



On the Question of Being: A Thomistic Response to Martin Heidegger's Critique Against Western Metaphysics

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Martin Heidegger announces that the entire Western metaphysics is an onto-theology, which means that it has failed to authentically raise the question of Being. This criticism is extended to the Christian philosophy of the Scholastics whose *essence-existence* distinction has further aggravated, rather than helped to solve, the problem.

The aim of this paper is to articulate a reply on behalf of Aquinas' metaphysics against this Heideggerian critique. It will argue that the latter's philosophy of *Esse* and his understanding of the human person as created in the image and likeness of God (*Imago Dei*), which allows him to treat the human person as a creature situated in the world and is thereby in constant search for the meaning of his earthly and limited existence, could support a Thomistic apologetic versus the Heideggerian critique. This paper will posit that in the philosophy of Aquinas, the call for an authentic existence is imperative to a being whose very existence is defined by his vocation to *return* to his Maker. Hence, every exercise of human freedom (which should be responsive to God's plan for the world) is an encounter with Being; that is, the rational and free creature raises the question of Being as s/he tries to make sense of his/her finite existence in the world.

Rather than viewing Aquinas' Christian philosophy as *pseudo-thinking* (as Heidegger claims), this paper will conclude that Aquinas' view on freedom is rather an articulation of that human pilgrimage from and back to the Creator. Aquinas then is very much aware that the human person needs to make concrete decisions in the world, thereby necessitating his/her encounter with Being.

Keywords: *Esse, Existence, Onto-theology, Freedom, Overcoming of Metaphysics, Aquinas, Heidegger*

I. Introduction

A. The Problem

Martin Heidegger expresses his criticism against traditional metaphysics by saying that the latter is not ontology (philosophy) but is rather an onto-theology. He argues that all metaphysical inquiries are simply limited to the inquiry on being, and fails to ask the question of Being. In other words, for Heidegger, Being has been forgotten all throughout the history of philosophy (which he equates with metaphysics), and so he speaks of an *overcoming* of metaphysics as the only means to authentically address the issue of Being.

The various philosophical (metaphysical) schools of the West that came before Heidegger are then faced with the charges of onto-theology. Scholastics, Thomas Aquinas in particular, are no exceptions. This has then prompted several authors to write on behalf of Aquinas, arguing that there is more in the philosophy of Aquinas that Heidegger may have overlooked. William Hill even claims that Heidegger's bold criticism against the Scholastics (including Aquinas) ...

appears, however, as overly facile and unconvincing – at least if the charge be made against the genuine thought of Aquinas. To claim that God is conceived in the latter system as merely being is simply an unwarranted assumption. True enough, Aquinas does not infrequently refer to God as *Primum Ens*. But he is not in such instances formally addressing the question raised here, and clearly intends the designation to be taken analogously...¹

The present study is another attempt to clarify the issue of Being in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. The main thesis of this work is that Aquinas' notion of human freedom accomplishes what Heidegger calls as philosophy's task for meditative thinking. In effect, it can be a useful tool for responding to the Heideggerian challenge to meditative thinking that will articulate the *die Seinsfrage*. In the process, the term onto-theology, as used by Martin Heidegger, shall be defined; the reasons as to why Martin Heidegger has spoken of an overcoming of metaphysics shall also be demonstrated.

Moreover, the study will examine the Thomistic understanding of freedom. This will highlight Aquinas' notion of freedom as perfected in the person's

¹ William Hill, *Search for the Absent God* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 39.

participation in the Divine plan. In other words, for Aquinas, Natural Law and freedom are closely linked, in the sense that the former defines the right expression of the latter.

This paper will eventually conclude that Aquinas' understanding of freedom as anchored in God's plan is parallel to Heidegger's characterization of "authentic" philosophical thinking. This means that God-talk in philosophy is neither fallacious nor impossible. Ultimately, the marriage of faith and reason could not be immediately taken simply as a "pseudo-thinking" that is devoid of the "authentic character" of philosophy.

B. Onto-theology: Literatures on Heidegger and Aquinas

Several studies exist on Aquinas' and Heidegger's view on Being. While some of them readily reject the Heideggerian charge as inappropriate, others are also in agreement with Heidegger and are motivated, as such, to rethink Aquinas' metaphysics and philosophy. Whereas studies in the mold of the former oppose these two thinkers to each other, concluding that Heidegger was mistaken, the latter have appropriated Heidegger's critique and articulated Aquinas' latent thoughts to make explicit the real genius of an illustrious thinker from the Middle Ages.

Thomas A.F. Kelly, in his "On Remembering and Forgetting Being: Aquinas, Heidegger and Caputo,"² aims to "rethink the essence of Thomistic metaphysics in a way that is both faithful to the spirit of Thomism, remaining attentive to its mystical source, and alive to the mystery of Being in Heideggerian sense."³ While recognizing that metaphysics is insufficient for a fuller understanding of Being, a thought which runs parallel to Heidegger's overcoming of metaphysics, he also argues that metaphysics remains relevant although it has to let go once it has reached its goal. He contends that metaphysics is "a ladder; a ladder that is necessary to reach a certain point, but that can be kicked away once the appropriate point of vantage is reached."⁴ This allows Kelly to speak of metaphysics' auto-deconstruction, which does not mean abandonment but is rather a kind of self-emptying, to give way to something that is already beyond its grasp.

While Kelly is ready to admit a kind of an auto-deconstructive metaphysics, some defenders of Thomas persist in their defense for metaphysics and in their efforts to demonstrate that the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas is not among the philosophies that are oblivious of Being. Michael Baur, in his "Heidegger and Aquinas

² Thomas A. F. Kelly, "On Remembering and Forgetting Being: Aquinas, Heidegger and Caputo," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 76, no. 2 (2002), pp. 321-340.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

on the Self as Substance,”⁵ compares Aquinas’ understanding of the human knower to Martin Heidegger’s Dasein. Baur recalls the ontical project of Heidegger as a kind of detour from his ontological priority of the question of Being. Heidegger’s ontical project gives emphasis on the Dasein as the only entity who treats its Being as an issue. For Baur, Heidegger’s study of the Dasein allows a meeting point with Thomistic metaphysics, especially in the latter’s understanding of the human knower. He says, “As Heidegger argues, Dasein’s freedom means that Dasein’s Being as a discloser is not determined or defined by any pre-given ontic presences or actualities within its world. In a similar vein, Aquinas argues that the human being’s intellectual knowing is not caused directly by the material objects which are present and knowable within the world.”⁶ For Baur, Aquinas is not really completely oblivious of Being. In fact, the Thomistic description of the human knower shows how the human person, as a thinker, continues to raise the question of Being.

