

## Aquinas on the Divine Ideas and the Really Real\*

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FOLLOWING IN THE PLATONIC TRADITION, Thomas Aquinas posits a doctrine of Ideas as the immaterial, immutable, and eternal exemplars of sensible things. And following in the Neoplatonic tradition, he locates these Ideas in a divine mind—to be precise, in the mind of God.<sup>1</sup> Yet, while Thomas’s doctrine of divine Ideas agrees with both Platonism and Neoplatonism on these basic respective points, it nevertheless differs from them in significant ways. For example, unlike Plato, Thomas concludes that the Ideas cannot exist as subsistent Forms that are the essences of sensible things.<sup>2</sup> And unlike Neoplatonists such as Plotinus and Proclus,

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<sup>1</sup> Thus, he also follows in the Augustinian tradition regarding the Ideas. For Augustine, see notably his *De ideis*, *Quaestio* 46 of his *De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII* (*Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* [hereafter, CCSL] 50.1:70).

In this paper, I will capitalize the initial letter of the term “Idea” to indicate the transcendent status both of Platonic-style subsistent Forms, and of divine Ideas within the mind of God. When referring to forms in the human intellect or intellectual forms in general, the initial letter of the term “idea” will remain uncapitalized.

<sup>2</sup> Here, he not only follows Aristotle’s critique of the Platonic Forms as subsistent entities (see, e.g., *Metaphysics* I, c. 6), but also Augustine’s insistence that they must exist within the mind of God (*De ideis*, CCSL50.1:70–71:16–20), as well as Ps.-Dionysius’s position that the exemplars of beings pre-exist in God in a singular way (*Divine Names* V, par. 8, in *Dionysiaca*, ed. Philippe Chevallier [Paris: Desclée, de Brouwer & Cie., 1937], vol. 1.22.359–60:S). For other fundamental differences

who posit a divine mind as the locus of the Ideas, Thomas holds that this mind cannot be an hypostasis subordinate to the first principle, but must be God himself.<sup>3</sup>

What, then, of the Platonic tradition that the Ideas possess a greater reality than the things that they exemplify: *viz.*, that the Ideas are the “really real”?<sup>4</sup> In this article, I will examine whether Thomas’s doctrine of divine Ideas departs from the tradition on this point or whether it is in agreement with it and, if so, how. In short, are the divine Ideas, in Thomas’s view, more real than sensible things? Does he consider the divine Idea of Man, for example, to be more real than the sensible, individual man Socrates? To answer these questions, my article will consist of four parts. (1) In the first part, I will consider what it might mean for Plato for something to be “real” and “really real,” by looking at various scholarly interpretations concerning Plato’s doctrine of degrees of reality doctrine. (2) In the second part, I will begin to address the same question for Thomas by looking at his general account of reality and the real. (3) In the third part, I will provide a textual analysis of key passages on the divine Ideas to see the sort of reality Thomas attributes

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between Thomas and Plato, see R. J. Henle, S. J., *Saint Thomas and Platonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956).

For an overview of Thomas’s doctrine of divine Ideas, see John F. Wippel, *Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, The Etienne Gilson Series 16 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1993). For an in depth consideration of the topic, see Vivian Boland, *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1996), as well as Gregory T. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Here, Thomas looks to Ps.-Dionysius (*Divine Names* V, par. 2 [*Dionysiaca*, vol. 1.21.326–27:S]). Thomas did not have access to the writings of Plotinus, having only a limited familiarity with his thought. Later in life, he did have direct knowledge of Proclus through Moerbeke’s 1268 translation of *The Elements of Theology* (Helmut Boese, ed. *Proclus: Elementatio theologica, translata a Guillelmo de Morbecca*, De Wulf-Mansion centre Ancient and Medieval Philosophy series 1, vol. 5 [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1987]), which Thomas employed extensively in writing his commentary on the *Liber de causis*. On his use of Proclus, see Vincent A. Guagliardo, O.P., “Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas,” in Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, trans. and ed. Vincent A. Guagliardo, Charles R. Hess, O.P., and Richard C. Taylor (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), ix–xxxv.

<sup>4</sup> Norris Clarke offers an excellent overview of the history of this theme from Plato up through the nominalism of the fourteenth century. See his “The Problem of the Reality and Multiplicity of Divine Ideas in Christian Neoplatonism,” in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. Dominic J. O’Meara (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), 109–27.

to them. (4) Finally, in the fourth part of this paper I will return to the various interpretations of the term “real” identified by Platonic scholars, to discern whether Thomas considers the divine Ideas to be the “really real” in any sense of the phrase. As we will see, the answer to this question will not be a simple “yes” or “no,” but instead a *sic et non*—or more precisely, a set of such responses. Identifying these responses, along with the important distinctions they entail, will clarify for us not only the degree of reality that Thomas attributes to the divine Ideas, but more importantly it will shed further light on the fundamental role his doctrine of *esse* plays in his metaphysical account of reality.

### Platonism and the Really Real

Plato’s doctrine of Ideas, or Forms, as the “really real” is presented in a number of his dialogues, but perhaps most strikingly in the *Republic*.<sup>5</sup> In Book X, Plato contrasts the physical bed made by a carpenter with the Form of Bed. The physical one, we are told, is not “perfectly real,” but “a shadowy sort of thing by comparison with reality”—that is, by comparison with the Form.<sup>6</sup> We are presented here with a paradox: although it is the physical bed that can be put in a bedroom, dressed with sheets, and slept in, Plato contends that, in fact, the Form of Bed is the “real” bed.

Why does Plato hold this paradoxical position? What does it mean for him to refer to the Forms as the “really real”? To begin to answer these questions, we first need to consider what precisely the English phrase “really real” translates, namely, the Greek τὸ ὄντως ὄν. In this phrase, both ὄν and ὄντως are derived from the Greek verb “to be” (εἶναι)—the former derived term as the participial form and the latter as the adverbial. Thus ὄν can be translated into English with the participial form, “being.” As regards ὄντως, however, there is no corresponding English adverbial form of “to be.” We do not use the term “beingly.” Instead, ὄντως is typically translated as “really.” Similarly, we do not ordinarily speak of “beingness”

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., *Republic* 476a–479d, 509d–511d, and 596b–597d. See also *Phaedrus* 247c and *Sophist* 240b–248a.

<sup>6</sup> *Republic* 597a, translation from Gregory Vlastos, “A Metaphysical Paradox,” in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 39 (1965–66): 5. In my discussion of Greek terminology in this paper, I will follow translations by Vlastos as presented in both “A Metaphysical Paradox,” 5–19 and “Degrees of Reality in Plato,” in *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle*, ed. Renford Bambrough (New York: The Humanities Press, 1965), 1–19. In particular, I will follow Vlastos’s morphological account of the phrase τὸ ὄντως ὄν (“Degrees of Reality,” 1–2).

in English, which would be a literal translation of the Greek noun *οὐσία*, also derived from *εἶναι*. As a parallel to the translation of *ὄντως*, therefore, *οὐσία* can be rendered into English as “reality.”<sup>7</sup> As a further parallel, the participle *ὄν* can be translated alternatively as the adjective “real” and treated as a participial noun, thus functioning as a substantive adjective. Hence, the phrase *τὸ ὄντως ὄν* can be rendered into English in a number of ways, including “beingly being,” “real being,” “what really is,” and, of course, “really real.” Although this last translation, with which we are concerned, certainly captures Plato’s original expression, as Gregory Vlastos notes, “it makes less than obvious what leaps to the eye in the Greek: that ‘real’ and ‘reality’ are simply the adjectival and nominal forms of ‘to be,’ and that ‘is’ in turn represents the verbal form of ‘real’ and ‘reality.’”<sup>8</sup>

What is more obvious, however, from this morphological consideration of the phrase “really real” is that for Plato the notion of reality is tied to—indeed is an expression of—his doctrine of being. To say that the Forms, or Ideas, are the “really real” is to say that, in some sense, they *exist* more fully than the sensible things they exemplify. Why might this be? One explanation is that, for Plato, sensible things, unlike Forms, both *are* and *are not*: he tells us that they are intermediate between what fully is and what in no way is, participating in both.<sup>9</sup> Sensible things are thus in a state of becoming (*γένησις*), whereas Forms are in a state of being (*οὐσία*) and are constant and unchanging.<sup>10</sup> Following from these positions, Plato concludes that Forms are the objects of knowledge, whereas sensible things are merely objects of opinion.<sup>11</sup>

We find these Platonic views carried forward and recast in the Neoplatonic presentation of reality, for example in Plotinus’s account

<sup>7</sup> This translation of *οὐσία* is by no means the only one. In the context of Aristotle’s writings, the term is commonly translated (for better or worse) as “substance.” Here, the English translation follows the medieval Latin rendering of *οὐσία* as *substantia*, which dates at least as far back as Augustine, but which was standardized through the influence of Boethius. Joseph Owens notably advocates translating *οὐσία* as “entity.” Regarding this rendering of *οὐσία* and the history of its translation, see his *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, 3rd rev. ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies), 137–54.

<sup>8</sup> Vlastos, “Degrees of Reality,” 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Republic* 477a–478e.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., *Phaedo* 78d–79a; *Symposium* 211; *Republic* 479a–d. Regarding the distinction between *οὐσία* and *γένησις* in Plato, see, e.g., Robert Bolton, “Plato’s Distinction Between Being and Becoming,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 29 (1975): 66–95.

