

A Heideggerian Critique of Aquinas and a Gilsonian Reply

John F. X. Knasas

I

In his book, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics*, John Caputo investigates among other points a claim of Étienne Gilson's followers. Their claim is that Heidegger's charge of an oblivion or forgetfulness of being cannot be pinned on Aquinas.¹ Aquinas escapes the charge because he alone in the history of Western philosophy deepens the understanding of being to the level of *esse*. How could someone who has seized upon the fundamental principle of being be guilty of a forgetfulness of being? Caputo begs to differ. A Heideggerian would find the Gilsonian thesis unimpressive. What Aquinas has done remains too ontical, for it still deals with things and the principles of things. Something else escapes Aquinas' eye, and Caputo variously expresses the Heideggerian dissatisfaction:

esse for Aquinas means that act by which a thing comes to be "real" rather than "present" in the original Greek sense of shining and appearing, revealing and concealing. . . . In St. Thomas the original Greek notion of presencing as the shining in which all appearances shine, as a rising up into appearance, into manifestness, has declined into an understanding of Being as "objective presence," the presence of what is mutely there, as a sound in an empty room is thought to be "there" in naive realism and common sense.²

Also:

Hence, St. Thomas takes the being, not in its very Being—that is, in its quiet emergence into manifestness—but in its character as something *created*.³

¹ John Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 100-1, 117-21.

² *Ibid.*, 199. ³ *Ibid.*, 200.

Then:

The metaphysics of *actualitas* is basically at odds with the meditative savoring of the original sense of Being as presencing.⁴

Finally,

The early Greek experience of *Anwesen*, of the simple emergence of things into the light, differs fundamentally from St. Thomas' metaphysics of actuality and science of first causes.⁵

Caputo's conclusion is that one cannot accept Heidegger's criteria of *Seindenken* and think that Aquinas meets them.⁶

But a Gilsonian might humbly take Caputo's correction and still feel constrained to note that if the issue is being in the sense of presencing, then another portion of Aquinas' philosophical doctrine becomes relevant, viz., Aquinas' elaboration of the mechanics of cognition. In sum, things are present to us insofar as our form has been informed by their forms. Formal reception of form allows us to become the really other without loss to ourselves. We are then sufficiently actualized to cause the presence of the real as the term of our cognitional activity.⁷

Once more, however, I believe that we have philosophers speaking past each other. For Heidegger believes that presencing requires an understanding of being as an *a priori* condition. Many texts to this effect exist. One of the most striking is from Heidegger's, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1927). In detailing what he means by "being" in the ontological difference between being and beings, Heidegger says,

We are able to grasp beings as such, as beings, only if we understand something like being. If we did not understand, even though at first roughly and without conceptual comprehension, what actuality signifies, then the actual would remain hidden from us. If we did not understand what reality means, then the real would remain inaccessible. . . . We must understand being so that we may be able to be given over to a world that is, so that we can exist in it and be our own Dasein itself as a being. We must be able to understand actuality before

⁴ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁶ *Loc. cit.*

⁷ "knowing beings are distinguished from non-knowing beings in that the latter possess only their own form; whereas the knowing being is naturally adapted to have also the form of some other thing, for the species of the thing known is in the knower. Hence, it is manifest that the nature of a non-knowing being is more contracted and limited; whereas the nature of a knowing being has a greater amplitude and extension. That is why the Philosopher says that the soul is in a sense all things." Thomas Aquinas, *S.T. I*, 14, 2c; as edited by Anton Pegis in *The Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Random House, 1945), Vol. I, 136. On the Aristotelian background, see Joseph Owens, "Aristotelian Soul as Cognitive of Sensibles, Intelligibles and Self," *Aristotle: The Collected Papers of Joseph Owens*, ed. John R. Catan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 81-98.

all experience of actual beings. This understanding of actuality or of being in the widest sense as over against the experience of beings is in a certain sense earlier than the experience of beings. To say that the understanding of being precedes all factual experience of beings does not mean that we would first need to have an explicit concept of being in order to experience beings theoretically or practically. We must understand being—being, which may no longer itself be called a being, being, which does not occur as a being among other beings but which nevertheless must be given and in fact is given in the understanding of being.⁸