John F. Knasas, in “A Heideggerian Critique of Aquinas and a Gilsonian Reply,”⁷ argues that God, in Aquinas’ view, can never be taken simply as an instance of being. Hence, he questions those who say that Aquinas has equated God and being, even if God is the *Primum Ens*. Knasas pointed out that in Thomistic metaphysics, God is infinitely separate from beings. A longer quotation may help illustrate his point:

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 inquantum ens*... Aquinas relates God to *ens commune* not as an instance thereof but as the transcending cause of *ens commune*. God is not under *ens commune* but above it. It is true that Aquinas sees *esse* as analogically common to God and creatures. But 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. God is *esse subsistens*. All other *esse* is *esse accidentale*.⁸

Arguing that God transcends *ens commune*, Aquinas has not fallen into onto-theology. For Knasas, in fact, “Aquinas does not forget what Heidegger calls as Being in the ontological difference. Aquinas just moves it to the latter stage of a *posteriori*

⁵ Michael Baur, “Heidegger and Aquinas on the Self as Substance,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 3 (1996), pp. 317-337.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

⁷ John F. Knasas, “A Heideggerian Critique of Aquinas and a Gilsonian Reply,” *The Thomist*, vol. 58, no. 3 (1994) pp. 415-439.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 420-421.

metaphysical reflection. If anyone has an oblivion of being, it is Heidegger.”⁹ He claims that Heidegger is subjectivist, as he understands judgment as *a priori*, that is, as a projection of being to beings. It is here where Aquinas surpasses Heidegger, for the former views the mental act, judgment, as a product of abstraction. It is a naming of the being from beings. It is an intellectual act that grasps the *esse rei*. Hence, it becomes possible for Aquinas to have a kind of an inference about God from creation. Knasas then justifies the possibility of Christian philosophy, and criticized Heidegger in these words:

I am not sure why one must adopt the Heideggerian attitude towards what is present-at-hand. The best reason I surmise is Heidegger’s noted insistence that beings, in whatever sense, are seen only in the light of being... why cannot a notion of being as a present-at-hand be understood as immediately abstracted from various things present-at-hand rather than projected upon them?¹⁰

Laurence Paul Hemming also claims that the equation of God with being is not from Aquinas but rather from Duns Scotus, who argues about the univocity of being in God and creatures. Referring to Scotus, Hemming writes, “for God is not known to us unless being is univocal to the created and the uncreated.”¹¹ Hemming argues further, “This demonstrates conclusively that the position often erroneously ascribed to Aquinas is in fact held by Duns Scotus – that God is known by way of an inquiry into being (*ens*), and therefore God as univocal *primum ens* is the same as being.”¹²

However, John Caputo’s critique of Aquinas goes beyond the usual arguments of Aquinas’ apologists. Whereas Caputo is willing to agree that Aquinas’ view of God and being is separate from other Scholastics, he also claims that most Thomist apologists have failed to appreciate the real strength of the Heideggerian critique against metaphysics. Heidegger talks not only about the oblivion of Being, but also about the Scholastics’ oblivion of the *aletheiological* character of Being. The West is oblivious of that which grants the difference, or what Caputo calls as the dif-fering of the difference. The entire metaphysics of the West, Aquinas included, simply conceives Being as objective presence, and has remained silent about Being as *aletheia*. Caputo says,

The oblivion of Being is not an oblivion of Being, for all metaphysics understands Being and does so in terms of presencing. It is an oblivion

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 433.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 438.

¹¹ Laurence Paul Hemming, “Heidegger’s God,” *The Thomist*, vol. 62, no.3 (1998), p. 398.

¹² *Ibid.*

of the difference which makes possible the 'ontological difference' of which all metaphysics makes use. That is why Heidegger later wrote in his marginalia to *Holzwege* that it is not enough to think in terms of Being; one must think instead in terms of difference.¹³

With Caputo, the controversy between Aquinas and Heidegger is pushed further. The question is no longer whether Aquinas has resolved the entanglement of Being and God in metaphysics, but rather whether Aquinas also has a kind of an overcoming of metaphysics, since metaphysics has already collapsed in front of the Heideggerian critique. For Caputo, every attempt from the Thomistic camp to argue for a novelty in Aquinas's metaphysics, even the emphasis of the Existentialist Thomists on the metaphysics of *esse*, is always insufficient. He says, "I am arguing simply that hitherto all attempts to carry out a confrontation of Heidegger and St. Thomas have failed because they remain lodged on the level of St. Thomas' metaphysics."¹⁴

Hence for Caputo, to confront Heidegger's critique is to highlight a mystical element in St. Thomas. Only in pointing out Aquinas' overcoming of metaphysics can an apology for the latter become successful vis-à-vis Heidegger's criticism. This is the reason why Caputo has resorted to Meister Eckhart as the one who makes explicit the mysticism which has been latent in St. Thomas' thought.¹⁵

However, despite Caputo's penetrating study on the issue, more writers still speak of retrieving metaphysics. Jinnam Yi even questions Caputo's methodology and says,

A scholar who had devoted his entire life to investigating the truth may feel that he himself is a very small existence before God especially right before his death. This fact, however, cannot negate the importance or gravity of all of his philosophy. Rather, it may support his philosophy as a religious belief. So, there is no necessity to see this Aquinas' episode as his confession of appeal to mysticism or as his negation of metaphysics.¹⁶

¹³ John D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), p. 156. Henceforth, this work will be referred to as HA.

¹⁴ HA, p. 11.

¹⁵ See Ernesto Lapitan, OP, "The Oblivion of Being: An Overview of Metaphysics and Mysticism in Aquinas, Eckhart and Heidegger," *Colloquia Manilana*, vol. 11 (2003), pp. 95-111.

¹⁶ Jinnam Yi, "A Critical Assessment on Caputo's Retrieval of St. Thomas," *Current Study in Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*. Retrieved from http://www.unt.edu/csph/Vol_01_winter00?Yi_article.htm on August 07, 2006, p. 10 of 18.

