

Analogy and Aquinas's 'Ontotheology'

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My article explains Aquinas's ecstatic reaction to his metaphysical conclusions in contrast to Heidegger's dower reactions to ontotheology. I take advantage of some scholarship in my recently published monograph, 'Thomistic Existentialism and Cosmological Reasoning'. Aquinas's philosophical joy is rooted in the mind's ability to discover sameness-in-difference, in other words, analogical conception. The discovery of analogy places the human mind in contact with an intelligible object, or commonality, that is far richer than portrayed in the different instances, as stunning as those different instances can be. *Esse commune* is one such commonality in different particular *esses*. Aquinas employs the analogon of *esse commune* to craft a representation of his metaphysical conclusion of *esse subsistens*. Consequently, Aquinas' metaphysics and its proof of God as subsistent *esse* confronts the philosopher not only with a stunning intelligible object but a stunning intelligible object that is also a reality. This conclusion evokes all of the emotions of analogical conceptualisation and presents the possibility of a direct encounter with an analogical object.

Keywords: analogy, sameness-in-difference, analogon, analogate, *ratio entis*, *esse commune*, *esse subsistens*, supernatural possibility

INTRODUCTION

In a past LOGOS article on Heidegger and ontotheology (Knasas 2021), I pointed out the different reactions of Heidegger and Aquinas to the God of the metaphysicians. Heidegger laments the inabilities to pray, to sacrifice, to kneel in awe, to play music and to dance before such a God. In contrast and echoing Aristotle, Aquinas proclaims that the little we know of the higher substances is valued more than all the knowledge of the lower ones and that this knowledge brings intense joy and produces the greatest perfection to the soul. I noted that Heidegger criticised the ontotheologian as naively thinking that the notion of being derives from beings. In truth, it is the other way around – being is a projection of the freedom of *Dasein*. Hence, unwittingly, the ontotheologian formulates an all too human understanding of God. Aquinas has a different phenomenology. Sense cognition is an immediate realist and its direct object is something other than ourselves. Aquinas's approach to God is from these really other things given in sensation. As such Aquinas's approach steers clear of anthropomorphising God.

Aquinas's problem is not anthropomorphism but something else. In a more recent LOGOS article (Knasas 2023), I noted just how Aquinas argues to God on the basis of his sense realism.

Through a metaphysical analysis of sensed existents, Aquinas uncovers a *sui generis actus*, or an attribute, apart from which a thing is existence neutral. Aquinas calls this *actus 'esse'*. Due to the priority of this *actus* to its subject, the subject is in no position to completely explain its *esse*. *Esse* requires something else. Ultimately this something else must be *esse* in a non-attributive, i.e. subsistent, configuration. In other words, *esse* is the subject and not an attribute. Aquinas identifies his conclusion of *esse subsistens* with the God of his Christian belief who told Moses that God's name is I am who am: *Ego sum qui sum*.

The problem here is that without an appeal to Scripture, i.e. simply from a philosophical viewpoint, *esse subsistens* seems still to merit Heidegger's criticism. At first glance, *esse subsistens* fails to evoke awe, joy, prayer, dance and sacrifice. If something is just existing, is it not the most uninspiring and uninteresting of items? Is it not the most skimpy and paltry of things? Yet as noted, Aquinas's reaction is decidedly upbeat and ecstatic. He must see something in *esse* that we have not. In the earlier article, I briefly indicated something called analogy as the basis for Aquinas's remarks (Knasas 2021: 52). Here I want to elaborate that basis more extensively.

THE NON-GENERIC NOTION OF BEING

The best way to present Aquinas on analogy is by presenting Aquinas on the *ratio entis*. By the *ratio entis* Aquinas means the notion, or meaning, of an existent, or a being. Heidegger acknowledges it in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Heidegger 1988: 83–4). Heidegger refers to it as the *conceptus objectivus entis*. He says that Scholastics including Aquinas refer to it. Heidegger describes it as the 'emptiest' of concepts. For Aquinas nothing could be further from the truth.

Aquinas describes being as a *ratio*, a common nature, a something one in many.¹ As such it is an object of the first operation of the intellect. Characteristic of this operation is its grasp of commonalities. Commonalities are sameness seen in appropriate multiplicities. For example, a commonality is the sameness of triangle in the right-angle instance, the equilateral instance and the isosceles instance that does not extend itself into the square or circle or the notion of human in Tom, Dick and Harry that does not extend itself into Fido the dog, Flicka the horse or Flossy the cow. Even the individual can be grasped as common, as I have explained in another place (Knasas 2022).

