

The Modern Semantic Principles Behind Gilson's Existential Interpretation of Aquinas (2)

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Abstract: Part one of this two-part paper looked at the modern semantic developments underlying Gilson's innovative and highly influential semantic theory in *Being and Some Philosophers* (*BSP*)—the existential neutrality of the copula, the distinction between predication and some positing or “thetic” function of judgment, and the distinction between predication and assertion. The present part of this paper offers a rereading of Gilson's work in light of this modern backdrop. It argues that Gilson's *BSP*, rather than being a purely historical exegesis of the writings of a thirteenth-century friar, is a work of original philosophizing inspired by Aquinas, but principally engaged with modern debates. In particular, it advances a Brentano-inspired reading of Aquinas in place of Maritain's Pfänder-inspired reading of him. Rereading Gilson in his historical setting clarifies the meaning and implication of many phrases and theses that have become commonplaces in philosophical discourse, in part because of Gilson's work.

Key words: Étienne Gilson; Jacques Maritain; Existential Judgment; Thomism; Aristotle's Categories; Semantics; Brentano; Pfänder

In the first part of this paper, I sketched the modern developments in logical theory, which underlie the existential semantics of Jacques Maritain and Étienne Gilson—the existential neutrality of the copula “is”; the distinction between predicating and positing; and the distinction between predicating or propositions, on the one hand, and asserting a proposition's truth, on the other. In this second part of the paper, I will describe how Maritain and Gilson's respective theories of judgment arose out of dynamic engagement with contemporary logical theories, the text of Aquinas, and each other. Though Maritain and Gilson are typically referred to as “existential Thomists,” their shared outlook could more precisely be classified as “thetic Thomism” in virtue of the centrality of the modern “positing” (thetic) function in judgment in their metaphysical understanding of “existence.”¹ Gilson's implicit critique of Maritain in *Being and Some Philosophers* (=BSP) flows from his more fully tracing out the implications of this

¹ For the language of a “thetic” tradition in the long nineteenth century (though not applied to Gilson and Maritain specifically), I am indebted to Wayne Martin, *Theories of Judgment: Psychology, Logic, Phenomenology*, Modern European Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Gilson and Maritain do not themselves use this term.

positing function in judgment. I show how Maritain's first attempt at synthesizing Aquinas's text with modern logico-psychological theories, especially that of Alexander Pfänder (§1), was rightly recognized by Gilson as defective (§2). Gilson's own revision of Maritain's existential Thomism in *BSP*, inspired by Brentano, resolved the problems in Maritain's account, but at the cost of a radical departure both from common sense and from Aquinas's text. In his later work, Gilson retreated into metaphorical formulas reminiscent of the views of Maritain he had, in *BSP*, sought to overcome. The problem with this retreat was that the logic of *BSP* was airtight. While Gilson's later description of Aquinas's metaphysics and semantics is formulated in a more conservative manner and is less obviously incompatible with common sense and Aquinas's own thought, this is only because it is more vague and internally inconsistent.

In the final section of this paper (§3), I sketch not only what is needed for further research into Gilson's sources, but also how the logic of Gilson's implicit dialogue with Maritain has important implications both for contemporary Thomists seeking to understand Aquinas's historical thought under the influence of Gilson and for scholars more generally inquiring into the nature of judgment and the meaning of "existence." While there are many ways to approach this last topic, I focus on the implications for the common Thomistic distinction, inherited from Gilson, between judgments of attribution and of existence.

1. Jacques Maritain's Thetic Thomism

As illustrated above by Brentano,² it was typical for modern logicians after Descartes to frame their semantic theories by a discussion of the taxonomy of mental "faculties," "acts," or

² For the works of Brentano used in this part of the paper, see Franz Brentano, *Psychologie vom Empirischen Standpunkt* (Leipzig: Verlag von Duncker & Humboldt, 1874); translated into French by Maurice de Gandillac as *Psychologie du point de vue empirique* (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1944); translated into English by Antos Rancurello, D. B. Terrell, and Linda McAlister as *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, ed. Oskar Kraus and

“phenomena.” It is tempting to read St. Thomas distinction between the intellect’s two intellectual operations, the second of which he designates in the language of “judgment” (*iudicare, iudicium*),³ in light of this modern debate. In *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad7 and two parallel texts, Aquinas says that there are two operations of the intellect, one of which pertains to the quiddity or nature of a thing, the other to the being (*esse*) of a thing.⁴ Such passages led Maritain and, after him, Gilson to see the two operations of the intellect as each having their own proper cognitive object (or, in the case of Maritain, quasi-object)—namely, essences and the act of existence. Both see the defining function of the intellect’s second operation as that of positing back into existence—as “restoring” to existence—essences abstracted in the intellect’s first operation as mere “ideas” or “presentations.”⁵ The intellect apprehends the act of existence

Linda McAlister (London: Routledge, 1995); Franz Brentano, *Vom Ursprung Sittlicher Erkenntnis* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1889; 3rd ed., Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1934); translated from the third edition by Roderick Chisholm and Elizabeth Schneewind as *The Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, ed. Oskar Kraus and Roderick Chisholm (New York: Routledge, 2009).

³ Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q.1, a.3, co., in *Opera Omnia* [Complete works] [=Leon. ed.] (Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1882–), vol. 22/1, 11:38–46.

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis* [Writing on the Sentences] [=In Sent.], ed., Pierre Mandonnet and Maria Fabianus Moos, 4 vols. (Paris: Sumptibus P. Lethielleux, 1929–1947), I, d.19, q. 5, a.1, ad7; d.38, q.1, a.3, co.; Aquinas, *Super De Trin.*, q.5, a.3, co. (Leon. ed., 50.147:90–105). For a study of how Maritain and Gilson interpreted these passages, see Elliot Polsky, “*Secunda operatio respicit ipsum esse rei: An Evaluation of Jacques Maritain, Étienne Gilson, and Ralph McInerny on the Relation of Esse to the Intellect’s Two Operations*,” *Nova et Vetera [English Ed.]* 19, no. 2 (2021): 895–932.

⁵ Though Maritain hesitates to use the precise language of “object” to describe the relation of *esse* to judgment, he does occasionally use it (see Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent* [=EE], trans. Lewis Galantiere and Gerald Phelan [Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2015], 18–19). Gilson has no similar hesitancy, but calls existence the “proper object” of judgment (Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* [=BSP], 2nd ed. [Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952], 202; cf. Étienne Gilson, *Thomism: The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Laurence Shook and Armand Maurer, 6th ed. [Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2002], 169). Just as Maritain maintains, “The function of judgment is an existential function,” and reinterprets sentences of the form, “The earth revolves round the sun,” as really involving judgments about existence, like “The earth *exists* in physical existence as revolving round the sun” (Maritain, *EE*, 10), so too, Gilson maintains “all real knowledge includes a judgment of existence” (Gilson, *BSP*, 206) and “what is thus united or separated [in judgment] is always existence, either *how* it is, or *that* it is” (Gilson, *BSP*, 203; cf. Gilson, *Thomism*, 169). Maritain contrasts the existential function of judgment “restor[ing]” essences “to existence” with that of the first operation of the intellect, described in Cartesian terms as “contemplate[ing] the picture of the essences in its ideas” (Maritain, *EE*, 10; see also p. 13). Gilson follows suit, replacing Maritain’s Cartesian description of the first operation with one closer to the idiom of Brentano: “the proper end of intellectual abstraction is not to posit essences in the mind as pure and self-sufficient presentations”; rather, it is to “use judgment to restore essences to actual being” (Gilson, *BSP*, 203).

