

A Constructive Thomistic Response to Heidegger's Destructive Criticism: On Existence, Essence and the Possibility of Truth as Adequation

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Martin Heidegger devotes extensive discussion to medieval philosophers, particularly to their treatment of *Truth* and *Being*. On both these topics, Heidegger accuses them of forgetting the question of Being and of being responsible for subjugating truth to the modern crusade for certainty: 'truth is denied its own mode of being' and is subordinated 'to an intellect that judges correctly'.¹ Though there are some studies that discuss Heidegger's debt to and criticism of medieval thought, particularly that of Thomas Aquinas, there is no constructive reply to his assertions.² As a result, Heidegger's critique had an unprecedented effect on the credibility of medieval philosophy, whereby great portions of the philosophical community dismiss it altogether as an illegitimate *Onto-Theology*. It is the aim of this study to offer a constructive reply that will fundamentally grapple with these allegations. By constructive reply we mean not only a reply that avoids the problems Heidegger raises regarding existence, essence and truth, but more importantly, one that uses Heidegger's criticism in order to present a more insightful account of these notions.

The present study is composed of two parts where the second serves as a sort of addendum. The first part, the core of this study, is an attempt to develop an understanding of the distinction between essence and existence that, on the one hand, accords with Heidegger's criticism while on the other hand advances our understanding of how we think and understand reality. After presenting Heidegger's depiction of Aquinas's distinction between essence and existence (*esse*) as a real distinction, the study will present several views propounded by scholars of Aquinas regarding the status of this distinction. It will be argued that it is not clear whether the distinction is real, formal or conceptual, and that different types of distinction are applied

Abbreviations: *ST* = Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Bros., 1947). *DE* = *On Being and Essence*, trans. A. Maurer (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1983). *QDA* = *Quaestiones Disputatae De Anima*, trans. John Patrick Rowan (St. Louis & London: B. Herder Book Co., 1949). *DP* = *Quaestiones Disputatae De Potentia Dei*, trans. The English Dominican Fathers (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1932). *QDV* = *Questiones Disputatae de Veritate*, Henry Regnery Company 1952-4, trans. Mulligan, McGlynn and Schmidt.

¹ See Sean Joseph McGrath, *The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy: Phenomenology for the Godforsaken* (CUA Press, 2006), 210.

² See for example John D Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (Fordham Univ Press, 1982).

in different places, particularly in regard to the phantasm that Aquinas considers essential to the human act of thinking.

The second part diverges from the first part and focuses on Heidegger's criticism of Aquinas's conception of truth as adequation, i.e., what it is that grounds the possibility of truth as adequation. This divergence is necessary in order to present a full metaphysical response to Heidegger's criticism. Since the aim of the present study is to argue that Aquinas's philosophical system can contend with Heidegger's criticism, a partial reply would greatly diminish its effectiveness.

Part I: The Distinction between Essence and Existence

1. Heidegger's Criticism

In *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* Heidegger³ surveys Aquinas's distinction between Essence and Existence. Heidegger claims that Aquinas's analysis of the question of existence, particularly as it appears in his essay *De Ente et Essentia*, neglects the question of Being. And indeed, it seems that Aquinas's central theses⁴ that concentrate on efficient causality support Heidegger's claim.

Joseph Owens argues that since the actualization of created things, and their essences 'is exercised by something else', i.e., by an external producer, this leads to an ultimate and self-subsisting being 'whose nature is to be'.⁵ The efficient causality diverts the formal question regarding a thing's existence to that which produced it and brought it into being, ultimately to God. This supports Heidegger's key claim that Aquinas's argument led him from an ontological consideration of being to an ontic one. However, in his question 'Whether it can be demonstrated that God exists?'⁶ Aquinas was very much aware of the need to distinguish between two facets of our knowledge of God, one that correlates to the ontic element and one to the ontological one: the fact of his mere existence and his essence. Though we can reach a positive answer regarding the first question, 'we cannot perfectly know God as He is in His essence'.⁷ It seems therefore that Heidegger's criticism is not alien to Aquinas's negative theology. In this respect, Aquinas was the first to embrace an ontological epoche although many of his commentators tend to forget this.

Our focus on Heidegger's criticism distinguishes the present study from the traditional approach to *De Ente et Essentia*. Typically, the primary question regarding *De Ente et Essentia* was whether it presented us with

³ Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Indiana University Press, 1988), §10.

⁴ *DE*, 4.

⁵ Joseph Owens, "Quiddity and Real Distinction in St Thomas Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies* 27(1965): 16.

⁶ *ST I*, q. 2, a. 2

⁷ *Ibid.*, ad. 3.

proof for the existence of God, and its relation to the five ways Aquinas presented in the *Summa Theologiae*. Maurer comments that ‘Thomists are not in agreement on the answer to this question’.⁸ Taking into account Heidegger’s reading, this study will be restricted to the actuality of that which is grasped by the human mind, and consequently will not offer an answer to this question. As Owens notes, the distinction between essence and existence cannot be addressed ‘as though Giles of Rome and Suarez and the modern epistemologists had never had their say’⁹; similarly one should not approach this distinction dogmatically, as if Heidegger had never had his say.

Heidegger’s discussion in the fourth chapter of *Basic Problems* revolves around the distinction between essence and existence, particularly in the thought of Thomas Aquinas and Francisco Suarez: ‘How are we to understand the mode of being or, as Scholasticism calls it, the *entitas* of the res, namely, reality?’¹⁰ Heidegger notes that though the Scholastics’ treatment of this question, particularly those of Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus and Francisco Suarez, is more profound than the one presented by modern philosophers, these treatments are still ambiguous. In the case of Suarez, Heidegger holds that because the actuality of being is posited as something primary together with the thing’s essence, Suarez is not able to present the actuality itself. On the other hand, Heidegger contends that Aquinas’s treatment of the actual existing being, from the point of view of a created being, led him to focus on the efficient causality that turns the question of being from an ontological question into an ontic one.¹¹ Presenting Aquinas and his school, Heidegger explains that they espoused a real distinction (*distinctio realis*) between essence and existence:

[I]n an actual being the what of this being is a second res, something else for itself as over against the actuality; thus, in an actual being we have the combination or composition, *compositio*, of two realities, *essentia* and *existentia*. Therefore, the difference between essence and existence is a *distinctio realis*. ... Actuality is something accessory to the what of a being.¹²

It is important to note that Heidegger qualifies the application of this distinction to Aquinas. Heidegger is very much aware of the fact that though such a formulation was endorsed by Aquinas’s disciples, primarily by Giles of Rome, Aquinas position is not conclusive. However, he concluded that it seems that Aquinas indeed favored such a position: ‘How Thomas himself thought about this question has not been established clearly and consistently to the present day. Nevertheless, everything speaks in favor of his inclination to

⁸ Introduction to Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, 25.