<sup>11</sup> *Republic* 477a–480a.

of Intellect ( $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ ). It is in this second hypostasis, beneath the One, that Plotinus locates the Platonic Ideas. More to the point, he identifies the Ideas with Intellect: Ideas, Being, and Intellect are one.<sup>12</sup> For Plotinus, it is Intellect that is constant and unchanging and, hence, the really real.<sup>13</sup> This Plotinian view is later echoed in Proclus's hierarchic triad of principles beneath the One: Being ( $\theta\upsilon\nu$ ), Life ( $\zeta\omega\eta$ ), and Intellect ( $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ ). Although the latter two proceed from the first as distinct principles, the higher is contained in the lower by participation; the lower, in turn, are contained in the higher as in a cause. Hence, Proclus tells us that, in Being, all things are really being ( $\theta\upsilon\nu\tau\omega\varsigma\ \theta\upsilon\nu$ )—really real—inasmuch as they are contained in the Form of Being.<sup>14</sup>

Identifying this link in the Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition between the notions of reality and being provides a helpful starting point to understand why this tradition considers the Ideas to be more real than sensible things. Still, it does not provide the full answer. For, as philosophers have acknowledged throughout the history of Western philosophy, “being” can be said in many ways—so, too, then with the notion of the “real.” A survey of Platonic scholarship reveals two fundamental readings of this term, “real”: (R1) an existential reading and (R2) a non-existential one. In light of the former reading, the Platonic doctrine of the really real has been interpreted as an existential doctrine. In light of the latter, it has been interpreted either as (R2a) an epistemic doctrine, (R2b) a doctrine of predication, or (R2c) an aesthetic-mystical doctrine. In what follows, I will briefly present each of these interpretations. My purpose in doing so is not to arbitrate between them in reading Plato, but rather simply both to see what it might mean to speak of the Platonic Ideas as the really real and also to consider whether, in any sense of the phrase, Thomas himself considers the divine Ideas to be such.

Let us start simply by considering how the term “real” is used in ordinary English language. Scholars note that there are two distinct senses of the term, which can be made clear by way of example:

R1. You, the reader, are real; by contrast, Harry Potter is not.

R2. The U.S. dollars in my wallet are real; by contrast, Monopoly money and counterfeit bills are not.

<sup>12</sup> *Ennead* V 3.5; V 9.6–8 *Plotinus*, ed. A.H. Armstrong, 7 vols., including Greek text of P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966–1988).

<sup>13</sup> *Ennead* VI 1.4.

<sup>14</sup> Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, Prop. 103.

The first sense of “real” (R1) is an existential sense contrasting the existent with the fictitious or imaginary, whereas the second sense is not existential, even if it presumes the existence of an object. Indeed, Monopoly money and counterfeit money can exist just as surely as the legal currency in my wallet. In calling the latter sort of bills “real money” what I am asserting is not that they exist but rather that they are *genuine*. It is this notion of the genuine that the second, non-existential sense of “real” (R2) denotes.<sup>15</sup>

What then of Plato? How does he use the Greek term for “real” (ὄν)? Some scholars read him as employing it according to the existential sense (R1). Thus, looking at Plato’s degrees of reality doctrine, R. C. Cross and A. D. Woozley note in their commentary on the *Republic* that “in what follows the expressions ‘exists,’ ‘is real,’ occur as synonyms.”<sup>16</sup> If the term “real” is thus taken, then for Plato the Forms are the really real because they *exist* more so than do sensible things. Other scholars, however, see this reading as problematic. In their view, existence is a binary state of affairs: either something exists or it does not. Existence, they would argue, does not admit of degrees. Thus, in interpreting Plato’s degrees of reality doctrine, these scholars conclude that the existential sense of “real” has no relevance.<sup>17</sup>

Regarding the non-existential sense of “real” (R2), scholars tend to agree that it *can* admit of degrees, since one thing can be more genuine than another. Thus, we speak of a “real friend” and “real gold.” The term “real” can be used as a descriptor in these cases not merely to distinguish the genuine article from the impostor (the sincere friend from the false-friend; genuine gold from fool’s gold), but also to distinguish the perfect, complete, and unadulterated from the deficient.

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<sup>15</sup> Vlastos, “Metaphysical Paradox,” 6–7. As Vlastos explains: “This non-existential sense of *real* has always been in common use and is recognized as such in the Oxford English Dictionary, immediately after the existential: ‘that which is actually and truly such as its name implies; possessing the essential qualities denoted by its name; hence *genuine*.’ But modern philosophers have ignored it all too often. Kant’s classical pronouncement on the hundred thalers makes no allusion to a hundred counterfeit ones. G. E. Moore, so eager to learn philosophy from language, missed the sense of *real* in his celebrated essay, ‘The Conception of Reality’ (1917).” Vlastos notes that it was not until after the Second World War that this second sense of “real” was recognized by J. L. Austin (*ibid.*, 7).

<sup>16</sup> R. C. Cross and A. D. Woozley, *Plato’s Republic: A Philosophical Commentary* (London: Macmillan, 1964), 145.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Vlastos, “Metaphysical Paradox,” 10 and Richard J. Ketchum, “Plato on Real Being,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 17 (1980): 213–14.

Thus, the person we identify as a “real friend” is, for example, fully loyal, in contrast to another sincere friend who is less so, and the gold we identify as “real gold” may be unadulterated, in contrast to genuine gold that has impurities. The loyal friend and the pure gold “realize” all of the characteristics that fulfill being those things. And again, in each of these examples, the claim is not that the contrasted item has *no* reality whatsoever as that kind of thing, but, instead, that it has a *lesser* reality.<sup>18</sup> To put the matter in other terms, we call a friend a “real friend” and pure gold “real gold” because they are what they are in a truer sense. The “true friend” and “true gold” are those that fully realize the essential characteristics of what it is to be those things.<sup>19</sup>

Considering this non-existential sense of the “real” as the genuine or true (R2), Vlastos notes that, in Greek, as in English, the term “true” applies primarily to propositions. He grants that it also applies to the things described by propositions (such as people who are friends and metals that are gold), but only derivatively.<sup>20</sup> In light of these considerations, he concludes that, when Plato speaks of the Forms both as “more real” than sensible things and as the “really real,” it is according to this non-existential sense of “real” (R2), since the Forms are what they are in a perfect, complete, and unadulterated way, unlike sensible things.<sup>21</sup> Hence, the Form of Bed is more real than the physical bed that merely participates in it.

Vlastos notes that, because these Forms are presented as necessary and eternally unchanging, the knowledge they provide is, for Plato, marked by an infallibility that provides logical certainty. In Vlastos’s terms, the Forms are “cognitively reliable,” unlike the sensible things that participate in them. Thus, the Forms are, for Plato, the objects of knowledge *par excellence*. For this reason, Vlastos concludes that Plato’s degrees of reality doctrine is properly an epistemological doctrine (R2a).<sup>22</sup>

In contrast to Vlastos, Richard J. Ketchum reads Plato’s degrees of reality as a semantic doctrine concerning predication (R2b). Ketchum agrees with Vlastos that Plato’s doctrine does not concern degrees of

<sup>18</sup> Vlastos, “Degrees of Reality,” 2–3. Not everything admits of such degrees, however. Vlastos notes that, whereas the category of “friend” admits of an intermediary between the *real* friend and the non-friend, diamonds, for example, do not.

<sup>19</sup> Vlastos (“Degrees of Reality,” 2) notes that “‘True’ is a fairly common meaning of ‘real’ in spoken and written Greek.”

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 17; Vlastos, “Metaphysical Paradox,” 11–12.

existence.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, he takes issue with Vlastos's translation of τὸ ὄν, insisting that it should not be translated in such a way as to obscure the close relationship between "being" (ὄν) and the verb "to be" (εἶναι). Thus, in Ketchum's view, the phrase τὸ ὄντως ὄν should not be rendered as "that which is really real," but instead as "that which really *is*." As a result, he concludes that Plato does not hold a degrees of *reality* doctrine but instead a degrees of *being* doctrine.<sup>24</sup>

With this clarification in place, Ketchum explains that the question that needs answering is not why Plato holds that Forms alone are *real*; instead, the question is why Forms alone have the sort of being that really *is*—why Forms alone really *are*.<sup>25</sup> Here, Ketchum takes the verb "to be" not in an existential sense, but simply in its role as the copula. Thus, in his view, the phrase "that which is" means the same as "that which is something or other." If we follow this interpretation, Plato's discussion of being is a discussion of affirmative predication.<sup>26</sup> Hence, Ketchum concludes that Plato's distinction between being and *real* being is a distinction between types of predication.<sup>27</sup>

To support this reading, Ketchum (like Vlastos before him) identifies Plato's use of the term "real" with the term "true" in the sense of "genuine" and "authentic." Granting Vlastos's reading that the Forms are true as objects of knowledge, Ketchum nevertheless contends that the truth of such cognitive objects requires a semantic truth: "We can understand what it is to speak of *objects* as true in the semantic sense as follows: an object is true if and only if something true can be said of it."<sup>28</sup> According to this reading, the Forms are real being because each Form is the paradigm case of being that thing. They really *are* because they are *what* they are in an unqualified sense.<sup>29</sup>

This is not to say that sensible things, in Ketchum's reading, simply *are not*.<sup>30</sup> As he reminds us, Plato tells us that they both *are* and *are not*—in between pure being and absolute nonbeing, in a state of becoming.

<sup>23</sup> Ketchum, "Plato on Real Being," 213–14.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. According to Ketchum, "The only reason that reality need enter a discussion of the doctrine at all is due to Plato's use of the adverb, 'ὄντως,' 'really.'"

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. Ketchum calls the use of the copula without a grammatical completion "systematically elliptical use."

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 218. Ketchum grants, however, that Plato does not state his degrees of reality doctrine as a theory about language (ibid., 219).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 220.



Ketchum thus concludes that, for Plato, sensible things have what he terms *mere* truth, rather than the *real* truth of Forms. Hence, he explains, for sentences about sensible things to have truth value, the copula requires qualification. By contrast, for sentences with abstract substantives as subject terms to have truth value, the copula requires no qualifications.<sup>31</sup> For the foregoing reasons, then, Ketchum concludes that Plato's degrees of being doctrine is a semantic doctrine of predication (R2b).

