula "*esse, vivere, et intelligere*...these three are called one essence since they flow from the one essence of the mind" (*De Veritate*, q.10, a. 1, ad 5). It is an assertion of a single source, *esse*. In this sense Fabro sees *esse* as "the primal emergence of man."¹⁵⁶ From the human *esse* there emerges what is specific to the human being, not only intellect and will, but especially consciousness.

I believe the understanding of having consciousness of one's *esse* can be assisted by looking at St. Thomas' observations of a human person experiencing pleasure or pain. He begins his observations in ST I-II, q. 31, a. 1 by indicating that passions in general start with a sensitive apprehension or perception and then a movement of the sensitive appetite, a process we share with animals. In q. 32, a. 1 however, he defines pleasure as a twofold process: the attainment of a suitable good and the knowledge of this attainment. This time he did not mention a shared experience with animals. Furthermore, in q. 32, a. 2 he places an emphasis on cognition by indicating that there are three components to pleasure: the subject, the object so conjoined, and the knowledge of the conjunction. He continues to discuss this particular human experience of perception in his discussion on pain. He opens the discussion in q. 35, a. 1 by recounting the two main parts of passion: the conjunction with a good or an evil, and the perception of this conjunction. But then in q. 35, a. 2 he writes, "man alone, who is a perfectly cognizant animal, takes pleasure in the objects of the other senses for their own sake; whereas

¹⁵⁶ Cornelio Fabro, "The Problem of Being and the Destiny of Man," 407.

other animals take no pleasure in them save as referable to the sensibles of touch, as stated in *Ehtics* III, 10.” I take it that St. Thomas is trying to say that although we and animals have sensible apprehension and sensible appetitation, we as humans experience it differently principally because we cognize it with our intellect, a power an animal does not have. I argue that this is also true of *esse*. Animals have *esse*, but not like we have *esse* because we can cognize it due to our having an intellect; and, in particular, the contemplative intellect. We can have a conscious awareness of *esse* and its emergent power, cooperate with it, and harness it to further our own personal completion.

In another article, Fabro grounds consciousness in *esse* as he credits but distinguishes Heidegger and Hegel’s return to the philosophy of being by typifying St. Thomas’ concept of being:

Quite the opposite is true of the apprehension of *ens* in Thomism and the simultaneous attestation of the being-in-act of the real, and of the being-in-act of consciousness, and of the being-in-act of the mutual relationship of the real to consciousness and of consciousness to the real as the constitutive of consciousness. It is in this synthetic intensive actuating that first of all the transcendentality of *esse* in *ens* as ground consists, insofar as *ens* says precisely *id quod habet esse*—‘says,’ that is, makes present what has being, what is act of being, as that which is in act of being. Note well: here, by means of the *esse* of *ens*, it is *ens* that makes itself present to consciousness and it is consciousness that is actuated as the presence of *ens*.¹⁵⁷

Inasmuch as Fabro is bringing St. Thomas’ axiom that the intellect’s first apprehension is being (*ens*) to modern philosophical thought, there is also the element that he captured regarding consciousness that I wish again to highlight. In his theory of the emergence of *esse*, Fabro continues to boldly assert that “being is the inexhaustible foundation for the activity of consciousness.”¹⁵⁸ I find further support of this in St. Thomas when he writes,

¹⁵⁷ Fabro, “Transcendentality of *Ens-Esse*,” 419.

¹⁵⁸ Fabro, “Philosophy and Thomism Today,” 51.

“The intellective power is a form of the soul with reference to its act of existing” (*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 8, ad 13). The power of the contemplative intellect, whose act is consciousness, is a derivative power from the power of *esse*, one’s *virtus essendi*.