⁹ Joseph Owens, "Aquinas' Distinction at De Ente Et Essentia 4.119-123," *Mediaeval studies* 48(1986): 287.

¹⁰ Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 89.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

¹² *Ibid.*, 91.

take the difference as a real one.¹³ When Heidegger says that ‘everything speaks in favor’ he is probably referring to the following key passage in *De Ente et Essentia* that seems to support conclusively a real distinction between essence and existence:

Every essence or quiddity can be understood without knowing anything about its being. I can know, for instance, what a man or a phoenix is and still be ignorant whether it has being in reality. From this it is clear that being is other than essence or quiddity.¹⁴

Though this statement seems to settle the matter, Aquinas’s scholars do not present a uniform view – to the contrary, and as will be seen, important interpretations reject such a straightforward reading. Before engaging with the different interpretations, let us first see what we can say about this seemingly real distinction.

2. Initial Reading

In the third chapter of *De Ente* Aquinas distinguishes between two ways of considering essence: 1. ‘absolutely, according to its proper meaning’,¹⁵ 2. ‘according to the being it has in this or that individual’.¹⁶ In the first sense, where essence is taken absolutely, the essence is considered according to its necessary features, e.g., man is an animal, rational etc. As such, all contingent attribution is left aside, e.g., that Socrates is fair or dark, or that the essence is one or many. Essence considered absolutely is not dependent upon any kind of actualization or particular existence, whether in thinking or as actualized in particular things in the world. As regards the second way of considering essence, i.e., as a specific instantiation that actualizes the essence, Aquinas distinguishes between two modes of instantiation: 1. as an individual thing; 2. in the soul.

As mentioned above, the statement about the phoenix and man seems to support a real distinction between essence and existence for ‘it is clear that being is other than essence or quiddity’. However, following Aquinas’s distinction between different ways of considering the essence, the question arises whether this distinction should be applied to: 1. essence as it is taken absolutely, 2. essence as it is actualized in individual things (in reality or in the soul), or 3. both. Considering that for Aquinas both the concrete actualization of an essence (a specific horse) and the mental instantiation of an essence (a thought about a horse), belong to the second consideration of essence, which is opposed to the absolute consideration of essence, it seems

¹³ Ibid., 89.

¹⁴ *DE* 4.6 (Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A Translation and Interpretation*(University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 5.77.)

¹⁵ *DE* 3.2.

¹⁶ Ibid. 3.3.

clear that the above key statement, that speaks of essence as ‘can be understood’, or as ‘I can know’, does not relate to essence as it is taken absolutely but rather as it is considered as specific and actualized. The essence as it is considered absolutely in itself ‘can never be a direct and immediate object of thought. It is always immediately known under some one of the existences to which it is open’.¹⁷ Consequently, the reality of these considered essences is dependent upon the reality of the principle that actualizes them, i.e., the reality of the soul. It seems, therefore, that from this key statement one cannot conclude that Aquinas supported a real distinction between essence and existence and, for the moment, we postpone drawing any conclusion. Our capacity to know a man or a phoenix, and whether it exists or not, is dependent on the soul's activity as an ontological principle that is actualized in our mind. This is a crucial point for it becomes clear that the statement does not support a real distinction between essence and existence, as it is understood by Heidegger and other interpreters of Aquinas, but is rather a real dependency between the producer and the produced or between the thinker and that which is thought.¹⁸ It is the emphasis on the role of thinking of the distinction between essence and existence that will allow us to evaluate the view of some contemporary interpretations of this distinction, namely that of Joseph Bobik, Scott Macdonald, Joseph Owens and John Wippel.

3. On the Otherness of the Thing

Joseph Bobik, in his commentary on his translation of Thomas Aquinas's *De Ente et Essentia*,¹⁹ explains that, ordinarily, real distinction is understood as a distinction that is drawn ‘between two individuated material and bodily things.’²⁰ Since matter, form, the composed essence and a thing's existence are said to be really distinct, and since they cannot be said to subsist distinctly, Bobik asks in what sense they are said to be really distinct. Without following the different senses he proposes,²¹ that are intended to mitigate the applicability of the real distinction, he concludes that ‘[w]hat is required is that at least one of them be a supposit, or an essence, or part of an essence.’ Bobik's desire to diminish the use of a real distinction seems only to blur our understanding of what is meant by it, which is expressed in his conclusions that, after all, essence and existence are really the same.²² And yet we believe that a more strict use of Bobik's formulation can be enlightening to our understanding of the distinction between essence and existence. Bobik recalls the two meanings of essence that Aquinas presents in *De Ente* 1:

¹⁷ Owens, "Quiddity and Real Distinction in St Thomas Aquinas," 3.

¹⁸ This support Thomas's criticism of Averroes on the unicity of the passive intellect. See *DE* 3.7.

¹⁹ Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A Translation and Interpretation*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 169.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 169-70.

²² *Ibid.*, 170.

The word ‘essence,’ recall, designates what is at once that in a real thing by which the thing exists independently of human knowledge about it, and that in the real thing by which the thing is intelligible... [the essence] designates that by which the real world is related to the intellect, that by which the real world has an impact on the intellect.²³

Bobik explains that though the essences in the individual things and in the intellect are not the same thing, that which is expressed by the intellect of the physical thing is in the physical thing. That which is expressed by the intellect, he continues, ‘belongs to the nature or essence absolutely considered’ and it is ‘the essence so considered which is that wherein the real world and our knowledge about it are identical’.²⁴ Here we point to our decisive debt to Bobik’s interpretation. He writes:

[I]f that by which a thing exists in the real world is intelligible in such a way that its existence in the real world is not included in its intelligibility, it follows that the otherness of its essence and its existence is an otherness in the real world. The proper understanding of the man and phoenix argument, therefore, lies in focusing one’s attention on the twofold character of essence recalled just above, and on the fact that the nature or essence absolutely considered is that wherein human thought and reality are identical.²⁵

Bobik distinguishes between that which is common to the thing in the real world and to our thought about it and an otherness of the thing which is not included in what is common between the thing and the thought of it. This reading places an emphasis on the common part but neglects to elaborate on the otherness that distinguishes them. The common, he explains, is that which is identical between the essence of the thing in the real world and the essence of the thing as an object of thought. This is nothing but the essence considered absolutely. The otherness thus expresses the actuality of the thing itself which is not shared in our thinking about it. From this one should not deduce that such absolute essence is prior to its actualization in the world or in the mind. We intend to elaborate further on the otherness Bobik mentions. However, instead of locating this otherness in the things in the world, we will locate it at the point of intersection between the mind and the world, i.e., in the sensual representation of the thing: the phantasm.

