Creation and Participation: The Metaphysical Structure of the World-God Relation in Aquinas

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INTRODUCTION

Overview: Creation and Participation in Aquinas

The term “participation” as we are principally concerned with it in the metaphysical scheme of Aquinas is a conceptually compact term that signifies the package of relations forming a structure of dependence between the manifold of inferior subjects and the higher source of their similitude or nature. Although the notion can be and is applied in the thought of Aquinas in a number of ways, Thomistic participation is most properly understood as the expression of the dependence relation of creatures to God,¹ a relation exemplified by a metaphysical structure open to analysis by the philosopher or theologian sufficiently trained in the general science of created being, that is, metaphysics. Participation is the way in which created beings are related to God and receptive of divine causality—the most superior and most transcendental type of cause.

Aquinas’s mature doctrine of participation is an original synthesis operating on two intertwining and mutually interpreting planes of thought: the philosophical, where Aquinas synthesizes the principle metaphysical concerns of Plato and Platonism (pagan Greek, Islamic, Jewish, and Christian sources) and the critical revision of Plato that is the achievement of Aristotle;² the theological, where the Angelic Doctor grants a metaphysical certification to key moments of Catholic dogma and the Christian tradition of Biblical interpretation in the Fathers of the Church as well as his scholastic predecessors—always with those dogmatic commitments in

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¹ W. Norris Clarke, “The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas” (Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, Vol. 26 [1952], 147-157), 152. I am also deeply indebted, throughout this thesis, to Stephen A. Hipp, S.T.D.; for technical criticism and guidance as to both the form and content of this work, and for considerable tutelage on general and specific questions in the metaphysical theology of Aquinas, including sources and reception history.

² The notion that Aristotle (and therefore Aquinas) is a revising Platonist, once a novel thesis, had received by the nineteen-sixties an imprimatur by no less an establishment figure than Frederick Copleston (A History of Philosophy, Vol. II: Augustine to Scotus, Image ed. New York: Image Books, 1985). “One [could] regard the achievement of St. Thomas, not so much as an adoption of Aristotle in place of Augustine or of neo-Platonism, but rather as a confluence and synthesis of the various currents of Greek philosophy, and of Islamic and Jewish philosophy, as well as of the original ideas contributed by Christian thinkers...This line of interpretation seems to me to be perfectly legitimate, and it has the great advantage of not leading to a distorted idea of [Aquinas’s thought] as a pure Aristotelianism. It would even be...legitimate to look on [Aquinas’s thought] as an Aristotelianised Platonism rather than as a Platonised Aristotelianism” (563).
view—especially as regards the doctrine of the creation of the world immediately and *ex nihilo* by God.³ “For us, Christians, it is indubitably certain that everything that exists in the world is created by God.”⁴ The idea of creation in its Christian form is a conception that pervades and controls the metaphysical thought of St. Thomas from start to finish, even though as operative meta-doctrine it remains unthematized in the texts.⁵ Creation for Aquinas “is the notion that nothing exists which is not *creatura*, except the Creator Himself...[and] this created-ness determines entirely and all-pervasively the inner structure of the creature.”⁶ The idea of creation and the idea of participation go together: the metaphysics of Aquinas is creationist-participatory metaphysics which, though he is a great analyzer of concepts, remains for him an “existential” mode of thought, that is, a philosophy of being (*ens*). By means of an analysis of the metaphysical structure of being and beings in terms of participation Aquinas arrives at a conception of a God who, as the first and supreme cause of the world, is both transcendent of it and immanent in it, such that the world is a manifold of created natures at once utterly under divine governance and free in their own order.⁷

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³ Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange *(Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought* [St. Louis, Mo: Herder, 1950; reprint with different pagination *Ex Fontibus Co.*, 2012]) recognized the importance of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* for Aquinas as a “guiding star,” like all revelation in Aquinas’s philosophy. “The revealed doctrine of free creation *ex nihilo* was, in particular, a precious guide” (48). Garrigou does demonstrate a critical sense of the way in which this makes a difference for Aquinas, but Thomism would require the work of Cornelio Fabro to see the profundity of the historical achievement of Aquinas with regard to the structure of created being laid bare.


⁵ Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas: Three Essays* (Eng. trans. Pantheon, 1957; reprint, South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 1999). “An unexpressed assumption, not explicitly formulated” (47). Writing from the standpoint of the mid-twentieth century, Pieper famously notes that the theme of creation, what I am calling an operative meta-doctrine, “has remained so unnoticed that the textbook interpretations of St. Thomas hardly once mention it” (48). Pieper is here referring to the “Neoscholastic” manual tradition which grew up rapidly in the wake of the reassertion of the primacy of Aquinas as a model for Catholic theology in Pope Leo XIII’s *Aeterni Patris* of 1879.


John F. Wippel, in his magisterial overview of the metaphysics of Aquinas, opens his chapter on participation by summarily rehearsing the history of twentieth-century Thomistic scholarship. Within the first sixty years of the past century a number of “keys” to the metaphysical vision of Aquinas were uncovered and thematized: the real distinction between essence and existence, the real division of being into act and potency, the idea of analogy and the “analogicity of being,” and the primacy of existence, have all taken their places as central issues of interpretation in various contemporary Thomisms. In our time the doctrine of the transcendentals is coming increasingly to the fore. It is the idea of participation, however, is now generally recognized as the dominant metaphysical vision running through the thought-world of the Angel of the Schools. As fundamental as is the idea of analogy for making intelligible the notion of being as it is applied both to the unity of being (the one) and to the differences in being (the many), even “more fundamental, however, from the metaphysician’s standpoint, is the issue of unity and multiplicity as it obtains within the realm of existing beings themselves.”

In Aquinas’s metaphysics of participation he is concerned to account for the actual existence of the manifold of beings which, though diverse, share in the universal perfection of being. For Aquinas the created world is a finite participation in the infinite being of the First Cause, God. Creation is constituted as a similitude of the divine being ordered hierarchically according to degrees of participation in the divine being. Each being and each class of being in the hierarchy is distinguished one from another “according to the degree to which each approximates to the

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9 For an excellent treatment of the meaning and import of analogy for the Christian necessity of divine naming, including the relationship of analogy to metaphysical participation, see Philip A. Rolnick, Analogical Possibilities: How Words Refer to God (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1993), especially chapter two, “The Metaphysics of Participation.”
10 John F. Wippel, The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 95. What is compared here is the notion or concept of being and being itself.
full perfection of God,“\textsuperscript{12} whose metaphysical name is “Being Itself Subsisting Through Itself”  
\textit{(Ipsum Esse Per Se Subsistens)}\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{The scope and content of this thesis}

The thought of Aquinas is controlled by metaphysical principles derived from Platonic and Aristotelian sources, and the idea of participation exercises dominant influence as a master controlling principle of Aquinas’s metaphysical vision. Present from the very earliest period of Aquinas’s writing life, the notion of participation becomes especially pronounced in his mature period. In this thesis I treat first of the historical sources of Aquinas’s participatory doctrine, showing a development that prepared the ground for Aquinas’s grand synthesis. I proceed then to a discussion of the general importance of participation in the thought of Aquinas, respecting the various contexts in which the doctrine appears most prominently and highlighting in each case the end to which Aquinas employs it. Next comes a discussion of principle texts in Aquinas in which the doctrine is operative, followed by a pause in which I will collate the principle defining features of participation in the metaphysics of the Angelic Doctor. Following this comes a clarifying and comparative section on the different kinds of participation as we find them operative in Aquinas, concluding with a section on a major moment of contemporary debate concerning the notion of participation in Aquinas’s œuvre: the question of metaphysical composition of creatures, the role of the divine ideas as exemplary causes of creatures, and the simplicity of the act of creation.

\textit{Chapter I: Participation: Aquinas and his sources}. I have spoken of the importance of the idea of creation and participation in the history of philosophy for understanding not only the


\textsuperscript{13} Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae}, Ia, q.4, a.2 \textit{resp}. As the translation of the English Dominicans (Benziger Bros. 1947-48) has it, “God is existence itself, of itself subsistent.”
thought of Aquinas on participation—because the idea characterizes his intellectual world—but also for understanding of the place of St. Thomas in a general history of thought. The first section of this work is dedicated to summary overview of participation in Greek and Hellenistic pagan pre-rationalism and philosophy. I trace the idea from Pythagoreanism to Plato, Aristotle, and the pagan Neoplatonist Proclus and the Plotinus-influenced Proclean work by an unknown author, the Liber de causis. The Christian Neoplatonists Boethius and Pseudo-Dionysius are engaged in the textual study of Aquinas that makes the matter of chapter two.

Chapter II: Analysis of principle texts in Aquinas. In chapter two I will present the position of Cornelio Fabro and Rudi A. te Velde that there exists in Aquinas a significant development in thought with reference to the role of participation in the metaphysical structure of created being, the history of Aquinas’s own notion of being. This history is tracked in its essence through the texts of Aquinas’s commentary on the De hebdomadibus of Boethius (In librum Boetii De hebdomadibus expositio, 1256-59), the Disputed Questions on Truth (Questiones Disputatae De veritate, 1256-59), the Disputed Questions on the Power of God (De Potentia Dei, 1265-66), the Commentary on the Liber de causis (1272), the Prima pars of the Summa Theologiae (1266-68),14 which on this interpretation represents the mature synthesis of Aquinas’s participatory metaphysical vision, the height of its articulation. I then move on to the Quodlibet II (1268-72), a product of the second Parisian regency and concurrent with the subsequent parts of the Summa Theologiae. Finally, three texts from the Summa contra Gentiles III (1260-1264) will be

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14 In dating these works I follow Jean-Pierre Torrell, Saint Thomas Aquinas. Volume 1: The Person and His Work, revised ed. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005). I treat them in a general chronological order since part of the thesis involves a claim to a development which aims to highlight the Angelic Doctor’s ever-deepening engagement with Neoplatonism over the course of his career. The one exception to my chronological order of treatment is the Commentary on the Liber de Causis, which, written in 1272, would post-date the Prima pars of the Summa Theologiae by about four years, but is nevertheless treated in this thesis prior to the Summa Theologiae. This need not undermine the case for development, however, since Aquinas had long been acquainted with the Liber, having employed principles drawn from it at least as early as De Ente et essentia (1252-56), where he gives three citations, one in c.3 and two in c.4. Thus Aquinas from an early point in his career imbibes the Neoplatonism of the De causis, and his interest in incorporating such thinking into the Prima pars is evidenced by the concurrence of his work on the Prima with the Commentary on the Divine Names of Pseudo-Dionysius, both dated to the regency in Rome of 1265-68.
discussed, one which deals with participation and divine providence in general, and the other two which deal with the world of secondary causes in relation to God the first cause. Of course all along the way I will have recourse to numerous other texts in Aquinas which will serve to aid our understanding of his meaning. It seems that we can reduce the works treated here to two general and fundamental periods, then: that of the first Parisian regency of 1256-1259, and the period of the Summa Theologiae of 1266-1272.

The development in conception between the first period and the second can be summarized as a movement from the consideration of the essence/suppositum as the primary instance and subject of esse (where esse is conceived as a quasi-accident), to a reconsideration of esse as the super-formal, universal perfection of the essence, the “act of being” (actus essendi) in which all beings except the First Being (God) participate.

Chapter III: Participation in St. Thomas and Thomism. In this chapter I will collate the principle defining features of participation in the thought of Aquinas. I begin by noting the characteristic metaphysical insights of two major figures in 20th century Thomism in order to highlight the development of interpretation in the last century. John F.X. Knasas cites an unnamed but “well-known expositor of St. Thomas” who claimed that “only in [the 20th] century have we finally understood Aquinas.” While the statement is hyperbolic, it is meaningful: the re-evaluation of Aquinas’s metaphysics in terms of the doctrine of esse as actus essendi is the major moment in the “existential” interpretation out of which the participatory interpretation grows, and this discovery is a result of 20th century scholarship. I then proceed to set forth the basic properties of the participation relationship between the created order and God, attending to some definitions of important terms.

Next I proceed to clarify and compare the four main classes of relation in the science of being with reference to the participatory element. These are: genus-species-individual, matter-form, substance-accident, essence-esse.

Finally in this chapter I explore the participatory structure of being with respect to the act of creation in its simplicity, and I do this in the context of mediating a key dispute among some major contemporary interpreters of Aquinas who have written on participation in his thought, and this with respect to the essence-esse distinction and the problem of composition. The main concern here is the one thematized by Rudi te Velde, commenting on a problem raised by L.-B. Geiger: the radical simplicity of the act of creation *ex nihilo*, argues te Velde, has certain implications for the structure of created beings as composed, and therefore for our understanding of the esse-essence distinction, that have yet to be fully appreciated in the contemporary literature. In short, this dispute has to do with the place of the essence in Aquinas’s metaphysical scheme as we see it in his second (“mature”) period, and its relation to the divine ideas as exemplar causes. Some contemporary commentators have interpreted Aquinas to hold to a “double participation,” that is, one participation in the divine being, and one in the exemplarity of the divine ideas, that is, the source of the intelligible essences in the divine mind which produce the limitation in creatures of otherwise unlimited divine act. Herein we summarize the pertinent arguments, arguments that add up to a rejection of a crucial 20th century consensus interpretation of Aquinas’s analysis of the being of composed creatures—that of the limitation of infinite esse in creatures by distinct receiving essence—and represent a synthetic solution which preserves the prior consensus. The view I shall defend in this section is that Gregory T. Doolan has successfully shown a way out of the Geiger-te Velde dilemma by demonstrating that it is a false one, based on an erroneous reading of the role the divine ideas play in Aquinas: for
Aquinas, created beings do not participate in their divine ideas at all, but rather are exactly like their corresponding ideas. The divine ideas represent the ability of the divine being to be participated, but in the end it is only the divine being itself that is and can be participated by creatures. Therefore there just is no problem of “double participation”, and the traditional Thomistic interpretation, that act is not limited except by a distinct receiving essence, is preserved.

CHAPTER 1. Participation: Aquinas and his Sources

1.1. Greek Theogonic Cosmogony and Pythagoreanism: the Limited/Unlimited and analogy

The notion of participation in Greek philosophy can be traced at least as far back as the Pythagoreans, although this is a dark history indeed, cobbled together as it is from fragments of documentation marked by an admixture of legend and hearsay that at times comes near to mythology. There is a reception of Pythagoreanism in Greek thought, however, and this reception combined with reflection on the mythological tradition can yield some basic conclusions.

In Pythagoreanism the finite world is (somehow) a participation in the eternal, Blessed Triangularity, as it were. How does this come about? The root of Greek philosophical thought, the origin of the Hellenic mind, springs from the meditation on nature in her organic materiality. The material world is a flux of being, but underlying, or rather, overarching the flux, must be a more primary world of permanence, or at least eternally recurring reality that constitutes the changeless basis for the flux. “Changelessness…is associated [with] increased, and, consequently, more extensive causal power.”16 Certain men of vision, in meditating on the

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cosmogonies birthed by the Hellenic mystery religions, begin to become philosophers. Inheritors of the theogonies of “orphic” origin as well as that of Hesiod, the first philosophers moved to explain the flux in terms of a higher order.

There begins a migration from a mere cultic-mythological consciousness toward philosophical contemplation of the primordial antinomies, ordered pairs of opposites. The most primordial are *peras* (πέρας) and *apeiron* (ἄπειρον). *Peras* is fatherhood/masculinity, light, aethereality/spiritual determinateness, form, limitation, boundedness/finitude—and it equals *intelligibility*; *apeiron* is motherhood/femininity, darkness, cthonic/material indeterminateness, potency-as-source-of-actuality-and-possibility, illimitation, unboundedness/infinitude—and it equals *unintelligibility*.

The philosophical move from the organic antinomy to the mathematical antinomy is apparent: the indeterminable chaos of ἄπειρον is organized by the formal intelligibility of the geometric πέρας, its perfection in the “ten-ness” (the Decad)\(^\text{17}\) of the sacred, triangular *tetraktys*.\(^\text{18}\) Aristotle is “our most comprehensive early source for the history of Pythagoreanism,” and the Stagirite “differentiated two groups of Pythagoreans along methodological lines.”\(^\text{19}\) As Aristotle avers (987b7-18), it is the *mathematikoi* that are of primary interest in the metaphysics of Plato, and therefore of the legacy of the notion of participation. The limited/unlimited duality is, together with participation itself—an idea with which it is necessarily bound up—perhaps the first and most important philosophical notion in the history of thought, a conception that rings down the ages and resonates forcefully throughout the history of philosophy and in this present study.

\(^{17}\) Plato. *Laws* 737e1-738b3; *Critias*, 113e.


1.2. Plato: participation and the theory of Forms

The founder of the Athenian Academy is best known for his theory of Forms. This theory constitutes a significant part of Aquinas’s interest in Plato and Platonism.²⁰ In Plato’s metaphysics, the theory of Forms or Ideas²¹ is put forward to account for the problem of the one

²⁰ Plato speaks directly to the 13th c. in only three works, and those in Latin translation: *Meno, Phaedo*, and *Timaeus*. Yet, even though Aquinas refers to these three works by name in his writings, it is doubtful that he had actually read *Meno* and *Phaedo* for himself and not at all clear whether he had even read the *Timaeus* directly (R. J. Henle *Saint Thomas and Platonism: A Study of the Plato and Platonici Texts in the Writings of Saint Thomas* [The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1956], 422). Aquinas knows of the existence of these works but his knowledge of Platonism is that of Plato’s interpreters in the pagan and Christian traditions. St. Thomas’s own “exemplarism” is clearly influenced by the great Neoplatonists of the Christian tradition such as Augustine, Ps-Dionysius, and William of Auvergne, as well as the pagan writers Proclus and Macrobius and the anonymous author of the *Liber de Causis* (Gregory T. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplary Causes* [Wash. D.C.: CUA Press, 2008], 32fn72).

But the interpreter of Plato most influential upon Aquinas is undoubtedly Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* (R. J. Henle *Saint Thomas and Platonism: A Study of the Plato and Platonici Texts in the Writings of Saint Thomas* [The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1956], 422). In this text, however, Aristotle only criticizes Plato according to what he has said about the Forms in the *Phaedo*, and this is the text in which the existence of the Form (of the Beautiful, in this case) “itself by itself” (αὐτὸ τὸ καθ’ αὑτό) is put forward in unadulterated earnestness (*Phaedo*, 100δ-e). Yet this is an incomplete and overly simplified and monolithic reading of Plato by Aristotle, a too-convenient because self-serving reduction of the ambiguous complexity and sprawling profundity of the theory of Forms. This Aristotelian estimate of Plato is for Aquinas, however, just the view of Plato on the question of exemplarity: that the self-existent Forms cause the being of other things by bringing them to exist by formal participation, without reference to efficient causality, which is to say, formal immanence.

²¹ On the usage of English translations and transliterations of Platonic philosophical terms: Lewis Campbell (*Plato’s Republic: The Greek Text*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894) gives us this warning: “In Plato…philosophical terminology is incipient, tentative, transitional” (cited in R. C. Cross, “Logos and Forms in Plato,” in *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 63, No. 252 [Oct. 1954], 436). Yet there is sufficient stability of usage in Plato and the tradition and we can recognize the following Greek terms with their English transliterations that stand for “the Forms” or refer to the formal notion: ‘Ideas’, (or ‘archetypes’, ‘paradigms’ when the Forms are referred to in their role as ‘exemplars’), in a related sense, *schema* (what is ‘common’ [τί ἐστι σχῆμα] among diverse things)—and in the Latin tradition, ‘universal’, although when using this term ‘universal’ we should exercise some reserve: Joseph Owens (“Thomistic Common Nature and the Platonic Idea,” *Medieval Studies* 21, 1959) argues that although Aquinas interprets the Platonic Ideas as universals—hence the synonymy of the two terms in subsequent thought—Plato’s Ideas themselves correspond more closely to Aquinas’ notion of ‘common nature’, a related but different notion (218-221, in Gregory T. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplary Causes* [Wash. D.C.: CUA Press, 2008], 33fn74). This view is in general harmony, I believe, with that of R.C. Cross and Eric D. Perl (although Perl does use the term “universal nature”), two writers whose views on the Platonic doctrine of Forms are discussed just below. At least Cross and Perl prefer to think of the Platonic “Form” as ‘nature’—the common “quality” of which the various *rex* of common being are instances.