Yi proposes that rather than highlighting Aquinas' negation of metaphysics in order to accommodate Heidegger's critique, one must also look at Heidegger's text with a critical eye. He suggests that,

Caputo's methodology has a problem. He lacks the fairness in comparison because he analyzes and criticizes Aquinas in the viewpoint of Heidegger without any proper ground. He measures Aquinas only with Heidegger's ruler, and not vice versa. His interest seems to be only whether and how Aquinas survives in Heidegger's attack of metaphysics. He even does not seem to try to see Heidegger's criticism with a critical eye.¹⁷

Moreover, other authors still argue that both Heidegger's and Aquinas' overcoming of metaphysics is, in fact, a consummation of metaphysics. Ranilo Hermida, in particular, speaks of a retrieval of metaphysics in both philosophers.¹⁸ Commenting on Aquinas, he says, "his vision of the divine being or *Ipsium Esse*, despite all the rational strivings of philosophers, is really inexpressible in purely metaphysical parlance."¹⁹ However, he also proposes that there is a ladder which would in turn lead us back to metaphysics. Hermida does not resort to Kelly's auto-deconstructive metaphysics, and he also departs from Caputo's religious aletheiology. Hermida's retrieval of Thomistic metaphysics is centered on the human person, although not as the human knower of Baur. For Hermida, the human person is a recipient of God's goodness, and the vocation of the human person is in "thanking" for the gift which he has received from God. "The metaphysician, besides being a shepherd of the meaning of *esse*, must become at the same time the crier of how the preciousness, beauty, fragility of his *esse* is to be prized and celebrated in the way he lives his life."²⁰

Moreover, the retrieval is not only in Aquinas but also in Heidegger, who also believes that thinking is an expression of gratitude. Hermida further claims, "So thinking for Heidegger is the greatest endowment received by the Dasein and the only fitting way to give thanks for this gift of being able to think what is most thought-provoking is by giving thought to it."²¹ Thus, Hermida's work underlines the challenge of placing metaphysics under the perspective of man's task which is "to respond to what addresses itself to him, and to open himself into the unconcealed through thinking."²²

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11 of 18.

¹⁸ Ranilo Hermida, "Towards the celebration of Being Human: A Retrieval of the Metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas and Martin Heidegger," *Philippiniana Sacra*, vol. 33, no. 9 (1998), pp. 409-434.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 414.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 421.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 424.

²² *Ibid.*

This retrieval was also pointed out by William Hill, who discusses human freedom as the locus for man's encounter with Being. Hill claims, "the root of this presencing is freedom, not merely of choice but freedom as a mode of being."²³ Hill acknowledges the insufficiency of metaphysics to utter the fullness of the mystery of God, but he does not agree with the total overcoming of metaphysics, and he characterizes the overcoming of metaphysics as "not so much a going beyond metaphysics but a by-passing of it."²⁴ He stresses that "the Thomistic reach towards the doxological does not discredit the underpinnings provided by a conceptual system (one that is ontological in kind and remains as a sort of scaffolding) even as it declares the inadequacies of the latter and seeks to surmount it."²⁵

Lastly, Jeffrey Robbins brings back this controversy to a circle when he argued that there is no way out of the entanglement of Being and God in metaphysics, and that there is no distinct division between philosophy and theology. Any attempt of overcoming simply adds to the problem. Robbins says:

It (onto-theology) is a thinking that is effective because it rethinks the problem from the unquestioned origin of its analysis. It redraws the divide such that all those who thought themselves in the most profound disagreements discover the persistence of the problem and the futility of an absolute overcoming... the answer lies not in the simplification of the problem which seeks a way out through recourse to an unproblematic notion of philosophy or theology, but rather through the realization that contamination is the condition for thought and that overcoming is a never-ending complication.²⁶

It would then be superfluous to defend Aquinas from Heidegger's criticism because the Thomistic system could not give up the God-talk in philosophy. Onto-theology is an inescapable path for Aquinas. Heidegger's criticism should not be taken as a threat but simply as a wholly different way of looking into things.

II. Metaphysics and Onto-Theology: The Heideggerian Critique

What has been presented in the foregoing is a survey of the literature on the problem of onto-theology vis-à-vis the metaphysics of Aquinas. Reading through

²³ Hill, p. 46.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

²⁶ Jeffrey Robbins, "The Problem of Onto-theology: Complicating the Divine Between Philosophy and Theology," *The Heythrop Journal*, vol. 43, no. 2 (2002), p. 150.

them, one would however observe that the term onto-theology has many nuances. In what would follow, we shall attempt to clarify the meaning of onto-theology.

A. Oblivion of Being in Metaphysics

Heidegger announces in the "Introduction" of his *Being and Time* that there is a necessity to explicitly restate the question of Being for "this question has today been forgotten."²⁷ What was rather given prominence in the history of western metaphysics is being to the point that Being is forgotten. Barret has noted that "it is Heidegger's contention that the whole history of western thought has shown an exclusive preoccupation with the first member of these pairs, with the *thing-which-is* and has let the second, the *to-be* of what is, fall into oblivion."²⁸ Chang has further commented that, "as a result of the indistinction between Being and beings, philosophical thinking is lost to itself, oblivious of its proper object and ignorant of the source which provokes thought to begin with."²⁹ Guignon also says that "entities obtrude as actually existing as having essential properties while being remains concealed."³⁰ Frede has noted that "a good deal of Heidegger's originality consists in his explanation of what he calls our 'forgetfulness' of Being."³¹ This forgetfulness is twofold. "There is the forgetfulness of our everyday understanding, which does not even try to gain any authentic comprehension but takes over the ready-made interpretations that it finds in its environment, the explanation and the evaluations of one's own society and time."³² This articulates the tendency to cease to think, to stop being awed by the world. Moreover, there is another kind of oblivion which is mainly theoretical. This she calls as the oblivion of the philosophers to raise the question of Being, and this is the kind of oblivion that needs immediate attention. Frede says, "Heidegger thought that he could put his finger on the crucial mistake: the mistake lies in the theoretical approach as such."³³

Heidegger traces the origin of this oblivion in the philosophical systems of Plato and Aristotle. He says in *On Time and Being* that "metaphysics begins when Plato separates the realm of Being (the Forms or Ideas) and the realm of time

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson. Tübingen: Neomarius Verlag, 1963, p. 41. Henceforth, this will be referred to as BT.

²⁸ William Barret, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (USA: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1958), p. 212.

²⁹ Brianle Chang, "The Eclipse of Being: Heidegger and Derrida," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 2 (1996), p. 116.

³⁰ Charles Guignon, "Introduction," in *Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 17-18.