To strengthen this point of human consciousness as derivative from the human *esse*, I offer James Robb’s interesting interpretation of St. Thomas’ opusculum *On Spiritual Creatures*, a. 11, ad 14. St. Thomas writes, “Now ‘understanding’ sometimes means an activity...but sometimes it means precisely *the actual being (esse)* (emphasis mine) of an intellectual nature...” Robb also looks at *On Separate Substances*. However, in this work, “St. Thomas is primarily concerned to treat of angels, but he naturally makes a number of points which apply with equal force to the human soul since it too is an immaterial substance.”¹⁵⁹ In chapter 11 of *On Separate Substances* St. Thomas writes, “In immaterial substances, their ‘being’ (*esse*) itself is their ‘living,’ and their ‘living’ is not other than their ‘being intelligent.’ Therefore, they are living and understanding from the same principle [*esse*] that they are beings.” Robb offers the following poignant interpretation. “These two texts should control our reading of the texts in [*Quaestiones De Anima*]. The fact that the act of existence of the composite human being is an intellective act or an *intellectual act of existence* (emphasis mine)... A human being...exists in his totality through an act of existence which is wholly intellectual.”¹⁶⁰

Gilson seems to agree with this synoptic convergence. On this point he writes that, “an (intellectual) operation is itself an act because it directly flows from an act of existing.”¹⁶¹ In other words, the human *esse* is intellectual in that from the human *esse* is

¹⁵⁹ James H. Robb, trans., *Questions on the Soul* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2016), 34-35.

¹⁶⁰ Robb, *Questions on the Soul*, 35.

¹⁶¹ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 207.

expressed a wholly intellectual way of being. And this is so because “we build a metaphysics of *esse* as act thanks to our awareness that there is an act in the mind that answers the act of being in the real.”¹⁶² And, as quoted in the Introduction of this Thesis paper on page 4, Gilson writes that “St. Thomas finds thought in being.” I propose a re-phrasing of the quote to read finding the intellect in *esse*, the human intellect in the human *esse*.

I find evidence for this union of intellect and *esse* when St. Thomas says that, “understanding, properly speaking, is not an activity of the intellect [per se], but of the soul [where *esse* resides] through the intellect” (*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 10, ad sed contra 3). For David Burrell, “the step from *esse* to intentionality in intellectual beings is no step at all, since *esse viventibus est vivere* so *esse intelligentibus est intelligere*.”¹⁶³ Therefore, *esse* is not only a power within a hierarchical order of being (*esse commune*), but for the human being, it is its emergent, arising, radiating power (*actus essendi*) as the source of its rationality, consciousness and intentionality. Intentional, active participation in *esse* is performed by the conscious awareness of executing the operations of nature, and by doing so, one is exercising the one, emergent power of *esse*.

2.6 *Esse* as Deeply Personal: Considered Now as Immediate, not Operational

In Chapter 1 we established that consciousness is predominantly located in the contemplative intellect, not at all in the active intellect. From our discussion in Chapter

¹⁶² Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, “Existence and *Esse*,” *The New Scholasticism* Volume 50 (1976), 44.

¹⁶³ David B. Burrell, “God’s Eternity,” *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 1, No. 4 (October, 1984): 404. I interpret this to mean “the to-be of living things is to live,” so “the to-be of intelligent beings is to understand.”

2, we can surely say that consciousness is not located in the human *esse per se*, but emerges from *esse*. However, despite *esse* being subconscious, it does not have to be impersonal (or sub-personal). Coming to know that *esse* is an ontological component of one's personal structure does not have to be solely a product of metaphysical reflection, but can also be a deeply personal matter. The analogy I have been using to describe the idea of harnessing the powers derived from the active intellect and from *esse* are like the surfer riding a wave. However, this may fit better as only applied to the active intellect because, as with a wave in the ocean, there is no personal relationship one has with the active intellect in one's soul. And as mentioned above, there is no uniqueness to one's active intellect. So, the surfer harnessing the power of the wave is like the thinker harnessing the power of the active intellect in one's rational soul. But with *esse* it is different because it is one's own unique *esse*. As to the other direct point of contact, there are no references that I am aware of in St. Thomas to indicate one has a unique agent intellect. Each human person has one (cf. ST I, q. 79, a. 4), but it is not unique to the human person. But with *esse*, it is different. Coming to know the metaphysical truth of *esse* is one thing. But coming to know the existence of one's own personal *esse* is quite another thing.