4. The Phantasm: Avoiding the Ontic Trap

Heidegger’s criticism according to which any consideration based on efficient causality is nothing but ontic, forces us to limit our ontological scope to the phantasm. The phantasm, though it is produced efficiently by

²³ Ibid., 167-68.

²⁴ Ibid., 168.

²⁵ Ibid.

an external cause, is really in the mind and carries with it both the identity and the otherness that were observed in Bobik's analysis. As Owens notes, existence in the mind (*esse in anima*), i.e., in our case the phantasm, was understood as 'a genuine kind of existence',²⁶ as is implied in Aquinas's distinction between essence considered absolutely and individuated essence, whether in the world or in the mind. As such, it avoids Heidegger's ontic claim, for the phantasm is something that is really present in our mind, and consequently we may inquire into the distinction between essence and existence without any requirement to consider the external efficient cause that brought it about. Though something is caused efficiently, one cannot deduce, as the Aristotelian school argues, any resemblance between the cause and its effect, which seems to be at the heart of the *ontological difference* that Heidegger draws. This is easily exemplified in the example of the brain in a vat, which might have similar phantasms to those we have, though caused in an utterly different manner.

Our emphasis on the phantasm might raise the objection that while we limit the consideration of the distinction to the human way of thinking, Aquinas's reasoning was intended not to be restricted to the human mode of thinking, as some argue that this distinction was meant to be applied to the angels as well. Yet, it is not clear that Aquinas's argument can straightforwardly be applied to the angels. Wippel makes the case that whatever is known about the angels is only inferred at the end of the argument after God's existence is proved.²⁷ However, the argument itself is initiated by our thinking and the distinction between the common and the otherness, which is grasped (in the phantasm). Consequently, what is fundamental, and without which Aquinas's argument cannot even start, is that the essences are actualized individually in the mind, and in our case, the phantasms are the only candidates for such an individuation. This cannot be stressed more explicitly than in Aquinas's quotation of Aristotle that 'the soul understands nothing without a phantasm.'²⁸

As we limit our discussion to the phantasm it is important to say a few words about the common sense. Aquinas distinguishes between proper and common sensibles.²⁹ The proper sensibles are those that are sensed by the senses, and which consequently define them. They are accidental and actual qualities that are perceived by the senses, e.g., the actual though accidental red that is perceived by the sense of sight. Common sensibles are accidental forms that are discerned through a comparison between the proper sensibles, e.g., the colors that result in a shape. That is why we don't see motion or shape through any of

²⁶ Joseph Owens, "Stages and Distinction in 'De Ente': A Rejoinder," *Thomist: a Speculative Quarterly Review* 45, no. 1 (1981): 121.

²⁷ John F Wippel, "Aquinas's Route to the Real Distinction: A Note on 'De Ente Et Essentia'," *ibid.* 43, no. 2 (1979): 294.

²⁸ *ST I*, q. 84, a. 7, *sed contra*.

²⁹ *QDA* a. 3, 1. See also *ST I*, q. 78, a. 4., ad. 2.

our senses but only apprehend them through a comparison of the proper sensibles: ‘this discerning judgment must pertain to the common sense, to which all sensory apprehensions are conveyed, as to their common terminus’.³⁰ The phantasm is the synthesization of the proper sensibles and the common sensibles that are perceived simultaneously. The act of the common sense not only discerns common sensibles out of the proper sensibles, e.g., shape or movement, it also makes it possible for the intellect to address it as a thing (*res*) which is distinguished from the actual data given by the senses, and consequently to address it according to its nature.

This collaboration between the common and the proper senses in the construction of the phantasm makes it possible for us to apply Bobik’s distinction between the common intelligible element and the otherness that expresses its specific actual realization without transcending the realm of thought. As we have seen in Bobik’s presentation, the common element represents the absolute within the phantasm and leaves out all considerations of its particular realization. In contrast to that stands the otherness in the phantasm which is not common and carries with it the specific actualization of the phantasms in its bare actuality, and so not of the thinghood of the represented thing but rather of the actual material of which the representation is made.

This feature in the phantasm, that expresses its actuality, cannot be expressed by the necessary aspects of the essence but rather by the contingent elements that accompany its realization. This is the place to refer to Owens who distinguishes between the act of thinking about things and the product of thinking itself. Owens explains that while the different acts of thinking, whether by the same person at different moments or by different persons, are really different from one another insofar as each act takes place differently. In contrast to that Owens explains that

[W]hen ‘concept’ is taken to mean the object, such as man, animal, or living thing, it remains the same no matter who is thinking of it or at what time the thinking takes place. In this sense it signifies objects that are distinct not necessarily in reality but in the way they are represented in human conceptualization.³¹

The product of the acts of thinking, when they all are thinking about one and the same thing, e.g., a man or a triangle, must be principally the same. This sameness is a sameness as it relates to a specific aspect, i.e., insofar as the necessary elements of thought are about a man or a triangle, for example, a rational animal or a three-side polygon. However we must recall that Aquinas explains that every human act of thinking

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Owens, "Aquinas' Distinction at De Ente Et Essentia 4.119-123," 267. See also Maurrer introduction to his translation of *De Ente*, 13 and his reference to note 19.

requires a phantasm, i.e., a sensual representation of the thing produced by the imagination. From this it follows that in our thinking of a man or a triangle, the imagination presents them in a specific manner that is different in every specific act – and yet, it is necessarily in some sense the same – for otherwise it would be impossible to say that they all think about a man or a triangle. Owens explains that the act of thinking and the thought that is the outcome of it are one in reality though they are formally distinct. This formal distinction is what permits us to distinguish between the act itself that produces the thought, and the product, and which also allows the sameness of the product to be shared by different thinkers.

5. Criticizing Owens, Macdonald and Wippel

Through a short critical survey of major interpretations, it will be argued that the unique role of the phantasm is missed by the abovementioned scholars. This results in committing two of the offenses Heidegger has criticized: either falling into the ontic trap or what Heidegger calls the forgetfulness of being.