There is one final interpretation of Plato's degrees of reality doctrine for us to consider, namely as an aesthetic-mystical one (R2c). Thus far, we have seen Vlastos present the doctrine as epistemological in character, but he also contends that it is more than that for Plato. Further considering the term "real," Vlastos identifies another aspect of its non-existential sense. In addition to cognitive reliability, he explains, the term "real" can denote *value*. If we consider the example of gold again, unadulterated gold merits the name "real gold" not only because it provides cognitive reliability by revealing the essential properties of gold, but also because it has truer value than impure gold. In Vlastos's terms, it is "reliably valuable." And so too with the Platonic Forms: Plato presents them as reliably valuable relative to sensible things, as is evidenced by the fact that he treats them as divine, putting them in the place of gods. In pursuing them, the philosopher is presented not merely as a knower of Form, but also as a *lover* of Form, and ultimately of Beauty.<sup>32</sup>

We see, then, varying interpretations regarding Plato's doctrine of the degrees of reality and the status of Forms, or Ideas. Again, it is not my intention to arbitrate between these interpretations. Rather, my intention is for the foregoing presentation to provide us with a frame of reference for interpreting Thomas's attitude toward the degree of reality of the divine Ideas. With that in mind, let us sum up the various senses in which the phrase "really real" might be said of the Ideas (divine or otherwise): either (R1) existentially, indicating that the Ideas have more existence than the things they exemplify, or (R2) non-existentially, in the sense of the genuine. The latter could be read as (R2a) an epistemic doctrine concerning what Vlastos terms the "cognitively reliable," (R2b) a semantic doctrine of predication, as outlined by Ketchum, or (R2c) an aesthetic-mystical doctrine regarding what Vlastos terms the "reliably valuable." To discern which, if any, of these interpretations

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>32</sup> Vlastos, "Metaphysical Paradox," 12–19.

apply to Thomas's doctrine of divine Ideas, we next need to consider his general account of reality and the "real."

### Aquinas on the Real

To begin with, we should recall that Thomas's exposure to Plato's thought was entirely, or almost entirely, second hand. Among these secondhand sources was Proclus's *Elements of Theology*, translated into Latin by William of Moerbeke in 1268.<sup>33</sup> Encountering the Platonic phrase τὸ ὄντως ὄν, Moerbeke renders it into Latin as *enter ens*.<sup>34</sup> Thus, like the original Greek phrase, Moerbeke's Latin translation consists of derivatives of the Latin infinitive "to be" (*esse*). But here the parallel ends. For, whereas the Greek participle ὄν can mean both "being" and "real," the Latin participle *ens* admits only of the former meaning.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, whereas ὄντως is a natural adverbial form of εἶναι, the Latin *enter* is not a natural adverbial form of *esse*.

Hence, Thomas does not take Moerbeke's awkward literal translation *enter ens* to mean "the really real," but instead treats it as "beingly being." This fact is evidenced in his commentary on the *Liber de Causis*, where he employs Proclus's *Elements of Theology* to interpret (and critique) the *Liber*. In the course of commenting on Proposition 2 of the Latin *Liber*,

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<sup>33</sup> In the thirteenth century, only three of Plato's works were available to the Latin West: the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Timaeus* in the partial translation of Calcidius. Although Thomas makes references to each of these three works in his own writings, it is almost certain that he never read either the *Meno* or the *Phaedo*, and there is debate about whether he even read the *Timaeus* (see Raymond Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition During the Middle Ages* [London: The Warburg Institute, 1939; repr. with new prefaces and supplement, Millwood, NY: Kraus International Publications, 1982], 27–28 [page citations are to the reprint edition]; James A. Weisheipl, O.P., "Thomas' Evaluation of Plato and Aristotle," *The New Scholasticism* 48 (1974): 101–2; and R. J. Henle, S.J., *Saint Thomas and Platonism* [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956], xxi., n. 41). We do know with certainty, however, that, toward the end of his life, Thomas had access to Proclus's commentary on the *Timaeus* which had been translated by William of Moerbeke in 1268. Weisheipl, *Thomas' Evaluation*, 101–2. On the dating of Moerbeke's translation, see Jean-Pierre Torrell's *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and His Works*, rev. ed., trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 222.

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., his translations of Props. 86, 88, and 89 in (Boese, *Proclus: Elementatio theologica*).

<sup>35</sup> This is not to deny that in Latin or for Thomas there is any connection between being and the real, as will soon be discussed below. Rather, it is to point out the immediate denotation of the term *ens*.

Thomas references Proposition 88 of Proclus's *Elements* as a source text, both quoting and clarifying his words: "Every beingly, or existingly (*exister*), being is either before eternity, or in eternity, or participating eternity."<sup>36</sup> Thomas's addition here of the word *exister*, with its root in the verb *existere* (to exist), indicates a clear existential reading of the adverb *enter*.<sup>37</sup> He then offers further clarification, explaining that "*beingly being* is said in contrast to mobile being (*mobilit* *ens*), just as to-be-firmly (*esse stans*) is said in contrast to to-be-moving (*moveri*)."<sup>38</sup>

Thus, Thomas does not take the Latin Procline phrase *enter ens* (τὸ ὄντως ὄν) to refer to the really real in the sense of the truly genuine; rather, he takes it to refer to immaterial being—the sort of being that is immobile. Moreover, Thomas never makes this Platonic style expression his own; it is only in the context of his commentary on the *Liber* that he employs either the term *enter* or the phrase *enter ens*.<sup>39</sup> Still, this does not mean that the notion of the "really real" is absent from his writings. For Thomas, it is not the term *ens* that immediately denotes the notion of the real, but instead *realis*, a term derived from the Latin *res*, meaning "thing."

For Thomas, *res* is a transcendental attribute of being (*ens*) and, so, is convertible with it: to be a thing is to be a being. As such, *res*, like *ens*, includes both essence and act of being (*actus essendi*). Nevertheless, the two names differ conceptually and are not mere synonyms. Thomas tells us that the name *ens* is taken from the act of being (*actus essendi*)

<sup>36</sup> All translations of Thomas are my own. The italicized text in the quotation above indicates Thomas's own quoting of Proclus. See *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Super Librum de causis expositio* (hereafter, *In Liber*), ed. H. D. Saffrey (Fribourg-Louvain: Société Philosophique, 1954), Prop. 2, 13: "His igitur praemissis sciendum est quod haec propositio in libro Procli lxxxviii invenitur sub his verbis: *Omne enter, vel exister, ens aut ante aeternitatem est, aut in aeternitate, aut participans aeternitate.*" Prop. 2 of the *Liber* itself states that "Omne esse superius aut est superius aeternitate et ante ipsam, aut est cum aeternitate, aut post aeternitatem et supra tempus" (Saffrey, *In Liber*, 10).

<sup>37</sup> The adverb *exister* is, itself, an awkward neologism, this time offered by Thomas himself. A search of the *Index Thomisticus* (<http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/it/index.age>) for the term reveals that this is the one and only occasion in his corpus where he employs it.

<sup>38</sup> *In Liber*, Prop. 2: "Dicitur autem *enter ens* per oppositum ad *mobilit* *ens*, sicut *esse stans* dicitur per oppositum ad *moveri*" (Saffrey, 13). Italics in original, again indicating Thomas's quoting of Proclus.

<sup>39</sup> A search of the *Index Thomisticus* shows that he employs the term *enter* only five times and the phrase *enter ens* only three times, all in the context of his commentary on the *Liber de Causis*.

and not from that thing to which this act belongs, *viz.*, essence. By contrast, *res* is taken from the quiddity, or essence, of a being.<sup>40</sup> In an early text, Thomas provides a twofold etymology of the term. On one hand, the name can be taken from *reor*, *reris* (to think, regard, reckon), in which case it refers to that which is within the mind (*anima*). On the other hand, it can be taken from *ratum*, and then it refers to that which is outside of the mind; in this respect, “thing (*res*) is taken as something fixed and firm in nature.”<sup>41</sup> Following this latter sense of *res*, he will use expressions such as *in re* and *in rerum natura* to indicate the extramental existence of something. And so it is, too, with his use of the adjective *realis*.

With this sense of *realis* as the extramental, Thomas commonly contrasts the real with what is merely according to reason (*secundum rationem tantum*).<sup>42</sup> We might be tempted to see Thomas as thus identifying the real with being (*ens*), but such a reading would not be entirely accurate. As he explains, *ens* can be taken in two respects: either as “being of reason” (*ens rationis*) or as “real being” (literally, “being of nature,” *ens naturae*). The former sense of being concerns the intentions discovered by reason, such as genus and species, that are not founded in reality (*in rerum natura*), but follow instead from a consideration of reason. Such being, we are told, is the proper subject of logic. By contrast, Thomas explains, the subject of metaphysics is *ens naturae*, what future scholastics would term *ens reale*.<sup>43</sup>

If real being, for Thomas, simply means extramental being, then

<sup>40</sup> *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* (hereafter, *De veritate*) I, q.1, co. & ad s.c. 3 (in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia*, vol. 22.1, [Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1972]). On this text, see John F. Wippel, “Truth and Essence,” in *Metaphysical Themes II* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 101.

<sup>41</sup> *Super Sententiis* I, d.25, q.1, a. 4 co. (ed. P. Mandonnet, vol. 1 [Paris: Lethielleux, 1929], 611–12): “. . . ideo nomen rei ad utrumque se habet: et ad id quod est in anima, prout ‘res’ dicitur a ‘reor reris’, et ad id quod est extra animam, prout ‘res’ dicitur quasi aliquid ratum et firmum in natura.”

<sup>42</sup> For example, he offers this contrast in considering types of relations (*Summa theologiae* [hereafter, *ST*] Ia, q. 13, a. 7 co., in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia*, vol. 4 [Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1888]), as well as types of distinction (*De veritate* q. 1, a. 7 ad 2).

<sup>43</sup> A search of the *Index Thomisticus* reveals that Thomas himself never employs the phrasing *ens reale*, instead using such phrases as *ens extra animam*, *ens naturae*, and *ens in rerum natura* (see, e.g., *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio* [hereafter, *In Metaphysicam*] IV 4.574 [M.-R. Cathala and R. M. Spiazzi eds., (Turin-Rome: Marietti, 1950)] ; *ST* IaIIae q. 8 a. 1, ad 3). Nevertheless, these phrases are clearly synonyms for *ens reale*.

it would seem that we already have an answer to the question of the reality of the divine Ideas: they cannot be the really real since they have no existence as Ideas apart from the divine mind.<sup>44</sup> It should be noted, however, that, just as Thomas never made the phrase *enter ens* his own, he similarly never employed the phrasing *realiter realis*.<sup>45</sup> Thus, he never asks, in so many words, the question: What is the “really real,” the divine Ideas or sensible things?

