

Thomas Aquinas' Concept of *Esse* and the Problem of Edith Stein's Notion of *Essential Being*

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Abstract: St. Edith Stein's notion of *essential being*, rich as it is, in a sense is problematic. This paper wants to argue this point in the light of St. Thomas Aquinas' understanding of *esse*. The first part of the paper will present how Stein understood essential being and how its existence is justified. For Stein, essential being must be acknowledged to give a full account of the nature of potency and the unity of intelligible structures otherwise, Stein asserts, one's investigation of being is inadequate. Then the next section of the paper will demonstrate how Stein's essential being is problematic in three ways: a) the primacy of *esse*; b) efficient causality; and, c) the dynamicity of *esse*. The paper concludes with a challenge of St. John Paul II in his encyclical *Fides et Ratio* which this work seeks to respond.

Keywords: *Esse, Essence, Ens, Essential Being, Potency, Actuality*

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Introduction and Presentation of the Problem

In Aquinas' work *On Being and Essence* chapter 3 paragraphs 2, 3 and 4,¹ he says that essence can be considered in two ways: 1) "absolutely according to its proper meaning," and 2) "according to the being it has in this or that individual." The second way can be divided into two: a) "one in individual things," and b) "the other in the soul." Essence in individual things means being that actually exists. Essence considered in the soul means the idea in my mind which is universal with respect to all individual beings. We find universality here, but universality in the sense of species (i.e., the definition of the essence). For example, I have an idea of dog in my mind. This idea of "dog" is universal in all the dogs that are predicable to it. This means that nothing that actually exists is a universal. Nothing about the individual is universal.

Similarly, Stein divides being into three kinds:² real being, mental being, and essential being. Real being is what actually exists. For example, the (Wendy's) hamburger that is actually in front of me now. Mental being is the being that is remembered or imagined. For instance, I remember the hamburger (in Wendy's) that I ate two days ago. Lastly, essential being is the "whatness" of beings, in this case, the "hamburgerness" of the (Wendy's) hamburger. Essential being is what is common to the actual (Wendy's) hamburger in front of me now and the remembered or imagined (Wendy's) hamburger in my mind.

Both Aquinas and Stein agree on number 2, i.e., letters a and b. The real rub between the two thinkers concerns number 1: essence as absolutely considered.

For Aquinas, essence as absolutely considered is a way of considering being – one that prescind from any particular act of existence. It is what is in fact predicated in each individual thing, and there is no universality that can be attributed to this first way of considering being nor is there an *esse* in this sense of essence. There can be no essence outside the thing or the mind.

On the other hand, for Stein, essence as absolutely considered must have some kind of being, a kind of being that can be understood in a way that is different from the being of things or the being in the mind. She termed it as "essential being."

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*. Translated with an introduction and notes by Armand Maurer, CSB, 2nd revised ed. (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1968), 46-47. Hereafter, this book shall be abbreviated as OBE.

² Pls. see Edith Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*. Trans by Kurt F. Reinhardt (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 2002), chapter 3, nos. 6, 11, and 12 and especially chapter 4 no. 2, 11. Hereafter, this book shall be abbreviated as FEB. See also Sarah Borden, *An Issue in Edith Stein's Philosophy of the Person: The Relation of Individual and Universal Form in Endliches und Ewiges Sein*, Ph.D. Diss. (New York: Fordham University, 2001), 71.

This paper's intent is to argue that Stein's position is problematic in the light of Aquinas' notion of *esse* and that she need not go as far as to say that essential being is a different kind of being, i.e., not separable but nonetheless different from and cannot just be reduced to actual being.

I will first give the most plausible argument that Stein presented for her position on essential being. Then I will say the important points of Stein's position that is problematic in the light of Aquinas' *esse*. In this way, I want to show in my paper, that if we are to be really true to our analysis of the several senses of being, Aquinas' notion of *esse* is a very significant path to follow that no investigation of being can by pass or exclude.

Stein's Notion of Essential Being³

For Stein, essential being is needed to give a justified and full account of the nature of potency and the unity of intelligible structures otherwise, as Stein thinks, our inquiry into being is inadequate.