The importance of the role played by the phantasm is missed by Owens's analysis. He accepts that the actuality that is grasped by the judgment 'is not concerned with existence as is later conceptualized, but with the existence that is actually exercised by a sensible thing', or in other words the phantasm.³² In that, we are totally in agreement with him. However, Owens immediately moves from that which appears, to the ontic question 'Who did it?'³³ That leads to the first being who is identical with its essence and who grounds his contention that there is a real distinction between essence and existence. Though he recognizes the importance of the senses as those through which 'one is immediately aware that things do exist', he contends that it is the '[s]ensible things [that] are immediately perceived to exist... Through sensation, accordingly, one is immediately aware that things do exist'.³⁴ The problem is that the senses only supply the sense data, and our ability to address the given as things is mediated by the common sense that allows the mind to address it as a thing. Here we see that Owens too quickly abandons any consideration of the phantasm as the original source of cognition.

Focusing on the phantasm is in line with the thrust of Scott Macdonald's reading of the importance of reality, and yet criticizes his quick leap to infer a real distinction between essence and existence in the world. Macdonald's key argument lies in what he calls the (E/E1) general principle:

³² "Quiddity and Real Distinction in St Thomas Aquinas," 16.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ "Stages and Distinction in "De Ente": A Rejoinder," 114.

Whatever belongs to a thing and is not part of its essence either comes from without and effects a composition with the essence or itself constitutes the entire essence.³⁵

Macdonald deduces that:

The principle does not, it seems to me, start us off solely with concepts or their contents but with an observation about ‘whatever belongs to a thing,’ i.e., about characteristics of things.³⁶

Macdonald turns to the plurality of things in the world as a fact that testifies to the need to distinguish between essence and existence. He explains that the plurality of things in reality can be explained either ‘(i) by the addition of some differentia, (ii) by a form being received in different matters, or (iii) by one thing being absolute and another being received in something.’³⁷ Macdonald eliminates the former two alternatives³⁸ and accepts the remaining alternative, explaining that ‘[t]here is only one thing, *esse* itself, which is absolute, and *esse* is received in other things as in effects from a cause. ... there is one thing which is *esse* itself and that all other things receive their *esse* from it’.³⁹ We hold that Macdonald’s question of why there is plurality, and his answer, are ontic, and fall under Heidegger’s criticism, for he presupposes that plurality is to be understood as an effect of a cause. As we shall see, the distinction between essence and existence can be addressed by attending to the specificity of things without the need to turn to an explanation of their origin based upon a participation in being, that leads to a dogmatic statement about the existence of things in reality.

We accept Macdonald’s contention that one should take empirical considerations seriously.⁴⁰ However, one does not meet things in their existence but only the phantasms that were efficiently caused by them. Thus, instead of speaking of ‘whatever belongs to a thing’ we limit the discussion to ‘whatever belongs to a phantasm’. In claiming that the phoenix argument is not essential to the understanding of *De Ente* 4,⁴¹ Macdonald missed the centrality of the act of thinking that grounds the individualization of the phoenix in

³⁵ Scott Charles MacDonald, "The Esse/Essentia Argument in Aquinas's *De Ente Et Essentia*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 22, no. 2 (1984): 164.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 159.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 162-63. It seems Macdonald is influenced by Wippel who mentions the same three alternatives. However, while Wippel presents these alternatives in order to show that there is at most one being whose essence and existence are identical, Macdonald presents these same alternatives as possibilities to explain the plurality of beings in the world. While Wippel's rejections of the first two alternatives is cogent, Macdonald's rejections of the same alternatives is not as convincing. For example, Macdonald's rejection of both the differentia and the matter as explanations for the plurality can be disputed. It could be argued that though matter cannot exist separately without form, it is still prior insofar as it is a condition for the actualization of the form. See Wippel, "Aquinas's Route to the Real Distinction: A Note on "De Ente Et Essentia", 287-88.

³⁹ MacDonald, "The Esse/Essentia Argument in Aquinas's *De Ente Et Essentia*," 163.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 161, 64.

the mind and its reality. Missing that, he discerns reality outside the mind. Focusing on the phantasm allows us to think of immaterial beings such as the angels even though we do not hold any empirical knowledge of them and even prior to a proof of God's existence (which is required, according to Wippel, to determine the status of the distinction to the angels). Focusing on the phantasms instead of things in the world offers us more flexibility in explaining how we can come to think of immaterial or non-existent things such as the angels or the phoenix.

In contrast to the ontic readings of Owens and Macdonald, Wippel offers a more logical approach. Following a qualified Anselmian argument, he explains that though it is problematic to prove the existence of an ultimate being whose essence and existence are identical, one can conclude that with regard to other beings, essence and existence must differ.⁴² The question remains whether such non-identity implies a real, formal or conceptual distinction. Wippel does not resolve this conundrum; however it seems that his Anselmian reasoning does not permit him to say much about the actuality of things. Since Aquinas criticizes Anselm's pure conceptual approach, it can be argued that Aquinas would demand more than Wippel's Anselmian reasoning. Wippel avoids, in his argument, resorting to efficient causality at the cost of purely Anselmian deduction. Echoing Heidegger's criticism of the forgetfulness of Being, Owens argues vehemently against Wippel's move as follows:

Even though the reasoning has been carried to the point where it has shown that the distinction does not hold in God, there is as yet no ground for projecting it as real. It would be reasoning from the presence of a distinction in the mind to a corresponding distinction in reality. In that perspective the reasoning would seem to have an ontological cast.⁴³

6. The Real Distinction as a Distinguishing Act

In the following we will contend that the phantasm, as 'the existence that is actually exercised by a sensible thing', is the locus where the distinction between essence and existence should be anchored.

Let us recall. The fruit of thinking, i.e., the thought that is formally distinct from the act of thinking, can be divided into its absolute aspect of thought and that which is not absolute. The absolute expresses that which persists and is necessary within that which is thought, while that which is not absolute, the otherness, has

⁴² 'Having eliminated, at least to his own satisfaction, the possibility of there being more than one entity in which essence and existence are identical or whose essence is its existence, Thomas then draws the conclusion: '[Wherefore,] it necessarily follows that in every other entity apart from this unique possible exception, existence and quiddity (or nature or form), must differ''. Wippel, "Aquinas's Route to the Real Distinction: A Note on "De Ente Et Essentia", " 289.

⁴³ Joseph Owens, "Stages and Distinction in "De Ente": A Rejoinder," *ibid.* 45, no. 1 (1981): 120.

its specific realization in the phantasm. This corresponds neatly to Aquinas's distinction between the two acts of the understanding: simple apprehension and judgment.⁴⁴ Simple apprehension, which corresponds to the former (the absolute), expresses that which makes a thing what it is, i.e., a flower or a triangle; and judgment, that corresponds to the latter (the non-absolute), perceives the thing's specificity as it exists. Whereas the first is common and the same for any act of thinking about something, or any actualization of something as a particular thing, such as a flower or a triangle, judgment perceives that which is specific to the flower that one actually perceives.