The ability to direct one's attention to the self by the exercise of the will upon the contemplative intellect, also applies to directing one's attention to one's *esse*. To pay attention to something is an operation of the possible intellect. Once again we are faced with the universal and the particular. In general terms, St. Thomas teaches that "the intellect has the universal for its object" (ST I, q. 85, a. 3). But in particular terms, "the active intellect is the cause of the universal" (ST I, q. 79, a. 5). Hence, at issue is to go

from the universal truth to a particular truth. “Our [active] intellect knows directly by the universal only. But indirectly, and as it were by a kind of reflection, it can know the singular” (ST I, q. 86, a. 1). Reflection is an act of the possible intellect or specifically, the contemplative intellect which is in the possible intellect. To make a selection for a particular object of thought is nothing other than an act of the will to direct the act of the contemplative intellect to a particular object. In our case, we are directing the attention of the contemplative intellect to one’s *esse* as the object of contemplation. But more precisely, at issue are acts. Acts are particular. Or, as St. Thomas writes, “acts are concerned with things singular” (ST I-II, q. 6, prologue). It is the focused act of the contemplative intellect on its own act of existence, which is also a particular act. It is the act of the intellect reflecting on its own act of existence.

In coming to know *esse*, some commentators favor the act of intuition, like Maritain, or the act of judgment, like Gilson. But I am intrigued with Fabro’s two-pronged approach, who not only includes the metaphysical steps to arrive at the *esse* of *ens*, but also the personal steps. Firstly, “considered metaphysically, *esse* is revealed to be something more profound and intimate to the thing than its essence.”¹⁶⁴ Now this is a thought clearly established by St. Thomas which has been mentioned above. Secondly, “Fabro calls the apprehension or *experience of esse* (emphasis mine) an emergence and the presence of act in consciousness”.¹⁶⁵ In other words, in “metaphysical anthropology” there is first “the helicoidal ascension of metaphysical thought that moves from act to act, founding the formal acts of the essence on *esse*.”¹⁶⁶ But then Fabro’s method goes

¹⁶⁴ Mitchell, “Being and Participation,” 717.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 789.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 633.

from metaphysics to a more personal experience: “The method of metaphysics...whereby *esse* emerges over all other acts and emerges in our consciousness...; the emergence of the ultimate act, *esse*, in consciousness in which the process itself is quieted.”¹⁶⁷ This is the experience of self, perceived from the uniqueness of one’s *esse*, in silence, while knowing that one’s self, perceived in the contemplative intellect, is empowered by one’s *esse*.

But there is another author who integrates all three approaches of intuition, judgement and experience in describing the knowledge of our own *esse*. John Ruane writes, “When, therefore, man has an intuition of himself existing, he knows from within his own *esse*. It is an intellectual experience in which he perceives being immediately, by its presence to himself, and not through the mediation of some abstraction.”¹⁶⁸ This is a dimension of the experience of existing without any operations other than the act of the contemplative intellect. We are no longer reasoning or reflecting discursively, but just letting ourselves be by simply paying attention to our existence. It is about being aware of one’s own presence without phantasm, which are a necessary part of human knowing, or interior words, which are also necessary for higher cognition and self-talk. But it is about being still or quieted. And as a believer, this stillness is a participated stillness. It is about appreciating our being as a participated being. “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps 46: 10).

Having a sensitivity towards one’s own interiority with respect to *esse* is not only about having sensitivity to existence by way of *creatio nihilo*, but, as mentioned earlier,

¹⁶⁷ Mitchell, “Being and Participation,” 452.

¹⁶⁸ John P. Ruane, S.J., “Self-Knowledge and the Spirituality of the Soul in St. Thomas,” *The New Scholasticism* 32 (1958), 435.

knowing that in that same act of creation, God is also conserving one's participated *esse* at every moment, at this very moment. It is in this contemplation that one is accessing one's *virtus essendi* such that one is "having the thoughts that enable one to experience one's own interiority—and to exist more fully."¹⁶⁹ This is when one is leaving the academics of the metaphysics of *esse*, but always keeping view of it in one's rearview mirror,¹⁷⁰ as it were, and entering the personal dimension or the personal experience of *esse*.