Still, the absence of such phrasing does not mean that Thomas is unaware of the Platonic question regarding the really real. For him, this question is phrased in different terms. Here, it is helpful to recall one sense of “real” as identified by both Vlastos and Ketchum as the genuine and true (R2). When we view the topic of the really real from this perspective, we find that Thomas is indeed aware of the question. Presenting his understanding of Platonic thought, he tells us, “Plato held that the separate *Man* was the true man (*verus homo*), whereas a material man is man by participation.”<sup>46</sup> Why? Because, Thomas explains, for Plato and the Platonists, an Idea is “more truly existing (*magis vere existens*) than a singular.”<sup>47</sup>

With this observation, we have the sense that, for Thomas, the distinction between the existential and the non-existential sense of the real may not be as clearly delineated as it is for the likes of contemporary scholars such as Vlastos and Ketchum; indeed, the two senses may be interrelated. And this would stand to reason, given Thomas’s position that being (*ens*) is convertible with the true (*verum*).<sup>48</sup> It is with an eye to this relationship between truth and being that we find Thomas

<sup>44</sup> “. . . ideo non possumus ponere ideas esse extra Deum, sed in mente divina tantum” (*De veritate* q. 3, a. 1 co. [100: 254–61]).

<sup>45</sup> It is also interesting to note that Thomas never employs the term *realitas* or its variants. Nevertheless, he clearly has a notion of reality, as is evident from his accounts of the real. Regarding the absences of these terms and phrases in Thomas’s writings, see the Index Thomisticus: <http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/it/index.age>.

<sup>46</sup> “Plato posuit quod homo separatus erat verus homo, homo autem materialis est homo per participationem.” ST Ia, q. 18, a. 4, ad 3 co.

<sup>47</sup> “Secunda quaestio est, supposito quod genera sint principia rerum, utrum principia sint universalis dicta de individuis, scilicet species specialissimae, quas genera appellat secundum Platonicorum consuetudinem, quia continent sub se plura individua, sicut genera plures species; aut magis sint principia prima generalissima, ut puta quid sit magis principium, utrum animal vel homo, qui est principium quoddam secundum Platonicos, et magis vere existens quam singulare” (In *Metaphysicam* III 3.356, 101–2).

<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., *De veritate* q. 3, a. 1.

considering, in a number of places in his corpus, whether sensible things have *esse* more truly in themselves or in God as Ideas. Hence, we will now turn to consider these texts and what they reveal for Thomas about the really real.

### Textual Analysis

#### *Super Sententiis I, d. 36, q. 1, a. 3 (1252–1256)*<sup>49</sup>

In *Super Sententiis I, d. 36, q. 1, a. 3*, Thomas considers whether the things that are known by God are in God. In the corpus of the article, Thomas explains that all things known by God are indeed in him. Nevertheless, they are not in his essence as though subsisting in the divine nature or as identical with it; instead, they are in him as objects known are in a knower.<sup>50</sup> In reply to the first objection, he offers further clarification, noting that creatures are in God through their likenesses, since the divine essence is the likeness of everything that is from God.<sup>51</sup> In response to this reply, the second objection of the article counters that everything exists more truly (*unaquaeque res verius est*) where it is by its own essence than where it is by its likeness; for, in the latter case, something seems to be there only in a qualified sense (*secundum quid*). This second objection then concludes that, if things are in God only according to their likeness, it seems that they exist more truly in themselves than in God.<sup>52</sup>

In reply to this objection, Thomas considers what it means for something “to be more truly” (*verius esse*) by focusing on the *esse* of things. We are told that a creature’s being (*esse*) can be considered in four ways: (1) as it exists in its own nature; (2) as it exists in our understanding; (3) as it exists in God; and (4) taken commonly (*communiter*), abstracted from these other modes.<sup>53</sup> Thomas explains that, whenever a comparison

<sup>49</sup> Dating of Thomas’s texts follows Torrell’s *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and His Works*.

<sup>50</sup> *Super Sententiis I, d. 36, q. 1, a. 3*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, ad 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, obj. 2.

<sup>53</sup> This fourfold division develops a threefold division that Thomas takes from Avicenna regarding the consideration of a nature. The fourth item that is added by Thomas concerns the consideration of something as it is in God. For the original distinction in Avicenna, see *Metaphysics V*, chs. 1–2 (*Avicenna Latinus: Liber de Philosophia Prima sive Scientia Divina I–IV*, ed. S. Van Riet [Louvain/ Leiden: Peeters/ Brill, 1980], 228–45). For Thomas’s application of the threefold Avicennian distinction to essence, see *De ente*, c. 3. For a similar presentation of the fourth item with

is made, it is made with regard to something common. Consequently, when we say that a creature has *esse* more truly in God than it does in itself, we are comparing the first mode of *esse* and the third with regard to the fourth. In other words, this comparison of how the creature exists in its own nature with how it exists in God is drawn in light of the creature's *esse*, insofar as that *esse* is considered commonly. Thomas next reminds us that everything that is in something is in it according to the mode of that in which it is. Hence, something that is in God exists in him according to an uncreated *esse* (*per esse increatum*). By contrast, the thing exists in itself according to created *esse* (*per esse creatum*), in which there exists less truth of being than exists in uncreated being.<sup>54</sup>

If we compare the first mode of being (the way a thing exists in its own nature) to the second mode (the way it exists in our understanding) with regard to the fourth (taken commonly), Thomas explains that the first two are found to be related as that which surpasses to that which is surpassed. Thus, since the *esse* that is present in a thing's own nature is there substantially, it surpasses the accidental manner in which it is present in the mind (*anima*). However, Thomas notes, the mode of *esse* that is present in a thing's own nature is itself surpassed, inasmuch as it is a material mode of *esse* (*esse materiale*), whereas that which is found in the mind is an intellectual mode (*esse intellectuale*) and, hence, by implication, immaterial. In light of the foregoing consideration, he concludes that sometimes a thing has *esse* more truly as it exists through its likeness than it does in itself.<sup>55</sup>

#### *De veritate* q. 4, a. 6 (1256–1259)

Thomas engages Plato more directly on this topic in *De veritate*. In question 4, article 6, he considers whether things exist more truly in the Word than in themselves. Referencing Ps.-Dionysius, Thomas begins his response with the observation that effects fall short of imitating those causes that are above them.<sup>56</sup> Because of the distance between such causes and their effects, something can be predicated truly of the effect but not of the cause. To illustrate the truth of this principle, Thomas gives as an example the causality of the sun. Following the physics of his time, he

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which Thomas provides a fourfold consideration of a nature, see *Quodlibet* 8.1.1 (in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia*, vol. 25 [Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1996], 51–53).

<sup>54</sup> *Super Sententiis* I, d. 36, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> See *Divine Names* IX.6–7 (*Dionysiaca*, vol. 1.31.470–72:S).

explains that things may be called hot because of the heat they receive from the sun, but the term “hot” would not properly be predicated of the sun itself. And this is the case because of the sun’s superiority over those things that are called hot.<sup>57</sup> In light of these observations, Thomas draws a distinction between what we might term the ontological truth of a thing (*veritas rei*) and its logical truth (*veritas praedicationis*). As regards its ontological truth, a thing exists more truly in the Word than it does in itself; but as regards its logical truth, the same thing exists more truly in itself than it does in the Word.<sup>58</sup>

In this article’s first objection, we find a counterargument similar to that offered in the text considered above from *Super Sententiis*. As before, the objector notes that something exists more truly where it is by its own essence than where it is by a likeness alone. Given the question at hand in this article from *De veritate*, this time the objector’s argument is phrased in terms of the presence of things in the Word, but the reasoning is the same: we are told that a thing exists in itself by its own essence, but in the Word only according to its likeness. Hence, the objector concludes, things exist more truly (*verius esse*) in themselves than in the Word.<sup>59</sup> While the basic framework of the objection here is the same as in the earlier text, Thomas’s reply to it is not. In considering the phrase *verius esse*, he focuses his attention this time not on the term *esse*, but instead on the term *verius*. Looking at modes of truth here, Thomas employs the distinction made in the corpus of *De veritate* 4, a. 6 regarding the two senses of truth. He tells us that as regards logical truth, something

<sup>57</sup> Thomas notes, furthermore, that all equivocal causes are superior to their effects.

<sup>58</sup> *De veritate* q. 4, a. 6 co. As Thomas explains, this conclusion regarding the truth of predication is not due to some shortcoming of the Word, but rather to its supereminence. In short, because of the supereminence of the Word, it is truer to call Socrates “a man” because of his individual nature. See also Thomas’s earlier discussion of truth in *De veritate* q. 1, a. 1–2. For commentary on these articles, see John F. Wippel, “Truth in Thomas Aquinas,” *Review of Metaphysics* 43 (1989/1990): esp. 307–21, and Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and The Transcendentals* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1996), 243–90.

As Wippel notes, although the terms “ontological truth” and “logical truth” are not employed by Thomas himself, they have been adopted by later interpreters of scholastic philosophy. Wippel, “Truth in Aquinas,” 295, n. 1. On this point, see, e.g., R. J. McCall, “St. Thomas on Ontological Truth,” *The New Scholasticism* 12 (1938): 9–29, and J. Wande Wiele, “Le problème de la vérité ontologique dans la philosophie de saint Thomas,” *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 52 (1954): 521–71.