In later Neoplatonic writing the term ‘logos’ and its plural ‘logoi’ come into usage in close or even synonymous connection with the Forms/Ideas. This is a development and not the usage of Plato. In Plato himself, rather, “logos” stands generally not for the Form itself but for the verbal/grammatical statement or account by which it is known: “The εἴδος…is displayed in the logos…in the predicate of the logos” (R. C. Cross, “Logos and Forms in Plato,” 447-448). As Cross argues, “the form is displayed in the predicate” of the logos, and so when any ‘What is X’ question is asked, the answer is the logos and thus the predicate contains the εἴδος. It is more “correct to say that we talk with εἴδη and logoi, pieces of talk, [which] are necessary to display εἴδη to us” (Cross, “Logos and Forms,” 447). This view bolsters the interpretation of Plato that we give here, that, however much a lofty theological thinker he may be, he has also a profound and abiding concern for conceptual clarity based on logical analysis of the “way we talk” about things. In Plato the ‘form’ does not appear as the subject of the logos, that is, not as the “substantial entity” that is under discussion, but rather as the predicate of the logos, such that the logos is rather more like a “formula”; “what is said of something, not something about which something is said” (Cross, “Logos and Forms,” 449). Thus for Cross the typical and fundamental meaning of εἴδος or εἴδη in Plato is “quality.” It is revealed in the discussion in the *Theaetetus* (Socrates’ "dream" 202b ff) that the true (hypostatic?) subject of the logos, however—some one of the original elements (ἐτόνγεια)—can only be named “in itself” but not known under any concept, since it is a simple entity and is that by which other complex things (μυλλαβόδοι) are known. The ἐτόνγεια can be “perceived” (αἰσθητά), however, by intuition (abstraction?) through the “syllables,” the complex wholes or sensibles which carry instances of the separately existing elements. Still—is the reference here really to the hypostases (separately existing Ideas) or merely the most fundamental notions from which concepts are formed (like Aristotle’s ‘first principles’) or both?
and the many, that is, the challenge of explaining how it is that the existence of a given quality or characteristic that is itself one can be in many subjects.\(^{22}\) “The problem of the one and many is one of the enigmas of reality which has exercised the intellect of man since the beginning of human thought.”\(^{23}\) The project of reducing the many to the one is perhaps the essence of the entire philosophical enterprise considered across time,\(^{24}\) in a certain way just what it means to think. Plato finds himself in a maturing Greek philosophical context which is committed to schematizing the phenomena of common experience on the conviction (the first philosophical intuition) that the world is an ordered whole (κόσμος) which is available to rational analysis and reducible to concepts expressible in language.\(^{25}\)

Plato inherits from Socrates the search for the stated definition (λόγοι, or sometimes, σχῆμα) that reveals the Form (ειδος), that is, the principle of unity to which plurality and diversity must

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Eric D. Perl ("The Presence of the Paradigm: Immanence and Transcendence in Plato’s Theory of Forms," *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 53, No. 2 [Dec. 1999], 339-362) argues for a return to the “traditional” reading of Plato, that the instance-Idea relation is one of immanence-in-transcendence and transcendence-in-immanence: transcendent because immanent and immanent because transcendent. “The forms are separate, not here, in the world experienced with the senses, in that they are not members of it; but they are here in that they are the very natures which sensible things have and display. And it is in this sense that everything we encounter with our senses is not reality itself but an image, an appearance, a presentation, of the intelligible, eternal, divine reality” (Perl, “Immanence and Transcendence,” 362).

Perl and Cross both argue against the “traditional” (modern academic) interpretation of Plato in different and special senses, such that their views are complementary. Perl advocates for a return to the ancient (neo) platonic “tradition” of the immanence-in-transcendence of the Forms as the abiding view of Plato (because logically necessary) as against the modern “tradition”, where interpreters generally recognize a development in Plato’s thought from an early Socratic immanence to a middle period (and Timaeus) in which Plato moves to a doctrine of separateness or “transcendence.” Cross argues also against modern interpreters (and Neoplatonic ones who use the term logos in connection with the hypostases) but in the sense that he sees a real difference between ‘logos’ and ‘idea’—these are not synonyms. Rather, logos are where eide are made to appear—the “talk” wherein eide are revealed. Thus if the forms were truly “part of the world” they could be spoken of as part of common being, which is to say, with univocality, and thus transcendental analogy would be unnecessary. But they are not, and thus we must have recourse to analogy.

\(^{22}\) Cf. Plato, *Philebus* (14c), where Socrates identifies “this principle…which somehow has an amazing nature. For that the many are one and the one many are amazing statements, and can easily be disputed, whichever side of the two one may want to defend.”

\(^{23}\) Thomas A. Fay, “Participation: The Transformation of Platonic and Neoplatonic Thought In the Metaphysics of Aquinas” *Divas Thomas* 76 (1973), 53.

\(^{24}\) Bernard Montagnes (The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being According to Thomas Aquinas, orig. French ed. 1963, Eng. trans. Andrew Tallon [Milwaukee, Wis: Marquette University Press, 2004], 12) says this outright in the clearest possible terms: “…the fundamental object of philosophy is to reduce the many to the one.”

be reduced.26 Plato’s theory of Forms can be thought of as an attempt to answer a twofold question: why must the many derive from one, and how is this derivation possible, i.e., what is the structure of the derivation?27

1.2.1. Platonic hyper-realism: participation in the separate Forms28

For Plato (with qualification) and Platonism, the intelligible is the real, and a Form is the ultimate intelligible, existing “itself by itself” (αὐτό κάθ’ αὐτά) immaterially as a hypostasis, a separate being, or in Aristotelian terms, something “not in a subject”29 with the addition of being separate from matter, in Latin terminology, substantia separata.30 The Forms, as the intelligible bases of phenomenal experience in the material world, are the “really real,” the permanent and eternal, which on account of their absolute character are able to impart reality to the world of material-sensible things-in-flux, which, when compared to the world of absolute Forms, is only vague image and shadow.31

The relationship between the universal causes, which are the Forms, and finite, concrete effects is given by Plato in terms of “participation” (usually from the μετέχειν/μέθεξις word group, sometimes the κοινωνεῖν/κοινωνία group when the emphasis is especially on “having in

26 Plato, Meno, 72a-b ff, to locate just one example of the “What is X” elenchi in Plato. In the Republic, “What is justice?” In the Theaetetus, “What is knowledge?” etc. R.C. Cross (“Logos and Forms in Plato,” in Mind, New Series, Vol. 63, No. 252 [Oct. 1954], 441-442) remarks, helpfully, that “it is quite clear in the Meno and elsewhere that when he asks this ‘what is X’ question, he is taking it for granted that there is a form of X, and wanting to know what that form is. And…from what he says it seems that he hopes to achieve this coming to know the form by way of statements, logos.”


28 R.J. Henle’s discussion of Aquinas’s critique of the exaggeration of Platonic realism comes under the heading “The Transposition of Abstractions into Reality” (Saint Thomas and Platonism; A Study of the Plato and Platonici Texts in the Writings of Saint Thomas, The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1956).

29 Aristotle, Metaphysics V (Δ), 8 (1017b10); cf. Posterior Analytics I, 4 (73b5).

30 “The Naturalists transfer the structure of reality, which they have determined as material, to the soul; Plato transfers the structure of knowledge, which he has seen to be immaterial, to reality” (R. J. Henle, Saint Thomas and Platonism; A Study of the Plato and Platonici Texts in the Writings of Saint Thomas [The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1956], 326). Cf. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Ia, q.84, a.2 resp. “The ancient philosophers held that the soul knows bodies through its essence. For it was universally admitted that “like is known by like.” But they thought that the form of the thing known is in the knower in the same mode as in the thing known. The Platonists however were of a contrary opinion. For Plato, having observed that the intellectual soul has an immaterial nature, and an immaterial mode of knowledge, held that the forms of things known subsist immaterially.”

31 Some loci classici for Plato’s theory of Forms are Phaedo 100a-101b; Cratylus 439c-440b; Phaedrus 246a-250a; Symposium 210a-212a; Republic V.478a-e, VI, VII.508c-517c.
Speaking merely of common usage, we should notice that the Greek verb *metechein* cannot be literally translated into the Latin *participare*, however, which term as Leo Sweeney points out can be “in philosophical contexts…very misleading.” The Latin verb means ‘to take a part’ (partem capere) and in the concrete this is not the Greek sense. Rather, *metechein* connotes a relationship of mutual having, or as Sweeney puts it, “to have along with, to have in common (*koinonein*) with,” and by inference, “to be dependent on, to be in relationship with.” While the metaphysical systems of Plato and Aquinas will be shown to be profoundly different, nevertheless it is the case that despite the concrete differences in non-metaphysical semantics between the Greek *metechein* that Plato uses and the Latin *participare* of Aquinas, the meaning of Aquinas will be that of Plato’s Greek: relationship of dependence by (analogical) sharing.

Participation for Plato (as it will be for Aquinas) also entails the attempt to show how the multiplicity and commonality of effects can be derived from formal, intelligible unity. Put another way, participation for Plato is an explanation of the relationship of concrete and singular objects of sense with their principles of intelligibility. Participation is the structure of the relationship (ἁνάλογον) between the One and the many, and this relationship is one of a mutual

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35 Leo Sweeney (“Participation in Plato’s Dialogues: Phaedo, Parmenides, Sophist and Timaeus,” in *The New Scholasticism*, Vol. 62, Issue 2 [Spring 1988]) draws out this generalization of Plato’s notion of participation from the consideration of four principle texts of Plato on the question of participation: *Phaedo* 100d-102b-d, *Parmenides* 131a-d, *Sophist* (numerous texts relating to the notion of exemplarity), *Timaeus* (numerous texts dealing with the problem of the “receptacle”), that is, the “participant” which is the receiver of participated reality from the Forms.
having which sets up a structure of dependence such that material things participate in the Forms which are participated in, and thus the material things depend upon the Forms for their being.

1.2.2. Plato and analogy

Plato is the first Greek philosopher to employ the notion of analogy with philosophical force.38 As we have seen the idea of analogy is closely related to participation, and in fact Plato uses both the idea of analogy and of participation to explain the relationship between the world of matter and the world of ideas.39 For Plato the distinction seems to be mainly between the question of the relation between human knowledge and the eternal Ideas, in which case analogy is employed, and the relation between the existence of material things and the world of ideas, in which participation is employed, where the Ideas “are related to things as prototypes are to images.”40 Plato holds that concepts (λόγοι) are to the Forms (εἰδοί) as belief (πίστις) is to truth (ἀλήθεια).41 This pair of pairs ‘concept>Form’ and ‘belief>truth’ are analogous because the proportion of the first item in each pair to the second item in each pair is the same, and thus the two pairs are bound together by ‘analogy of proportionality.’

That the relation of knowledge to the Ideas, considered in the most general way, is seen in the genesis of the philosophical notion of analogy as it comes to Plato from Pythagorean

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41 This is argued by Hampus Lyttkens (The Analogy between God and the World: An Investigation of Its Background and Interpretation of Its Use by Thomas of Aquino [Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1953], 24-25), who points to Timaeus 29b-c: “So accounts of what is stable (μονίμου) and fixed (βεβαίου) and transparent to understanding (μετὰ νοὴν καταφανοῦς) are themselves stable and unshifting (μετατριτοροῦς). We must do our very best to make these accounts (λόγος) as irrefutable (ἀνελέγκτος) and invincible (ἀνικήτος) as any account may be. On the other hand, accounts we give of that which has been formed to be like that reality (ἀπεικασθέντος), since they are accounts of what is a likeness (εἰκόνα), are themselves likely (εἰκότος), and stand in proportion (ἐνα λόγον) to the previous accounts, i.e., what being (οὐσία) is to becoming (γένεσιν), truth (ἀλήθεια) is to belief (πίστιν).” Cf. Timaeus 53e.
mathematical theory. The term itself, ἀναλογία⁴² is taken from the Greek mathematicians—traditionally called “Pythagoreans,”⁴³ and as Aristotle notes it signifies the equality between two numerical proportions, a proportionality.⁴⁴ There is a proportional relation between a set of numbers, and two sets of numbers admit of a “proportionality” when the proportion relation of each set is the same such that we can present “two couples of numbers interpreted in the same way.”⁴⁵ For instance, the arithmetic proportion of 1:2 is the same as that of 3:6, such that there is an arithmetic proportionality between 1:2/3:6: the “distance” between the two pairs of numbers is the same by arithmetic proportionality, that of “double.” Analogy of proportionality “was designated ‘geometrical’ because it was discovered in connexion with the discovery of the irrational numbers, which could only be represented by geometrical figures. Proportionality made it possible to relate irrational numbers to rational numbers.”⁴⁶ The analogy of proportionality came to be seen as more generally applicable to being, such that a non-directly

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⁴² Derived from λόγος, a noun in the λέγειν (‘to speak/tell’) word group; ‘word’, ‘statement’, ‘account’, ‘concept’, ‘thought’, ‘reason’; and the prefix ἀν: w/acc. ‘motion upward’; such that the term in its etymology signifies an ascent of the mind from one thing better known by us to something else less better known by us but more intelligible in itself, with the metaphysical overtone in Greek philosophy: one ascends the scale of being by comparing what is worldly to what is eternal, since the world is the shadow of the eternal made on the pattern of the eternal—the world is a ‘speculum enigmatum’ (1 Cor 13:12) of the theological realm. Thus analogical reasoning is a part of (or perhaps even in some sense synonymous with) “dialectic” in that dialectic proceeds from what is more known to us (logical intentions) to what is more known in itself, that is, being. And so the relation of logic and metaphysics, analogical reasoning and being (cf. Rudi A. te Velde, “Metaphysics, Dialectics, and the Modus Logicus According to Thomas Aquinas,” in Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale, Vol. 63 [1995], 15-35). Emerich Coreth (Metaphysics, New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), generally defines analogy as a dialectical mode of reasoning. “We see in human knowledge a steady dynamism which assumes the form of a dialectical process…Our knowledge can never be wholly conceptualized, it never catches up with its ultimate term. This dialectics of our knowledge about being is traditionally called the analogy of being” (110). The basic point is that a dialectical inquiry begins with what is known in a certain way, and yet obscure, and as knowledge progresses, more questions appear, thus the common wisdom “the more you know the more you know what (or better, that) you don’t know.”

⁴³ Cf. Hampus Lyttkens, The Analogy between God and the World: An Investigation of Its Background and Interpretation of Its Use by Thomas of Aquino (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1953), 15-16, incl. 15 fn4. Later Greek philosophers generally refer to the mathematicians as “Pythagoreans”, since Pythagoras is held to be the father of Greek mathematical thinking, and furthermore, any philosopher with a predilection for thinking about the cosmos in mathematical-geometrical terms is labelled by the Greeks a “Pythagorean.” Pythagoras himself is a shadowy figure whom we only know about through the writings of others, and his reputation as the progenitor of Greek mathematics is so strong that other philosophers co-opted his myth-like authority by ascribing to him views of their own making. By “Pythagoreans” Aristotle seems to mean a certain set of contemporaries of Plato, academicians who dealt in mathematical-geometrical philosophy.

⁴⁴ Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, 1131a31 ff.


comparable order of being can be compared indirectly to an order of being of which we have better knowledge: realities otherwise inaccessible to us due to their ontological distance from us can be reached by means of the analogy of proportionality.

The chief texts of Plato in which the concept of analogy is employed are the *Timaeus* and the *Republic*. While he retains mathematical allusions in his use of the notion of analogy, we can see that Plato increasingly tends to an extension and ultimately transformation of the notion of analogy. Thus analogy in Plato begins to point to a more fundamental reality in the structure of being. In this way do the notions of analogy and participation begin to approach one another, insofar as analogy is concerned with the relation of knowledge in the material sphere to the eternal Ideas. The Platonic notion of analogy as regards intellectually formed concepts and “true concepts” (Forms) is a relation of partiality to fullness—a participatory relation. The formed concept is the image of the prototype (Form) such that the image is a mixture of truth and falsity, a mere approximation with admixture of error, to the prototype. The image thus bears *in part*, or *has a share of*, what the Idea/Form possesses absolutely, and so there is a fundamentally ontological aspect to Plato’s notion of analogy. To put this Platonic understanding in somewhat more Aristotelian and Thomistic terms, the Form has *by essence* (per essentiam) what the image has *by participation* (per participationem) in that Form.

In seeing the relation between analogy and ontological participation, we see better what Plato means by his general epistemological rule that true knowledge comes from turning away from the physical world to the world of Forms or Ideas. It is not that we must be blind to the physical world of images. Rather, by looking at the image we should be led to turn our gaze to

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the Form—the physical world sends us to the theological world. In the *Republic* Socrates holds that, while the Good cannot be spoken of directly it can be described by speaking of its “offspring.” And then there is the famous analogy of the Sun (*Rep.* 508b): the Sun is that offspring of the Good which is most like the Good itself.\(^49\) There is a similarity of function between the Sun and the Good. The Sun makes the visible available to the sense of sight, and likewise is the Good the cause of truth in intelligible objects and the source of knowledge in the mind (νοῦς) of the intelligent person. The Good is higher than the Ideas as it is the source of their truth in a way “like” (ἀνάλογον) the Sun is higher than the sensible objects. The term “analogon” is thus seen to stand for the *relationship* between two realities, where the realities themselves that are the subjects of the analogon are the ‘analogates.’ In the case of our example, the sun is the ‘prime analogate’ since it is the source of the qualities of the ‘secondary analogate,’ the sensible object.

1.2.3. The “grounding problem” in Plato: difficulties for his notion of participation

In Plato’s theory of Forms the “reduction of the many to One” is not in fact complete, but only partial, since the realm of the Forms retains its multiplicity and the mutual distinctions of relation of any Form to any another,\(^50\) i.e., “men” are reduced to the Form of Man, but the Form of Man is still, in its oneness, different from other Forms. Thus the Forms in their multiplicity were fated to remain ungrounded (unreduced to one) in Plato, and so his idea of participation must remain obscure: a coherent metaphysical structure of participation cannot be brought forth until the relationship of the Forms to the One as their source and ground can be recognized and made metaphysically articulate. Regardless of the trajectory of reduction established by the

\(^49\) Plato, *Rep.* 508b-c: “The Sun (ὁ ἥλιος)...which the Good (τὸ ἄγαθον) begot (ἐγέννησεν) to stand as a likeness or proportion (ἀνάλογον) to it.”

Founder of the Academy, a thematized reduction does not occur in Plato’s texts, and later interpreters and scholars have been left to argue about the nature of his metaphysical achievement on this question.

As Norris Clarke notes, Plato does tentatively advance a vision of the One and Good “as the source of both ideas and minds,” but it is not made clear whether the Good is itself mind or whether it is ontologically “above” mind.51 “The ultimate relation [of participation] between the world of ideas and mind remains unfinished business for Plato, a legacy for his successors to unravel.”52

1.3. Aristotle: the turn to the world: substantiality and formal immanence

The most brilliant disciple of Plato, Aristotle translates his master’s theory of Forms from a doctrine of separate existence into a doctrine of “immanence”: the form is the intrinsic cause of the characteristics of the substance or entity,53 οὐσία, which is the concrete thing that actually exists, sufficient and by itself (“κἂ’ αὐτά” or “per se”),54 as the “ground” (ἀρχή) of all non-self-sufficient categories of being.55 Forms are in the things themselves and constitute things in their

51 A locus classicus is the Timaeus, 29e-30d: “Let us now state the cause (αἰτίαν) wherefore he framed the whole universe (τὸ πάν) of becoming. He was good, and one who is good can never become jealous of anything. And so, being free from jealousy, he wanted everything to become as much like himself as was possible.” cf. Plato, Republic VI (509b); Aristotle, Metaphysics 1074b21-35.


53 Joseph Owens (The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics: A Study in the Greek Background of Mediaeval Thought, 2nd ed. revised [Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1963] 138-154) cautions against an unreflective English translation of ‘ουσία’ to ‘substance’ when dealing with Aristotelian ousiology. Aristotle uses οὐσία as a catch-all term for ‘being’ but he will at any moment use it in any number of specialized ways as well, e.g., not infrequently it means ‘form.’ Our English word ‘substance’ with reference to its Latin derivation has the instant connotation in metaphysics of “something standing underneath.” Certainly Aristotle uses οὐσία in this way at times. After lengthy argumentation, Owens opts for ‘entity,” which in a most general way will always be at least not incorrect, whatever additional interpretation we may need to give to it. Lawrence Dewan (St. Thomas and Form As Something Divine in Things [Milwaukee, Wis: Marquette University Press, 2007], fn16 on 61), concurs with Owens, following him, no doubt.

54 Aristotle, Metaphysics VII (7) 1033b-1034a.

55 Cf. Werner Marx, Introduction to Aristotle’s Theory of Being as Being (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), 18. “Οὐσία is the determining factor within the manifold meanings of on [ens]. For this reason Aristotle can also call οὐσία a “ground,” ἀρχή…Οusía is the ground in the sense that it bestows a particular ‘meaning of being’ upon each of the other categories. As such a ground, ousia is called ‘primary’; it is primary with regard to the logos (concept), to gnosis (cognition), and to chronos (time).”
being—they do not exist apart from things as separated hypostases. Aristotle does not so much tackle the problem of Platonic participation and its deeper logical and metaphysical troubles as much as he sidesteps it by refusing the hypostatization of the Ideas altogether. For Aristotle a separate Form is causatively impotent—only immanent forms can cause. From a certain angle Aristotle’s project appears to be in discontinuity with the Platonic project, since it may look as though, rather than seeking a further unification (grounding) of the multiplicity of the theological realm in some highest unity, he has simply denied the separate theological existence of the hypostases and turned to the immanence of form in primary substance (πρῶτα ὁσία).