This personal process of having a deep awareness of one's interiority reaching to the depths of one's *esse* is not a narcissistic process, but rather a natural one. "All things, inasmuch as they are, love their own being (*diligent suum esse*)" (SCG I, 80). This quieted experience of being can occur in prayer when one closes one's eyes and quiets the mind by emptying it of any thoughts. It can occur after a climb to a mountain top sitting on a rock ridge overlooking the horizon of numerous mountains just absorbing the breathtaking scene in silence. It is taking in not only *esse commune*, but simultaneously one's *actus essendi* in the midst of this *esse commune*.

2.7 Summary

For students of St. Thomas who wish to reflect the master's teaching, *esse* should not only be included in the discussion of human nature, but have a primacy that reflects its importance as the direct point of contact with God and as an emergent power that empowers all other acts in the human person. *Esse* serves not only as the passive

¹⁶⁹ Mary Hayden Lemmons, "Love and the Metaphysics of Being: Aquinas, Clarke, and Wojtyla," *Quaestiones Disputatae* Volume 6, Number 1 (Fall, 2015), 67.

¹⁷⁰ This phrase and concept I learned from Paul Gondreau during an Independent Study regarding a method to better understand how St. Thomas wrote the *Summa Theologiae* and how to read it.

constitutional element within the hierarchy of being, but for the human person is something that can be recognized as a power unique to one's self, and as something that can be consciously exercised¹⁷¹ and actively participated in in order to achieve one's own completion through one's own operations. But there is also the dimension of perceiving *esse* in silence, the immediate experience of *esse* without operations other than the act of contemplating one's act of being.

¹⁷¹ As discussed in the Summary of chapter 1 in footnote 80 about the use of the term "concurrent" to describe the kind of active participation in the active intellect, the term and concept "exercise" is the operative and controlling term to describe the kind of participation in *esse*. This is based on Maritain's analysis of *esse* in *The Degrees of Knowledge* pages 436-439, which is also echoed by Clarke in *The One and the Many* page 51. See also Giles Emery, "The Unity of Man, Body and Soul in St. Thomas Aquinas," in *Trinity, Church, and The Human Person* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2007), 221 where he writes, "It [the soul] exercises the act of existence as though from itself."

Conclusion

St. Thomas teaches the revealed truth that the ultimate end of every human person is to see God face to face. Human nature is designed by God in such a way that it is “hardwired” to find its fulfilment and perfection in Him. However, this objective truth is meant to be experienced subjectively and uniquely, albeit collectively with all the other angels and saints.

In chapter 1 we explored the structure of human nature in order to see how in this life God is an active principle energizing one’s intellect through the active intellect. Within this structure of human nature we explored St. Thomas’ philosophical psychology and explored the psychic location of the self. But we also learned that the very location of self is also the very location of where the Beatific Vision is experienced, the contemplative intellect. We learned that this structural and mechanical design is epistemologically significant because in seeing God we become known as He knows us; that this is not only a Biblically revealed truth in 1 Corinthians, but an epistemological design in human nature in which that Biblical truth can be explored and understood through Thomistic philosophical psychology. Because God is the author of both, it is no wonder that Scripture and human nature agree. I argued that we can actively participate in this divine power coming from the active intellect by concurrently using this power to think our thoughts and learn about the self in an intellectually conscious manner.

In chapter 2 we went even deeper by employing St. Thomas’ metaphysics of being. We discussed that not only by metaphysical reflection, but also by experience that each of us has a unique *esse*, a unique center of being. We learned that at this center there is also a direct point of contact with God. I say an even deeper exploration, because with *esse* we are not just talking about one of the powers of the soul as in the active intellect, but rather a power that empowers

the entire composite being. We explored how some theologians and philosophers see the *esse* as the center of one's being such that all the powers of one's nature actually emerge or arise from the one power of *esse*, including the power of consciousness. It is in this special gift of consciousness in the contemplative intellect that enables us to be reflective and reflexive in the act of knowing the self, the me, as well as the very center of me, my *esse*.