<sup>59</sup> *De veritate* q. 4, a. 6, obj. 1.



exists more truly in its essence. As regards ontological truth, however, it exists more truly through the likeness that is its cause.<sup>60</sup>

In the third objection from the same article, it is observed that, in itself, a thing exists in act, whereas in the Word it exists only in potency, just as the work of art exists in potency in the mind of the artisan. Thus, a thing exists more truly in itself than in the Word. In reply, Thomas explains that active potency is more perfect than an act that is its effect, and he notes that it is in this respect—*viz.*, according to active potency—that creatures are said to exist according to potency in the Word.<sup>61</sup> Implied here is the conclusion that, in this respect, they also exist more truly in the Word.

In the fourth objection, we find a seemingly Aristotelian inspired argument. The objector notes that a thing's operation is its ultimate perfection. It is inasmuch as things are existing in themselves that they have their proper operations—operations that do not exist in the Word. I take the objector's point to be that a being such as Fido the dog can only perform dog activities (such as barking, chasing cats, and being a loyal companion) as he is in himself. By contrast, the likeness of Fido in the Word of God cannot do these things. Hence, the objector concludes that things exist more truly in themselves than in the Word. In reply, Thomas does not shrink from his original position. He grants that, in the Word, creatures do not have their proper operations, but he insists that there they have more noble operations. For in the Word, they are productive both of things (*effectivae rerum*) and of their operations.<sup>62</sup>

Thomas's replies to the objections in *De veritate* q. 4, a. 6 appear to suggest, in a certain respect, an affinity between himself and Plato regarding what constitutes the really real. Nevertheless, as is frequently the case for Thomas, his stance in fact entails both *sic et non*. Although he offers a qualified Platonic *sic* in reply to these objections, the replies that he provides in response to the *sed contra* arguments from the same article offer an Aristotelian *non*.

In *sed contra* 1, the authority of Anselm is cited with the observation that, in the Word, a creature is the creative essence. Since the uncreated is truer than what is created, it is argued that a thing thus has *esse* more truly in the Word than in itself.<sup>63</sup> In reply, Thomas reminds us again of the distinction he had identified in the corpus of the article,

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., ad 1.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., ad 3.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., ad 4.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., s.c. 1.

that between the two senses of truth. As he explains, this argument in *s.c.* 1 proceeds regarding the ontological truth of the thing, rather than according to its logical truth.<sup>64</sup> Left implied is Thomas's position that, as regards logical truth, a created being has *esse* more truly in itself.

The second *sed contra* argument makes the connection with Platonism more explicit. There, it is noted that, just as Plato had posited Ideas of things existing outside of a divine mind, "we" hold that there are Ideas within a divine mind. Now, Plato held that the Separate Man is more truly man than is a material one, which is why he termed this separate Idea *Per se* Man. In the same way, (we are told) according to the position of the Faith, things exist more truly in the Word than in themselves.<sup>65</sup> Thomas's response to this line of reasoning is strongly worded: Plato's position is blameworthy (*reprehenditur*) because it presumes that natural forms exist according to their own nature without matter, as though matter were accidentally related to natural species. If this position were true, then the term "natural things" (*naturales*) would be predicated more truly of things without matter. "But we," he observes, "do not hold this [position]; hence there is no parallel comparison (*simile*)."<sup>66</sup>

In the third and final *sed contra* argument, it is noted that what is truest in any genus is the measure of all that is in the genus. Now, the likenesses of things that exist in the Word are measures of the truth in all things. For, something is said to be true inasmuch as it imitates its exemplar, which is the Word. Thus, we are told, things exist more truly in the Word than in themselves.<sup>67</sup> In response to this argument, Thomas simply notes that his reply is the same as to the first *sed contra*. So, here again, he is indicating that, although a thing does exist more truly in the Word as regards ontological truth, as regards the logical truth of predication, it exists more truly in itself.<sup>68</sup>

If we compare the foregoing text from *De veritate* with the earlier text from *Super Sententiis*, we see that Thomas's different approach to considering the question of whether a creature exists more truly in

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., ad *s.c.* 1.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., *s.c.* 2.

<sup>66</sup> "Ad secundum dicendum quod Plato in hoc reprehenditur quod posuit formas naturales secundum propriam rationem esse praeter materiam ac si materia accidentaliter se haberet ad species naturales, et secundum hoc *res* naturales vere praedicari possent de his quae sunt sine materia; nos autem hoc non ponimus, et ideo non est simile" (ibid., ad *s.c.* 2 [22.1.134:108–15]).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., *s.c.* 3.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., ad *s.c.* 3.

itself than in God results in a more nuanced answer. In addressing the question from the perspective of *esse*, the earlier *Super Sententiis* text emphasizes the greater ontological status of *esse increatum* relative to *esse creatum*. With that in mind, Thomas reaches the simple conclusion that, even though a creature exists in God only through its likeness, it nevertheless exists there more truly than it does in itself. The treatment of the same question phrased in terms of truth in the *De veritate* leads Thomas to a response that is both *sic et non*: yes, created beings exist more truly in God according to the ontological truth of a thing (*veritas rei*), but they do not exist more truly there according to the logical truth of predication (*veritas praedicationis*). Rather, in this latter respect, created beings exist more truly in themselves. Plato's error in positing subsistent Ideas, we are told, was to attribute a greater truth to the Ideas according to the order of predication. And that is an error Thomas himself intends to avoid.

*Summa theologiae Ia, q. 18, a. 4 (1266–1268)*

Thomas addresses the issue again in *Summa theologiae Ia* in the context of considering whether all things in God are life (q. 18, a. 4). In the *responsio* of this article, he explains that, for God, to live is to understand; moreover, in God, intellect, what is understood, and the act of understanding are identical. Hence, whatever is in God as understood is there according to his very living or life (*ipsum vivere vel vita*). Thomas concludes that, since all things made by God are in him as understood, they are all present in him as the divine life itself.<sup>69</sup> In the third objection, it is noted that, according to Augustine (*De vera religione* 29), a living substance is better than a non living one. Consequently, if things that are not in themselves living are life in God, it seems that they would exist more truly in him than in themselves. The objection then continues, however, by noting that this conclusion seems false, since in themselves things exist in act, whereas in God they exist only in potency.<sup>70</sup>

Thomas replies to this objection by granting that, if form alone, and not matter, belonged to the nature of natural things, they would exist in every respect according to a truer mode through their Ideas in the divine mind than they exist in themselves. And he repeats what he had noted in the earlier *De veritate* text, that this was the view of Plato, who held that the Separate Man was the true man, whereas a material one

<sup>69</sup> ST Ia, q. 18, a. 4 co.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., obj. 3.

is only a man by participation. Rather than offering here an immediate rebuke of Plato, Thomas next presents an important distinction regarding two modes of existing for natural things. He tells us that, since matter does in fact belong to their nature, simply speaking, natural things have a truer *esse* in the divine mind than in themselves. Why? Because, in the divine mind, they have *esse increatum*, whereas in themselves they have *esse creatum*. Nevertheless, Thomas notes, as regards *this esse* (*esse hoc*)—such as a man or a horse—natural things have *esse* more truly in their own nature than in the divine mind. For, as he explains, it belongs to the truth of what man is to have *esse* in a material way (*esse materiale*), a mode of being that man does not have in the divine mind. Similarly, he observes, a house has a more noble mode of being in the mind of the artisan than it does in matter, and yet, Thomas insists, the house in matter is more truly said to be a house than the one that exists in the artisan's mind because the latter is only a house in potency whereas the former is a house in act.<sup>71</sup>

If we compare this text from the *Prima Pars* with that from *Super Sententiis*, the considerations agree as regards the use of the distinction between *esse increatum* and *esse creatum*: natural things exist more truly in God because there they have an uncreated being. Nevertheless, the texts differ inasmuch as the *Prima Pars* consideration goes beyond the *Super Sententiis* to identify a way in which natural things can be said to have a truer *esse* in themselves—namely, as regards the determinate *esse* (*esse hoc*) that they have in their own nature.<sup>72</sup>

If, however, we compare this text from the *Prima Pars* with that from *De veritate*, the considerations differ inasmuch as the former is addressed in terms of *esse* whereas the latter is addressed in terms of truth. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the texts fundamentally agree if we recall that in *De veritate* Thomas concludes that a created being is said to exist more truly in itself according to the logical truth of predication. Now, viewing the same issues from the perspective of *esse* in the *Prima Pars*, he concludes that a material being such as a house or a natural thing exists more truly in itself than in an intellect (whether divine or human) because it has *esse hoc*, which is why the house in matter is more truly *called* a house than is the idea of a house, and by implication the

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., ad 3.

<sup>72</sup> Regarding Thomas's treatment of *esse hoc* as determinate mode of existence, see John E. Naus, *The Nature of the Practical Intellect According to Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1959), 98–99 and n. 164, and Robert O. Johann, "A Commentary on Secondary Causality," *The Modern Schoolman* 25 (1947): 25.

same is the case *mutatis mutandi* for natural things: a man is more truly *called* a man than is the divine Idea of Man. In short, what Thomas terms *esse hoc* here is presented as the basis for the truth of predication.

### Conclusions

From the foregoing survey of texts, we find that Thomas is willing, in a certain respect, to say that sensible things exist more truly in God than in themselves—namely, according to the ontological truth of the thing. In this respect, the *esse* creatures have in God is a nobler *esse*, namely, *esse increatum*. But what does it mean for a thing to exist in God in this way? Thomas tells us: “Things exist in God through their proper Ideas (*proprias rationes*), which, in God, are nothing other than the divine essence. Hence things as they exist in God *are* the divine essence.”<sup>73</sup> In short, Thomas concludes that created things exist more truly in God according to ontological truth because, in God, their being is his being, which is a truer being, since God is *esse* by his very essence. Thomas’s observations from both the *De veritate* and the *Summa theologiae* regarding the manner in which things exist more truly in God can thus be reconciled. But what about his observations regarding the manner in which things exist more truly in themselves? Here, we need to consider more closely what was merely implied in the latter text, namely, the relationship between the ontological truth of a thing and its logical truth of predication.