Instead of viewing these two acts of understanding as separate, we suggest they are rooted in one and the same process of abstraction of the phantasm.⁴⁵ While the mind strips the material conditions from the phantasm, it is left with two products: 1. the phantasm as stripped of its material features; 2. the material features that were stripped away from the phantasm. The reality is limited to the material features alone (smell, brightness, humidity, etc.) while the conceptual elements are abstracted from the phantasm. These two aspects are really distinct from one another insofar as the latter is completely abstracted from reality whereas the former retains all that is cast aside by this abstraction of reality. It is crucial to emphasize that, for Aquinas, these material conditions are not discarded but are an essential part of the thinking process for humans who think by returning to the phantasms. It is the phantasms that make it possible for us to think of the things in their specific actuality.⁴⁶ For when one remembers a specific flower, only the material features that are stored in one's memory make it possible for that person to remember a specific flower and not to think simply of an abstract flower: '[for] something comes into being not purely and simply but in a certain respect'.⁴⁷ This explains why the two acts of understanding, though distinct, cannot be exercised separately, as Owens explains:

[The essence] cannot be conceptualized in simple apprehension without simultaneous cognition of its existence, real or intentional as the case may be, through judgment. The existence that inevitably

⁴⁴ 'Since in a thing there are two considerations, the thing's quiddity and its being, these two correspond to a twofold activity of the intellect. One is called by philosophers "formation," in which it [i.e., the intellect] apprehends the quiddities of things. This is also called "the thinking of indivisibles," by the Philosopher in the third book of the *De Anima*. The other comprehends the thing's being by composing an affirmation, because the being of a thing composed of matter and form, from which it [i.e., the intellect] gets the cognition, also consists in a composition of form with matter, or of accident with subject'. Sent. 1.38.1.3. Translation as well as a discussion of the two acts of understanding is found in "Aquinas on Knowing Existence," *The Review of Metaphysics* 29, no. 4 (1976): 674.

⁴⁵ For a comprehensive treatment of Aquinas's process of abstraction see Liran Shia Gordon, "Reconstructing Aquinas's Process of Abstraction," *Heythrop Journal* 59, no. 4 (2018).

⁴⁶ In *ST*. I, q. 84, a. 7 Thomas asks 'whether the intellect can, through the species of which it is possessed, actually understand, without turning to the phantasms?' Thomas answers in the negative, based on the words of Aristotle, that 'the soul understands nothing without a phantasm.' (respondeo)

⁴⁷ *DE* 2.2.

accompanies the essence that is known will therefore always be apprehended in conjunction with it.⁴⁸

The real distinction as we understand it now, distinguishes clearly between the ideal aspect that is not real or actual, and the real and actual aspect that expresses the thing in its individuality. The real distinction between essence and existence does not produce two real products – essence and existence – for in reality there is but one thing. Within that one thing our mind is capable of conceiving and distinguishing the necessary elements that are not real or actual in themselves. For if they were real then they must be contingent – as is the nature of all created things – and in opposition to the one thing whose essence is identical with and necessary for its existence: God.

We can thus speak of two meanings of real distinction. The first, which corresponds to what Bobik calls the ordinary understanding of real distinction, distinguishes two things that really subsist or attributes that are grounded in things that really subsist, either in thought or in the world. The second distinction refers to the act within the abstraction process that distinguishes between the real and that which is not real. For example, if we look at a tile on the floor we can distinguish between that which is given to us primarily through the sense – colors – that are really actual, and the rectangularity which is not given by the senses but is rather derived from the common sense through a comparison of the actual colors. Rectangularity does not exist in itself, nor does it exist in the actual thing but is rather derived from the actual thing, and is reflected in it, and consequently is cognized together with the thing's colors. Therefore, when we distinguish between the colors and the rectangularity of a tile, we distinguish between the actual which is in the thing (the colors) and that which is not actual but is reflected in the actual thing (rectangularity). Whereas Bobik's soft definition of the real distinction was too imprecise, it opened the door to consider real distinction not as a distinction between two subsisting parts (or parts of subsisting parts), but rather as a distinction whereby only one of its parts is real and the other is not. The distinction becomes an act that distinguishes between that which is absolute and not real and that which is actual and contingent.

Though Owens points out the fact that while the acts of understanding, simple apprehension and judgment, cannot be executed separately, they can be distinguished conceptually:

What kind of otherness, though, has been demonstrated? Is it merely conceptual distinction? Existing, while originally grasped through judgment, is for purposes of thought and discussion at once conceptualized as an actuality or perfection, notions taken from quidditative objects. Existence becomes the object of this concept, while quiddity remains an object originally attained through conceptualization. The two are the objects of different concepts, and in this way

⁴⁸ Owens, "Quiddity and Real Distinction in St Thomas Aquinas," 3.

conceptually distinct. That is the strongest distinction that appears for the time being. It is the distinction only between the objects of two different concepts.⁴⁹

Owens's reading, though closely related to the reading we present, still differs significantly from what is presented here as it apprehends the distinction between the grasp of actuality of things and their nature as a conceptualized distinction.

Finally we propose to distinguish between three levels of distinctions in the process of thinking: formal, real, and conceptual. This allows us to alleviate the tensions between the different interpretations regarding the distinction between essence and existence that we have already alluded to. The formal distinction describes the relationship between the act of thinking and its product, the thought itself. It is important to note that this distinction is a result of an actual production in the mind (production in the world is different than a production in the mind, for while the carpenter and his product are really distinct, the act of thinking and its product are the same in reality). This formal distinction is due to the fact that the product is of a different nature than the process that produced it. This difference is that which allows us to consider the product as detached from that which produced it and that allows the consequent intellectual acts on the product to be carried out regardless of the act of thinking itself that produced it. This, as we shall see, is that which provides the grounds for Aquinas's insistence that truth is primarily said of the intellect.⁵⁰ The product of thinking is never an abstract concept but a specific realization of a concept by the imagination, i.e., that something must be conceived in order to think of it. This concretization can either be complete, as with the actual sensual grasp of something really existing, or something almost utterly abstract; for example when one considers a triangle, some bare triangle is conceived of, a sort of polygon with three sides. In such a case, the triangle must be concretized with the fundamental principles of individuation. For as we recall, Aquinas distinguishes between essence considered absolutely and essence individualized in the world or in thought, and so the triangle must be concretized with this bare minimum of individuation without which it cannot be an object of thought.