What is Heidegger saying about being? As I understand him, he is saying that being is the expanse up and against which realities are seen as realities. The driving idea is that the individual is only known in the light of the universal. Undergirding this driving thought is Heidegger's description of what we experience. Does not saying that we experience beings, mean that the beings are appreciated as instances of something larger, viz., being? Similarly, to

⁸ Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1988), 10-11. Also, from *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962): "Inquiry, as a kind of seeking, must be guided beforehand by what is sought. So the meaning of Being must already be available to us in some way" (25); "what is asked about is Being - that which determines entities as entities, that on the basis of which entities are already understood" (25-6); "But as an investigation of Being, [phenomenological interpretation] brings to completion, autonomously and explicitly, that understanding of Being which belongs already to Dasein and which 'comes alive' in any of its dealings with entities" (96); "understanding of Being has already been taken for granted in projecting upon possibilities. In projection, Being is understood, though not ontologically conceived. An entity whose kind of Being is the essential projection of Being-in-the-world has understanding of Being, and has this as constitutive of its Being" (188-7); "If what the term 'idealism' says, amounts to the understanding that Being can never be explained by entities but is already that which is 'transcendental' for every entity, then idealism affords the only correct possibility for a philosophical problematic" (251); "At the bottom, however, the whole correlation necessarily gets thought of as somehow being, and must therefore be thought of with regard to some definite idea of Being" (252); "only if the understanding of Being is, do entities as entities become accessible" (255); "[Common sense] fails to recognize that entities can be experienced 'factually' only when Being is already understood, even if it has not been conceptualized" (363); "All optical experience of entities - both circumspective calculation of the ready-to-hand, and positive scientific cognition of the present-at-hand - is based upon projections of the Being of the corresponding entities" (371); "[the paradigmatic character of mathematical natural science] consists rather in the fact that the entities which it takes as its theme are discovered in it in the only way in which entities can be discovered - by the prior projection of their state of Being" (414). In sum, Caputo, *op. cit.*, 53, remarks: "[In Being and Time] Being is the meaning or horizon of understanding within which beings are manifest. Thus instead of being an abstract concept, a vacuous abstraction when separated from concrete beings, . . . , Being for Heidegger becomes the meaning-giving horizon, the transcendental a priori, which precedes beings and renders them possible in their Being. It is not an abstraction drawn from beings, but an a priori which precedes them."

experience Fido as a dog means to experience Fido as an instance of dog. But unlike dog, being is underived from the beings that we experience. How could it be derived? Being sets up experienced beings in the first place. Whenever we have beings, we already have being. Hence, in the previous quote, Heidegger says that being is "before" all experience of actual beings and that the understanding of being is "... in a sense earlier than the experience of beings." Continuing this *a priori* construal of being, *Basic Problems* says that "the understanding of being has itself the mode of being of the human *Dasein*."⁹ Elsewhere, Heidegger says that being is what is closest to us.¹⁰ His science of being is also called a transcendental science for it adopts the original sense and true tendency of the Kantian transcendental. As such, transcendental science is uninvolved with the task of popular metaphysics that deals with some one being behind the known beings.¹¹ Finally, in the following chapter of *Basic Problems*, Heidegger analyzes perceptual intentionality and stresses that the uncoveredness of a being in perception means that the being of the being has already been disclosed.¹²

What would a Gilsonian Thomist say to all of this? What comes most readily to mind is that the datum, viz., a consciousness of something as a being, fails to indicate necessarily an *a priori* notion of being. For it may well be that the notion of being is immediately abstracted from things and subsequently employed to appreciate them as beings. Being is always found with beings because it is simultaneously derived from them.

Why does this alternative view apparently not even occur to Heidegger? The answer seems to be that the notion of being used to grasp a thing as a being Heidegger considers to be applicable to immaterial beings, including God. In lines just previous to the above quote from *Basic Problems*, God, too, is described as a being and so is apprehended through being: "What can there be apart from nature, history, God, space, number? We say of each of these, even though in a different sense, that it *is*. We call it a being." Likewise, Heidegger says elsewhere, "[Being] is not God, nor [some] ground of the world. Being is broader than all beings - and yet is nearer to man than all beings, whether they be rocks, animals, works of art, machines, angels, or God."¹³ But how does a notion of being wide enough to include God come out of sensible things alone? The abstractive account of being chokes on this point. Better to say that being is not abstractive, or *a posteriori*, but is *a priori*. In short, because being is wide enough to include God, then it is underived from sensible things.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰ From Martin Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism," quoted by William J. Richardson, *Heidegger—Through Phenomenology to Thought* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 6.