Potency for Stein is a rudimentary stage of being compared to its being actualized.⁴ It has a basis in some actuality. And it has this directedness towards the fulfillment of its own *telos*, i.e., to fully actualize its potencies. For example, I am a human being and at the same time a catholic priest. As a human being endowed with rationality and as a catholic priest who had studied philosophy (and theology) before I was ordained, I have the potency to become a professor of philosophy who can teach in a catholic university or/a seminary. My potentiality to be a teacher has its basis in my actuality now as a human being and as a catholic priest. And what I am doing now as a graduate student of philosophy is directed towards the fulfillment of this particular potentiality which nonetheless, is not yet fully actualized. Thus, potency for Stein is something and not necessarily non-being, a something but not yet fulfilled or actualized.

Now Stein argues, if potency is something, it must be in some sense (though not yet fulfilled or actualized). Potency is intimately tied to form which prescribes the type of potentiality that each entity must actualize. So, for example, as a human being, I have a human soul which is my form. This form of mine prescribes the type

³ FEB, 61-120. For an able study of Edith Stein's notion of essential being, pls. see Sarah Borden, *An Issue in Edith Stein's Philosophy of the Person: The Relation of Individual and Universal Form in Endliches und Ewiges Sein*, Ph.D. Diss. (New York: Fordham University, 2001), 70-96. See also Sarah Borden Sharkey, "Edith Stein and Thomas Aquinas on Being and Essence" in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* vol. 82 no 1 (Winter 2008): 87-103.

⁴ FEB, 90, 92.

of potentialities appropriate to me as a human being, me as Adriand. Form is also the principle of intelligibility. The question Stein asked is: how do we explain this principle of intelligibility? How do we give an account to the being of intelligibility itself? It is not the same as this particular individual entity and yet it is also important to this particular individual entity. So, for example, I, as a human being, do not develop merely in a random way. There is an intelligible pattern that one can discern as I develop as a human being. And yet this intelligible pattern is not the same as me. One can thus distinguish the intelligible pattern and the developing being that I am. Stein strongly believes in intelligible structures. She likes to use the example of joy to prove her point. The experience of joy is not limited to the here and now experience of it. It can be experienced by many people at different sets of time and various particular places. The meaning of joy is the same here in Steubenville as it is in Manila; however, the experience of joy is different because my experience of joy in Manila is not the same as your experience of joy here in Steubenville. You cannot replicate exactly my own experience of joy neither can I also duplicate exactly your own experience of joy. You have to be me which is of course impossible. Different the experience of joy maybe, but the fact is, the intelligible structure of joy is not because it is what makes a particular experience of joy, joy. Stein says:

It is necessary to make a distinction between the becoming and passing away and *what* becomes and passes away and which, after it has become, still is in a certain manner despite its being *past*... My joy – the joy which I experience right now – comes into being and passes away. Joy as such, on the other hand, neither comes into being nor does it pass away.⁵ (emphasis mine)

And what is this that “which, after it has become, still is in a certain manner despite its being past? Stein calls this “essential being”⁶ which is the being of intelligible structures.

There must be something in essence if we are to consider it absolutely. Essence must have some kind of being different from actual being. She says:

What the mind encompasses is, as a matter of fact, identical with what it encountered in the actual nature as the nature’s quid. This identical element preserves a peculiar intactness and integrity with respect to both its *actualization* and its *intellectualization*. It is what it is, regardless of

⁵ FEB, 62-63.

⁶ FEB, 68. Stein writes: “The possibility of real being has its ground in the being of the essence... Anything which is the condition of another’s being must itself possess being. The very fact that it is something indicates that it *is*. Only what is *nothing* is *not*. Now what kind of being is this something of the essence? In contradistinction to real being, we shall call it *essential* being.”

whether it is actualized or not and regardless of whether it is known or not. And it is precisely this being indifferent with respect to *actualization* and *intellectualization* which we call its *own essential being*.⁷ (emphasis mine)

Essential being is what makes our knowledge of things intelligible and structured. It is that which is “indifferent” to what is actual and what is in fact experienced. There can be no experience of joy without an essence of joy prior to the experience. But there can be an essence of joy even without an experience of it.⁸ Essential being has “intactness and integrity” in spite of it being actualized in individual things or being in the mind. Essential being is something which is independent of our consideration of it, and hence, we cannot just call essential being, nothing. Thus for Stein, if we are to limit being to anything that is actual, i.e., to anything that is or to anything that is in the mind, our investigation into being is inadequate because the being of intelligible structures must also be given a full account. Essential being cannot just be reduced to either real or mental being.

