

Essence and Existence
A New Foundation of
Classical Metaphysics on the Basis
Of "Phenomenological Realism,"
And a Critical Investigation of
"Existentialist Thomism"

(Second Part)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOURTH CHAPTER

THE REAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN ESSENCE AND
EXISTENCE IN CONTINGENT BEINGS 375

1. The ontological and the epistemological ground of the real distinction 375
2. Ways of knowing that there is a real distinction 376
3. The real distinction and the actual "seperability" between essence and existence 377
4. The real distinction and the imperfect union of essence and existence within contingent beings 378
5. Misunderstandings of the "real distinction" to be excluded 378

FIFTH CHAPTER

THE "PRIORITY" OF EXISTENCE OVER ESSENCE.
FURTHER REMARKS ON THE MEANING OF EXISTENCE (*ESSE*) 379

1. Formulation of the "priority" of existence over essence 379
2. What is the meaning of existence, *esse*, or to be? Existence as act or actuality in a sense distinct from all other meanings of act and actuality. 379
3. Re-formulation of the "priority of existence over essence" 385
 - a. Criticism of false conceptions of the priority of existence over essence 385
4. Existential experiences of the priority of existence over essence: gratitude; despair; wonderment 387
5. The "forgetfulness of being" as forgetfulness of existence and the primacy of *esse* 389

SIXTH CHAPTER

THE UNION OF ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE IN EVERY
REAL BEING AND SEVERAL FIRST MEANINGS OF THE
"PRIMACY OF ESSENCE OVER EXISTENCE" 393

1. The indispensability of essence for existence and various meanings of the primacy of essence over existence 393
2. *Esse* (existence) as such, or a being whose essence consists (only) in existing, is absolutely impossible; least of all would it be God. The most fundamental error of existential Thomism. 398

- a. Brief analysis and first criticism of Gilson's position on God as "*esse tantum*." 398
- b. Insights which Gilson's position contains and the apparent necessity that essence implies not only *Abgrenzung* (delimitation), but also *Begrenzung* (limitation) and cannot, therefore, be in God 400
- c. Criticism of Gilson's position: errors and confusions leading to the identification of *Abgrenzung* with *Begrenzung* 402
- d. Conclusion 408
3. The inseparable union of real essence and existence in contingent beings: the being, not essence, as the subject of existence 411
4. The "synthesis" which each real being is, is a fruit not of *esse* as such, (conceived of as "synthesizing act"), nor of "essence" alone, but of their intimate union 415

SEVENTH CHAPTER

THE PRIORITY OF ESSENCE OVER EXISTENCE:
FURTHER SENSES 417

1. Various meanings of the term "essence" recapitulated 417
2. The priority of necessary, "essential plans" over contingent existence 418
3. "*Natura absolute considerata*" and some Thomistic objections 419
4. Objections of existentialist Thomists to necessary, essential plans being prior to the existing contingent world 427
5. Various meanings of "being in the mind" and a further dimension of the priority of essence over existence 429

EIGHTH CHAPTER

KINDS OF "REAL EXISTENCE" AND THEIR CAUSES 433

1. Different kinds of "real existents" and their causes 433
2. Instantaneous and gradual "coming into existence" 434
3. Human freedom as cause of existence 435
4. Contingent existence and "first cause" 435

CONCLUSION 437

Fourth Chapter

The Real Distinction Between Essence and Existence in Contingent Beings

The question whether there is merely a conceptual or a real distinction between essence and existence in contingent beings is an old issue of discussion. Existentialist Thomists strongly affirm that there is a *real* distinction between them. We propose to investigate in the following the senses in which one can legitimately speak of such a real distinction, and to separate these from the senses in which one cannot rightly claim a real distinction between essence and existence. The term "essence" is taken here in the sense in which it has being only *in* (really) existing beings. "Existence" is understood primarily in the sense of real existence (compare chapter i and ii of this essay).

1. The Ontological and Epistemological Ground of the Real Distinction

It is surely true that with regard to each contingent being, the most exact and perfect *understanding* of what the being is, of all of its determinations, does not in and of itself allow us to grasp that the being or its determinations possess real existence, as long as it remains undecided whether all these determinations really exist and are meant as the essence of an existing being¹³² or whether they are spoken of as mere possibilities or as the objects of imagination. From this epistemological fact we can conclude that *what* a contingent being is (its essence) and its existence are in some sense really distinct.

Ontologically speaking (that is, leaving the above epistemological level of discussion) the essence of a contingent being does not necessarily imply real existence; this means that what each contingent being is, could have remained a mere possibility, could also not exist. Since the essence of a contingent being does not necessarily imply its real existence, the two cannot be identical nor be necessarily united. They must, therefore, be really distinct in some sense.

2. Ways of Knowing that There is a Real Distinction

There are many ways of knowing that there is a real distinction between essence and existence in the sense just described. Some of these "ways" shall be discussed in the following:

The mere fact that we can conceive of "possible beings" which do not exist in reality (or where we at least can know that it is possible that they do not exist) shows that there is a distinction between the essence and existence of a contingent being in the sense that there is no necessary link between both. We grasp this distinction on the basis of imagination and phantasy. Moreover, we grasp, as Thomas shows in *De Ente et Essentia*, that no being that possesses a nature which can be "multiplied" in many individuals, can exist by necessity. For the very fact that other beings of the same nature are possible, shows that to have the given nature and to exist are neither identical nor necessarily connected. Avicenna as well as Thomas Aquinas and some contemporary Thomists have described this first way of knowing the difference between essence and existence.¹³³

Also the observation of the coming into existence and of the passing away of things may lead us to the same knowledge. This observation refers to the changes of beings which come into existence and pass out of existence in concrete things and substances (e.g., virtues, vices, colors, etc.), as well as to the coming into existence and the perishing of concrete substances, for example, of all organisms we know and of many material substances like buildings or statues.

This coming into existence and perishing is analyzed with great accuracy by Aristotle in his *Physics*.¹³⁴ This experience of the coming to be and perishing does not let us grasp, however, the absolute coming into existence of something "from nothing," except in an analogous sense in free acts.¹³⁵

The deepest and most reliable knowledge concerning the difference between the real existence and the essence of contingent beings, is gained by means of the insight into the essentially necessary fact that contingency in the sense of temporality, dependence on efficient causes, but especially in the sense of *limitation*, limited perfection, implies contingent existence. This insight can be reached philosophically, without any reliance on religion, i.e. Revelation, but historically it has actually only been gained under the influence of the Jewish-Christian Revelation of the creation from nothing. Plato and Aristotle seem to have explicitly rejected a becoming (creation) out of nothing, and thereby the deepest ground and ontological level of the "real distinction" between essence and existence. We cannot develop this point further in the context of the present paper.¹³⁶

These three ways and levels of knowing the real distinction between essence and existence in contingent beings can be formulated in the form

of a proof in the following fashion:

1. *Premise:* In all cases in which, given a certain nature, there are possible beings which do not actually exist, really existing beings of the same nature cannot exist necessarily.

2. *Premise:* With regard to all real beings which we know in our experience (i.e., ourselves and the whole world), there are (indefinitely many) possible beings of such nature which do not exist.

Conclusion: Therefore, all beings which we know in experience as existing (the whole world) cannot exist necessarily, i.e., they could also not exist.

The first part of the first premise in this categorical syllogism (of the first figure in the first mood: *Barbara*) could be replaced by conditions corresponding to the states of facts related to becoming and perishing, or to the relation between limitation and contingent existence. The second premise and conclusion could correspondingly be changed and, in this manner, we would have three proofs for the distinction between essence and existence in all contingent beings, in the sense specified above.

3. The Real Distinction and Actual "Separability" between Essence and Existence

The real distinction between essence and existence, being even more radical than the one Aristotle implicitly admits in his *Physics*,¹³⁷ implies also an actual separability between essence and existence.

In place of *what* these beings *are*, instead of their existing essence, there could be the mere possibility *that* beings of this nature could exist; moreover, the real existence of these beings could have remained *nothing*. Here we are confronted with a metaphysical truth about our own and the whole world's being which existentially affects us very deeply:¹³⁸ our essence and existence could be "separated," our being could not be. This truth can also be formulated in stating that what we are, and that we exist, could be reduced to nothing; or that "we" could have remained a mere possibility with regard to our essence as well as with regard to our existence. We could have remained nothing, or nothing from which we came could have remained without our being.

Indeed, as only an investigation of the necessarily temporal beginning of contingent beings could show, all beings of and in this world *were* once actually nothing.¹³⁹ (This remains true, even though, as we have seen in chapter I, the possibility of the world's being, as well as intelligible and even necessary "essential plans" of the world preceded the world's actual being; otherwise contingent being could never have come into existence.)

4. The Real Distinction and the Imperfect Union of Essence and Existence Within Contingent Being.

Yet not only are our essence and existence separable in the sense just described, distinct in the sense analyzed; they remain even in one sense of the term (which later on will be differentiated and qualified) "really distinct" *within* the existing being. This real distinction *in* the real being is perhaps equivalent to, and in any event a necessary consequence of, the fact that such a being could also (at any time) not exist. In virtue of this fact, it never "possesses" its being (neither *what* it is nor its *existence*) in the sense in which the absolute being *possesses* its being. The absence of any inner necessity that a being of this nature exist, and that *this individual being* exist, grounds a true sense of the statement that essence and existence remain distinct in a contingent being, and that the latter neither possesses its essence nor its existence fully and in every respect as "its own," but that they are given to it.¹⁴⁰ Only in the absolute Being is there no real distinction between essence and existence in this sense, but only a conceptual distinction (*cum fundamento in re*).

5. Misunderstandings of the "Real Distinction" to be Excluded

After having investigated the true senses in which we can speak of the real distinction between essence and existence, we must also take care to avoid all misunderstandings of this real distinction.

There is, first, the misunderstanding which conceives of essence and existence as if they were two separately existing entities. The "real distinction," however, in no way refers to the possibility that either of the two (e.g., what we are or that we are) could exist or be real independently from the other. This, and many other misunderstandings of the real distinction between essence and existence, will become more evident after an analysis of the primacy of existence over essence, of the other priority of essence over existence, as well as of the intimate unity of being, the intimate and, in one sense, inseparable and undivided unity of essence and existence in the concrete being.

Fifth Chapter

The "Priority" of Existence Over Essence. Further Remarks on the Meaning of Existence (Esse).

1. Formulation of the "Priority" of Existence Over Essence

There is a sense in which existence is indeed the most fundamental and therefore "primary" element of real being. Since the term "element" in this context might be misleading, however, we could instead speak of existence as a constituent of being. But even this term is not satisfactory. Consequently, we have to take refuge to the notion moment or the (Latin) *id* (that), in order to avoid the confusion between existence and a thing or *what* a thing is.

Insofar as existence is that (*id*) in virtue of which the being itself, and everything that is in it, are real, we can speak of existence — without which the being would be nothing — as being in the primary sense. We can also speak of existence as having a priority over essence insofar as it is true that what a being is (its essence) is real because it exists. In *this sense*, it would *not* be true to say of a contingent being that its existence is real because of what it is. It is in this manner, therefore, that the primacy of existence over essence should be understood. Yet, in order to grasp this clearly, we have to better understand the meaning of existence.

2. What Is the Meaning of Existence, Esse, or to Be? Existence as Act or Actuality in a Sense Distinct from all Other Meanings of Act and Actuality.

When we say existence is that (*id*) "in virtue of which a real being and whatever is 'in' it, are real," what do we mean? In which sense is it that, *in virtue of* existence, a being is or becomes real? (We will concentrate in the following on the *act*-character of existence which we distinguished in the second chapter from the aspect of existence as a *fact*.) Surely, existence is not a thing which makes another thing real; existence is not one thing inside another thing. But what is it then?

We could further try to escape the misleading notion of existence as a thing by saying that existence is an *act*. Thus, we could state that existence is that act of a being in virtue of which it is real. While this notion of act may be superior to that of thing, however, it still might be quite misleading.

Obviously, existence is not an act in the usual sense of this term. For, when we speak of an act, we are well aware of the fact that the being of that which is usually designated by the term act or action presupposes precisely the *being whose* act it is. "*Esse praecedit agere*," as the Scholastics rightly said.

Even when we do not mean the temporal antecedence of a being with regard to its actions, it still remains true that *metaphysically* the being of an agent precedes the being of any act. Never can an action or an act in the usual sense (e.g., an act of will, of intellect, etc.) ground the being of an agent. Consequently, when Fichte attempts to let the "positing" (*das Setzen*) of the I become the ground for the being of the I, he contradicts exactly this self-evident truth, which was always acknowledged by the great ancient and medieval philosophers. Existence therefore is clearly not an act in the usual sense of the term.¹⁴¹ For were it *such* an act, it could never be true that a being is real in virtue of this act.

The only other notion of act, though, that presents itself immediately in light of this result is the act of the cause bringing a being into existence. This act indeed fulfills two requirements of the above characterization of the act of existence. It possesses a priority over the being in question; and it is in virtue of this act (for instance, the creative causality of the architect and the workers with respect to a cathedral) that its effect, the being in question (e.g., the cathedral) becomes real. Yet, on the one hand, this act often also precedes temporally the being it causes. (The being caused by this sort of act may outlive the latter. The Cathedral of Châtres still exists while all its secondary efficient causes and the agents who created it do not exist any longer.) Thus the act of the efficient cause cannot be the existence of its effect. On the other hand, it is also obviously absurd to call the acts and actions of the agents the existence of the being they cause because there is a self-evident difference between the two. Thus it seems that no meaning for existence as an act is left over.

Perhaps we can come closer to understanding correctly the meaning of the act of existence by saying that existence means an "interior" act or the most intimate inner *actuality* of a being. Existence would then be the actuality of what the being is. What a being is, is only real because of its existence, not as if existence itself would be the cause, but in that it designates the actuality inherent in the being. That actuality in virtue of which we can rightly call the being "real," is (real) existence.

Even such an understanding of existence as inner actuality, however, can be misleading in a twofold manner. In the first place, actuality in all other senses of this term already presupposes existence in various manners; and secondly, *what* all other actualities are, their essence, is different from their existence.

We shall now turn to the first point. When we speak of the actuality of a thing, we normally contrast it with the potency or potentiality of that same being. We mean with actual being the blossom, for example, as opposed to the bud, the adult person in contrast to the baby, the actual pianist as opposed to the potential pianist, the full-grown oak tree in contrast to the seed, etc.

With Aristotle we could further distinguish, within the potencies, active and passive potentialities. An active potency would be found in the seed, for example, in relation to the full-grown tree or flower. Within the seed there exists not only an "abstract," quite indeterminate potency to become, but a real and determinate tendency towards becoming a flower or a specific tree. The same has to be said about the baby in relation to the adult person. A passive potency, on the other hand, is found in the marble block in relation to the statue that can be made out of it. In such a case of potency, the being in question does not, like an entelechy, possess within itself the "form" toward the realization of which it has the potency. Still less is it actively driven from within towards the realization of the form; but this passive potency is realized "from without." The form or actuality, one among many possible ones, is given to the being from without and in a sense accidentally. A "passive potency" may allow for an inexhaustible richness of formation and is presupposed for all art. (We prescind here completely from another meaning of "active potency" in Aristotle. This term can also refer to positive power, a "pure perfection" which is quite compatible with highest — even with absolute — actuality of a being.)

This distinction of Aristotle is very important, but not sufficient to do justice to all of the many kinds of potency. Another different distinction, for example, can be drawn between potencies which are rooted in the very essence or nature of a given being, and potencies which are not grounded in a being's essence in the narrower sense of its *τί εἶναι*, of that which *makes* the being the kind of being or the individual being it is. One might think that active potencies and potencies which are rooted in the essence of a being are the same thing. To this objection the following answer has to be given. Perhaps it is exclusively active potencies that can be rooted in the essence of a being; yet not all active potencies are grounded in a being's essence. A strong talent or inclination, for example, to cook, to act, to exercise a certain profession, are certainly active potencies. Yet they are accidental and quite distinct from those potencies which

are inseparable from a being's nature. Within active potencies a further crucial distinction must be made. This is the distinction between potencies towards the actualization of which a being has an automatic inevitable tendency, and those potencies which can be realized only through or in freedom. For example, the potencies realized by a man in moral virtues and good acts are not sufficiently characterized as "active potencies." Still less can they be adequately described as "passive potencies." They are realized only through freedom, and there is no immanent automatic or inevitable potential in man to become morally good, in contradistinction to, for example, the case of the baby where we find a potency to grow up which, under normal circumstances, inevitably strives towards its actualization. The potency to become just can only be realized in freedom; therefore somebody might be inclined to count it as a passive potency. And it is certainly correct that, like in a passive potency, another actuality or "form" can be realized by a man, such as injustice, or a life of unbridled passions and vices. Yet the potency under consideration is not a passive potency nor is it even only an active potency, but one of the active potencies in the most proper sense which are rooted in the very essence of a given being. Man is by his very nature ordained to become just and morally good. This ordination or vocation is even more interior to man than it is for the seed to become a full-grown plant. Further distinctions have to be made within those active potencies that imply freedom in order to be realized: there are some potencies which belong to the very freedom itself or to the person *as free*, such as the potencies to become morally good. Others, such as the potencies of the "born athlete," require freedom to be realized, but the actuality (physical strength, etc.) does not *consist* in a free attitude or action like the actuality in the moral sphere. Also some passive and accidental potencies not rooted in our nature (such as to build a house or not, to travel here or there) require freedom in order to be realized, but the corresponding actualities come still "from without" in the sense of having no foundation in any active potency, pre-given striving or ordination in a being's nature.

Many potencies actualized only through freedom, as well as many other potencies actualized in knowledge, hope, trust, conviction, etc., are distinct from many other active or passive potencies through another decisive fact. They imply intentionality in the sense of a meaningful and conscious relation to the objects of personal acts. The meant potencies can only be actualized by an object of conscious knowledge or other intentional relations. The actuality is in such cases either engendered in a person by the object of which he is conscious, or the actuality is in other ways dependent on the conscious intentional dialogue between the person and other beings.

In regard to all of these potencies, but especially in reference to the

active potencies, we can say that the term "potency" can refer to three related but quite different data. We can mean with the term "potency," first, the real faculties, capacities, abilities, etc., which exist actually in a given being. The human person, for example, must have from the very first moment of his existence the faculty to think, to will, etc. which constitute him as a rational personal being. Quite different again are the various abilities which must often be acquired and which imply that a being has a given activity at his disposal, so to speak. Thus a man acquires the ability to think, on the basis of the faculty to think, through free acts and developments, as Crosby has shown in his previously quoted article. Also in the other example of the seed we find the existing capacity to grow. If we call such actually existing faculties, abilities, or capacities "potencies" rather than actualities we mean that these faculties, abilities, etc., are not simply speaking actual traits of the being which possesses them. They are destined to be exercised and they should give rise by their exercise to a new being: actual knowledge, thought, growth, the full-grown tree, etc.

A second sense of potency that refers to a less "really existing" aspect of a being is at stake when we call "potencies" those unawakened, uncultivated layers *in* a given being that are destined to awaken by the exercise of actual faculties, abilities, etc. Here we refer to a somehow "dormient" side *within* a given being that must already really exist in the being, but still is unawakened, as long as the corresponding actuality is not realized. The Aristotelian thesis is more correct about this second meaning of potency than about the first: namely, the thesis that τὸ δύναμει ὄν (the potential being) is somehow "in-between being and not being."

The third meaning of potency refers to something that is not yet actually existing at all in a given being, but that *can* become real in it. In this sense one can call a child a "potential pianist" or a "potential great philosopher" if one means that a great pianist or philosopher *can* become real on the basis of the existence of that child or in that person. The third meaning of "potency" refers, one could say, to the fully actual state of a being *before* it is real and while it is only possible in the peculiar way which is grounded in certain capacities, faculties or abilities of a given being. In that sense the full grown oak tree exists already in the seed "in potentia." The Aristotelian thesis about potency in general can be most adequately applied to this third meaning or kind of potency which we distinguished. For this "potential being" is in-between (actual) being and non-being, a bit closer to not existing and to not being than to being. Yet it is more than a mere abstract possibility. For the potential being in the third sense is grounded in actually existing capacities or faculties of a being. This third kind of "being in potentia" is strongest in the case of active potencies, and again in the case of active potencies that do not require the use of freedom

in order to be realized. In the other cases of potencies this "being in potentia" is close to "not being at all." This does not exhaust the meanings of "potencies" but suffices for the present purpose.

Wherever we find potency we find these *three different data* that can be meant by the term "potency." For this reason, they should be called three stages of potency or three different data that can be called potency rather than three *kinds* of potency.

On the basis of this brief analysis of potency we see clearly that potencies presuppose real existence in at least four senses. First of all, the being that possesses capacities, faculties, potencies, etc., exists really. Secondly, the potencies in the first sense (faculties, abilities, etc.) exist really although they are at the same destined to give rise to a further reality. Thirdly, the "unawakened layers" in a being exist already really as potentials. Fourthly, the being "to be brought into existence" has already some, although a very "weak" existence; it is "in-between" being and not being.

It is quite true that in regard to the last meaning of potency, and to some extent also in regard to the first meanings of potency, the transition from potency to act means also some coming to be. In this actualization something comes fully into being that did not (fully) exist before. Nevertheless, if we consider the further fact that real existence has to be predicated of the real being having a potency and of its potency itself, and already precedes any actualization in the senses described, we see that the understanding of this kind of actuality can in no way give us a sufficient notion of what existence means. It rather presupposes already the understanding and presence of the fundamental and irreducible datum of real existence.

The second misunderstanding of existence as actuality could arise from a confusion of *what* we mean by the actuality of something which existed before only as a potential, with existence. *What* actuality and actualization mean, is precisely not yet the existence of this actualization. Rather, we find also here the real distinction between what actuality is (the essence of actuality) and its existence.

Therefore, the understanding of actuality as such seems in no way to give us any grasp of what we mean by existence. First of all, not only actualized beings but also potential beings may really exist. Potential beings presuppose real existence in a fourfold manner. Secondly, what we mean with existence is precisely not *what* we mean by actuality; it is not the essence of actuality.

We can say that existence means something quite different, and yet, in one respect, something analogous to actuality in the sense described. Thomas Aquinas had undoubtedly this fact in mind when he called existence the "act of (all) acts." It is that unique actuality which makes poten-

tialities as well as actualities (in the sense described) *real*. It signifies the unique actuality of what the thing, or its potentials, or its actions and actualities, are. It signifies that irreducible actuality which is the reason for our calling one thing or actuality real, whereas we call another thing, potency or actuality only possible because it lacks real existence. Existence means that unique actuality to which we refer when we say that something is really or actually exists. Existence refers to that actuality which accounts for the difference between possibility and actual reality wherever this difference is found. Existence is that actuality of a being which accounts for the essential change which we find between the "possible essence" and the "real essence" of a being, which we analyzed earlier in this journal, Vol. I, 1, (pp. 42ff, 72ff, 120ff).

3. Re-formulation of the "Priority of Existence Over Essence"

a. Criticism of False Conceptions of the Priority of Existence over Essence.

On the basis of this analysis, we can reformulate and better understand the primacy of existence over essence: what any contingent being is (its essence) is real because that being exists; in the same sense it is not true to say that the being exists because of what it is.