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems*, 17.

¹² *Ibid.*, 67.

¹³ See *supra*, n. 10.

At this time it is noteworthy that Caputo mentions two sources for Heidegger's thinking on being: Heidegger's university professor, Carl Braig,¹⁴ and the sixteenth century Jesuit, Francisco Suarez.¹⁵ For both thinkers being is amply wide to include God. This point is so true for Suarez that he regards the philosophical treatment of God as subdivision of ontology, or general metaphysics. On the notion of being, neither of these men were *apriorists*. Both were abstractionists. But in light of the incongruity between the notion of being that is "abstracted" and the sensible data, is not an *apriorism* for being an implication just waiting to be drawn? I believe so. And such an observation, in my opinion, goes a long way to explain why Heidegger took the *a priori* route.

II

If the mentioned incongruity constrains Heidegger to understand being as an *a priori*, then the Gilsonian need simply say that it is by no means obvious that things are originally known as beings in the light of such a grandiose notion of being. For starters a much less ample notion of being will suffice, and as less ample, the incongruity of its immediate abstract derivation from sensible experience disappears.

Moreover, in Aquinas the notion of being that runs through creatures fails to carry over to God, as Heidegger seems to think. Aquinas variously expresses the notion of being common to creatures as *ens commune* and as *ens in quantum ens*. I will elaborate upon this point later. Now let it suffice to say that Aquinas relates God to *ens commune* not as an instance thereof but as the transcending cause of *ens commune*.¹⁶ God is not under *ens commune* but above it. It is true that Aquinas sees *esse* as analogically common to God and creatures. But again one must be careful to conceive this position correctly. The analogon of *esse* is not even intelligibly prior to God. Rather, the divine analogate instantiates the analogon.¹⁷ God is *esse subsistens*. All other *esse* is *esse accidentale*. Aquinas traces *esse accidentale* to God not only causally but also intelligibly. In sum, for Aquinas unlike for Heidegger, even intelligibly speaking, nothing exists prior to God.

Heidegger has a much better case for the *a priori* status of being in respect to what Aquinas calls the subject of metaphysics. Aquinas' terminology of *ens*

¹⁴ John Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics*, 45-55.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 69-70. ¹⁶ *In de Trin.* V, 4c.

¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *In I Sent.*, prol. q. 1, ad 2m. For a note on whether the analogy between God and creatures is basically one of proportion or proportionality, see John F. X. Knasas, "Aquinas, Analogy, and the Divine Infinity," *Doctor Communis*, 40 (1987), 79, n. 32.

commune and *ens inquantum ens* labels the subject of metaphysics. The terminology designates an intelligibility or commonality that one appreciates as having a capacity of realization in non-bodies.¹⁸ The intelligibility is separate from matter both in being and in notion. As such *ens* is unlike the commonalities of man, horse, or ass. These are natures admitting realization only in matter. Aquinas also conveys this point by calling *ens commune* a transphysical commonality.¹⁹ In this sense neo-Scholastics have used the term "transcendental."²⁰ But besides harboring the possibility of realization apart from matter, *ens commune* encompasses a composition. It is a composite transphysical commonality. Two parts, substance as potency and *esse* as act, comprise the composition.²¹

But various well-known attempts to formulate an *a posteriori* source for the subject of metaphysics have both philosophical and Thomistic problems. Both in whole and in part, I have told this story before.²² For present purposes I must at least in succinct fashion repeat it.

III

Throughout many works, but especially in *Existence and the Existent* (1947) and *Approches sans entrave* (1973), Maritain presents as the entry to metaphysics a heightened judgmental appreciation of the *esse* of sensible things. Something about such *esse* so known informs us that to be a being is not necessarily to be a body.

The philosophical problem here is that Maritain abstracts a notion too great for the data to bear. From a number of judgments I can see that *esse* is an act

¹⁸ "We say that being [*ens*] and substance are separate from matter and motion not because it is of their nature to be without them, as it is of the nature of ass to be without reason, but because it is not of their nature to be in matter and motion, as animal abstracts from reason, although some animals are rational." Aquinas, *In de Trin.* V, 4, ad 5m; trans. by Armand Maurer, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1963), 48-9. Also, "In this [second] way being [*ens*], substance, potency, and act are separate from matter and motion, because they do not depend upon them for their existence . . . Thus philosophical theology [also called metaphysics] investigates beings separate in the second sense as its subject, . . ." *In de Trin.* V, 4c; Maurer, trans., 45. See also Aquinas, *In Meta.* proem.