In many other places, Aquinas says that the *ratio entis* is a commonality grasped in the instances of substance and accident. Each is an existent in some sense. In this respect, he brands the commonality of being to be analogical. A reader should not take this claimed spread of being through substance and accident to mean that the grasp of being must wait upon a grasp of all the categories mentioned by Aristotle. The grasp of the distinction between substrate and determination from the superficial instances of extension and colour or extension and temperature are sufficient data to see a meaning of being that is open to other senses of accident besides quality. Likewise, the notion of substrate is open to the meaning of substance.

¹ '... the Creator and the creature are reduced to one, not by a community of univocation but of analogy [*analogiae*]. Such a community is able to be twofold. Either from this that some things participate something one [*aliquid unum*] according to a priority and a posteriority, just as potency and act participate the notion of being [*rationem entis*] and similarly substance and accident.' *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* I, Prol. q. I, a. 2, ad 2m (Aquinas 1929: 10); 'Just as being [*ens*] is said of substance and accident; and of such things it is necessary that the common nature [*natura communis*] have some being in each of the things concerning which it is said but differing according to the notion of greater and less perfection.' *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 2, ad 1m (Aquinas 1929: 492) (My translations).

What Aquinas means by the analogical character of the *ratio entis* is brought out by way of contrast in two articles in his *Disputed Questions on Truth (Questiones Disputatae de Veritate)*. In *De Ver.* I, 1, Aquinas insists that being is not a generic concept, or commonality. A generic concept is narrowed down to its instances by the addition of extrinsic items, items not included in the generic concept. For instance, the concept or meaning of animal is narrowed down to human and brute by bringing in the ideas of rational and non-rational. Or using the concept of triangle, we make our minds go from this concept to an instance like isosceles by bringing in the idea of just two equal sides. In contrast, the notion or meaning of being cannot be narrowed down in this way. The reason should be obvious. Outside of, or extrinsic to, the meaning of being is only non-being. Recall that for Aquinas a thing is constituted a being, an *ens*, by the addition of *esse*, just as a man is constituted a runner by his running (*currere*). Apart from *esse* a thing is entirely existence neutral, or non-being. Anything that is non-being cannot do anything, even the narrowing down of a generic concept.

How, then, do we narrow down the notion of being? Aquinas' answer is that the instances of substance and accident 'express' modes of being.² In other words, the idea of being, or an existent, differentiates itself not by bringing in something from the outside but by surfacing items from the depths of being. This manner of differentiating the non-generic notion of being bespeaks a richness to being that is not true of generic notions. At *De Ver.* XXI, 1, Aquinas states that generic notions contain their differences implicitly and potentially.³ This characterisation should entail that a non-generic notion like being contains them implicitly and actually.

Being's manner of differentiation also bespeaks an imperfection in our intellecting of being. Since we cannot render the differences of being extrinsic to being, then it is always the case that we intellect being through the differences of being. This manner of apprehension always occludes our grasp of being while it also affirms it. In sum, in its awareness of the *ratio entis*, the human intellect finds itself confronting dimly an object of unfathomable richness.

Even though Aquinas' gloss of the non-generic, or analogical, character of the notion of being is remarkably matter of fact and unemotional, I think that the intellectual perception of being has deep effects in our psychic life. Thereafter one is not the same. Everything becomes of interest because everything in what distinguishes it gives one an insight into the further richness of being. Before one ever knew of a giraffe or hippopotamus could one have imagined that a being, or an existent, could be expressed by these animals. What other ways of expressing being are out there? The life of the intellect in which knowledge is sought for its own sake is called forth. The dream of the intellectual person would be to no longer contemplate being imperfectly by seeing it through its modes but to contemplate being directly, or in itself. At this point, however, the dream seems to be only a phantasy. Since the differences of the modes of being cannot be placed outside of the notion of being, then the natural way to access the richness of being seems to be through a plodding discovery and examination of its instances. This procedure is both satisfying and yet frustrating. There is both a measure of joy and a measure of sadness.

² '... but according to this somethings are said to add something beyond being [*supra ens*], insofar as they express a mode of being itself [*exprimunt ipsius modum*] which is not expressed by the name of being itself' (Aquinas 1952: 5).

³ '... that which is contained determinately and actually [*determinate et actualiter*] in the notion of man is implicitly and as it were potentially [*implicite et quasi potentialiter*] contained in the notion of animal.' *de Ver.*, XXI, 1 (Aquinas 1954: 6).