outside the soul in judgment, by grasping the judgment itself as a self-conscious, vital adequation or correspondence of the mind to existence outside the mind.⁶

Maritain and Gilson expressed the semantics for this theory of judgment in slightly different ways—Maritain being closer to Pfänder, Gilson closer to Brentano. In *Degrees of Knowledge*, Maritain makes little explicit use of Pfänder’s thought, but what he does say suggests a deeper connection; he says, with explicit reference to Pfänder’s *Logic*, the “full importance” of phenomenology’s teaching “cannot be duly appreciated so long as Prof. Alexander Pfänder’s teaching has not been published in full.”⁷ Similar to Pfänder, he recognizes two functions in judgment. In judgment, he thinks, there is simultaneously an identification of two *noemata* (the ideas of subject and predicate terms), and an act of “putting” or “placing” those *noemata* in “actual” or “possible existence.”⁸ Reminiscent of Kant’s claim that absolute positing in judgment corresponds to God’s creative judgment, “*Let there be*,” Maritain, in one place, sees the act of affirmation in judgment as the human correlate and imitation of God’s

⁶ The original impetus for this view seems to be Maritain’s need to contrast the will from the second operation of the intellect, both of which, for him, have for their object existence. Since the will terminates in existence outside the mind, the intellect must terminate in it within the mind; see Jacques Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1948), 21. See also Maritain, *EE*, 9–10, 15; Gilson, *BSP*, 203, 207. For a very similar dialogical description, see Theodor Lipps, *Leitfaden der Psychologie* [Guide to psychology] (Leipzig: Verlag von Wilhelm Engelmann, 1903), 60; quoted and discussed in Martin, *Theories of Judgment*, 141. See also J. N. Mohanty, “Heidegger on Logic,” in *Logic, Truth and Modalities: From a Phenomenological Perspective*, ed. J. N. Mohanty, Synthese Library 278 (Dordrecht: Springer, 1999), 79–109, at 90.

⁷ Jacques Maritain, *Distinguer pour unir; ou, les degrés du savoir* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1932); translated from the fourth edition by Gerald Phelan as *Distinguish to Unite, or, The Degrees of Knowledge [=DoK]*, ed. Ralph McInerny, The Collected Works of Jacques Maritain 7 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 107n70. Citations are to the English edition, but interpolations are sometimes added from the French.

⁸ Maritain, *DoK*, 103: “And what is judgment if not an act by which the mind asserts that a predicate and a subject, which differ in notion or in their intramental existence, are identical ... outside the mind? ... [W]hen I judge that ‘Bernard Shaw is a dramatist,’ or that ‘the whole is greater than the part,’ I put [*je pose*] in actual existence a thing in which the object of thought ‘Bernard Shaw’ and the object of thought ‘dramatist’ are identified; I place [*je pose*] in possible existence a thing in which the object of thought ‘whole’ and the object of thought ‘greater than the part’ are identified.” For a similar view, see Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 71. See also Jacques Maritain, *An Introduction to Logic*, trans. Imelda Choquette (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1937), 52–53, where the same notion of judgment is expressed, but without the explicit use of “positing” language. In describing the relation of predicate and subject as that of identity, Maritain is closer to James Mill’s notion of the “copula” than to that of John Stuart Mill, Kant, and Pfänder.

creative act.⁹ Elsewhere, however, he describes judgment not as corresponding to the creative act of God, but to the act of existence immanent in creatures themselves, which he views as an intrinsic act of self-positing—of the *esse* in a thing “positing” its essence’s existence.¹⁰ Whereas Pfänder had merely described existence as a thing’s act of “establishing” itself, analogous to the assertion function in judgment, which posits a state of affairs into the world, Maritain goes one step further. Existence in a thing just is its own internal act of self-positing, and the act of positing in the mind is a *sui generis* mode of apprehending the intelligible content of this extramental act. Maritain’s minor departure from Pfänder’s theory of judgment creates a problem of redundancy in his analysis of existential propositions since existence seems to be signified twice over in them—once in the copula’s assertion or positing function, and once in the predicate term: “In a proposition such as ‘I am’ ... which is equivalent to ‘I am existing,’ the verb to be

⁹ Maritain, *DoK*, 93.

¹⁰ Maritain claims (incorrectly) that for both Kant and Descartes existence is a “mere positing” of eidetic content; Maritain, *EE*, 14: “Descartes holds that judgment is an operation of the will, not of the intellect, and that the existence which it affirms is merely the positing of the *ideatum*, in itself inaccessible, of which the *idea* is the portrait. For Kant, judgment itself possesses an ideal and non-existential function; it effects the concept by subsuming an empirical matter under a category; and existence is a mere positing absolutely devoid of all intelligible value or content.” Though Maritain rejects the view existence is a mere positing, he himself sees it as a positing. In one place, he calls essence “that which *esse* posits” (Maritain, *EE*, 3; cf. p. 15). Elsewhere he says, commenting on how “The most fundamental and most characteristic metaphysical thesis of Aristotelianism as re-thought by Thomas Aquinas, the thesis of the real distinction between essence and existence in all that is not God,” is connected to the intuition of being, Maritain remarks, “in it [the thesis] potency ... is completed or actuated by an act of *another order* which adds absolutely nothing to essence as essence, intelligible structure, or quiddity, yet adds everything to it inasmuch as it posits it *extra causas* or *extra nihil*” (Maritain, *EE*, 25). In the earlier *Degrees of Knowledge*, we, once again, see the same notion of “existence” as an act of self-positing. He says, “There are two different *esse*’s, two levels of existence, for things,” the first of which he describes in self-relational causal terms as “the proper existence they possess in order to maintain themselves outside nothingness” (Maritain, *DoK*, 91). It is the second kind of existence “not to posit a thing outside nothingness for itself as a subject, but, on the contrary, for another thing and as a relation. ... In virtue of that existence, the thing exists in the soul with an existence other than its own existence, and the soul is or becomes the thing with an existence other than *its* own existence” (Maritain, *DoK*, 121). Apropos of the first of these existences, he explains the “purely metaphorical” language of speaking of a thing “existing ‘outside God,’” by noting that what is meant is that something “exists in the order of being merely posited or existentially realized” and as “in the order of simple *positio extra nihil*” (Maritain, *DoK*, 90). Thus, Maritain does not disagree with (his anachronistic interpretation of) Kant and Descartes that “existence” is an act of self-positing. Where Maritain disagrees with these authors (as interpreted by him) is in their failure to recognize the “intelligibility” of existence as the perfection of the intellect and the chief end of intellectual cognition—Descartes because he made judgment an act of volition, not intellect, and Kant because he gave judgment “an ideal and non-existential function.” Cf. Maritain, *EE*, 14–15.

exercises the function of both *copula* ... and *predicate* (inasmuch as it signifies the existence attributed to the subject), but it directly *manifests* (*in actu signato*) the latter function only.”¹¹ He claims, “[E]ven when used simply as *copula*, the verb *to be* continues to signify *ideal* or *possible* existence.”¹²

2. Gilson’s Thetic Thomism

2.1. Gilson’s semantics

Maritain’s overburdened analysis of existential propositions seems to have led Étienne Gilson, in *BSP*, to embrace a semantic theory, like that of Brentano, in which one-term existential propositions are accommodated while Pfänder and Maritain’s categorical interpretation is abandoned. The verb “is” or “exists,” which might be thought to be a second term or predicate, is interpreted instead as merely signifying the assertion of the subject’s existence—that is, the act of judgment. In other respects, however, he preserves Maritain’s interpretation of “existence” and judgment—his notion of “existence” as a thing’s self-positing and of judgment as a *sui generis* mode of cognizing existence. Since Gilson follows Maritain in thinking that the act of judgment is a vital reenactment of the act of existing outside the mind and, thus, the way of intellectually grasping that existential act, for him, “exists” or “is” signifies both the act of judgment and, through that judgment, the act of existence itself of which judgment is a likeness. Let us first look at Gilson’s (tacit) critique of Maritain’s semantics, next at his critique of Brentano, and finally at his understanding of “existence.”