Furthermore, in light of this analysis, it would not seem adequate to the primacy of existence over essence to say that it consists in the fact that "if you cancel existence, you also cancel essence."¹⁴² The same could also be said, namely, of existence: i.e., "if you cancel essence, you also cancel existence." This touches on a point, however, which calls for further differentiation.¹⁴³

It is true of both essence and existence to say: without existence (and essence) we would be nothing. Similarly, one could rightly say, "If you cancel all modal determinations of a substance, you cancel the substance." Yet this does not imply any priority of the modes over the substance. The primacy of existence does not follow, then, from the fact that without it we would be nothing, but rather from the fact that with existence we designate that in a being which accounts for that being's reality. It is to existence that the being "owes" its being real, not to what it is; what it is is real because existence is given to it, not vice versa.

This primacy of existence over essence also expresses itself in the truth that it is existence which accounts in a unique and primary sense for the tremendous difference between the "world before creation" and the "world after creation." Existence gives in a unique sense being to the world and accounts in a unique sense for the fact that the world is not

nothing.¹⁴⁴

The "primacy" of existence over essence can also be seen when we consider that existence is in no way an *accident* of an essence or substance, as Avicenna seems to have suggested in introducing existence as an eleventh category. Existence is quite different from an accident of a substance, nor is it related to essence in a way similar to that in which an accident is related to a substance.

Existence is not in a substance in the sense that it inheres in it, as a mode or property inheres in the substance. For, the substance as well as its modes and properties are only real because they exist. Thus, existence can never be in a substance like modes or properties. In order that *anything* may inhere in the substance, the substance must already exist, its existence is presupposed; the substance gives being, lends being to everything that inheres in it, whereas existence gives being to the substance.¹⁴⁵

Existence, therefore, is in the substance in a totally different way than any mode or property of it is in it. In addition, existence is not only in substances, but in accidents as well, a fact which already precludes that existence is found in a substance in the same way that accidents are.

Yet, it is also not true that existence resembles a substance; existence is even less similar to a substance than to an accident. Existence *in no way* resembles a substance in which properties inhere. Existence can only be in a being that possesses essence, or in a substance in the sense that it is the existence of the substance.

Existence is, however, not of the substance in any way comparable to the manner in which modes or accidents inhere in the substance and are of the substance. Existence is ascribable to a thing in a principally different manner from the way in which other essential attributes or accidents are ascribable to a substance. This is already quite clear from the fact that existence is not only in and of substances, but in and of accidents or actions, acts, etc., as well. They, too, can exist or not exist. Existence does not exclusively refer to substances. Apart from this, existence is not of the substance like a part or property of the substance; it is rather in a more profound manner of the being that exists, since, in contradistinction to accidental properties, it is inseparably related to the being in question. Whereas this is also true of modal properties of the substance, existence is not inherent in a thing as modal properties of it are.

Still less can existence be of an *essence* as if it were analogously an accident or modal property of it. Such an analogy could only be applied to the relation between an essence and the essential marks grounded in it, never to the relation between essence and existence.

Finally and most importantly in our context, existence is not *secondary* to a substance, grounded in the being of a substance, as modes and accidents are. Rather, it is *prior* in that it designates the actuality of the

thing itself.

This priority, however, is again completely different from the way in which the substance is prior to its accidental determinations. Existence is not a substance and essence the mode of it. Nor is essence a mode or modality of an act of existence. Existence is not an underlying substratum, as is the substance. (Still less is it a substratum in the way in which the material cause is for a material substance.) The priority of existence with regard to essence does not even faintly resemble the priority of substance with regard to accidents. To state this clearly should be sufficient to grasp that it is true; for on the basis of our whole investigation of existence hardly anything could be more evident.

Existence, then, is in no way prior to essence in the sense in which the substance is prior to its modes and accidents. No modes or accidents can inhere in an act of existence, as this is at least suggested by many existential Thomists.¹⁴⁶ Nor is existence prior to essence in the sense that existence is of higher value than essence. We will return to this question later.

Still less is existence prior to essence in any temporal sense; existence "is" in no way *before* essence is; that a thing exists can in no sense temporally precede its essence. Still less is existence prior to essence in the sense of one *thing* being prior to another thing.

Rather, the priority of existence means precisely that what a thing is, is real because it exists and not vice versa. The priority of existence goes, furthermore, in the direction of the priority of act over *potency*, yet one has to take into account the differentiations and qualifications made concerning the act of existence in the previous section (2) of this chapter.

4. Existential Experiences of the Priority of Existence over Essence: Gratitude; Despair; Wonderment.

In our experience we sometimes become aware of this priority or primacy of existence with regard to essence.

We experience the primacy of existence above all and in a positive manner in the gratitude we feel when we consider the gift of our existence as the arch-gift upon which all other gifts are founded, on the basis of which everything in us, everything that we are, is real. Augustine describes this experience in an admirable fashion in his *Confessions* XIII, 1:

... quia et priusquam essem, tu eras. Nec eram, cui praestares, ut essem; et tamen ecce sum, ex bonitate tua praeveniente, totum hoc quod me fecisti, et unde me fecisti.

For before I was, you were, and I was nothing to which you could grant being.¹⁴⁷ Yet, behold! I am, because of your goodness, which

preceded all that you made me to be, and all out of which you made me. (trans. J. K. Ryan)¹⁴⁸

A wonderful poetic expression of this gratitude that we experience over our own existence is found in the poem "Täglich zu Singen" by Mathias Claudius (l. 1-4):

Ich danke Gott und freue mich	I thank God and rejoice,
Wie's Kind zur Weihnachtsgabe,	like a child upon receiving
Dass ich bin, bin! Und dass ich dich,	its Christmas gift,
Schön menschlich Antlitz! habe . . .	that I am, am!, and that I
	have (am given) thee, noble
	human countenance (nature)!

In this gratitude (which, as we shall see, also includes necessarily the gratitude for "what we are") the primacy of existence is clearly recognized in the gratitude first, that "I am, am!". Herein it is expressed that *whatever* I am, I am only because I exist, because I received existence.

"Receiving" existence is something quite unique, as Augustine expresses it. It does not resemble any other case of gain or loss, where the subject of gain and loss remains; and yet, in one sense, existence is the most fundamental gift or gain, as is acknowledged in Augustine's "et tamen ecce sum, ex bonitate tua."¹⁴⁹ In this gratitude, which refers to a gift, we realize that the fact that we exist is, in a sense, the most basic gift, the most "prior" gain: precisely in the sense that whatever else we may gain or receive is only possible on the basis of our coming into existence.

Yet, as will be shown, our existence is by no means the highest gift. It is in one sense a gift which *only* receives its dignity because of what we are, which could even be insignificant if our $\tau\acute{\iota}$ εἶναι were that of a mouse or a stone, or terrible and no gift at all, if what (how) we are in the sense of our ποῖόν εἶναι were to become inseparable from evils. This will be better understood after we shall have discussed the type of primacy essence has over existence and the unity of essence and existence.

Already in this context, however, we can add a negative existential experience where the primacy of existence is experienced not in gratitude as the root of all gifts and goods, but in despair as the origin and basis upon which all evils rest. If a man despairs, as Kierkegaard has pointed out in *Sickness unto Death*, in his analysis of "passive despair" or "despair of weakness," he experiences it as terrible that he exists, he desperately wishes not to be that self that he is.¹⁵⁰ He wishes his own death, an end to his life; indeed, he may prefer not to exist at all afflicted by the evils he is. He may desire his own destruction, and is, finally, driven to despair in its most horrifying form, precisely when he becomes aware of the fact that his longed for self-destruction, this falling outside existence, this falling into nothingness is impossible.

Immortality, an eternity of existence, as Kierkegaard writes, is the condition for ultimate despair. The despair of the suicidal person who intends to destroy his life and existence and wishes his own death, is not yet the full despair. The most terrifying despair "of weakness" is rather the experience of existing continually, eternally, and yet wanting not to be. Only what Kierkegaard calls the "active" despair of defiance is an even worse form of despair: when one wants to continue to exist despite one's despair as a protest against the world and against God.

This negative experience of existence is significant for two reasons: on the one hand, it shows the absolutely basic (and in another sense primary) role of *essence* in understanding being; for, according to *what* our life is, we either will be grateful for it or it would be better for us never to have come into existence. We will return to this point shortly.

On the other hand, it shows in a negative way the primacy of existence we discussed in that whatever evils may be in us, are based upon the fundamental fact that we exist. The despairing person therefore turns precisely against his own existence when no chance of bettering his condition presents itself to him. In rejecting his existence, he realizes that he thereby rejects the ground of *whatever* evil can be in him.^{150a}

Finally, there is an experience in which we realize — either positively in gratitude, or negatively in despair — the primacy of existence over essence in still another fashion: namely, in the experience of our contingency, in the experience "that we also could have remained nothing," that it would really have been possible that we would not exist. In the experience of the abyss of "nothingness" in which we could have remained, if we never would have been, we realize the fragility and contingency of our being, and either gratefully acknowledge our existence as being the primordial gift; or we revolt against the cause and author of our existence and wish rather not to exist, as the man St. Paul describes, who reproaches God for having made him because he is afflicted with evils.¹⁵¹

Or, again, we may experience the "abyss" of our contingency in being puzzled by it and asking the questions why or by whom we have been given existence upon which the reality of everything in us depends.^{151a}

5. The "Forgetfulness of Being" as Forgetfulness of Existence and of the Primacy of Esse

On this background, we share Gilson's view that those metaphysicians who are caught up in a false essentialism (who are concerned only with the essences of things, especially with the universal essential structures of things) are "forgetful" of *being* in a most fundamental, primary sense: in the sense of being as existence. They concern themselves with a

"being" that is phantom-like, as Gabriel Marcel once put it in a conversation, deprived of that tremendous weight of real existence. They investigate a universe in which the question of its real existence versus its mere possibility, in which the impact of what happened to the universe at its creation, is left out of consideration. In Hegel or in the late Husserl we find indeed such a forgetfulness of being, such an exclusion of the theme of real existence from metaphysics, or an "essentializing" of existence.¹⁵² In a less radical manner this false essentialism is found also in other great thinkers of the past.¹⁵³

Yet, at the same time, we hasten to add that such thinkers who forget existence also fail to recognize the fundamental role of essence as well, because essence (especially in the fourth and fifth sense investigated in the first chapter of this essay) is only well understood and even really considered when its role for the existing order of things is recognized.¹⁵⁴ Let us add, finally, that existence is not recognized either in its true weight, if *essence* is not adequately understood.¹⁵⁵

It should be noted, moreover, that the fundamental role of existence and of the existing order of things is in no way sufficiently acknowledged by the philosopher if he only gives consideration to existence in general and to the fundamental difference it accounts for between possible and real being.¹⁵⁶ Existence is not yet adequately dealt with even if a philosopher does justice to its intimate union with, and relation to essence.¹⁵⁷

Philosophy has rather to be interested not only in *what it means* for real things to exist, but also in *whether* they exist. In this regard we find that Augustine or Descartes, for example, by far surpass Gilson in the depth with which they acknowledge the central impact of the question of existence for philosophy. It could indeed be said that, in comparison with the question whether and what beings exist, the question what it means "to exist" is still "essential" (i.e., having to do with "essence" in the first sense discussed in chapter I of this paper) in nature. This latter question refers, namely, to "what" existence is and, moreover, to universal truths valid for any and every being that really exists. In analyzing *esse* as such, we still prescind so to speak, from the really existing order of things, insofar as it is not the theme of this question to determine whether certain beings exist, but what "happens" to them if they exist.¹⁵⁸

Therefore, it must be made clear that in any complete attempt to understand being, philosophy is also bound to consider the following questions concerning actually existing beings in their concrete, unique existence.

Does any being actually exist? There are many ways in which one could answer this question. We will only deal here with Augustine's and Descartes' answer to this question which is of utmost philosophical signifi-

cance as I tried to show elsewhere. It could be interpreted in the following manner: we find in the experience of our own indubitable existence the truth that *one* being exists. This could be formulated: "cogito, ergo sum; ergo esse est," (I think, therefore I am: therefore being is).¹⁵⁹

Furthermore, philosophy should ask the question whether man can know his own existence and thereby also the *existence* not just of *any* being, but of a *personal being*. This question is at least as important as whether *something*, e.g., a stone or piece of clay, really exists rather than nothing. Viewed in light of the insight into the nature of personal existence, it is even much *more* important than whether *anything* exists, since a person's being is so far superior (in dignity, value, seriousness, etc.) to other beings that in comparison they can hardly claim to possess being.¹⁶⁰

Philosophy, if it is to completely escape a "metaphysical solipsism,"¹⁶¹ should also be thematically interested in the question whether the world, as given to us in sense experience, exists really, and exists as we know it. Not only the existence of the material and living universe, but above all the existence of other persons is given to us through the medium of sense experience. To examine, therefore, whether and how we can know the existence of the material world, and the existence of other persons, is a fundamental topic of philosophical knowledge. It is not exclusively a question of epistemology concerning our *knowledge*, but also a question of metaphysics referring to the real existence and the type of real existence the "exterior" world possesses. Husserl's, Heidegger's, or Merleau-Ponty's analyses of us always being-"in-the-world" phenomenologically, in no way answers this metaphysical question nor does it dispense us of it.

The question of existence becomes most outspokenly thematic for metaphysics when we explore whether an absolute being, God, exists. With this question we reach the climax of metaphysics. On this level of metaphysics, the question of existence (whether God exists) and the question of essence (what God is) are inseparable and equal in importance. Here it is not only relevant for metaphysics to ask whether a being of a certain kind (e.g., personal being) exists really; but the real existence of the most concrete and unique being, the absolute being, is the highest topic for metaphysics.¹⁶²

Finally, the metaphysician is also concerned with questions of concrete existence when he asks, for example, whether the good will in reality triumph "at the end" over all evil.¹⁶³

With regard to these metaphysical issues which concern the concrete existence of beings, we must note that Gilson did not succeed in completely overcoming the forgetfulness of being as existence which he rightly criticized in many modern thinkers. The same is true with regard to an adequate understanding of the central impact of existence as such, which

is only possible on the basis of a clear recognition of the indispensable role of essence in understanding being, as well as of the intimate union of essence and existence.

In reference to all these issues, we are invited to become existentialist thinkers in the sense propounded admirably by Gilson, though not sufficiently realized by him. It is necessary to become existential thinkers, in the best sense of this term, in a more radical way than did Gilson and other existentialist Thomists. This statement contains not only a criticism of these thinkers, but at the same time expresses our indebtedness to them for having opened the door to a truly existential philosophizing — though this door concealed many horizons that have, in our judgment, remained at least partially uncovered by existential Thomism.

The foregoing analysis has hopefully served not only to point out the task of a metaphysician to deal with the concrete existence of beings, but also to clarify the true meaning of the priority of existence over essence, and to exclude some major misunderstandings of this priority.

In the following chapter, we will undertake to shed more light on misunderstandings of this priority, which have to be absolutely excluded since they would jeopardize, on the one hand, the priority essence possesses over existence; and, on the other hand, the intimate union of essence and existence.

Sixth Chapter

The Union of Essence and Existence in Every Real Being and Several First Meanings of the "Primacy of Essence Over Existence"

1. The Indispensability of Essence for Existence and Various Meanings of the Primacy of Essence Over Existence

In a sense which does not in any way contradict the priority of existence over essence, there is also a primacy of essence over existence. Existence is utterly dependent on essence in a way different from the dependence of essence on existence. Each of the following ways in which existence depends on essence constitutes also one sense of a primacy of essence over existence.¹⁶⁴

The very *possibility of existence depends on essence*, and this in two senses: (1) It depends on "essence" in the sense of "necessary essential plans": on εἶδη, ideal objects and ideal rules. Absurd and contradictory objects, which are so on the basis of their "essence," cannot exist at all. An object is absurd not only when it contradicts the first principles of being, above all, the principle of non-contradiction (as, for instance, when an object is said to be large and not large, intelligent and not intelligent at the same time and in the same sense, etc.). Objects can also be absurd because they contradict any of the innumerable specific essentially necessary laws and thereby constitute an "absolute impossibility." Something that goes against the eternal reasons, the necessary "essential plans" for things, can never exist, not even through the omnipotence of God, as Bonaventure points out.^{165a} Here, it is not in virtue of the principle of non-contradiction, but because of other necessary essential and unchangeable laws, not deducible from this principle, that, for example, justice cannot exist in a determined being, that an animal cannot be morally good, that free will cannot exist without knowledge, that blue can never lie between yellow and red in the order of resemblances within colors (hues), that 5 plus 5 can never equal 100, and so on. Furthermore, these same necessary essential "plans" or laws constitute the reason why there exists positively a necessity, e.g., that each straight line drawn through the center of a circle bisects this circle (in a plane), or that a judgment must be either true or false (whereas a question can be neither);

that moral goodness should be desired and evil avoided; that God ought to be loved, and so forth.

As we have shown in chapter i of this essay, it is absolutely and intrinsically impossible that any being could exist, or that any world would exist to which these necessary laws as well as the corresponding oughts or impossibilities would not apply. To deny this is itself a grave error which is found, for example, in William of Ockham's thesis that God could reverse the whole moral order, or command that He should be hated, etc. We also find traces of it in several voluntaristic statements of Descartes,¹⁶⁵ which suggest that only God's will and, thus, "existence" decides what is and what ought to be, and that existence is not dependent in its very possibility on absolutely unchangeable essential laws.

We can say, then, that only a being which does not contradict any of these necessary laws can exist. The possibility or impossibility of a being's existence is thus contingent on infinitely many essentially necessary truths. Essence is primary to existence, therefore, insofar as it (in the sense of the εἶδη, of "ideal rules" or "ideal objects") determines whether or not a being can (could) exist; existence is in this sense dependent on "essence" and not vice versa.¹⁶⁶ A square circle, an extended will, a false question, a just dog, an immoral love of God, etc., can never exist.¹⁶⁷

(2) The possibility of existence depends on essence, however, in still another sense which can be seen without reference to absurd, impossible things. Essence is here taken in the sense of the essence of really existing beings. Possibility refers here not to the question of the compatibility or incompatibility of essential elements, but to the fact that no being can exist which does not have a specific essence or content. This is already implied in the transcendental property of *res*, but it takes on a more concrete sense with regard to real existence.¹⁶⁸ Only a being with a specific essence, with a specific content, can exist. A specific essence is primary to, it is the "condition of the possibility of" an act of existence.^{168a}

When, therefore, existentialist Thomist thinkers state emphatically that "essence is nothing without existence,"¹⁶⁹ the counter can as emphatically be made that "existence is nothing without essence" (though, of course, in another sense, referring to another kind of primacy), or "if you cancel essence, you also cancel existence."

Existence, is, however, in yet a second fundamentally different sense dependent on essence; essence possesses in yet another sense a priority over existence in that the value or disvalue of essence (the latter being taken especially in the sense of the ποῖόν εἶναι, but also of the τί εἶναι) determines the value or disvalue of existence. If pain exists, the existence of the pain is evil; and because it is an evil, it would be better if it did not exist. If true happiness exists, its existence is good. Similarly, if justice comes into existence, it is good; if injustice comes into existence, it is bad. The same

could be stated about adultery or faithfulness, about the Gulag Archipelago or an island of peace and freedom, about beauty or ugliness, hatred or love, qualitative values or disvalues of a being, etc. In each of these cases, existence is either good or bad according to the question of what exists. This truth finds — if we may speak for a moment on a theological level — its deepest and most frightening expression in (Christian) Sacred Scripture where it is written that a man's very "being born," if he persists in evil, is an evil for him; and in the liturgy where we hear that had we not been redeemed, it would be of no purpose for us — despite all earthly happiness — to exist at all. These passages are also philosophically relevant, even for the non-believing philosopher.¹⁷⁰

This clearly shows that the coming into existence of something is determined by and depends on what comes into existence as to whether it constitutes a good or an evil. This fact, however, is evidence of another and in a sense even more amazing priority of essence over existence than the one mentioned before. For here, the existence of a being is already given, and yet existence is utterly dependent on essence in the radical sense that whether the existence of a being is justified and good or whether a being should not exist, depends on what comes into existence, on essence.¹⁷¹

This can be seen in principle by anyone who acknowledges any sense of saying that evils are real, that they exist. It can be seen, however, all the more clearly when we recognize the terrible reality evils have, and the truth that they are more than a mere privation of the good, and, above all, more than a mere *ens rationis*.¹⁷²

Yet, even before the way in which evils exist is determined, the fundamental fact can be recognized that injustice, murder, adultery, terrible pain, the atrocities of the Gulag Archipelago, blasphemies and hatred are surely not (unfortunately not!) mere possibilities; they do exist — often indeed with a more dreadful apparency than their opposites. It was the intention neither of Thomas Aquinas nor of Augustine to deny this reality of evil. Once this is established, however, the "priority" of essence over existence in the sense just elaborated becomes clear.¹⁷³ Essence is taken here in the sense of the ποῖόν εἶναι as well as in the sense of the τί εἶναι. It is not taken in the sense of "essence of a substance" nor in the sense of the "original good nature" of a being. In the latter two senses no essence can be evil as we have discussed before (cf. chapter i). Essence in the sense of the τί εἶναι accounts, for example, for hatred being evil and love being good. Essence in the sense of the ποῖόν εἶναι accounts for a good man's existence being good and the incurably evil man's existence being an evil.

Augustine expresses this dimension of the priority of essence over existence in the following passage in his *Confessions*:

Neque enim ejus (spiritus) informitas placeret tibi, si non lux fieret:

non existendo, sed intuendo illuminantem lucem, eique cohaerendo, ut et quod utrumque vivit, et quod beate vivit, non deberet nisi gratiae tuae . . . tu solus es, quia solus simpliciter es: cui non est aliud vivere, aliud beate vivere, quia tua beatitudo tu es.¹⁷⁴

The primacy of essence over existence that we are dealing with here goes back to the fact that value, as the intrinsic preciousness of being, constitutes in one sense the deepest dimension and *raison d'être* of being. Correlated to this, we find that the deepest opposition to *being* and to its innermost meaning is constituted, not by nothing, but by a being of *dis-value*, i.e., a being that *should not* be, a being for which it would be better had it never come into existence. The value or disvalue of a being, however, depends primarily on its essence, at least in one sense, rather than on its existence. It is in this sense then that essence, insofar as it decides whether a being is intrinsically precious or not, possesses a fundamental priority over existence.¹⁷⁵

Existence depends on and is secondary to essence in yet another third sense. Even if we were to grant that everything that exists is good, even if we were to prescind from evil, it is quite clear that the *rank of existence with regard to its value depends on the rank of essence*. If, for example, a material substance and its aggregate states, shapes, colors, etc., come into existence, this certainly constitutes a good. Yet the coming into existence of a plant with its mysterious life principle is a still higher good precisely in virtue of *what* comes into existence. When, however, a human being is conceived, when a human person (with a human soul) comes into existence, we have an incomparably greater reason to rejoice than in the previous cases. This fact is grounded in the hierarchical order of the various essences (τί εἶναι) and of their value. The ultimate reason, however, for the goodness and for the degree of goodness of the existence of contingent beings is the positive content of their ποῖόν εἶναι, the fulfillment of the "vocation" of a being. In the case of man, as expressed in the above quotation from Augustine, this would consist in the union of intellect, will and heart with the absolute good.

There is an incomparable rank of goodness proper to a human being's existence as opposed to that of a stone. The superiority of a man's existence could not be attained even by indefinitely increasing the degrees of the value proper to a stone's existence, since both beings belong to a different "order," in Pascal's sense of the term.¹⁷⁶ This difference of the hierarchy of the orders of being is dependent on what exists, on essence. Whether the coming into existence of a being (e.g., of a new machine, or a human being) is of little moment or of wonderful depth, depends not on existence as such, but on *what* exists.