³¹ Dorothea Frede, "The question of Being: Heidegger's project," in *Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 57.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

(becoming, existence).³⁴ To address the problem of change, Plato constructs a world that is separate from ours. He then argues that Reality, as the Being of beings (the Form or the Idea), is in the other world and what we have here are simply imitations and poor copies of those Ideas. Being is then thought as that which is permanent, as that which endures and is unchanging. The concept of being as permanent is what Heidegger calls as the beginning of metaphysics. He claims, “in the beginning of its history, Being opens itself out as emerging (*physis*) and unconcealment (*aletheia*). From there, it reaches the formulation of presence and permanence in the sense of enduring. Metaphysics proper begins with this.”³⁵ This beginning has influenced much of the history of the western metaphysics that Guignon even says, “as the result of the first dawn of history, being comes to be thought of as what endures, what is permanent, what is always there. It is the continuous presence of the substance (*ousia*) that which remains through all changes... Because Plato inaugurated this interpretation of beingness, the entire history of metaphysics can be called as Platonism.”³⁶

Aristotle has adopted Plato’s metaphysics of Forms. However, he brought the beingness of beings (the Idea or the Form) from Plato’s other world to “our” world. Heidegger traces this development and says,

In contradistinction to Plato, who held that the “Ideas” were “what is truly existent,” allowed for individual beings only as seeming beings (*eidolon*), and demoted them to that which really ought not to be called beings (*me on*), Aristotle took the free floating “ideas” as “forms” and conceived these “forms” as “energies” and “forces” housed in beings.³⁷

Heidegger sees the Aristotelian rejoinder to Plato’s Ideas as more faithful to Greek thinking. For as “Plato can never admit the individual being as what is truly in being, and in that Aristotle, however, conceives the individual together with presencing, Aristotle is more truly Greek in his thinking than Plato, that is, more in keeping with the primordially decided essence of Being.”³⁸

³⁴ Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1972), ix.

³⁵ Martin Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 4. Henceforth, this will be referred to as EP.

³⁶ Guignon, p. 18. Heidegger himself affirms this when he says, “Throughout the entire history of philosophy, Plato’s thinking remains decisive in its sundry forms. Metaphysics is Platonism.” [Martin Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 433. Henceforth, this work shall be referred to as EpTT]. He says further, “all metaphysics, including its opponent, positivism, speaks the language of Plato. The basic word of its thinking, that is, of its presentation of the Being of beings, is *eidōs, idea*” (*Ibid.*, p. 444).

³⁷ EP, p. 9.

³⁸ EP, pp. 9-10.

However, this laudation for Aristotle does not mean that the latter has already intimated Being. Heidegger is quick to clarify that “to say that Aristotle is more truly Greek in his thinking than Plato in the way described does not mean that he again comes closer to the primordial thinking of Being.”³⁹ For Heidegger, since Aristotle’s conception of Being as *energeia* is already mediated by Plato’s Idea and is no longer the primordial *physis* or *aletheia* of the more ancient Greeks, it also has used the Platonic language of the Forms and thereby counts among what Dorothea Frede calls as the tradition of “substance ontology,” or the “primacy of substances.”⁴⁰ In fact, with Aristotle’s cosmology, “what is ultimately real is that which underlies properties – that which stands under (*sub-stantia*) and remains continuously present throughout all change.”⁴¹ With Aristotle, “substance remained the central term in traditional ontology, and substances or things, natural entities with attributes and the capacities to interact casually with one another, remained the building blocks – and became Heidegger’s main challenge.”⁴²

Following Plato’s and Aristotle’s lead, the Scholastics thought of being as composed of essence and existence. Being then is equated still to substance. Caputo illustrates this saying, “Being is everywhere reduced to the proportions of something entitative, of some being or other... In any case, Being itself is characterized in terms of a region of beings.”⁴³ Moreover, Heidegger contends that the Scholastic distinction of essence and existence further complicates the onto-theological character of metaphysics. In his *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger claims that “the distinction between reality and existential, or between essential and existential, does not coincide with the ontological difference but belongs on the side of one member of the ontological difference. Neither *realitas* nor *existentia* is a being, rather it is precisely the two of them that make up the structure of being.”⁴⁴ Heidegger claims that this distinction is not sufficient to constitute a philosophy of Being, and “we should not and need not be satisfied with a common understanding of the basic concepts of *essentia* and *existentia*...”⁴⁵ Moreover, the Scholastics complicate the problem when their Christian philosophy has equated Being with God. Heidegger already calls Christian philosophy as “a round square and a misunderstanding.”⁴⁶

³⁹ EP, p. 10.

⁴⁰ Frede, p. 45.

⁴¹ Guignon, p. 4.

⁴² Frede, p. 45.

⁴³ John Caputo, “The metaphysics of *Esse* and the *Esse-Ens* distinction,” *The Thomist*, vol. 26, no. 3 (1982), p. 196.

⁴⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems in Phenomenology* trans. by Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 78. Henceforth, this will be referred to as BPP.

⁴⁵ BPP, p. 119.

⁴⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 7. Henceforth, this will be referred to as IM.

It is faulty because “philosophy, as the science of being itself, differs absolutely from theology, which is an ontic science of a particular region of beings, not of a universal being.”⁴⁷ Christian philosophy violates both theology and philosophy for it reduces God into one of the beings (*Primum Ens*) and it reduces philosophy into merely a science of beings. The Being of philosophy has faded into the background as Scholastic metaphysics treats the essence-existence distinction, and presupposes that it could talk about God in the language of metaphysics.

Modernity comes with Descartes’ introduction of the subject in his *Cogito ergo Sum*, which has further eclipsed Being. Descartes has placed prominence on the subject. With modernity, the doubting mind became the yardstick. “It cultivated a new mindset that gave absolute price to reason as the only safe measure of certitude. One can almost imagine the arrogant, triumphalistic intellectual mindset that dawned upon the western man.”⁴⁸ With Descartes, it is the thinking subject that defines the being of the world. The ultimate measure of reality is now reduced to the thinking I, and hence the Being is further ignored and is rather assigned to the sole authority of the thinking subject. Steiner relates, “in Descartes, says Heidegger pointedly, transcendence becomes rescendence. Everything is referred back to the human viewer. The *cogito* becomes the *sum*; thought precedes being.”⁴⁹

Modernity has followed the Cartesian lead. Meaning has become a privilege solely of the mind, which projects Being unto things. This has brought the oblivion into a deeper level. The focus has been closely tied on beings, polarized by the subject-object distinction. Hence, Being as differentiated from beings becomes forgotten. Heidegger claims, “ultimately, presencing as such is not distinguished from what is present... the essence of presencing, and with it the distinction between presencing and what is present, remains forgotten. The oblivion of Being is the oblivion of the distinction between Being and beings.”⁵⁰

The foregoing shows that Heidegger’s critique against metaphysics as onto-theology is layered and admits several nuances. Its earliest forms, initiated by Plato and Aristotle, take the substance as primordial, whereby Being is reduced to something static, permanent and enduring. Later, onto-theology becomes the oblivion of the ontological difference. This is ushered by the Scholastic distinction between essence and existence, and the promotion of Christian philosophy. The ontological difference is further ignored by the moderns, when they focused on the subject as the crier and creator of Being.