But the truth of Aristotle’s view, as in Plato, is not so simple. In denying the hypostatic existence of the Forms Aristotle does not deny that they are real universals and therefore the true objects of science. Rather, the universal Forms have existence in things. The theory of abstraction that accompanies Aristotle’s immanentism is of a piece with his critical recognition that “the course of knowledge is not the literal replica of the development of things, and that the articulations of thought do not correspond entirely to real distinctions.” Yet, however much Aristotle demonstrates in his philosophy of immanence that he is a man of the world, in true

56 Aristotle, Metaphysics I (A) 9; and XIII-XIV (N, Ξ, O). A summary of the arguments against the Platonic doctrine of Forms is given in I,9: the central gist is that it is impossible to see how the Forms can actually be the cause of anything unless they are in matter, and therefore not separate (again, Eric Perl would think that Aristotle is not accurately representing Plato on this point: on Perl’s reading Plato’s forms are immanent because they obviously must be—Plato perhaps did not consistently explain himself well). Here Aristotle is referring to the notion of efficient causation, a notion for the absence (or at least absence of thematization) of which he reproaches Platonism in Meta. I (A), 6 (988a, 8–9): “[Plato] has used only two causes (δύοιν ὠρίζειν ὁμόν), that of the essence (τί ἐστι) and the material cause (τὴν ὕλην).” The whole of books M and N (13 and 14) constitute an extended argument against the existence of separated Forms. An abbreviated version of the “tritos anthropos” objection is found in M 1076b-1077a15. Also see the discussion in Z 14 (1039a24–1039b5). Aristotle reads Plato like he does every other philosopher, which is to say, in terms of his own four-fold theory of causes (formal, final, material, efficient). Joseph Owens can be shown likely to agree with Perl on Aristotle’s deficient reading of Plato: “The Stagirite is a splendid talker, but a poor listener. Just as he read in his predecessors only imperfect developments of his own doctrines, so does he continue in a like inability to see a question from a medieval or a modern standpoint” (Joseph Owens, The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics: A Study in the Greek Background of Mediaeval Thought, 2nd ed. Revised [Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1963], 11).


Platonic fashion he still regards “matter as the element which is impenetrable to thought,” looking instead to “pure form as the intelligible.”

Aristotle makes a great show of rejecting Platonic participation, but as Fabro notes the Stagirite nevertheless introduces elements pertaining to the notion of participation (μέθεξις), if not the term itself, in his discussions, both in the *Organon* on universals (logical relations of individuals to species and species to genus), and on his doctrine of immanent formal causation in the *Metaphysics*. Aristotle’s critical reception of Plato goes through further refinement in pagan (Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus/Liber de causis) and Christian (Augustine, Boethius, Ps-Dionysius, Eriugena) Neoplatonism.

1.3.1. Aristotle and Aquinas: the First Cause and participation

Crucial to note for our study of Aristotle is the consonance Aquinas sees in Aristotle’s notion of universal dependence of all things on the First Cause (πρωτή ἀρχή) with the Christian doctrine of Creation *ex nihilo*. The universal structure of causal dependency upon a first is most pithily expressed in Aristotle’s axiom “if there is no first [cause] there is no cause at all,” which Aquinas represents as “Whatever is first in any order is the cause of all that come after it.”

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60 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I (A) 992a29-30: “[Plato’s] account of the way in which [the Forms] are the substances (οἴσια) of perceptible things is empty talk (κενῆς λέγομεν); for ‘sharing’ (μετέχειν)…means nothing (οὐθέν ἐστιν).”


62 Aristotle, *Topics* IV, 1, 121a11 ff.

63 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII (A), 6 (1072b-1073a12). This passage represents a locus classicus, an Aristotelian metaphysical hymn to the First Cause: “If, then, God (ὁ θεός) is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder (θαυμάστον); and if in a better state this compels it yet more. And God is in a better state. And life (ζωὴ) also belongs to God; for the actuality (ἐνέργεια) of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God’s self-dependent (καθ᾽ ᾧν) actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this is God” (1072b24-30).


66 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIIa, q. 56, a. 1 resp. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.2, a.3 resp. “Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus.”
Herein remains the seed of Platonic participation which Aristotle retained and which will flower again in the thought of Aquinas via the Neoplatonic Liber de causis.

1.3.2. The “non-Aristotelian” nature of Aquinas’ use of Aristotle’s act-potency scheme

Now Aristotle himself cannot conceive of the possibility of creation ex nihilo—no merely Greek thinker could do so. Ex nihilo nihil fit. Although he makes a major advance with his formulation of the being of God as actus purus, Aristotle is still mired in the Greek notion of infinity as the unlimited substratum of formal determination, what Garrigou-Lagrange calls “infinity of imperfection.” Every object in the material sphere is always already a form-matter composition and so there must be eternally a prior existing substratum for the eternal process of generation and corruption. This means that in the purely Aristotelian scheme act and potency are two “correlative, incomplete metaphysical principles intrinsically ordered to one another so as to form a per se unit.” We must see that this is a decisive conceptual advance. Yet for

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67. David Sedley ("Hesiod’s Theogony and Plato’s Timaeus," in Boys-Stones, G. R., and Johannes Haubold ed. Plato and Hesiod [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010], 249) notes that Sextus Empiricus (Against the Professors, 7.53) records “the one reported example” in the Greek pagan tradition of a philosopher who held that the world comes into being out of nothing. Otherwise, says Sedley in speaking of the Timaeus, “Plato would no more than any other ancient thinker allow generation to come out of literally nothing.”

68. Cf. Parmenides, Frag. 8 (Diels), trans. by J. Burnet, Early Greek Philosophy (4th ed., London, 1930), 176 (cited in Norris Clarke, “The Limitation of Act by Potency: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism?” [New Scholasticism 26, No.2, 1952], 174. “... hard necessity keeps it in the bonds of the limit that holds it fast on every side. Wherefore it is not permitted to what is to be infinite; for it is in need of nuthing; while if it were infinite, it would stand in need of everything.”

69. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, The One God: A Commentary on the First Part of St. Thomas’ Theological Summa (St. Louis, Mo: B. Herder Book Co, 1943; reprint with different pagination, Ex Fontibus Co., 2012), 237. Garrigou, commenting on Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Ia, q.7, a.1, refers to the Ionian background of the notion of limitation, and notes that the Greeks generally could not appreciate the distinction between the ‘infinity of imperfection’ which is the material principle, and the ‘infinity of determination’ which is the perfection of being they sought in the absolute nature of the Forms. This problem is carried through in Plato and to substantial degree in Neoplatonism (although Plotinus makes a decisive advance here).

70. Aristotle, Metaphysics III (Γ), 4 (999b8). “But if there is nothing eternal (ἄθαντον), neither can there be a process of coming to be (γένοισθαι); for there must be something that comes to be (τὸ γεγονόμενον), i.e. from which something comes to be (ὁ ἐκ γεγονότος), and the ultimate term (τὸ ἐγγέτον) in this series cannot have come to be (ἐγένετον), since the series has a limit (ἐγκατάλειπτον) and nothing can come to be out of that which is not (οὐκ ἐπὶ όντος)...Further, since the matter (ἡ ὡλη) exists, because it is ungenerated, it is a foriitori reasonable that the substance or essence (τὴν οὐσίαν), that which the matter is at any time coming to be, should exist; for if neither essence nor matter is to be, nothing will be at all (οὐ οὐκείον ἔσται τὸ παράξτημα), and since this is impossible (ἄνεκοιτο) there must be something besides the concrete thing (σύνολον), viz. the shape or form (τὴν μορφήν καὶ τὸ ὄνομα).” We must understand that the entire foregoing analysis takes place within the context of the material sphere.

Aristotelian and Platonic metaphysics was for the most part marked by an essentialism, i.e., the "gate of being," in Categories. Nowhere in Categories does Aristotle indicate that the preposition 'in' adequately expresses the full entitative dependence of an accident upon the subject it actuates, in Aquinas's existential metaphysics, the preposition is extended in its meaning to the inherence of the multiplicity of beings and for the manifoldness of being itself. Whereas in the second chapter of the Categories, Aristotle indicates that the preposition ‘in’ adequately expresses the full entitative dependence of an accident upon the subject it actuates, in Aquinas's existential metaphysics, the preposition is extended in its meaning to the inherence of an act of existence that is prior to the subject it actuates and dependent, not on the subject, but on a transcendent efficient cause.

Without the doctrine of creation ex nihilo to reckon with, Aristotle is free to take actuality itself for granted: the Stagirite can be satisfied with a notion of substance whereby the reduction of the multiplicity of being to form on the horizontal level of the categories is achieved. Now it is true for Aristotle that the motion of all substances is derived from that ultimate, simple, and.

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Footnotes:

72 W. Norris Clarke, “The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas,” Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, vol. 26 (1952), 155. Cf. Aristotle, Metaphysics VII (Z), 8 (1033a24-1034a7): “…in everything that is generated matter is present, and one part is matter and the other form (1033b18-19).” Obviously… it is quite unnecessary to set up a Form as a pattern…; the begetter is adequate to the making of the product and to the causing of the form in the matter” (1034a1-5); Metaphysics VII (θ), 1 (252b): “There never was a time when there was not motion, and never will be a time when there will not be motion” (οὐν οὐδὲς ἐν γρόνοις οὐδ' ἐστιν ὅτε κίνη ἐν αὐτῷ ἦν ἡ ὕστερον τοσάτοι).  

73 John Tomarchio (“The Emergence of the ‘Supposit’ in the Metaphysics of Creation,” in 20th World Conference of Philosophy, 1998), representing a contemporary “Gilsonian” and “creationist” reading of the history of philosophy, puts Plato and Aristotle next to Aquinas like this: “Aristotelian and Platonic metaphysics was for the most part marked by an essentialism, i.e., the incomplete reduction of beings to their essences, and therefore of the primary sense of being to essence: to be always meant to be some kind. Thus in the ancient metaphysical purview, concerned as it was with giving an account of the articulation of the whole into kinds, the highest sense of being recognized was form, and the actuality of form remained as unquestioned as the existence of the cosmos. The articulation of the cosmos was seen to be as necessary as it was eternal. However, with the creationist affirmation that the existence of the cosmos, even if eternal, is causally contingent, the contingency of the articulations of being realized in it also became evident…[Aquinas’s] primary existential intuition demands an explanation more ultimate than form and formal contrariety both for the multiplicity of beings and for the manifoldness of being itself. Whereas in the second chapter of the Categories, Aristotle indicates that the preposition ‘in’ adequately expresses the full entitative dependence of an accident upon the subject it actuates, in Aquinas’s existential metaphysics, the preposition is extended in its meaning to the inherence of an act of existing that is prior to the subject it actuates and dependent, not on the subject, but on a transcendent efficient cause.”


75 Bernard Montanges, The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being According to St. Thomas Aquinas (Milwaukee, Wis: Marquette University Press, 2004; orig. French ed. 1963), 12. W. Norris Clarke (“What is Most and Least Relevant in the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Today?”, The International Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 14, No. 4 [1974], 416), supports this reading: “Even Aristotle, committed realist that he is, after clearly affirming that the prime analogate of being is singular, existing, active substance, proceeds to carry on his entire explicit analysis of being in terms of substance, form and matter, change, and efficient and final causes. Existence plays no further technical role in his metaphysics.”
motionless substance that is the First Mover, yet this remains a matter of efficient causation in nature, and so “it still remains [as a project for metaphysics] to reduce the different substances themselves to unity from a transcendental point of view.” Aristotle has not yet achieved a complete metaphysical reduction such that all beings can be shown to depend upon the transcendental source of being in every respect in which they are in act: there is not a scheme by which the macro-relation of beings to Being can be understood, and pure Aristotelianism is thereby “a radical severing of the link in being between God and the universe.”

While adopting the basic Aristotelian act-potency scheme, as we will see, Aquinas, in his Neoplatonic synthesis, employs to great effect the Aristotelian doctrine of formal immanence while reinterpreting away its principle shortcoming: the inability of Aristotle to ascend to a true metaphysics of creation. Aquinas achieves this partly by correcting the Aristotelian conception

76 Of course ‘motion’ in Aristotle means ‘reduction from potency to act’ and so the First Mover is ‘unmoved’ because he is without potency, that is to say, pure act. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IX (6), 8 (1050b3-6). “Actuality (ἐγκειόσεις) is prior in substance (πρότερον τῇ οὐσίᾳ) than potentiality (δυνάμεις); and as we have said, one actuality always precedes (ὑπὲρ προσωμβάνει) another in time right back to the actuality of the Eternal prime mover (ὑπὲρ κυνόντος πρῶτος).”

Thomas Joseph White (*Wisdom in the Face of Modernity: A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology*, Ave Maria University, Fla: Sapientia Press, 2009), 56 comments on the importance of the Aristotelian discovery of the dependence of all dynamic energies on the primacy of the a dynamic divine energy for future theology. “This understanding of the primacy of actuality will prepare a theological metaphysics, therefore, of separate being, by means of a causal understanding of God as the first mover, understood in terms of pure actuality (as the primary actuality and final cause of secondary beings). It will permit a properly analogical manner of speaking about God, based on the effects of his being upon secondary beings, those that we experience directly.”

77 Bernard Montagnes, *The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being According to St. Thomas Aquinas* (Milwaukee, Wis: Marquette University Press, 2004; orig. French ed. 1963), 12. C.A. Hart (“Participation and the Thomistic Five Ways,” in *The New Scholasticism* 26 [1952], 271-273) likewise reads Aristotle in terms of substantivalist immanence (still a physicalized metaphysics) as against the existential metaphysics of Aquinas. For Aristotle being ultimately is the being of substance, and he takes the existence of substances gratis. All change is physical change for Aristotle, and his First Mover is not unique, since “there could be as many first immovable movers as there are distinct lines of motion,” whereas for Aquinas the proof of the First Mover is simultaneously proof of the unique Creator who confers existence upon all things.


79 W. Norris Clarke, “The Platonic Heritage of Thomism,” in *Review of Metaphysics* 8, No.1 (Sep. 1954), 113. As we have just seen, however, Thomas Joseph White (*Wisdom in the Face of Modernity: A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology*, Ave Maria University, Fla: Sapientia Press, 2009), 56) and other neo-Aristotelian Thomists writing today (e.g. Edward Feser, Steven A. Long) would judge such radical language as immoderate and misleading and would see it revised. This is a debate to which there is no terminus: how much credit should Aristotle be given as an influence on Aquinas? I suspect that the divisions fall mainly into two camps: the first, which desires to highlight as much as possible the “Christian difference” in the thought of Aquinas; the second, which is especially concerned with the importance of showing forth the “perennial” nature of the Stagirite’s thought, and thus would interpret Aquinas as much as possible in continuity with him. All admit that Aquinas notices and develops certain possibilities in the Philosopher which remained latent in his own writing, or that the man himself did not (or could not have) thematized. For an illuminating discussion on the problems of the historical approach to Aquinas, particularly on the challenge of being a historian of metaphysics who is also a metaphysician, see George Lindbeck, “Participation and Existence in the Interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas,” *Franciscan Studies*, Vol. 17, No.1 (1957), 1-22; No. 2., 107-125.
as regards the nature of the mutual ordering of act and potency. In his doctrine of act limited by potency, Aquinas shows that God as actus purus is the First and Universal Cause of all things, having created them ex nihilo, while creatures, as secondary causes, are act mixed with potency. If this is in fact the case, then as Cornelio Fabro argued, the metaphysics of Aquinas is much more than Aristotle-grown-up. Rather it is the transformation of Aristotle.  

CHAPTER 2: Analysis of Principle Texts in Aquinas with respect to the Development of the Idea of Participation in His Thought

Introduction: Participation and substantiality: De Veritate, q.21, a.5; In De hebdomadibus

The Commentary on the De hebdomadibus of Boethius (In Librum Boetii De Hebdomadibus Expositio) and the Disputed Questions: on Truth (Questiones Disputatae De Veritate),

80 Some texts in Aquinas on the limitation of act by potency are: Summa Theologiae, Ia, q.7, a.1 resp.; Summa Theologiae, Ia, q.7, a.2; Summa Theologiae, Ia, q.50, a.2 ad 4; Summa contra Gentiles II, c.52; Summa contra Gentiles I, c.43; Compendium theologiae, prima pars; De spiritualibus creaturis, a.1; De substantiis separatis, c.8; De causis, first half; In De divinis nominibus, c.5, lect. 1.1. All of these texts are given, with discussion and commentary, in John F. Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom That Unreceived Act Is Unlimited,” The Review of Metaphysics, Vol. 51, No. 3 (Mar., 1998), 533-564.

81 See Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought, St. Louis, Mo: Herder, 1950, reprint with different pagination Ex Fontibus Co., (2012), where he comments that “in Aristotle the [act-potency] doctrine is still a child. In Aquinas it has grown to full age” (Ex Font. ed., 48). Garrigou puts his finger on a crucial moment of Aquinas’s reception of Aristotle, but one may wonder if he has put more into the mouth of Aristotle than is really there with respect to the doctrine of the limitation of act by distinct receiving potency (corollary to the principle of the non-self-limiting character of act). Garrigou had insisted that Aristotle held the doctrine and taught it “in the first two books of his Physics…with admirable clearness” (Reality, Ex Fontibus ed., 37). W. Norris Clarke (“The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas,” Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, Vol. 26 [1952], 155fn31 cont’d 156), however, says that neither Garrigou “nor any other Thomist gives any texts to back up their contention.” Indeed, although Garrigou asserts that the doctrine is readily apparent in Aristotle’s Physics, he only cites Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I,7,1 resp. The question is whether Aquinas has received directly from Aristotle—whether from the Physics or any other text—the doctrine of the limitation of act by potency as such. Perhaps Garrigou finds the doctrine to be so obviously implied by what Aristotle does say about real distinction/composition of act and potency in finite beings that he can assume that Aristotle understood the doctrine as Aquinas did (and thus Garrigou exaggerates with the assertion about Aristotle’s “admirable clearness”). This is, in fact, the argument of Jude Chua Soo Meng (“Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, on Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and the Doctrine of Limitation of Act by Potency,” The Modern Schoolman, Vol. 78, Issue 1 [November 2000], 71-87). Furthermore, we should note that Bernardo Cantens (“The Interdependency Between Aquinas’s Doctrine of Creation and his Metaphysical Principle of the Limitation of Act by Potency,” Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, Vol. 74 [2001], 122), similar to Chua Soo Meng, points up the distinction between the presence of the principle in Aristotle and Aquinas’s belief in the presence of the principle in Aristotle. Because Clarke himself does not make this distinction, Cantens concludes that Clarke’s assertion “is not sufficiently supported” (Cantens, 122). Cantens also makes the following reference to Lawrence Dewan (Cantens, 134en7). “Fr. Lawrence Dewan has pointed out in his unpublished comments on the version of this paper presented at the ACPA Meeting, that there are certain texts in Aquinas that seem to suggest that he does attribute the doctrine of the limitation of act by potency to Aristotle; see for instance De substantiis separatis, c. 7; Summa Theologica, Q. 44 A. 1, C. p. 229; and SCG, book 1, ch. 13, p. 95.” Cantens then points us to Lawrence Dewan, O.P., “St. Thomas's Fourth Way and Creation,” Thomist 59 (1995), 371-378. Let us suppose that Thomas does attribute the doctrine to Aristotle. It remains to argue about the nature of Aquinas’s reading: is it a stretch of the sort Weisheipl and Torrell would allow (cf. my fn62), or a plain and straightforward commentary, as Ralph McNerny (Boethius and Aquinas, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1990) insists? It shouldn’t be too difficult to show that it is both.
specifically q. 21, are as close as we get in Aquinas to a “study” on participation. Both of these works are products of the first Parisian regency of 1256-1259. They are conceived not only in the same frame of time but also in the same frame of mind. Up until this point in his career Aquinas had employed the term *participare* without explicating any structure of participation and for the most part without even adverting to its meaning—participation was a wholly operative and unthematized notion in his thought. In these texts St. Thomas turns his attention to participation in order to reconcile what had hitherto been understood as a categorical opposition between participation and substantiality. Both Cornelio Fabro and Rudi te Velde understand these texts as a first solution. As we will see, although the solution is not complete, it offers a crucial advance in metaphysical conception, and stands as a test case for our claim that Aquinas harnesses the power of Aristotelian analysis in order to incorporate the Neoplatonic categories which the tradition has bequeathed to him, categories which Aquinas has no reason to ignore and which he judges necessary for the articulation of a coherent Christian metaphysical vision.

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83 Cf. Aquinas, *De ente et essentia* of 1252-53, where some form of *participare* appears four times, and yet no definition is given, its notion apparently to be taken by the reader as self-evident. Cf. Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententias*, also of the same period, where the term appears once (q.1, a.1 ad 3).

84 In their major studies on participation in Aquinas, both Cornelio Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d’Aquino*, Milan (1939, 3rd ed. 1961) and Rudi A. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995) begin with Aquinas’s Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus* of Boethius. The other early major work on participation, L.-B. Geiger (*La participation dans la philosophie de Saint Thomas d’Aquin*, Montréal: Institut d’Études Médiévales, 1952) begins in like manner, and this does not escape the notice of J.-P. Torrell (*Saint Thomas Aquinas, Vol. 1: The Person and His Work*, revised ed. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), who implies that the subject of participation is thematized by Boethius in connection with so central a notion in classical and Christian metaphysics—how creatures are said to be good—that his treatise made for an almost irresistible starting point, both for Aquinas and for contemporary writers on the subject. Rudi te Velde (*Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995], 8) notes that Aquinas’s commentary on the *De hebdomadibus* is the only one known to us from the 13th century, and that this fact “suggests that [it]…was not so much prompted by scholarly convention as by his interest in the treatise’s content.”