Augustine, in his *De Libero Arbitrio*, and Thomas¹⁷⁷ have expressed

this in pointing out that to merely exist is of lowest value, that to exist and live is of higher value, and that to exist, live and think is of highest value. Granted that Thomas is quite right in holding that all higher levels of being include existence and are *real* goods only on the basis of their existence, it remains true that the good of their existence is also utterly dependent on *what they are*; and in that sense it is not existence as such, but the existence of a *being of noble essence* that constitutes "being in the primary sense."

This is also expressed in the second part of the poem we quoted above by M. Claudius where his gratitude not only refers to his existence (that "I am, am!") but also to his essence (that "I have thee, noble human countenance!"). The rank of the value of existence is dependent on essence in another sense than that in which essence is in its value dependent on existence, because existence gives reality to the being of a noble essence.¹⁷⁸

Both priorities of essence and of existence interpenetrate each other here as well as the previously discussed priorities of the τί εἶναι and the ποῖόν εἶναι. Yet our immediate theme in this context is the priority of essence over existence, insofar as essence decides the rank of value and the order to which a being belongs.

Fourthly, the "kind" of existence as well as the individual unique act of existence is dependent on what exists (essence).

Essence decides not only the possibility, the goodness and the rank of goodness proper to existence or to the coming into existence of something, but essence also determines what kind of existence is or can be given to a being. This is most clearly apparent when we consider that a color cannot receive existence in the same sense as a substance, that a table cannot receive existence of the same kind as a person, and so on. The character and meaning of "to be" is profoundly and utterly determined by the essence of the respective being. This becomes clearer still when we consider the causes necessary for existence. A color can very easily be brought into existence by man, whereas a plant cannot at all, except indirectly from and on the basis of already existing plants. A soul cannot be brought into existence even by the whole order of secondary causes. All this reveals clearly that "to be" is something very different depending on the essence of a being. We will come back to this point later.

But not only the kind of existence found in a being, even the unique and individual existence of a being depends on *what* that being is. This will be dealt with in the third section of this chapter. There it will become clear that the dependence of existence on essence reaches even into the very depth of individual existence.

Essence decides, and in this sense is "prior" to, the kind of existence and the unique individual existence a being possesses (can possess).

2. Esse (Existence) As Such, or a Being Whose Essence Consists (Only) in Existing, Is Absolutely Impossible; Least of All Would It Be God. The Most Fundamental Error of Existential Thomism.

As we have already seen in discussing the first sense of the dependence of existence on essence, only a being with a determinate essence can exist. Though it cannot be shown in this context, truth also compels us to recognize a being *of whose essence it is to exist*: a being to which existence is not given, but which exists necessarily; a being in which existence is not really distinct from essence; a being which possesses necessarily, and even "is" its own existence.¹⁷⁹

Yet, never can it be that the essence of a being solely consists in existing, without having any quiddity or content. It would be, as we shall show, a great error to consider existence prior to essence in the double sense, first, that essence is something "to be looked down upon" in that it is less "absolute" than existence; and second, that essence could ever — in the absolute being — be restricted (reduced) to existence. We dealt already critically with this notion of essence as "consisting only of existence" (cf. chapter i, p. 41, of this essay).

This interpretation of the "*esse tantum*" in Thomas Aquinas¹⁸⁰ is subject to the following criticism. It confuses, on the one hand, essential determination ("determinedness") with limitation, and conceives, on the other hand, of God as an intrinsically impossible "existence as such."^{180a}

We find in Gilson and his followers not only that they overlook the senses in which essence possesses a primacy over existence, but also that they consider God as pure *esse*, that they speak of God as confronting us with the unique case, "where existence is alone"; (this phrase can only be interpreted as meaning, "where existence is without essence").^{181a} Gilson and his followers clearly imply that essence is ultimately a limitation which cannot exist in God.¹⁸¹

Before subjecting this view to a more detailed criticism, however, we want to present it at greater length and to show the plausibility and even the seemingly inescapable necessity of Gilson's position.

a. Brief analysis and first criticism of Gilson's position on God as "*esse tantum*."

Let us start by analyzing more carefully a decisive passage in Gilson's *Being and Some Philosophers* (cf. note 181):

as soon, as essence appears, there also appears some otherness, namely the very otherness which distinguishes it from its own possi-

ble existence and, with it, the possibility of becoming.

It is certainly a matter of general agreement between members of the Gilsonian school and ourselves that the distinction between possible and real existence as well as "the possibility of becoming" are traits of a contingent being only. It belongs only to the essence of real contingent beings that these two marks are given; they must not be posited in the absolute being.

The decisive point in the passage quoted is that Gilson ascribes these marks and, with them, contingency to the very fact that a being has an essence. We may undoubtedly, therefore, interpret his text as implying: as soon as essence appears, contingency appears. From this it follows that God can have no essence, but must be "existence alone."

Certainly, Gilson does not deny simply speaking that God has an essence. He explains in many places that we should not say that God has no essence, but that his essence is precisely nothing but his existence. What Gilson denies is not, therefore, that the peculiar notion of essence (to exist, and only to exist) is applicable to God. We have critically referred to this notion of essence already in the first chapter of this study.

What Gilson does deny, however, is that God has any essence in the sense of a quidditative determinedness. Any such-being or essence that is not reducible to existence is denied in God.^{181b}

This remark needs a further stipulation or qualification. Gilson does not — I suppose mainly because of his Christian and Catholic faith — consistently hold this position. Still less does he draw the objective logical consequence from his position. This consequence, namely, seems plainly to be the following: *any* statement about the nature or *quiddity* of God such as that God is a personal being, omniscient, omnipotent, justice itself, etc., would be meaningless or even false if God would not have a quidditatively determined essence irreducible to "to be." Gilson does not draw this consequence from his position. On the contrary, he even explicitly tries to save the possibility of such essential predication of God with which all philosophical and revealed theology stands and falls. The reason for this lack of radicality, I venture to say, is primarily or exclusively found in Gilson's idea of a Christian philosophy. Since he purports a view of philosophy according to which the philosopher finds in Revelation the highest criterion for the truth of his philosophy he cannot possibly deny any essential predication of God, since the Bible and the Gospels are full of such essential predications: God is living, knowing, merciful, just, charity, etc.

Against this attempt to preserve "essential predication" of God I would make two objections. In the first place, Gilson's view of "Christian philosophy" is, I fear, fideistic in the sense that it entails an assumption

putting into question the very condition of the possibility of philosophy: that there is a (natural) philosophical understanding of reality and truth which does not in any way presuppose religious faith nor find its criterion in faith. In the second place, there is an objective logical incompatibility between Gilson's attempt to justify essential predicates of God and his basic philosophical conception of God as "pure existence." For if essence as quidditative determinedness of a being necessarily entails contingency and if God's essence is solely existence, any predication of essential pure perfections of God such as justice, knowledge, love etc., has to be abandoned.

I would like to express two further criticisms of Gilson's concept of a "Christian philosophy." First of all, Gilson overlooks that his interpretation of the revealed "name of God" ("I am who I am," as meaning "I am pure existence") is a purely metaphysical speculation on the meaning of these words and can in no way claim the authority of Revelation for itself. Other interpretations are equally possible and even much more plausible. Therefore, it is illicit to claim the authority of faith and Revelation for a purely metaphysical interpretation of a word of Scripture that can be interpreted philosophically and theologically in many other ways. Secondly, some of these other interpretations, for example the profound one E. Stein gives, are much more convincing in light of the text and the whole of Scripture than Gilson's. I would dare to say, that even if I could adopt Gilson's view of a "Christian philosophy" taking its highest criterion of philosophical truth in the faith I would have to reject his interpretation as clearly contradicting the sense of Scripture.^{181c}

To conclude this series of thoughts on Gilson's notion of "Christian philosophy" I want to stress that I do not in the least doubt the utter sincerity of Gilson's notion of "Christian philosophy" nor his strict personal adherence to a theistic, Christian and Catholic faith. I would however suggest that his basic philosophical conception of God as "existence alone" undermines not only the Christian but any philosophical theism and has even nihilistic consequences. Thus I argue against what I consider grave philosophical errors and their consequences, not against the personal and sincere effort of Gilson to retain all of those things which his basic metaphysical conception tends to dissolve.

b. Insights which Gilson's position contains and the apparent necessity that essence implies not only *Abgrenzung* (delimitation), but also *Begrenzung* (limitation) and cannot, therefore, be in God.

A historical remark may be in order here, too. Gilson's position that (quidditative) essence^{181d} entails limitation and contingency has a long

tradition. It reaches back at least to Anaximander who already conceived of the *ἄπειρον* as at the same time infinite and indefinite or who suggested already that any essential "determinedness" (definiteness) implies limitations and boundaries. In innumerable forms this idea has been defended throughout the history of philosophy, in the East and in the West.

Before we proceed to criticizing this position we have to weigh the strong arguments and understand the significant insights contained in it.

There is, first, the important insight that essence always implies some distinctness; this distinctness goes also hand in hand with at least some potential otherness. It is by no means evident, and as we shall see later, even false that this otherness consists in "the very otherness which distinguishes it (essence) from its own possible existence," as Gilson maintains. Yet it is true that each essence implies the otherness from any other real or possible essence. Each being of a given essence is by its essence other than any being that has another essence or that would have another essence. Essence or such-being, even taken in the widest sense, always implies the possibility of another essence and another such-being. Essence implies necessarily *Abgrenzung*, to introduce here a telling German word which means delimitation, delineation, demarcation, distinctness. It is indeed self-evident that essence goes always hand in hand with *Abgrenzung*. By its essential determinateness a being is delineated from beings of another essential content. For example, each person is, by having the essence of a person, distinct from all non-personal beings. Love is distinct by its essence from hatred, and from every being that does not have the essential determinateness of love. Each knowing being is essentially distinct and delineated from all non-knowing beings.

Another important insight underlying Gilson's position is that *Abgrenzung* normally goes hand in hand with a second moment: limitation which we will render by the German term *Begrenzung*. Limitation (*Begrenzung*) means definitely some want, some deficiency in a being, some possible being beyond the limit (*Grenze*) at stake. It is clear that in all beings which we know in experience essence implies *Abgrenzung* as well as *Begrenzung*. For example man, by having the nature (essence) of a man, is as well delineated (*abgegrenzt*) from the lion as *begrenzt* (limited) in lacking the strength, beauty and other predicates the lion possesses.

These two insights seem to make necessary a third point. It seems to be necessary that the *Abgrenzung* (delineation) from other beings inherent in essence also implies *Begrenzung* (limitation). For in virtue of being different from a real or even possible being of another essence, a given being seems also necessarily limited. For it seems inescapably to lack precisely the essence and all essential perfections found in the being from which it is different. Thus it seems necessary to say with Gilson: as soon as essence appears, also otherness appears. Since this otherness implies also

limitation, it seems also to imply the otherness of a merely possible existence, i.e., contingency.

How can we then fail to accept Gilson's thesis and also his view that God must be existence alone, because otherwise he would be limited and contingent? Or is it possible to show that not all essential determinateness is linked to limitation? Is it possible to show that the last point which seems to be supported by the two undeniable insights, is neither self-evident nor at all known, but grounded in a misleading illusion and in several confusions?

c. Criticism of Gilson's position: Errors and Confusions leading to the Identification of Abgrenzung with Begrenzung

In the first place, the two data meant by the two terms *Abgrenzung* and *Begrenzung* ought to be clearly distinguished.

Already the term *Abgrenzung* (otherness) has two very distinct meanings or dimensions of meaning. It refers primarily to a mark inherent in a being and its essence which we could call the *inner* distinctness or definiteness of an essence. (We are reminded of the Cartesian formula of the "clear and distinct ideas," but use the term "distinct" in a wider sense than Descartes did.) This *inner* distinctness of each essence corresponds also to the transcendental properties of *res* (essence, content) and *aliquid* (something) in the first of the previously discussed three meanings of this term. Each essence has a structure or intelligible content which makes it something articulate and distinct in itself. It is not possible to explain this arch-datum through something else. One has to *see* how it belongs to any possible essence.

As a consequence of this inner differentiation and distinctness, each essence is also distinct from what is "outside itself." The two remaining meanings of *aliquid* come into play here. By being *something* in virtue of its essence each being is also differentiated from nothing (*non nihil*). It is also distinct from other (real or possible) beings, an *aliud quid*. Thus the term *Abgrenzung* refers secondly to the fundamental datum that each essence is distinct from any *other* essence, or that a being in virtue of having an essence is differentiated from all beings having *another* essence. Without implying that essence is the sole ground of difference we may still say the following: by having an essence a being is different from any other being having another essence.

Neither of these two dimensions of *Abgrenzung*, neither the *interior* distinctness (definiteness) nor the *exterior* distinction of a being, refers to anything negative. Neither of these two meanings of *Abgrenzung* mean per se any limitation or lack of being or perfection. What is meant, is only

the fact of the inner articulateness of a being in virtue of its essence that sets this being apart from the rest of things.

Such articulateness and definiteness is metaphysically speaking something *eminently positive*. This becomes clear when we consider the opposite of this feature: the indefinite, the chaos and totally unformed, totally indistinct nothing. Only nothing can be absolutely indefinite. The notion of the indefinite is a pure *Grenzbegriff* (limit notion) to which no reality (real being) corresponds but which plays a significant role for metaphysics. It means the indiscriminateness and nothingness which is precisely the negation of essence; it means the opposite of the character of being *something*, of being *definite* by a such-being. The indefinite refers to something purely negative: to what lacks the inner clarity and meaning, the inner determinateness of being. Therefore no being whatsoever, not to speak of the endless richness of content, meaning, goodness, beauty, truth, is possible within the "realm" of the indefinite. The fact of the pure metaphysical negativity of the indefinite as the contradictory opposite of the *Abgegrenztheit* of essences points to the archpositivity of the distinctness and definiteness of being. It shows that these terms refer in no way to a limitation or to a lack of perfection, but rather to the ontological condition of the possibility of any perfection and being whatsoever.

The term *Begrenzung* (limitation), on the other hand, has a meaning quite different from *Abgrenzung* (delimitation). It refers indeed to a lack, to some form of finiteness and contingency. As soon as the value and positivity of a content is given, to call this content limited (*begrenzt*) is always to say that there could be a "more," a "deeper," a "better" than it. When we say that somebody's wisdom or strength is limited we mean that it is lacking in perfection, that there could be more of it. Whenever we speak of the limits of knowledge, being, value, simplicity, goodness, justice, etc., we refer to a deficiency of essence, to the absence of what would be greater.

This becomes clearer when we consider the opposite of *Begrenzung* which is something purely positive: the *infinite*, the unlimited. Infinity does not mean, like indefiniteness, something negative; it does not refer to a lack. On the contrary, it means a content without any lack or limits.

In order to understand this better, one has to briefly consider the many meanings of the term "infinite."

There is first the infinite within finite beings, the infinite within a limited part or aspect of being: such as the infinity of numbers, of space, of time; or also the infinity of the divisibility of any stretch of space and time. Again, this "infinity within the finite" appears in entities or phenomena presupposing time, space, or their infinite divisibility, such as movement.^{181e}

Some of these infinities within the finite, for example of space and time, imply extension; others not (for example, numerical infinity). Within the former we find, first, an important distinction which already Aristotle made in the context of his refutation of the famous Zenonic antinomies. It is the distinction between the infinitely small or infinitely divisible within two limits, and the infinitely great or large. Infinite divisibility or smallness is found within stretches having *two limits*. For example, any limited line contains as well infinitely many points (which are infinitely small by not possessing any size of extension) as well as it is infinitely divisible, without this infinite division ever reaching the mathematical point. The infinitely large or great can be of two kinds again. It can be infinite in one respect or on one side, or in two respects, on two sides. A line can be infinite in one direction, limited in the other, or it can be unlimited (infinite) in both directions. The infinity of space also belongs within this context. Without dealing here with the quite different modification infinity takes on within numbers we may merely hint at other necessary distinctions such as between discrete and continuous infinities.

Even if we take the infinitely great as the more genuine phenomenon of infinity we may say the following things about the "infinite within the finite."

First, the infinite is incommensurable by any finite stretch or measure.

Second, the infinite (within the finite) contains, nonetheless, finite "parts" within itself although it cannot be measured by them and is more than a whole composed of finite parts. For example, there are infinitely many finite stretches on, and as parts of, an infinite line.

Third, the infinite has properties quite different from the properties of any finite part of it, and properties that seem paradoxical. This can be seen by the fact that the infinite multiplied or divided by any number still remains infinite, that the "number infinite" can neither be even nor odd, etc. This shows again the transcendence and incommensurability obtaining between anything finite and the infinite.

Fourthly, these "infinities" are limited and finite in the sense of being restricted to a limited sphere of being: numbers, time, space, lines, etc. The content that is the subject of infinity in these instances is itself very contingent and finite, quite subordinated to other realities ranking higher, such as the person.

Quite different is another kind of infinity that we will call *absolute infinity*. It is characterized by the following marks.

The "absolutely infinite" is also, and even more absolutely, incommensurable by anything finite. This more absolute transcendence to anything finite becomes clear through a second mark.

The absolutely infinite does in no way contain finite moments as real

"parts" or actual elements within itself. It does not consist of finite stretches or elements in the sense in which the finite infinities do.

Thirdly, and more importantly, the absolutely infinite does not find itself within a limited sphere or aspect of being. Its subject is itself infinite, or it is infinite in every respect.

Fourthly, the subject of the absolute infinity contains only "pure perfections" which to be is absolutely better than not to be. The exact opposite is true of finite infinities, where it is more perfect to be above the whole sphere of being to which such infinities refer: number, space, time, lines, etc.

Fifthly, the absolutely infinite is primarily characterized by its core: namely, the infinity of perfection. It alone can be called "that greater than which nothing can be," or "greater than which nothing can be conceived." This formula of Augustine and Anselm refers precisely and exclusively to the "absolutely infinite" (God).

It is not our task in this context to prove the existence of an absolutely infinite being, but only to distinguish the meaning of absolute infinity from any finite infinity.

Let us return to our main task which is to show that the infinite, especially in the sense of the absolutely infinite, is in no way lacking essential definiteness or essence, and that it is quite opposed to the indefinite.

Already the "finite infinities" do not only have a definite content or subject (time, space, number, line, etc.). They are also in virtue of their infinity and their definite predicates of infinity set apart from all finite things and finite essences. They are clearly not lacking the *Abgrenzung* from all other infinities and from all finite things and essences.

It is, however, so one could object, still true that these finite infinities imply some degree of indefiniteness. The infinite space, for example, lacks all the definiteness which we find within limited shapes and forms. It cannot bear the many aesthetic values, to take one illustration of this fact, which are found exclusively within forms, lines and shapes that are finite.

It could be shown, however, that this deficiency is due to the fact that the infinity in question is precisely found within the finite, that it refers not to "pure," but to "mixed" perfections.

The absolutely infinite lacks even this aspect of indefiniteness still found within finite infinities. The absolutely infinite, which necessarily possesses pure perfections, does not pay for its infinity the prize of a certain amount of indefiniteness, as does the infinity of space or lines. On the contrary, "that greater than which nothing can be" is *absolute definiteness*, being itself, beauty itself, justice itself, omniscient, omnipotent, infinitely good. Nothing is more definite than the absolutely infinite being.

This will become clearer when we will say some further things about pure perfections.

The result of the preceding investigation is the following. Infinity, "finite" and even more absolute infinity, does in no way imply a lack of essence or quidditative content. On the contrary, it necessarily implies it. This is especially true about the absolutely infinite. It is the absolute perfection, and possesses the plenitude of the essential content, of pure perfections.

Consequently, infinity also implies *Abgrenzung* as inner distinctness and articulateness and definiteness of meaning. Moreover, it is even more radically and essentially set apart from all other beings and other (finite) essences than one of the latter is from another. Thus it embodies fully the second dimension of *Abgrenzung*.

At the same time, the infinite is the opposite of the finite and limited; it has no *Begrenzung* (limitation).

Thus, we see the utter difference of delimitation (*Abgrenzung*) and limitation (*Begrenzung*), and recognize the error of Gilson in implying that to have an essence means to be limited and contingent.

A second important objection to Gilson's position is that the indefinite which lacks all quidditative content and essence is a mere "*Grenzbegriff*" (limit concept) to which no reality *can correspond*. This has already been stated. It constitutes another devastating criticism of Gilson's position, however. Since no reality and being whatsoever can be without essence and content (absolutely indefinite), God would be nothing and have absolutely no being if He were "pure existence" in the sense of lacking any quidditative content and essence. Therefore, the logical conclusion from Gilson's position that God has no essence would be to say that God is nothing, which is atheism (a consequence which Gilson would certainly reject as violently as we, but which still does not cease to follow objectively from his view).^{181f} The truth that God is not beyond essence and predication has always been recognized by the Scholastic tradition of philosophy which introduced against Plotinus' indefinite "One" the insight that *all* being possesses the transcendental properties of being. Consequently, nothing can be without essence; the infinite being and the finite being possess the transcendental *res* (content, essence) analogously, as we have already shown.^{181g}

A third objection has to be raised against Gilson's position. Even if we prescind from the absurdity and intrinsic impossibility of a being without quidditative content (essence), such a being would be not more but less perfect than any finite being. Any mouse or man would be more perfect than God if God were to lack all definite content and articulateness of being. The more something approaches the indefinite, the *less perfect* it becomes: for it lacks all content and pure perfections in virtue of which it

could be perfect: personhood, substantiality, life, knowledge, freedom, justice, love, etc.

The ἀπειρον in the sense of the indefinite ought not to be revered as a divine principle. It is not only nothing (has no being), but would also be the lowest, if we assume for a moment it could "be." It is that which lacks all perfection and all conditions of the possibility of perfection (essential characteristics).

A fourth objection against God as "pure existence" without (quidditative) essence has also to do with the difference between pure and mixed perfections. It can be formulated in the following manner. Gilson confuses anthropomorphism in our talking about God with the predication of pure essential perfections of God. This objection can be raised although Gilson writes about this difference himself without noticing, however, that it destroys the possibility of conceiving God as existence alone.^{181h}

It was one of the greatest contributions Xenophanes made to philosophy that he rejected any anthropomorphic speaking about God. He rejected Greek polytheism on the grounds that it predicates body, shape, immoral actions, etc., to the gods. Xenophanes put his finger on the fact that such necessarily finite and limited (or evil) predicates can never be applied to God. Yet this insight did not prevent Xenophanes from ascribing power, spirit and thought to the divine being. Xenophanes gained thereby, at least implicitly, one of the most important philosophical insights: that there is a difference within essential predicates between necessarily limited and potentially unlimited ones. The application of the first kind of predicates to the divine being is the mark of anthropomorphism; the second kind of perfections, the pure perfections, must be predicated of the divine being. The bearing of this distinction for our criticism of Gilson's exclusion of essence from the divine being is so great that we will present it in the conclusion to this analysis and criticism of existentialist Thomism.

I want to add here a fifth criticism of Gilson's position that God is existence only. This thesis is partially based, I venture to say, on a confusion between two completely different types of "width." The one kind of width is found in the most universal or abstract notions. Existence as such, as it is found in absolutely everything that has being analogously, and being in the sense of the *ens transcendental* are instances of this first type of width. It is the width of what is found in absolutely everything. Of this width metaphysicians of all epochs, especially Aristotle and the Aristotelian tradition, were so fond that they sometimes taught that something is "the nobler the more abstract it is." This opinion radically forgets the fact that the width of *being as such* is achieved at a very high price, so to speak: as the *widest* notion it has also the least content. Fundamental as the notion of "being as such" is (which is the point of reference of the first

metaphysical principles which apply to absolutely every being) it is also the most impoverished in meaning. In a sense it contains "everything" within itself, since it applies to everything; in another sense it contains almost "nothing" within itself, since it lacks all the richness and specificity of content found in beings of various kinds and orders. (Hegel, in his *Logik* builds his dialectics largely on this double aspect of "being in general," which is instructive although we radically disagree with Hegel.)