⁴⁷ John Caputo, “Heidegger and Theology” in *Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 275.

⁴⁸ Alfredo Co, “Thomistic Response to the Postmodern Age,” *Colloquia Manilana*, vol. 13 (2005), p. 53.

⁴⁹ George Steiner, *Martin Heidegger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 70.

⁵⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 50.

Interestingly however, Heidegger claims that the oblivion is not a shortcoming of the thinker. Heidegger admits that the oblivion is an act of Being, that is, it is Being itself which withdraws. Heidegger says, “that we are not thinking is by no means only because man does not yet turn sufficiently toward that which, by origin and innately, wants to be thought about since in its essence it remains what must be thought about. Rather, that we are still not thinking stems from the fact that what is to be thought about turns away from man, has turned away a long ago.”⁵¹ He reiterates this when he writes further, “we said: man still does not think, and this because what must be thought about turns away from him; by no means only because man does not sufficiently reach out and turn to what is to be thought. What must be thought about turns away from man. It withdraws from him.”⁵² The oblivion of Being then is inevitable for that which facilitates this oblivion is Being itself.

B. Onto-theology: Being as the First Cause

Noting that Being withdraws itself from the thinker, Heidegger stresses that asking the question of Being is an interplay of disclosure and concealment. The oblivion happens in the concealing and the hiding of Being. But, along with this concealing is the projection, a disclosure. Hence, as Being withdraws itself as a *logos*, it also reveals itself as the *aitia* (cause). This is yet another instance of onto-theology. Heidegger explains, “but the withdrawing does not exhaust itself in this concealment. Rather, inasmuch as it conceals its essence, being allows something else to come to the fore, namely ground/reason, in the shape of the *arxai*, *aitia*, of *rationes*, of *causae*, of Principles, *Ursachen* (causes) and rational grounds.”⁵³ In onto-theological metaphysics, Being as coming-into-presence is understood as Cause. Jaran claims that after Aristotle, metaphysics has become more oblivious of being for the “question of the concept of beings as a whole, concerning the *olon*, would have quickly been replaced by a question concerning the highest sphere of beings (*timiwtaton genos*) understood as the divine ground of the world.”⁵⁴ Philosophers after Aristotle, Jaran further claimed, “dedicated their efforts to the problem of foundation or causation of the whole of beings by a supreme being, a *Θεός*.”⁵⁵

In his *Identity and Difference*, Heidegger illustrates the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics, which he claims to have arisen out of the need to account

⁵¹ Martin Heidegger, “What Calls for Thinking,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 372.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 374.

⁵³ Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 110. Henceforth, this will be referred to as PR.

⁵⁴ Francois Jaran, “Heidegger’s Kantian Reading of Aristotle’s *Theologike Episteme*,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 63 (March 2010), p. 578.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 579.

for the ground of thinking. The ‘logic’ in the word onto-theo-*logy* is to be understood as the “name for that kind of thinking which everywhere provides and accounts for the ground of beings as such within the whole in terms of Being as the ground.”⁵⁶ In this sense, metaphysics can either be a philosophy or a theology because both of these sciences are also *-logies*. “Ontology... and theology are ‘Logies’ inasmuch as they provide the ground of beings as such and account for them within the whole. They account for Being as the ground for beings.”⁵⁷ “Metaphysics is theo-logic because it is onto-logic. It is only onto-logic because it is theo-logic.”⁵⁸ “When metaphysics thinks of beings with respect to the ground that is common to all beings as such, then it is logic as onto-logic. When metaphysics thinks of beings as such as a whole, that is, with respect to the highest being which accounts for everything, then it is logic as theo-logic.”⁵⁹

But, by understanding being as the ground, as that which accounts for, metaphysics ultimately thinks of being as “cause.” With the disclosure of being as the “cause,” metaphysics becomes onto-theology. Heidegger’s dislike against this form of onto-theology is illustrated in his critique versus Leibniz’ *Principle of Reason* when he says,

“Nothing is without reason or no effect is without cause.” One calls the principle “no effect is without a cause” as the principle of causality. By using *seu* (or) in the formula cited here, Leibniz obviously posits the principle of reason and the principle of causality as being equivalent. One is tempted to find fault with this equation for it makes one wonder: every cause is indeed some sort of reason, but not every reason has the character of being a cause that has an effect as a consequence.⁶⁰

The search for Being of beings has become the search for the cause. Hence, metaphysics has to come to conceive of God as the ultimate reason or cause of all things. There arises then the equation of Being and God (*Deus est suum esse*⁶¹) in onto-theology (metaphysics).

Equating Being with God caps the entanglement of Being and God especially in the Christian philosophy of the Scholastics. “Metaphysics begins by positing God as the first cause, as ground, as highest being. That which is grounded, which

⁵⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 59. Henceforth, this will be referred to as ID.

⁵⁷ ID, p. 59.

⁵⁸ ID, p. 60.

⁵⁹ ID, p. 70-71.

⁶⁰ PR, p. 21.

⁶¹ Hemming, p. 377.

is not-God, is *ens creatum*, created things. To create therefore is to ground.”⁶² But onto-theology falls short in two respects: it is neither real philosophy nor is it a real theology. Heidegger says, “man can neither pray nor sacrifice to this god. Before the *causa sui*, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god.”⁶³ He would eventually posit that philosophy has to become a god-less thinking, and God-talk could never be possible in philosophy.⁶⁴

Heidegger claims that the god-less thinking is necessary to free being from God. Heidegger disagrees with Leibniz’ principle of reason which claims that ‘nothing is without ground.’ For Heidegger, Being as the ground, should have no ground.⁶⁵ Heidegger uses the example of the child and says that when the child plays, “it plays because it plays.”⁶⁶ Heidegger claims that the ‘because’ needs to wither in the play. The play needs to be without a why. Heidegger is even inviting us to forego thinking of the ground as the cause, and rather attempt to think of the abyss, the clearing, that is in itself, indeterminate and yet lets the entities emerge into existence.