AN ANALOGOUS CONCEPT FROM ORDINARY EXPERIENCE

One would be wrong to think that the only non-generic, or analogical, *ratio* was the notion of being. To further illustrate the analogical intellection, I would like to consider another more ordinary example. Contemplate how both Paris and Rome are charming cities. If I asked you ‘Why is Paris a charming city like Rome?’, you would answer by mentioning the wide boulevards, cafes, the fin de cercle architecture and the bouillabaisse. On the other hand, if my question was asked of Rome, the answer would be the narrow winding streets, the Baroque churches, the ruins and the gelato. What is amazing here is that you are telling me that what makes Paris like Rome, namely charming, is precisely what Paris has and Rome does not and vice versa. In other words, we are discovering sameness within difference.⁴ Unlike the consideration of a generic meaning, with the meaning of charming city, you do not want to want to consign the differences of the instances to oblivion. The differences are carrying the sameness. They reveal something far richer than themselves. One wonders in what other ways the meaning of charming city can manifest itself. Is it difficult to imagine how a life-long love of travel is inspired here? Any trip will reveal charming city through new stunning differences. Yet at the same time these differences do not fully reveal the sameness that they contain. The tourist has not yet visited Venice, Prague, Hong Kong and Rio de Janeiro. The traveller is always unsatisfied.

TYPES OF ANALOGY

The phenomenon of grasping sameness in difference is the essence of analogy.⁵ Some helpful Scholastic terminology for further discussion of analogy is the following. The commonality intellectually seen within the instances is called the analogon by the Scholastics. Hence, being and charming city are examples of analogons. The instances whose differences present the analogon are called analogates. Hence, substrate and determination, Paris and Rome, are examples of analogates.

This terminology can be used to describe the specific types of analogy. If the analogon comes into the analogates without producing a reference of one analogate to the other, in other words, if the analogates realise the analogon independently, then we have analogy of proportionality. Charming city is an example of that type. Rome would be charming if Paris never existed and vice versa. If the analogon comes into the analogates with a reference of one to the other, then we have analogy of proportion, or attribution. Proportion is subdivided into intrinsic and extrinsic attribution. If the analogon is in both analogates, then the analogy is an intrinsic attribution. For example, holiness is in both Christ and the saints but only insofar as the saints are referred to Christ as their model. Also, being is in both substance and accident, but it is in an accident only insofar as the accident is referred to substance as a subject to be in and of. Finally, if the analogon is only in the relation of one analogate to the other, in other words, the analogon is only superficially in one of the analogates, then we have an extrinsic attribution. The standard example taken from Aristotle is healthy said of the animal and of

⁴ Jacques Maritain 1959: 212, more effusive: ‘The scholastics call it analogous... It differs essentially, even as a concept, from the universals, not only because it has greater amplitude but also and primarily ... it is polyvalent, it envelops an actual multiplicity; the bird we spoke of a moment ago is at the same time a flock.’ For more on analogy in Aquinas and in neo-Scholasticism, see Knasas 2003: 131–50.

⁵ At *Summa Theologiae* I, 4, 3c (Pegis 1945: 40), Aquinas says that in analogy things communicate in the same form but not according to the same formality: ‘... communicant in eadem forma, sed non secundum eadem rationem.’

the medicine and of the complexion. Only the animal has health intrinsically. The medicine and complexion are called healthy only insofar as the health of the animal is in their different relations to the animal, for example, as a cause and as a sign.

Finally, there is a unique class of analogons. They are special because they have everything as their analogates. This is not true of charming city, sanctity or healthy. The Scholastics called these analogons 'transcendentals'. The *ratio entis* is an example. There may be cities in reality that are not charming but there is no thing in reality that is not a being. In Aquinas's case, the reason is clear from Aquinas's metaphysics. For a thing to be a being is for the thing to have *esse* apart from which the thing is only existence neutral, or nothing. As a result of having everything as its analogates, a transcendental is an analogon of unsurpassable intelligible richness.

THE INTELLIGIBLE HEART OF THE NOTION OF BEING

I mentioned that as satisfying and joyful as analogical intellection is, it is also frustrating.

We contemplate the analogon through the differences of its instances. Hence, the analogon both shows and hides itself. This dual character of the intellection provokes the thought of knowing an analogon directly. The thought, however, quickly becomes relegated to a phantasy or a dream. Just as a tourist would never expect to encounter a charming city that was a charming city itself, so the philosopher also has no reason to think that it is possible to encounter a being that was the *ratio entis* itself. All of this changes, however, as a result of Aquinas' conclusion of subsistent existence.