In this sense of discussing the human *esse* as an emergent *esse*, there is really only one point of contact with God, and it is in one's *esse*. This thought does not become clear in St. Thomas' teaching where we explored and established how the active intellect and the *esse* are direct points of contact with God. But we reviewed several authors who came to the conclusion that *esse* is an emergent *esse* from which all other powers flow, including the active intellect. Except for the quote from *On Spiritual Creatures*, a. 11, ad 14, which I shall condense, "now understanding sometimes means *esse*", the one-point-of-contact thought would escape us. Similarly, as discussed above, it is in one act that God creates and conserves His creatures. Just as creation and conservation are one act for God, so is *esse* and the active intellect one point of contact. In other words, just as the one act of creation extends itself into conservation, the one point of contact in *esse* extends itself into the active intellect. This oneness thought is consistent with the teaching that God Himself is one and simple. This thought comes into relief when we reread Acts 17:28, "For in Him we live, and move, and have our being." These are not three separate acts of God, or three separate, direct and constant points of contact with God, but rather one act, one contact point emerging into three different expressions. In other words, one source of contact that emerges in three different ways: existence, life, and movement. It is one point of contact from which the other powers emerge. These three acts are all acts that God wants us to

actively participate in by exercising our *esse* so that we may achieve self-fulfillment, self-completion in and through Him.

Can we actively and consciously participate in the active intellect and in our own *esse*? I say Yes, but the kind of active participation for each point of contact is different. Just as we participate in our creation and in our conservation differently, so do we participate in our *esse* and in the active intellect differently. St. Thomas uses the term “concur” when active participation is applied to the active intellect. Maritain uses the term “exercise” when active participation is applied to *esse*. There are specific reasons why.

Active participation by way of concurrence contemplates two actors forming one act simultaneously. In the intellect there are two parts, the active intellect and the possible intellect. As discussed above, God is present via the active intellect, but I am doing the thinking via the possible intellect. In this sense I am contributing to my own thought. In horsemanship language, this is like driving the horses two abreast or side by side.

However, as active participation relates to *esse*, the kind of active participation cannot be concurrence because *esse* has no parts. I do not contribute to my own act of existence; therefore, active participation in *esse* must be by way of exercise. Again, in horsemanship language, this kind of active participation is like driving horses in tandem, one in front of the other.

So, the one point of contact in the human *esse* that has an extended direct point of contact into one specific power of the soul, the active intellect, has different kinds of active participation that can be taken by the human person. But active participation seen in unison in the one act of

thought, we are exercising our “intellectual act of existence,” as Robb would say, while at the same time our possible intellect is concurrently operating with the active intellect.

There is a concurrent nature to cooperating with the power coming from the active intellect. There is the exercise of one’s *esse* when executing the operations of our nature. And in silence we can perceive our *esse* as we contemplate our being as energized by God. As rational beings possessing a contemplative intellect, we can be consciously aware of our using these powers while we are using them and knowing that we are cooperating and using a power energized by God. And St. Thomas would also make it clear that our active participation is not like an equal partnership with God; we do our part and God does His. His divine mode of action is entirely transcendent, immanent, and atemporal (cf. SCG III, 70). In this sense there is a real distinction in modes of action between human and divine even though there is one action in thought or being. The surfer and the wave are distinct, but surfing is one action.

The theological and philosophical analysis of the human intellect is important because its designated end is to be fulfilled and perfected by the vision of God. And due to the nature of the duality of human conscious thought, and that the knowledge of self and the Beatific Vision occur in the same psychic location, when we see Him, we will know ourselves as God knows us, not as a divine intellect, of course, but as a human intellect elevated by the light of glory. “A man does not delight in himself except through the concept he has of himself” (*De Potentia*, q. 9, a. 5, ad 24). And that is eternal life: to delight in God and in ourselves through God. And the means to that end is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul [where *esse* is], and with all your mind [where the possible intellect is]” (Matt 22:37).