In the final chapter of *BSP* (Ch. 6), Gilson describes a view like that of Maritain (misleadingly attributed to James Stuart Mill, not Maritain) in which “I am” is equated with “I

¹¹ Maritain, *Introduction to Logic*, 51; cf. Maritain, *EE*, 10 (quoted above).

¹² Maritain, *Introduction to Logic*, 51–52.

am being,” and, thus, “being” is signified twice over in existential propositions—once in the predicate, once in the copula “is.” Gilson treats this conclusion, which Maritain clearly embraced, as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the notion that existence is a predicate and that existential propositions, like “I am,” have two terms.¹³ He had laid the groundwork for this argument at the end of his penultimate chapter (Ch. 5) and beginning of his final chapter. At the end of Ch. 5, where he introduced the two operations of the intellect, he distinguished two “classes” of judgment. The first relates the concept expressing what something is to its object, and the truth of this judgment “remains an abstract and general one, applying to possible being as well as to actual beings. In short, it is not yet knowledge of a ‘thing.’”¹⁴ On the other hand, there is another class of judgment

by which we state that what the thing is, actually is, or exists. Such is the composite operation which we call a judgment of existence. By saying that *x is*, we mean to say that *x* is a certain *esse* (to be), and our judgment must needs be a composite operation precisely because, in such cases, reality itself is composite. Existence is synthetically united with essence in reality.¹⁵

Thus, Gilson, unlike Maritain, embraces a theory of existential judgment like that found in Hume, the Herbartian school, and Brentano in which existential judgments are not a special class

¹³ Gilson, *BSP*, 193: “The metaphysical truth that existence is not a predicate is here finding its logical verification. The same conclusion can be formulated in two different ways. ... Logically speaking, any attempt to make it a predicate is doomed to failure, because, in existential judgments, *is* never loses its existential connotation, so that it cannot become a copula. In *I am being*, instead of the three known parts of predication, we really have four: (1) the subject, *I*; (2) the predicate, *being*; (3) the copula, *is*, which itself means, (4) once more, *being*. Here, James Stuart Mill was right. All we have to add is that, if such propositions are made up of four parts, they nevertheless include only one term and a verb. All the rest is mere verbiage calculated to make us believe that existence falls under the scope of conceptual predication”; cf. James Mill, *An Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, 2 vols. (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1829), I, ch.4, sect.4, 126–27. Gilson’s presentation of Mill’s view is rather misleading. Mill certainly didn’t intend his four-part analysis of existential propositions as an argument for one-term existential propositions of which he had no notion. Rather, he really did think that “I am” is equivalent to “I am existing,” and his point in saying that existence is signified twice over in such propositions was to warn against being misled by the *unintentional* signification of existence in the copula. Maritain, in contrast, treats the signification of existence by the copula as a consequence of the fundamentally existential character of judgment, not as an unfortunate accident of language. Gilson is clearly, if tacitly, criticizing Maritain when he speaks of Mill.

¹⁴ Gilson, *BSP*, 187.

¹⁵ Gilson, *BSP*, 187–88.

of categorical (i.e., predicative) judgments, but a class of their own. This is clarified in *BSP*, Ch.

6. He opens this chapter with a relatively traditional description of judgment in the spirit of the Port Royal logicians.

To judge is to compose or to separate by an intellectual act two elements of reality grasped by means of concepts. The verbal expression of a judgment is the *enunciation*, which logicians call a *proposition* ... All complete logical propositions are made up of two terms, the ‘subject’ of the affirmation or negation, and the ‘predicate,’ which is affirmed or denied of the subject. As to the ‘copula,’ it is not really a term, because it designates, not a concept, but the determinate relation which obtains between two terms.¹⁶

He informs his readers that “logicians” find the copula particularly problematic “because the verb *is* can perform two different functions and thus give rise to two distinct classes of propositions”: *de tertio adjacente*, where “the predicate is the third word,” and *de secundo adjacente*, such as “Toronto *is*,” in which “*is* does not seem to introduce any predicate.”¹⁷ He calls “these two classes of propositions ‘two-term propositions’ and ‘one-term propositions,’” and asks, “how can the classical definition of propositions be valid?” in the case of the latter.¹⁸

Gilson will later designate two-term judgments, which have traditionally been called “categorical [=predicative] judgments,” as “judgments of attribution”—apparently drawing on a combination of sources including the French translation of a related passage in Brentano where “a predication” (*eine Prädication*) is rendered “*un jugement attributif*.”¹⁹ Gilson includes under

¹⁶ Gilson, *BSP*, 190.

¹⁷ Gilson, *BSP*, 190–91.

¹⁸ Gilson, *BSP*, 191.

¹⁹ Brentano, *Psychology*, 161 (interpolations from p. 213 [French edition]; p. 276 [German edition]): “It is not even correct to say that there is a combination or separation of presented attributes in all judgments. Affirmation and denial are no more always directed toward combinations or connects than desires or aversions are. A single feature which is the object of a presentation can be affirmed or denied, too. When we say, ‘A exists,’ this sentence is not, as many people have believed and still do, a predication [German *eine Prädication*; French *un jugement attributif*] in which existence as predicate is combined with “A” as subject. The object affirmed is not the combination of an attribute “existence” with ‘A’ [*n’est pas l’union du caractère ‘existence’ à A*] but ‘A’ itself. By the same token, when we say, ‘A does not exist,’ ... ‘A’ is the object we deny.” Joseph Fröbes seems also to have played a role in Gilson’s turning “attributive judgment” or “judgment of attribution” into a technical term. In Brentano’s text, even in the French, “attributive judgment” is not obviously used as a technical designation. On the other hand, Fröbes’s himself, in his “division of real judgments,” distinguishes five kinds, two of which are “the judgment of attribution”

one-term judgments not only existential judgments, but also judgments of action (e.g., “Peter runs”).²⁰ He claims that “logicians,” being motivated by “the classical definition of propositions” as composing and dividing, endeavored “to reduce all one-term propositions to two-term propositions” by making “Peter runs” into “Peter is running” and “I am” into “I am being.”²¹ Gilson does not explicitly say which “logicians” he is attacking, but he is clearly talking about Maritain from whose *Introduction to Logic* he borrows the distinction of judgments “*de tertio adjacente*” (also called “propositions with a verb-copula”) and “*de secundo adjacente*” (also called “propositions with a verb-predicate”).²² Maritain is the logician Gilson tacitly accuses of being over-committed to the “classical” definition of a proposition and, therefore, of converting all propositions *de secundo adjacente* into ones *de tertio adjacente*. In effect, the whole discussion of propositional semantics in *BSP*, Ch. 6, must be viewed as a lengthy refutation of Maritain’s own propositional semantics. Given the premise common to Maritain and Gilson—namely, that existence is grasped through (the thetic character of) judgment, Gilson rightly concludes that Maritain’s categorical (“attributive”) analysis of existential judgments must be abandoned as nugatory in favor of a purely thetic analysis of them that allows for one-term existential judgments.