Thomas addresses this relationship in a number of texts, but notably in *De veritate* q. 1, a. 2, where he considers whether truth is principally found in the intellect or in things. In his *responsio*, Thomas begins by acknowledging the analogical character of truth, explaining that truth is said of many things by priority and posteriority. And, as with all analogical predication, the complete *ratio* is found in the primary sense of the term. Following Aristotle, he notes that this term, “truth,” signifies the order of things to the intellect. Although we do indeed call things outside the mind “true,” that is only the case insofar as they are adequated to the intellect. Hence, Thomas concludes that truth is

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<sup>73</sup> “Creaturae in Deo esse dicuntur dupliciter. Uno modo, inquantum continentur et conservantur virtute divina. Alio modo dicuntur *res* esse in Deo sicut in cognoscante. Et sic sunt in Deo per proprias rationes, quae non sunt aliud in Deo ab essentia divina. Unde *res*, prout sic in Deo sunt, sunt essentia divina.” (*ST* Ia, q. 18 a. 4, ad 1 [4: 229–30]). Emphasis added in translation. For Thomas’s use of the term *ratio* to signify a divine Idea, see Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 4–25.

indeed found in both the intellect and in things, but by priority in the intellect and by posteriority in things.<sup>74</sup>

He then notes that a thing is related to the practical intellect differently than it is to the speculative. As the cause of the things it knows, the practical intellect is the measure of them. By contrast, the speculative intellect receives its knowledge from the things it knows; thus it is, in a way, both moved and measured by them—as is the case with our knowledge of natural things. But those things are themselves measured by the divine intellect. For, all things are in the divine intellect, he tells us, as artifacts are in the mind of an artisan. In light of these distinctions, Thomas concludes the following: (1) the divine intellect is a measure that is not measured, whereas (2) natural things are both measures and measured, and (3) our intellect is measured and is not a measure of natural things, but only of artifacts.<sup>75</sup>

As regards the second class of items on this list—natural things—Thomas explains that they are both measures and measured because they are placed between two intellects: the human and the divine. Hence, they are said to be true in two respects, according to their adequation to each sort of intellect. In one respect, natural things are said to be true because they fulfill that to which they are ordered by the divine intellect. Thomas cites as support for this position the authority of both Anselm and Augustine, and in addition he quotes Avicenna's definition of truth: "The truth of each thing is a property of its own *esse* that has been established for it."<sup>76</sup> Here, Thomas clearly has in mind an ontological truth that is present *in* the natural thing itself, and with his Avicennian quotation, we also see him clearly equating the basis for this truth with the thing's own *esse*. As regards the second respect in which natural things are said to be true, Thomas explains that this occurs following the adequation of such things to the human intellect insofar as they produce in the intellect a true estimation of themselves.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> *De veritate* q. 1, a. 2 co.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> "Res ergo naturalis, inter duos intellectus constituta, secundum adaequationem ad utrumque vera dicitur: secundum enim adaequationem ad intellectum divinum dicitur vera in quantum implet hoc ad quod est ordinata per intellectum divinum, ut patet per Anselmum in libro *De veritate* et per Augustinum in libro *De vera religione* et per Avicennam in definitione inducta, scilicet 'veritas cuiusque rei est proprietas sui esse quod stabilitum est ei'" (*De veritate* q. 1, a. 2 [22.1.9: 97–107]).

<sup>77</sup> And he notes, conversely, that things are said to be false when they are taken to be although in fact they are not, or when they are taken to have qualities that they do not in fact have (*De veritate* q. 1, a. 2 co. [22.1.9:107–13]).

Here then, Thomas is referring to what he elsewhere terms the truth of predication.

With all of the foregoing distinctions in place, Thomas ends his *responsio* with the conclusion that the *ratio* of truth is found in natural things by priority in the first sort of truth (ontological truth), and by posteriority in the second kind (logical truth). This is so because the comparison of natural things to the divine intellect is prior to their comparison to the human intellect. And he notes that, even if there were no human intellect to know natural things, they would still be true given their order to the divine intellect, since the *ratio* of truth would remain (namely, the adequation of thing to intellect). To highlight this point, Thomas notes for the sake of argument that, if, *per impossibile*, there existed no intellect whatsoever—neither human nor divine—then natural things would not be understood at all and the *ratio* of truth would not remain in any way whatsoever.<sup>78</sup>

This text from *De veritate* sheds light on the question in the texts we have considered regarding whether things exist more truly in God or in themselves. First, it confirms the primacy of ontological truth over the truth of predication that we had seen Thomas discuss in both *De veritate* q. 4, a. 6 and *ST* Ia, q. 18, a. 4 by showing how the truth of predication is caused by and depends upon ontological truth. Second, it shows that ontological truth is something rooted in a natural thing's own *esse*—i.e., in its *actus essendi*. Third, it reveals Thomas's view that, even though ontological truth is rooted within a natural thing, this ontological truth is nevertheless dependent upon the adequation of that thing to the divine intellect.

Thus, we see in *De veritate* q. 1, a. 2 the connection between ontological truth and the truth of predication. This connection is further brought out in reply to the third objection from the same article. There, Thomas makes clear that, even though truth in the human mind consists in the adequation of intellect to things, that truth does not follow simply from the mind's estimation. Rather, truth in the human mind is *caused* by things, since such truth follows the existence of things (*existentia rerum*). As he explains, quoting Aristotle, “it is because a thing either *is* or *is not* that a statement is called either true or false,’ and so too is the [human] intellect.”<sup>79</sup>

<sup>78</sup> *De veritate* q. 1, a. 2 co.

<sup>79</sup> “veritas, quae est in anima causata a rebus, non sequitur aestimationem animae, sed existentiam rerum ‘quoniam eo quod *res* est vel non est, dicitur oratio vera vel falsa’, similiter et intellectus” (*De veritate* q. 1, a. 2 ad 3 [Leon. 22.1.10: 136–45]).

Thus, the logical truth of a thing is caused by its inner ontological truth, which in turn is caused by the divine intellect. These causal connections are highlighted nicely in a terser passage from *Contra gentiles* I, c. 60, in which Thomas shows that God is Truth. In the fifth argument from that chapter, he begins by acknowledging Aristotle's position that truth is in the mind and not in things. Nevertheless, Thomas notes that sometimes we do refer to a thing as true—namely, when it properly attains the act of its own proper nature. It is for this reason, he explains, that Avicenna says that ontological truth (*veritas rei*) “is a property of the *esse* of each thing, which is established for it.” Elaborating on this point, Thomas clarifies that such truth is a property of a thing for two reasons: (1) inasmuch as a thing produces a true estimation of itself in the human mind; and (2) inasmuch as it imitates its own proper Idea (*propria sui ratio*) in the divine mind.<sup>80</sup>

Thus, even though we have seen Thomas conclude in various texts that a thing exists more truly in God according to ontological truth, he should not be read as saying that there is *no* ontological truth within created beings. Rather, such truth is in the thing itself to the extent that it imitates its proper divine Idea. And it is precisely because there is such ontological truth within the thing that there can be truth of predication. The term “man” can truly be predicated of Socrates because Socrates *is* in fact a man.

Hence, when Thomas concludes in *De veritate* q. 4, a. 6 that a thing exists more truly in itself according to the logical truth of predication, he is not merely making a point about our understanding or speech about extramental things—he is making a claim about those things as they are in themselves.<sup>81</sup> It is for this reason that Thomas maintains

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See Aristotle, *Categories* 5 4b8. Regarding this causal relationship, see Aertsen, *The Transcendentals*, 251 ff.

<sup>80</sup> *Summa contra gentiles* (hereafter, *SCG*) I, ch. 60, in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia*, vol. 13, (Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1918), 173: “Licet verum proprie non sit in rebus sed in mente, secundum Philosophum, res tamen interdum vera dicitur, secundum quod proprie actum propriae naturae consequitur. Unde Avicenna dicit, in sua *Metaphysica* IV, ch. 1 [Van Riet, *Avicenna Latinus*, 184–93], quod *veritas rei est proprietas esse uniuscuiusque rei quod stabilitum est ei*, inquantum talis res nata est de se facere veram aestimationem, et inquantum propriam sui rationem quae est in mente divina, imitatur. Sed Deus est sua essentia. Ergo, sive de veritate intellectus loquamur sive de veritate rei, Deus est sua veritas.” Cf. *ST* Ia, q. 16, a. 1, and *In Metaphysicam* V 9.895.

<sup>81</sup> As Aertsen (*The Transcendentals*, 253) observes, “The disposition of a thing is ‘the foundation and cause’ of the truth of the intellect.”



in *ST* Ia, q. 18, a. 4 that a natural thing has *this* being (*esse hoc*) more truly in its own nature than it does in its proper divine Idea because it belongs to the truth of what a man is to be material. By contrast, the *esse* of a divine Idea, ontologically considered, is nothing other than the immaterial, uncreated *esse* of God. The divine Idea of Man, therefore, cannot be called “a man” because the *esse* of a man is not that of God. In Avicennian terms, the *esse* of a man is “established” in the essence of a sensible, individual man such as Socrates; the *esse* of a divine Idea is not.<sup>82</sup>

But what of the apparent contradiction between the texts from the *De veritate* and *Summa theologiae* regarding their accounts of how created beings exist in God according to potency? As we have seen, in *De veritate* q. 4, a. 6, Thomas argues that, since the active potency by which they exist in the Word is more perfect than the act by which they exist in themselves, creatures exist more truly in the Word. In *ST* Ia, q. 18, a. 4, however, we do not find this distinction between active potency and the act of the effect. Instead, Thomas simply states that, just as a material house is more truly said to be a house than the one that exists only in potency in the mind of the artisan, so too a natural thing exists more truly in itself according to *esse hoc* than it does in God. Implied in this conclusion is that a natural thing exists more truly there because in itself it is in act, whereas in God it is merely in potency.