This brings us to a radically different kind of "width," the width of the most perfect being, of that being which contains preeminently the perfections of all lower beings. Without differentiating in this context the notion of "per eminentiam" perfection any further, we may say the following. The absolute being possesses, not in virtue of its abstractness, but in virtue of its infinite perfection, all lower perfections "per eminentiam." This means in regard to the pure perfections that the absolute being possesses them in their infinite plenitude (in an absolute superlative sense). In regard to the mixed perfections this means that what is perfect in them is contained and preserved in the absolute being, although the absolute being does not literally possess these mixed perfections themselves.

In this sense alone the absolute being is not *abgegrenzt* or set apart from the rest of things, it is not one among other things, but it is "all things" supereminently containing all their perfections. This second kind of width does not exclude content or go hand in hand with a loss of content as the first type of width. On the contrary, only a being of infinite essence can fully possess this width. This width alone is perfect in the sense that we as human beings can "look up" to it. The width of the most abstract notions is something which is wider than, for instance "human nature," only because it is less perfect than it. The second kind of width is "wide" at no expense whatsoever, as we could put it.

In Gilson's existentialist Thomism we certainly find attempts to distinguish the absolute being from being in the most general sense.¹⁸¹ Yet we do not find a clear awareness of the two radically different kinds of width. Consequently, we find the tendency to believe that God can only be the unlimited, absolutely wide being, if he has no essence and content in the sense of a quiddity; for this would be opposed to the first kind of width; but not to the second truly divine width. This second kind of width, on the contrary, is wide because of the splendor of an infinitely rich essence and content.

d. Conclusion

By way of response to Gilson's position, we have, therefore, to stress that the metaphysical truth that existence cannot be without essence is

absolute and equally valid for God. Not only this, however, but the fact that no being can exist without having an essence, or that essence *and* existence are united in *each* being, finds even its *unique and absolute* realization in God; since in God essence is inseparable from existence, not only if He exists, but absolutely and necessarily. It is, therefore, *as* absolutely true to say that God is justice, goodness, omniscience, omnipotence, mercy and love, personal, substantial, as it is to say that God is His own existence.¹⁸² And both truths are equally important.¹⁸³

To deny this, or to reduce God's essence to His existence, has objectively the consequence — even if the defender of this view may firmly affirm God's existence — of denying even that God exists, since nothing can exist without essence. This consequence, in outspoken reference to Gilson, has been drawn by L. Dewart, who speaks of God as pure "presence" and rejects *any* predication of God, not only of essential predicates, but even of "existence."¹⁸⁴

This consequence is surely opposed to Gilson's intention, as is the further consequence of a rejection of any predication concerning God's nature in theology. (Such a rejection is paramount to rendering the statement "God is just" as false as the statement "God is unjust," although in truth the former is absolutely true and the latter absolutely false.)¹⁸⁵ Since Gilson claims that his philosophy of God is specifically Christian, we may for a moment go beyond the borders of philosophy and indicate in a few sentences which consequences the philosophical error of rejecting God's essence has for the Christian and Catholic faith. The additional theological conclusion that all dogmas are pure superstition, nonsense, and anthropomorphism, or that each dogma is more erroneous than any other error (Hans Küng), can — despite the fact that they would be strongly opposed by Gilson personally — be traced directly back to the fundamental error that God has no essence beyond or except "to exist." It has convincingly been shown that this error was also defended by the gnostics.¹⁸⁶

Not only, as Hill pointed out, is Gilson's position, viewed in light of its consequences, close to that of Dewart; but it is also close to the Heideggerian refusal to admit any predication of "being." To equate the Heideggerian notion of "being" (*das Sein*) with God, as some theologians attempt to do, amounts, however, to pure confusion.¹⁸⁷

The error of considering God as pure existence without essence, or rather as pure existence whose essence is nothing else than "to exist," rests upon the unfounded assumption that essence and limitation are one and the same thing, which is quite false. Essence as such is as little limited as existence is. In no way are the two data "existence" and "essence" such that only existence admits of being unlimited, whereas essential determination always entails limitation. To the contrary, we saw clearly that while

there are, on the one hand, essentially limited perfections such as "animal," "man," "humor," "elegance," "speed," etc., there are also other essential perfections which, when fully realized, do not contain the slightest imperfection. Xenophanes and Plato already discovered this truth, and medieval philosophy developed it in distinguishing between mixed and simple (pure) perfections. Pure perfections, (e.g., being, unity, goodness, beauty, personhood, knowledge, justice, freedom, and infinitely many others)¹⁸⁸ are not "themselves" as long as they exist in the world in a limited fashion. They are not only also, but even primarily predicable of God; of no other being can they be positively predicated in the unrestricted sense in which they can be of God.¹⁸⁹

A failure to recognize the fact that essence is as unlimited as existence and that essential predicates can as truly be predicated of the absolute being as the existential predicate, even though such a failure may be based on an interpretation of certain passages in Thomas, still goes against the letter and spirit of other parts of Thomas' philosophy.¹⁹⁰ Beyond this, however, and of much greater importance is the fact that such a view leads to grave errors about essence in general as well as about God. It leads, furthermore, to the rejection of eternal essential plans (*rationes aeternae*) and, thereby, to the rejection of one of the most important metaphysical truths. For, if God has no essence, but is only "*esse*," it is only logical to think that the innumerable necessary essential reasons for things, the importance of which we have discussed in the first chapter and shall discuss still further, cannot be "in" Him.¹⁹¹

Finally, if it is not recognized that the *existence* of any contingent being is just as much contingent as is its *essence*,¹⁹² this understanding can easily lead to pantheism. "What is created" is identified, on the one hand, with essence, and "what is not (and cannot) be created," on the other hand, with "*esse*." Since "*esse*" cannot be created but only limited by essence, according to this conception, which is at least suggested by many statements of existential Thomists, God's existence is conceived of as being the uncreated "*esse*" which is then limited by contingent, created essences. From this follows the peculiar type of pantheism suggested by Phelan's statement that "Father Phelan is not God, but God is Father Phelan."¹⁹³

This pantheism can only be avoided if we affirm with Thomas that the *esse* of contingent beings is contingent and created exactly as much as their essence.¹⁹⁴

In conclusion, we can say in short that the indispensability of essence for being as well as the primacy of essence, find their highest expression in the metaphysical fact that in God *essence* is as unlimited as *existence*. God's *essence* is as infinite as His "*esse*"; His being does not only consist of existence, but is infinite essence as well. Essence in no way is identical with limitation.

Whereas in contingent beings existence is as limited as their essence, in God both are infinite; both are "one." Being as existence as well as Being as quidditative content find their infinite perfection in God, without any reduction of the perfection of essence to that of existence.

3. The Inseparable Union of Real Essence and Existence in Contingent Beings: the Being, not Essence, as the Subject of Existence

This paper on essence and existence would remain very incomplete if we were to conclude it after having analyzed the unique primacy peculiar to existence as well as to essence, without investigating the intimate union of both in the real being. We turn our attention now, therefore, to the kind of inseparability between essence and existence which we find even in contingent beings.

This inseparability is quite compatible with the separability mentioned above: while it remains true that essence and existence in contingent beings are never united necessarily, yet, when and as long as they are united, they become inseparably "one" in a being. They enter, as it were, an inseparable marriage in the concrete being such that neither of them either could have been before or could be after their union. This intimate union of essence and existence can be seen in many ways:

1) Essence and existence (in the fourth sense investigated in chapter I of this essay) *are only in* a real being. Indeed, the union of the two is so deep that we even have to say that it would be more appropriate, rather than to speak of essence and existence "*existing*" as such, to say that the individual real being exists and is of a certain essence. Essence and existence would, then, so to speak, both be real in a "third" entity, the concrete being.

With regard to existence, it has rightly been pointed out that we cannot properly say, for instance, "The table's existence exists," or "His existence exists," since whenever existence is predicated, it is precisely the actuality (the existence) of a *being*, i.e., "of something," an entity not identical with and yet possessing existence (e.g., a table or person) that is at stake. This feature of existence — together with other features — has been referred to as the "paradoxical structure of existence."¹⁹⁵

As significant and somehow paradoxical as this fact is, however, it is in another sense quite clear and understandable that existence is not the subject of itself, but is rather always the existence of something and not of itself. We can indeed find, in at least an analogous way, a similar phenomenon on all levels of being: there is, namely, a unique relation between a being and its predicates. In virtue of this unique relation, it

would obviously not be meaningful to ascribe the same predicate again to itself. In this way, a triangle is said to have an angle, whereas the same can hardly be said of the angle itself. Or a table is red in a sense in which "red" cannot be said to be red; redness inheres in the table, not in itself.

In a slightly analogous way, existence does not itself possess existence, but rather a being exists. This truth does not exclude that there is one true sense in which "red is red" or "existence exists." Yet, clearly, existence is not its own subject, but is only "in" a being in the sense analyzed before.

From this, we might be inclined to conclude that essence is the subject of existence. In a sense, this can also more truly be said than that existence itself could be its own subject. We can say, for example, "What we are, exists," or "What this tree is, came into existence." Yet, it is open to question whether this expression is metaphysically completely correct, and whether the essence, i.e., "what the being is," exists.

It rather seems as if the one being would contain in intimate union, or be the subject of essence and existence as well. Surely, what we are, is not like a quality; it comprises also our substantial being. In that sense we do not have, but are our essence. Nonetheless, it still cannot be denied that we are a being of a certain essence rather than being an essence which exists.

Thus it seems that neither existence nor essence in the strictest sense exist or are the subject of existence, but that it is the *one being* which comprises existence and essence, which exists and which is of a certain essence. In a being, then, essence and existence are inseparably one. They can not only not exist in separation, but they can so little be understood as two components of being that they have inseparable reality only in the one being.

This is a truth which should evoke our deep philosophical wonder (*θαυμάζειν*), a mystery of being which leads us into an abyss of what being really is. Yet it is, at the same time, a simple truth in the sense that we can see not only that essence and existence cannot exist in separation, but also that they are not simply speaking identical with the being. They are rather two dimensions, two aspects of one and the same being. It is clear then that it is not our essence (what we are) that exists in the most proper sense, but rather the being which we are. Again, it is obviously artificial to say, "Our existence exists." Rather, the being which we are is the subject of essence and existence, which cannot be in separation from us who exist and are of a certain essence.

2) The inseparable union of essence (in the decisive fourth sense analyzed in chapter I of this study) and existence in the concrete being is also seen through the fact that neither real essence nor existence can strictly speaking precede either temporally or eternally the concrete being

which exists and is of a certain essence. Essence and existence are only in their togetherness (in the being).

The possibility of a thing is not identical with its essence at all: first of all, possibility does not only refer to essence, but also to existence. Both are possible before the being becomes real. In the second place, however, essence in the strict sense is only in the being. Essence is precisely not, as Gilson suggests, "being minus existence."¹⁹⁶ Essence in the strict sense¹⁹⁷ is real exclusively *in* the concrete being; it is only in the being which exists, and in its reality it possesses, as we already saw, predicates radically different from its possibility. Existence and essence are merely possible — they "are" not — before the being is.

Before a real being exists, "what it is" is indeed "nothing,"¹⁹⁸ and its existence is equally nothing. This true inseparability of real essence and existence is not always clearly enough recognized by Gilson and existentialist Thomism.¹⁹⁹

3) Essence and existence do not only constitute an intimate union insofar as each essence needs *some* existence and each existence *some* essence in order to be and to become one. Rather, there is a deep general as well as individual correspondance between essence and existence (which has already been discussed).²⁰⁰

Not only can a substance never receive the existence of an accident (or vice versa), not only can the existence (actuality) of an animal never be given to a person, but *each* individual being can only receive its own unique existence. Above all, the existence of one person could never be nor have been given to any other person.

This truth can be realized in many analogous steps. To take an example from aesthetics, it is already true in a sense that each different production of a Beethoven symphony by the same artists has its individual such-being and its unique existence. This takes on an added dimension with productions of the same work by different artists; and with regard to different compositions, it is true in a still stricter sense that to each of these essences there corresponds another unique existence.

This real and intimate bond between the essence and existence of each individual being is still better seen in substances and especially in living, sensitive beings like animals. It reaches a climax — in comparison with which the unique, intimate bond between essence and existence in other beings is only casual — in the person. In the "I exist" of each person, "*what* this person" uniquely and irreplacably is, as a knowing and free being, capable of loving and being loved, is inseparably and intimately one with *his* unique existence, which could never have been given to another being. The irreplacable character of each person clearly requires that one person's act of existence never could have been given to another

person, even if it is true that the first person could have never existed, and *another* being could have existed in his "stead."

This uniqueness of each being's essence and existence and their "pre-established" harmony is not at all clearly seen by Gilson, who often suggests the misleading image of an essence resembling, as it were, a container which receives an indistinguishable act of existence that it then determines, or rather the image of essence being a purely negative mode determining an act of existence that is indistinguished in itself.²⁰¹

The uniqueness of essence and existence in each being and their not only general, but also individual correspondence, can more clearly be seen when we grasp that each real essence and existence, like each really existing being, is individual.²⁰²

4) The individuality of each real being in the full sense of the term belongs to the very essence of real being. A real being in the proper sense *can* only be individual.

We would like to emphasize here again the fact discussed in chapter i of this study that this individuality does not result from a mysterious "principle of individuation" which makes a universal essence individual. In no way is *what* the individual being is (its nature or essence) universal as such and then "individualized" through existence or through signate matter.²⁰³ This theory seems to overlook, among other things, that nothing "happens" to a universal nature when an individual being comes into existence.²⁰⁴ The universal essential structure (εἶδος, idea, etc.) of a being certainly determines what will exist in each individual corresponding to this nature, but in no way does the general "essence" *qua* general enter the individual being, or "become individualized." In no way, for example, does the universal nature of a triangle (which has neither angles at all and still less any specific angles nor any other property of a triangle, but is the timeless *essential plan* for triangles of all kinds) enter the individual triangle or become individualized when a concrete triangle is drawn.

In no way is the nature of a concrete being any less individual than its existence. Rather, it is a necessary fact that, as the existence, so also the essence of each concrete real being is fully its, is in no way general. Many individual beings may share the same essence in the sense that they are made according to the same plan, that the contents of their natures resemble each other because they participate in, are formed according to the same archetypical *ratio*. But the universal nature or plan as such (as universal) remains always outside and transcendent to the concrete real being. It is a necessary apriori truth that each concrete being possesses an individual content (essence) as well as an individual existence. Each individual being is individual through and through, so to speak. In no way is its essence as such general, its existence individual.

This false conception of essence being as such universal is surely suggested by Aristotle, as we have seen, in his attempt to "immanentize" the universal forms (εἶδη), conceived correctly by Plato and Augustine as transcendent to the individual being, and to put them "into" the individual thing.²⁰⁴ Instead of recognizing (in virtue of "immanentizing" the universal form) more deeply the dignity of the individual being, of *real being*, which Aristotle stresses so much, he tends to overlook completely its nature and impact by making the individual being a sort of composition of universal essence and an "individualizing factor," whereby he precisely overlooks and makes later thinkers fail to see that the individual being is as primarily and necessarily individual in what it is as in its existence.²⁰⁵

On the other hand, contrary to Plato's view, it is also necessary to stress the full ordination of the general nature to the individual being possessing it. This must be done, however, in avoidance of the nominalistic rejection of the universal nature by insisting at the same time on the truth that no individual being would be possible if there were not unchangeable eternal "reasons" and "plans" for individual beings which give unity to the many, and according to which concrete things are or, at least, which they can never contradict. We could express this in the following manner: individual things in their essence "realize" a universal nature while at the same time this "universal" essence remains transcendent to the individual being, as we have already shown in chapter i of this essay.²⁰⁶

We can say on this background that individuality resides necessarily in the intimate union, in which *what* any *real* being is (its essence) and *that it is* (existence) are intimately "one." No principle of individuation is necessary to explain the individuality of real beings; rather, the concrete nature (and kind of nature) a being possesses and the existence of that same being (which unites the two in a most intimate marriage) account for the individuality which is evidently inseparable from any real being. This individual uniqueness can be possessed in many degrees of perfection (we need only compare a stone with a plant or still more with a person); but no real being can be lacking in it completely.²⁰⁷

4. The "Synthesis" Which Each Real Being Is, Is a Fruit Not of Esse as Such, (Conceived of as "Synthesizing Act"),²⁰⁸ Nor of "Essence" Alone, but of Their Intimate Union.

Each individual real being could undoubtedly be characterized as a "synthesis" of all the elements belonging to its essence, to what it is. Each

individual being in this sense is a concrete existing unity (synthesis) of all the features of its nature. Each concrete being could, furthermore, be characterized as a "synthesis" and union of essence and existence, as we have seen.

In whichever sense we speak of the "synthesis" that each concrete being is, the thesis of existentialist Thomism is definitely true — although this cannot be shown in this paper — that it can in no way be understood and explained as the fruit of a synthesizing activity within our mind,²⁰⁹ as Kant conceived it,²¹⁰ which forms and applies categories to an unformed material. This subjectivism in German transcendental idealism claims that the "synthesis" is found only due to our *thinking* unity, whereas in truth it resides in the *being* in itself and exists on a metaphysical level.²¹¹

We equally agree with the Thomistic thinkers that it cannot be exclusively the essence of a being which accounts for this "synthesis" (that each being is), but that existence, too, plays a vital part in the formation of the "synthesis" of being.

At the same time, it is necessary to make it clear that it is also not *esse* (existence) as such which explains this unity of a being, which constitutes the "synthesizing act."²¹²

On a first level, it is even more *what* the being is, its essence, which determines which degree and type of unity a being possesses. The essence of a stone implies that the stone can possess only a relatively superficial unity; the essence of forms decides which inner artistic unity a piece of marble possesses in a statue, for example. The essence of the immaterial substantial being of the soul determines it as an intimate synthesis of elements possessing a deeper and more metaphysical union than could possibly exist in the material universe, and so forth.²¹³

Yet, we may hasten to add that it is the *existing being* only, and in that sense real existence, which unites *in actuality* the various individual and essential features of a being. In this sense it is indeed existence, in virtue of its priority as described above, which accounts for the concrete synthesis a being is.

Most precisely, it should be stated that it is again neither existence as such nor essence as such, nor the two taken summarily together, but rather the *being* in which both are intimately and inseparably united which is the reason for and which in fact is an always unique "synthesis." This being is the existing unity in which all of its characteristics are synthesized, in a much deeper fashion even than the sounds in a melody.

Chapter Seven

The Priority of Essence Over Existence: Further Senses.

1. Various Meanings of the Term "Essence" Recapitulated

The term "essence" is even more ambiguous than the term "existence," as we have seen already. We intend to place in the following some of the most basic different meanings of essence, which we discussed in the first chapter of this paper, into the context of the priority of essence over existence.

Essence, first of all, can mean *what a real being* is. We restricted the term essence to this primary meaning, when we said that an essence would be nothing without existence. We agree fully with the deepest meaning of Aristotle as well as with Thomistic philosophers on the point that the essence of things does not reside and exist outside the things, but rather is real only *in* the concrete real beings. As long as we refer with the term "essence" to *what a real being is*, this essence, as has been repeatedly stated, is real only in its union with existence in the concrete real being. Essence *in* the concrete being, which is the fullest "form" of being essence can attain, was nothing before the being existed; it depends on existence for its reality.

As we have seen, however, the possibility of an essence (possible essence as we can also conceive of it before a being exists) does not depend on the existing being. To the contrary, the existing being depends in its essence as well as in its existence in a sense on the preceding possibility of it. Something that is impossible (e.g., a square circle) can never exist. In order that something can enter the existing order of things, it has to have been possible before.

It is certainly true to say with the Scholastics, "*Ab esse ad posse valet illatio*": i.e., from reality we can conclude to possibility. Metaphysically speaking, this is so because the possibility precedes the real existence of any contingent being, because any being that really exists must have been possible eternally.

This *possibility* is surely not *simply "nothing,"* as we have seen before, even though a being (i.e., a real being) is *in itself nothing* as long as it is

merely possible.²¹⁴ The possibility as such is, rather, definitely "something" in the sense that we can truthfully affirm or deny its givenness. We can, for example, say, "This or that object you think of is possible," or, "What you are speaking of is impossible;" and we make thereby a very important metaphysical statement about possibility versus impossibility.²¹⁵

The ontological status of possibility is very "weak," though, and in a sense "close" to nothing.

Earlier we have gained the result that possibility is not dependent on "being in the mind." Something either is or is not possible quite independently from the question whether anybody thinks of it. Indeed, even the being thought of by God does not constitute possibility or impossibility. Not even God could change something that is impossible into something "possible" simply by thought, nor could He make impossible what is intrinsically possible.²¹⁶ Thus "essence" in the sense of "possible essence" precedes really existing contingent beings timelessly, and is in this sense prior to them.

Furthermore, wherever we find a meaningful being (e.g., a rose, or lily, etc.) we must not only posit that this being must have been "possible" before, like any mere accidental event taking place. Rather, the inner meaning of these beings presupposes a deeply meaningful "plan" or idea preceding the concrete thing, as we have shown in chapter i. Any being that has a morphic meaningful unity of such-being must be preceded by the timeless and meaningful plan for a being of this type.²¹⁷ Also "essence" in the sense of the idea, then, is prior to the real contingent beings which correspond to an idea.

Much more clearly given, and much more strongly opposed to a mere thin possibility, are the "necessary essences," or, as we have called them, the necessary rationes and "plans" of things which precede individual beings timelessly: the εἶδη, ideal objects and ideal rules discussed in chapter i. In this context we must refer back to our previous discussion and give a brief summary of the results of our investigation of these *rationes aeternae*.²¹⁸

2. The Priority of Necessary, "Essential Plans" Over Contingent Existence

The "essential plans" (in the sense of the εἶδη, ideal objects and ideal rules) are absolutely necessary; what contradicts them is absolutely impossible. They contain the unchangeable objective conditions of any possible contingent being, but here we are concerned with their priority in relation to those existing beings which *have* a necessary essence. In chap-

ter i 5, of this study we have already analyzed the reasons which show that these *necessary* "essential plans" ("essences") precede more clearly and in a more absolute sense the contingent world than "ideas" or "possibilities."

These necessary, essential rationes are definitely prior to the individual things and their essences in that they not only temporally precede the things, but are eternally before any concrete existing being. They are, furthermore, prior to any individual existing being in prescribing to it absolutely unchangeable and strictly universal "rules" of meaning according to which every contingent being has to be or ought to be. In no way do these necessary essences (or "essential plans") depend on the contingent individual beings; they clearly possess ideal existence, notwithstanding that they, too, are ordained to the world of really existing beings in which alone what corresponds to them becomes real, as we have explained in chapter i.

Neither do they depend on the divine will or intellect in the sense that they are absolutely unchangeable even with respect to the omnipotence of God as we have shown before.

3. "Natura absolute considerata" and some Thomistic Objections Against our Position Concerning Ideal "Necessary Essences" Preceding Contingent Beings Which Have a Necessary Essence

Somebody could at this point object to our having introduced ideal "necessary essences" not reducible to either their "existence in the real" or their "existence in the mind." The objector could at the same time point out that our account of the Thomistic position as allowing only for the existence of an essence in the real or in the mind is incomplete. He could state his objection in the following way: although it is true that in Thomism (and in Thomas Aquinas himself) we find only the recognition of two modes of being an essence can possess, we find in addition the important notion of an "essence absolutely considered." With its help many or all of the truths we tried to explain by "ideal essences" can be accounted for by Thomism.