Esse subsistens embodies the analogon of *esse commune* and so, there is something that is an analogon. In a surprising admission of agreement with Plato, Aquinas claims that not every analogon is simply an object of the intellect's activity of abstraction.⁶ What is *esse commune*? As I will explain, *esse commune* is the intelligible heart of the *ratio entis*. Hence, the metaphysician knows that reality contains the remote conditions for a direct encounter with the perfection of the *ratio entis*. Aquinas's metaphysics enables him to explain this exceptional case.

As I noted above, in Aquinas' analysis of beings, a thing is a being because it has the act of existing, just as a man is a runner because the man has his act of running. In other words, apart from its *esse*, a thing is simply existence neutral. In this perspective the *esse* of the thing is the root and the source of all perfection in the thing. My *esse* actuates me and yours you because each *esse* has the perfection appropriated to its subject. Nevertheless, this initial encounter with *esse* as radically particular does not preclude seeing something common in particular *esses*.⁷ It is analogous. The perfection of *esse* is not diversified by addition from the outside because any such addition would presuppose the diversity of *esse* to actuate that addition. Recall that apart from *esse* there is only the existence neutral. Hence, at *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 26, Aquinas maintains that the *perfectio essendi* diversifies itself in the light of the thing to be actuated by some *esse*.⁸ Hence, just as substance and accident surfaced the richness implicitly

⁶ "The [Platonists] maintained one first thing that is the essence itself of goodness and of unity and of being [*ipsa essentia bonitatis et unitatis et esse*], which we call God ... Hence, this position of the Platonists is not agreeable to the faith or the truth insofar as it contains separate natural species, but in respect to what they say about the first principle of things, their opinion is most true and consonant with the faith of Christians' (Aquinas 1950: proem). (My translation)

⁷ See *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 26, and *Summa Theologiae* I, 4, 2c.

⁸ 'If then things differ from one another, ... things must differ in that the being itself [*ipsum esse*] is appropriate to natures that are diverse in species' (Pegis 1975: 129).

and actually within the *ratio entis* and Rome and Paris did the same for charming city, each particular *esse* surfaces the richness found within the *perfectio essendi*.

In other words, there is an intelligible reduction here. The perfection of each thing is reduced to the perfection of each particular *esse* and the perfection of each *esse* is reduced to *esse commune*. Aquinas's observed intelligible reduction of the perfections of things to the perfection of *esse* is not a phenomenological or a transcendental reduction because from the start Aquinas is dealing with real things given in sensation.

In sum, the *ratio entis* is a composite analogon. It is an analogon that contains parts. One of these parts is *esse commune*, and it itself is an analogon. Aquinas thinking about the analogon of *esse commune* makes *esse commune* the intelligible heart of the *ratio entis*. The *ratio entis* can surface various things because the *ratio* contains *esse commune* which can surface the particular *esses* that actuate those things. The metaphysician can see that the entire intelligible picture flows from the analogon of *esse commune*.⁹

AQUINAS' DEPICTING OF THE DIVINE

Hence, if reality contained a being that was the nature of *esse*, that being would present the entire perfection of the *ratio entis*. The dream of knowing an analogon directly would be more than a dream; it would be a genuine possibility remote as it may be. To reach a creator that is subsistent *esse* is, however, to reach such a being. Subsistent existence is a thing intelligibly merged with its *esse*. But since a thing is something common, *esse* merged with the thing is *esse* commonised. *Esse* commonised is the *perfectio essendi*. Hence, the creator is a cause that embodies the analogon of *esse commune*.

Granted that this direct encounter with an analogon is more than a dream but a genuine possibility, is the possibility actualised? Not from our side. The best that we can do is to know the analogon through its analogates. This requirement holds in our grasp of the *perfectio essendi*, even when the *perfectio essendi* is used with nuance to reflect the creator. If an encounter with the creator is to be realised, the creator must take the initiative. Does the creator step forth into the human intellect? The philosophical answer is inconclusive. The creator could step forth, or the creator could leave us with the intellection of being and the metaphysical knowledge of the creator. Imperfect and insecure as those things are in human history, they are undoubted achievements. They merit the mentioned ecstatic reactions of Aquinas. The possibility of an encounter, however, remains. It haunts the mind, and the philosopher cannot be unaware of religious claims of such an encounter. The claims of Biblical faiths can be especially persuasive. If the philosopher converts, his conversion is eminently compatible with the creator that the philosopher has reached by reason.