¹⁹ "Haec enim transphysica inveniuntur in via resolutionis, sicut magis communia post minus communia." *In Meta.*, proem.

²⁰ Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 210-18.

²¹ "potency and act divide common being." Previous lines identify potency and act as substance and being [*esse*]. For a sketch of the subject of Thomistic metaphysics, see John F. X. Knasas, *The Preface to Thomistic Metaphysics* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1990), 4-7.

that need not actuate this body or that body. Nevertheless, in every case of judgment so far, *esse* is still presented as the act of *some* body. From the data no indication yet exist that *esse* possesses an ability to actuate more than bodies. Texts from the *De Ente et Essentia* and *In de Trinitate* indicate that for Aquinas also abstraction is controlled by the data. Only if we increased the data to include existing non-bodies as well as existing bodies could we know that being need not mean a body.

Other *a posteriori* Thomists who criticize Maritain along the mentioned lines claim that the entry into metaphysics follows upon natural philosophy's demonstration of the immaterial. From Aristotle's *Physics*, one demonstrates separate substance as a required immaterial and immovable mover. From the *De Anima*, one proves the human soul to be immaterial. Such conclusions add to our data and enable us to stretch our original notion of being so that it is seen to apply analogically both to the material and immaterial orders.

But this approach fares no better than Maritain's. First, a proof for the immaterial on matter/form principles runs into a genuine Aristotelian problem. The proof appears to posit an efficient cause whose nature is form alone. But a case can be made, as Joseph Owens has, that in an Aristotelian context in which act is identified with form no pure form can be an efficient cause.

The natural philosophy approach is also at odds with the Thomistic texts. At *S.T. I*, 44, 2c, Aquinas has reasoning based on matter/form principles taking the philosopher to a universal cause that is still bodily, a celestial sphere. If philosophers reason further, the text continues, it is on the basis of *ens in quantum ens*. This basis is the metaphysical viewpoint. At *In de Trin.* V, 4c, Aquinas restricts philosophical knowledge of God and angels to metaphysics: "Philosophers, then, study these divine beings only insofar as they are the principles of . . . being as being." Finally, at *In II Phys.* lect. IV, n. 175, Aquinas assigns the study of the rational soul insofar as it is separable from matter to first philosophy, for natural philosophy considers any form only insofar as form has being in matter.

I find no texts that unequivocally give natural philosophy a demonstration of immaterial being. *In de Trin.* V, 2, ad 3m is often cited in behalf of the natural philosophy approach. Aquinas is replying to the objection that natural philosophy does treat what exists apart from matter and motion because it considers the First Mover that is free from all matter. In reply, Aquinas admits that natural philosophy treats the First Mover which is "of a different nature from natural things" but as the terminus of its subject that is about things in matter and motion. This seems to catch Aquinas giving natural philosophy proof of an immaterial being. Not necessarily, however. Bearing in mind, Aquinas' distinction between terrestrial and celestial matter (I, 66, 2c) and his references

to the celestial bodies as first mover (*Primum movens*, C.G. I, 13), it is not too far out of line to say that the immaterial first mover about which Aquinas is speaking is a celestial mover free from *terrestrial matter*. This rendering would also prevent the text from contradicting Aquinas' mentioned claim a scant two articles later that philosophers know God and the angels only in metaphysics.

Hence, as I see it, the flashpoint between Aquinas and Heidegger is the subject of Thomistic metaphysics and the inability to ground that subject *a posteriori*. In Heidegger's eyes, Aquinas should frankly confess that *ens commune* is an *a priori*. Furthermore, Aquinas should see that his account of cognitional presence in terms of formal reception of form is lacking, for it makes no acknowledgment of the *a priori* factor of being. Going this route also means giving up traditional ontology understood as a search for the ultimate causes of things. In its wake follows a phenomenological ontology that uncovers ourselves as projectors of the being in the light of which we are conscious of beings. This is just what Heidegger wants.²³

IV

I wish to defend Aquinas by upholding an *a posteriori* origin for Thomistic metaphysics. Yet, I will not be returning to Maritain or the natural philosophy Thomists. Instead I pivot to Gilson and his trumpeting of Aquinas as a discoverer of the existential dimension of being. In an essay criticizing Maritain's intuition of being position, Gilson speaks of metaphysicians who lack Maritain's intuition of being at the third abstractive degree but nevertheless possess an intuition of being simply in the sense of a grasp of the *esse* of sensible things.²⁴ Among

²² "Immateriality and Metaphysics," *Angelicum*, 65 (1988), 44-76, and *Preface*, chs. 1-3.