85 Afterwards will come the consideration of a further set of texts that, while considered separately, are ordered together and in a certain sequence so as to form a continuous narrative in the hopes of showing both the antecedent components of Aquinas’s mature view as well as to demonstrate his original and creative development. Therefore in the individual considerations I will continue to give comparative references each to the others.
2.1. In De Hebdomadibus: Substantiality and participation: how things are good

We begin with the Boethian problem: *how can substances be good in virtue of their existence without being good substantially?* This problem arises from two presuppositions to which Boethius and Aquinas are committed.

i. *All things are good insofar as they exist.* The Platonizing theology of Boethius’s age issues in this principle. Goodness is seen as a “transcendental,” which is to say, the goodness of a creature is *not accidental* in the way the other characteristics of the categories are, such as whiteness, tallness, etc., which may or may not inhere in a given subject. Goodness is associated with existence itself, which is not a categorical but rather an analogical concept.

ii. *Only God is good per essentiam.* This is an inference from the biblical principle/Christian dogma of creation *ex nihilo*. Creatures cannot be said to be good in virtue of their essence on pain of identifying them with the first goodness, which is God. God’s goodness must transcend that of creatures.

The terms driving the meaning in these propositions are derived from a particular ontology, largely Aristotelian, a shared element in scholastic thought. These require some basic attention.

For Aristotle the ten “categories” (κατηγορία) are the highest divisions/classes of being. The categories are substance, quantity, quality, relatives, somewhere, sometime, being in a position, having, acting, being acted upon. These also go by the names “things that are said or said of” (*τὰ λεγόμενα*), or predicates (*praedicamenta*). Of these ten, only the first, substance, can be a being *per se*, that is, a subsistent being “through/in itself.” Quantities, qualities, locations, etc. do not exist “in/by themselves” but only in subjects, that is, in “primary substances,” which are

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86 The work in question of Boethius, “De Hebdomadibus,” is a further explication at the request of a reader of a question in Boethius’s work Hebdomads (“group of seven”), now lost to us. Boethius himself tells us this in his opening, which is framed as a kind of personal letter, a *responsum* to a *dubium*: “You ask me to state and explain somewhat more clearly that obscure question in my Hebdomads concerning the manner in which substances are good in virtue of existence (modum quo substantiae in eo quod sint bona sint) without being substantial goods (cum non sint substantialia bona)” [Boethius, H. F. Stewart, Edwa


particular beings like ‘this man Socrates’ or ‘this horse Traveler.’ Primary substances are “not said-of (another subject) and not present-in (another subject).” All other categories besides substance have their being only in something else (in alio) and are therefore relational, and as such are expressions of accidental modes of being. Thus ‘being’ (ens) is also divided into substance and accident.

For medieval-scholastic ontology the term ‘transcendental’ in general means ‘surpassing the categories.’ The opposition is between transcendental (general) being and categorical (particular) being. What emerges in the thirteenth century is the awareness that metaphysical reason can “transcend” the categories, not in the sense that the transcendentals (maxima communia) exist per se beyond categorical being but in the sense that they “run through” (circumeunt) the whole of the categories. The four top-level transcendental predicates are being, one, true, and good (ens, unum, verum et bonum). With this propaedeutic in mind, let us look again at the two Boethian axioms.

i. All things are good insofar as they exist.
ii. Only God is good substantially (per essentiam).

Since Boethius knows that created things cannot be good merely “by accident” (i), he asks: Are created things good by participation or by substance?

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89 Secondary substances (“universals”), however, are “said-of (another subject) but not present-in (another subject).” Secondary subjects are “essential characteristics of primary substances,” e.g. it is an essential characteristic of Socrates that he is ‘man,’ (belongs to the class ‘man’, a “natural kind,” a real category of being in its objective actuality) such that ‘man’ is “said of” Socrates—Socrates is what he is essentially in virtue of belonging to the class ‘man.’

90 Jan Aertsen, Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 88-89. Cf. Aquinas, In V Metaphysics, lect. 9, 890: “A predicate is referred to a subject in a second way when the predicate is taken as being in the subject, and this predicate is in the subject either essentially and absolutely and as something flowing from its matter, and then it is quantity; or as something flowing from its form, and then it is quality; or it is not present in the subject absolutely but with reference to something else, and then it is relation.”


94 Cf. Aquinas, De veritate, q.1 a.1 sed contra 5: “What are predicated of a cause and of the effects of the cause are more united in the cause than in its effects—and more so in God than in creatures. But in God four predicates—being, the one, the true—are appropriated as follows: being, to the essence; the one, to the Father; the true, to the Son; and the good, to the Holy Spirit.”

They cannot be good by substance (per essentiam) (ii).
They cannot be good merely by participation, since what is good only by participation is not good in itself (per se ipsa), but merely by accident (per accidens).

But this result surely conflicts with axiom (i), “all things are good insofar as they exist.” How can something be good “insofar as it exists” and at the same time not be good “in itself” (per se ipsa)? Implied is the identification of ‘substantial’ with ‘essential.’ We should note that Boethius is thinking in terms of the Aristotelian predication scheme in which things are predicated in one of either two ways: per se (by essence), or per accidens (accidentally). This binary scheme, as we will ultimately see, places Boethius in a logical box that inhibits the application of participation to the problem of substantial goodness. In order to escape the box a further distinction is needed, an existential one that corrects the Aristotelian logic.

Further reinforcing the logical prohibition on substantial participation in the good are two more Boethian notions: 1) the axiom “to be and that which is are diverse” (diversum est esse et id quod est), and 2) the definition of participation, “‘That which is’ (quod est) is able to participate in something, but being itself (ipsum esse) in no way participates in anything. For participation comes about when something already exists; but something exists when it has received being.” As we should be starting to understand by now, for Boethius (following Plato), participation and substantiality are opposites. Participation refers to accidents of substances and not to common properties which follow upon being as such. “What is predicated of something per participationem is an accidental property that falls outside the substantial being of the subject.” The Platonists always had something of a problem with substantial unity of material beings: beings tended in various ways to be thought of as

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concatenations of participations with only an external principle of unity. As we will see momentarily, Aquinas, picking up on the solution that he takes Boethius to be pointing at, will come to deny the participation-substantiality opposition on Aristotelian grounds.

For Aquinas, the diversity of ‘that which is’ and ‘being’ are related to the two principles of being: 1) essence, 2) being/esse through which the essence exists. Aquinas has this in mind when he gives his own definition of participation: “Participation is, as it were, to take part in something; and so when something receives in a particular way that which pertains to another universally, it is said to participate in that thing” (my trans.).

There are for Aquinas three modes of participation relevant to the present problem:

i. *logical relations of species, genus, and individual*; e.g. Man participates animal, since man does not exhaust animal. Socrates participates man, since Socrates does not exhaust man.

ii. *matter-form/substance-accident relation*. Although substantial and accidental forms are universal in themselves, they are restricted by their receiving subjects. Thus the receiving principle is said to participate in the universal form, since the receiving principle restricts and thus individualizes the universal. Thus, matter participates in the universal substantial form resulting in the composed individual substance, e.g. Socrates; the individual participates in its accidents, e.g. Socrates participates in whiteness.

iii. *cause-effect relation*. Effects participate in their causes, especially when the effect is inferior in power to its cause.

Aquinas distinguishes the modes of participation in order to cultivate some possibility in the radical Boethian antinomy. As we saw above, Boethius views participation as a relation that falls outside of substantial being, only occurring in the accidental order. In showing how the species participates in the genus, Aquinas suggests that participation is possible in the substantial order as well. Aquinas does not attach ontological density to the species/genus/individual relationship. It remains logical. Yet by invoking it he opens the door to further lines of reasoning that could

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100 Aquinas, *In de hebdomadibus*, lect.2, n.24. “Est autem participare quasi partem capere; et ideo quando aliquid particulariter recipit id quod ad alterum pertinet, universaliter dicitur participare illud.”
demonstrate how a thing could be said to be both good “by participation” and good “essentially/substantially/per se.” As te Velde notes, Aquinas is developing Boethius along Aristotelian lines, since Plato had said that genus and specific difference are reducible to distinct ideas, and thus genus and specific difference are not brought together in a substantial identity. Thus, for Plato, a man is really a bundle of participations—both in “animal” and in “biped”, for instance. Aristotle, however, reduces genus and species to substantial identity in any actual creature—genus and species have no existence apart from creatures, while in creatures they are substantially united. If this is a truer picture of reality, then the Platonic opposition between participation and substance is destroyed, and what can be predicated by participation can also be predicated substantially.

The solution that Boethius offers to the antinomy in De Hebdomadibus is enlightening for Aquinas, because it does show how beings can be good on the substantial level without their goodness coming into identity with their essence. In fact, in DV 21.4 Aquinas summarizes the Boethian position again for us.

And so it is that the essence of God, who is the last end of creatures, suffices for God to be called good by reason of it; but when the essence of a creature is given, the thing is not yet called good except from the relation to God by reason of which it has the character of a final cause. In this sense it is said that a creature is not good essentially but by participation. For from one point of view this is so inasmuch as the essence itself, in our understanding of it, is considered as something other than that relation to God by which it is constituted a final cause and is directed to God as its end. But from another point of view a creature can be called essentially good inasmuch as the essence of a creature does not exist without a relation to God’s goodness. This is Boethius’ meaning.\(^\text{101}\)

If we consider the creature in itself according to its essence but abstracting from its existence, then we see that it is not good “essentially” because goodness does not belong to the definition of the creature—only in God is goodness identical with essence and thus, if we may, “definitional.” Now, we know that when two things are possessing of the same property, and one

\(^{101}\) Aquinas, De veritate q.21, a.1 ad 1.
has this property by essence, the other must be said to have it by participation. When considering
the essence alone of the creature we can only call the creature good “by participation” where
participation is derived from the relation of the creature to God as final cause. But “from another
point of view” (per alium modum)—that is, considering the creature in its actuality, as actually
existing—it must be good because it could not exist, become actual, without this relation to the
divine goodness. Boethius has discovered what we might call a necessary accident.102 It seems
that we know that the creature is after a fashion “essentially good” by inference from its
derivation,103 which is a relation and therefore an accident albeit a necessary one: from knowing
this necessary relation to God—an accidental property in itself—we nevertheless know that a
creature cannot be actual without this relation. Thus we can say that a creature is good “insofar
as it exists.”

Now to make creatures “good insofar as they exist” was always the goal of Boethius, but this
good-by-relation is not the sort of essential goodness Aquinas is looking for. The fact that we
have discovered the necessary—though-accidental goodness of the creature by way of an
ingenious inference—albeit within the context of considering the creature existentially and not
merely according to its essence—is still insufficient. We haven’t yet gotten down to the
metaphysical-structural analysis such that the creature’s substantial goodness can be shown to
come about formally. Aquinas needs to unfold the metaphysical structure of created being in

102 A “necessary accident” is a property that does not belong to the essence considered in itself but that the essence cannot be
instantiated without. Compare this passage, Aquinas, Questiones Disputatae de anima, a.12 ad 7. “Now the powers of the soul
are accidents in the sense of properties. Therefore, although the essence of the soul is understood without them, still the existence
of the soul is neither possible nor intelligible without them.”

103 Boethius, Quodmodo substantiale in eo quod sint bonae (ed. H. F. Stewart, Edward Kennard Rand, S. J. Tester, The
theological tractates [Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1973], 47). “For the first good, since it exists, is good in
virtue of its existence; but the secondary good, since it is derived from that whose existence is itself good, is itself also good.” Cf.
Aquinas, In de hebdomadibus, lect.4, n.62. “The solution of Boethius to this problem is that the being of the first good is good
according to its proper formality (proprium rationem), and this is because the nature and essence of the first good is nothing other
than goodness; however, the being of the second good is indeed good, not according to the formality (rationem) of its own
essence, because its essence is not goodness itself, but rather humanity, or some other essence in that sense; rather the second
good has its goodness from a relation (ex habitudine) to the first good as its ultimate end” (my trans.).
relation to God the first cause in order to show how, in God’s communication of his being to creatures, he also communicates his goodness such that beings have a real, metaphysical participation on the substantial level in the divine goodness by means of immanent form. Aquinas must overcome the Platonic opposition between participation and substantiality. Rudi te Velde thinks that we see in DV 21,4 even in the second objection a formulation of the problem as Aquinas sees it.

But a creature is called good in reference to the first goodness because everything is called good from the fact of its flowing from the first good, as Boethius says. Hence the creature is not denominated good from any formal goodness found in it but from the divine goodness.104

It is a question of “whether God’s goodness can be viewed as the denominating form whereby all things are formally called ‘good.’”105 Aquinas realizes that for creatures to be considered truly “good in themselves” they must be shown to be good “formally”, that is, on account of an immanent form which grants an intrinsic relation to the good. We must note the Aristotelian principle of formal immanence at work here: the goodness of creatures must be formally received as an image and likeness of the first good, which is God. Aquinas imposes the Aristotelian doctrine of causation on the neo-Platonic principle bonum est diffusivum sui. The diffusion (diffundere/defluere), a “pouring out/down” of the good from the first good to creatures entails on the part of the first good the imparting of a likeness (similitudo) of itself to creatures, a likeness that is formally constitutive of and thus immanent in creatures. In normal usage, even in philosophical usage, diffusion is identified with the efficient (agent) causation of Aristotle: efficient causes produce similitudes or formal likenesses of themselves in their effects. But Aquinas notes that this sort of diffusion really applies in a certain way to any kind of cause. In

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104 Aquinas, De veritate, q.21, a.4, ob. 2.
the case of the good what is intended is not efficient but final causation. Efficient causation refers to being, whereas final causation refers to the good. God is thus said to be the efficient cause of all things with respect to being, and the final (and exemplary) causes of things with respect to the good. What must be achieved is a linking up of efficient and final (and exemplary) causality in God. It must be metaphysically demonstrated and not merely asserted (Augustine) or obliquely inferred (Boethius) that “being and goodness are convertible.” Only then will we be able to see that God’s communication of being to creatures is truly also a communication of the good—good because being. This is what see in DV 21.4.

Every agent is found to effect something like itself (omne agens invenitur sibi simile agere). If, therefore, the first goodness is the effective cause of all goods, it must imprint its likeness upon the things produced; and so each thing will be called good by reason of an inherent form because of the likeness of the highest good implanted in it, and also because of the first goodness taken as the exemplar and effective cause of all created goodness. In this respect the opinion of Plato can be held.

In the passage just above the one we’ve cited here Aquinas sets forth a version of the Platonic position which he will reject on Aristotelian grounds. Aquinas will not accept a Platonic ‘form of the separate good’ insofar as this form cannot be identified with the first goodness, but, since for Aquinas it must be so identified, the good is indeed separate. Though the good has only been understood by Boethius as an exemplary and final cause, Aquinas will now

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106 Aquinas, *De veritate*, q.21, a.1 ad 4. “Though, according to the proper use of the word, to pour out seems to imply the operation of an efficient cause, yet taken broadly it can imply the status of any cause, as do [the words] ‘to influence’ (influere), and ’to make’ (facere), etc. When good is said to be of its very notion diffusive, however, diffusion is not to be understood as implying the operation of an efficient cause but rather the status of a final cause.”
107 Aquinas, *In I Sententias*, d.8, q.1, a.3. “Bonum habet rationem causae finalis, esse autem rationem exemplaris et effectivae tantum in Deo.”
108 Aquinas, *De veritate*, q.21, a.4 resp.
109 Aquinas, *De veritate*, q.21, a.4 resp. “This Platonic position was in a sense followed by the Porretans. They said that we predicate good of a creature either simply, as when we say, “Man is good,” or with some qualification, as when we say, “Socrates is a good man.” A creature is called good simply, they said, not by any inherent goodness but by the first goodness—as if good taken absolutely and in general were the divine goodness; but when it creature is called a good something-or-other, it is so denominated from a created goodness, because particular created goods are like particular ideas for Plato. But this opinion is refuted by the Philosopher in a number of ways. He argues that the quiddities and forms of things are in particular things themselves and not separated from them, and he shows this in various ways. He also argues more specifically that, granting that there are ideas, that position does not apply to good, since good is not predicated univocally of goods; and where the predication was not univocal, Plato did not assign a single idea. This is how the Philosopher proceeds against him in the *Ethics.*”
say that the first goodness must also have an effective causality about it. What Aquinas makes explicit is that the created inherent form of goodness must be *effectively* caused by the first goodness in creatures. Thus are efficient, final, and exemplary causality linked in God and we are made to understand how the good and being are convertible: every agent effects something similar to itself. There is a likeness to God by the immanent created form: “every form is a certain likeness of God.”110

Aquinas continues on to present a comprehensive solution in *De ver.* q.21 a.5. In this article he incorporates and synthesizes the insights of the previous tradition—Augustine, *Liber de causis,* and Boethius. These three authors present complementary aspects of the structure of participation in the good such that Aquinas synthesizes them, yielding a three-fold structure of created goodness.111

*Augustine.* God’s goodness is identical with his unchangeable essence, whereas the goodness of creatures is changeable, that is, it admits of degrees of perfection such that ‘being’ and ‘being good’ are diverse for creatures. Creatures increase in goodness on account of superadded (superadditum) perfections and thus *perfections in the accidental order* (the virtues). On Aquinas’s definition of participation it follows that one thing which possess some perfection accidentally (and is therefore changeable with regard to it) which another possesses essentially is said to participate in that other thing. Thus we can conclude that the creature is good by participation on account of its mutability in goodness. The goodness of the creature is a participation in the goodness of God, who is good by his essence.112 And so the Augustinian route does indeed grant participation in the divine goodness, but this is not shown to come about

110 Aquinas, *De veritate,* q.21, a.4 resp.
by immanent form, and so Augustine’s argument is unsatisfactory all by itself to explain the created goodness in relation to God—even though Augustine affirms that things are good insofar as they exist, he cannot show this metaphysically.

_Liber de causis_. There is a distinction to be made between the essence considered absolutely and the essence considered as having being (esse). God’s essence is identical with his being.\(^{113}\) For creatures absolutely considered there is a non-identity between essence and being—a creature is not its being but receives it from without, from the first being. Thus a creature has being by participation (is relatively good), and can be said to be non-relatively good at the same time. Aquinas has shown that creatures are both substantially good and good by participation. First he shows the convertibility of ‘good’ and ‘being/to be’ by demonstrating first that ‘to be’ is the universal perfection, and ‘good’ is that which is perfective of an entity. Then, by making a distinction on the substantial level between the essence of a being and its ‘to be’ (act of being or esse), Aquinas shows that insofar as a being has esse by participation it also has goodness by participation. Creatures are substantially good insofar as they are good in virtue of their existence (formal act of being) and thus they are good intrinsically. But creatures also participate in goodness, since they receive their being from another (ab alio), that is, the first good. Thus, Rudi te Velde: “Thomas reconciles the opposition in Boethius between substance and participation by extending participation to the being (esse) of the substance itself. He thus goes beyond the accidental character of participation and the equation of participation with ‘accidentally.’”\(^{114}\)

_Boethius_. Aquinas considers the main argument of Boethius to be a proof for the thesis that “the good has the character of an end” (bonum habet rationem finis). Accepting this thesis and its

\(^{113}\) _Cf. Liber de causis_, Prop. 9, which, as Aquinas says in _De Ver._ q.21, a.5, must be taken to implicate the identity in God between essence and esse. “God, however, is goodness through his essence (per essentiam), insofar as his essence is his esse (in quantum eius essentia est suum esse). And this is seen in the intention of the philosopher of the _Liber de causis_, who says that only the divine goodness is pure goodness” (my trans., cited in Rudi A. te Velde, _Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas_ [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995], 28fn16).

argument, Aquinas simply notices that whatever is ordered to a good outside itself participates in that good. The *ultima ratio boni* of creatures is God, whereas God’s *ratio boni* is *per seipsum*—God is good in himself.

We can now summarize Aquinas’s appropriation of the three-fold tradition of the goodness of creatures. “Something can be called good both (1) in virtue of its being and (2) in virtue of added properties (propietas) or (3) by relation (habitudo). Thus a man is called good insofar as he is a man; or insofar as he is just and chaste; or insofar as he is ordained to ultimate happiness.”115 The key addition of Aquinas is from that of the *Liber*, the factor of substantial goodness. The goodness of the created substance is grounded in its *esse*, its act of being.

2.2. *Summa Theologiae* Ia, q. 5; q. 44: securing the convertibility of ‘bonum’ and ‘ens’

As we have seen, Aquinas has explicated Boethius’s good-by-relation in such a way that goodness is seen as grounded in the being of created substances which desire the first good as their final end. As te Velde notes, however, what is required is not merely a *proof* of the intrinsic goodness of being but also an *explanation* of being’s goodness-by-nature.116 Fundamentally, being is found to be good by inference in *De ver*. 21. Yet the structure of the goodness of being is left undisclosed. Recall the partial non-identity of goodness and being in the finite order. Unlike ‘being,’ ‘good’ adds something definitive to our conception of the essence, namely, a relation of final cause, and thus goodness is said *per participationem*. Since creatures can be understood without goodness (i.e. without relation to their final cause), being and good are partially non-identical. The fact that *in actuality* no created nature exists without relation to the

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first good still leaves untouched the distinction between the “the formal reason why” a created substance is said to be and the added relation to the first good by which it is called good.

There remains in the “first solution” of De. ver. 21 a latent extrinsic character to the first good on the part of creatures, since it has not yet been shown how being and good signify the same res, which is what is required to secure convertibility. Once this difficulty is overcome the metaphysical structure of created being in its relation to God the creator can be truly unfolded, an unfolding that occurs in the mature period of Aquinas, the era of the Summa theologiae.