I would contend that the apparent contradiction between these two texts is resolved again through a consideration of the connection between what Thomas terms *esse hoc* and the truth of predication. Thomas’s analogy of the house is not meant to deny that natural things exist more truly in God according to ontological truth. According to ontological truth, things exist in God according to the active potency mentioned in the *De veritate*—an active potency that, considered in itself, is nothing other than the *esse increatum* mentioned in *ST* Ia, q. 18, a. 4. According to the logical truth of predication, however, things do not exist in God with *esse hoc*, but instead with the potential to have *esse hoc*—namely, as Ideas in the mind of God. Thus, according to *esse hoc* and the truth

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<sup>82</sup> See *SCG* II, ch. 52, par. 2 where Thomas notes that the *esse* of a man is distinct from the *esse* of a stone because in each case *esse* is diversified by something other than itself, *viz.*, the essence principle in which it is received. God’s *esse*, moreover, is distinct from both that of a man and a stone because it is a subsisting *esse*.

Regarding Thomas’s position that God’s *esse* is not that of creatures, see *SCG* I, ch. 26, where he argues that God is not the formal *esse* of all things.

of predication, the divine Ideas have less reality than created things: the Idea of Socrates, unlike Socrates himself, is not essentially a man.

Here it is necessary for us to note an important distinction that Thomas draws elsewhere between the divine essence taken *simpliciter* and taken as a divine Idea. The divine essence, he tells us, is not called an Idea inasmuch as it is that essence. Rather, it is called an Idea inasmuch as it is the likeness of this or that thing.<sup>83</sup> Hence, Thomas notes that, according to its principal meaning, a divine Idea includes (conceptually) something more than the divine essence, *viz.*, the relation of a creature *to* that essence.<sup>84</sup> We can thus distinguish between the ontological status of a divine Idea from its conceptual, or intentional, status.

This distinction is further clarified by Thomas in the context of considering how a form is present in the intellect.<sup>85</sup> As he explains, a form in an intellect, in fact, has two relationships. In one way, it is related to the thing whose form it is, *i.e.*, the thing that is understood. This is the intentional status of an intellectual form, or idea. In another respect, an intellectual form is related to the very intellect in which it exists. This is the form's ontological status. According to the first relationship, Thomas tells us that an intellectual form is not said to be "of a certain kind" (*aliqualis*), but rather "of a certain thing" (*alicuius*), because it is neither a material form for material things nor a sensible one for sensible things. As an example, we might give the intellectual form, or idea, of a dog in the human intellect. It is "of a certain thing" precisely because it is the form of this thing that we are understanding, the dog. Yet, inasmuch as this idea is in the intellect, it is neither material nor sensible, since it is an intentional similitude and not a Form that enters into matter.

According to the second relationship that Thomas identifies, an intellectual form *is* said to be "of a certain kind" because it follows the mode of the thing in which it exists, namely, the intellect.<sup>86</sup> To continue with our own example of the idea of dog as it is in the human intellect, we might add that it is "of a certain kind" according to the mode of that intellect. Thus, not only is it immaterial according to the immateriality

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<sup>83</sup> See, *e.g.*, *ST* Ia, q. 15, a. 2 ad 1. To be precise, a divine Idea, for Thomas, is God's *knowledge* of his essence as imitable.

<sup>84</sup> "Sed idea de suo principali intellectu habet aliquid aliud praeter essentiam, scilicet ipsam proportionem creaturae ad essentiam, in quo etiam completur formaliter ratio ideae, ratione cuius dicuntur plures ideae" (*De veritate* q. 3, a. 2 ad 2 [22.1.105:236–40]).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, ad 5.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

of the human intellect, but it is also ontologically a quality that is really distinct from the intellect into which it is received.<sup>87</sup>

For Thomas, this distinction regarding the relationship of intellectual forms in the human mind applies, *mutatis mutandi*, regarding such forms in the divine mind. If we consider the ontological status of a divine Idea insofar as it is related to the divine mind, it is said to be “of a certain kind.” Thus taken, a divine Idea is present according to the mode of the divine intellect and, as such, is ontologically nothing other than the divine essence. For, the Ideas in God’s intellect (unlike those in a human intellect) are not really distinct from the divine essence. As we have seen, it is for this reason that Thomas attributes a greater ontological truth to a divine Idea than to the natural thing it exemplifies.

If, however, we consider the intentional status of a divine Idea—namely insofar as it is related to the thing it exemplifies—that Idea is said to be “of a certain thing” and is taken as including (according to reason) the relation the natural thing has to the divine essence. As we have also seen, it is for this reason that Thomas attributes a greater logical truth to a natural thing than to the divine Idea that is its exemplar. And, as a result, that natural thing also has, in a certain respect, a greater ontological reality than its corresponding divine Idea.

The situation is summed up nicely by Norris Clarke:

What we are asserting here is what seems to us the absolutely primary condition of any thoroughgoing and fully conscious realism of being: that to be a pure *esse intentionale*, or object of thought, in any intellect, even the divine, confers no proper or intrinsic reality of its own whatsoever on the object. In other words, the “being” or “existence” of a thought object or “intentional being” is not a “to be” but a “to-be-thought,” not a “to-bereal” but a “to-be-really-thought by a real act of a real mind.” The reality resides entirely in the real act of the mind thinking, not in the object of this thought.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>87</sup> See, e.g., *ST I*, q. 84, a. 1–3, and *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia dei* (hereafter, *De potentia*) 8.1 co (in *Quaestiones disputatae*, ed. M. Pession [Turin-Rome: Marietti, 1949]).

<sup>88</sup> Norris Clarke, “What is Really Real?” in *Progress in Philosophy. Philosophical Studies in Honor of Rev. Doctor Charles A. Hart*, ed. J. A. McWilliams (Milwaukee, 1955), 86. In this article, Clarke’s concern is to show that, although “real being,” for Thomas, has traditionally been interpreted by scholars as including possible being, this is a misreading. He contends that a proper, existentialist reading of Thomas shows that

In other words, the true or real being of created things does not consist in their being known, but in their existing according to what Thomas terms *esse hoc*. The divine Idea that God has of me is *not* me. “It is true,” Clarke notes, “that my *intelligibility*, the *intelligible content* of the divine idea of me, exists in a higher, more perfect way in God than in me; but this is still not my true being, my *esse*.”<sup>89</sup>

What, then, can we conclude regarding the really real for Thomas? Phrasing the question in terms of “existing more truly” (*verius esse*), he clearly wishes to affirm that the divine Ideas have a greater reality than the things that they exemplify, namely inasmuch as the divine Ideas are ontologically identified with the divine essence. However, as the texts we have considered reveal, he does not view them as the really real in the manner that he understands Plato to have intended—namely, according to the logical truth of predication. In short, although Thomas’s doctrine of divine Ideas has Neoplatonic foundations, it nevertheless is structured by an Aristotelian appreciation for the reality of concrete sensible things.<sup>90</sup>

We thus see Thomas distancing himself from what *he* would take Platonism to mean by the phrase “really real,” but what of those interpretations offered by Platonic scholars? What relevance do they have for Thomas’s account of the reality of the divine Ideas? As we saw in Part I of this paper, scholars identify at least four possible interpretations of Plato’s degrees of reality doctrine: either as (R1) an existential doctrine, (R2a) an epistemological doctrine, (R2b) a semantic doctrine, or (R2c) an aesthetic and mystical doctrine. In concluding this paper, I will consider which, if any, of these senses of the degrees of reality doctrine is applicable to Thomas’s account of the divine Ideas.

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“real being” (which is the proper object of metaphysics) does not prescind from actual existence, and that possible being should be classified as purely intentional or mind-dependent being. On this point, I am in disagreement with Clarke and sympathetic with Wippel’s response to him. As Wippel shows, real being is not limited merely to the sort of possibility found in the passive potency of matter, but extends also to the active potency of an agent—most notably to the divine power. See John F. Wippel, “The Reality of Nonexisting Possibles According to Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, and Godfrey of Fontaines,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 34 (1981): 738–39.

With Wippel’s distinction in mind, one can grant with Clarke that the divine Ideas as intentional similitudes do not have real being, but the possibility of the essences of which they are similitudes has real *potential* being rooted in the divine power.

<sup>89</sup> Clarke, “Reality and Multiplicity of Divine Ideas,” 123–24.

<sup>90</sup> Boland, 226.

### Aquinas and the Really Real

Let us begin with (R1) the existential interpretation. In looking at the scholarship on Plato, we saw both Vlastos and Ketchum contend that to speak of “degrees of existence” is nonsensical. Hence, they insist that Plato could not possibly have considered the Ideas to “exist more than” sensible things. As before, I will not address here whether this interpretation of Plato is accurate. Suffice it to say that, for Thomas, the language of “degrees of existence” is by no means nonsensical. Rather, it has meaningful grounding in his metaphysical doctrine of *esse*—hence his question of whether natural things “exist more truly” (*esse verius*) in God or in themselves. With that in mind, does Thomas consider the divine Ideas to be the really real in an existential sense? From what we have seen, the answer is yes and no.

Here, I think it is important to acknowledge a distinction drawn by Thomistic scholars between the “act of existence” and the “fact of existence.”<sup>91</sup> Although Thomas himself never identifies this distinction in so many words, it nevertheless seems to be implicit in his writings on *esse*. What is indeed explicit is his account of *esse* as the act of existence, as the *actus essendi* principle within a being—a principle that Thomas famously holds to be distinct from the essence principle in created beings but, in God, identical with his essence.<sup>92</sup> Thomas identifies this act principle as most formal, giving actuality even to actualizing form.<sup>93</sup> Hence, he considers the *esse* principle within beings to be the “actuality of all acts and consequently is the perfection of all perfections.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> See, e.g., Cornelio Fabro, “The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation,” trans. B. M. Bonansea, *The Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1974): 470, and John F. Wippel, “Truth in Thomas Aquinas,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 43 (1990): 552 n. 20, reprinted in Wippel, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas II* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 99 n. 79. For Joseph Owens’ objections to this distinction, see Owens, “Aquinas on Knowing Existence,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 29 (1976): 670–90.

For an excellent investigation of this distinction between act and fact of existence, along with a summary presentation of the views of the aforementioned authors, see Kevin White, “Act and Fact: On a Disputed Question in Recent Thomistic Metaphysics,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 68 (2014): 287–312.