²³ "We are surmounting beings in order to reach being. Once having made the ascent we shall not again descend to a being, which, say, might lie like another world behind the familiar beings. The transcendental science of being has nothing to do with popular metaphysics, which deals with some being behind the known beings; rather, the scientific concept of metaphysics is identical with the concept of philosophy in general - critically transcendental science of being, ontology." Heidegger, *Basic Problems*, 17. Also, "If we are to understand the problem of Being, our first philosophical step consists . . . in not 'telling a story' - that is to say, in not defining entities as entities by tracing them back in their origin to some other entities, as if Being had the character of some possible entity." *Being and Time*, 26. Hence, Caputo, *op. cit.*, 98, remarks, "The Scholastic who wishes to respond to Heidegger's critique has to come to grips with the whole premise of transcendental philosophy." This is the challenge that I accept in this paper. Caputo also says, however, (94 and 239) that in his *Discourse on Thinking* (1959) Heidegger gave up transcendental critique.

²⁴ "There comes a point where certain thinkers refuse to push beyond the existent as existent (*l'étant comme étant*); they refuse precisely because they do not recognize the intuition of

these metaphysicians Gilson includes Avicenna, Aquinas, and Banez. Does this not imply that for Gilson the transphysicality of *ens* is a non-essential for starting metaphysics? I repeat, Gilson claims that Aquinas and others are metaphysicians and yet they lack what Gilson calls Maritain's intellectual intuition of being. What made them metaphysicians? Simply their grasp of *esse* as the most profound principle in the sensible existents before us. It appears to me that Gilson is saying that a grasp of Aquinas' essence/existence sense of *ens commune* sufficiently distinguishes the beginning of the metaphysical enterprise. The inception of the enterprise has no need of the other transphysical sense of Aquinas' notion of *ens commune*.

The consideration of sensible beings in the light of their *actus essendi* seems sufficiently distinctive for a speculative science. Natural philosophy can be left to consider real bodies as *habens forma*, and the empirical sciences can take them up as various *habens accidentia*. Both approaches leave room for a consideration of sensible existents as *habens esse*. Though both presume *esse*, neither focus upon it. What about transphysical *ens* as the subject of metaphysics? In the Gilsonian approach, *ens commune* would describe the subject of metaphysics at a later and mature stage. Metaphysical reflection upon *actus essendi* leads the thinker to possible immaterial beings. This conclusion is the rational basis for expanding the essence/existence distinction beyond the material order.

I find Gilson's position apt for stymying the Heideggerian reduction of Thomism to an *a priorism*. If we can initiate metaphysics by a notion of being that highlights the existential dimension of sensible beings, we protect ourselves from being forced onto an *a priorist* road. Contrary to Caputo's opinion, Gilson's thesis in *Being and Some Philosophers* that Aquinas alone was sufficiently attentive to the existential side of being is relevant for answering Heidegger's charge of the oblivion of being among Western philosophers. Aquinas does not forget what Heidegger calls Being in the ontological difference. Aquinas just moves it to a latter stage of *a posteriori* metaphysical reflection. If anyone has an oblivion of being, it is Heidegger. Heidegger seems to be unaware of the merely existential notion of being by which Aquinas initiates metaphysics.

being (*l'intuition de l'être*) as the ultimate and root of the existent (*l'étant*); such is for example the case of Duns Scotus. Others, quite rare indeed, but Avicenna, Thomas Aquinas, Banez and their successors, attest their existence, dare to affirm as the supreme act, the *esse* in virtue of which the existent exists." (my trans.) Étienne Gilson, "Propos sur l'être et sa notion," *San Tommaso e il pensiero moderno*, ed. Antonio Piolanti (Città Nuova: Pontificia Accademia Romana de S. Tommaso d'Aquino, 1974), 16. For an extended analysis of Gilson's criticism of Maritain, see John F. X. Knasas, "Gilson vs. Maritain: The Start of Thomistic Metaphysics," *Doctor Communis*, 43 (1990), 250-265.