(*iudicium attributionis*) and “the existential proposition” (*propositio existentialis*). Joseph Fröbes, *Tractatus logicae formalis* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1940), 120–22. Pfänder is the principal author cited to explain the judgment of attribution. For him, this is a judgment distinguished, on the one hand, from “determinative judgments,” which pertain to the essence or quiddity of a thing and, on the other hand, “ontic judgments,” which include existential ones. Alexander Pfänder, *Logic: Translated from the Third, Unaltered Edition*, trans. Donald Ferrari, *Realist Phenomenology 3* (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2009), 49–50. Gilson too treats “judgment of attribution” as a technical term, but he changes its meaning from that of an adjectival or accidental predication, as it was understood by Fröbes (following Pfänder), and applies it to what the phrase “attributive judgment” describes in the French translation of Brentano’s text—namely, all categorical or two-term judgments whatsoever. Further research is required to determine with certainty the origin of Gilson’s technical vocabulary of a “judgment of attribution.”

²⁰ Cf. Gilson, *BSP*, 197–99.

²¹ Gilson, *BSP*, 191.

²² Gilson cites this work elsewhere; see Gilson, *Thomism*, 170n71: “I could not recommend too highly these lucid and rich pages [pp. 51–54 in Maritain].” Cf. Maritain, *Introduction to Logic*, 51, 53.

Besides Hume, the only philosopher Gilson cites in *BSP* who shared his view that there can be such a thing as one-term propositions and that existential judgments are a class apart from categorical (“attributive”) ones is Franz Brentano, and it is from him that Gilson seems to have gotten his own theory. Most of Gilson’s remarks about Brentano are negative, but this reflects more a misunderstanding of Brentano’s views on Gilson’s part than any great gulf between the two authors. His knowledge of Brentano seems to be filtered through the summaries of that author found in Joseph Fröbes’s Latin logico-psychological manuals, *Psychologia speculativa* (1927) and *Tractatus logicae formalis* (1940),²³ the second of which he misleadingly describes as “an objective modern presentation of the Scholastic theory of judgment.”²⁴ It is really a scholastic presentation of (mostly) modern theories of judgment, like those of Brentano, Sigwart, and Pfänder. Fröbes paraphrases Brentano’s view as follows:

A further explication of judgment, given by Brentano, conceives judgment in a certain sense as an existential judgment. Brentano converts judgment into the form: “A is” (A is not), where “is” signifies “acknowledgement for A” [*significat “agnitionem pro A”*]. “This tree is green,” then indicates: “This green tree is”; “All men are mortal,” indicates: “Immortal men are not.”²⁵

A judgment is not directed towards some thing [*rem aliquam*], but towards the fact [*id*] that a thing is something or it is a mental composition (Suarez). Later, Fr. Brentano revived the opinion that even a simple object can befit affirmation. In the proposition, “God exists,” one does not refer to existence as a predicate in God (as subject) so that this relation is then recognized [*agnosci*], but simply God himself is recognized or affirmed [*agnosci seu affirmari*].²⁶

²³ Joseph Fröbes, *Psychologia speculativa* [Speculative psychology], 2 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1927); *Tractatus logicae formalis* [Treatise on formal logic] (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1940). Though he cites them early in the final chapter of *Being and Some Philosophers*, Gilson does not make clear in what way he is indebted to these works.

²⁴ Gilson, *BSP*, 191n2.

²⁵ Fröbes, *Tractatus* [Treatise], 113: “Ulterior quaedam explicatione iudicii a Brentano data iudicia in certo sensu concipit ut iudicia existentialia. Brentano iudicium convertit in formam: ‘A est’ (A non est), ubi est significat ‘agnitionem pro A’. Haec arbor est viridis, tunc dicit: haec arbor viridis est; omnes homines sunt mortales, dicit: homines immortales non sunt.”

²⁶ Fröbes, *Psychologia* [Psychology], 53: “Iudicium non dirigitur in rem aliquam, sed in id, quod res aliquid sit, seu est compositio mentalis (Suarez). Postea Fr. Brentano opinionem redintegravit affirmationem etiam obiecta simplici convenire posse; in propositione ‘Deus existit’ non refertur existentiam quasi praedicatum in Deum (ut subiectum), et hanc dein relationem agnoscere, sed simpliciter Deum ipsum agnoscere seu affirmari.”

Brentano says that, in judgment we *affirm* A. In both of Fröbes’s presentations of Brentano’s view, he uses a form of the verb *agnoscere*. This Latin verb can have a wide variety of meanings—from claiming to realizing to discerning—and the presence of “*seu*” in Fröbes *Psychologia* presentation suggests he intended it simply as a synonym for the act of asserting or affirming. Yet, Gilson seems to have latched onto the phrase, “‘is’ signifies ‘acknowledgement for A’ [*est significat ‘agnotionem pro A’*],” and interpreted this to mean that, for Brentano, “is” signifies the presentation or idea of A. From this misunderstanding of Brentano’s position, Gilson is led to his first criticism of Brentano: “Brentano says, in existential propositions, the verb *is* should make sense, and, since it is agreed that existence is no predicate, there is but one term which *is* can predicate, namely, the subject.”²⁷ If so, Gilson complains, Brentano will have succumbed to the view of his opponents that “in all propositions, the verb is bound to signify a term”—except that he says it is the subject term rather than the predicate one; but then we have turned the formula “*A is*” into the predicative formula, “*A is A*.”²⁸ Gilson retorts that “the proposition *A is* does not signify A, it signifies A’s existence.”²⁹ As we’ve already noted, for Gilson, for “is” to signify existence is for it to signify the second operation of the intellect as a vital act corresponding to the act of existence outside the mind. Of course, Brentano’s true historical position was not the one Gilson attributes to him—namely, that, in “*A is*,” “is” signifies “A”—but rather a view much like that of Gilson himself—namely, that, in “*A is*,” “is” is not a term at all, but signifies the act of judgment affirming A’s existence.³⁰ Although Brentano would not have accepted the Maritainian-Gilsonian notion of judgment as a *sui generis* mode of

²⁷ Gilson, *BSP*, 194.

²⁸ Gilson, *BSP*, 194.

²⁹ Gilson, *BSP*, 194.

³⁰ Cf. Brentano, *Psychology*, 177; Brentano, *Origin*, 49. See also Hynek Janoušek, “Judgmental Force and Assertion in Brentano and Early Husserl,” *Studia Phaenomenologica* 15 (2015): 105–28, at 112; Arkadiusz Chrudzinski and Barry Smith, “Brentano’s Ontology: From Conceptualism to Reism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Brentano*, ed. Dale Jacquette (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 197–219, at 198–99.

apprehending intelligible content, both Gilson and Brentano are (*pace* Gilson) in agreement that propositions of the form, “A is,” have only one term, the subject term, and that “is” signifies no concept or idea, but only the act of judgment affirming the existence of the subject. Gilson’s remark, “*Is* does not predicate anything, not even existence; it posits it,”³¹ is perfectly consistent with Brentano’s thought.