<sup>92</sup> See, e.g., *ST* Ia, q. 3, a. 4.

<sup>93</sup> *Quaestiones disputatae de anima* 6 co.; *ST* Ia, q. 4, a. 1 ad 3; *ibid.*, Ia, q. 8, a. 1 co. (in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia*, vol. 24.1 [Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1996], 51:229–40).

<sup>94</sup> “Unde patet quod hoc quod dico *esse* est actualitas omnium actuum, and propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum” (*De potentia* 7.2 ad 9 *Quaestiones disputatae* 2:192).

By contrast, what scholars term “the fact of existence” is not an act principle, but instead results from the act of existence as an effect.<sup>95</sup> It is meant to signify a certain state of affairs—namely, that a thing is real in the sense of extramental: present outside of the mind. Regarding sensible things, we can judge the fact of their existence through a presence that we can experience in a sensory way.<sup>96</sup> With that said, for Thomas, judging the fact of something’s existence is not dependent solely on sensory experience, since he also holds that we can judge *that* something exists (*i.e.*, the fact of the matter) via *a posteriori* reasoning from effect to cause, as with his *quia* demonstrations of God’s existence.<sup>97</sup>

To have factual existence, then, is to be real both according to the existential sense of the term “real” identified by Vlastos and Ketchum and according to Thomas’s sense of the term *realis* as referring to the extramental.<sup>98</sup> And here, I would argue, Thomas would be in agreement with these Platonic scholars: factual existence does not admit of degrees. In this respect, it is analogous to the illumination of an incandescent lightbulb that is either switched on or off. Similarly, a being either exists in the factual sense or it does not; there is no in between. Regarding this existential sense of “real” as referring to the fact of existence, then, I would argue that Thomas considers created things to be the really real, and not the divine Ideas. For, as we have seen, a created being such as Socrates has *esse reale*, and hence extramental existence, whereas his corresponding divine Idea has *esse intentionale* and no extramental existence.

If, however, we consider the *act* of existence, we find a different account of the really real in Thomas’s writings. Here, he stands in stark contrast with the likes of Vlastos and Ketchum, since he presents the act of existence as no mere binary state of affairs. Rather, for Thomas, it admits of degrees. To return to our analogy of light bulbs, those with a higher wattage have a greater intensity of brightness than those with a lower one. In a similar way, Thomas considers the act of existence to admit of degrees inasmuch as it is determined by the various essence

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<sup>95</sup> Fabro, “Intensive Hermeneutics,” 470.

<sup>96</sup> As Fabro (*Introduzione all’esistenzialismo in Opere Complete*, vol. 7 [1943] [Segni, Italy: Editrice del Verbo Incarnato, 2005], 117) notes, “Clear is the ‘fact of existence’; one can even point one’s finger (‘It is him, take him!’).” Translation appears in Jason A. Mitchell, *Being and Participation: The Method and Structure of Metaphysical Reflection according to Cornelio Fabro*, vol. 1 (Rome: Ateneo Pontificio Regina Apostolorum, 2012), 345.

<sup>97</sup> See, *e.g.*, *ST* Ia, q. 2, a. 2–3.

<sup>98</sup> At least, for Thomas, according to the primary sense of *realis* as *realis in actu*.

principles that receive and limit it, some less so and some more (as in an angel as opposed to a stone). And in God, who is subsisting *esse*, it is entirely unlimited and infinite in intensity.<sup>99</sup> Now, regarding the act of existence, we have seen Thomas considers the divine Ideas to be ontologically nothing other than the divine essence itself and, as such, to have *esse increatum*. Thus, they have greater existential reality than the things they exemplify inasmuch as God himself does; as Thomas tells us, a creature compared to God is, as it were, nothing at all (*quasi nihil*).<sup>100</sup> In this respect, the divine Ideas can be said to be the really real. Nevertheless, we have also seen Thomas note that as regards *this esse* (*esse hoc*)—such as a man or a horse—created things exist more truly in their own nature (*propria natura*) than in the divine mind. From this perspective, Thomas again presents creatures, and not the divine Ideas, as the really real.

What of the position (R2a) that the degrees of reality doctrine is, for Plato, an epistemological one? Is this reading applicable to Thomas's doctrine of divine Ideas? Recall that, according to Vlastos, Plato considers the Ideas to be the really real in the sense of what is most genuine because they are "cognitively reliable" as the proper objects of intellectual knowledge. Granting Vlastos's interpretation of Plato, we find that the same reading is not applicable to Thomas. To the contrary, in his view, the proper objects of the human intellect are the quiddities of material things, which he tells us first fall under sense and imagination, since such essences are present in the material objects considered by the intellect.<sup>101</sup> Thus, to know Socrates is to know a man, and not the Idea of Man (separate or divine). Indeed, Thomas goes so far as to tell us that we cannot know the divine Ideas in this lifetime, since in this lifetime we do not behold the essence of God.<sup>102</sup> Thus for Thomas the divine Ideas are not the really real in the cognitive sense identified by Vlastos.

What of Ketchum's interpretation of the degrees of reality doctrine for Plato, namely, as (R2b) a semantic doctrine concerning predication?

<sup>99</sup> Regarding grades of *esse*, see, e.g., *Super Sententiis* I, q. 36, a. 2.3, ad 2; SCG I, ch. 50, par. 7; ST Ia, q. 22, a. 4 co. On the axiom that unreceived act is unlimited, see John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom that Unreceived Act is Unlimited," *Review of Metaphysics* 51 (1998): 533–64.

<sup>100</sup> *De veritate* q. 2, a. 3 ad 18.

<sup>101</sup> ST Ia, q. 85, a. 5–6. Thomas tells us that natural objects are thus inseparable from matter and motion both in their being (*secundum esse*) and as they are understood (*secundum intellectum*). See *Super Boetium De Trinitate* 5.1 co. (in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia*, vol. 50 [Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1992], 138:141–49).

<sup>102</sup> ST Ia, q. 84, a. 5; Ia, q. 88, a. 3.

According to this reading, for sentences about sensible things to have truth value, the copula requires qualification, unlike sentences with abstract substantives (namely, the Ideas) as subject terms. If we grant this reading of the Platonic doctrine, we again find Thomas departing from Plato. As we have seen regarding the logical truth of predication, Thomas concludes that natural things exist more truly in themselves according to *esse hoc* than they do in the mind of God. For, it is a being such as Socrates who is properly called a man, not a divine Idea. According to the order of predication, then, we again find Thomas presenting created beings as the really real, rather than the divine Ideas.

Finally, we should consider (R2c) Vlastos's aesthetic-mystical interpretation. As we saw, he maintains that, for Plato, the Ideas are the really real, not merely because they are "cognitively reliable," but also because they are "reliably valuable". As such, they are the ultimate objects of human desire. Granting this interpretation of the really real, we again can ask its relevance for Thomas. Here again, I would argue, we need to draw the distinction between the intentional versus the ontological status of the divine ideas.

Inasmuch as the divine Ideas are the intentional similitudes of created beings, they are not, for Thomas, the reliably valuable. Rather, the reliably valuable is God himself, who is the ultimate good and, as such, the ultimate end of human desire.<sup>103</sup> Attainment of this end, Thomas tells us, is beatitude, which consists in the human intellect's union with God, whereby it contemplates the divine essence itself.<sup>104</sup> If, however, we consider the ontological status of the divine Ideas as identical with that divine essence, then I would argue that, from this perspective, they *can*, for Thomas, be viewed as the reliably valuable. As he explains, whatever is known is, in a way, in the knower. And he reminds us that it is for this reason that Aristotle says the human soul, in a way, is all things, because the mind can know all things (*De anima* III.8, 431b20). In this respect, Thomas explains, it is possible for the perfection of the whole universe to exist in one thing. Hence, he notes:

According to the philosophers this is the ultimate perfection that the soul can attain: that the whole order of the universe, and its causes as well, be transcribed in it (*describatur*). And they held this also to be the ultimate end of man, which according to us

<sup>103</sup> See, e.g., *ST* I-II, q. 2, a. 8.

<sup>104</sup> *ST* I-II, q. 3, a. 8.



consists in the vision of God. For as Gregory says, “What does he not see who sees Him Who sees all things?”<sup>105</sup>

For Thomas, then, in seeing God, who is himself the “reliably valuable,” the blessed see the divine Ideas, for it is only in seeing these Ideas in the mind of God that they can see all things. And, thus, in their very union with God, the blessed, in a sense, are also united with the Ideas.

From all that we have seen in considering the really real, it is clear that, for Thomas, the different senses of the “real” debated by scholars of Plato are not mutually exclusive. Though these various senses are implicit in his writings, each is nevertheless present, and all presuppose his metaphysical doctrine of *esse*. As he shows, within his system, it is the act of existence that is the foundation of the real, providing created beings with a reality outside the mind that allows them not only to be, but also to be known and spoken of. Ultimately, however, the reality that created beings have due to their intrinsic act of existence is dependent upon another, extrinsic act. For, as Thomas indicates, God as *esse subsistens* is, by his very essence, the exemplar of reality for all that is real.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> “Unde ut huic imperfectioni aliquod remedium esset invenitur alius modus perfectionis in rebus creatis secundum quod perfectio quae est propria unius rei in altera re invenitur: et haec est perfectio cognoscentis in quantum est cognoscens quia secundum hoc a cognoscente aliquid cognoscitur quod ipsum cognitum est aliquo modo apud cognoscentem; et ideo in III De anima dicitur ‘anima esse quodam modo omnia’ quia nata est omnia cognoscere; et secundum hunc modum possibile est ut in una re totius universi perfectio existat; unde haec est ultima perfectio ad quam anima potest pervenire secundum philosophos ut in ea describatur totus ordo universi et causarum eius, in quo etiam finem ultimum hominis posuerunt, quod secundum nos erit in visione Dei quia secundum Gregorium ‘quid est quod non videant qui videntem omnia vident?’” (*De veritate* q. 2, a. 2 co. [22.1.44:114–33]).

<sup>106</sup> *ST* Ia, q. 44, a. 3.