It is at this point that the second level of distinction, the real distinction, comes to the fore. The real distinction operates on the product of thinking which is individualized. It is an act that distinguishes between the absolutely essential that is reflected in the product and that which opposes it, i.e., that is not absolute about it. As we have seen, this is the process that strips the material features from the phantasm. As a result the real is distinguished from that which is not real. The not real, i.e., the absolutely essential, is really distinct from the real, which is that which is actual and contingent. Since for that which is not absolute there

⁴⁹ "Aquinas' Distinction at De Ente Et Essentia 4.119-123," 279.

⁵⁰ See *QDV* q. 1, a. 2.

is no essential concept, it can only be designated by intervention of an intermediary through a negation of its conceptual counterpart. As we have seen, though the rectangularity of the tile does not exist in reality, it is derived from a quantitative analysis of the tile's actual colors, and is reflected in it. This rectangularity is not only derived from the actuality of the colors but also allows the mind to designate negatively and through a mediation the actuality that lies within it (the colors).⁵¹ For this reason it is possible for us to share our thoughts about a flower by using words and concepts though we cannot share our memories of its material features, for no concept can designate them positively.

The third is a conceptual distinction that is drawn between essence and existence. While the second level was a process that distinguished the product of the act of thinking into the absolutely essential and the actual, which is opposed to it, the third level addresses these two products of the real distinction into two categories that are designated, as argued by Owens, by two concepts: essence and existence.⁵² Aquinas's two considerations of essence, as absolute and individualized, correspond to the concept of essence (absolute essence) and to the product of thinking (individualized essence in thought). Existence can be divided into dynamic existence that expresses the actuality of the phantasm, and existence as a 'still-life object' that is expressed by a concept.⁵³

7. Partial Summary

In contrast to Heidegger, who holds that Aquinas diverts the emphasis from the ontological question to the ontic one, in the *De Ente* two readings of being can be found: ontic and ontological – and both are grounded in Aquinas's distinction between the two manners in which things subsist: 1. according to oneself; 2. according to another.⁵⁴ While the first is according to necessity, the other is dependent and contingent. The ontic reading, as Owens clarifies,⁵⁵ is focused on the efficient causality that leads to the first being who is his own cause of being. The ontological reading does not focus on the efficient causality that brings things into existence, but rather on a thing's mere existence, and distinguishes between the particular aspect of existence of a thing and the common one according to which it is said to be such and such. While the latter expresses the necessary which is reflected in the existing thing, the former expresses the particular and unique in the existence of a thing and does not offer itself to be expressed or conceptualized. As a result the

⁵¹ Since this negation that extracts the actual from the individualized thought is the result of the negation made by the essence taken absolutely, it follows that from the essence taken absolutely alone, one cannot infer anything about actuality – and so Anselm's ontological proof, which is only conceptual, cannot deduce anything about reality.

⁵² Owens, "Aquinas' Distinction at *De Ente Et Essentia* 4.119-123," 279.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁵⁴ *DE* 4.7.

⁵⁵ Owens, "Quiddity and Real Distinction in St Thomas Aquinas," 16.

real distinction is a buffer between that which is actual and real and the conceptual things that are abstracted from any reality. Consequently, one cannot speak of the forgetfulness of being in Aquinas's thought. To the contrary, the real distinction clearly buffers between conceptual thinking and the actuality.

Part II: On the Possibility of Truth as Adequation (a brief addendum)

The criticism Heidegger levels against scholastic philosophy, particularly that of Aquinas, addresses primarily the distinction between essence and existence and truth as adequation. We hold that the presented treatment of the former can be used to resolve the difficulty Heidegger raised against the latter, i.e., what grounds the possibility of truth as adequation. In so doing, the following will diverge from the specific problem we have dealt with so far. This is done for two reasons: 1. If we present only an incomplete reply that does not address Heidegger's overall criticism, the study loses its ability to claim that Aquinas's philosophical system can contend with Heidegger's devastating criticism. A partial reply is not as effective as a complete one. 2. The argument in favor of our distinction between essence and existence is greatly bolstered if we can show that it can solve additional important problems – in this case Heidegger's criticism of Aquinas's conception of truth.

In the *Essence of Truth*, Heidegger explains that typically we say that 'a statement [of something] is true if what it means and says is in accordance with the matter about which the statement is made.'⁵⁶ This is of course a paraphrasing of Aquinas's endorsement of the definition of truth as *veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus*⁵⁷ [truth is the adequation of thing and intellect]. In the second section of his essay, Heidegger asks what it is that grounds the possibility of adequation. Since Aquinas is primarily interested in understanding what truth⁵⁸ is and not how the adequation comes about, this important question is absent from Aquinas's treatment of truth as adequation. Heidegger notes that it is not clear in what sense real things and our statement about them can be adequated. He asks the following: in what sense is there a correspondence between the actual five-mark coin (his example), and a statement about that five-mark coin. Heidegger notes that the 'coin is made of metal. The statement is not material at all. The coin is round. The statement has nothing at all spatial about it. With the coin something can be purchased. The statement about

⁵⁶ Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 138.

⁵⁷ *QDV* q. 1, a. 1.

⁵⁸ More on Aquinas's treatment of truth see John F. Wippel, "Truth in Thomas Aquinas (I)," *Review of Metaphysics* 43, no. 2 (1989); J.A. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas*, Studien Und Texte Zur Geistesgeschichte Des Mittelalters (Brill, 1996); Liran Shia Gordon, "Some Thoughts About Aquinas's Conception of Truth as Adequation," *The Heythrop Journal* 57, no. 2 (2016).

it is never a means of payment.’ Thus, he concludes, ‘[h]ow can what is completely dissimilar, the statement, correspond to the coin?’⁵⁹

The problem Heidegger raises points to that which grounds our ability not only to speak truthfully about real things – but to say anything about them at all. This is the reason why that which grounds the possibility of adequation must primarily ground our ability to approach real things, i.e., to allow a thing to ‘stand opposed as [an] object.’⁶⁰ Heidegger concludes that that which grounds the possibility of the adequation, i.e., as correctness or incorrectness, is freedom.⁶¹ This freedom should not be understood simply as the ability to act otherwise but rather as the capacity to be open to a thing which ‘reveals itself as letting beings be.’⁶² By letting beings be Heidegger means letting things appear in their actuality without imposing our will on them, as when one imposes economic, social and other ideological interpretations on reality.