In *De Ente et Essentia* (ch. iii; in some editions ch. iv) Thomas Aquinas distinguishes two modes of being an essence can have. On the one hand, an essence can exist in real individual beings (*in singularibus*). If the essence of man, for example, exists in this way in Socrates, Plato, Shakespeare, etc., it has being in the real. On the other hand, an essence can have being in the mind (*in anima*). This being in the mind of an essence is considered by Thomas mainly or even exclusively insofar as it implies the

universality or generality of a nature and not in the other senses which we shall discuss. In the real, the essence exists *as* individual essence, in the mind it exists *as* universal (general) essence. Thomas Aquinas (following Aristotle and his Arabic Commentators) teaches that the generality of an essence can only be achieved through the mind and through the abstraction whereby the mind prescind from the individual features of an essence in the single beings. (A more complete analysis of the philosophical views of Aristotle and Thomas on the eternity of forms and on the principle of individuation would show that other modes of being of essences are suggested by both Aristotle and Thomas. Such an analysis would also show that the general forms *as* "individualized" are still in a certain sense ascribed by them to the things themselves. In regard to this aspect of Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophy a certain "universalizing" of the essences of individual beings takes place as we discussed in other places in this essay).

Thomas Aquinas, after having distinguished the two modes of being an essence can have, distinguishes between predicates that are found in an essence insofar as it exists in a singular being (for example, the essence of man *in* Socrates is one) and predicates which an essence possesses insofar as it has existence in the mind. The essence of man, for example, in this latter mode of being, is not singular but universal. It is clear that the predicates of an essence that are only found in the essence *as* universal exclude the predicates of an essence that are bound up with the individuality of an essence. If the essence is general, it cannot at the same time (in this same mode of being) be individual and vice versa.

Once these distinctions are made, Thomas Aquinas makes the extremely interesting observation that there are other predicates, a third set of predicates, which belong to an essence in both modes of its being or which simply belong to the essence as such, whether it exists in its universal or in its particular mode of being. In this way, for example, rationality belongs to the essence of man as such; for it belongs as well to man in general as well as to each singular man. Those predicates which are found in the essence in both modes of its being, Thomas says, belong to the "*natura absolute considerata*." This "nature absolutely considered" is the essence of a being considered while prescinding from the differences which are linked to whether it exists in the real or in the mind. Oneness, for example, does not belong to the essence of man absolutely considered. If one were to hold that it does, then it could not exist in more than one individual nor could there be a general essence (in the mind). Nor does abstraction or abstractness belong to the essence in absolute consideration; otherwise the given essence could never be concrete and singular.

This "essence absolutely considered" does not have any being accord-

ing to Thomas Aquinas. It does not constitute a third mode of the being of an essence, but it is simply the essence considered from a certain point of view: namely, considered from an absolute point of view, i.e., prescinding from which kind of being the essence has. One could perhaps also say that the "nature absolutely considered" constitutes the commonality between general and individual essence.

On the basis of these distinctions one could raise the following objection to our position on necessary and ideal "essences."^{218a} Some of the features which we ascribed to the εἶδη, ideal objects, etc., really are grounded in the nature absolutely considered. Above all, the essential necessity which we ascribed to ideal and general essences, belongs to both the general essence and each individual instance in which it is realized (e.g., it is a general essential fact that responsibility implies in general necessarily freedom and at the same time the individual responsibility of Socrates implies necessarily his singular freedom). To say that essential necessity is necessarily bound up with generality or with ideal existence, as von Hildebrand suggests in chapter iv of his book *What is Philosophy?* and as we suggested in chapter i of our essay, seems plainly false; for if essential necessity were inseparable from a general (and ideally existing) essence, how can the undeniable fact be accounted for that the essential necessity is also found in the individual beings? Once it is admitted that essential necessity is grounded in the "nature absolutely considered," however, it becomes also highly questionable whether the features of timelessness, eternity, etc., have to be ascribed to "necessary essences." It seems that abstraction can account for a certain timelessness which has not to be conceived in Platonic terms of ideal existence. It also seems that the incomparable intelligibility and certainty of our knowledge of necessary essences could be explained by the "nature absolutely considered." In the final analysis, then, all the data which we elaborated would be accounted for if one introduced besides the real essence and the general "essence" (the two modes of being of essence) the "nature absolutely considered." This would also spare us the very thorny metaphysical problems linked to the thesis that there are eternal essences of things. But beyond this, to want to ground essential necessity in a general essence rather than in the "nature absolutely considered" leads to the same absurdities which Thomas Aquinas shows (in *De Ente et Essentia*) as a result of ascribing predicates that belong to the nature absolutely considered to one of the two modes of being of an essence (essence in the real singular being, and universal essence in the mind).

In answer to this objection I shall make the following points.

1) It is certainly true that the feature of "essential necessity" is not exclusively found in a necessary essence *as* general essence, but also in

each individual realization of a necessary essence (although in a different sense).

2) This fact which we fully grant to the objector could be expressed in at least two ways. One could express this truth, using the language of Thomas Aquinas, in the following way: one could say that essential necessity, for example, belongs indeed to the essence of certain beings; yet it neither belongs to the individual essence *as* individual, nor to the general essence *as* general, but to the essence in absolute consideration. As long as this formulation is understood correctly there is no objection to be raised against it. This "correct understanding" implies the following points. The "essence in absolute consideration" must not be understood as a third kind of being an essence has; rather the statement "something belongs to nature absolutely considered" has to be understood only as a way of expressing that essential necessity is found in an essence regardless of whether one speaks of it as general essence or as individual essence. That something belongs to a nature in absolute consideration does not say more than that the predicates so qualified belong to an essence as such and differ as well from those predicates which belong to the given essence only *as* general essence, as well as from those predicates which belong to a given essence only *as* individual essence. If Thomas' statements are interpreted in this way they contain a profound truth and important metaphysical discovery. (We shall show shortly, however, that the above objection contains many points beyond this genuine discovery.)

Or one could express the same truth in a second way. One could simply say that besides those marks of an essence that belong either only to its individual being or exclusively to the general essence, there are other features of an essence which belong to both the general and the individual essence, but to each in a different sense. If one speaks of essential necessity, for example, one would say that it is found in both the general essence and the individual essence, but only analogously and not in the same sense. This can be seen through the following reasons. First of all, as I showed in ch. i. of this study, the two things meant by the term "essence" (and all their attributes such as necessity), namely the essence of real beings, and the "general essence" which is more something like an "essential plan," are completely different. Secondly, essential necessity as it is found in the general essence is an "absolute" and in a certain sense unconditioned necessity. Essential necessity in contingent real beings (their individual essence) is never in this sense "absolute" and "unconditioned." Essential necessity *in* contingent beings rather means the following: if a person exists, for example, if Socrates exists (and if his real essence exists), then it is necessary also that his freedom and faculty to know exist. Or, if this person's responsibility exists, his freedom must also necessarily be given. Thirdly, it is only in the individual essence of beings

that the necessary bond between freedom and responsibility is *really* given, because only the individual *is* free or responsible. The general essence contains this necessary bond more in the sense of the absolute necessity of the intelligible ratio ("plan," structure) of the relation between, e.g., freedom and responsibility. Fourthly, and in consequence of all the facts just mentioned, the essential necessity is *grounded* in the general essence. We can see that a contingent being could never ground this absolute necessity, because its individual essence *as* individual could also not exist, whereas the general absolute essential necessity must exist. The individual essence as such is not absolutely necessary, whereas the general essence and the states of facts grounded in it are absolutely necessary. Thus we see that essential necessity is grounded in a general essence and in that sense is necessarily bound up with generality as von Hildebrand states. The essential necessity in the individual essence is the consequence and result of the essential necessity of the general essence.

This second way of expressing the same truth seems to be more adequate and differentiated than the first way of stating it. It elucidates, namely, the relation between the general and the individual necessary essence and the character of their respective necessity more fully. Yet, as long as the Thomistic way of stating the same truth about which both sides agree is not interpreted beyond what was just explained, there is nothing incorrect in it. In fact, if only taken in the sense just stated, the two ways of expressing the same truth complement each other. Moreover, each of them contains some advantages over the other in that each brings out some aspects the other does not mention.

The advantage of the first way consists in bringing out more directly the fact that there is a "link of unity" which binds together the universal and the individual essence. The first way expresses more directly the "commonality" found between individual and general essence. Moreover, if we consider here also the historical question of prior discovery we have to give Thomas Aquinas the credit that he formulated for the first time clearly the fact that there are the three kinds of predicates of an essence which we discussed. There are those which belong to the essence *as* general, those which belong to the essence *as* individual, and those which belong to the essence simply speaking or prescinding from the difference between general and individual essence. It has to be added that this distinction has to my knowledge never been made with the same clarity within phenomenological studies of essence. Also my stating this fact in the second way of expressing it is dependent on and inspired by this philosophical contribution of Thomas Aquinas.

Having granted all this, I want to stress, however, that the second way of expressing this truth which St. Thomas has seen, is in many respects more adequate and more differentiated. It even is almost neces-

sary to add it to the first way if confusions and errors are to be avoided. The advantage of the second way and the necessity to add it as interpretation to the first one can be seen from the following reasons. First, it shows that the essential necessity is primarily found and grounded in the general essence, and at the same time more properly realized in the individual essence. Secondly, it can account for the fact that the object of our knowledge of essential necessity is primarily the general essence which alone is directly and with absolute certainty accessible to our mind, as we have discussed in chapter i. Thirdly, it explains the decisive fact that "essence" in both senses means something quite different and that, consequently, the sense of essential necessity is in both cases quite different and only analogous: in the one case unconditioned, in the other not; in the one case "absolute," in the other not, etc. Fourthly, it does not introduce the notion of "essence absolutely considered" which is, as we shall see, almost inevitably understood as a further (third) kind of being an essence has.

The second way to express the given truths avoids therefore the misunderstandings easily engendered by the first way of expressing them.

This leads us, however, to the criticisms of some general Thomistic positions, and of the above objection which goes far beyond the points we agreed on while expressing them in different ways.

3) The Aristotelian' view of universality and generality being given to an essence by the human intellect or by an intellect's abstractive activity is certainly false, if it is applied to necessary "essences." This can be seen in various manners.

First of all, abstraction as such, whether performed by a human or by a divine mind, can never account for the essential necessity of an essence for the obvious reason that abstraction is possible in regard to every nature, whether necessary, contingent, or even totally accidental in the sense analyzed in chapter i.

Secondly, the *strict* universality of an essence and of essential laws grounded in it presupposes essential necessity. For there can be exceptions to all other general natures and to the laws grounded in them. Therefore, since strictly universal validity of an essence is inseparable from essential necessity and since essential necessity can never be explained by abstraction of either a human or divine mind, the strict generality (universality) of necessary essences cannot be accounted for by any mind and its abstraction. It is pre-given and found by the human mind and is necessarily bound up with essential necessity.

Thirdly, an act of abstraction performed by the *human* mind can least of all explain the strict generality of necessary essences and of the facts and laws grounded in them. For that mind's activity is contingent and could also not exist, whereas the essential necessity must be given and could neither not be nor be otherwise. Also all the other arguments in

chapter i by which we established the ideal existence of the εἶδη, and of other necessary "essential plans," remain fully valid.

4) The "nature absolutely considered," although it goes back to an objective "likeness" between general and individual essences, cannot account for any essential necessity; because in the first place this nature absolutely considered has no being and therefore can neither bear nor ground properties, but also for the additional reason that the "nature in absolute consideration" is "essence under a point of view" and thus depends on somebody *considering* it in this way. No absolute necessity could be grounded, however, in something (nature absolutely considered) which depends on a consideration. It is absolutely impossible that something so tremendously important metaphysically as to contain the foundation for an absolute inalterable necessity could ever be ascribed to a "nature absolutely considered" that has no being and that is only "essence under the point of view of prescinding from any being that this essence has." Never could an essence which does not have any being and which depends on a mind "considering it" (absolutely), never could a "nature" that depends on the object of certain acts of "prescinding" from *esse*, metaphysically ground anything, leave alone essential necessity.

5) A further criticism refers to the notion of "nature absolutely considered" itself, and this for two reasons. First, this notion seems very unclear and even equivocal, and secondly, this notion seems almost inevitably to lead to confusions and misunderstandings.

To the first point: the nature "absolutely considered" refers sometimes in Thomas to essence of and in real beings (essence as discussed in section Four of our first chapter), while only prescinding from the question whether the essence of real beings exists in this or that real being. When we discussed the essence of real beings as distinct from general and ideal "essences," we spoke in this first sense about "essence absolutely considered." For we obviously did not speak of Socrates' or Thomas' essence, but of something which can be found in any singular being, yet only in singular beings. This meaning of "nature absolutely considered" is also at stake when Thomas says, for example, that the essence of man cannot be absolutely one (in its absolute consideration), because then it could only be in Socrates, for example, and not also in Plato and other individuals.

At other times a second meaning of "essence absolutely considered" is at stake. Then this term means "nature" while prescinding from the difference between essence as it can only have being in an individual, and essence as general essence ("being in the mind" in Thomas' terminology). But this is a completely different sense of "nature absolutely considered." This is shown by the fact that, whereas nature absolutely considered in the first sense is subject to everything we have said in chapter i, section

Four, in the second sense it does not have any of these predicates; nor does it have the predicates of general and ideal essences. Rather it refers only to those predicates which are found as well in individual essences as in general essences, although only in an analogous sense.

A third meaning of "essence absolutely considered" is at stake when we prescind, as Thomas sometimes explicitly exhorts us, from all being (from all *esse*) an essence might have: general, individual, in reality, in mind, etc. This seems even altogether impossible and to refer to an intrinsic impossibility, for one can only prescind from *which* being an essence has, while knowing that any essence must be either general or individual, etc. How can one meaningfully conceive of essence without at the same time conceiving of the different modes of being it can have?

We have to notice that "nature absolutely considered" in the first sense has no being as such, but refers only to what each (corresponding) essence of a real being is, or has in terms of predicates. With the help of the abstract concept "nature absolutely considered" one refers, however, to predicates which truly are found in the essence of each real being or in each real being of a given nature which is taken in absolute consideration.

"Nature absolutely considered" in the second sense is a still much more abstract notion. Not only does the object of this notion as such not have any being. It does not even directly *refer* to something that could have any being at all. If the object of this second notion of nature in absolute consideration were considered as "being" in any sense beyond being conceived by a mind, this would even contradict the first principles of being; for the object of the term "nature absolutely considered" in the second sense would have contradictory properties. It would be abstract and not abstract, individual and not individual, or, neither individual nor not individual, etc., in the same sense (respect).

"Nature in absolute consideration" in the third sense refers to something not even conceivable by the mind; for to conceive of "essence" at all implies the knowledge that this essence must have either one or the other kind of being.

This brings us to the second reason for our criticism of the term "nature absolutely considered." It seems inevitably to suggest some kind of being in something that has no being, but that is only "considered" insofar as it (or rather insofar as two corresponding and related kinds of "essence") can have being in two modes which mutually exclude each other. Especially when this "nature absolutely considered" is supposed to ground things, to have certain properties, etc., it seems inevitably and wrongly to be treated as some sort of thing that has some being and some properties. This is, however, false, as we have seen.

On the basis of this analysis we can see not only that the objection related above implies several errors but also that certain misleading and

false conceptions seem almost inseparable from introducing the Thomistic notion of "nature absolutely considered" in order to explain the truth that some predicates are — in different senses — found both in the individual and in the general essence.

4. Objections of Existentialist Thomists to Necessary, Essential Plans Being Prior to the Existing Contingent World.

These necessary "essential plans," which were discovered by Plato and then rejected (on the basis of a grotesque caricature of Plato and for surprisingly superficial reasons) by Aristotle,²¹⁹ were again recognized and expounded upon not only by Augustine (especially in his *De Ideis*, but in almost all his other works as well) and his followers, but also by Thomas Aquinas.²²⁰

One of the reasons for some philosophers rejecting the eternal, unchangeable εἶδη is that they overlook or fail to grasp their true character, as it has been rediscovered and made evident with a completely new degree of clarity within the Munich phenomenological movement, to the particular merit of A. Reinach and D. von Hildebrand. On the basis simply of a deeper understanding of these necessary essences, most of the objections of Aristotle as well as of present day existential Thomistic thinkers concerning the "eternal reasons" of things break down.²²¹

There are two further specific reasons, however, why Thomistic thinkers sometimes reject them: the first is that it seems at first sight that the absoluteness of God is jeopardized by admitting the existence of "eternal ideas" of, and necessary, unchangeable plans for contingent beings. It seems inevitable that they impose some sort of a limit on God (even much more so than the "possibilities"). Since God has to model the world according to these ideas, it is reasoned that He can no longer be absolute, but must rather resemble the Platonic Demiurg, who shares eternity with the eternal archetypes and ideas that are outside and independent from him, and on which he is in a sense dependent. This contradicts, however, natural theology as well as faith, which teach us that only one being is eternal and absolute, namely God. Nothing can, therefore, be "between God and creatures"; everything must either be God or be created by Him. In view of this, it seems that there is no place, metaphysically speaking, for the eternal ideas, and the conclusion is drawn that they have to be rejected.

This kind of argument, however, which we have already refuted in chapter i, typically betrays an absence of phenomenological thinking (in the best sense of the term), in rejecting a most clearly given datum be-

cause it cannot easily be reconciled with other known realities, because its metaphysical place cannot readily be located. "Phenomenological" thinking means here simply the absence of a mentality in which reality is violated for the sake of a system, a mentality reminding us of Procrustes.

When confronted with an apory such as we find here, the first response that must be given is to realize that such difficulties in no way allow us to doubt what we do know to be true or to exist: i.e., two seemingly irreconcilable realities. We know in this instance that God is absolute and that there are "eternal essential plans or ideas" of things. The fact that our attempt to reconcile both truths may leave us faced with an apory, does not allow us to discard the one truth or reject the other. Otherwise, we would find ourselves in the same dilemma in many other instances: for example, concerning the existing world, where the question arises how there can be an infinite being and yet a real world distinct from Him, where it would at first seem that this world must either be part of God or add something to Him, etc. If we cannot fathom exactly "how" both truths coexist, we at least know indirectly (by virtue of their truth and by virtue of the principle of noncontradiction) that they must be compatible, since nothing contradictory can exist.

From this point, we can even reach a dim understanding of how both truths are compatible. We have briefly developed such a speculative answer to this problem in chapter i.²²² In any case, we know that eternal reasons exist and that God is absolute. To deny eternal reasons because we are unable to fully comprehend their compatibility with God's absoluteness is a grave philosophical mistake: first of all, because they are clearly given; and, secondly, because their denial would lead us not only to an error, but to a self-contradiction and ultimately to skepticism. We would have to give up all grounds for holding any position, since eternal unchangeable necessary essences are presupposed for all *certain* knowledge. To reject these unchangeable "rationes" of things would condemn us to skepticism. Moreover, as we have shown before, the metaphysical consequence of denying eternal verities is a dissolution of all meaning, a type of nihilism. Finally, this rejection of unchangeable necessary essences leads to a self-contradiction. For, in the name of and solely on the basis of an *alleged* "eternal truth," i.e., that God's absoluteness is opposed to "eternal ideas," we would reject all *real* eternal truths.

The second specific argument of existentialist Thomists against "eternal verities" or necessary unchangeable essential plans for existing contingent beings is as follows: You cannot "add on" being to God. Consequently, neither can the world have being (*esse*) different from God's *esse* (but must rather be the limitation of divine *esse* through created essence); nor can there be "eternal reasons" of things because they would add being to God.

This argument puts into question any being not identical with God (not only eternal ideas, but also the world). It even puts into question any distinction within God. It is even less plausible than the first one and can be refuted on rational grounds. Philosophically speaking, it is untenable since it seeks the reason why we cannot "add on" to the infinite being in the alleged fact that there cannot be any being distinct from God, rather than in the essence of infinity as such. Our previous discussion of infinity should suffice to refute this argument. To recognize real being other than the infinite being, a being, not part of but distinct from, "in addition to" the infinite being, in no way diminishes the infinity of the absolute being or implies a deficiency that is supplemented through an "addition." The "added" real being of the world does not imply that the being of God alone would be less than that of God plus that of the world (though such a misconception easily follows from a false understanding of infinity). We cannot "add on" to the being of God, not because His infinity excludes any other being from real existence, but because His being is *in itself* and absolutely infinite.

Since Gilson and existentialist Thomists see in Revelation and Catholic doctrine the highest criterion of their philosophy one could add a theological (Christian and Catholic) argument against their position (which "pure" philosophers may disregard): it is clearly defined doctrine (based upon philosophical insight applied to the revealed mystery of the Trinity), that *each* of the divine persons of the Blessed Trinity is *infinite* in being, that *one* person of the Trinity is not less infinite in being than the other two persons "together." This shows theologically that not only finite, but even infinite being does not "add more being" to infinite being.

These truths find their analogous application even within "infinities" in the contingent world.²²³

Quite apart from the invalidity of this argument as such, it does not apply to the "eternal ideas" because they are in a mysterious sense, as we have speculatively shown before, identical with the Divine essence and not "outside God," as Plato thought.

Thus neither of these two arguments existential Thomists present keeps us from recognizing the datum of necessary essential "reasons" of contingent beings, preceding contingent beings eternally. In this sense ideal essences are *prior* to the existing (contingent) world.

5. Various Meanings of "Being in the Mind" and a Further Dimension of the Priority of Essence Over Existence

There is still a "form" of being an essence may have, different from its

unique *real* existence in the concrete real being whose essence it is: the so-called "existence of an essence in the mind," or the existence of an essence as object of knowledge.

Existence "*in the mind*" is a very ambiguous notion that can have at least five fundamentally different meanings.

1. It can, first of all, mean the existence of a conscious act "in" the mind. The existence of this conscious act is quite real — at least as real as that of other real beings (e.g., a stone or tree) and their existing predicates. Entities existing "in" the mind in this sense do not constitute any opposite to "existing in the real." On the contrary, they have an *excellent* being in the real, they are in no way distinct from what has real existence, but rather are an excellent example of it.

2. Existence "in" the mind can also refer to "entia rationis" or concepts, etc., which are not in the same sense real as acts; they exist as "produced" and "made" by the mind, or have a "logical being" as "ideal unities of meaning," as Husserl put it in the *Logical Investigations*.

3. Existence "in" the mind can, furthermore, refer to the "opposite" of the first meaning of the term (and to the opposite of real existence), namely, to the being of unreal or illusory objects; such objects have *only* the (miserable heteronomous) "being" proper to mere objects of intentional acts which have no being in themselves.

4. Existence "in" the mind can also refer to the world of appearances (e.g., colors, sounds, perspectives, etc.) which depend on the mind without being illusions or simple products of the mind. Appearances are valid aspects of reality, they constitute an objective sphere of "being" and meaning, yet do not exist independently from the mind.

5. Lastly, "being in the mind" can refer not to a type of being, but rather to the fact that a being existing independently from knowledge can *also* become the object of knowledge and in that sense be "in" or an object of the mind. In this sense, every essence as well as every existence, every being can exist "in" the mind.

