

The Importance of Steven A. Long's *Analogia Entis* within Contemporary Catholic Thought*

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The publications of Steven A. Long elicit deep admiration. Beyond the hosts of articles that have emerged from his study and teaching, his three books have particularly enriched contemporary Catholic philosophy and theology. First, *The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act* (published in 2007).¹ Second, *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* with its leading chapter (the heart of the book), titled "On the Loss, and the Recovery, of Nature as a Theonomic Principle" (published in 2010).² Finally, and most recently, *Analogia Entis: On the Analogy of Being, Metaphysics, and the Act of Faith* (published in 2011). An impressive list of publications adorns Professor Long's curriculum vitae. Nonetheless, as is the case with the writings of Saint Paul, "there are some things in them hard to understand" (2 Pt 3:16). Indeed, if one had to propose words that best capture the essences of his books, no doubt they would include "teleology," "theonomy," and

* These remarks were originally delivered on October 11, 2012, at the American Maritain Association Conference book panel dedicated to Steven A. Long's *Analogia Entis: On the Analogy of Being, Metaphysics, and the Act of Faith* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011).

¹ Steven A. Long, *The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007).

² Steven A. Long, *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

“analogy.” Three demanding words that, as we all realize, elude facile explanation.

To honor the considerable service of Professor Long to Catholic intellectual life, I propose that his writings share a common, sapiential aspect. They do not constitute a disparate collection of technical inquiries. Professor Long’s three books form an integral unity such as one finds in the twenty-four theses of Thomist philosophy issued on July 27, 1914, by the Sacred Congregation of Studies under the heading “Decree of Approval of some theses contained in the Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas and proposed to the Teachers of Philosophy.” Moreover, I further suggest that his most recent book, *Analogia Entis*, offers us insight into the fundamental principle—indeed, one might say, the sapiential key—to an adequate appreciation of Long’s work vis-à-vis contemporary Catholic thought.

First, *The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act*. During a 2008 symposium on Long’s first book, I made the following remarks:

Why does this book matter[?]: Let *Veritatis splendor* serve as a starting point: “The object of the act of willing is in fact a freely chosen kind of behaviour” [*Veritatis splendor*, §78]. Personal worth and dignity depends on our rightly discerning kinds of behavior. As *Veritatis splendor* §63 sets it forth, choosing a kind of behavior that conforms to the truth about the good of the human person affects an individual’s moral growth, the perfection of that human person, and the right disposition in a person for receiving the reward of eternal life. In short, happiness, now and forever.³

In other words, how one articulates the nature of the human act matters on both speculative and existential levels. No wonder Professor Long “argues eloquently that for Aquinas there is a basic ‘unit of act,’ and [that] this ‘unit’ is the case wherein the object is *per se* ordained to

³ Romanus Cessario, O.P., “Why This Book [*The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act*] Matters,” remarks presented at the 43rd International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 9, 2008. See also Romanus Cessario, O.P., “Human Action and the Foundations of the Natural Law,” *Nova et Vetera* 8 (English), no. 1 (2010): 185–89.

the end.”⁴ The *teleology of act* matters for the human person. It matters for us.

Second, Cajetan Cuddy, O.P., one of my Dominican confreres, offered the following observation during the 2011 American Maritain Association Conference panel devoted to the book *Natura Pura*: “Professor Long—like a skilled physician—has been able to locate the ‘pulse’ of theology, diagnose the cause of certain noticeable irregularities in the ‘heart beat’ of the history of Catholic thought, and offer principles and suggestions to aid in a full and integral appropriation of the *depositum fidei*.”⁵ What sorts of irregularities might these be and what are their causes? Cuddy summarizes Long’s diagnosis: contemporary Catholic theologians have neglected “the Thomistic understanding of obediential potency which is a *passive and specified potentiality*—grounded in the impressed sapientia of the theonomic order in human rational nature.”⁶ In other words, the theonomic character of human nature and its obediential *potency* (like the teleology of moral *act*) matters greatly. And one recognizes this importance not just in speculative but also in existential—and, indeed, beatitudinal—considerations. If one errs on the level of obediential potency, one will err on the level of the theological act. Not a small (or insignificant!) error for the Catholic thinker who keeps the Highest Truth before his gaze.

Finally, Long’s most recent book on the analogy of being draws out the universal implications of Saint Thomas Aquinas’s teaching that “*potentia et actus dividunt ens et quodlibet genus entis*”—“potency and act divide being and every kind of being” (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 77, a. 1). Attentiveness to potency and act is not optional within realist speculation. Indeed, Long argues assiduously—and, I might add, compellingly—that “the intrinsic analogicity of being as divided by act and potency” affords the philosopher and theologian a much surer foundation for their engaging life and contemplation than does “free-floating relation.”⁷ As the twentieth-century Dominican commentator Reginald

⁴ Cessario, “Why this Book.”

⁵ Cajetan Cuddy, O.P., “*Natura Pura*, Obediential Potency, and *Sacra Doctrina*,” paper presented at the 35th Annual International Meeting of the American Maritain Association, Notre Dame, Indiana, October 14, 2011.

⁶ *Ibid.*; emphasis original.

⁷ Long, *Analogia Entis*, 1.

Garrigou-Lagrange was wont to remark, “the definition of potency [and act] determines the Thomistic synthesis.”⁸ If one fails to formulate this vital distinction correctly, one abandons the sapiential key to the truth of reality.

Steven A. Long is a Thomist, pure and simple. His work manifests a mastery of the fundamental importance (and universal implications) of the real distinction between potency and act. Because of this mastery, Professor Long has been able to articulate the subtleties and nuances requisite to any adequate consideration of being—both natural and supernatural. Only if one understands potency and act’s real and proper division of being will one be able to apprehend the reality behind words like “teleology,” “theonomy,” and “analogy.” Moreover, without much exaggeration, I suggest that unless one understands Long’s *Analogia Entis*, one will not really appreciate the importance of his *The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act*, nor that of his *Natura Pura*, which I and others have explored in more detail elsewhere. 

⁸ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought* (St. Louis, MO: Herder, 1950), 37.