Stein wants to stress the intelligibility of beings that's why essential being is so important for her. It is present in all things that can be known. Without essential being, a being is meaningless.⁹ Eva-Marie Knoche says it clearly: “essential being... is an indestructible meaning-part of all being. Essential being is an enduring ruling being that survives all changing relations. It is timeless unfolding of pure structures of meaning beyond act and potency.”¹⁰

Furthermore, essential being, which is inseparable from actual being, is nevertheless distinct from it. It is a kind of repose or abiding in itself that is neither actual nor potential. Stein says: “But now, we have discovered in *essential being* – in the being of essences and in the being of natures and whatnesses when they are

⁷ FEB, 100-101.

⁸ FEB, 63-64. Stein says: “What does it mean when we say that the essence of joy is *actualized*? If joy is not experienced anywhere in the world, is there still an essence of joy? ‘There is’ but this essence is not in the same way in which experienced joys are. There could however be no experience of joy if there were not an essence of joy prior to the experience. It is the essence which makes possible any and all experienced joy.”

⁹ FEB, 102-103. Stein writes: “Nothing temporal can exist without a timeless *formal structure* (*Gestalt*) which regulates the particular course of the temporal sequence of events (*das Geschehen*) and is thereby actualized in time...we understood the timeless formal structures as the meaningful contents (*Sinngehalt*) of our experience. It was therefore implied in our statements...that no temporal *cognition* and no cognition of a temporally real nature (*Zeitlich-Wirklich*) is possible that is not simultaneously the recognition of a timeless meaning. It is only in the recognition of such a timeless meaning that makes knowledge in the strict sense possible.”

¹⁰ As quoted by Sarah Borden, *An Issue in Edith Stein's Philosophy of the Person: The Relation of Individual and Universal Form in Endliches und Ewiges Sein*, Ph.D. Diss. (New York: Fordham University, 2001), 83.

considered apart from their actualization – a type of being that is not a *becoming* and *passing away* and that stands *in opposition to actual being*.¹¹ Furthermore, Stein says:

Whatever is essentially *is* immutably what it *was*. More exactly, in essential being the difference between present, past, and future is suspended. Whatever is essentially, does not step into existence: It is. And it is not as something which from moment to moment is wrested from nothingness; it is not in any temporal sense. But precisely because it is independent of time, it is also in every instant. *The being of essence and whatness reposes in itself*.¹²

In view of Stein's understanding of essential being, being then cannot just be limited in act. She says:

The being of essence and whatness reposes in itself. This condition is poignantly described in the German verb *wesen*, because this verb expresses more emphatically than in the latin *esse* [*essentiae*] the intimate connection between being and nature. Becoming and passing away, on the one hand, and *wesen*, on the other, are arrayed against one another as being in motion and being in repose. Both are being. If one of the two may be said to precede the other in point of fact, it is *wesen*. For just as all motion aims at repose, so all becoming aims at some enduring *wesen*.¹³ (emphasis mine)

Being for Stein is not just being in act, i.e., dynamic and efficacious. In the case of essential being, it is also rest, a being that is static. It includes a striving towards a *telos* and that *telos* itself (complete, quiet, and at rest) of a particular being. A being is not only what it is now; it also includes what it can be, i.e., the unfolding of the essential possibilities of that being.¹⁴

Stein is clear that essential being is not eternal being. Though the former is timeless, it is nevertheless limited by its content. God's being, on the other hand, is not limited for he is the fullness of being.

If this is what essential being is, then it follows, that Stein's notion of reception of being differs from that of Aquinas.¹⁵ Stein says:

Our description of *wesen* as a reposing of the essence or whatness in itself (in contrast to becoming and passing away) seems to exclude the transition of the essence or whatness from nothing to being, as appears to be implied

¹¹ FEB, 91.

¹² FEB, 93.

¹³ FEB, 93.

¹⁴ FEB, 92-93.