2.2.1. Summa Theologiae I,5: esse as universal perfection; the self-denomination of the good

What Aquinas sets out to show in ST 1,5 is that both the terms ‘good’ and ‘being’ signify (not merely ‘are predicated of’) the same res each according to its own ratio. Te Velde summarizes. “So the argument must effect a kind of transition from the ratio boni to the ratio entis through a middle term which refers exactly to the same res of both terms.”

This middle term is ‘perfect’ (perfectum). Every desire for the good is a desire to be perfect, and the desire to be perfect is a desire to be in act. A given perfection represents act in a certain respect.

“Goodness and being are in fact the same, but differ only according to ratio, which is made clear in the following way: For the ratio of the good consists in this, that it is something desirable, whence Aristotle says in the first book of his Ethics that ‘the good is that which all things desire.’ Now it is plain that something is desirable only insofar as it is perfect (perfectum), for everything desires its own perfection. Now something is perfect insofar as it is in act, whence it is clearly the case insofar as something is good, it is also a being, for ‘to be’ (esse) is the actuality of every being (res), as has been shown above [q.3, a.4; q.4, a.1]. Whence it is clear that ‘good’ and ‘being’ are really the same (idem secundum rem), only

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‘good’ represents being-as-desirable (rationem appetibilis), which ‘being’ (ens) does not represent.”¹²⁰

A given perfection represents act in a certain respect. The metaphysical move is from good-as-relation (De ver. 21) to good as reduced to being-in-act (ST). By means of the middle term perfectum Aquinas has given that which was to be demonstrated, that a thing is understood as a being in virtue of the same thing by which it is understood as desirable and therefore good. “[T]o be in act is to be perfect, and to be perfect is to be good, as each thing desires to be perfected.”¹²¹

And since what is desirable is good (good is simply defined as what is desirable) it follows that to be in act is good.

Thus, every desire is a desire for a particular esse (wisdom, chastity, etc.), and so it follows that what is good is always a particular being (ens), which is desirable per se and thus good per se. Unlike in De ver. 21 this text in the ST does not use ‘good’ as a relative term, that is, in relation to some other thing. Things are perfect in themselves, in particular ways, as beings, that is, they are perfect insofar as their actuality is completed.¹²²

Thus Aquinas answers the original problem of Boethius, how a substance can be essentially (i.e. non-accidentally) good without its goodness coinciding with its essence (per se ipsa) in the manner of the first principle. Or, alternatively, how can a substance be good by participation and also good intrinsically, on the level of substance? The solution of Aquinas involves the distinction between essence and esse on the substantial level: insofar as it has esse by participation it also has goodness by participation.

And so in ST I,5 we saw that the transition from good to being is effected by means of this middle term ‘perfect,’ and that what Aquinas intends to signify under the banner of perfection is

¹²⁰ Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Ia, q.5, a.1 resp.
nothing less than ‘to be’ itself: esse is understood here as the universal perfection—“To be (esse) is the actuality of every being.” With this move “the idea of participation acquires its true metaphysical significance” for Aquinas, as he has moved “towards a true metaphysics of being, in which primacy is assigned to esse as act of the essence [actus essendi].” 123 We can scan back to ST I,4 for a fuller expression of the notion.

“The transcendentality of the good. The terms ‘being’, ‘one’, and ‘good’ are “transcendentals”—a category of terms which are most universal and transcend the special categories of finite being. Because of the convertibility of ‘one’ and ‘good’ with ‘being’, these terms belong to any being regardless of special category.

According to Aquinas, while the Platonic notion that natural species also exist as subsisting ideas in no way harmonizes with Christian faith or the truth of things (ratio fidei non consonat nec veritati), the postulate of Plato that there is a separate existence for the maxime communia (de primo rerum principio), or transcendentals, is most true and harmonious with faith (verissima est eorum opinio et fidei Christianae consona). 125 The difference here can be labeled as the difference between the physical and metaphysical orders of conception. Since natural species

124 Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Ia, q.4, a.1 ad 3.
125 Aquinas, In De divinis nominibus, Proemium: “Not only by abstraction of this sort were the Platonici thinking about the ultimate species of natural things, but also about the transcendentals (maxime communia), which are ‘good,’ ‘one,’ and ‘being’ (ens). They laid down that there is a first ultimate (unum primum) which is the very essence of goodness and unity and being, which we call God, such that all things are called good or one or a being (entia) by derivation from that first ultimate (unum primum). Whence that first one was called the good itself or the good per se or the principle good or the beyond-good (super bonum) or the goodness of all things or also goodness or essence or substance, according to the same explanation regarding the separated humanity. This reasoning of the Platonists is not harmonious with faith nor with the truth, insofar as it posits the separate existences of the species of natural things, but insofar as what they say concerns the first principle of all things, their opinion is most true and harmonious with the Christian faith. Wherefore Dionysius calls God at various times the good itself or the beyond-good or the principle good or the goodness of all goods. And similarly he calls God the beyond-life, the beyond-substance the “thearchic deity,” by which he means the principle deity, because even in certain creatures the name of deity is received by a certain participation” (my trans.).
cannot be conceived (have no intelligibility) apart from matter, their consideration belongs properly to physics. Unlike the ideas of natural species which only exist in the mind as abstractions (their corresponding concrete realities existing only in matter), the maxima communia can indeed be thought to exist in actuality separate from matter.\textsuperscript{126}

2.2.2. Summa theologicae q.44: the two-tiered hierarchy of being—creator and created

In the first article of \textit{ST} I,44 Aquinas relates all things other than God to God as necessarily created by God. The argument is from participation.

It must be said that every being in any way existing is from God. For whatever is found in anything by participation, must be caused in it by that to which it belongs essentially, as iron becomes ignited by fire. Now it has been shown above (q.3 a.4) when treating of the divine simplicity that God is the essentially self-subsisting Being; and also it was shown (q.11 a.3, a.4) that subsisting being must be one; as, if whiteness were self-subsisting, it would be one, since whiteness is multiplied by its recipients. Therefore all beings apart from God are not their own being, but are beings by participation. Therefore it must be that all things which are diversified by the diverse participation of being, so as to be more or less perfect, are caused by one First Being, Who possesses being most perfectly.\textsuperscript{127}

The reasoning in the passage can be seen, with a bit of analysis, to depend upon the distinction between essence and esse, where the essence is understood as the definition of a being, that is, under what formal respect it is constituted, while the esse is understood as the act of being by which a being is in fact a being. Aquinas begins by employing the “via Aristotelis” which states that whatever is in many things in a less perfect way by participation is attributed to them by some one thing which has it most perfectly. This principle Aquinas has worked out in \textit{De potentia} q.3, a.5. Building on his prior proof of the divine simplicity, Aquinas says again that God is a being by his essence—in God essence and act of being (esse) are identical. We should note that this identity still depends upon the distinction, however. Nevertheless, as there can be only one being whose essence it is ‘to be’ (just as there is only one essence of whiteness), all


\textsuperscript{127} Aquinas, \textit{Summa theologicae}, Ia, q.44, a.1 resp.
other beings receiving their ‘to be’ from that first being in whose being they are participants. Thus, the first being is the total cause of their total being.

Also at work is the distinction, found in Boethius, that beings are either by essence (per essentiam) or by participation (per participationem), yielding the thesis that God is being by his essence and creatures are beings by participation. Finally, there is the note that all beings other than God exist in a hierarchy of participations in being such that the diversity of being is measured in terms of more or less (perfectius vel minus perfecte) according to proximity to the first being which is the most perfect (primo ente quod perfectissime est).

We can now sum up the participatory argument for creation ex nihilo using the ‘intensive principle of being.’ There is one uncaused cause which exists essentially (per se) and this cause is the total cause of all other things the existence of which depends radically and utterly on the First Cause. The First Cause is known classically in three ways (triplex via):

1. *Ratio Platonis*. Many-to-one. Whatever is common to many things is the effect of one cause.

   “First, if in a number of things we find something that is common to all, we must conclude that this something was the effect of some one cause: for it is not possible that to each one by reason of itself this common something belongs, since each one by itself is different from the others: and a diversity of causes produces a diversity of effects. Seeing then that being is found to be common to all things, which are by themselves distinct from one another, it follows of necessity that they must come into being not by themselves, but by the action of some cause. Seemingly this is Plato’s argument, since he required every multitude to be preceded by unity not only as regards number but also in reality.”

2. *Ratio philosophi* (Aristotle). Imperfect-to-perfect. Whatever is in many things in a less perfect way by participation is attributed to them by some one thing which has it most perfectly.

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129 Aquinas, *De potentia*, q.3, a.5 resp. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.65, a.1 resp. “Hence whenever in different things some one thing common to all is found, it must be that these different things receive that one thing from some one cause, as different bodies that are hot receive their heat from fire. But being is found to be common to all things, however otherwise different. There must, therefore, be one principle of being from which all things in whatever way existing have their being, whether they are invisible and spiritual, or visible and corporeal.” Te Velde discovers that this principle is also noted in *In de causis*, prop. 16.
“The second argument is that whenever something is found to be in several things by participation in various degrees, it must be derived by those in which it exists imperfectly from that one in which it exists most perfectly: because where there are positive degrees of a thing so that we ascribe it to this one more and to that one less, this is in reference to one thing to which they approach, one nearer than another: for if each one were of itself competent to have it, there would be no reason why one should have it more than another. Thus fire, which is the extreme of heat, is the cause of heat in all things hot. Now there is one being most perfect and most true: which follows from the fact that there is a mover altogether immovable and absolutely perfect, as philosophers have proved. Consequently all other less perfect beings must needs derive being therefrom. This is the argument of the Philosopher” (Aristotle, *Meta.* ii, I).\(^{130}\)

3. *Ratio Avicennae. Per alterum-to-per se.* “All which is by something else (per alterum) must be reduced to that which is by itself (per se) as to its cause.” Making use of this principle, Aquinas says that “one must assume a being (ens) that is its being itself” ( ipsum suum esse).\(^{131}\)

“All which is by something else (per alterum) must be reduced to that which is by itself (per se) as to its cause.” Making use of this principle, Aquinas says that “one must assume a being (ens) that is its being itself” ( ipsum suum esse).\(^{131}\)

“The third argument is based on the principle that whatsoever is through another is to be reduced to that which is of itself. Wherefore if there were a per se heat, it would be the cause of all hot things that have heat by way of participation. Now there is a being that is its own being: and this follows from the fact that there must needs be a being that is pure act and wherein there is no composition. Hence from that one being all other beings that are not their own being, but have being by participation, must needs proceed. This is the argument of Avicenna (in *Metaph.* viii, 6; ix, 8). Thus reason proves and faith holds that all things are created by God.”

All three of the above “ways” arrive at the First Cause as soon as it is grasped that an infinite line of causal reference leads to absurdity. But the only way to escape the vain appeal to infinity is to appeal to a “First Cause” which is most one, perfect, and “in/of itself” (per se) such that no further cause need or can be sought.

The argument depends on the prior condition of the metaphysical standpoint. Without the recognition of the creation of prime matter, the metaphysical standpoint has not been fully achieved. It is still possible to posit an eternal universe on the presupposition that matter is uncreated, and hence this remains a problem for Aristotle. As te Velde points out, Aquinas (*S.T.* 44,2/*De pot.* 3,5) sees that the recognition of prime matter “marks the transition” from a physical

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\(^{130}\) Cf. Aquinas, *De potentia*, q.3, a.5:

\(^{131}\) Cf. Aquinas, *De potentia*, q.3, a.5.
to a metaphysical understanding of being. In asking the question “whether prime matter is created by God” Aquinas seeks to establish “the conceptual perspective in which a truly universal causality can be conceived.” This is because from a metaphysical point of view (from the standpoint of looking at being as such) matter is not merely the “irreducible substrate of all natural things”, as it is in physics. In physics, “matter is an ultimate cause of nature which cannot be accounted for by any process of becoming.” But even matter is not ultimately ultimate, since as the universal substrate of physical nature it makes sense to ask whether it too is created. Aquinas will show that, considered from the metaphysical standpoint, matter, as that universal aspect of physical being, is a part of being that requires reduction to a first cause.

2.3. In Liber de causis, propositions 1 and 3: the intensive principle of being

Aquinas, symphonic thinker that he is, desires to demonstrate the possibility of a Neoplatonic monotheism, which he has taken Ps-Denys to have advanced. Aquinas seeks a reduction of the Neoplatonic multi-layered hierarchy of universal causes to one (God), the first being in which all beings participate. Rudi A. te Velde brings forward three salient points in the Liber de causis which note “the specific priority of the higher cause,” and bring into relief the intensive principle of esse.

“The operation by which the second cause causes the effect is caused by the first cause, since the first cause helps the second cause in that it causes it to operate.”

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135 Aquinas, In de causis, prop. 3. “Dionysius, however, corrects this view [of the Platonici] insofar as they posit a succession of different separated forms, which they call ‘gods,’ such that there is one ‘goodness per se,’ and another ‘being per se’ and yet another ‘life per se,’ and so on for all the other separate forms. Rather it is the case that all of those so-called ‘separate forms’ are essentially to be identified with the first cause of all things by which things participate in all of the various perfections, and thus we do not recognize many gods, but rather one God” (my trans.).
137 Aquinas, In de causis, prop. 1 (my trans).
“The first cause impresses itself more emphatically in the effect that does the second cause, and therefore its impression inheres more deeply and thus fades more slowly.”

“The second cause is not active in its effect except by the power of the first cause,” which is to say, as te Velde puts it, that “the power of any second cause is insufficient to produce its effect unless it is mediated with its effect by a superior cause which therefore must act immediately and most intimately.”

We must unpack the background and implications of these notions. The classical world is a hierarchical world. Aquinas inherits the basic world-model and makes the most of the pagan background by translating it into his Christianized metaphysical vision. The term ‘hierarchy’ (ἱεράρχης, “priest, president of sacred rites,” ἱεραρχία, “systematic order,” from ἱερός, “holy, divine, sacred,” and ἀρχω, “primacy, origin, source”) is a coinage of the sixth century Christian theologian Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite. Its metaphysical usage refers fundamentally, as reflected in its etymology, to the ordering of sources of being with reference to their origin, cause and effect, originally from within the context of religious rites. The Neoplatonic vision includes a theological realm of universal transcendent causes, hierarchically arranged, and Aquinas reduces this cosmos to one. There is likewise for the Neoplatonists an order of corresponding effects in its mirroring the celestial hierarchy, and this too is reduced by Aquinas to univocal subordination to the first cause, “univocal,” because, with relation to the First Cause, the created order is one in being insofar as its being is composite, finite, and categorical. “The Neoplatonic hierarchy of causes,” says te Velde, “is...reduced by Thomas to the dual relation of transcendental causality (creation, primary causality) on the one hand and categorical causality (secondary causality) within the realm of nature on the other.”

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138 Aquinas, In de causis, prop. 1 (my trans.).
139 Aquinas, In de causis, prop. 1 (my trans.).
Aquinas sees in the notion of hierarchy a “principle of intelligibility” represented by the Neoplatonic rule ‘the more universal effects must be reduced to the more universal and prior causes.’ In applying this rule to the special case of being a problem has arisen to which we’ve already alluded: being is just not merely different from other causes by being “more universal and more prior,” as if the only difference is one of degree such that being sits at the top of a univocal hierarchy, as in Neoplatonism. As te Velde notes, “the hierarchy in Aquinas’s interpretation is divided by a radical distinction between first and universal cause on the one hand and the whole (created) order of secondary and particular causes on the other hand. And this distinction is reflected in the ontological structure of reality by the difference between the (categorical) form, which can be considered...according to species and genus, and the (transcendental) being, which is the common actuality of all forms. Compared to being as such, all forms are particular as they constitute the particular mode of being.”

For Aquinas, then, the hierarchy, the divine kingdom (sacer principatus) is at its most fundamental expression a two-tiered reality: God>creation, i.e. “ipse princeps, et multitudo sub principe.” The hierarchy is compared to a kingdom under a prince, and just as in any principality there are delegations of power in varying degrees of participation in the power of the prince, so in the divine kingdom is the created order designed in a goodly wisdom by degrees of participation in the power of God, who is the fullness of the power of being (virtuti essendi plenitudine). The notion of hierarchy in Aquinas is controlled by two principles, that of likeness and that of difference, and augmented or balanced by a third, that of dependence.

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144 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.108, a.1 resp. “Hierarchy (hierarchia) means a ‘sacred’ principality, as above explained. Now principality includes two things: the prince himself and the multitude ordered under the prince.”
three principles are interpreted in terms of participation. Noticing in the *Physics* that Aristotle points out the likeness produced in effects by univocal agents, Aquinas adds that even equivocal (analogical) agents produce “some” (aliquam) likenesses of themselves in their effects “insofar as they can” (secundum quod possunt). Thus, the principle of likeness is the sharing of the subjects in the power of the prince. The principle of difference is elucidated by comparing the effect to the cause in respect to the inferiority of the power of the effect in relation to that of the cause. The hierarchical relation of the First Cause to the created order is presented by likeness-difference-dependence in a participatory manner par excellence in Aquinas’s commentary on the *Liber de causis*.

**Principle of likeness**  
*In de causis* lect. 3 “Every effect participates in some way in the power of its cause.”  
*In de causis* lect. 9 “The power of the effect depends upon the power of the cause.”  
*In de causis* lect. 12 “The cause is present in the effect by the mode of its causation.”  
*In de causis* lect. 18 “There is in any genus a first cause from which the other causes of the genus derive.”

**Principle of difference**  
*In de causis* Prooemium “The cause is more intelligible than its effects.”  
*In de causis* lect. 9 “The cause is always better than what is caused.”  
*In de causis* lect. 6 “A cause which exceeds its effects can never be embodied in them.”  
*In de causis* lect. 12 “The cause is in the effect in the mode of the effect, while the effect is in the cause in the mode of the cause.”

**Principle of dependence**  
*In de causis* lect. 18 “The First Cause is the ground for the subsistence and efficacy of all other causes.”  
*In de causis* lect. 9 “In intelligences and souls and natures having power participated from another (ab alio), the powers of the secondary cause are participated by the power of the first cause which is not participated from another but is itself ‘the cause of every power.’”

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147 Aquinas, *In II Physics*, lect. 11, n.2. “…in agentibus univocis, in quibus agens facit sibi simile secundum speciem…”  
148 Aquinas, *In II Physics*, lect. 11, n.2. “…participant aliquam similitudinem eius secundum quod possunt.”  
2.4. *Quodlibet II, q.2, a.1. Esse from accident to actuality: the participation-structure of being*

The question is on the being of angels. Aquinas crafts a definition of accident that is unconventional and seemingly an attempt to have two mutually exclusive principles in effect at once. First, he affirms that the being of the created substance must be an accident, since anything whatever lying outside a thing’s essence is accidental to it. But being is a strange kind of accident, as it turns out, in that it is not related to the substance *as* an accident but rather as its actuality. But let us begin from the very top of the question and work through it as the problem unfolds in the text.

The question is “Whether an angel is composed of essence and being (esse) in the manner of a substance? He answers in the affirmative, following the *Liber de causis*. The first objection reads:

For the essence of an angel is the angel itself, because the quiddity of a simple thing is the simple thing itself. If, therefore, an angel were composed of being and essence, it would be composed of itself and another. But this is incoherent. So it is not composed of being and essence in the manner of a substance.

The background of the objection’s argument runs like this: an angel, though a creature, is a pure “subsisting form”\(^{150}\) and as such it does not come into composition with matter.\(^ {151}\) The interlocutor does not deny being to the angel but seems rather to assume that the angel has being simply in virtue of the form that it is, such that the angel would be like God in this respect: its being is the same as its essence. This Aquinas will deny, because the act of being is not limited in itself but in subjects,\(^ {152}\) such that creatures, which are not their being, are receivers of being and therefore the being of creatures is limited. Aquinas gives a version of this principle

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\(^{151}\) Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.50, a.2.

\(^{152}\) Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.7, a.1: “If, however, any created forms are not received into matter, but are self-subsisting, as some think is the case with angels, these will be relatively infinite, inasmuch as such kinds of forms are not terminated, nor contracted by any matter. But because a created form thus subsisting has being, and yet is not its own being, it follows that its being is received and contracted to a determinate nature (receptum et contractum ad determinatam naturam). Hence it cannot be absolutely infinite.”
immediately after the second objection, in the *sed contra* of *Quodlibet II*,2,1: “for no creature is its being but rather is something which has being.” Thus even a creaturely subsisting form is composed of essence and act of being (esse). Aquinas will explain how such a substance can be composed. In order to do this he employs the notion of participation: being “can be predicated of something in two ways,” either “by essence” (uno modo essentialiter) or “by participation” (alio modo per participationem). Here he makes an illustration with light (lux). If there were some “separated light” (lux separata) then light would be predicated of the separated light essentially—separated light would just be light itself. But we say that light is predicated of some body or other, by which we mean that some essence which is essentially non-light nevertheless is luminous because it participates in light, in luminescence. Just as the lux separata would be light itself *essentialiter,* light “subsisting and absolute” (subsistens et absolutum), so is separated being *subsistens et absolutum,* and this subsisting and absolute being is God. However, ‘to be’ (esse) “is predicated of any creature in the manner of participation, for no creature is its being but rather is something which has being.” The next step is crucial:

Whenever something is predicated of another in the manner of participation, it is necessary (oportet) that there be something in the latter besides that in which it participates. And therefore, in any creature the creature itself which has being and its very being are other, and this is what Boethius says in *De hebdomadibus,* that ‘being and what is are diverse’ (aliud est esse et id quod est) in all entities except the first.