V

Before concluding, I must address two of a number of issues raised by Gilson's position on the initiation of Thomistic metaphysics.

First, does not Gilson locate in divine revelation the Thomistic basis for conceiving the thing's existence as *actus essendi* in divine revelation? In his *The Elements of Christian Philosophy*, Gilson does say that disputes among Thomists on whether to conceive existence as an act of the thing or simply as the fact of the thing are an invitation for us to give up the philosophical way and to try the theological way.²⁵ According to Gilson, Aquinas' *actus essendi* interpretation of existence was inspired by God's *ego sum qui sum* revelation to Moses. Aquinas took God to be saying that God is pure existence. God's creation should reflect the divine nature in a distinct existential act.

The theologizing charge against Gilson also suggests Heidegger's opinion from *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Heidegger appears to regard the essence/existence distinction among the Scholastics as simply an *ad hoc* device fashioned to distinguish creatures from God.²⁶ The philosophical basis of the distinction is nugatory.

The above theologizing reading of Gilson fails to take account of Gilson's assertions, even in *The Elements*, that for Aquinas the thing's *esse* is apprehended by the intellect's second operation, also called judgment.²⁷ Also, Gilson is on record as saying that "what we call Thomistic philosophy is a body of rigorously demonstrable truths and is justifiable precisely as philosophy by reason alone."²⁸

²⁵ Étienne Gilson, *The Elements of Christian Philosophy* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1960), 131.

²⁶ The traditional discussion of the second thesis, that *essentia* and *existentia*, or possible existence, belong to each being, lacks a solid foundation and a sure clue." *Basic Problems*, 78. "The problem [of the relation between *essentia* and *existentia*] must be understood in the philosophical context of the distinction between the concepts of the infinite being and the finite being." *Ibid.*, 81. John Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics*, 67-8, correctly notes that Heidegger's subsequent Suarezian critique of the Thomistic distinction between essence and existence is insufficiently attentive to *esse* as a prior principle within the concrete being.

²⁷ The second operation, which is the composition or division of concepts—that is, the judgment—attains the thing in its very act of being . . . This conclusion, so firmly asserted by Thomas Aquinas, has often been overlooked or intentionally rejected by many among his successors. And no wonder, since it is tied up with the Thomistic notion of the composition of essence and the act of being in created substances." *Elements*, 232. See also Gilson, *Le Thomisme: Introduction à la Philosophie de Saint Thomas D'Aquin* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1972), 184-5 and 188.

²⁸ Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Random House, 1956), 22. John Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming*

In my opinion,²⁹ Gilson's talk about a turn to theology is merely his invitation for us to consider the hints, or suggestions, from revelation as to where the philosophical truth of the matter may lie.

Nevertheless, some characterizations that Gilson makes of judgment might cause the theologizing charge to arise once again. Gilson at least gives the impression of equating the judgment with the proposition. For example, "Existential judgments are meaningless unless they are meant to be true. If the proposition 'Peter is' means anything, it means that a certain man, Peter by name, actually is, or exists."³⁰ Also, "The formula in which this composition is expressed is precisely the proposition or judgment."³¹ Such an equation is unfortunate because judgment is supposed to be the intellectual act that *grasps* the *esse rei*, while the proposition at best only *expresses esse*. As Aquinas himself points out, the enunciation, or proposition, signifies the *esse rei* that the *secunda operatio intellectus* grasps (*respicit*).³² Gilson's equating of the judgment with the proposition results in the appearance of an undeveloped notion of the intellectual act of judgment itself that "*respicit esse rei*."

The undevelopment might incline some to think that Gilson needs to theologize to obtain what he wants. But this shortcoming can be handled by two remarks. First, Aquinas generally describes the cognitional act of judgment this way: "Our intellect composes or divides by applying previously abstracted intelligibles to the thing."³³ This text, plus others,³⁴ enables the reader to understand that the intellect's second act of composition and division is what Aquinas elsewhere describes as the intellect's knowledge of singular existents. Such knowledge is attained by a certain reflection, *per quamdam reflexionem*, back from the universal to the phantasm from which the universal had been abstracted and in which the individual is represented.