¹⁵ I will have to say more on this issue in the third part of my paper.

in the phrase *to receive being*. We may legitimately speak of a reception of being when we have in mind *the actualization of the nature*, but essential being does not seem to admit of a beginning, and the nature quid does not seem to permit a separation from its essential being.¹⁶

On Stein's notion of the reception of being, Borden says it clearly: it is the "realization in actual being of an essential structure which exists 'already' in so far as it has essential being."¹⁷ For Aquinas, every created being is a composition of *esse* and *essentia*. He puts emphasis on the importance of *esse*. But for Stein, a being is not only a being in act. She sees essence in a different way. She understands essence as also having an essential being. For her, essence with essential being, may and can receive actual being.¹⁸

Stein uses her notion of essential being in order to explain potency. As we said above, potency for Stein is a rudimentary stage of being, not yet fully actualized, but it does not mean that it is not-nothing. Thus, to explain essence only in terms of real or mental being, for Stein, is to fail to give a full account of the distinction between act and potency. The actualization of a rudimentary stage of being is articulated by its essential being. A being is not only what it is now; it also includes what it can be in the future, i.e., the unfolding of the essential possibilities of that being. What a being is, is not only what it is now; it also includes its goal, its future *telos*.

The reason why Stein says that being can arrive at its *telos* is because this being "carries" its own *telos*, i.e., the fullness of my humanity to which I aim. It is like a growing baby that unfolds its DNA which is 'already' there at the time of his / her conception. In other words, I have an essential being (which is 'already' there) that I realize and unfold. Thus, potency rests on essential being. In order for Stein to understand potency in this way, she must stress the importance of essential being.

The Problematic in Stein's Notion of Essential Being as Seen in Aquinas' Concept of *Esse*

What makes Stein's position on essential being problematic? In the following section of the paper, I will offer three arguments that will show that Stein's position on essential being is deficient (and that she has to account more if her position would hold) if seen in Aquinas' notion of *esse*. In each of the three arguments, I will first pre-

¹⁶ FEB, 93-94.

¹⁷ Sarah Borden Sharkey, "Edith Stein and Thomas Aquinas on Being and Essence" in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 82 no. 1 (Winter 2008): 98.

¹⁸ Ibid.

sent Aquinas' understanding of *esse* then proceed to point out what Stein overlooked or did not consider in her concept of essential being.

Argument 1. To understand Aquinas' notion of *esse*, we must first ask, what is the meaning of to-be? What is the meaning of being (*ens*)?

Aquinas says that "being means that-which-is or exists (*esse habens*)."¹⁹ That which signifies what a thing is or its essence. The *is* signifies the act of existing, the active presence which means that this being is outside of nothingness. It is something rather than nothing. A being then is a thing that actually is. It is "something-existing-in-act."²⁰ Thus, Aquinas says in *On Being and Essence* that being (*ens*) taken in one way "is divided by the ten categories."²¹ Being exists either as a substance or as an accident.

From this definition of being (*ens*), we can already understand that at its deepest level, each being for Aquinas is a composition of *esse* and *essentia*. *Esse* is the act of being, that act which makes the thing actual, the "actuality of all acts and the perfection of all perfections"²² and thus it is the foundation of all the notions that we use. Nothing can be without *esse* and nothing can be known without *esse*.²³

Esse is not static. It is dynamic. It implies action and activity. W. Norris Clarke clearly states: "*being* expresses not just a simple what or essence, but precisely a *proportion: that which is = that which* (some particular subject or *what*, some essence or nature) *as exercising the act of being*, not as a static state, but as an act of standing out from nothing and actively presenting itself to the community of real being."²⁴ Fr. Clarke says that we can discern two acts of existence in any being: the first act is its *esse* or to be and this first act naturally overflows into a second act which is action or activity.²⁵ To be in itself is incomplete unless one includes the dimension

¹⁹ XII *Metaph.*, 1, 2419 as quoted from Thomas Aquinas, *An Introduction to the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas*, translated and edited by James F. Anderson (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing Inc., 1953), 19. Hereafter, this book shall be abbreviated as IMTA.

²⁰ IMTA, 20.

²¹ OBE, 29. Aquinas also says that being can be taken in a second way, that is, to signify the truth of proposition. I will not consider this second notion of being because it is already outside the limits of this paper.

²² Thomas Aquinas, *De Potentia*, 7, 2, ad.9 as quoted by Armand Maurer in his Introduction on OBE, 10. See also IMTA, 20-21.

²³ W. Norris Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 52-61. Hereafter, the book shall be cited as "Explorations."

²⁴ W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 51. Hereafter, the book shall be cited as "The One and the Many."

²⁵ Explorations, 46.

of active presence which is the self-communication and self-revelation of a being to other beings.