⁹ 'For there are diverse grades of beings [*diversi gradus entitatis*] insofar as diverse modes of *esse* [*diversi modi essendi*] are taken' (Aquinas 1952: 5) (My translation). Also, 'So therefore, according to the mode by which a thing has *esse* is its mode of perfection: Sic ergo secundum modum quo res habet esse, est suus modus in nobilitate.' Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 28 (Pegis 1975: 135). And, 'Nothing has actuality except insofar as it is, whence being itself [*ipsum esse*] is the actuality of all things.' Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, 4, 1, ad 3m (Pegis 1945: 38). Heidegger (1988: 85) claims that essence is 'primo in ratione nobilitatis, that which is first in rank in the res, that which the thing is in its realness.' Aquinas would emphasise that the priority of essence in the thing as thing does not exclude priority of the *esse* in the thing as a being (*ens*). Hence, the reduction of all perfection to *esse* still holds.

CONCLUSIONS

As I have indicated in the notes to this article, much more can be said about Aquinas's ontotheology than can be presented in a brief article.¹⁰ I have spotlighted especially the crucial role of analogical intellection. Are these points enough to deal with Heidegger's complaints about ontotheology? I think so. In Aquinas's ontotheology there is awe and fascination because God is thought about through analogical concepts formed from our experience of things and their existence. The awe and fascination associated with knowing analogons extends to the creator who realises the analogon of *esse*.

Also, a subsistent intelligibility satisfies Aquinas' realist criteria for knowledge. Hence, there is a place for prayer. Because of the possibility of communication, or revelation, from the creator, there is place for prayer. Not just the religious believer but also the philosopher can pray. The philosopher will always be attentive to the possibility of communication from the supernatural about its designs for the human race and can always petition the creator for answers.

Finally, if the philosopher accepts the conjunction between the creator reached by human reason and God of religious revelation who calls us to himself, one will have a joy far greater than the joy of analogical knowledge. From this greater joy an appropriate music of chant and the dance of liturgical rubrics will result. Aquinas's metaphysics is 'ontotheological' in the best sense of the word.

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¹⁰ There are nuances that are necessary in connecting *esse subsistens* and *esse commune*. *Esse commune* is a portion of the *ratio entis* and so is an abstraction. Hence, at *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 26, Aquinas can deny a connection between *esse commune* and the reality that is *esse subsistens*. To better represent *esse subsistens*, Aquinas employs the negating capacity of the mind, or *separatio*, on the *ratio entis*. *Separatio* blots out, or covers over, the thing portion of the *ratio entis* and so allows the remaining *esse* portion to stand forth more as a subsistent rather than a commonality. Hence, in *Sujmma Theologiae* I, 4, 2c; Pegis 1945: 39, Aquinas can connect the two and use what he knows of the *perfectio essendi* to know what is true of *esse subsistens*. On the details of the employment of *separatio*, see Knasas 2003: 236–247.

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Analogija ir Tomo Akviniečio „ontoteologija“

Santrauka

Straipsnyje aiškinama Tomo Akviniečio ekstatinė reakcija į jo metafizines išvadas priešinant Heideggerio reakcijai į ontoteologiją. Naudojamasi neseniai anglų k. išleistos monografijos „Tomistinis egzistencializmas ir kosmologinis mąstymas“ moksliniais duomenimis. T. Akviniečio filosofinio džiaugsmo šaknys glūdi proto gebėjime atrasti tapatumą skirtume, kitaip tariant, analoginėje sampratoje. Atradus analogiją žmogaus protas susiduria su suprantamu objektu arba bendrumu, kuris yra kur kas turtingesnis nei vaizduojamas skirtinguose atvejuose, kad ir kokie stulbinantys gali būti tie skirtingi atvejai. *Esse commune* yra vienas iš tokių bendrumų skirtingose konkrečiose *esses*. T. Akvinietis pasitelkia *esse commune* analogą, kad sukurtų savo metafizinės išvados *esse subsistens* vaizdinį. Todėl T. Akviniečio metafizika ir jos įrodymas, kad Dievas yra subsistuojanti *esse*, filosofui pateikia ne tik stulbinantį inteligibilų objektą, bet ir stulbinantį inteligibilų objektą, kuris taip pat yra tikrovė. Ši išvada sužadina visas analoginio konceptualizavimo emocijas ir pateikia tiesioginio susitikimo su analoginiu objektu galimybę.

Raktažodžiai: analogija, tapatybė skirtume, analogas, analogatas, *ratio entis*, *esse commune*, *esse*