Bibliography

- Aquinas, St. Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York, NY: Cosimo Books, 2007.
- _____. *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei*. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004.
- _____. *An Exposition of the On the Hebdomads of Boethius*. Translated by Janice L. Schultz and Edward A. Synan. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001.
- _____. *Commentary on the Book of Causes*. Translated by Vincent A. Guagliardo, O.P., Charles R. Hess, O.P. and Richard C. Taylor. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996.
- _____. *De Ente et Essentia*. Translated by Joseph Kenney, O.P. The website of the Dominican House of Studies Priory. Accessed June 27, 2016.
<http://dhsPriory.org/thomas/DeEnte&Essentia.htm>.
- _____. *Disputed Questions On Virtue*. Translated by Jeffrey Hause and Claudia Eisen Murphy. The Hackett Aquinas. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2010.

_____. *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by C.J. Litzinger, O.P.
Notre Dame, Indiana: Dumb Ox Books, revised edition, 1993.

_____. *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Book One translated by Anton C. Pegis. Book Two translated
by James F. Anderson. New York: Hanover House, 1955-57. Books Three and Four
translated by Laurence Shapcote, O.P. Green Bay, WI: Aquinas Institute, 2018.

_____. *Questiones Disputatae de Veritate*. Questions 1-9 translated by Robert W. Mulligan, S.J.
Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1952; Questions 10-20 translated by James V. McGlynn.,
S.J. Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1953.

_____. *Commentary on De Trinitate*. Translated by Armand Maurer. Toronto, Ontario, Canada:
Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986.

_____. *Disputed Questions on Spiritual Creatures*. Translated by Mary C. FitzPatrick, Ph.D.
Milwaukee, WI: The Marquette University Press, 1949.

_____. *Disputed Questions on the Soul*. Translated by James. H. Robb. Milwaukee, WI: The
Marquette University Press, 2016.

Aristotle. *On The Soul*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University
Press, 1984.

Black, Deborah L. "Consciousness and Self-Knowledge in Aquinas's Critique of Averroes's
Psychology." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* Volume 31, Number 3 (July, 1993):

349-385.

Brennan, O.P., Robert Edward. *Thomistic Psychology*. Tacoma, WA: Cluny Media, 2016.

Burrell, David B. "God's Eternity." *Faith and Philosophy* Volume 1, Number 4

(October, 1984): 389-406.

_____. *Aquinas: God and Action*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979.

Clarke, S.J., W. Norris. *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics*.

Notre Dame: Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001.

Connor, Robert A. "Relation, The Thomistic *Esse*, and American Culture: Toward a Metaphysic of Sanctity." *Communio* 17 (Fall, 1990): 454-464.

Cory, Therese Scarpelli. *Aquinas on Human Self-Knowledge*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Dewan, Lawrence. *Form and Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006.

Fabro, C.P.S., Cornelio. "The Notion of Participation." *The Review of Metaphysics* Vol. 27, No. 3 (March, 1974): 449-491.

_____. "The Problem of Being and the Destiny of Man." 407-436.

_____. "Philosophy and Thomism Today." 44-53.

_____. "The Transcendentality of *Ens-Esse* and the Ground of Metaphysics."
International Philosophical Quarterly Vol. 2, Issue 3 (September, 1966): 389-
427.

Feser, Edward. *Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*. Piscataway, NJ:
Transaction Books, 2014.

Flood, Anthony T. *The Metaphysical Foundations of Love: Aquinas on Participation,
Unity and Union*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press,
2018.

Gilson, Etienne. *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Notre Dame, Indiana:
University of Notre Dame Press, 1956.

_____. *Being and Some Philosophers*. Toronto, Ontario: Pontifical Institute of
Mediaeval Studies, 1952.

_____. *Methodical Realism*. Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 1990.

Glenn, Paul J. *A Tour of the Summa*. St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Company, 1963.

Hankey, W.J. *Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae*.
Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Hayden Lemmons, R. Mary. "Love and the Metaphysics of Being: Aquinas, Clarke, and
Wojtyla." *Quaestiones Disputatae* Volume 6, Number 1 (Fall, 2015): 58-72.