The distinction in question is that between *esse et id quod est:* the ‘act of being’ (esse) and the thing itself that exists—the ‘that which is’ (id quod est)—are different in all things except God, including even separated forms (angels). This leads us directly to the issue of essence-esse composition in creatures: even in angels—essences/forms existing purely (not in matter)—there

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153 Aquinas, *Questiones Quodlibetales II,* q.2, a.1 resp.
154 Aquinas, *Questiones Quodlibetales II,* q.2, a.1 resp.
is composition of the essence and the act of being, for ‘to be,’ as in any created essence, is not included in the definition of the angelic essence.

Something is participated in two ways. In one way it is participated in as though belonging to the substance of the thing participating, as a genus is participated in by a species of it. However, a creature does not participate in being in this way for that belongs to the substance of a thing which enters into its definition, but being (ens) is not included in the definition of a creature because it is neither a genus nor a difference. So it is participated in as something not belonging to the thing’s essence. And therefore, the question “Is it?” (an est) is different from the question “What is it?” (quid est). So, since all that is outside a thing’s essence may be called an accident; the being which pertains to the question “Is it?” is an accident. Therefore, the Commentator [Avicenna] says in Metaphysica that this proposition, “Socrates is,” is an accidental predication when it signifies either a thing’s being (entitatem) or the truth of a proposition.

Up to this point Aquinas’s argumentation is in perfect harmony with both Boethius and Avicenna. But being (ens), since it includes the thing which has being, “signifies the real essence and is divided by the ten categories…; ‘being’ is not an accidental predicate in the sense that it refers solely to the esse which lies outside the essence; [but rather] it signifies the whole of the essence and its being.”155 As te Velde argues, in the end Aquinas will simply not allow there to be any substantial composition in substances. We see in the response to the second objection the most important contribution of Quodlibet II,2,1 for our understanding of Aquinas’s notion of the essence-esse composition of creatures. The second objection runs thus.

No accident enters into the substantial composition of a substance. But an angel’s being is an accident, for Hilary attributes properly to God in De trinitate that ‘being is not an accident in him but is subsisting truth.’ Therefore, an angel is not composed of essence and being in the manner of an essence.

So, says Aquinas,

Being (esse) is an accident, not as though related accidentally to a substance, but as the actuality of any substance. Hence God himself, who is his own actuality, is his own being.156

156 Aquinas, Quodlibet II, q.2, a.1 ad 2.
For te Velde this is a “groping” towards the “right formulation” with which to synthesize Aristotle and Avicenna. What Aquinas is looking for is this: Not a substantial composition of two forms (essence and esse) but rather a composition of a form/substance and the actuality by which it exists as a being. Aquinas has clearly rejected, in principle, the Avicennian notion of esse as superadded accident to a self-contained essence as from the outside (extrinsice). He simply has not yet struck upon a formula that satisfies him. “We can see Thomas wrestling with alternative notions like ‘act’ and ‘complementum’ in order to do justice to the intrinsic connection between the essence and its esse.” Aquinas is charting out the distinction between logical and real (ontological) participation.

**Logical vs. real participation.** The first form of participation is a *logical* mode, participation of the species in the genus, and this according to the creature’s definition, e.g. “rational animal” is the definition of “man” where ‘animal’ signifies the genus and ‘rational’ signifies the species. When analyzing essences “as such” we realize that we are discovering logical necessities (e.g. if there is a man, he must be a “rational animal” for anything which is neither rational nor an animal is not human). Thus definitions are given with respect to necessities. Except in the case of God definitions do not carry existential import, and this must be so because ‘to be’ is not a necessity for any essence considered as such except God, insofar as any essence but God may or may not exist. Considered from the standpoint of definitions, created essences are simply potencies, beings which can possibly exist. This is just what is meant, then, by the phrase of Boethius “being and that which is are diverse” (aliud est esse et id quod est): “The question ‘is it’ is different from the question ‘what is it.” Aquinas is charting out the distinction between logical and real (ontological) participation.

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159 Aquinas, *Questiones Quodlibetales II*, q.2, a.1 resp.
esse compositions, and in the second, real mode of participation, creatures participate in esse: they have an act of being per participationem, they do not have it by essence, per essentiam.

We return then to the example of the lucere and the lucens. This example illustrates the relation between the ‘act of being’ (esse) and ‘a being’ (ens). The relation can be seen by attending to the infinitive form of the verb and its present active participle. The grammatical distinction mirrors the distinction in reality between the act and the subject which performs it, and with this distinction in hand Aquinas raises the grammatical distinction to the metaphysical level with respect to divine naming and the naming of creatures, which participate in the essential nature of the divine being.

Lucere (pres. infin.) = “to shine” or, the act of shining.
Lucens (pres. act. part.) = “that which is shining.”

The relationship between the infinitive (lucere) and the participle (lucens) shows the inherent relationship of “formal togetherness”\(^{160}\) between the act of being (esse), which is common, indeterminate, infinite, and that which is (ens), as finite. The participle, ens, is derived from the act of being (esse)—an infinitive verb befitting the infinite status of act (or an act) considered merely in itself—the unlimited. As the lucens is inconceivable without its lucere (the thing that is shining can’t be what it is [a shining thing] without ‘a shining’, that is, the ‘act of shining’, from which it is derived), so is the ens, the thing that is (id quod est), inconceivable without its ‘to be’ (esse), its act of is-ing. Rudi te Velde comments. “Ens signifies this whole of something which is, conceived from the point of view of its act of being. It is this approach which we see Thomas elaborating on in his commentary on the De hebdomadibus and which prepares the way for his metaphysics of participation.”\(^{161}\)

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\(^{160}\) Rudi A. te Velde, Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 76.

\(^{161}\) Rudi A. te Velde, Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 76.
In the case of God, the *ens* and the *esse* are the same, as in “if there were some separated light [lux *qua* lucens] then it [lucere] would be predicated of it [lux *qua* lucens] in the manner of an essence (lucens),” which is to say that in the case of God ‘to be a light’ (lucere) *would be the same thing* as the shining thing (lucens), or, in the case of the metaphysical name of God, the ‘to be’ itself (ipsum esse) is on its own (per se) as an existent (subsistens). But as Aquinas interprets Boethius, “being as such participates in no way” (ipsum esse nullo modo participat). Aquinas reads Boethius as in fact implying three forms or modes of participation, and Aquinas wants to show why *ipsum esse* is unable to participate at all.\(^\text{162}\)

- *subject-accident/matter-form*. In order for this sort of participation to take place there must be a participating subject. But *ipsum esse* is a non-subject, something abstract. So it can’t participate in this way.
- *particular-universal*. *Ipsum esse* can’t participate as particular in a universal because there is nothing particular about *ipsum esse*—it’s as universal as it gets.
- *logical*. The relations of species, genus, and individual fall under this category, but clearly *ipsum esse* is none of these.

Aquinas “has tacitly introduced a new mode of participation here,” the predication of the concrete in the abstract.\(^\text{163}\) Now for Boethius, participation is only possible if something exists already, prior to the participating. As we see just above, for the first two modes of Boethian participation a prior existing subject is required, and if it isn’t for the last, this can only be because there is no ontological density ascribed to “logical” participations of individual>species>genus. This makes participation accidental and thus extrinsic for Boethius, and Aquinas is pushing beyond this, to an intrinsic relation, as we have seen. For te Velde it isn’t so much that Aquinas refuses the Boethian understanding as that he takes it “a step further…the concrete *ens* includes *esse* and cannot be understood without it.”\(^\text{164}\) Thus,


\(^\text{163}\) Rudi A. te Velde ( Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995], 79 fn31) cites Wippel and Geiger in support of this general view, and even McInerny to a certain extent, in his later work.

Ens = id quod habet esse (‘a being’ is ‘that which has an act of being/esse’).
Esse = id quo aliquid est ens (‘The act of being/esse’ is ‘that by which something is a being’).
Ens (id quod est) participat esse (actus essendi)—a being (id quod est) participates in its esse (act of being/actus essendi).

The diversity of _ens_ and _esse_ “is a matter of signifying the same in diverse ways, according to different intentiones.”¹⁶⁵ This includes all created forms, whether material or angelic, since even angelic forms, as different from one another, differ according to species and therefore “the esse which they have in common must be determined differently in each of them according to a different form.”¹⁶⁶ Thus even for angels (formae separatae) “the id quod est must be different from its esse; in each id quod est the esse is differently determined.”¹⁶⁷ However, as we saw at the end of our analysis of the _lucere/lucens_ analogy, God is both “infinitive” (lucere) and present active participle (lucens) at once—except that for God there just is no partaking. In God _esse_ and _id quod est_ are one.

2.5. _Summa contra Gentiles III_

_C. 64: the good ordering of the world as hierarchical participation in the goodness of the First Cause (God)_

Aquinas sets out to refute the thesis of the ancient Greek Naturalists (physiologoi) that all things in the world, including the order of the world, come about by material necessity (necessitate materiale). Against this Aquinas sets forth that God orders and governs all things by his providence, that is, through his understanding and will (per intellectum et voluntatem), the ultimate end of which is his goodness. The divine governance is effected in things because God moves them to their end, which is the good of the creature. The good of every creature ultimately

leads back to God himself because God is the supreme good, that good to which the goodness of every creature pertains (ad quem principaliter illa bonitas pertinet).

Thus we see that in making creatures with proper ends which are their respective goods God as supreme good in fact ordered all things to himself, such that God is the final end of every creature. The order of the world is an order of diversity and multiplicity of contrary natures (contrarias naturas) and thus it is hierarchical with respect to perfection, some natures more perfect than others as they approach more or less to the First Cause. The diverse and contrary natures comprise an ordered whole, with some being aided or commanded by others (iuvantur vel imperantur) to achieve their end. An ordered system of command of diverse natures requires a supreme commander, God.

The notion of participation is explicitly introduced in the discussion of the hierarchy of perfections in natures, and the principle is taken from the \textit{Liber de causis}.

\begin{quote}
The nearer a thing is to its cause, the more does it participate in its influence. Hence, if some perfection is more perfectly participated by a group of things the more they approach a certain object, then this is an indication that this object is the cause of the perfection which is participated in various degrees.\footnote{168 Aquinas, \textit{SCG III}, 64 (para. 8 in the Hanover House ed. [1955-1957], Bourke trans.).}
\end{quote}

The mind can discern in the order of the world that the various natures are ordered according to more or less with reference to a maximum of perfection, and in this way principle causes are discerned, e.g., things grow hotter the closer they are to fire and thus we discern that fire is the cause of heat. In like manner we know God as principle cause of the order of things, since we see that things become more like God the closer they approach him.

A word must be said about the line of reasoning represented here, which contains a number of unexpressed premises. The argument is a summary presupposing that certain characteristics of God are already known or proved, e.g., that he exists, that he is the first good, that he possesses
intellect and will which are ordered to his goodness, that he is the maker of all things and the end of all things—all premises established in the SCG prior to III, 64. We recall that the argument of the chapter itself it strictly defined: Aquinas only seeks to show that the order of the world does not arise from material necessity, but rather by the wise intention of God. We might suppose that God very well could have made the things in the world and yet not set them in a determinate order one to another, but merely allowed the various component parts to order themselves according to “material necessity.” Aquinas’s argument is designed to show that this notion is against reason.\textsuperscript{169} In creating the world according to intention and will, God also creates according to understanding. Like any artist he has a model, and in the case of God his model can only be himself, who is infinite actuality. As ‘to be’ is ‘to be good,’ goodness is included in God’s actuality and thus the divine operations of intellect and will have his goodness for their end. All created things are thus good according to God’s goodness, as finite participations of the divine goodness, which includes the good order of the whole as well as the goodness of the individual natures. Creation is not mere divine fiat combined with ordering by material necessity, the view of “deism” which has it, as the popular song goes, that “God is watching us from a distance.” Because of its participation in the divine goodness creation also participates in the divine intellect (things and the order of things are natively intelligible) and the divine will (things are directed to an end which defines their nature, and the order of things to an end which defines the world as a whole). Or, put another way, through participation in the divine intellect and will things come to participate in the divine goodness.

\textsuperscript{169} Brian Shanley (“Demonstrating God’s Providence,” in Gregory T. Doolan ed., \textit{The Science of Being as Being: Metaphysical Investigations} [Wash., D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012], 241-242), explains the situated-ness of the reasoning. “Once the existence of God is established on grounds other than the finality of nature, Aquinas believes that the logic of divine perfection entails providence. Perfect goodness and perfect wisdom require that once God freely decides to create, it is impossible for him not to take care of his creatures and to order them to their ends.”
C. 66: the order of causes subordinated by participation in the First Cause

The opening line of this chapter is also a principle drawn from the Liber de causis, “no lower agents give being except in so far as they act by divine power.” By ‘giving being’ (dat esse) here Aquinas means ‘acting as a cause.’ Only actual beings can give being, and since all beings are preserved in being by the divine providence (c.64), it follows that all beings give being (act as real causes) by the divine power. The background problem comes from Neoplatonism and its posited hierarchy of sub-creators. Subordinate orders of gods were posited by Proclus, for instance, and Proclus holds that these subordinate gods really do create, even though as “by divine power.” And so Aquinas is giving new meaning to the Neoplatonic principle, following the monotheistic reduction of the author of the Liber—only God can be said to create. Other beings, while acting as real causes, do so by the divine power immanent in them, but this secondary causality is not creative, since it presupposes being and thus does not bring being from nothing.

In this chapter Aquinas brings in the idea of participation to describe the relation between the world of secondary causes and the First Cause, God.

When several different agents are subordinated to one agent, the effect that is produced by their common action must be attributed to them as they are united in their participation in the motion and power of this agent. For several agents do not produce one result unless they are as one.

In other words, any number of secondary causes may act for an effect, and yet these causes are “subordinated” to the First Cause. There may even be (and in fact there is) a hierarchy of secondary causes, each lower cause sharing in the power of the higher. Ultimately, the causal power must be traced back to that of a supreme First Cause to which all effects are attributed. Yet this fact does not change the necessity of secondary attribution as well—secondary causes are really causes, and they must be considered so since their causal power is drawn from the First
Cause. Insofar as the power of secondary causes is derived power, the secondary causes are “one” with the primary agent as participating in its power.

To give being is the “proper effect” (proprius effectus) of the divine agent, “and all things that give being do so because they act by God’s power.” This is meant in the sense of “the act of being” (esse), which as the “act of acts”, is that act of which all other beings are merely determinations (omnia alia sunt quaedam determinationes ipsius), and in their causality they are merely “particularizers and determinants of the primary agent’s action” (particulantes et determinantes actionem primi agentis). This is the reason why Aquinas here calls esse “the first among all effects” (primum in omnibus effectibus) and the “most perfect” (perfectissimum) of all acts, because every perfection is a perfection of actuality, a perfection of being. If there were a being which was essentially act, then that being would be the cause of all other beings. In fact there is such a being—God. Just as fire is the cause of everything fiery, so God, as the fullness of actuality or essential act, is the cause of everything that has actuality. But that which is something by its own essence is the cause of all the things which are that same something non-essentially, which things are related to the essential thing as potency to act and are also said to participate in the essential thing. Since God is a being by his own essence (ens per essentiam suam), other things are beings by participation. Yet they are beings, and thus real causes in their own order—the subject of the next chapter.

**C. 69: how by participation creatures are established as true causes in their own order**

This question takes as an opponent some Arabic theorists (Aquinas seems to have in mind chiefly Avicebron but also refers to “certain exponents of the Law of the Moors”), who claim that “no creature has an active role in the production of natural effects,” such that “fire does not give heat, but God causes heat in the presence of fire, and they said like things about all other
natural effects.” This is the theory we now call occasionalism: the natural being presents the occasion for God to act while itself having no real causal role in the production of the effect. A natural philosophy must decide whether its task involves “saving the appearances” or, as it were, the saving of an ideology. In the case of the “Moors” the ideology is a distorted monotheistic piety which, refusing the full implications of the notion of metaphysical participation, pits the causality of nature against that of God in a zero-sum game. In order to save the absolute divine supremacy and therefore the divine causality, creatures must be demoted to occasions for divine action. Aquinas must, of course, choose the saving of appearances, for any other route is absurd: it is “the structure of ordinary experience” from which philosophical reflection, and ultimately reflection about God takes its starting point. The positing of theses that make for direct and flagrant contradiction of sense experience amounts to a non-philosophical approach to the world, since “all the knowledge of natural science is taken away from us, for the demonstrations in it are chiefly derived from the effect.” Furthermore, the ascent to God from natural things would be impossible under such intellectual behavior, since “the perfection of the effect demonstrates the perfection of the cause” (Perfectio effectus demonstrat perfectionem causae):

for a greater power brings about a more perfect effect. But God is the most perfect agent. Therefore, things created by Him obtain perfection from Him. So, to detract from the perfection of creatures is to detract from the perfection of divine power. But, if no creature has any active role in the production of any effect, much is detracted from the perfection of the creature. Indeed, it is part of the fullness of perfection to be able to communicate to another being the perfection which one possesses. Therefore, this position [of the Moors] detracts from the divine power.

Aquinas counters Muslim piety with a piety of his own, which has the added benefit of saving the experience of sense. To be a cause is to give being. Since being qua being is good, to give being is a good action. God displays his own goodness by sharing or participating out his

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171 Aquinas, SCG III, 69.
being to creatures. His goodness is further displayed by giving creatures the participation in his own power of causality, so that creatures too can share in the goodness of the giving of being.

Now God not only can but does indeed act in this way. “As it is the function of the good to make what is good, so it is the prerogative of the highest good to make what is best. But God is the highest good, as we showed in Book One. So, it is His function to make all things best.” The point Aquinas has made refers to the good ordering of creation considered as a whole: God has made the world in such a way that the things in the world make their own real contribution to the cosmic order, the “common good” (bonum commune). And so the cosmos is an ordered structure of giving and receiving such that “one thing which receives [the divine goodness] can transfer it to another. Therefore, to take away their proper actions from things is to disparage the divine goodness.”

CHAPTER 3: Participation in Thomas Aquinas and in Thomism: Esse as the Act of Being

3.1. Participation in Aquinas: a summary overview

Norris Clarke augments our understanding of participation in Aquinas by explicating it according to a tripartite structure: 1) the source of all being (God), as pure actuality, has some given perfection in an unlimited manner in virtue of its own essence, 2) the participating subject (as mixture of act and potency) has the given perfection in merely a “partial and restricted” manner, 3) the participating act-potency composed subject has received the given perfection from the unlimited source, the pure actuality of God the first being. As for the nature of the dependence between source and subject, it can be 1) logical by “conceptual extension” (Fabro’s “semantic” participation), 2) formal by dependence in virtue of exemplarity, or 3) existential and

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172 Aquinas, *In I Metaphysics*, lect. 10, n. 154. “For that which is something in its entirety does not participate in it but is essentially identical with it, whereas that which is not something in its entirety but has this other thing joined to it, is said properly to participate in that thing.”
therefore a relation of efficient causality. The latter two are indeed ontological, but in the existential order participation is analogical/transcendental. There can be no relation of univocity between a transcendental infinite source and a finite receiving subject.

As we noted at the outset, the term ‘participation’ signifies the hierarchical structure of dependence that in fact constitutes the created order in relation to the transcendent source of all things. For Aquinas, *esse* as *actus essendi* is the basic perfection common to God and creatures which is the basis for all analogical predication of God by creaturely names.

*Two ways of predication of a subject.* For Aquinas there are two ways of predicking something of a subject—either by essence, or by participation. The two are mutually exclusive. This leads to a new definition of participation. “For that which is something in its entirety does not participate in it but is essentially identical with it, whereas that which is not something in its entirety but has this other thing joined to it, is said properly to participate in that thing.”

*Participation as the limit of act by potency.* This is the final step in Aquinas’ development of his doctrine of participation—the great synthesis. He transfers his developed Neoplatonic participation structure to the Aristotelian metaphysical scheme of act-potency.

Everything which participates in something else is compared to that in which it participates as potency to act, since by the participated thing the participating thing is made to be in a particular way *(tale)*...Thus, every created substance is compared to its own being as potency to act.