In this context we will concentrate only on the third and the fifth meaning of "being in the mind." With the third meaning of "being in the mind" we refer to a type of "being" an essence can have which we have called the essence of "heteronomous entities" in chapter I of this essay. We followed herein Ingarden's terminology. The being of an essence "in the mind" in this sense is certainly quite different from that of the *real* essence. Even a *possibility* as such (the possibility of an essence) which comes closest to the being of an essence in the mind in the third sense, is quite distinct from it and has a certain independence of the mind, as we have seen. Whether something is possible or not is independent from being "in the mind" in the third sense, as we pointed out already. That the possibility of an essence cannot be identified with the being of an essence

"in the mind" becomes clear through the following fact: also an *intrinsically impossible* object (e.g., a square circle) can be the object of an intentional act and in that sense be "in the mind." Consequently, being "in the mind" and possibility cannot be the same thing.

There is an even more drastic difference between a mere "being in the mind" in the third sense and an essentially necessary intelligible essence. In virtue of their timelessness, intelligibility, intrinsic necessity, etc., these "essences" are radically distinct from a mere "being in the mind" which is lacking in all the properties characteristic of such essences.²²⁴

In the fifth sense, "being in the mind" does not designate a particular form of being; it rather designates the fact that *all* real, possible and ideal essences as well as existence can have "being in the mind" in that they can be known as they really are. The new "entity" that arises here is (apart from that of knowledge itself) the "being" of an essence *as object* of knowledge. All forms of an essence's being (i.e., essence as real, possible, etc.) can, in addition to the being they have independently of our knowledge, also be "in the mind" in this last sense; and they are, as it were, in the mind each according to its own nature, i.e., they are known either as existing essence, as possible essence, or as ideal necessary "essential plan," etc.²²⁵

In considering human knowledge and creativity, and above all divine knowledge and creation, it is clear that a real essence can, in principle, "exist in the mind" *before* it exists in the real. Knowledge can embrace an object even before it exists, not only when it exists. Divine knowledge embraces from eternity all real beings before they exist, and, as Thomas Aquinas stresses, all possible beings even in their ultimate possible determinations.²²⁶ Not only the universal necessary plans of things are known by God eternally, but also the existence and essence of concrete beings.

Thus we can say that, at least with regard to divine knowledge, there is an absolute eternal primacy of the "being of essences and existences in the mind" before they can ever exist in real contingent beings.

By way of summary, we have seen in this last chapter that whereas essence in the real being has no temporal priority over existence, other senses of "essence" do have a "precedence"; they precede temporally or even eternally the real existence of the being. Furthermore, we saw that, as long as we deal with "possibility," the existence as well as the essence of a being is possible before the being is real. Lastly, we found that, with respect to the last meaning of "being in the mind," not only the essences, but even the concrete real existences of contingent beings precede in the mind (of God and sometimes of men) the really existing being.

In reflecting back on the insights won in these last chapters, we can in general conclude by reemphasizing the fact that not only the primacy of

existence over essence, but also the priority of essence over existence is a clearly given datum. Having analyzed the various and different forms of this priority of essence over existence, we can see that it would be impossible to reduce them all simply to either a "being in the mind" or to a mere "possibility." To grasp the evidence of this, we need only think back to our discussion of the necessary essential plans of certain things, which, as we saw, are incomparably more than mere "possibilities." They are also something quite distinct from "being in the mind" in any of the senses discussed. That they can be known (be "in the mind" in the fifth sense), presupposes in their case precisely that their own reality is more than a "being in the mind."

Chapter Eight

Kinds of "Real Existence" and Their Causes

In order to complete the previous investigations on essence and existence, it is necessary to add at least in outline form a few remarks about the various kinds of real existence and their causes. We will, at the same time, endeavor to arrive at a critical understanding of the statement often made by existentialist Thomists that "existence is the proper effect of God."²²⁷

This brief investigation should serve, above all, to further elucidate from another point of view, on the one hand what it means to be, and, on the other hand, the exact meaning of the *priority* of existence over essence, as well as our criticism of the existential Thomistic interpretation of this "primacy of Existence."

On the basis of this analysis, namely, it will not only become clear that the "*esse*" of contingent beings is not "prior to their essence" in the sense that it is the divine *esse* itself — limited by contingent essences; but also that existence is not even prior to contingent essences in the sense that only *essential* determinations could be caused by secondary causes and agents, but never *existence*. We will see, to the contrary, that the act of existence is *not* always the immediate effect of the "first cause," that secondary causes can bring beings into existence just as they can have effects on their quidditative properties. This will further uncover a false "mystique of the act of existence."

1. Different Kinds of "Real Existents" and Their Causes

The becoming and perishing of accidents implies the change from existence into non-existence or vice versa. The color of a body exists at one time and not at another; youth, justice, beauty, etc., are found in a being at one time and not at another.

Obviously, we speak here of existence in the sense of real existence. The real existence of accidents can to a large extent be caused by man (even though it remains true that ultimately every existence goes back to God as first cause); man is the efficient proximate cause of many accidental existences. Accidents can also be brought into existence by other secondary causes, however, distinct from man, namely, the causes in nature.

Finally, the believer in God will accept the existence of accidental changes in a deeper sense which in virtue of their nature can neither be brought into being by man nor by natural causes, but owe their existence to a higher power, or the direct intervention of God. (Such are the changes which occur, for example, through miracles or grace, or due to the providential guidance of man.)

The coming into existence of a substance is again something quite different. Real existence here takes on a very different meaning than in the case of accidents. The coming into existence of some substances, which occurs in virtue of a change in the inner structure or exterior form of an already existing substance (e.g., when a new chemical substance is made, or when a statue is formed from a piece of marble) can be caused by secondary causes, e.g., either by natural causes or by human intervention. Other substances (e.g., plants, animals, matter as such) require in principle for their existence an immediate intervention of the first cause. We say "in principle" because, since the further production or generation of the same kind of substance is possible through that substance once it exists (e.g., the reproduction of plants), the immediate intervention of the first cause is not necessary in each individual case. Still other substances (like the human soul) require a direct causation of their existence through the first cause, as can be seen through a study of their very essence.²²⁸

The substantial becoming of an already existing substance is again often brought about directly through secondary causes, among them being man. The becoming of a tree out of a seed, for example, is more than an accidental change, and yet, at the same time, not a direct effect of the first cause; it is caused rather by the inner entelechial nature of the seed as well as through forces like water, light, etc. In a similar way, substantial becoming of man is also partly brought about by secondary causes; it is in part due to his organic growth-process, and on a deeper level is not realized without freedom and, as we accept in faith, on the deepest level only through grace and cooperative freedom.

2. Instantaneous and Gradual "Coming into Existence"

We find on the level of accidental as well as substantial becoming the difference between a sudden and a gradual coming into existence or perishing. This is to say that whereas the coming into existence of some substances and accidents is a process admitting of different degrees of temporal duration (e.g., the shaping of a marble block into a statue); other substances (e.g., the human soul) and accidents come into existence instantaneously.

3. Human Freedom as Cause of Existence

On the level of secondary causes, the highest efficient cause for existing things is freedom (a free agent). In virtue of its conscious spontaneous nature, freedom is a cause in a certain *absolute* sense. An agent that is a free being is an efficient cause in the most proper sense of the term (on the level of contingent being), as Augustine clearly pointed out.²²⁹

The free self is above all and most importantly the cause which brings into existence free acts and actions. Through such acts and actions the free human agent can bring into existence, furthermore, not only innumerable accidental determinations of material things, but material substances (e.g., artifacts or works of art) as well. He can also bring into existence through his free acts communities (such as the one constituted by the marriage *consensus*), or countless changes of private, political or historical nature. He can freely bring into existence or abolish words, rules, conventions, etc. Furthermore, the free human agent can bring about changes in other persons or in himself.

4. Contingent Existence and "First Cause"

The first cause of all existing contingent beings is the absolute divine being. God alone creates existence from nothing in the strict sense, whereas freedom does so with regard to acts only in an analogous sense. He alone sustains any contingent being in existence and allows it to cause other beings to exist.

The existence of contingent beings is in no way, however, an "effect" of the First Cause in the sense that the *esse* of contingent beings is identical with the divine *esse* limited by created essence. This view strongly suggested by Gilson, Phelan, or Carlo, for example,²³⁰ overlooks the fact that the contingent real existence is absolutely as much contingent as the real essence of contingent beings. It overlooks, furthermore, that the existence of contingent beings is intimately united with their essence, that their existence could *in no way* precede the coming into existence of the respective essence, as we have seen. A kind of pantheism, which, on the one hand, fails to do justice to the dignity of the intrinsic reality of the world, and, on the other hand, and above all undermines the infinite and "exclusive" sublimity of the divine *esse* (which in no sense of the term is *identical* with "Father Phelan's existence"), follows from this view.²³¹

The argument that if the world had a "being of its own" which was not identical with the divine "*esse*" in its limitation by essence, something would be "added on" to God, which is impossible, is not tenable, as we have discussed already. In suggesting that the *esse* of the world is in some sense one with the divine *esse*, limited by essences, it seems that we are

confronted with many views about essence and existence at once which we were forced to reject as false in the course of this investigation: the intimate union of essence and existence is overlooked and a false priority (absolute) of existence over essence is implied; essence is considered as limitation; God is considered as pure undetermined *esse* without essence in the sense of quidditative content so that the divine *esse* could be received and limited by a finite essence; the fundamental sense in which, metaphysically speaking, essence possesses not only an indispensable *absolute* metaphysical significance, but even a certain priority over existence is denied, etc.

Conclusion

If, in concluding this paper, we consider just one central question which formed the background of this discussion, namely, what being in the most proper, in the most perfect sense is, we could summarize our results in the following manner:

In one sense of the term, real existence is being in the most proper sense, since through it "whatever else" a being is, has reality. The essence of contingent beings depends on existence in a fundamental manner in which existence does not depend on essence. Since all perfections of a being have only real being because they *exist*, existence can in one sense truly be called the "perfection of all perfections," namely, in that it actualizes or is the unique interior actuality of all (otherwise only possible or potential) perfections, in that it alone makes real the perfections of which even an eternal essentially necessary plan only "speaks."

In another sense, however, the possibility, as well as the value or disvalue, and the rank of goodness of existence are totally dependent on essence; in this sense essence has a "priority" over existence, and the positive content (essence) constitutes being in the most proper and perfect sense. Also in the sense that necessary and ideal "essences" (essential plans) precede the existence of the world timelessly, "essence" has in various manners a priority over (contingent) existence.

Yet, ultimately, essence and existence are, even in contingent beings where they are in one sense distinct, so inseparably one and united, that "being as being" can only be understood as the union of essence and existence, or even as that *tertium* (the being) *in* which alone essence and existence are and become one. Furthermore, not even this union of being as such, but only the value of the constitutive essence (τί εἶναι), of the qualitative essence (ποιόν εἶναι), and of all other dimensions of essence *as existing* constitutes perfect being.

The perfection of perfections in the most proper sense, then, is the being in which we find a union of a perfect essence and of a perfect existence. This is absolutely true of God, whose essence is as absolutely perfect as His *esse*. It is true in a restricted sense of contingent beings whose perfection is also not constituted by their existence alone, but equally by their essence (nature), by the extent to which *what* the contingent beings *are* and become, is perfect and an image or similitude of the absolute divine perfection of essence and existence.

NOTES

132. We have already seen that existence is not "added" to "possible essence," but "transforms it" completely in a way describable by many essential judgments. If we would know the essential properties of a being as they are "transformed" by existence, we would *eo ipso* know that the being exists. Therefore we speak here of a knowledge of "what" the contingent being is or would be, in which the "existential determination and transformation" of an essence is precisely not known, in which the question of existence is left open.

133. They use in part different terminology. Instead of speaking of imagination they say that we find an "essence in the mind" without finding this "essence in the real." We will deal later with the "being in the mind."

134. See Aristotle, *Physics*, I. See also Aristotle, *On Coming to Be and Passing Away*.

135. Freedom itself is a capacity of the person in virtue of which the person is creative; he can bring into existence acts by a spontaneous "fiat." Yet his free and existing center from which these free acts spring is itself contingent (created).

When man creates freely a really existing material object outside himself, he has always to use a material cause as well as the knowledge of things distinct from himself. When he creates freely not a material thing, but a poem or drama as mere "object of his mind," this creation, since it is free and does not produce the object from a material cause, resembles most closely within the contingent world a "creation from nothing." In freedom we find a deep analogy to the creativity of God. Yet, even here, man remains dependent on the knowledge of objects distinct from himself and on his own being, which is *given* to him. Moreover, he cannot give real existence to the objects of his creative acts without using a material cause. He cannot give being to persons at all. In all these respects, human free creativity is more dissimilar than similar to divine creativity.

136. See Plato, *Timaeus*. See also Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII. Cf. also note 137.

137. Aristotle deals with the coming into existence of substances out of material causes (material substrata), or from other organisms. This becoming of a substance takes place, when, for example, a painting comes into existence, a house is built, a new plant or an animal comes into existence. This is the most radical "coming into existence" Aristotle deals with. The most radical perishing he considers is that of the destruction or death of such substances.

He, implicitly at least, conceives therefore of the difference between essence and existence in that he knows that for all these substances (as well as for their properties) what they are does not imply existence. Yet their being is understood as the "product" of already existing elements; their coming into existence is understood as a composition of "elements" already "waiting to be united."

The radical coming into existence of a being which did not eternally pre-exist potentially in material causes and forms, but which comes into existence with all its constituents, elements, parts, etc., from nothing was never recognized by Aristotle. It is, however, only against the background of this contingency of a being, a contingency which embraces all "parts," the totality of a being, that the full depth of the distinction between essence and existence first becomes clear. I do not want to absolutely affirm this deficiency in Aristotle since Thomas Aquinas holds in his *Commentaries* on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and *Physics* that Aristotle did conceive of a radical and total dependence of the world's existence (including

prime matter and forms) on God.

138. "Existential" is used here in a different sense that is related to existential philosophy as it was initiated and understood by Soeren Kierkegaard. It means that which is not only existent, but in a significant manner related to personal, human existence.

139. This touches the controversy between Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure over the philosophical knowability of the temporal beginning of the world. In this controversy we take, with F. Wenisch, and D. Ferrari, Bonaventure's side. See the current issue, I, 1, of *Aletheia*, pp. 185 ff.

140. Later in this paper, when the intimate union of essence and existence in the concrete being becomes thematic, it will be seen that essence and existence are in another sense each being's "own," that both are individual through and through, immanent in the being, etc. We will at that point also have to reject a view suggested by Gilson, according to which the *esse* of contingent beings is not their own. As long as Gilson speaks only about the feature of contingency under discussion here, his remarks are quite true. But as soon as he interprets them as implying the fact that the *esse* of each contingent being is ultimately a created "*esse* in general," or even the divine *esse* as "limited" and "diversified" by a contingent essence, he defends a philosophical error to be criticized later.

141. See Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, trans. Rene Hague, 6th ed. (Chicago, 1970), II, p. 34.

Can we be quite certain that the words act of being are not in some way contradictory? However we may define the word act, it is evident that I cannot speak of the act of being unless I am ready to give up the idea of conceiving anything resembling a subject of the act, a someone who fulfills the act. We should have to admit that this subject itself is, and that would send us back again to a being which is anterior to the act of being . . .

Cf. also Frederick Wilhelmsen, *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence* (Irving, 1970), pp. 41-42.

In all other cases, as Plato clearly saw, there is a sharp distinction between the subject which participates in perfection and the perfection participated in. This distinction implies a priority of the subject with respect to the participated. The subject already exists before it receives the act it has. It exists as a thing — 'man,' before participating in the act 'to fight' . . . But here, in the heart of being, the situation changes radically. A 'runner' is something before receiving the act of 'to run,' but a 'being' is nothing 'before' receiving the act of 'to be.' In the most rigorous sense of the term, there is no subject prior to existence. We are reasoning about an activity, the most radical of all activities — existing — which posits or places within the field of existence the very subject which 'receives it.'

Both authors express clearly in these passages the unique sense the term "act" has when it is applied to existence. Both distinguish this sense, too, from the meaning of the term "act" in all other cases, where "act" differs essentially from existence in that it necessarily presupposes the existence of the agent (being).

At this point we also want to mention an important work in the school of Existential Thomism, Joseph Owen's *An Interpretation of Existence*, (Milwaukee, 1968). In pp. 46 ff., Owens excludes the notions of existence as act, as perfection, as fact, as occurrence, as attribute, etc., as inadequate, without going sufficiently into a phenomenological analysis of the completely different possible meanings of these terms. He decides finally for the term "synthesizing" (pp. 56 ff.) as the most adequate way to describe existence. We will

come to this notion of existence as "synthesis," "synthesizing," or "synthesizing act" later in this essay.

Like Gilson, also Owens denies any "conceptual content" to existence (p. 5), and he grounds this thesis in existence being a synthesis. Even more absolutely than Gilson he rejects (pp. 14 ff.) that any concept could refer to existence and he implies that the judgment is the only way in which existence can be known, precisely because existence is "a synthesizing, dynamic, and temporally conditioned actuality" (p. 25). It is only a secondary "conceptualization" that is allowed for in regard to existence according to Owens (p. 65, 70). Cf. also p. 42. Cf. our criticism of this whole position in chapter iii of this essay.

We may add a further criticism to Owens' thesis that only in the judgment are we capable of grasping existence: 1) Both concept and judgment can refer to either the existence or the essence of a being. The essential feature of the "judgment" is that it refers to a state of affairs, whether the latter is related to existence or to essence. Only *that something exists, what it means to exist, or that an essence (being) has such and such features* (only states of affairs) can become direct objects of judgments, never existence as such nor essence as such. 2) The "synthesizing" goes back as much to essence as to existence, as will be shown later, and cannot therefore be restricted to "existence."

142. The formulation of the "priority of existence over essence" used here is taken from a lecture delivered by F. Wilhelmsen on October 10, 1975, to a group of graduate students and professors at the University of Dallas, Irving, Texas. The same thought is expressed in his above-mentioned book, *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence*, p. 38:

Essence is nothing without being or existence. Hence, there is a metaphysical priority or primacy of being over essence; this primacy cannot be temporal because we experience no existence or 'is' without some determined essence or nature. Essence . . . depends upon being because — outside of that 'is' — essence 'is not.'

A further sense of the "primacy" of existence over essence that we find formulated on p. 39 is still more problematic and will be discussed later, namely, ". . . that being or existence falls outside essence or nature, but that essence does not fall outside being."

Cf. note 146, and also our previous discussion of the primacy of essence over existence, sections 2 and 3, Chapter v, as well as the sixth chapter of the present paper.

143. See Chapters vi and vii of this paper in which the primacy of essence over existence is discussed.

144. Augustine implies in the following passage that we can, through the changeability of the world, recognize the difference between *what* the world is and its *existence*, as well as the fact that it is the existence or being of the world which prevents the world from sinking back into nothing. Augustine, *Confessiones*, ed. P. H. Wagnereck, S. J. (Torino, 1962), XI, iv:

Ecce enim coelum et terra; clamant quod facta sunt: Mutantur enim, atque variantur. Quidquid enim factum non est, et tamen est, non est in eo quidquam, quod ante non erat, quod est mutari atque variari. Clamant etiam, quod seipsa non fecerint; ideo sumus quia facti sumus. Non ergo eramus, antequam essemus, ut fieri possemus a nobis. Et vox dicentium est ipsa evidētia.

145. In Thomistic circles it has traditionally been held that existence (which Avicenna seems to have considered not only as an eleventh category, but also as an accident of the substance) shares with accidents the first two features, i.e., being "in" and being "of" the substance, but differs from the third characteristic of the accident, the being "secondary to" the substance.

146. Though this is never explicitly held by Gilson and his school, there are many passages in Gilson's works as well as in the writings of his followers which suggest a sort of "substantial act of existence" which is clothed with predicates. We will quote the respective passages in Gilson later, when our theme will be to show how "*esse* as such," whose essence is only to exist, is impossible (See below, chapter vi, 2).

If we refer to Phelan, we find the following passage. G. B. Phelan, "The Being of Creatures," *G. B. Phelan Selected Papers*, ed. A. D. Kirn, C.S.B. (Toronto, 1967), p. 91.:

To be, for a creature, is always to exercise being (*esse*) IN SOME MODE. It is the mode of existence which limits and restricts the *esse*. To call it 'essence' is all very well, provided essence is not regarded as some positive thing, but simply the 'by which' (*quo*), or the mode, measure or manner in which the act, *esse*, is exercised. To say, for example, 'Crystals are solids' means for the existential metaphysician 'Crystals exercise the act of existence in a solid manner.'

Having stressed the "primacy" existence has over essence, Gabriel Marcel makes the following critical remark in his *The Mystery of Being*, II, p. 23, about such a quasi-substantial understanding of existence:

. . . it is *to be* that makes possible the existence of any property at all; it is that without which no property whatsoever can be conceived, though it is true that we must be careful to avoid the sort of scheme in which being exists in some way anterior to properties; nothing could be more fallacious than the idea of a sort of nakedness of being which exists before qualities and properties and which is later to be clothed by them.

Some existential Thomist thinkers go, without holding a priority of existence over essence in time, much farther than suggesting a "sort of nakedness of being." They proceed to characterize existence totally in terms of a substance as the only reality and entity "standing in itself," in which essence only "inheres" and of which essential predicates are only a "mode." This complete "quasi-substance": existence, is then identified with God.

The attempt to substantialize existence goes farthest in the work of W. E. Carlo, *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics*, (The Hague, 1966). In this book, dedicated to G. B. Phelan, Carlo writes:

Although the imagination plays no more than a supporting role in metaphysics, . . . let us imagine, then, existence as a stream rushing down the mountain side. Again, for our purposes it is frozen by a sudden drop in temperature. An axe at this point can help us to explain what we mean by essence as the intrinsic limitation of existence. If we cut the stream into several pieces or blocks they will differ only by the pattern left by the blade of the axe. There is nothing in the blocks but frozen water or ice. But one is distinguishable from another by the place where they stop, the myriad grooves and raised surfaces left by the blade of the axe. This is what we mean when we say that essence is the intrinsic limitation of existence. It is not *that which* limits *esse*, it is *the limitation of esse*; it is not *that which* receives, determines and specifies *esse*, it is *the very specification itself* of existence. (*Ibid.*, p. 104)

It is not possible to use a more misleading image in order to describe existence than the one Carlo uses. Existence presented in the images of water and ice is clearly confused here with the substance or being *which* exists and which can never be reduced to existence. The fundamental metaphysical fact is overlooked that existence is never a quasi-substantial bearer of anything, but is the existence *of* the substance or being *which* exists. Furthermore, essence or the quidditative dimension of the being *which* exists, is never a specification of an act of existence; still less can the metaphysical arch-datum of all content and quiddity of being be reduced to a totally exteriorly conceived limit or form of existence. To reduce essence to existence in this fashion is metaphysically a worse mistake than to

reduce the number 3 to the color yellow.

See also Wilhelmsen, p. 89:

But the act of existing is that without which nothing is . . . existing is utterly unintelligible in terms of the world whose being it is . . . 'To be' is intelligible in terms only of 'Is', as a gerund is intelligible in terms of a verb. It follows that it is impossible to think of a non-affirmed act of existing without thinking it as *deductum* or 'seen from' an affirmed Is. This affirmed Is is simply Existence as such, Subsisting To Be, in the language of the tradition, God.

Cf. notes 182-194.

147. The meaning might be rendered more exactly by translating: "And I did not exist; so you could not help me or assist me in coming into existence" (which would presuppose already my existence).

148. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York, 1960), p. 335.

149. See notes 147 and 148.

150. See Soeren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* and *The Sickness unto Death*, trans. and ed. (Walter Lowrie), 5th Printing, (Princeton, 1974), pp. 150 ff., pp. 182 ff.

It is not possible here to interpret and discuss Kierkegaard's profound analysis of despair in its whole context.

Cf. also Marcel, II, p. 137, where the possibilities of viewing our life (our existence) as a gift in gratitude or as absurd and meaningless in despair are discussed.