Essentia, on the other hand, is “that through which and in which a thing has existence.”²⁶ It is that which contains *esse*. What is stressed here is the essence of individual beings.²⁷

It is in Aquinas' understanding of being (*ens*) as composed of *esse* and *essentia* with particular emphasis on *esse* as the act of being that Stein's notion of essential being becomes problematic. By saying that essential being is a distinct kind of being that just cannot be reduced to actual being, Stein has to take into full consideration Aquinas' notion of *esse* which is the perfection of all perfection. For a being to be a being (*ens*), it must pass through *esse* otherwise it is nothing. If essential being is different from actual being and is a kind of being, it must therefore have an *esse*. And Stein did not give a clear account for that. Stein put much emphasis on the intelligible structure of beings that she failed to look into something which is more fundamental than that and without which she cannot even have being or talk about it: *esse*.²⁸

An implication of the distinction between *esse* and *essentia* is that for Aquinas, *essentia* does not have any being prior to its existence in the individual thing. There is no essence of a hamburger which is separated from the hamburger itself. A thing cannot be other than its own beingness.²⁹ Thus, *essentia* which is distinct from *esse*, can only exist in unity with being,³⁰ i.e., *esse* + *essentia* = *ens*. For Aquinas, therefore, reception of being cannot possibly mean essence, which 'already' has essential being, receives being. Essence cannot possibly exist even before 'receiving' being.

²⁶ OBE, 32.

²⁷ Furthermore, in chapter 4 paragraph 8 of *On Being and Essence*, the term *essentia* unfolds another meaning, that of limiting potency with respect to the first being. What is received is actuality. Aquinas says: “Everything that receives something from another is potential to what it receives, and what is received in it is its actuality. The quiddity or form therefore, which is the intelligence, must be potential with regard to the being it receives from God, and this being is received as an actuality.” (OBE, 37). From what Aquinas said, we can already have an intimation to the answer to the problem of the one and the many. If all beings are similar in the sense that they all have *esse* or the act of existence, how can we account for the diversity of beings? The answer is Aquinas' theory of participation through limiting essence. Pls. see *The One and the Many*, 72-91. See also Stefan Hofman, *Thomas' Dynamic Notion of Being (esse) and its Significance for Man and the Many*, M.A. Thesis (Steubenville: Franciscan University of Steubenville, 2006), 11-12.

²⁸ And here lies the full impact of Aquinas' *esse* and being understood as active and self-communicative: the to be (*esse*) of the being naturally overflows into a second act which is action or activity. One cannot know what a being is even if he insists on the importance of the intelligible structure of a being (as Stein did) without first having the first act of being which is the act of existence itself. Thus, we can speak of the priority of *esse* over Stein's essential being.

²⁹ This is the point wherein Aquinas moves away from Plato.

³⁰ Sarah Borden Sharkey, *Ibid.*, 98.

Not so with Edith Stein. As we saw above, her understanding of the reception of being differs sharply from that of Aquinas. “It means the realization in actual being of an essential structure which exists ‘already’ in so far as it has essential being.”³¹ But for Stein, this does not mean that a being (*ens*) exists prior to its actualization. Stein means to say that the being that corresponds to essence as such becomes real. Stein says:

The *realization* of the essence does not mean that the essence as such becomes real but that *something* that corresponds to it becomes real. The possibility of real being has its ground in the being of the essence... Anything which is the condition of another’s being must itself *possess being*. The very fact that it is something indicates that it *is*. Only that which is *nothing* is *not*.³² (emphasis mine)

Even though she means it this way, it is still quite obvious that Stein’s line of thinking follows that of the platonic tradition. Going back to our example, this is what I think Stein wants to say: there is something which is ‘already’ apart from the hamburger itself because the possibility of the real hamburger has its ground in the “being of the essence” of the hamburger.

This is nonsense to Aquinas. *Essentia* devoid of *esse* cannot possibly be. The significance of his notion of *esse* is that it shifted the gravity of discussion in metaphysics from essence to *esse*. Since *esse* is the actuality of all acts and the perfection of all perfection, *esse* has “the primary place in the order of being... St. Thomas was the first to appreciate fully the supremacy of the act of existing over essence.”³³ Thus, even before Stein can talk about (and eat) a hamburger, it must first be. Even before she can stress the intelligible structure of the hamburger and know that it is a hamburger, she must presuppose that this hamburger is.