With regard to our needs, Heidegger’s account raises two essential points regarding the question of truth: 1. That which grounds the possibility of adequation must ground the opposedness of real things to our mind, i.e., our ability to consider them as independent. 2. This opposedness of things to our mind needs to be undertaken in a manner that permits us not to impose our will on them, or, in Heidegger’s words, in a manner that lets beings be.

Let us now return to Aquinas in order to ask whether, based on the results of the previous part, we may construct a Thomistic answer to Heidegger’s criticism of adequation. As we argued in the first part, by turning to the phantasm one can avoid Heidegger’s criticism regarding the distinction between essence and existence, so we will argue that the phantasm and the understanding of the real distinction as an act, answer the two points raised in the above section, and so ground the possibility of adequation.

But first let us make a brief remark. Just as Heidegger criticizes the scholars of Aquinas who are too quick to leap to God and consequently forget being, Heidegger too, in his example of the five-mark coin also leaps too quickly to complicated features. Instead, in trying to answer what grounds the possibility of adequation, one should ask what correlates between the thing’s simple features and our thinking about them, e.g., the roundness in the phantasm and that statement about that round thing. Heidegger’s example, though it definitely makes his point clear, may not serve us well in our attempt to present an answer, for the concepts of five or of a coin, or metal, are all of a higher level that already presupposes a hermeneutical structure that is imposed by the mind. Only after establishing the possibility of adequation between the simple

⁵⁹ Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," 141.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 142.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 144. This recalls Descartes contention in *Meditation IV* that ‘In order to be free, there is no need for me to be inclined both ways; on the contrary, the more I incline in one direction... the freer is my choice’. (AT VII:57-8; CSM II:40)

elements of the phantasm and a proposition about it, can a more sophisticated account be made about it, e.g. that the round thing is a five-mark coin.

We hold that the phantasm is that which grounds the opposedness of the object to the mind and so makes adequation possible. Also we hold that the real distinction as an act that distinguishes between the absolute essential and the actual, establishes the needed buffer that permits us not to impose our projections on reality, as we are accustomed to do.⁶³

With respect to the two points raised above we respond as follows. 1. The phantasm can ground the possibility of adequation because it allows the distinction to be made between two facets of the same thing: the essential and the actual. 2. The real distinction, as we understand it, is part of the abstraction process that distinguishes between the real and actual on the one hand, and the ideal/essential aspect that is not real or actual, on the other hand. This ideal aspect does not exist in the actual thing but is rather derived from the actual thing, and is reflected in it, and consequently is cognized together with the thing. These two aspects do not overlap insofar as the ideal/essential is that which is common to the phantasm and the thought of it, whereas the real is what is opposed to that which is common, the otherness.⁶⁴ And yet, though they do not overlap, they are distinct from one another in the sense that they both designate the same thing. The opposedness between the essential/ideal and actual elements does not mean they have nothing in common; on the contrary, they are fundamentally adequated to one another because they originate from the same thing, the phantasm, though the nature of their designation is different. The grounds for the adequation is not similarity, e.g., the similarity between the perceived metal and our statement about the metal, but rather the fact that they originate from the same thing. A striking similarity can be found in Aquinas's explanation of the relation between angelic knowledge and reality.⁶⁵

⁶³ This tendency is the result of the fact that the essential is reflected in that which is given, e.g., we perceive the rectangularity of the tile to exist in reality.

⁶⁴ See first part, section 3.

⁶⁵ Though Aquinas does not use the terminology of adequation that is based on origination, what we have presented concerning the role of the phantasm resembles his explanation of the adequation between the angelic knowledge of reality and reality. Just as our explanation of two opposed aspects of the phantasm, i.e., the actual and the essential elements, are grounded in one and the same phantasm, Aquinas maintains that the reality of the world and the representational knowledge given to the angels, though distinct insofar as one is 'actual' and the other 'essential' or representational, both originate in one and the same divine act. He explains that 'Angels acquire knowledge of things through an influx of divine light; in the same way that things themselves come forth into being from God, representations or likenesses of things are imprinted on the angelic intellect by God.' Similarly see *Compendium Theologiae* ch. 216: '[A]ngels' knowledge, however, is not caused by things and is not the cause of things, but both the things which the angels know and their knowledge are from one cause; for in the same way that God communicates universal forms to things, making them subsist, He communicates likenesses of things to the minds of angels so that the angels can know them.'; *QDV* q. 2, a. 14. See also *ST I*, q. 56, a. 2. This similarity strengthens the heuristic important comment by Harm Goris who said that 'Angelology makes up a kind of philosophical laboratory to carry out thought experiments in which angelic knowledge will serve either as contrasting counterexamples or as idealized forms of human knowledge and human will'. Harm Goris, "The Angelic Doctor and Angelic Speech: The Development of

It is important to note that though the phantasm grounds the possibility of adequation, the adequation itself can be made only by the intellect that relates the phantasm to a statement about it. This is the reason why Aquinas contends that truth is primarily said to reside in the intellect and not in things. Though the actual and the essential originate from the same phantasm, the intellect cannot approach non-conceptual elements directly and requires a conceptual manipulation to address the actual. As we have seen above, the absolutely essential is that which is necessary to the thing and is encapsulated in the thing's concept. The non-absolute element of the phantasm, i.e. the actual, cannot be designated directly, and can be designated only negatively through the negation of the concept as that which is such and such (see p. 16). Since actuality cannot be conceptualized, our ability to designate it can only be attained through the negation of the concept that defines it. This allows the intellect to relate the concept of the thing to the actuality of the thing.

To exemplify how the two opposed designations can be adequated to one another, let us recall how Owens distinguished between two designations of the concept of existence, i.e., between dynamic existence that expresses the actuality of the phantasm, and existence as a 'still-life object' that expresses existence abstractly. When something is given by the phantasm, the dynamic sense of existence allows the abstract concept of existence to relate negatively to the thing's actuality and to state that it *is*. It is important to note that in distinguishing between dynamic existence and the still-life existence of an object, these are not really two distinct concepts but are rather two different designations of the same concept – one expresses the essence, the other expresses that which has that essence, which in itself is contingent. Whereas the still-life existence designates the existence of the thing conceptually, the dynamic existence designates it negatively in its actuality.

We do not assume that this presentation settles the matter but we do hope we have been able to make the case that our reading of the phantasm and the real distinction can answer Heidegger's question about what grounds the possibility of adequation. Furthermore, one should note that Heidegger never offered an explanation for how truth as unconcealment takes place, nor does he explain how this truth grounds truth as adequation. Since our exposition of the distinction between essence and existence fits the idea of truth as unconcealment,⁶⁶ and since we managed to use it to explain what grounds truth as adequation, the

Thomas Aquinas's Thought on How Angels Communicate," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 11, no. 1 (2003): 88. A fuller presentation of this can be found in Gordon, "Some Thoughts About Aquinas's Conception of Truth as Adequation," 328.