150a. This brings to evidence how terribly real evils can be. They have such a powerful reality that they can even "absorb" the good a substance as such, nay, even the good a free person is, in the sense that they make it better for the being never to have come into existence. See the further elucidation of this in Dietrich v. Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 1972), Chapter xi.

In light of this truth, it is difficult to understand how Augustine in his *Confessiones*, V, and Thomas Aquinas in *Questiones Disputatae De Malo*, could interpret evil as a mere absence of (due) reality. How can the tremendous reality of evil (which makes even the substance in which it exists, "participate" in evil to such an extent that it would be better had it not existed) be interpreted as a "conspicuous absence" of being or of "due form" (St. Thomas)? How can it possibly be interpreted even as a mere "ens rationis" without any positive reality (similar to "nothing" or to a mere fiction), as existing only "in the mind" and not in the real, as St. Thomas suggests? Cf. note 170.

Indeed, it is understandable that Marcel, for example, considered this theory of evil to be "cynical" in face of the overwhelming reality evils have in the world. It seems that we have to acknowledge fully the *real existence* of evils precisely if we want to retain the deep truths which Augustine and Thomas above all intended to defend. Otherwise, in rightly rejecting the false view of the two thinkers that evil has "no real existence" at all, one could easily, but wrongly reject these truths as well.

The following insights, which underlie the old scholastic dictum "ens et bonum convertuntur" (and which in part can be grasped philosophically on the basis of the proofs for God's existence, and in part are also contents of Revelation) are extremely important and should therefore be clearly distinguished from the error that evils have no real existence at all:

A. There can be no being which would be *altogether* evil, without containing some good in it. (Even in a diabolical act, freedom as such is a good, etc.) If we mean by "transcendental properties" of being characteristics found in everything that is insofar as it is, we could call the *bonum* (good, value) and the *pulchrum* (beautiful) "restricted transcendental properties" of being; for no being can be totally without them. But if we mean by a transcendental property a mark of being which characterizes every being and which can be predicated of it in all its being (existing aspects), then the bonum and pulchrum are not transcendental properties of being. In other words, if we mean that everything, insofar as it is and insofar as it is real, and to the extent to which it is real (existent), is good and beautiful (in the same fashion as it must have some content, unity, etc.), then we commit a grave metaphysical error.

B. There can be no evil substance, i.e., substantiality as such can never be evil (as Manichaeism thought concerning matter).

C. All evil stems from an abuse of the good of free will (as Augustine especially insisted on).

D. All evil presupposes the good and is secondary to it: either to the good of the nature in which it occurs (as pains presuppose the good of the suffering being); or, in addition, to the good against which evils are directed (as moral evil presupposes the good that is hated or destroyed, etc.).

E. Consequently, there can be *no absolute evil*. The absolute being, God is all good; no evil can be in Him. This is a most important truth which Augustine wants to defend against Manichaeism, and which already Plato defended against Greek polytheism, which ascribed moral evils to god(s).

F. Evil, even if it is real, is utterly opposed to the inner "ratio" of the good. It is in a sense even more opposed to the good than nothingness is; for it is, yet it should *not be*; it lacks the justification of, the "throne" of legitimacy "in" being. See Josef Seifert, "Die verschiedenen Bedeutungen von 'Sein' — Dietrich v. Hildebrand als Metaphysiker und Martin Heideggers Vorwurf der Seinsvergessenheit," in *Wahrheit, Wert und Sein*, ed. [Balduin Schwarz] (Regensburg, 1970), pp. 315 ff.

G. Evil had no being "in the beginning." (This truth presupposes the existence of an infinitely good God.) It is not eternal in the sense of having no beginning, as the Manichaeans taught. Nor was it originally in creation as it came from God.

H. There is no evil that is "absolutely evil" in the sense that God, in His Providence, could not use it for the good according to the plans of His wisdom — like a "felix culpa," which is *in itself evil*, but *from which* greater goods (e.g., redemption, judgment, justice, etc.) can be drawn. Augustine mentions this repeatedly especially in his *De Civitate Dei*.

I. Evil will not triumph in reality "at the end." It will be subjected to the good completely in the sense of being "bound" and punished.

J. In many cases, evil consists in, or is grounded in a "conspicuous absence" of a good or of a "due form" (as in blindness or insensitivity); yet, in other cases (e.g., pain or hatred) this is not so. (Not hatred, but indifference "consists" in an absence of love.)

Even the evil, though, that is due to, or "consists in" an absence of a good (e.g., the deafness that afflicted Beethoven) causes sufferings which *are not merely* the "absence" of that good (i.e., hearing) but which can be intense psychic pain or even despair (as Beethoven experienced them in consequence of his deafness).

On the other hand, even the evil which is much more than an absence of due good (as, for example, intense physical pain is more than the absence of pleasure) *presupposes and implies* an absence of due good (e.g., the absence of pleasure). It is presupposed even for the existence of evils which *by no means consist in* an absence of due good (such as hatred or physical pain) that the due good (of pleasure or charity) is absent.

Everyone who sets out to defend consistently these profound truths, can do so only in

fully acknowledging the horrible reality and real existence of evils. It would be a great mistake, especially at a time in which the reality of evils is seen by more thinkers and stressed as never before, not to admit it, and thereby run the risk of preventing people from seeing these other truths that we only pointed at, which underly the thesis "*ens et bonum convertuntur*." Cf. note 170.

151. The following remarks are in reference to a text in Holy Scripture. But the *possibility* of what St. Paul speaks about in this context can be grasped by the non-believer or atheist, too. In this sense, revealed truth can also be used in a purely philosophical argument.

In St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans ix:14-21, where the image of the "pot of God's anger" is used, it is said that, as the pot has no right to ask the potter why he gave it this shape, so man, if he is damned, has no right to reproach God for not having saved him. This passage surely presupposes the freedom of man; it in no way implies that someone is damned without his own fault. Yet it does imply that even the damned man, who despairs and would prefer "not to be," cannot rightly reproach God either for having created him, or for having shown justice to him rather than choosing to show him greater mercy. In our context, it is most significant that this passage shows how existence as such is of no good for man. Cf. note 170.

151a. Pascal expresses this experience marvellously in his *Pensées*, ed. Louis Lafuma (Paris, 1963), fr. 69 (205):

Quand je considère la petite durée de ma vie absorbée dans l'éternité précédente et suivante . . . le petit espace que je remplis et même que je vois abîmé dans l'infinie immensité des espaces que j'ignore et qui m'effraye et m'étonne de me voir ici plutôt que là, car il n'y a point de raison pourquoi ici plutôt que là, pourquoi à présent plutôt que lors. Qui m'y a mis? Par l'ordre et la conduite de qui ce lieu et ce temps a-t-il été destiné à moi?

When I consider the brief span of my life absorbed into the eternity which comes before and after . . . the small place I occupy and which I see swallowed up in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I know nothing and which know nothing of me, I take fright and am amazed to see myself here rather than there: there is no reason for me to be here rather than there, now rather than then. Who put me here? By whose command and act were this time and place allotted to me?

— trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (London, 1966).

Taken one step further, this is the experience of being puzzled by the question: why do I exist? why is there something rather than nothing? why is there any contingent being rather than none?

152. See note 9.

153. There is definitely a considerable "essentialism" within the Platonic tradition which implies a forgetfulness of being as existence. Plato, in holding that not really existing beings, but pure "ideal essences" of the Good, the Beautiful, etc., are "being in the most proper sense," overlooks the unique impact and priority the order of really existing beings and "existence" have metaphysically.

The "essentialism" in Leibniz, who conceives of the existence of the best possible world as a necessary result of its "essence" is even more radical. See Norman E. Fenton, *A New Interpretation of Leibniz's Philosophy* (Dallas, 1973), pp. 240 ff., for a very clear analysis of this "essentialism."

In a milder form, Max Scheler's conception of values as primarily existing "ideally," and Nicolai Hartmann's restriction of their existence to ideal existence are "essentialistic."

Yet, neither Leibniz nor Scheler and Hartmann defend the radical philosophical "essentialism" of a universe which ultimately only consists of "essences" (phenomena), and of a nonindividual "life" (of transcendental subjectivity), as we find it to a large extent in Averroës, Hegel, or the late Husserl.

154. The ordination of ideal essences (or ideal essential plans) to really existing beings has to be stressed. See von Hildebrand, *What is Philosophy?*, pp. 117 ff. See also above, Chapter One, 5 ff.

Cf. also Seifert, *Erkenntnis*, pp. 258 ff. and 290 ff. There I tried to show that there is no contradiction between a full insistence upon the dignity of existing beings (i.e., full realism) and true "Platonism" as the clear acknowledgement of unchangeable "eternal truths." I even tried to show that the *true* Platonism is necessarily presupposed by true realism: that no existing being could exist or be of any weight, without essentially necessary timeless laws preceding it eternally. Cf. also the following analysis of essence and its role.

155. Helmut Kuhn in his book, *Das Sein und das Gute*, (München, 1962), pp. 43-47, also acknowledges Gilson's merit in warning of a false "essentialism." At the same time Kuhn rightly insists on the fundamental impact of essence for real being as well as for human knowledge. He points out that a false "existentialism" constitutes an even greater threat and error than a false essentialism. He observes very well that this threat is prevalent today in different forms: in empiricism and positivism on the one hand, and in the Heideggerian and very influential denial of transhistorical essences on the other hand. Kuhn also mentions some of the legitimate senses of the priority of essence over existence still to be explored.

It is impossible for Gilson to recognize the true and full impact of existence, since he fails to do justice to the true role of essence. To see the one clearly without seeing the other is impossible. See note 154.

156. Gilson, in his book, *Being and Some Philosophers*, p. 3, calls this distinction the very first and most universal distinction:

Being is quite conceivable apart from existence; so much so that the very first and most universal of all distinctions in the realm of being is that which divides it into two classes, that of the real and that of the possible.

This distinction is definitely *one* of the most universal distinctions and extremely significant in order to grasp the weight of the question of existence for metaphysics.

157. See Seifert, *Erkenntnis*, pp. 149 ff. and 203 ff. The fundamental theme of the really existing world should have been stressed more than it is in these passages. I added some clarifications on this issue in the "Anhang zur Zweiten Auflage" of this book, pp. 327 ff.

158. As long as Gilson speaks primarily about "to be" as such, he still deals with a question of "essence" in the sense that he deals with the "universal" meaning of existence, as found in *every* being.

It is only when we raise philosophically questions concerning actually existing being, and get to know *concrete existing* beings, that we refer to that individual unique "being" of which Gilson rightly says that no concept as such can intend it; that it is "unspeakable." This does not exclude, however, that we can refer to it by means of a name or in *applying* a concept to a unique existing being, as when we say, "This being exists." Cf. note 112.

159. I borrow this formulation from S. J. Hamburger. It has been developed by D. v.

Hildebrand in a series of lectures delivered at the University of Salzburg in 1964. Cf. also Seifert, *Erkenntnis*, pp. 203 ff.

160. The personal, conscious, free being, capable of love, is "being" in a unique sense. Impersonal beings can be said to be "non-beings" compared with the perfection of being found in a person. With the Thomist tradition, we have to stress the analogicity of being and apply it also to the being of the "substance." Contrary to Aristotle's view that there are no degrees of the being of the substance, we must point out that there are not only degrees, but such radically different "orders" of perfection in the way different beings are substances, that the substantiality of a table is merely analogously to be called substance, if compared with the substantiality of a person, or with the substantiality of God.

Substantiality is not a genus which can be predicated univocally of all substances. This implies that metaphysics has expressly to deal with the specific features of personal being in order to find an answer to the question, "what is being in the most proper sense?" (what is being as being?)

161. "Metaphysical Solipsism" can mean many things. In a sense, even the knowledge that it is intrinsically true that we exist, frees us already from "solipsism"; but in this context we mean with metaphysical solipsism any philosophy according to which we are the only existing person, as Stirner maintains, and as Husserl poses as a serious problem in his *Cartesian Meditations*.

162. When we come to God, even the "individual," concretely existing being "as such" belongs to metaphysics, whereas with regard to human persons, individual existence belongs to the subject matter of metaphysics only insofar as it shows that "one person" is real. The higher we ascend in being, the more the concrete existing being and the qualitative dimensions of his essence belong to the subject matter of metaphysics, which is the study of "being as being"; for the higher we climb in being, the more the "concrete being" has to be understood (and not only some general features of it) in order to understand "being as such."

163. The impact of this metaphysical question is inseparably linked to the great questions Plato raises in his *Phaedo*, of death, immortality, judgment, and attainment of beatitude, and to the question of the "end of history," etc.

164. This priority of essence over existence is not constituted by the fact "that" existence depends on essence, but by the kind of dependence at stake (See note 142). Not the mere fact that existence cannot be without essence, but rather the reason for this constitutes the "primacy" of essence over existence. For neither can a substance be without its modal properties and in this sense it depends on them; yet this does not give to the modes any "priority" over the substance. (The capacity to know, for example, is constitutive for the substance of a person, yet in no sense "prior" to the person.)

165. See Bonaventura, I *Sententiarum*, in *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, ed. studio et cura PP. Collegii a S. Bonaventura, ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi), ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 10 Volumina (1882-1902), 42 Concl., I, 753. Cf. also above, Chapter One, 5.

165a. One of the decisive corrections Leibniz makes of some of Descartes' errors is his insistence upon the independence of essentially necessary laws from God's will. Like Bonaventure, Leibniz stresses that even divine omnipotence could not change these "eter-

nal truths," not because it is limited, but because to change eternal truths is in itself impossible and absurd; it would imply a nihilistic destruction of meaning, a "lack of power" by the (impossible) destruction of the meaningful basis for any power. See the article quoted in note 123.

166. Insofar as "essence" possesses an inner "unity" and renders existence possible, the "union of a manifold whole," the "synthesis" each being is, depends fundamentally on essence. The role existence plays in the "synthesis" of being will be discussed later.

167. The utter metaphysical dependence of existence on essence under our consideration here constitutes a true priority of essence over existence, which is overlooked by the "existential Thomists." In his classical book on Bonaventure, Gilson shows a great perceptiveness with regard to this priority of essence over existence. Yet, in his later works, it seems as though the voluntaristic tendencies in W. of Ockham had been revived, even if involuntarily, in "existential Thomism."

Whereas Thomas had insisted upon the fact that the "eternal truths" and essences of things do not depend on the will, but on the intellect and essence of God, the voluntaristic position is that the essential order depends wholly on existence, and existence on the will of God.

Any claim of an "absolute priority" of existence over essence, however, which fails to acknowledge a timeless and absolutely unchangeable essential order of things, must lead to nominalism, voluntarism, and, in its last consequence even to chaos, to nihilism, since it makes all essential structures dependent on existence and thereby on the will of God. We shall come back to this point later. Cf. notes 181-193.

168. For we find, concerning real being, the tension between content as such and its realization in existence. Through the corresponding problem of what can enter the world of really existing beings, the truth that nothing can be (really exist) without content, receives a new dramatic sense.

168a. Some existential Thomists would recognize this point to some extent in what they would call the "formal priority of essence" over existence.

169. See note 142. We see that existence without essence is at least as radically nothing as is essence without existence. In addition, the dependence underlying this truth is such that it allows us to speak of a true priority of essence over existence, since essence also in this sense (as concrete essence) determines the very possibility and kind of existence a being has. This will become clear later.

170. The philosophical reader will allow me to leave the order of philosophy for a moment and to defend my position against the accusation of heresy, launched against it by some existential Thomists.

The following passages show how fully the philosophical theses explained here are in harmony with Revelation. Though these passages are taken from religious texts (i.e., Holy Scripture and the liturgy) they can also serve as a starting point for an insight that can be gained in purely philosophical terms.

In Mark xiv:21, Christ says about Judas Iscariot: "It were better for him, if that man had not been born." (trans. from the Latin Vulgate, New York, 1912). The Roman Catholic liturgy from Holy Saturday expresses that something very similar is true of every man as long as we prescind from redemption: "Nihil enim nobis nasci profuit, nisi redimi profuisset." ("It would have profited us nothing to have been born, unless redemption had also

been bestowed upon us.")

This revealed truth implies the philosophical truth, which in order to be grasped does not presuppose faith, that "existence as such" is not a good, if the content of what exists is not good also. This has been acknowledged not only by Christians, but very often by those outside Christianity as well. We do not even have to think of the many modern forms of nihilism and despair in order to see this. Not only Ionesco, Camus or Nietzsche have expressed the view that man's existence, if afflicted by grave evils, is not a good. Also the ancients often expressed this, as we find, for example, in the fable which Nietzsche retells in his work, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geist der Musik*. In this fable the prophetic word is addressed to an ancient king that the best fate that can befall a man is never to have been born, and the second best, to die as soon as possible.

False as this statement is, insofar as it contradicts already a natural hope that the good will triumph at the end in reality, it still contains the evident truth that a human life and existence, if it were inseparable from afflictions and sufferings outweighing any happiness, would not be good, but evil. Cf. also notes 150 and 150a.

In William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* III. iii. 29-32, 40-59, this finds a powerful poetic expression in Romeo's answer to the Friar's words that banishment from Juliet is a mild punishment, since it does not mean the end of life:

'Tis torture, and not mercy: heaven is here,
Where Juliet lives; and every cat and dog
And little mouse, every unworthy thing,
Live here in heaven and may look on her . . .
But Romeo may not; he is banished:
This may flies do, when I from this must fly:
They are free men, but I am banished:
And say'st thou yet that exile is not death?
Hadst thou no poison mix'd, no sharp-ground knife,
No sudden mean of death, though ne'er so mean,
But 'banished' to kill me? — 'Banished'?
O friar, the damned use that word in hell;
Howling attends it: how hast thou the heart,
Being a divine, a ghostly confessor,
A sin-absolver, and my friend profess'd
To mangle me with that word 'banished'?

Cf. also Shakespeare, *Hamlet* III. i. 56 ff.: "To be, or not to be . . ."

171. See notes 150 and 150a.

172. See note 150a.

173. The important and true intention of Augustine and Thomas, the elaboration of fundamental metaphysical truths, has been explained in note 150a.

174. Augustine, *Confessiones*, XIII, iii.

175. This "priority" is not founded simply in the fact that each being has an essence, in essence as such, but rather in the specific positive content of the essence of a being. We could, furthermore, following here a line of thought that reaches from Plato up to thinkers like Dietrich von Hildebrand and Gabriel Marcel, insist upon the fact that the positivity of human personal being depends not only on the positive essence of a (contingent) being, the essence of man, but also upon his knowing and free transcendent participation in the

Good, ultimately in God. It depends upon his qualitative values which to possess he is essentially called, but which he does not possess necessarily. It depends on his essence in the sense of the *ποῖόν εἶναι* as well as on his *τί εἶναι*. It depends, furthermore, on certain transcendent relations which belong to man's essence, as shown in Chapter One.

Again, within transcendence and participation, many further distinctions have to be made: first of all, the distinction between the transcendent participation implied in knowledge, and the transcendence of which man is capable through a free value response; and, most importantly, on a purely theological level, the distinction between nature and grace. All these distinctions refer to "what a being is," however, not to its existence as such, and can therefore be included in the problem of "essence" in a wider sense. Cf. Chapter One of this essay.

176. See Pascal, *Pensées*, fr. 308:

All bodies, the firmament, the stars, the earth and its kingdoms are not worth the least of minds, for it knows them all and itself too, while bodies know nothing.

All bodies together and all minds together and all their products are not worth the least impulse of charity. This is of an infinitely superior order.

Out of all the bodies together we could not succeed in creating one little thought. It is impossible, and of a different order. Out of all bodies and minds we could not extract one impulse of true charity. It is impossible, and of a different, supernatural order.

177. See Thomas Aquinas' discussion of these statements of Augustine in his *Disputed Questions on the Power of God*, VII, 2, reply to objection 9.

178. We excluded already the misinterpretation of this metaphysical fact as if essence would be a "mode of existence." See note 146 and the passages in the text of the paper to which it refers.

179. See our discussion of the real distinction between essence and existence.

180. See note 8.

180a. Not only is it absolutely and *metaphysically* necessary that each being that exists have some *content* (essential nature) beyond existing. (This self-evident truth has been discussed and will still be discussed.) It is equally true for the *order of knowing* that we must possess some knowledge of "*what exists*," before we can affirm legitimately the existence of a being, at least the existence of a being more than an "X": before we can say more than, "X exists." This is also and especially true of God, as has been excellently shown by Duns Scotus. Duns Scotus, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. A. Wolter, 4th ed. (New York, 1962), p. 19:

In the second place, there is no point in distinguishing between a knowledge of His essence and a knowledge of His existence . . . For I never know anything to exist unless I first have some concept of that of which existence is affirmed.

Duns Scotus shows further that it is impossible to reduce our knowledge of either God's essence or of His existence to our knowledge of the truth of the proposition, "God exists"; for the truth of a proposition presupposes some knowledge of the real state of facts affirmed in the proposition:

Thirdly, in regard to God's existence there is no need to distinguish between the question of the truth of the proposition and the question of His existence. For before there can be any question of the truth of a proposition wherein existence is predi-

cated of a subject, it is necessary first of all to conceive the terms of this proposition. . . . and, we could add, before we can know the truth of the proposition, we have to have some knowledge of the real state of facts to which the true proposition refers. Cf. note 185.

See also Thomas Gornall, S. J., *A Philosophy of God. The Elements of Thomist Natural Theology* (New York, 1962), p. 51.:

Any showing of the existence of God concludes to a Being possessing some characteristic which belongs to God and to God alone, e.g., first cause, or necessary Being, or infinite Being. Any division between knowing *that* God is, and knowing *what* God is, is to some extent artificial . . . St. Thomas frequently says that we can know *that* God is (*an est*) but not *what* God is (*quid est*); but that is a technical use of language, and means only that we cannot have a direct and adequate knowledge of the essence of God, but only an indirect, analogical knowledge.

181. Here we touch upon the most serious metaphysical error in Gilson: namely, that he overlooks that essence (essential content) is absolutely as important for being — including (and most of all for) the absolute being — as is existence. See Gilson, *Being*, p. 180:

Where existence is alone, as is the case in God, Whose essence is one with His existence, there is no becoming. God is, and, because He is no particular essence, but the pure act of existence, there is nothing which He can become, and all that can be said about Him is, *He Is*. On the contrary, as soon as essence appears, there also appears some otherness, namely, the very otherness which distinguishes it from its own possible existence and, with it, the possibility of becoming.

The error consists, as we will have to show in detail, in confounding two absolutely distinct things: finiteness of an essence and essence as such. What Gilson says is only true for a finite essence, not at all for the infinite essence of God. His view that the only thing that can be truly said about God is "*He Is*," is the very destruction of theology — philosophical as well as revealed theology. A God about Whom it is not equally true to say that He is justice itself, goodness itself, omnipotence, holiness . . . , is no God, and the consequence which L. Dewart drew, i.e., that we can then not even speak of God's existence, follows immediately. Cf. notes 146 and 181a ff., especially notes 184 and 185.

See Gilson, *Being*, p. 177:

When we say that God is only *to be* (*Deus est esse tantum*), we are not falling into the error of those who said that God was that universal being (that is, *being* taken as a mere universal) owing to which each and every thing should be said to be as through its form. Quite the reverse: the only case in which 'to be' is absolutely pure of any addition or determination is also the only instance in which being is absolutely distinct from the rest.

Instead of seeing the ground of the difference of God from the world in the unique and infinite essence and existence of God, Gilson sees it in the alleged fact that God has absolutely no essence, but is only "existence," or that His essence is only "to be" without any quidditative content. Cf. also pp. 87, 112, and 124 in his book.