Thus, we can now understand that for Aquinas, potency as a rudimentary stage of being (which is the position of Stein) cannot just be explained as an articulation of essential being. Before we can even talk about potency, the being must first and foremost be, in act (*esse*). Even before a human being can unfold its potentialities, a human being must first be in act (*esse*), an actual being. I think this is a sharp edge of Aquinas against Stein.

Argument 2. Another implication of the distinction between *esse* and *essentia* and the importance of the Aquinas’ notion of *esse* concerns efficient causality.

³¹ Cf. footnote # 17 above.

³² FEB, 68.

³³ Pls. see the introduction of Armand Maurer in OBE, 10-11.

Any being whose *esse* and *essentia* are distinct cannot cause themselves. There must be someone extrinsic to them who bring about their being to-be. That is why God, whose essence and existence is one, is the first cause of everything. Aquinas says:

Whatever belongs to a thing is either caused by the principles of its nature (as the capacity for laughter in man) or comes to it from an extrinsic principle (as light in the air from the influence of the sun). Now, being itself cannot be caused by the form or quiddity of a thing (by 'caused' I mean by an efficient cause), because that thing would be its own cause. And it would bring itself into being, which is impossible. It follows that everything whose being is distinct from its nature must have being from another.³⁴

The question now that Stein has to account is: who caused essential being?³⁵ If essential being is distinct from actual being and if essential being is different from the beingness of God, how can we give an explanation to essential being's "beingness?" Did it cause itself³⁶ or is it something that is "dangling" above us?

The issue of efficient causation³⁷ is a very strong objection to Stein's notion of essential being. To shift the discussion from *esse* to essence and essential being is just to postpone the solution to the problem of causation. It is legitimate to stress the importance of intelligible structures just as Stein did in so far as to say that being is intelligible, i.e., it can be known. But it must first be before it is intelligible.³⁸ But before a being can be, something or someone outside of it must cause it to be for it does not hold in its being the sufficient reason why it is (except of course when we are talking about God).

³⁴ OBE, 56.

³⁵ The question of causation is very important because it points to a very significant problem in philosophy: Why is there anything rather than simply nothing? From the perspective of Aquinas *esse*, the issue of causation must be given full consideration in relation to our inquiry into being.

³⁶ Obviously, essential being cannot possibly cause itself for its beingness is different from that of God. Any being whose beingness is different from God cannot possibly have the full and adequate explanation of its existence. Its existence must come from another. Thus, any being that does not have the sufficient reason of its existence must have an efficient cause.

But a Humean may raise this objection: this whole notion of causality is nothing but a connection like a billiard ball hitting another billiard ball. But I say, one has to take note of the player playing billiards. Hume obviously overlooked this point.

³⁷ For an able discussion, pls. see *The One and the Many*, 178-198.

³⁸ I do not want to take the position that it is the human mind that brings about the "beingness" of a being. To say this would mean that the "beingness" of the being depends on the human knower which is obviously false.

Stein says that essential being is timeless like the being of God but restricted in terms of its content. If essential being is not like the being of God, then it follows that its *esse* and *essentia* are distinct. Only God can claim that his *esse* and *essentia* are one. Furthermore, Stein's claim that essential being is restricted by its content. These two points are already an admission that essential being asks for an adequate and sufficient explanation why it is, for by itself it cannot be the cause of itself. Stein did not take into full account the notion of God as the efficient cause of every created being. If she did, I think she would have to re-think and make a major surgery about her notion of essential being.

Argument 3. Stein sees essential being as a kind of repose or abiding in itself, a static being rather than dynamic. It is neither act nor potency. It follows therefore that there is a kind of being which is not in act. Being for Stein cannot just be identified with being-in-act. It follows that Stein's notion of being is equivocal (which means a being can signify two completely different things) and not analogical.

To view being as static contributes to the negative understanding of modern thinkers that Aquinas' metaphysics is a study of a rigid system of lifeless and inert substances that do not have anything to do with reality.³⁹ The contrary is true. Aquinas' metaphysics is full of life, vibrancy, and dynamicity because being for him is first of all to be in act, to exercise the act of be-ing and this act of being (*esse*) overflows into a second act which is action and activity.⁴⁰ Seen from the perspective of Aquinas' *esse*, being cannot just be in repose or abiding in itself as Stein saw it. It is always self-communicative. It reveals itself to other beings to form a universe.