C. The ‘Destruction’ of Metaphysics

Since metaphysics is onto-theological in its very constitution, Heidegger saw the need to overcome metaphysics. Hence, he speaks of a step-back from metaphysics. Philosophical thinking should go beyond metaphysics.⁶⁷

Heidegger proceeds with his work by looking into the Dasein, which is “an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather, it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it... Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein’s Being.”⁶⁸

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 381.

⁶³ ID, p. 72.

⁶⁴ Heidegger says that “the god-less thinking which must abandon the god of philosophy, god as *causa sui*, is thus perhaps closer to the divine God. Here this means only: god-less thinking is more open to Him than what the onto-theo-logic would like to admit” (ID, p. 72). John Haldane observes the tendency among contemporary philosophy circles to dismiss the God-talk and elements of religion in philosophical discourses. He says, “nevertheless, religion become an unwelcome presence and efforts to introduce it are generally resisted,” in *Reasonable Faith* (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2010), p. 40. It should however be said that Haldane’s project is aimed at countering this resistance.

⁶⁵ cf. PR, p. 113.

⁶⁶ PR, p. 113.

⁶⁷ cf. BT, 41ff.

⁶⁸ BT, p. 32. Some Heidegger scholars would however speak of the “turn” in Heidegger’s philosophy and argue that after the 1930’s, Heidegger has shifted emphasis from Dasein to art and poetry. See, James Magrini, “The Work of Art and Truth of Being as ‘Historical’: Reading *Being and Time*,” “The Origin of the Work of Art, and the ‘Turn’ (*Kehre*) in Heidegger’s philosophy of the 1930’s, *Philosophy Today*, vol. 54, no. 4 (Winter 2010), pp. 346-363.

Moreover, Heidegger also contends that the Dasein is a being situated in a 'world,' and so the Dasein has to become constantly vigilant over its existence because it may "fall prey to the tradition"⁶⁹ of which it has more or less explicitly taken hold. This tradition keeps it from providing its own guidance, whether in inquiring or in choosing."⁷⁰ Moreover, this "tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks our access to those primordial sources, from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn."⁷¹

The question of Being is no exception. Hence, if the Dasein is to address the question of Being authentically, there is a need to free the Dasein from the clasps of the tradition to which it has been thrown. This is then the reason why Heidegger would later speak of overcoming metaphysics:

If the question of Being is to have its own history made transparent, then this hardened tradition must be loosened up, and the concealments which it had brought about must be dissolved. We understand this task as one in which by taking the question of Being as our clue, we are to destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being.⁷²

When Heidegger speaks of the '*destruktion*' of metaphysics, he pointed out that this should not be understood in the negative sense. *Being and Time* says that the "*destruktion* is just as far from having the negative sense of shaking off the ontological tradition. We must on the contrary, stake out the positive possibilities of that tradition, and this always means keeping it within its limits."⁷³ He also reiterates this in *The End of Philosophy* where he says that, "metaphysics cannot be abolished like an opinion. One can by no means leave it behind as a doctrine no longer believed and represented... Metaphysics is already thought as the destiny of the truth of beings, that is, of beingness, as a still hidden but distinctive Appropriating, namely the oblivion of Being."⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Tradition here refers to the 'facticity' or 'thrownness of Dasein.' Heidegger claims that the "Dasein has grown up both into and in a traditional way of interpreting itself: in terms of this it understands itself proximally, and within a certain range, constantly. By this understanding, the possibilities of its Being are disclosed and regulated. Its own past – and this always means the past of its own generation – is not something that follows along after Dasein, but something which already goes ahead of it" (BT, p. 41).

⁷⁰ BT, pp. 42-43.

⁷¹ BT, p. 43.

⁷² BT, p. 44.

⁷³ BT, p. 44.

⁷⁴ EP, p. 85.

For Heidegger then, the *destruktion* of metaphysics has to be done because metaphysics has already reached its end (culmination). But this end should not be understood as a giving-up or a cessation of that which has been done. This end should rather be understood as completion of metaphysics. "As a completion, the end is the gathering into the uppermost possibilities."⁷⁵

Heidegger has noted that the coming of technology and scientific advancements amplifies the need to end metaphysics. "The development of the sciences is at the same time their separation from philosophy and the establishment of their independence... This development looks like a mere dissolution of philosophy, yet in truth is precisely its completion."⁷⁶ This means that philosophy has undergone this transformation.

Philosophy turns into the empirical sciences of man and of all that can become for man the experiential object of his technology... This development of philosophy into the independent sciences that, however, interdependently communicate among themselves ever more markedly is the legitimate completion of philosophy. Philosophy is ending in the present age.⁷⁷

With this development in our present age, the empirical sciences hold now the authority to give meaning for the world, that is, the world becomes meaningful as long as empirical sciences justify it as so.

However, Martin Heidegger also observes that this transformation remains to be lodged within the language of Plato's and Aristotle's substantial ontology. The dominance of purely empirical sciences is the culmination of onto-theology. The Heideggerian *destruktion* is "an analysis intended to show where the decisive steps of the derailment took place..."⁷⁸ It will be an attempt of "unraveling the history of ontology to show the decisive steps that lead to the dominance of the ontology of *Vorhandenheit* and to the forgetfulness of being."⁷⁹ In effect, the *destruktion* is an attempt to articulate the *die Seinsfrage*. Heidegger himself says,

The question of Being does not achieve its true concreteness until we have carried through the process of destroying the ontological tradition. In this way, we can fully prove that the question of the meaning of Being is one that we cannot avoid, and we can demonstrate what it means to talk about 'restraining' this question.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ EpTT, p. 433.

⁷⁶ EpTT, p. 433.

⁷⁷ EpTT, p. 434.

⁷⁸ Frede, p. 60.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ BT, p. 49.