Gilson’s second criticism of Brentano, unlike his first, reflects a genuine difference between the two authors, but, at the same time, it highlights another way in which Gilson is (perhaps unknowingly) indebted to the one he criticizes. Gilson thinks Brentano’s attempt “to turn all judgments of attribution into so many existential ones” was “a mistake.”³² As noted earlier, Brentano accomplished this transformation of categorical judgments, in part, by turning universal affirmative judgments into negative existential ones about a privative subject term. Since Gilson, like Maritain, but unlike Brentano, sees judgment as a *sui generis* way of cognizing the intelligible content of a real principle in extramental things, he, unlike Brentano, cannot allow for affirmative judgments to be casually transformed into negative ones. Although Gilson objects to Brentano’s exact procedure of reducing all attributive judgments to existential ones, he embraces something very close to Brentano’s conclusion by proposing his own transformation of the grammar of ordinary categorical judgments to make them not strictly existential judgments, but at least about existence. A judgment of attribution affirms or denies “a certain way of being” whereas existential judgments “deal with nothing else than actual existence.”³³ Whereas Brentano makes all judgments existential by changing their quality and introducing privative terms, Gilson follows Maritain’s model³⁴ of making them all about

³¹ Cf. Gilson, *BSP*, 201.

³² Gilson, *BSP*, 200.

³³ Gilson, *BSP*, 200–1.

³⁴ Maritain, *EE*, 10.

existence by treating ordinary predicates as adverbial modifications of existence: “Peter is sick” becomes “Peter *is* in a sick way.”³⁵ For him, “what is ... united or separated [in judgment] is always existence, either *how* it is, or *that* it is.”³⁶ In his later *Thomism* (6th ed., 1965), Gilson uses the same basic strategy to show that both judgments of existence and copulative judgments have an “existential value.”³⁷ But he fluctuates between seeing them as attributing existence to the predicate and to the subject. In one place, he says we use “the verb *is* as a copula in order to state that such and such a substance ‘exists with-such-and-such a determination,’” thereby implying that that to which a copulative judgment attributes existence is the subject of that sentence.³⁸ Only a paragraph earlier, however, he made these sentences attribute existence to the predicate, not the subject: “to form a judgment is to signify that a certain form, and therefore a certain act, exists *actually* in a subject. *Socrates is a man* signifies that the form *man* inheres in Socrates as the constitutive act of his substance.”³⁹

Despite differing from Brentano on the details concerning how to transform predicative judgments into ones about existence, Gilson is in harmony with Brentano on the most important points: That “exists” or “is” used absolutely is not a predicate and does not signify any conceptual content, but only the mind’s own act of judgment as asserting existence, and that

³⁵ Gilson, *BSP*, 200: “The reason why *is* has become a copula is here apparent ... When I say that *Peter is sick*, I directly conceive Peter as being in a sick way, that is, I conceive his being as that of a sick man. This is so at least as soon as, stepping out of logic, I become interested in actual truth. The verb ‘to be’ is used as a copula because all judgments of attribution which are true or intend to be true aim to affirm or to deny a certain way of being. In short, *is* has correctly been chosen as a copula because all judgments of attribution are meant to say *how* a certain thing actually *is*.” Gilson also endorses a second strategy for making all judgments about existence, which is to say, “every logical assertion presupposes a hypothetical judgment of existence.” Gilson, *BSP*, 200. Gilson attributes this to Edmond Goblot, *Traité de logique* [Treatise on logic], 7th ed. (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1941), 43. It is very similar to Drobisch’s notion that every categorical proposition is really a hypothetical one with an existential antecedent. On Drobisch, see Martin, *Theories of Judgment*, 60–61.

³⁶ Gilson, *BSP*, 203.

³⁷ Gilson, *Thomism*, 169. In *Thomism*, Gilson also makes more abundant use of the Maritainian language of “positing” for judgment instead of the language preferred by Brentano of “affirming” or “asserting.” Cf. Gilson, *Thomism*, 131, 227, 231.

³⁸ Gilson, *Thomism*, 170.

³⁹ Gilson, *Thomism*, 170.

there may, therefore, be one-term, existential judgments, like “Peter is.” Moreover, like Brentano, he achieves this result by transforming the ordinary grammar of categorical propositions to make them somehow about existence. Finally, in one place, Gilson, like Brentano, even explicitly conflates the knowledge of existence through judgment with the assertion of truth. “To perceive is to experience existence, and to say through judgment that such an experience is true is to know existence.”⁴⁰

2.2. *Gilson on existence*

Now that we’ve seen Gilson’s semantic critique of Maritain and Brentano, we can return to the question of what existence or *esse* is for Gilson. As we saw, for Kant, it is the non-predicate determination that follows from God positing creatures by uttering “Let there be” over the possible world. Pfänder and Maritain took this a step further by seeing existence as a quidditatively empty determination or act in the very creature—either a self-establishment analogous to positing (Pfänder) or a self-positing (Maritain). Existence is, then, not just the terminus of God’s creative act of positing, but also another act of positing in the creature, which is the intrinsic principle of the creature’s own existence.

Gilson’s *BSP* reflects basically the same view of existence, but he is more explicit about what this means: it means existence or *esse* is an essence-less efficient cause in the creature of its own existence. For Gilson, “although there is essence in each and every existent,” “there is no essence of existence.”⁴¹ That the existence efficient causality adds is truly stripped of all essential content comes out in Gilson’s discussion of the possibles. He criticizes those who think

⁴⁰ Gilson, *BSP*, 207.

⁴¹ Gilson, *BSP*, 171.

that once an essence has received “all its determinations,” “it is bound to burst into existence.”⁴² For Gilson, “to be fully completed in the order of essentiality does not bring an essence one inch nearer actual existence.”⁴³ God, he thinks, must add to all the essential determinations of a thing the “the further determination to actual existence ... the active energy through which the corresponding essence shall progressively receive all its determinations.”⁴⁴ He calls “the greatest contribution ever made by any single man to the science of being” and “nothing short of a revolution” in the metaphysics of Aristotle, Aquinas’s “dissociation of the two notions of form and act”: “Supreme in their own order, substantial forms remain the prime acts of their substances, but, though there be no form of the form, there is an act of the form. In other words, the form is such an act as still remains in potency to another act, namely, existence.”⁴⁵

For Gilson, existence is an “act” not only in the broad sense in which a shape is an act, but in the sense that it is an “operation”⁴⁶ of self-positing. For Gilson, God’s *esse* “constitutes” and “posits” his own essence and unicity: “If God is *esse*, He is He Whose own ‘to be’ constitutes His own essence. Hence both His unicity and His singularity. Fully posited by its ‘to be,’ essence here entails neither limitation nor determination.”⁴⁷ Created *esse*, being a likeness of God, must be a cause just as it is an effect.⁴⁸

⁴² Gilson, *BSP*, 182.

⁴³ Gilson, *BSP*, 182.

⁴⁴ Gilson, *BSP*, 182.

⁴⁵ Gilson, *BSP*, 174; see also p. 171: “existence does not monopolize the whole actuality of existing substance. Rather, just as essence is in potency to the act of its own existence, so also is the act of existence in potency to the formal act of its own essence.”

⁴⁶ Gilson, *BSP*, 184.

⁴⁷ Gilson, *BSP*, 183.

⁴⁸ Gilson, *BSP*, 184: “The very existence of finite essence is the first and immediate effect of the first and absolute existential Act. To repeat, *prima rerum creatarum est esse*. Born of an existential act, ‘to be’ is itself an existential act, and, just as it is effect, so also it is cause. Even finite being is, in its own way, cause of being. ... Not: to be, then to act, but: to be is to act. And the very first thing which “to be” does, is to make its own essence to be, that is, ‘to be a being.’”