To view essential being as repose in itself, as static, makes us understand that there's a kind of being for Stein that only abides by itself but does not have that relational dimension with other beings. In this case, I think Stein was not able to preserve what Fr. Clarke calls the "dyadic synthesis of substance and relations."⁴¹ Every being is both in itself and towards others.

That is why Aquinas is the thinker that strongly claims being is analogical⁴² (which means being is applied to different subjects with a meaning which is partly the same and partly different). Take for example these terms: strong argument and

³⁹ Explorations, 102-122.

⁴⁰ Clarke further says: "Every second act of the being points back to its first act as to its ground and source, and every first act in turn, points forward to its natural self-expression in the second act." Explorations, 46.

⁴¹ Explorations, 104.

⁴² Pls. see The One and the Many, 42-59.

strong body. To say that being is analogical means it is a flexible concept that can enable us to link together and compare two different (in this case, argument and body) yet somehow similar things. It means it is not limited to one, fixed meaning or can be applied to one kind of being only. Stein's essential being, understood as static, is a kind of being different from being in act. Being then for Stein is not a flexible concept. It signifies two completely different things: being in act and being as static.

But I think this misses a fundamental dimension of being which is rooted in Aquinas' notion of *esse*. Take for instance a hamburger and a hotdog. Both these beings are different because a hamburger is not a hotdog (obviously!) But to say that they are completely different is to miss something which is fundamental to both of them i.e. that they are. Both of them are beings in the real order of things, participating in the all-inclusive perfection of God's existence which contains all perfections. But both of them participate in a limited way according to their respective essences. Thus, for Aquinas, the perfection of the whole existing universe lies in *esse*. If we will not admit the basic truth that beings are, we cannot even talk about them. So essential is Aquinas' notion of *esse* that not to admit it is to impair human knowledge. Speaking about the foolishness of some philosophers who deny that there is no such thing as metaphysics or that metaphysics is meaningless, Fr. Clarke writes:

He [St. Thomas] would courteously point out to them that no matter what philosophical positions they hold or what method they use, they must all presuppose or take for granted the actual existence of themselves as philosophers posing the questions and dialoguing with each other, as well as of the world they are trying to describe or explain. Hence, they are all at least implicitly presupposing some kind of metaphysical view on what it means to be and what is necessarily implied by that.⁴³

Conclusion

In the year 1998, the servant of God Pope John Paul II wrote an encyclical letter entitled *Fides et Ratio*. It is an encyclical that treats on the relationship between faith and reason. The late Holy Father, being a keen and accomplished philosopher himself, was very much aware of a way of thinking of not a few nowadays. What is this way of thinking? It is a kind of belief that distrusts reason so much as to say that there is already an "end of metaphysics."⁴⁴ And the pope challenges the church, as she enters the dawn of the new millennium, to renew once again the importance of

⁴³ Pls. see the introduction of W. Norris Clarke, SJ in IMTA, xi.

⁴⁴ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 1998), 55. The number given pertains to paragraph numbers, not page numbers. Hereafter, the book shall be cited as FR.

metaphysics in theological research. What he wrote re-echoes what we have been saying so far in this paper. He said:

Set within the Christian metaphysical tradition, the philosophy of being is a dynamic philosophy which views reality in its ontological, causal and communicative structures. It is strong and enduring because it based upon the very act of being itself, which allows a full and comprehensive openness to reality as a whole, surpassing every limit in order to reach the One who brings all things to fulfillment.⁴⁵ (emphasis mine)

I think the renewal of metaphysics does not only concern theology. The challenge of the pope can also and surely be extended to philosophical research as well. Our study of being is by no means finish. But this paper shows that our investigation into Aquinas' notion of *esse* makes us see that any inquiry into the senses of being must in fact take *esse* as a significant path to follow. Aquinas' metaphysics is not complete in itself. Its richness and depth admit that it can still be enhanced. But to develop it further and to heed the challenge of John Paul II of renewing the field of metaphysics in philosophical research, one must in truth consider *esse* as the first step of the inquiry.

Stein greatly stressed essential being because she wanted to have a full account of potency and the being of intelligible structures but she missed something which is prior and fundamentally important: *esse* as the act of being.^{PS}

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⁴⁵ FR, 97.

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