Hence, Heidegger argues that there is now a need for a new type of thinking, which is “more sober-minded than the incessant frenzy of rationalization.”⁸¹ This is the thinking from which the modern man is in flight. Contemporary man is so used with the calculative control-freak mentality, which is propagated by science and technology. For Heidegger, the contemporary crisis of thought lies not in the proliferation of technology, but in man’s unwillingness to reflect amidst these technological advances. “It is not that the world has become entirely technical which is really uncanny. Far more uncanny is our being unprepared for this transformation, our inability to confront meditatively what is really dawning in this age.”⁸² We are facing the danger of absolutizing the role of technology in our life. Heidegger has once warned us to keep our guard because “the approaching tide of technological revolution in the atomic age could so captivate, bewitch, dazzle and beguile man that calculative thinking may someday come to be accepted and practiced as the only way of thinking.”⁸³ This may result to a total disregard of Being that can only be intimated through meditative thinking. If this happens, “man would have denied and thrown away his own special nature – that he is a meditative being. Therefore, the issue is the saving of man’s essential nature.”⁸⁴ For Heidegger, the question of Being is primordial for us. He once asked: “are we obliged to find paths upon which thinking is capable of responding to what is worthy of thought instead of, enchanted by calculative thinking, mindlessly passing over what is worthy of thought?”⁸⁵ Then he described the *die Seinsfrage* saying, “It is the world-question of thinking. Answering this question decides what will become of the earth and of human existence of this earth.”⁸⁶

III. The Metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas: Some Highlights

A. *Thomas Aquinas and the Essentialism of the Scholastics*

Apologists of Aquinas highlight the fact that Aquinas does not fully subscribe to the substance ontology of Plato and Aristotle. Most of them agree that Heidegger’s critique may have been true for the essentialist traditions of the west, but this is a movement which Aquinas has carefully avoided. While some Thomistic

⁸¹ EpTT, p. 499.

⁸² Martin Heidegger, *Discourse in Thinking*, trans. James Anderson & E.H. Freund (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1966), p. 52. Henceforth, this will be referred to as DT. Describing Heidegger’s critique versus technology, Robert Scharff writes, “what ‘distresses’ him is the way the current technoscientific world ‘sets up’ and overshapes how we generally understand ourselves and the things we encounter as being,” in “Technoscience Studies After Heidegger? Not Yet.” *Philosophy Today*, vol. 54 (Supplement 2010), p. 107.

⁸³ DT., p. 56.

⁸⁴ DT., p. 56.

⁸⁵ PR, p. 129.

⁸⁶ PR, p. 129.

terminologies suggest that Aquinas may also be an essentialist, what will follow is an attempt to precisely argue that Aquinas has thought of Being as *Esse* – not as substance and not even as *essence*.

Etienne Gilson, in his *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, observes that there is an essentialist tradition of the west. Essentialism gives primacy to essence over existence. Gilson names Augustine and Plato as foremost of the essentialists. He writes:

This is precisely the notion of Being that Augustine had inherited from Plato. For him, as for Plato, the radical existential opposition between being and nothingness disappears before the distinction of what truly is, and what truly is not. Being acquires that variable value which it always has in the ontology of essences. In the fullest sense, it is defined as the absolutely immutable, self-identical and at rest as opposed to non-being conceived as changing, other and pure motion.⁸⁷

But Gilson has vehemently defended Aquinas against essentialism. He claims that Aquinas is the first thinker who makes existence, and not just essence, an issue for thought. He claims that “It is only in Aquinas that Being is taken precisely as Being, in all its primordially as Being... Thomas alone has the tenacity to stay purely in the element of Being... and to think of Being purely in an existential act which is *esse*, the *actualitas omnium*, the *perfectissimum omnium*.”⁸⁸ Whereas essentialism treats existence simply as a mode of essence (an instantiation of an essence), Aquinas’s metaphysics establishes the real distinction of existence from essence. As a theologian, it was also Aquinas’ task to problematize existence. This is Aquinas’ path away from essentialism. When Aquinas has needed to prove that an existing thing requires an extrinsic cause of its existence, he admits that such entity does not contain existence in itself. This means that Aquinas was fully aware that existence and essence are distinct principles of being.

The distinction of essence and existence is already clearly laid down in Aquinas’ early work, *On Being and Essence*. Maurer even describes the novelty of Aquinas’ thoughts when he says, “This was a decisive moment in the history of western metaphysics, for St. Thomas was transforming previous Greek and medieval conceptions of being, which gave primary place to form... St. Thomas was the first to appreciate fully the supremacy of the act of existing over essence.”⁸⁹ Maurer

⁸⁷ Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), p. 49.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁸⁹ Armand Maurer, “Introduction” to Thomas Aquinas’ *On Being and Essence* trans. by Armand Maurer (Canada: The Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1949), p. 10-11.

argues that his notion on existence is Aquinas' contribution to the history of western metaphysics and "*On Being and Essence* marks the beginning of this metaphysical reformation."⁹⁰

Aquinas, following the *hylomorphic* principle of Aristotle, also argues that every physical entity is composed of a matter and a form. But, whereas Aristotle sees only the principles of matter and form in a substance, Aquinas argues that a substance is not only composed of matter and form but also of essence and existence, which are distinct principles. Aquinas conceives matter and form as simply constitutive of essence, which could never instantiate a thing without 'existence.' He argues that "the quiddity of the composite is not the composite itself whose quiddity it is, though the quiddity itself is composite."⁹¹ This means that *ens* is not to be fully equated with essence. The essence, though a composite of matter and form, is not yet the sole composition of the *ens*. This departure from Aristotle was observed by Caputo who says, "... though this metaphysics has Aristotelian point of departure, it soon severs its Aristotelian moorings and enters a wholly different world."⁹² Existence is a significant Thomistic addition to Aristotle.

As Aquinas progressed in his investigation of the composition of things, he discovers that not all composites are made of matter and form. For example, when he examines the composition of the soul or intelligence, he says, "in a soul or intelligence therefore, there is no composition of matter and form, understanding matter in them as it is in corporeal substances."⁹³ But the soul and intelligences remain to be a composite, as he says that "there is in them a composition of form and being."⁹⁴ Hence, it can be argued that the essence of the soul and intelligences is purely formal, but they remain to be composite beings because of the presence of another principle, that is, being or existence. This paves the way for his distinction of the simple and composite substances: "The essence of composite substance accordingly differs from that of a simple substance because the essence of a composite substance is not only form but embraces both matter and form, whereas the essence of simple substance is form alone."⁹⁵

Hence, Aquinas distinguishes being (existence) and quiddity. As what has been mentioned above, simple substances are still composite: of *quiddity* and *esse*. Aquinas clarifies this point and says, "Now, every essence or quiddity can be understood without knowing anything about its being. I can know, for instance, what

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence* trans. by Armand Maurer (Canada: The Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1949), p. 42. Henceforth, this will be referred to as OBE.

⁹² HA, p. 114.

⁹³ OBE, p. 52.

⁹⁴ OBE, p. 52.