What defines existence, so to speak, and constitutes its distinction from essence, for Gilson, is its role as efficient cause.⁴⁹ Gilson attributes to “the Thomistic reformation” of Aristotle’s metaphysics the introduction of “a clear-cut distinction between the two orders of formal causality and of efficient causality” wherein efficient causality gives “existential being to substance” and makes a thing “to be” simply, but formal causality gives “substantiality” or “substantial being to actual existence” and makes a thing “to be a *what*” or what it is, not “to be” simply.⁵⁰ So, for Gilson, form is only a cause of being “in a way”—in the sense that it provides a subject for being to actualize, but what is the direct or proper cause of being is the efficient cause; formal causes directly relate to whatness, not being. This view of efficient causality as directly ordered to being simply whereas the formal cause is only ordered to being in a certain respect reflects that of Descartes and Antoine Arnauld,⁵¹ but it is exactly opposite to the view of Aquinas for whom the formal cause is the absolute cause of being whereas the other three causes are causes of receiving being through form.⁵²

⁴⁹ Gilson, *BSP*, 172: “The very common mistake about this fundamental thesis of Thomism [the real distinction of essence and existence] is due always to the same overlooking of the reciprocal character of efficient causality and of formal causality. ... Actual existence, then, is the efficient cause by which essence in its turn is the formal cause which makes an actual existence to be ‘such an existence.’”

⁵⁰ Gilson, *BSP*, 168–69.

⁵¹ Here, Gilson reflects (and presumably is influenced by) the view of Descartes and Antoine Arnauld that, as Arnauld puts it, “We look for the efficient cause of something only in respect of its existence, not in respect of its essence. ... I cannot without absurdity inquire into the efficient cause of this triangle’s having three angles equal to two right angles.” Antoine Arnauld, *Fourth Objection*, in in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 149 (212); cf. Descartes, *Fourth Reply*, 169 (243) (where he concedes Arnauld’s premise); Descartes, *Meditations* V, 45 (64).

⁵² Cf. Aquinas, *In Aristotelis libros Physicorum* [Commentary on the books of Aristotle’s *Physics*], II, l.10, 15: “esse eius quod habet causam, potest considerari dupliciter: uno modo absolute, et sic causa essendi est forma per quam aliquid est in actu; alio modo secundum quod de potentia ente fit actu ens. Et quia omne quod est in potentia, reducitur ad actum per id quod est actu ens; ex hoc necesse est esse duas alias causas, scilicet materiam, et agentem quid reducit materiam de potentia in actum. Actio autem agentis ad aliquid determinatum tendit, sicut ab aliquo determinatio principio procedit: nam omne agens agit quod est sibi conveniens; id autem ad quod tendit actio agentis, dicitur causa finalis. Sic igitur necesse est esse causas quatuor. Sed quia forma est causa essendi absolute, aliae vero tres sunt causae essendi secundum quod aliquid accipit esse; inde est quod in immobilibus non considerantur aliae tres causae, sed solum causa formalis” (Leon. ed., 2:86).

2.3. Gilson's retraction

The obvious difficulty for any Thomist in maintaining, as Gilson did in *Being and Some Philosophers*, that *esse* is an “operation” intrinsic to a creature of efficiently causing its essence to exist is that Aquinas, in some of the most well-known of his texts, explicitly denies that anything can efficiently cause itself. In *De ente*, c. 4, he says, “It is not possible that being [*esse*] itself is caused by the form itself or quiddity of a thing—I mean as an efficient cause—because then something would be the cause of itself and something would produce itself in being [*esse*], which is impossible.”⁵³ In the *secunda via* of *ST I*, q. 2, a. 3, he gives an argument much like that which Arnauld presented against Descartes’s self-causing God: “nor is it possible that something is the efficient cause of itself because thus it would be prior to itself, which is impossible.”⁵⁴ Thus, in the sixth edition of his *Thomism*, Gilson announces in a footnote that “*Esse* is not an efficient cause; its causality is in the order of form, of which it is the act.”⁵⁵

This retraction, announced in a footnote without any fanfare, would seem to require a radical reshaping of Gilson’s interpretation of St. Thomas since he now commits what he had previously called “a very common mistake about the fundamental thesis of Thomism.”⁵⁶ Instead of a total reinterpretation of the essence-*esse* distinction, we find only a terminological retreat from the candid, technically precise (if implausible) language of *esse* as an intrinsic “efficient cause” to the metaphorical language, preferred by Maritain of it as an act of “positing.” “Each essence,” he says, “is posited by an act of existing which it is not, and which includes it as its self-determination. ... Thus it is the hierarchy of acts of existence that establishes and regulates

⁵³ Aquinas, *De ente et essentia* [On being and essence], c.4 (Leon. ed., 43:377:131–37).

⁵⁴ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [Summary of theology], I, q.2, a.3, co.: “...nec est possibile, quod aliquid sit causa efficiens sui ipsius; quia sic esset prius seipso, quod est impossibile” (Leon. ed., 4:31).

⁵⁵ Gilson, *Thomism*, 231n36. See Gilson, *Thomism*, 62, where he closely paraphrases the *secunda via*’s prohibition of self-causation.

⁵⁶ Gilson, *BSP*, 172.

the hierarchy of essences, each of which expresses only the specific intensity of a given act of existing.”⁵⁷ It was probably a coincidence,⁵⁸ but a revealing one nonetheless, that this passage combines Maritain’s description of *esse* as “positing” an essence with Pfänder’s description of existence as a thing’s “establishing” itself. Elsewhere—again combining Pfänder’s language of “establishing” with Maritain’s language of “positing”—he makes basically the same point in the course of contrasting *esse*, which “is not the object of a quidditative content,”⁵⁹ with formal acts. Here, we see that the act of existing, for Gilson, can be called not only “the secret principle that establishes ... the actuality of being as being,” not only “the act that posits it as a real existing being by actualizing the very form,” but also “the secret energy that causes its object.”⁶⁰ Elsewhere, again connecting the act of existing to the act of judgment, he adds that the former is both “the secret energy that causes its act or operation” (i.e., second act) as well as the act that “reaches being by its form and confers *esse* upon it.”⁶¹ Just as, in *BSP*, Gilson had made “*esse*” the “efficient cause” that makes creatures to exist from within, so too, now Gilson still says “*esse*” is the “cause” that confers *esse* on creatures from within. Moreover, this causality can be described alternatively as a “positing” or “establishing,” and it cannot be grasped in a concept. Yet, he now verbally denies that *esse* is an efficient cause.

In any case, even if Gilson can coherently describe the *esse* in creatures that posits or establishes them in existence from within as a “formal cause” rather than an efficient cause, it remains that Aquinas, unlike the Gilson of *Thomism*, denies forms have another formal cause of their being.

⁵⁷ Gilson, *Thomism*, 163.

⁵⁸ Fröbes’s summary of Pfänder on existential judgments does not include this language and, to my knowledge, Gilson, unlike Maritain, did not read Pfänder directly. See Fröbes, *Tractatus* [Treatise], 121.

⁵⁹ Cf. Gilson, *Thomism*, 418.

⁶⁰ Gilson, *Thomism*, 424–25.

⁶¹ Gilson, *Thomism*, 210n14.