With this move Aquinas solves one of the key troubles of the purely Neoplatonic system, namely, the inability of Neoplatonism to secure an intrinsic principle of unity in a participating subject. This failure of the older system resulted in a conception of the subject as a concatenation of participating forms. Aquinas makes use of the Aristotelian act-potency scheme to remedy this

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174 Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, II, c.53, Iitem. Clarke gives the following parallel citations: *Questiones Quodlibetales*, III, 8; *De spiritualibus creaturis*, 1; *De substantiis separatis*, 3, init.; *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.75, a.5 ad 1 et 4.
trouble: every composed substance can be reduced to two mutually ordered principles of act and potency. In Aquinas’ new scheme, potency participates act while simultaneously limiting the act which it participates. But as substance composed fundamentally of a particular (“distinct”) potency-limiting-its-participated-acts, the subject now has all the metaphysical elements it needs to guarantee it as a per se unity. Clarke agrees with Fabro that “it is impossible to understand this principle in terms either of pure Aristotelianism or pure Neoplatonism…” since for Aristotle (like Plato) the finite was the perfect and the infinite the imperfect. Nor can it be any form of Platonism, since there is no act-potency scheme in the Platonic systems.175

Participation in this sense (ontological/transcendental) grounds the analogy of being (analogia entis) through which we can speak of the relation of creatures to God, “inasmuch as God is being by his very essence, and other beings are beings by participation.”176 Participated esse, as the “immanent act of the substance” (esse substantiale) is “the proper effect of divine causality. [I]t is only in the order of essence and existence that all the elements in the participation structure take on full ontological value”,177 since there is but one source which enjoys a plenitude of perfections in an unlimited way such that the unlimited perfections of the plenitude of being are equal to its essence—God. God is “the sole efficient cause of all being as such, and ultimate exemplary cause of all forms by His divine ideas.”178

3.2. The different kinds of participation

As we have seen, the principle definition of participation for Aquinas is the relationship

176 Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Ia, q. 4, a. 3 ad. 3. “The likeness of creatures to God is not affirmed on account of agreement in form according to the formality of the same genus or species, but solely according to analogy, inasmuch as God is essential being, whereas other things are beings by participation.”
formed between one subject which has a given characteristic in a partial fashion and the subject which has that same characteristic in a total, or essential, or universal fashion (the “ratio Platonis”).\textsuperscript{179} The participation relation accounts for the presence in many subjects of a common characteristic. In every category of participation the \textit{participans} relates to the \textit{participatum} as potency to act.\textsuperscript{180} This is so because the \textit{participans} is that subject which is capable of taking on being in some aspect or other, but with reference to any given aspect, the \textit{participatum} is that being which has the given aspect universally, which means in a total way, therefore precluding any possibility or potency in it with respect to that aspect.

\textit{Genus-species-individual}. This participatory relation is logical only, that is, with respect to intelligible content, for of the three constituents represented here, only individuals have actual existence at all, and even here we are only considering the individual in relation to the species to which he belongs. Thus logical (or intentional) participation has to do with the share that “one intelligible content [of less extended intelligibility] shares in another [more extended intelligible or universal content] without exhausting it”,\textsuperscript{181} e.g. man participates in animal because animal has an intelligible content not exhausted by man. Likewise, a particular man participates in humanity (man-as-such, man-qua-man), since humanity has a universal intelligibility which any given man does not have.

\textit{Matter-form}. Matter is the universal substrate of corporeal being, or “physical nature.” Thus it is ‘material being’ that is the object of the science of physics. For Aquinas\textsuperscript{182} matter is that

\textsuperscript{179} Aquinas, \textit{In De hebdomadibus}, lect. 2. Cf. \textit{In I Metaphysics}, lect. 10, n. 154. “That which is not something in a total manner, having something else joined to it, is properly said to participate” (my trans.); \textit{In II De caelo}, lect. 18, n.463. “To participate is nothing else than to receive something from another in a partial manner” (my trans.).


which is in potency to a material substantial form.\footnote{Aquinas, De principiis naturae, Leon. 43.40:21-23: “That which is in potency to substantial being (esse substantiale) is properly called matter” (my trans.).} Matter and form are, at least for material beings, correlative concepts which point to a real composition of distinct principles in corporeal being: corporeal being is matter-form composition. For Aquinas the receptivity of act in matter by means of form is understood in terms of participation: matter participates in being by means of form.

In substances composed of matter and form we find three principles (tria invenimus), namely, matter, form, and the act of being itself ( ipsum esse), of which the principle is form; for matter participates in esse (participat esse) \footnote{Aquinas, Questiones disputatae de anima, q. un., a.6 resp.} [or alternatively, ‘receives an act of being’] because it receives form. Thus ‘to be’ (esse) follows upon form [my trans.].\footnote{John Patrick Rowan, The Soul: A Translation of St. Thomas Aquinas’ De Anima, (St. Louis & London: B. Herder Book Co., 1949), \url{http://www.dhspriory.org/thomas/QDdeAnima.htm#6}. As Rowan renders this passage, “For we observe three things in substances composed of matter and form: namely, matter, form, and the act of existing itself, the principle of which is the form; for matter receives an act of existing because it receives a form. Therefore a thing’s act of existing is the natural effect of the form itself of that thing.”}

I have altered the English translation of John Patrick Rowan\footnote{Or, alternatively in Aquinas, the creaturely being participates in the similitudo of the divine being, which similitudo is ‘the being common to creatures’ considered as such—esse commune—and which being remains in any case a participation in the divine being.} while including a salient phrase of his in order to highlight an ambiguity arising from a latent polyvalence of meaning in this passage. Rowan is quite right to render, for “participat esse,” “receives an act of existing” (my emphasis). But this translation has the defect, when read out of total metaphysical context, of allowing us to forget that creaturely “acts of existing” are participations in the divine esse, which is just the divine essence/nature ( ipsum esse subsistens).\footnote{Rudi A. te Velde, Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 220.} This participation in the divine being is what form brings to all creatures. When we say that form “gives being” (forma dat esse) we mean that form is not absolutely to be identified with a being’s act of existence (esse) but that esse is mediated through form. Without form there is no being, and so “form plays a fundamental role in the constitution of reality.” But above form there is a higher cause of being, since without the transcendent first cause, God, there would be no form. The formula “forma dat
esse"\textsuperscript{188} means the mediated mediation and determining power of form for the being of beings. Here there is a “double mediation” in the process of creation. God as subsistent being itself (ipsum esse subsistens) gives being by means of form, which is a created likeness of the divine being. So the form is the formal mediator of being. But God himself mediates the effect of the formal likeness such that being is always God’s own effect (proprius effectus), even in its formality. “God causes natural existence in us by creation without the intervention of any agent cause,” says Aquinas, “but nevertheless with the intervention of a formal cause; for a natural form is the principle of natural existence (esse naturalis).”\textsuperscript{189} While God remains, as agent (efficient) cause, the first and therefore immediate cause of being in creatures, he acts through a secondary formal cause proportionate to nature, that is, the natural form which confers being formally, that is, according to a certain limitation which is a finite imitation of the divine being. Therefore “being is the likeness which connects God and creature as cause and effect.”\textsuperscript{190} Every different creature is mediated in a different formal respect. “God mediates each creature in a distinctive and particular manner with the being He himself possesses in a universal manner.”\textsuperscript{191} Thus, creatures are like God according to a likeness which is simultaneously the reason and cause of their distinctness, since beings have being by means of some determinate and finite form, whereas God has being in an infinite and universal way.\textsuperscript{192}

Substance-accident: “the accidental order of the virtus.”\textsuperscript{193} Now the being of the finite creature, because “it is enclosed within the limits of a determinate nature,”\textsuperscript{194} is an imperfect essence which requires interaction with other essences in order to achieve its potential

\textsuperscript{188} Aquinas, \textit{De anima}, q.un, a.10. “Forma dat esse et speciem.”
\textsuperscript{189} Aquinas, \textit{De veritate}, q.27, a.1 ad 3.
\textsuperscript{192} Rudi A. te Velde, \textit{Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas} (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 221.
perfections. The “first act” (forma) of the creature pertains directly to its essential being, and a creature is “in act with respect to itself” in virtue of its essential form. But the “second act” (operatio) of the creature pertains to the operations, which are ordered to objects outside itself, outside its essence. A creature is in act with respect to itself but in potency with respect to what is external to it, and because in its finitude it is not self-explanatory and self-contained as a being, it needs an external agent and the relations that go with the external to actualize its principle potencies.

Now it is by its essential principles that a thing is fully constituted in itself so that it subsists; but it is not so perfectly constituted as to stand as it should in relation to everything outside itself except by means of accidents added to the essence, because the operations by which one thing is in some sense joined to another proceed from the essence through powers distinct from it. Consequently nothing achieves goodness absolutely unless it is complete in both its essential and its accidental principles.

A habitus or virtus of a creature is an additional, non-essential perfection or power necessary for finite creatures to achieve their proper ends, ends which require being in act with respect to external things. Because the virtues are non-essential they are accidental, but they are necessary for all that, and therefore they are in the class of accidents which belong to creatures necessarily either with reference to the species, in which case they are called “proper” (propria), or with reference to the individual, in which case they are called “inseparable” (inseparabilla). It is not possible to understand the species to exist without reference to those propria which are so because they arise “from the principles of the species” (consequentur principium speciei), and neither is it possible to understand the individual without its inseparabilia.

196 Aquinas, De potentia, q.1, a.1 resp. Now act is twofold; the first act which is a form, and the second act which is operation.” In I Sententias, d.33, q.1, a.1 ad 1. “To be (esse) is the very act of the essence; as ‘to live,’ which is the ‘to be’ (esse) of the living, is the act of the soul, not second act, which is operation, but first act” (my trans.).
197 Aquinas, De veritate, q.21, a.5, resp.
198 Aquinas, Questiones Disputatae de anima, a.12 ad 7. “There are three genera of accidents: some are caused by the principles of the species, and are called proper accidents (propria), for example, risibility in man; others are caused by the principles of the individual, and this class is spoken of [in two ways]: first, those that have a permanent cause in their subject, for example,
“Each finite substance,” explains Rudi te Velde, “needs so to speak an ‘extension’ of its essential being. This extension of the second act is motivated by the potency implicit in the substance which only participates in being and does not have being in its fullness.”

199 We see here that the hard Boethian distinction between *per essentiam* and *per participationem* “loses its edge. For Aquinas, accidental participation on the level of the second act is not an isolated and non-essential instance of participation, on the contrary, it is implied by the finiteness of the created essence which stands in need of an additional perfection in order to realize itself with respect to other things.”

200 *Ens/essence-existence.* The participation of beings in *esse* is the most fundamental kind of participation, since only this participation can show how any given being can actually exist.

201 “All creatures are beings by participation, inasmuch as their essence participates in the *esse* which is the ultimate act of all reality.” In this relationship the essence is the participating principle and the *esse* is that which is participated, but unlike the other forms of participation, *esse* is not predicated univocally of that which participates it, but rather analogically. “As an individual man participates human nature, so every created being participates, so to speak, the nature of being.”

202 The analogy here is instructive. *Esse*—pointed at here by the analogical masculine and feminine, and other things of this kind, and these are called inseparable accidents (inseparabilia); secondly, those that do not have a permanent cause in their subject, such as to sit and to walk, and these are called separable accidents. Now no accident of any kind ever constitutes part of the essence of a thing, and thus an accident is never found in a thing’s definition. Hence we understand the essence (quod quid est) of a thing without thinking of any of its accidents. However, the species cannot be understood without the accidents which result from the principles of the species (consequentur principium speciei) [i.e., the proper accidents], although the species can be understood without the accidents of the individual, even the inseparable accidents. Indeed, there can be not only a species but also an individual without the separable accidents. Now the powers of the soul are accidents in the sense of properties. Therefore, although the essence of the soul is understood without them, still the existence of the soul is neither possible nor intelligible without them.”

203 Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia, q.45, a.5 ad 1. “sicut hic homo participat humanam naturam, ita quodcumque ens creatum participat, ut ita dixerim, naturam essendi.”
euphemism “natura essendi”—is in a certain sense to all beings (except God) as the species is to the individual. Every individual has a specific nature, e.g. ‘Socrates’ participates in ‘humanity’ while not exhausting it. While esse is not a genus or species, yet it is as if, in the analogy, that it were a species: insofar as every being is a being it must partake not only in the nature of a given species but in the “nature of being” itself, and the nature of being is simply ‘to be’, esse. There is just no more simple notion to which things can be reduced, and every being is (analogically, not generically or specifically) some manifestation of ‘to be.’ But no being except God is ‘to be’ by its essence, and thus whatever being but God that we refer to, we are referring to a composed substance such that its determined structure—its essence—is, when actual, a participation in the fullness of actuality, a participation in esse.

3.3. The Participatory Structure of Being: Exemplarity, composition, the simple act of creation

Exemplarity and participation: creation ex nihilo. In Plato, “the exemplars” (archetypes, paradigms—the forms/ideas/essences in their roles as “models”, or rather, as “plans”, “patterns”, or “designs”) are sometimes written of and generally interpreted in the tradition as separate (per se) existents. As transcendental entities the exemplars are the universal causes of the world of essences which in their diversity and multiplicity have their being by sharing (μετέχειν) in them. According to the “ratio Platonis”, the exemplars, as the ultimate existing perfections of a given quality, possess through themselves what the manifold of subjects possess by participating in the exemplary perfections, which they receive in a limited mode. In Aquinas, however, when exemplarity is spoken of in the most general way, we should understand the “similitude” of the created world as a resemblance of the divine nature in terms of the divine goodness—God himself in the simplicity and absoluteness of his being is the one “exemplar” of/for creation. Aquinas has reduced the Platonic manifold of exemplary ideas to the one divine being which is
the totality of the perfection of being in a simple act. Nevertheless, Aquinas can still locate a certain logical “manifold” in the simple divine essence insofar as God in his wisdom knows all of the ways in which his being is imitable, which is to say, the ways in which the divine being can be participated.204

Now for Aquinas, as for Plato, effects receive determinate forms on account of exemplars, and without recourse to exemplars there is no reason why one particular effect should follow and not another (effectus determinatam formam consequatur).205 The divine ideas are the reasons (rationes) of created things, but not as formal causes in an intrinsic manner—the divine ideas themselves are not in things as their species. The ideas, as the patterns of which things are likenesses, can be brought under the category of formal causation,206 since there is an immanent form in things that makes things to be the things they are. Yet the divine idea itself remains an extrinsic cause. The immanent form, on the other hand, is itself the immediate giver of imitated being—imitative of what?—of its corresponding divine idea, that is, the divine being-as-imitable.207

In scholastic philosophy the “exemplar cause,” while always the “plan in the mind of an intelligent agent,” is a formal cause insofar as it is spoken of as that idea or plan, an efficient cause insofar as it “aids or equips the agent for his task,” and a final cause “insofar as it

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204 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.44, a.3 resp. “God is the first exemplar cause of all things. In proof whereof we must consider that if for the production of anything an exemplar is necessary, it is in order that the effect may receive a determinate form. For an artificer produces a determinate form in matter by reason of the exemplar before him, whether it is the exemplar beheld externally, or the exemplar interiorly conceived in the mind. Now it is manifest that things made by nature receive determinate forms. This determination of forms must be reduced to the divine wisdom as its first principle, for divine wisdom devised the order of the universe, which order consists in the variety of things. And therefore we must say that in the divine wisdom are the types of all things, which types we have called ideas—i.e. exemplar forms existing in the divine mind.

205 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.44, a.3 resp.

206 Aquinas, *In V Metaphysics*, lect.2, n.764: “In another sense cause means the form and pattern of a thing, i.e., its exemplar. This is the formal cause, which is related to a thing in two ways. In one way it stands as the intrinsic form of a thing, and in this respect it is called the formal principle of a thing. In another way it stands as something which is extrinsic to a thing but is that in likeness to which it is made, and in this respect an exemplar is also called a thing’s form.”

207 As we will see in our discussion of Gregory T. Doolan’s interpretation of exemplarity in Aquinas, creatures can only be said to “imitate” the divine idea in a specific sense: the divine idea, as Doolan reads Aquinas, is not strictly what the creature imitates. The creature imitates the divine being but of course in a limited way, and the divine idea is the divine being-as-imitable.
represents the good to be realized.”

Gregory T. Doolan puts it this way: “Inasmuch as an exemplar is properly a productive idea, then, its causality necessarily entails efficient and final causality: it entails efficient causality because the exemplar’s causality is caused by the efficient cause; it entails final causality because the exemplar must first motivate the intention of the agent for him to produce his work. Nevertheless... an exemplar idea, in its capacity as an exemplar, is reduced to the order of formal causality since the characteristic that is proper to it as an exemplar is its imitatibility.”

God is the great artist (artifex) who shapes the world, his ars, intentionally, according to each thing’s proper idea—an idea in the mind of the artist.

We now turn to the issue raised by Rudi te Velde concerning the simplicity of creation and the supposed “double participation” found in the Thomistic commentators Geiger, Fabro, and Wippel. Te Velde’s solution involves the elimination of the doctrine of the limitation of act by receiving potency, which potency is identified as an “essence” preexisting in the mind of God, an “idea” which serves as an “exemplar” for the created being. “In the traditional approach to Thomas’s metaphysics of creation” says te Velde, “…God knows all the essences through the divine ideas and He produces them into existence through his act of will....[But] this view is not that of Thomas.”

Te Velde goes on to summarize his worry that the tradition here necessarily leads to a “double participation” which “breaks the unity of the act of creation” by recognizing a “prior...phase which consists in the constitution of the possibility of existence” that is the

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210 Rudi A. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 102. Cf. Aquinas, *De potentia*, q.3, a.4, ad 9. “Although between God and the creature there cannot be a generic or specific likeness, there can nevertheless be a certain likeness of analogy, as between potentiality and act, substance and accident. This is true in one way forasmuch as creatures reproduce, in their own way, the idea of the divine mind, as the work of a craftsman is a reproduction of the form in his mind. In another way it is true in that creatures are somewhat likened to the very nature of God, forasmuch as they derive their being from the first being, their goodness from the sovereign good, and so on. However this objection is not to the point: for even granted that creatures proceed from God through the instrumentality of some created power, the same difficulty remains, namely how this first nature can be created by God and yet not be like God.”

essence-as-divine idea in God’s mind (the exemplar or exemplary cause). But this “double participation” renders the very notion of participation itself otiose, argues te Velde, since the idea has no place in a scheme which consists merely of “attributing factual existence to a possible essence.”212 At the end of this section I hope to make it clear that Doolan may very well have opened a path for the vindication of the tradition as regards the limitation of act by distinct receiving potency (and the relation of that potency to the divine causality). In so doing Doolan offers a resolution to a complex disagreement among four subject-defining contemporary scholars which appears to me to be quite successful.213

L.B. Geiger214 has shown that there are, in fact, two modes of divine exemplarism: 1) the divine ideas, 2) the divine nature itself. Now for each of these modes there must be a participation, argues Geiger. This is so because the two modes are really diverse according as they respect either the modes of being or the perfections of being in creatures, and therefore in God.215 The divine ideas correspond to the determinate nature of the finite being, which has “this mode of being and no other.”216 The divine nature, by contrast, is participated by finite beings according to the divine perfections (being, life, goodness, etc.). For Geiger, however, the

212 Rudi A. te Velde, Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 282. Cf. te Velde Participation, 83: “One of the main problems in the literature on participation concerns the position of the essence as an aliud. Especially Geiger is very sensitive to the difficulties involved in the composition scheme. If the essence is said to be ‘composed’ with the being it receives from the first cause, one is inclined to think of it as a kind of subject which, at least in our imagination, has an independent ontological status and origin. However, the unity of created being understood in this remains extrinsic and almost accidental. If participation is really to be successful as a metaphysical account of created being, the ‘otherness’ of the essence with respect to esse must be understood from their original and prior unity. The unity of being, and the unity of the origin of being, must be prior to the inner distinction of created being.”


216 Gregory T. Doolan (Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplary Causes, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press [2008], 220. We should note that Aquinas says that the exemplars represent both the essence and the accidents of finite creatures such that “there are two types of divine exemplars: one that primarily exemplifies the essence of a finite being and secondarily its inseparable accidents, and another that exemplifies its separable accidents,” since separable accidents require a “distinct account” owing to the fact that they do not belong to the essence of a thing and so cannot be expressed by the essential idea, whereas inseparable accidents are so expressed (Doolan, Divine Ideas, 217). Like Doolan we are concerned here chiefly with essential exemplarity of the ideas.
distinction, e.g. between “life proper to a horse” and the “essence of a horse”—that is, the idea-
nature distinction considered from the standpoint of the creature—is “full of obscurities”
(pleine d’obscurités).
For Geiger the attempt to analyze a being according to the distinction
between its relationship to the divine nature (the transcendentals) and its relationship to the
divine idea (exemplar) is profoundly problematic. This quandary of Geiger’s has launched te
Velde in search of a solution that preserves the distinction yet brings them into the unity of a
single participation. Geiger, on the other hand, offers no such solution, opting rather for a
“double participation”: there is a first participation on the part of the created essence, prior to its
composition with existence. For Aquinas this must be the case, says Geiger, because a thing is a
‘this such’ in virtue of its essence but a real being in virtue of the act of existence (esse)
composed with it. The second participation is in the esse by which the essence is made actual.

Here te Velde objects. While essence and being (esse) are truly distinct as principles, it
remains true that both the essence and the actuality of a thing can be explained according to a
single participation. Geiger’s notion of esse is too thin, says te Velde: Geiger does not
understand esse to bespeak the mode of being of a thing but only its bare actuality. On te Velde’s
interpretation, however, esse has a much richer import. The finitude or limitation of a being—
what is referred to under the banner of essence—is in fact determined by its simple, individual
act of existing (esse) and not by any such essence-existence double-limitation/participation.