Hütter, Reinhard. *Bound for Beatitude: A Thomistic Study in Eschatology and Ethics*.
Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019.

Kreeft, Peter, " 'Thomersonalism,' or Thomistic Personalism (or Personalistic Thomism):
A Marriage Made in Heaven, Hell, or Harvard?" Paper presented at the 30th
Annual Aquinas Lecture, Center for Thomistic Studies, University of St. Thomas,
Houston, TX, January 27, 2011.

_____. *Practical Theology: Spiritual Direction from Saint Thomas Aquinas*. San Francisco:
Ignatius Press, 2014.

Lee, Patrick. "St. Thomas and Avicenna on the Agent Intellect." *The Thomist* Volume
45, Number 1 (January, 1981): 41-61.

Mahoney, Christopher J. "Esse in the Metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas." *The New
Scholasticism* Vol. LV, No. 2 (Spring, 1981): 159-177.

Maritain, Jacques. *The Degrees of Knowledge*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959.

Mitchell, Jason A. "Being and Participation: The Method and Structure of Metaphysical Reflection According to Cornelio Fabro." PhD diss., Pontificii Athenaei Regina Apostolorum, 2012.

O'Rourke, Fran. *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005.

Owens, Joseph. "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being in the Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas." In *Etienne Gilson Anniversary Studies Volume XX*, 1-40. Toronto, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1958.

_____. "Stages and Distinction In *De Ente*: A Rejoinder." *The Thomist* Volume 45 (January, 1981): 99-123.

Pasnau, Robert. *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Perez Lopez, Angel. "Karol Wojtyla's Thomistic Understanding of Consciousness." *The Thomist* 79 (2015): 407-437.

Pieper, Josef. *Living the Truth: The Truth of All Things*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989.

Pinckaers, O.P., Servais. *The Sources of Christian Ethics*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995.

Rahner, S.J., Karl. *Spirit in the World*. Wm. Dych, S.J., trans. New York: Harper and Row, 1968.

Reeve, Pamela A. "The Metaphysics of Higher Cognitive States in Thomas Aquinas." In *Essays in Medieval Philosophy and Theology in Memory of Walter H. Principe, CSB*, edited by James R. Ginther and Carl N. Still, 105-119. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005.

Rosemann, Philipp W. *Omne Agens Agit Sibi Simile: A "Repetition" of Scholastic Metaphysics*. Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1996.

Ruane, John. "Self-Knowledge and the Spirituality of the Soul in St. Thomas." *The New Scholasticism* 32 (1958): 425-442.

Salas, Jr., Victor. "Thomas Aquinas on Christ's *Esse: A Metaphysics of the Incarnation.*" *The Thomist* Volume 70, Number 4 (October, 2006): 577-603.

Sanguinetti, Juan Jose. "The Ontological Account of Self-Consciousness in Aristotle and Aquinas." *The Review of Metaphysics* Volume 67, Number 2 (December, 2013): 311-344.

Scarpelli Cory, Therese. *Aquinas On Human Self-Knowledge*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Smith, Wolfgang. "From Schrödinger's Cat to Thomistic Ontology." *The Thomist* Volume 63, Number 1 (October, 1999): 49-63.

Stock, O.P., Michael. "Sense Consciousness According to St. Thomas." *The Thomist* Volume 21, Number 4 (October, 1958): 415-486.

Sweeney, S.J., Leo. "Philosophical Problems." *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* Volume XXXVII (April, 1963): 97-131.

Wilhelmsen, Frederick D. "The *Triplex Via* and the Transcendence of *Esse*." *The New Scholasticism* Volume 44 (1970): 223-235.

_____. "Existence and *Esse*." *The New Scholasticism* Volume 50 (1976): 20-45.

Wippel, John F. *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000.

_____. "Aquinas's Route to the Real Distinction: A Note on *De ente et essentia*." *The Thomist* Volume 43, Number 2 (April, 1979): 279-295.