Those composed of matter and form are not immediately being [*ens*] and one, but matter is a being [*ens*] in potency and comes to be a being in act by the arrival of form, which is a cause of being [*causa essendi*] to it. But form does not have being [*esse*] by another form; whence if there is some subsisting form, it is immediately a being [*ens*] and one—nor does it have a formal cause of its being [*esse*].⁶²

For a subsisting form to require an additional formal cause of its being is redundant since what form is to begin with is a formal cause of being. Gilson was right in *BSP* when he said that, for Thomas, there is “no form of the form.”⁶³

2.4. Conclusions

Gilson’s semantic theory in *BSP* was the product of original philosophizing, not a work of exegesis of St. Thomas’s thought. Regardless of its plausibility as a philosophical theory or as an interpretation of St. Thomas, it exhibits an internal coherence as well as a clear logical connection to problems that were then extant in the field—in particular, the problems with the way Maritain attempted to read Aquinas’s distinction of the two intellectual operations in dialogue with contemporary psychologico-logical theories and, especially, that of Pfänder. Gilson solves the problems with Maritain’s synthesis of Thomistic exegesis with modern semantics by recasting it on the model of Brentano’s semantics. The result, however, is a theory that is so open about its radical claims that it could hardly find general acceptance either among exegetes or philosophers. Thus, in *Thomism*, he was forced into a more metaphorical formulation of his existential semantics in which it became difficult to tell what precisely he was claiming or why he was claiming it. If his later account of *esse* as an act of self-positing or self-establishing

⁶² Aquinas, *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis* [Disputed question on spiritual creatures], a.1, ad5: “Illa enim que sunt composita ex materia et forma non statim sunt ens et unum; set materia est ens in potentia et fit ens actu per aduentum forme, que est ei causa essendi. Set forma non habet esse per aliam formam: unde si sit aliqua forma subsistens, statim est ens et unum nec habet causam formalem sui esse” (Leon. ed., 24/2:15:468–74).

⁶³ Gilson, *BSP*, 37.

rather than self-efficient causation was less obviously false, this was only because it was more vague and less bound to a precise chain of logical inference. In any case, it was not Gilson's views in *Thomism*, but his views in *BSP* that would come to exercise a surprising influence over the course of the late-twentieth-century study of ancient and medieval semantics in its shift from a Fregean paradigm to one very close to the mind of Brentano.

3. Implications

As noted in the introduction, the investigation of this paper is very much preliminary. This paper has principally focused on logicians and only a selection at that. It has omitted any discussion of the influence of the giants of early twentieth-century philosophy—Husserl, Bergson, Heidegger, and Sartre—on Maritain and Gilson's thinking. It has also overlooked the influence of earlier twentieth century Thomists, most notably Joseph Maréchal and Désiré-Joseph Mercier, both of whose views Gilson engages in detail in *Thomist Realism* (1939).⁶⁴ The impact of these authors was probably far from negligible.⁶⁵ Further research is also called for with regard to the sources actually addressed in this paper. For Maritain and Gilson's sources, this paper has relied on the rather sparse evidence available from their explicit citations, but this method leaves much unanswered. Did Gilson have direct knowledge of Pfänder's work? Was Maritain at all familiar with Brentano's? How familiar were either of these Thomists with Fichte? How much did Pfänder owe directly to Fichte? Answers to these questions would go a

⁶⁴ Étienne Gilson, *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, trans. Mark Wauck (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012).

⁶⁵ Cf. Laurence Shook, *Etienne Gilson* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 227–28 (Gilson on Heidegger and Aquinas's act of being), 268–69 (moderate praise of Sartre and existentialism). For a comparison of Sartre to Aquinas (or an existential reading of him), see Stephen Wang, *Aquinas and Sartre: On Freedom, Personal Identity, and the Possibility of Happiness* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009); Joseph Catalano, *The Saint and the Atheist: Thomas Aquinas and Jean-Paul Sartre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

long way to confirming, expanding, and qualifying the conclusion of this study. Despite this study's incompleteness, we can draw an important conclusion: Gilson's semantics and metaphysics in *BSP* is not a pure or historical exegesis of the thought of Aquinas, but a synthesis of modern theories of judgment with Maritain's understanding of Aquinas's metaphysics and psychology.

To make this clear, by way of summary, I'll number the assumptions from Gilson we saw above and make a few comments about their interconnection. Gilson accepts two points of Thomistic exegesis from Maritain, which are foundational to his own semantic theory and metaphysics: first, that *esse*—interpreted as existence—is internal to the things to which it is attributed (Thomistic Assumption 1); second, that the second operation of the intellect (i.e., judgment) is an operation of cognizing a certain object or quasi-object—namely, *esse* (Thomistic Assumption 2).

With Maritain, he accepts three important semantic assumptions from modern authors: first, what we might call the existential neutrality of the copula (Modern Assumption 1);⁶⁶ second, the Kantian distinction between predication (relative positing) and positing (absolute

⁶⁶ Many recent scholars have demonstrated the inapplicability of this assumption to the Aristotelian semantics of propositions, where affirmative propositions with a copulative structure are assumed to imply the existence of their subject. See Allan Bäck, *Aristotle's Theory of Predication* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Charles Kahn, "The Greek Verb 'To Be' and the Concept of Being," in *Essays on Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), esp. 113; Patrick Lee, "Existential Propositions in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 52, no. 4 (1988): 605–26, at 617–18; see also Gyula Klima, "Existence and Reference in Medieval Logic," in *New Essays in Free Logic*, ed. Alexander Hieke and Edgar Morscher (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 197–226; E. J. Ashworth, "Existential Assumptions in Late Medieval Logic," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1973): 141–47. I noted in the first part of this paper that Modern Assumption 2 seems to arise as a solution to the problems created by Modern Assumption 1 and, in particular, the difficulties that follow from conceiving propositions as fundamentally about ideas, not extramental things. Modern scholarship has shown the inapplicability of Modern Assumption 1 to ancient and medieval Aristotelian semantics. But it remains to be explored whether there is a link between the emergence of Modern Assumption 1, on the one hand, and, on the other, the shift within medieval logic between conceiving propositions as predicating extramental things to conceiving them as predicating concepts or terms; likewise, it remains to be explored whether the lack, in many medieval authors, including Aquinas, of any distinct existential function in judgment, apart from the predicative function (i.e., the lack of Modern Assumption 2), is connected to those authors' conception of propositions as ultimately about things, not concepts or ideas. An elaboration of these points within the history of the Aristotelian logical tradition must be left to future research.

positing)—the latter of which being the function by which we judge that something exists (Modern Assumption 2); three, the distinction between predicating or propositions, on the one hand, and asserting propositional truth, on the other (Modern Assumption 3). Brentano had conflated the distinction between predicating and positing (Modern Assumption 2) with the distinction between predicating and propositional assertion (Modern Assumption 3), and, like Kant and the Herbartians, he used the positing function of judgment, which he called “affirmation,” to explain our knowledge of existence. This allowed him, like the Herbartians, to admit one-term existential judgments. Pfänder preserved Brentano’s conflation of the predicating-positing distinction with the predicating-asserting distinction, but, rejecting Brentano’s one-term existential judgments, he disjoined positing from existence. For Pfänder, existence—which he understands in a way reminiscent of Fichte as a *sui generis*, non-quidditative determination of self-establishment in an extramental subject—is grasped in a predicate term, not in the assertion function of judgment, which, instead, serves only to posit the compound of the subject and predicate outside the mind. Maritain’s adaptation of Pfänder’s categorical interpretation of existential judgments to his own interpretation of Aquinas on judgment led to a problem of redundancy. Since, like Brentano (though not probably due to his direct influence), he restored the existential role to positing function of judgment, and since he saw this function of judgment as a *sui generis* way of grasping the intelligible content of existence, his categorical interpretation of existential judgments had existence being grasped twice over, once in the positing function of judgment and once in the predicate term. Gilson saw this redundancy in Maritain’s Pfänder-esque Thomistic semantics and reverse engineered it into a Brentano-esque Thomistic semantics in which existential judgments are, once again, something distinct from categorical judgments and can consist of a single term combined with “is”