Metaphysics, 9, holds that Aquinas' metaphysics was the "concealed, discursive, representational—one is tempted to say 'alienated'—way" of expressing Aquinas' animating mystical experience. But Aquinas' metaphysics can be surmised within his earliest works, e.g., the commentary on the *Sentences* and his *De Ente et Essentia*. Both were written long before any evidence of Aquinas suffering mystical experience.

²⁹ See also Joseph Owens, *An Interpretation of Existence* (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1985), 132.

³⁰ Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), 201. Also, 196 and 202.

³¹ Étienne Gilson, *Christian Philosophy of Aquinas*, 41

³² . . . prima operatio respicit quidditatem rei; secunda respicit esse ipsius. Et quia ratio veritatis fundatur in esse et non in quidditate, ut dictum est, ideo veritas et falsitas proprie invenitur in secunda operatione, et in signo ejus quod est enuntiatio, . . ." *In I Sent. de* 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad 7m; Mandonnet ed., I, 489.

³³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* II, 96, *Palam*.

³⁴ See John F. X. Knasas, *Preface*, 131-4.

Second, the task remains of explaining how judgment in the just described cognitional operation sense is a *respicit esse rei* rather than simply the recomposition of an intelligible with some designated matter. As far as I know, Gilson nowhere performs this task. The task, however, can be accomplished and the Thomistic texts themselves provide the help. In sum,³⁵ they describe a consideration of the individual material thing itself as *possibile esse et non esse*. Such a consideration appears to be generated from data composed of the thing really existing, on the one hand, and the real thing cognitively existing, on the other.³⁶ The consideration of the individual body as possible permits judgment to recombine the abstracted intelligible with the individual in a fashion that leaves the recomposition of the the individual with its *esse* as a further distinct and crowning moment in judgment.

The above sketch of judgment as the access to *esse* raises a second problem to which I want to respond. The multiplicity that presents the existentially neutral individual has as one instance the thing really existing. I believe that a Heideggerian would want to object to the naiveté with which Aquinas accepts this instance. To the contrary, a Heideggerian would insist that a really existing thing is just a case of what *Being and Time* calls the present at hand, and such a case comes before us in consciousness only because of our antecedent projection of being as presence at hand. In short, the theoretical attitude characteristic of so much of Western philosophy is no exception to Heidegger's thesis that *Dasein* is in the world as care.³⁷ So, a Heideggerian would subvert Aquinas' judgment approach to *esse* by giving a phenomenological account of one of the key instances necessary for the judgment approach.

In reply, I am not sure why one must adopt the Heideggerian attitude towards what is present at hand. The best reason that I surmise is Heidegger's noted insistence that beings, in whatever sense, are seen only in the light of being.³⁸ In sum, we return to the argument for the *apriority* of being, quoted at length in *Basic Problems*. But then my previous replies again become relevant. Why cannot a notion of being as "present at hand" be understood as immediately abstracted from various things present at hand rather than projected upon them?

³⁵ Aquinas speaks of individual generable and corruptible things as *possibilia esse et non esse* at *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 15, *Amplius* and II, 15, *Praeterea*.

³⁶ For an elaboration of this point, see John F. X. Knasas, *Preface*, 83-5.

³⁷ "This transcendence [of entities thematized] in turn provides the support for concerned Being alongside entities within-the-world, whether this Being is theoretical or practical." *Being and Time*, 415.

³⁸ Hence, Heidegger remarks of the theoretical science of mathematics, "it consists rather in the fact that the entities which it takes as its theme are discovered in it in the only way in which entities can be discovered – by the prior projection of their state of Being." *Ibid.*, 414.

In other words, it is incumbent upon the Heideggerian to show here some incongruity between the instances and the notion that would make the abstractive account of the notion questionable. Success in that task would swing the account of the notion into the *a priori* domain. But I fail to see Heideggerians performing this task for the notion of being as present at hand. Nor do I see how the task could be performed. Being as present at hand is not yet Aquinas' *ens commune* and as such it has no features that prohibit its abstractive derivation from real sensible existents.

In conclusion, Heidegger's *a priori* thinking about being can make its best case against Aquinas *vis-a-vis* what Aquinas calls the subject of metaphysics, *ens commune*. That argument is what I have tried to anticipate and to defend Aquinas from.