217 Cf. Aquinas, In I Sent. d.36, q.2, a.2 ad 2.
218 L.B. Geiger, La participation dans la philosophie de Saint Thomas d’Aquin. Montréal: Institut d’Études Médiévales (1952),
233n1 (trans. Doolan, Divine Ideas, 220). The whole of Geiger’s problematic is expressed only in this footnote.
219 This is also the view of William Carlo (“The Role of Essence in Existential Metaphysics,” in Readings in Metaphysics [J.
Rosenberg, ed., Westminster, MD. 1963]; The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics [The
No. 4, 1962], 557-590).
Doolan proceeds to analyze the simple act of creation into three phases or “moments.”\(^{220}\) In the first moment, there is simply the divine essence/nature which is imitable in itself. The second moment consists of God’s knowing his nature-as-imitable, thus “discovering” his ideas. In the third moment God “looks” (adinvenit)\(^{221}\) to the ideas, and by an act of his will makes creatures according to the idea, complete with the appropriate acts of being that befit them as participations in the likeness of their creator.\(^{222}\) These moments are not to be considered as separate divine “acts.” God’s knowledge of creatures and his willing of their existence comprise a simple act.\(^{223}\)

Doolan follows Fabro’s notion of the “act of intensive esse” in recognizing a “double-exemplarity” in creatures.\(^{224}\) For Doolan the nature-idea exemplarities constitute a distinction in mutual dependence. The divine artist, unlike the creaturely artist, needs no material outside of his own being/nature with which to create. Thus the ideas—the divine nature-as-imitable—depend for their exemplarity upon the divine nature. Yet God’s nature as it is in itself can obviously not be received by any created subject, and so the divine nature also depends upon the divine ideas


\(^{221}\) Gregory T. Doolan (Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplary Causes, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press [2008], 223). In fn101 of p.223 Doolan, via Brian Shanley (“Eternal Knowledge of the Temporal in Aquinas,” American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly 71 [1997], 217-18), highlights the three kinds of the divine knowledge of the created order. Shanley notes that the kinds are distinguished as *our own* logical intentions (“different intelligible perspectives and different objects”). There are the possibilities (scientia simplicis intelligentiae), the executive decisions (scientia approbationis), and the contemplation of the finished work (scientia visionis). Not only are these “successive stages of knowing” not temporally successive in God, they are not even logically successive or successive in any way at all in God. Only for us do they represent any kind of separation, priority, or succession. The miscomprehension of this transcendental difference between the created artist and the divine artist is at the heart of the Molinist error, i.e. the theory of scientia media.

\(^{222}\) Aquinas, *De veritate*, q.3, a.2 ad 6. “The one first form to which all things are reduced is the divine essence, considered in itself. Reflecting upon this essence, the divine intellect devises—if I may use such an expression—different ways in which it can be imitated. The plurality of ideas comes from these different ways.” Cf. Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, c.50. “He who knows a certain nature knows whether that nature is communicable. He who did not know that the nature of animal is communicable by likeness. God, therefore, knows in how many modes there can be something like His essence. But the diversities of forms arise from the fact that things imitate the divine essence diversely; and so the Philosopher has called a natural form “something divine.” Therefore, God has a knowledge of things in terms of their proper forms.”


(nature-as-imitable) for its power of exemplarity. The Thomistic idea of participation thus involves the interdependence of the two modes of exemplarity. On the one hand, the finite created essence participates in the likeness of the divine nature, because if it does not, it cannot receive an act of being, and there is simply no such thing as a created essence without an act of being. On the other, any created act of being is limited by a receiving essence, since “act is not limited except by a really distinct potency-as-subject” which receives it (actus non limitatur nisi per potentiam subjectivam realiter distinctam).225

But must “double-exemplarism” = “double participation”? In short, the answer for Doolan is no. Aquinas does not hold to creaturely participation in the divine ideas. To begin, the divine ideas are for Aquinas the ideas of individuals. Things are said either essentially (substantialiter) or by participation, but they cannot be both, since what is by participation is opposed to what is by essence.226 Socrates does not participate his essence but is essentially Socrates.227 Most fundamentally, Doolan points out that Aquinas just does not have a language of ‘participation in ideas.’ It is rather because the divine essence is imitable—can be participated—that the ideas even exist at all.228 Therefore Aquinas says that creatures participate “in a likeness of the divine

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225 The phrase as I have it here is not found in this precise form in Aquinas, but is taken from the article by Jean-Dominique Robert, “Le principe: ‘Actus non limitatur nisi per potentiam subjectivam realiter distinctam’” (Revue Philosophique de Louvain. Troisième série, Tome 47, N°13 [1949], 44-70). References, culled from Aquinas by John F. Wippel in support of his argument that the principle as a proper interpretation of the Angelic Doctor are given on p.24 fn79 of this present work. Aquinas gives his closest equivalent formula in Compendium theologiae (Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1979), 42:88, II. 7-13: “Nullus enim actus inventur finiri nisi per potentiam quae est eius receptiva…” The principle, though not the exact wording, is taught in the Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Studies, July 27, 1914 (Denziger-Hünnermann 3602).

226 Aquinas, De veritate, q.21, a.5, s.c. “Nothing which is said of a thing by participation belongs to that thing by its essence. But a creature is called good by participation, as is clear from Augustine. A creature is therefore not good essentially.”

227 Furthermore, that in virtue of which Socrates is Socrates is also that in virtue of which Socrates is a man (species) and animal (genus). Participation in genus and species is for Aquinas only logical, not real, since ‘man’ and ‘animal’ are not practically created but only exist in individual supposita (this or that man). In addition, the divine ideas as exemplar causes are practical in that they act only as exemplars for what is actually created—the supposita that really exist. Thus the divine ideas of genus and species “are cognitive principles of God’s knowledge, not ontological ones by which he creates,” and we recall that where there is no created substance there is no participation (Gregory T. Doolan (Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplary Causes, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 228-229, incl. 229fn105.

228 Gregory T. Doolan (Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplary Causes, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008): “Indeed, it is only because things participate in a likeness of the divine nature that God has ideas—or, more precisely, it is only because the likeness of that nature is able to be so participated.” We recall that for Doolan the ideas as ideas are imitables, and the ideas as causes of things that actually exist are exemplars.
“Every single creature has a proper species as it participates in some degree in likeness to the divine essence. Thus, inasmuch as God knows his essence as imitable thusly by such a creature, he knows it as the proper notion (rationem) and idea of that creature.”

The ideas are not what is participated in but are rather what exemplify the participated essence/nature. “Through his ideas,” says Doolan, “God intends to create beings that are like his divine nature; but it is only as creatures are like that nature that they are in turn like their ideas.”

To call a divine idea ‘participabilis’ is not to say that the idea is what is participated, although Geiger, Wippel, and te Velde all draw this conclusion. The similitude that a creature enjoys with respect to its divine idea is not a hierarchical but a perfect similitude, although simultaneously “secondary”: things are like the ideas because they are like the divine nature, and so the likeness to the divine nature is the primary likeness in creatures.

Following Cornelio Fabro, Doolan holds that the divine ideas are not in fact productive of beings. Essences are assimilated to their respective divine ideas only in the formal order because ‘essence’ and ‘idea’ only signify something as it is in the knower. Yet to say that something is in a knower is not to say that an effect proceeds from that knower. In the real order, the order of actuality (esse), an essence is actual by its act of being (actus essendi). A being is made actual by the will of the knower and not by his knowledge alone. However te Velde may object to this vision as a conceptualistic essentialism not true to Aquinas’ mature thought, Doolan does seem to have allayed the worry over “double participation.”

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229 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.15, a.2 resp. Doolan’s trans. with my adaptation.
We can see that te Velde will not be so easily dismissed, however. He simply does not think that there is any such “realm of possibilia” in the divine mind, which must be always and everywhere and in every sense only pure actuality. The mediation of the ideas as possible essences will for te Velde, as for Geiger, inevitably mean a double participation. Yet as Doolan points out, Aquinas in *De potentia Dei* does affirm that the divine ideas have an ontological priority over created essence. As Aquinas says:

> “From the very fact that being (*esse*) is attributed to a quiddity, not only is the quiddity said to be but also to be created: since before it had being it was nothing, except perhaps in the intellect of the creator, where it is not a creature but the creating essence (*creatrix essentia***).”

Wippel argues that te Velde’s concern derives from an error concerning two principal notions, and that although te Velde disagrees with Geiger’s two participations he commits the same conceptual error as does Geiger: 1) te Velde miscomprehends the diverse orders of dependency by which *esse* and essence can be understood to have mutual dependence, and 2) he refuses consistently and clearly to distinguish the ontological order from the temporal order such that what has ontic priority need not have temporal priority.

In sum, for Doolan the divine ideas are exemplars insofar as they are formal causes of existing things, and as exemplars they are the similitudes of both essences and accidents of creatures. Creatures in no way participate in the divine ideas but only in the divine nature. A

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233 Aquinas, *De potentia*, q.3, a.5 ad 2. “From the very fact that being is ascribed to a quiddity, not only is the quiddity said to be but also to be created: since before it had being it was nothing, except perhaps in the intellect of the creator, where it is not a creature but the creating essence” (*creatrix essentia*).

234 Now this second “error” is based on such an elementary metaphysical distinction that I have difficulty believing it is really a problem for te Velde. It seems to me that his dissent is lodged fundamentally at the notion of any kind of priority whatsoever for essence, which he believes is a holdover from pre-metaphysical picture-thinking. Gregory T. Doolan (*Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplary Causes*, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press [2008], 239) complains that te Velde is in the end not nearly so clear about the ultimate nature of his objection as his readers might like him to be. For my part I think that te Velde’s position, when one reads him carefully over the course of his entire work, is not undiscoverable: his metaphysics is at bottom so radically “existential” (even more than is Clarke’s, in the end like Carlo), that he wants to give nothing more than a nominal status to essence. I admit that he is never perfectly straightforward about this, however. His dialectical approach, I suspect, is designed to convince more doctrinaire Thomists of his quasi-Hegelian interpretation without openly offending them with a plain repudiation of the reality of essence. This is not subterfuge or dishonesty on the part of te Velde. His style is an attempt at unveiling.

creature is exemplified by its idea but it is what it is through its essence, not through participation. The divine idea is, however, determinative of the created essence’s mode of being—the idea is the “reason” for the creature’s limitation.

*Esse* and essence are mutually dependent in the manner of the relation between potency and act. The mode of being of a creature is a particular potency determined by the divine idea but the actuality of the being is determined by its participation in the likeness of the divine nature.\(^{236}\) The mutual dependence of *esse* and essence is due to the prior mutual dependence of the two modes of divine exemplarism: nature (as requiring limitation) and idea (how the nature is limited). The mutual dependencies are mediated by the divine will, since the determination itself depends upon the knowing divine agent who orders the exemplar to its end.

Lastly, each mode of divine exemplarism is prior in its own order: the causality of the ideas is prior to the causality of the nature in the intentional order since this causality determines the mode of the limitation of *esse* (the essence); but the divine nature is prior in the actual/real order since it brings the essence into existence.

To conclude, we require a doctrine of formal exemplarity because we must make an accounting of the *intelligibility* of the manifold of created being. If creaturely being must be said to participate in a limited way in the divine being as its ultimate source and ground, then the creature’s formal intelligibility, which represents the divine-being-as-imitable (the divine idea or exemplar), must enjoy the participatory relation to the divine being as the ultimate reason for its intelligibility. But each creature in its particular mode of being also contributes to the good order of the whole in that participating creation appears not merely in diversity but in hierarchy. Thus

\(^{236}\) Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* II, 53, *item*. “Likewise, whatever participates in a thing is compared to the thing participated in as act to potentiality, since by that which is participated the participator is actualized in such and such a way. But it was shown above that God alone is essentially a being, whereas all other things participate in being. Therefore, every created substance is compared to its own being as potentiality to act.”
exemplarity in Aquinas accounts not only for the intelligent ordering of particular (participating) beings but also for the created order as a whole, that is, for the way in which the manifold of particular creatures contribute to the good ordering of the whole. Aquinas has advanced upon the Platonic notion of exemplarity by placing the exemplars within the divine being itself as God’s knowledge of his imitability and therefore participatibility, not as external intellectual-formal material upon which God works, as in Plato, nor as co-creators emanating from the One by natural necessity, as in Neoplatonism. This seems to us a distinctively “Aristotelian” reception of the notion of Divine Ideas.

CONCLUSION

We began with a simple summary of the notion of participation in Aquinas. The metaphysics of the Common Doctor is a metaphysics of being (ens) as it is manifest in the concrete beings of the created order. The science of causes, beginning with the empirical (physical) analysis of concrete, actual beings leads to a metaphysical analysis of the structure of being itself, and this analysis leads us to see that being is what is common to beings (ens commune) as the universal perfection of beings. Although beings show forth being in a diverse manifold, it is a manifold ordered in a hierarchy of approach to the perfection of being. ‘To be’ (esse) is the perfection of every entity, but no entity possesses the entire perfection of ‘to be’. Yet each entity, in virtue of its individual act of ‘to be’, possesses a share in the universal perfection that is actuality. Thus the created world is a finite participation in the universal perfection of ‘to be’. The “perfection of being” considered in itself (esse per se) however, must be seen also as an “existent”, as something that also “subsists.” Esse per se is not itself a part of the world, not a being-in-the-world. The world, as finite participation in being, cannot contain the infinite perfection of being,
which is self-existent utterly above the world as the world’s creative source. This ultimate “perfection of being” is not a being, an entity subsisting through a received esse, but is rather Being Itself, subsisting “on its own” or “through itself”—Ipsum Esse Per Se Subsistens. This is the metaphysical name, as it were, of God.

The radically transcendent self-existence of God, the First and Universal Cause, does not thereby isolate God from the world, however. On the contrary, God by his nature must be both utterly transcendent of and radically immanent in the world: transcendent as he is in himself, immanent as the First and Universal Cause of all things, who is more deeply present to created entities as the source of their perfecting actuality, their ‘to be’, than they are to themselves.

The overview of participation that we achieved at the beginning of our essay gives us a picture, then, of two fundamental orders of being, a two-tiered hierarchy: God, the creator, is the infinite self-existing perfection of being, first and universal cause of a world of creatures which is at once utterly under divine governance and yet free with a conditioned freedom proper to the order of created entities. The created order participates, then, in the being of the divine order, which is simply God.

Chapter one of this work highlighted some primordial sources of the infinite/finite antinomy in early Greek theogonies and Pythagorean mysticism. Pre-Platonic mystical contemplation of being was restricted to the notion of infinitude as maximal indetermination, and what is indeterminate, unlimited, is unintelligible. Greek thought either could not grasp or was unable to clarify the idea of an infinity of maximal determination and therefore of maximal intelligibility. But only an infinite that is maximally determined in itself can be the source of all finite beings. With the advent of the Platonic theory of Ideas, or Forms, and once the analogical relation of the world of multiplicity to the world of unity had been put forward, a major progression was
achieved concerning the problem of the infinite: the intelligibility of the infinite is at least recognized, though not fully unfolded. Plato systematizes the “problem of the one and the many” and formulates the relationship of multiplicity to unity in terms of participation: whatever is common to many things is possessed by participation in some one thing which has the participated quality in a non-participated way, that is, by essence. This ideal essence, or Form, surely possesses for Plato a maximally determined infinitude, which is to say, an infinity that is positive, that is the full actuality itself of the quality or characteristic under analysis. Yet neither Plato nor the Platonists were able to reduce the world of Forms to a single, simple, super-formal source of being that is infinite with a positive infinity, a maximal determination of being that metaphysically can be the source of being for all beings. Thus Platonism is left at best with a “trinity” of hypostatized infinities—Being, Life, Understanding. The Triple Hypostatic Order of Platonism remains ungrounded metaphysically in a higher unity.

The innovations of Aristotle at first appeared to sidestep the Platonic system of ideal participation with a doctrine of substantial being and formal immanentism. Aristotle’s analysis of material being is superior to that of Plato’s. It shifts the focus to the substantial level: substances as existing essences. Aristotle finds that real beings are composed of the formal essence and a principle of potency (matter), and unlike in Plato, the forms of things are in the things, a real part of the substance. As the formal essences do not exist by themselves above the world of things, they do not require reduction to a One beyond the single substantial form-matter composition. Instead of continuing to flail away at the problem of reduction, Aristotle develops his master’s work by means of a different approach. He begins as it were by taking the being of creatures with a deeper level of seriousness, and this new attention to material being on the level of substance makes possible a superior analysis of its metaphysical structure. No longer is material
being merely the shadow of the higher, purely intellectual reality of the ideal realm. Rather, the material order has a robust, substantial reality of its own.

While this Aristotelian vision is appealing to Aquinas on account of the seriousness with which it takes the material order, Aristotle himself takes too much for granted. The problem of reduction remains for Aristotle: he ought to have explained the origin of being for entities in every sense in which an entity is in act. But he cannot make explicit that the One is the source of entitative being on the level of actuality (einaí/esse) as well as on the efficient level—the One must be the total cause of all things, which means the cause of the individual acts of being of entities and not simply of their movement. It is sufficient for Aristotle to account for the actuality of matter by means of form, and thus the existing form-matter essences of the material plane of being remain a function of the eternal cosmic process within which the proto arche is only the highest aspect. Thus does Aristotle remain a thoroughly “hellenistic” thinker: the world is the eternal state of emanated being-in-flux, such that “worlds come and go in an endless succession…held in existence by the One” as necessary emanations from the nature of the One without whom “nothing can exist”\(^{237}\) but at the same time whose “being” is itself bound up with the emanated world. Certainly it is the case that for Aristotle form gives being (forma dat esse). Yet Aristotle has identified actuality so closely with form that he cannot articulate the structure of being such that the formal act is seen to be drawn from a higher source which is pure actuality.

In our analysis of principle texts in Aquinas on participation in the second chapter we came to see that, contra Aristotle, form considered in itself is just intelligible essence, and as such it cannot be simply identified with actuality, since only in God is essence and actuality identical. As we saw in section 2.6 in our discussion of *Quodlibet II*, q.2, a.1., even angels, which as non-material substances can be thought of as pure essences or separated forms, must enter into

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composition with an act of being—‘to be’ does not belong to the essence of an angel even though the formal essence does exist by itself. But what does not belong to a thing by essence must belong to it by participation. Act is not self-limiting but is limited by the distinct receiving subject. In the case of material beings the receiving subject is the material substrate. In the case of the separated form, the receiving subject is the essence itself considered in its role as suppositum. The analysis of angelic being shows that Aquinas is able, unlike Aristotle, to envision form not only as a giver of being but as a limiter of being. Thus, unlike Aristotle, Aquinas shows that form, as well as matter, is in potency to act, to esse. While form truly “gives being” it does so as a measured measure of the divine perfection, and thus is a receiving limiter of the infinite perfection of divine being. For Aquinas, form is in potency to act just as matter is in potency to form. Aquinas has transformed the Aristotelian act-potency principle to the meta-cosmic level: the whole of the created order—all the form/matter compositions and the essence-act compositions—are conceived as in potency to the unlimited subsisting actuality which is God himself as First Cause. Thus the created world as a whole should be considered a participation in the unlimited act of the divine ‘to be.’

The metaphysical transformation of Aristotle by Aquinas according to the concept of participation has been shown to have a number of important implications. First, in Aquinas’s refined scheme the basic goodness of all created beings has been guaranteed not merely by inference (Boethius) but by analysis of the metaphysical structure of entities according to the categories of substance and participation. In making articulate the distinction between essence and existence (the act of being, actus essendi) Aquinas shows that beings are good in virtue of their existence (their individual acts of being) without being good in virtue of their essences, a trait reserved to God alone. In Aquinas’s refined articulation of Boethius (without violating the
Boethian principle of the dichotomy between *per essentiam* and *per participationem*) we are able to see how beings can be both “good by participation” and “good in virtue of their existence,” that is, good on the substantial level and thus “substantially good” or “good intrinsically.”

Secondly, we have come to see that the metaphysical vision of Aquinas is related to Neoplatonism on a much deeper level than the mere common interest in the notion of participation. The central issue of Aquinas’s appropriation of Neoplatonism is the notion of what Cornelio Fabro has called “the intensivity of being.” Every cause impresses itself upon its effect such that an image of the cause is present in the effect. In any chain of causes the more primary cause makes a deeper and more lasting impression on every effect below it. God, as first cause, is thus more present in every effect of the created order—right down to the lowest effect, matter—than any other cause. Thus all non-divine being comprises a single hierarchical level below the divine being not only insofar as all non-divine being is an intentional creation of the divine being but also insofar as the being of the created order is participatory of the divine being on account of the impressed image of the divine which it must, in virtue of being created, possess. This notion has a number of important further implications of its own. Because to give the act of being is the proper effect of the first cause alone, all things in the created order receive not simply efficient motion but also the act of being. Because no creature is identical with its act, each creature requires the constant *inflatus* of being from the divine being in a maximally intimate fashion—no part or aspect of any creature exists ever at any time without the constant in-pouring of being from God: the act of being is the universal effect, and God is the being for whom the giving of the act of being is his *proprius effectus*.

I have said at the outset that the metaphysics of the Angel of the Schools is a philosophical system of transcendence-in-immanence: in emphasizing the utter transcendence of God Aquinas
shows how it is necessary that God also be immanent in the world in a radical way. Yet the
divine immanence in no way compromises the authentic integrity of being, and therefore it does
not compromise the freedom of creatures in their own order. Rather, the divine immanence is the
condition and guarantee of creaturely freedom. St. Thomas will compromise not one whit the
proper *nobilitas* of creaturely being, for to do so would be to compromise the *nobilitas* of God,
the goodness of God. The good pours itself out, and the greatest good manifests the greatest self-
outpouring.
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