understood not as a predicate, but as a thetic operator. What survived in Gilson from Pfänder through the influence of Maritain is the notion of existence as something internal to existing things, analogous to this thetic operation in judgment—a *sui generis*, non-formal, and self-causal determination in existing subjects. He initially spoke candidly of this act of existence as an efficient cause, and vehemently rejected any attempt to call it a formal cause, but apparently because this theory could not withstand scrutiny with the texts of Aquinas or with reason, he verbally acknowledged it as a formal cause while continuing to describe it in the metaphorical language for efficient causality—of self-establishment and self-positing—found in Maritain and Pfänder. This retreat came at the expense of the precision and logical cogency of his theory and did not significantly improve its character as a historically faithful exegesis of Aquinas.

Why does any of this matter? The history sketched above matters, on the one hand, because it helps to lay out a more diverse range of options for interpreting “existence” than is usually contemplated in a field so heavily dominated by the Frege-Russell quantificational definition of “existence.” On the other hand, it matters because it helps us to diagnose the underlying premises for the conclusions which are habitually accepted—particularly in the exegesis of Thomas’s works. Greater awareness of the origin of commonplace conclusions allows us to better evaluate whether we want to preserve them.

I’ll close by giving one example by way of illustration. Gilson was severely criticized by other Thomists for saying, in *BSP*, that there can be one-term propositions and that “is” (i.e., “exists”) is not a predicate since these two doctrines are clearly incompatible with what Aquinas says in his commentary on *On Interpretation*.⁶⁷ In response, he conceded that, in some sense,

⁶⁷ For other criticisms of Gilson’s semantics as a reading of Aquinas, see Louis-Marie Régis, “Gilson’s *Being and Some Philosophers*,” *The Modern Schoolman* 28, no. 2 (1951): 111–25 (repr. in the appendix to *BSP*, 217–21); Ralph McNerny, “Being and Predication,” in *Being and Predication: Thomistic Interpretations*, Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy 16 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986),

“is” (as signifying existence) is a predicate, though a distinct sort of predicate.⁶⁸ Despite following Gilson in conceding this point, John Wippel preserves Gilson’s distinction between judgments of attribution and of existence or, put differently, between copulative and existential uses of “is,” citing *In I Sent.*, d. 33, q. 1, a. 1, ad1 and *In II Peryermenias*, lec. 2⁶⁹ as prooftexts for this distinction.⁷⁰ The problem is, of course, that when we note the origin and meaning of the distinction between these two sorts of judgments in Gilson—that is, Brentano’s distinction between categorical (i.e., predicative) and one-term existential judgments—it is clear that, however these texts ought to be interpreted (a topic I will not address here), this cannot be it. If “is” or “exists” is a predicate, then, *ipso facto*, any judgment with such a predicate is a judgment of attribution—that is, a categorical judgment. If we conceded that “is” (used absolutely) is a predicate for Aquinas, it is not clear that there is any longer any sense in speaking of “judgments of existence” for him, but if we do continue to speak of such judgments, we must at least concede that they are not a class apart from judgments of attribution; they are, at best, a distinct genus of attributive judgment. This is far from a trivial point when we consider Aquinas’s understanding of the categories as the various senses of “*esse*” or “is.” As Wippel rightly notes, in *In V Metaphysics*, lec. 9, Aquinas derives the ten categories from the different ways of predicating:

173–228; Ralph McInerney, *Praeambula fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 152–55; Rosa Vargas Della Casa, “Thomas Aquinas on the Apprehension of Being: The Role of Judgment in Light of Thirteenth-Century Semantics” (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2013); Polsky, “*Secunda Operatio*.”

⁶⁸ Gilson, *BSP*, 225.

⁶⁹ Aquinas, *Expositio libri Peryermenias* [Exposition of the book *On Interpretation*], II, 1.2 (Leon. ed., 1*/1.87–88:34–52). For similar readings of this passage, see Allan Bäck, “Aquinas on Predication,” in *Aristotle’s Peri Hermeneias in the Latin Middle Ages: Essays on the Commentary Tradition*, ed. Henricus Antonius Giovanni Braakhuis and Corneille Henri Kneepkens, *Artistarium: Supplementa* (Groningen: Ingenium Publishers, 2003), 329–30; Allan Bäck, “Two Aristotelian Theories of Existential Import,” *Aporia* 2 (2011): 4–24, esp. 8–9; Bäck, *Aristotle’s Theory of Predication*, 296–97; Gabriel Nuchelmans, *Secundum/Tertium Adiacens: Vicissitudes of a Logical Distinction* (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1992), 18.

⁷⁰ John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 25–26.

These predicaments are distinguished according to different modes or ways of predicating. ... Therefore, in accord with each of these supreme modes of predicating, *esse* must signify the same thing, i.e., what something is, or what kind it is, or how much there is, etc. For instance, when we say that man is an animal, the term “is” signifies substance. When we say a man is white, the verb “is” signifies quality.⁷¹

Immediately after accurately paraphrasing Aquinas on this point, however, Wippel goes on to add something not found in his text:

Perhaps we should comment here that these propositions express what we, following Gilson, have called judgments of attribution. In these the verb “is” takes its meaning from the term which is affirmed of a subject. In this discussion Thomas is not primarily concerned with judgments of existence.⁷²

Wippel clearly feels compelled to say that the ten categories are derived from the ways of predicating in attributive judgments since, among the ten categories, Aquinas does not mention a sense in which “*esse*” or “is” signifies existence. Since he thinks existence must be one of the senses of “*esse*” or “is” for Aquinas, he feels the need to say that the ten most general significations of “is” or “*esse*” listed here only include those used in judgments of attribution, not judgments of existence. Yet, we just saw that existential judgments *are* judgments of attribution since what it is to be a judgment of attribution is to be a categorical (i.e., predicative) judgment and Wippel concedes that “is” or “exists” is a predicate in existential judgments. It won’t do to respond that “is” or “exists” is a *sui generis* predicate, not like the other ten, since the whole point of the ten categories is that they are each *sui generis* predicates; they each involve a generically diverse mode of predicating. If “exists” (“*est*” as a principal predicate) is, for Wippel, a *sui generis* mode of predicating, distinct from the ten categories, he has unknowingly introduced an eleventh category.

⁷¹ Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 212.

⁷² Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 212.

In short, when we consider the meaning of the existential reading of Aquinas in Maritain and Gilson in its historical context, the very notion—now so taken for granted—that Aquinas recognized “judgments of existence” or that he uses “*esse*” or “*est*” to mean existence becomes deeply suspect. At the very least, these claims demand either significant reevaluation or reinterpretation in light of semantic principles proper to the thirteenth century, not the nineteenth.⁷³

⁷³ I am grateful to my sister, Sr. Eliya of the Child Jesus, OCD, for reading through the final draft of this two-part paper (and catching typographical errors), to R. E. Houser and Brian Carl for their feedback on earlier versions of the paper, and to Thomas Ciavatti and Danny Leahy for their feedback on an oral presentation of this paper.

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