Cf. also Etienne Gilson, *God and Philosophy*, 7th ed. (New Haven/London, 1970), pp. 70 ff., especially p. 72, where he writes: ". . . (God is) such a being whose essence is pure Act of existing, that is, whose essence is not to be this or that, but 'to Be'." Cf. also pp. 142-144.

181a. The idea that essence as such means limitation is at least as old as the Presocratic thought of Anaximander that the infinite is also the indefinite (the *ἄπειρον*). It reappears often in the history of philosophy and is definitely contained in Gilson's position. See note 181.

181b. Cf. E. Gilson, *The Elements of Christian Philosophy*, (New York, 1963), ch. v (The essence of God), p. 123:

Of this *esse* we know very little at first, except that in God it is that to which entity or essence (*essentia*) or quiddity (*quidditas*) has to be reduced.

This thought is repeatedly expressed by Gilson. Cf. *opus cit.*, pp. 128 ff. Again, on p. 139 of the same work Gilson interprets the well-known passage in Thomas Aquinas' *De Ente et Essentia* in which Thomas mentions Avicenna's statement about God, "Quidditatem non habet," and says about the relation between Avicenna and Thomas:

In both doctrines, the notion of God without an essence, or whose essence is his very *esse*, is reached at the term of an induction which consists in removing all composition from the notion of God . . . after removing essence, only existence is left, and this is what God is.

In the same work, ch. vi, pp. 149 ff., Gilson attempts to keep the Thomistic position that the transcendental properties of being (*ens*, *res*, *aliquid*, *unum*, *verum*, *bonum*, etc.) can be predicated of God (all of which imply in fact essential and quidditative features in every being). But he tries to reduce all transcendental properties in God to *esse* (existence). See for example p. 178.

A similar position is held by Gilson in his article "Haec sublimis Veritas." See *A Gilson Reader*, ed. A. C. Pegis, (New York, 1957), pp. 230 ff.

In the most radical form the Gilsonian William E. Carlo develops this standpoint in his book, *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics*. While Carlo clearly ascribes in many places quidditative essential properties to God (see p. 100 f.), he still tries to reduce all essence to existence. He holds that essence is a purely negative concept of limitation and that it must be consequently absent in God whose essence is ultimately reducible to existence. See Carlo, pp. 99-105, 137-141.

181c. See, for example, E. Gilson, *The Elements of Christian Philosophy*, pp. 145 ff.

181d. See Chapter One of the present essay in the first part of Vol. I of *Aletheia*, p. 41.

181e. We think of the famous Zenonic antinomies most of which center around the problem of the relation between movement and the infinite divisibility of space. As Reinach has shown, however, the problems Zeno has raised have to do with the relation between every kind of movement and the continuum. The limited scope of this article does not allow to offer or even to sketch a solution to these seeming antinomies.

181f. There are, however, places in Gilson's writings in which he seems to admit the destructive and nihilistic consequences of his position — not, however, without immediately adding affirmations which seem only justified by his faith, not by his philosophy. See, for example, E. Gilson, *The Elements of Christian Philosophy*, pp. 145 ff. There it is admitted that according to his view it follows (seems to follow) that "God is *nothing*" and that He is totally unthinkable. Only by relying on his faith can Gilson avoid drawing the consequences from his philosophical position that God is "beyond essence," while not being "beyond being" (as existence).

181g. Compare also Chapter One of this essay, pp. 38-41.

181h. Although Gilson makes the distinction between pure and mixed perfections and admits that the pure perfections can be predicated of God, this part of his position goes radically against his own main position that God is existence only. There are also many striking passages in Gilson's work where he excludes any positive or even quidditative

predicates from God. In his *The Elements of Christian Philosophy*, p. 118, Gilson denies that the essence of God can be known at all.

Since all the effects of God are unequal to their cause, the only thing we can know about Him is that He is. Neither His power nor His essence is naturally knowable to us.

Furthermore, the same tendency manifests itself in the fact that Gilson admits ultimately only the *via negativa* (negative theology) and denies the *via positiva* (affirmationis) and the *via eminentiae*. He writes:

Negative theology is a fight relentlessly carried on by the human intellect against the always recurring illusion that, despite all that is said to the contrary, man has a certain positive notion, limited though it may be, of *what* the essence of God really is.

Ibid., p. 123, when dealing with Augustine's interpretation of the Biblical I AM WHO I AM in *On Christian Doctrine*, Gilson ascribes Augustine's statement that God is a substance to a sort of essentialism of Augustine. He opposes such statements with the decisive turn that Thomas Aquinas according to his view has taken in his interpretation of the same Biblical word in *Summa Contra Gentiles* 21, 21.

In reality, Gilson's rejection of all quidditative essential predicates goes not only clearly against Thomas Aquinas' repeated doctrine ascribing essential predicates to God and even holding that God *is* His essence; they are also inconsistent with Gilson's own position, insofar as he ascribes "simple perfections" such as substance, justice, power, etc., to God.

181i. See, for example, Gilson, *Being*, p. 177.

182. As the great tradition of medieval philosophy (following in part Plato and Aristotle, in part the divine revelation that "God Is Charity") has always insisted: God is not only just, He is His own justice; He is each of His Attributes. This truth expressed by Augustine, Anselm of Canterbury (in his *Monologion*), as well as Thomas Aquinas and many others, is in no way adequately seen, and at places even denied, by Gilson. In stressing the truth that God does not *have*, but *is* His own existence, he forgets to stress that God is also the only being that does not "have," but that *is* (perfectly, fully, existentially) His own essence. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, qu. 3, art. 5.

183. Both these truths are *inseparable*. They imply also that both "priorities" (i.e., of essence and of existence) are "preserved" in their positive aspects in God. In other words, in some respects God's necessary and infinite existence is most fundamental, in other respects His essence is more important. Both priorities are "preserved," yet in inseparable unity.

184. See Hill, *Knowing the Unknown God*, pp. 165 ff., in particular p. 167, where he analyzes how Dewart rejects any positive statement about God except that He is called "presence":

Thus he (Dewart) is understandably sympathetic towards Gilson's project of denying that God has any essence at all; but the conclusion he sees this logically culminating in is the consequent denial (against Gilson) that God has being. He is right in seeing Maritain as a better guide to St. Thomas when the former maintains that we must attribute to God both essence and *esse*, though only as conceptually distinct.

This judgment of Hill is correct and Dewart's sympathy for Gilson's philosophy of being quite understandable although it has to be noted that Wilhelmsen and several other Gilsonians have, in various articles, violently rejected Dewart's theses about God and being. It has again to be noticed that the objective consequences following logically from a position

have to be radically distinguished from the intention of the authors of a position and from the limited amount of consequences which they themselves are ready to draw. In no way is it ever suggested that Gilson is in his own position or intention nihilistic about God in the way in which Dewart is. But it is suggested that Dewart's thesis of even denying the possibility of saying that God exists, follows logically from Gilson's denial that God has any quidditative essence.

It would also be interesting to investigate how the attempts to interpret Heidegger's notion of "being" (about which no statement can be made, according to Heidegger) as identical with "God," can be linked to Gilson's position. It is impossible to show in this context some similarities in the position of Gilson, Karl Rahner, Karl Barth, Hans Kueng, *et al.*, on this point.

185. It is crucially important in a philosophy of God to show clearly that the predication of "simple perfections" of God is even much more "absolutely true," and their denial of God more absolutely false, than the affirmation and denial of the same predicates of contingent beings. To say, "God is just, holy, knowing, beautiful," etc., is much more properly true than to predicate any of these perfections of man. We should actually say, "God alone is truly just, knowing, beautiful," etc. Here, the "*via negativa*" is *only* applicable with regard to the *limitations* of these perfections as they are found in contingent beings; whereas the "*via positiva*" is the really appropriate theological "way" with regard to these pure perfections. The "*via negativa*" should rather be applied to man in this context, (e.g., in saying, "man is just, but also not just," etc.). To God it is properly applied only with regard to the "mixed perfections," except if *via negativa* has a completely different sense and means only that *our knowledge* of God is neither direct nor (all-)comprehensive.

Duns Scotus rightly stresses the positive quidditative knowledge of God as the very presupposition of any negative knowledge of God and of any love of God. See his *Philosophical Writings*, p. 18:

In this first question there is no need to make the distinction that we cannot know what God is: we can only know what he is not. For every denial is intelligible only in terms of some affirmation. It is also clear that we can know negations of God only by means of affirmations; for if we deny anything of God, it is because we wish to do away with something inconsistent with what we have already affirmed. Neither are negations the object of our greatest love.

Cf. also *ibid.*, p. 22.

186. The error of Gilson that "pure existence without essence" is "being in the most proper sense," absolute being, as well as the similar error of Heidegger regarding "being," are found already in gnostic thought. See the analysis of gnosis in Karl Pruemmm, *Gnosis an der Wurzel des Christentums?* (Salzburg, 1972). Of special interest is p. 19, where Hans Jonas' analysis of the similarities between Heidegger and gnosticism is discussed; and p. 588, footnote 2, where Pruemmm writes the following:

Das praktische Vorbeisehen an Gott hat zur Kehrseite bei Heidegger das, was H. Jonas im Aufsatz *Gnosis und moderner Nihilismus* (s. Anm. 15 zu S. 19) 'die Konzeption einer transessentiellen, sich frei entwerfenden Existenz' nennt . . . Jonas findet darin eine deutliche Ähnlichkeit mit der Gnosis, sofern dahinter die Verwerfung einer 'objektiven Ordnung von Essenzen' . . . stehe.

Pruemmm points out the connection between this position and voluntarism and adds some critical remarks about Jonas' own philosophical position. Cf. also above, note 165 and the passages in the text it refers to.

187. See the article of Seifert quoted in note 150a.

188. It has been stated often, especially in the Thomistic philosophy of God, that God is infinite in each perfection, and that He possesses also — in utter simplicity — the perfections of all things. See Gornall, pp. 51 ff.

Cf. also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, qu. 4, art. 7.

Cf. also note 185 above.

189. See note 185.

190. See the texts referred to in note 188.

191. See the next chapter of this paper.

192. See note 146. It is decisive to see that the essence of the world is in no way "more contingent" than its "esse"; in no way is the "esse" of the world uncreated and only the (limiting) essence created. This view, which is suggested by Gilson and some of his followers (see note 193), has been defended often in the past, e.g., by Rosmini. See *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, ed. Henricus Denzinger, XXXIV ed. (Freiburg i. B., 1965), 3211:

Quidditas (id quod res est) entis finiti non constituitur eo, quod habet positivi, sed suis limitibus. Quidditas entis infiniti constituitur entitate, et est positiva; quidditas vero entis finiti constituitur limitibus entitatis, et est negativa.

See also 3213:

Finita realitas non est, sed Deus facit eam esse addendo infinitae realitati limitationem . . . Esse, quod actuatur naturas finitas, ipsis coniunctum, est recisum a Deo.

193. Pantheism is by no means convincingly overcome, even if the authors often reject it explicitly, if such formulations as we find, for example, in Phelan, p. 89 in "The Being of Creatures," are used:

Diversity is a meaningless term when applied to *esse* as such. This, of course, does not imply that the *Esse* of God and the *esse* of creatures are identical, since 'identity' is as meaningless as 'diversity' where *esse* is involved.

We find further on p. 93:

In being created creatures . . . pass unintelligibly . . . from being in the Divine Mode (i.e., in the *Esse* of God) to being in the created mode (i.e., in the *esse* proper to each). Thus God is each and every creature; but no creature is God, nor all creatures together.

This conception of one *Esse* which is diversified by being limited and restricted by contingent "essences" is an intrinsic impossibility, metaphysically speaking. It overlooks the kind of inseparability and individuality which essence and existence have in contingent beings.

Cf. also Wilhelmsen who expresses the same thought as Phelan even more clearly in *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence*, p. 91:

It follows that the existential identity of the creature is God: *I am* only in Him. Rather than open the door to pantheism, this metaphysics destroys it totally. I am not God because I am not identically my 'to be' . . . The only identity the creature possesses in itself is the identity with its essence, expressible in the proposition 'A is A.' Given that this identity excludes existence, the creature (nature has now been revealed as created) *existentially* is without proper identity . . . the creature is nothing in itself. Existing exclusively in the *Is* of God, God is the existential identity of all that is.

Cf. also p. 89 in his book. Cf. also note 146 of this paper.

194. It follows already from the inseparable union of essence and existence that, if the essence of a being is created, also its existence is created — as long as we speak of essence and existence "in the being," and not of them as universal essential plan, or as existing in their exemplary cause or in the knowledge of God, etc. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 44, a. 1-2; and q. 45.

Cf. the next chapter of this paper.

195. The "paradoxical structure of existence," as Wilhelmsen (pp. 58 ff) understands it, means at least three things:

1) ". . . that the act of existing neither is nor is not." To this it must be observed that it would contradict the principle of excluded middle and is obviously false to maintain that "in the same sense" existence neither is nor is not. Rather, in one sense, existence "is not" (the subject of itself), and, in another sense, it "is" ("in" a real being; existence is not nothing).

2) "Existence is neither the same as essence nor other than essence." This again is true only if it is understood that "sameness" and "otherness" are spoken of here in two senses. In one sense, existence is not the same as (i.e., is other than) essence. In this sense, it would be false to say that it is "the same" (not other). In another sense, existence is not a "different thing" from essence, and in this sense it is not "other" than essence. In this latter sense, again, it would be absolutely false to maintain that it is "other" than essence.

3) "By essence all things are nothing (nature is zero)." This thesis suggests again that the existence of beings (God as limited by finite essences) is not created, but only their essence which is purely negative. This last sense of the "paradoxical structure of existence" has already been criticized. See notes 192 and 193.

196. See note 107 and Chapter One of this paper, where the difference between real and "possible" essence is discussed.

Cf. also Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, p. 3.

197. Essence in the sense in which it exists exclusively "in" the thing. See Chapter One of this paper.

198. See note 197.

199. See notes 146 and 192-194.

200. See Chapter vi.

201. See notes 146 and 192-194.

202. "Essence" in the sense of the species or the "universal nature" of a thing has to be clearly distinguished from "essence" in the sense of the real essence existing *only* in a real being and necessarily individual. See note 204 and Chapter One of this essay.

203. See Edith Stein's criticism of the Aristotelian and Thomistic theory of individuation in Edith Stein, *Endliches und Ewiges Sein. Versuch eines Aufstiegs zum Sinne des Seins*, in *Edith Steins Werke*, ed. L. Gerber, 2nd ed. (Wien; 1962), II, 439 ff., and 457 ff.

Cf. also Josef Seifert, *Leib und Seele* (Salzburg, 1973), pp. 61 ff., and 342-346.

204. When Aristotle criticized Plato's doctrine of Ideas, he overlooked the profound difference between concrete things (and their essences), on the one hand, and the universal "essence" or essential plan of a being, on the other hand. This "universal essence" is not

an "ideal thing" and in no way resembles an individual thing and its essence. Whereas the latter *must* always have an individual concrete "determinedness," the former can never have it; whereas the latter truly cannot exist outside the "thing," the former cannot exist "in" the thing, and so forth. See the analysis of this difference by Adolf Reinach in his article, "Die obersten Regeln der Vernunftschlüsse bei Kant," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, hrsg. v. seinen Schülern (Halle a. d. Saar, 1921), pp. 43 ff.

Cf. also von Hildebrand, *What is Philosophy?*, Chapter iv.

205. It is interesting to observe that in "existential Thomism," as Gilson propounds it, there seems to be no principle left which could explain "individuation." On the one hand, essence as such is always declared to be nothing, pure limitation; it is said to be always conceived as universal, such that it can never ground individuality. Existence, on the other hand, is itself never included in the identity of any individual being; it is the *esse* that is not diversified in itself but only limited by contingent "essences."

Thus, it seems that the individuality crucial for real being, for the existing order of things, is conceived in purely negative terms and is not really accounted for in existential Thomism. The individual seems to become merely one modal determination of an "act of existence," which is in itself not differentiated.

"Being" itself seems to be, according to this view, not individual and concrete, but beyond identity (unity) and differentiation (many). It thereby appears to resemble Kant's concept of the transcendental ego and/or thing in itself, to which, according to Kant, no category can be applied (including the categories of unity and plurality). If we consider that Kant's "transcendental ego" contains also one decisive clue to Heidegger's concept of being (see the article of Seifert quoted in note 150a), the sympathy existential Thomists feel for Heidegger becomes understandable. In this respect, the position they hold also turns out to be more similar to that of the school of Maréchal (transcendental Thomism) than they would like to admit.

The notion of a real "act of existence" beyond identity and difference (unity and plurality), which is not the act of *one concrete real being*, implying the "existential identity" of that very same being, refers to an intrinsically impossible fiction. Cf. our preceding and following analysis of this point.

206. See also the next chapter of this paper.

207. Individuality is truly an indispensably necessary feature of each real being. It is, however, only an analogous term. In contingent beings it finds its highest expression in the person; it exists in its highest and absolute perfection in the "unicity" of God (and, theologically speaking, in the difference of the three divine Persons).

208. The one-sided emphasis that existence is the synthesizing act has to be avoided. Not only is the "synthesis" of being as much dependent on essence as it is on existence (even if in a different way); but the essential order as such is also in no way identical with the analytic, tautological order in the sense of Kant. It is not only when existence is at stake that we reach the ground of synthetic judgments (Wilhelmsen, pp. 47 ff. and 55 ff.)

Rather, each essence, insofar as it contains elements not reducible to the principles of self-identity and non-contradiction, is "synthetic." To have overlooked this is one of the great philosophical shortcomings suggested by passages in Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, and especially in Leibniz. The synthetic character of propositions about essences was clearly seen by Kant.

See also von Hildebrand, *What is Philosophy?*, pp. 77 ff.

Cf. also Seifert, *Erkenntnis*, pp. 170 ff.

209. The analysis of existence as synthesizing act in existential Thomism has, above all, the merit of rejecting the subjective mental synthesis of Kant, according to whom the unity of being is dependent on a subjective action of synthesis, and of stressing the real ontological synthesis. It must be emphasized that the essential unity of being as well as the unity constituted by existence, the basis of unity *in the real*, is completely extramental. This decisive point, which separates a realistic philosophy of being from transcendental idealism, unites our position with existential Thomism.

Another merit of the investigation of existence as synthesizing act is that the role of existence for the *real* unity of being is thereby recognized. A similar merit is found in Hans-E. Hengstenberg's philosophy of metaphysical constitution, as opposed to subjective idealistic constitution (as it is found, for example, in the later Husserl). See Hans-Eduard Hengstenberg, *Autonomismus und Transzendenzphilosophie*, (Heidelberg, 1950), especially pp. 38 ff., 99 ff., 162 ff., 301 ff., 310 ff., 321 ff., 434 ff.

210. The subjective synthesis of Kant. See notes 208 and 209.

211. The agreement of all philosophers who recognize that being in itself is a synthesis, a unity of elements, and that this unity is not constituted by our minds, goes very deep. See the investigation of Seifert quoted in note 208.

212. See note 208.

213. See the book quoted in note 203.

214. Similarly, being can already be known before it exists. This knowledge is something quite real (even much more than the possibility); the reality of the act of knowing is in no way incompatible with the non-being of its object.

215. We refer with such statements even to the objective condition of any being. Each real being presupposes that it had been possible before it became real. A kind of metaphysical status of possibilities is also presupposed by the scholastic statement, *ab esse ad posse valet illatio*. This does not mean: *ab esse ad nihilum valet consequentia*. The *posse* here is surely not simply nothing.

216. See note 165.

217. This has been stressed by Augustine, especially in his influential Quaestio XLVI, *De Ideis*. He has been followed in this, despite various interpretations given to the Divine Ideas, by the major stream of medieval philosophy, including Thomas Aquinas.

218. See Chapter One, pp. 77 ff., of this essay. See also Seifert, *Erkenntnis*, pp. 258 ff. Cf. also the literature quoted there, and notes 154, 165, 165a, 167, 186, and 204.

There are also many additional meanings of "essence," some of which we have analyzed in this essay, especially in the first chapter dedicated to the many meanings of essence. Other additional meanings of essence we did not discuss in Chapter One. Cf. in this context our discussion of "nature absolutely considered."

We could have dealt with, for example, Emmanuel Levinas' use of the term "essence" in his book, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, (La Haye, 1974). Already on p. IX of this book, Levinas makes it clear that he uses the term "essence" in a quite unusual sense as equivalent to *l'être* as opposed to *l'étant*, to *Sein* as opposed to *Seiendes*. Thus his study is more concerned with transcending the Heideggerian "Being" rather than with the problem

of essence in the sense discussed in this article. For this reason as well as for its extremely difficult content which would require lengthy explanations in order to be meaningfully discussed, we have not included a discussion of this work in this essay.

218a. Such an objection is not made by Thomas Aquinas himself as far as I can see, but it was made by Michael Waldstein, a graduate from Thomas Aquinas College in Calabasas, California, one of our Ph.D. students in philosophy.

219. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, A. Cf. also note 204.

220. See the powerful evidence of this (Thomas' defense of the *many* divine eternal ideas) in *On Truth*, q. 3, especially a. 1 and 7.

221. See note 204.

222. See the excellent study of this in Etienne Gilson, *Die Philosophie des hl. Bonaventura*, 2nd ed. (Köln, 1960), pp. 161 ff.

Thomas Aquinas reaches a very similar conclusion in the passages quoted in note 220.

223. There are infinitely many points between two distinct points on a line; their number is not smaller than the number of another set of infinitely many points existing between two other points of the same line; nor is it smaller than the number of their addition. These cases are surely mere analogies and they contain many differences to the only *absolute* infinity of God.

224. To overlook this difference in applying the same notion of being in the mind to both radically different things, leads to a great confusion and grave errors. See Seifert, *Erkenntnis*, pp. 135 ff., 176 ff., 191 ff., 233 ff., and 258 ff.

J. Owens distinguishes in his work, *An Interpretation of Existence*, various kinds of existence. See pp. 36 ff. But he commits the same equivocation in his usage of the term "existence in the mind" or "cognitional existence" that we try to clarify in the present chapter of this study. He totally overlooks "ideal existence" and the completely different mode of being of "essences" (essential plans) found in εἶδη, ideas, ideal objects and ideal rules, as discussed in Chapter One of this essay. Basically, it is only the narrow alternative of either "cognitional existence" (in its equivocal meaning) and real existence that Owens allows for. It is mainly on the basis of this distinction that Owens rejects the identification of existence with "real existence."

In general, however, one might say that Owens' book contains in regard to various questions the most balanced and differentiated view of the positions offered within Existential Thomism. This is especially true in regard to the problem of the cause of existence (pp. 73 ff.) and the bestowal of existence (pp. 100 ff.).

225. It would be more appropriate to say that they do not even exist "in" the mind; rather, the mind transcends itself receptively and participates in what they are in themselves. Our knowledge of an essence does not resemble a closed immanent form or image to which extra-mental essences would correspond. Seifert, *Erkenntnis*, pp. 49 ff. and 169 ff.

226. This has often been explained in the tradition. Bede delves into the mystery of each person being eternally known by God. Thomas speaks about the same truth. See note 220.

227. This statement of Thomas' is often quoted by existentialist Thomists in what seems to be a false interpretation of Thomas. See note 193.

See also Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, p. 185.

228. See Seifert, *Leib und Seele*, pp. 147 ff.

229. See Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, V.

230. See notes 145, 192 and 193.

231. This phrase of Father Phelan was cited by F. Wilhelmsen in the lecture quoted already, (see note 141). Cf. also note 193.