⁶⁶ It should be noted that Aquinas's exposition of truth, e.g. in *QDV* q. 1, a. 1, speaks of several definitions of truth, namely 1. 'it is defined according to that which precedes truth and is the basis of truth... "The true is that which is"'; 2. 'Truth is the conformity of thing and intellect'; 3. 'truth is according to the effect following upon it. Thus, Hilary says that the true is that which manifests and proclaims existence. And Augustine says: 'Truth is that by which that which is, is shown''. Though not discussing the third option, by accepting the second alternative, Aquinas does not reject the other two. Aquinas explains that only the second conception of truth captures truth in the full sense and that the first sense is only said analogically. Thus one can conclude that truth as unconcealment or as manifestation

question that Heidegger's followers should now strive to answer is whether they should not adopt this Thomistic solution.

Epilogue

Our formulation of the real distinction, that was understood as an outcome of the abstraction process, should also be considered from a theological point of view. The real distinction categorically separates the given actuality and our reflection on it. Though the former is most immediate, in itself, it remains unknown to us and all we can say is that it is. Whereas our reflection of reality continuously divides and limits it under our internal designations, reality in itself escapes our grasp. For reality transcends all distinctions or limitations that are expressed about it. It is, as Aquinas quoting Damascene says: 'the boundless sea of substance'.⁶⁷ God is nothing but a concept we use to designate that which is given in the most primordial sense – as the origin of the given:

Of all the terms relating to origin, the word principle is most appropriate to God. For since we are unable to comprehend the things of God it is better for us to indicate them by means of general terms which have an indefinite meaning, than to employ special words that have a definite signification.⁶⁸

The notion of God and our relation to him is the posterior result of our attempt to conceptualize that which is. Aquinas stresses that the highest theological insight man can attain about God is our incapacity to know him: 'man reaches the highest point of his knowledge about God when he knows that he knows him not, inasmuch as he knows that that which is God transcends whatsoever he conceives of him'.⁶⁹ This pure givenness transcends even concepts such as creator and creatures, necessity and contingent, and the relations between them.

Putting aside the notion of God – that seems to be in accord with Heidegger's approach to the question of Being, a question arises whether it is possible to reconcile this interpretation of Aquinas with his commitment to Christian doctrines. In other words, can Aquinas the philosopher and Aquinas the theologian be reconciled or should we conclude that Aquinas, by accepting the Christian tenants of faith, was

of existence does not capture truth according to its full sense, but only secondarily insofar as it brings the intellect to perceive the thing as it is.

⁶⁷ Damascene, *De Fide Orthod.* I, 12. Quoted in *DP* q. 10, a. 1, ad. 9.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* q. 7, a. 5, ad. 14.

inconsistent? This problem, that becomes evident in Aquinas, is whether the notion of *Christian philosophy*, is contradictory. As Heidegger clearly states:

Anyone for whom the Bible is divine revelation and truth has the answer to the question ‘Why is there anything rather than nothing?’ even before it is asked; One who holds to such faith can in a way participate in the asking of our question, but he cannot really question without ceasing to be a believer and taking all the consequences of such a step. He will only be able to act ‘as if’ [This] does not imply that the statement ‘In the beginning God created heaven and earth’ is an answer to our question. Quite aside from whether these words from the Bible are true or false for faith, they can supply no answer to our question because they are in no way related to it. Indeed, they cannot even be brought into relation with our question. ... A ‘Christian philosophy’ is a round square and a misunderstanding.⁷⁰

In *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 8, Aquinas explains that no science can prove its own principles. While the principles of lower sciences can be examined by higher sciences, ‘Sacred Scripture, since it has no science above itself, can dispute with one who denies its principles only if the opponent admits some at least of the truths obtained through divine revelation’. This means that the discussion can be rational only for those who accept common ground. Thus he concludes that ‘it is clear that the arguments brought against faith cannot be demonstrations, but are difficulties that can be answered’.⁷¹ The role of the theologian is not to prove the articles of faith but rather to show that the opponents cannot undermine their coherency, and so that faith does not contradict reason but rather perfects it.

Both Heidegger and Aquinas accept the fundamental givenness of that which is. The difference lies in how they situate man. While Aquinas understands the givenness as grace – that which is given is given willingly and voluntarily to creatures – the givenness in Heidegger’s world rejects any such association. In 1950 Heidegger published an important collection of articles that were written between 1935 and 1946 under the title *Holzwege*. In German Holzweg translates as a wood-path. A wood-path is a small path in the woods that is paved in order for the chopped wood to be carried from one place to another. Luther used this term in order to stress that there is only one path to truth and that all other paths are Holzwege. In the opening to this collection, Heidegger adds a few mysterious lines about the Holzwege:

‘Wood’ is an old name for forest. In the wood there are paths, mostly overgrown, that come to an abrupt stop where the wood is untrodden.

⁷⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 7-8.

⁷¹ *ST* I, q. 1, a. 8, respondeo.

They are called Holzwege.

Each goes its separate way, though within the same forest. It often appears as if one is identical to another. But it only appears so. Woodcutters and forest keepers know these paths. They know what it means to be on a Holzweg.⁷²

This is not the place to present a full exposition of the text but only to pay attention to the last two sentences: ‘Woodcutters and forest keepers know these paths. They know what it means to be on a Holzweg’. The woodcutters and the forest keepers refer to two types of people and their two distinct functions. The first is ontological and refers to those who pave the paths of Being whereas the latter is ontic and refers to those who maintain the path and makes sure that the path does not get covered up and disappear. The ‘they know’ of the last line, needs to be understood differently when it refers to the woodcutters and when it refers to forest keepers. Whereas the latter understand the Holzweg that they are walking on to be a road that leads to a place, and so associate the meaning of their walking in accordance with that destination, the former know that the road leads nowhere for them. They know that the Holzweg is not meant for humans but rather for the transportation of the Wood (for Heidegger the Wood represents Being). This knowing that the road was never meant for us drastically alters the meaning of the givenness of Being. For Heidegger, Being is not given to us by God’s grace. In fact, Being does not see us at all and so we are not even forsaken by it. The givenness of Being is, for Heidegger, not something intended, it is simply given as the snake sheds its skin in the process of its own self-generation. This view, which is not without beauty, is nothing but a graceless negative theology.

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⁷² Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), vi.

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