⁹⁵ OBE, p. 54.

a man and 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, unless perhaps there is a reality whose quiddity is being.”⁹⁶ To further distance himself from the essentialist tradition, Aquinas argues that “being itself cannot be caused by the form or quiddity of a thing itself.”⁹⁷ Montague Brown affirms this saying,

We may recognize through judgment that a thing exists in the radical sense of there being a universe at all. Its *esse* or act of existing cannot be derived from a thing’s essence, yet is the *sine qua non* for all the thing’s perfections. Knowing this, we may argue that what is in the full sense is *esse* and that all other metaphysical principles including essence are modes or limitations of *esse*. Thus, essence appears to be ultimately reducible to existence.⁹⁸

Finally, Aquinas identifies three ways by which essence can be found in different beings. First, he says that essence can be found in God in an absolutely unique way. There can be no other being whose essence can be like that of God. Aquinas claims that “God is pure being.”⁹⁹ This means that in God, his essence, his quiddity, is his own existence. In God, there is no composition whatsoever, and hence, God is pure existence. God’s essence is his own existence. Secondly, essence can be found in simple substances, like the soul or intelligences. The essence of simple substances is purely formal, but unlike God, their essence is still distinct from their existence. Thirdly, material substances also have essence which is composed of matter and form. This composite essence has to be acted by existence to constitute the reality of *ens*.

Thus, quite clearly, Aquinas’ *On Being and Essence* shows his radical departure from Aristotelianism and the rest of the essentialist tradition of the west. His distinction between God, simple substances and material substances, together with the distinction of essence from existence, has afforded him the premises to argue that existence is not simply a mode of essence.

B. Aquinas on Esse

Moreover, it can be seen that in the philosophy of Aquinas, *esse* is even more primordial compared to *ens*. Caputo even writes that “*ens* is taken from *esse*.”¹⁰⁰ He further added, “to begin with, far from holding that *esse* is subordinate to *ens* as a

⁹⁶ OBE, p. 55.

⁹⁷ OBE, p. 56.

⁹⁸ Montague Brown, “Permanent Creation in St. Thomas Aquinas,” *New Blackfriars*, vol 67 (1986), p. 369.

⁹⁹ OBE, p. 60.

¹⁰⁰ HA, p. 128.

principle is subordinate to its *explicandum*, St. Thomas actually holds the opposite view. For he frequently points out that *ens* is a participle which derives from the infinitive... *ens* signifies limitation upon *esse*, a limited, participated share in what *esse* is in infinite perfection.”¹⁰¹ Whereas the essentialist traditions take *esse* to mean ‘instantiation’ or the “not not-to-be,”¹⁰² Aquinas takes *esse* to mean something more. *Esse* is a principle whereby something comes out of nothing. In fact, *esse* is that principle which allows a being to show up. It is rather the *ens* which is the limiting principle, an instantiating entity, a particularization of *Esse*. Aquinas’ teaching on creation explains this.

Aquinas, as a Catholic thinker, adapts the Biblical truth on *creatio ex nihilo*. This is a development from Aristotle’s metaphysics which is adopted by other Scholastics to mean “production” of a new reality from the old one. Aristotle explains the world as merely a product of change, a transformation, a motion from one form to another. But, Aquinas’ metaphysics of *esse* admits no prime matter. Aquinas radically teaches that a created entity comes from nothing because of God’s bestowal of *esse*. In Aquinas, *esse* makes possible the emergence of being from nothing. Caputo writes lengthily on this:

The doctrine of creation does not confine St. Thomas’ metaphysics to the horizon of “making” but brings it face to face with the upsurge of Being as such. Indeed, Heidegger himself has found the old formula of Christian metaphysics *ex nihilo ens qua ens fit* to be a useful expression to articulate his own experience as long, that is, as it is understood aletheiologically and not causally. But this causal formula contains an intuition of the sheer act of Being, the simple upsurge of the being into Being vis-à-vis nothingness... With it one enters the horizons of Judaeo-Christianity in which the world is contingent, in which the being has Being only as a gift. To think of Being as *esse* is to shatter the conceptual horizons of Hellenism.¹⁰³

Hence, we see a clear Thomistic departure from Aristotle’s matter and form. The metaphysics of form simply admits the generation of form and not of matter hence Aristotle admits that prime matter is eternal. For Aristotle, there is no such creative event which brings something into being out of nothing. Creation is only possible for a metaphysics of *esse* that is freed from the grasps of essentialism. This is what Montague Brown refers to when he says, “Besides the making that is of this particular thing, besides even the universal cause or causes of all generation, there is a more radical making which is of the totality of being.”¹⁰⁴ Such is the metaphysics of

¹⁰¹ HA, 130.

¹⁰² John Nijenhuis, “To be or to Exist: That is the Question,” *The Thomist*, vol. 50, no. 3 (1986), p. 364.

¹⁰³ HA, pp. 116-117.

¹⁰⁴ Brown, p. 362.

Thomas Aquinas, who says that “creation, which is the emanation of all being, is from not-being, which is nothing.”¹⁰⁵

C. Aquinas on Human Freedom

Relevant to the question at hand is the Thomistic view on human freedom. Following Aristotle’s metaphysics of potency and act, Aquinas also holds that all beings, including the immobile beings, have potencies. In fact, only God is pure act.¹⁰⁶ Potency has two senses, active potency, that is having the power to act, and the passive potency, the power of being acted upon.¹⁰⁷

Human freedom then is the expression of the human person’s potencies. Freedom refers to man’s power to actualize himself/herself. It becomes relevant here to look into the Thomistic view on human freedom as vital in the human person’s endeavor to create meaning and make sense of the world that s/he is living in.

Aquinas’ understanding of human freedom cannot be separated from his understanding of human rationality. When Aquinas treats the hierarchy of beings, he places the human person in between the angels and the brutes. He further says that the human person is similar with the rest of the animal kingdom because s/he is composed of matter and form.¹⁰⁸ But the human person is also a spiritual being because of his/her rational soul. For Aquinas, the human person’s rationality separates him/her from the rest of creation. Gilson says that “though the human person is the lowest degree of intelligent creatures, [it still] belongs to the series of immaterial beings through his soul.”¹⁰⁹

Moreover, Aquinas holds that the person’s rationality mirrors God in a more perfect way. It is the human person’s privilege of being created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27) that separates him/her from the rest of creation. Aureada claims that “since man is the visible creature closest to the Divine Governor, man, as the *imago Dei*, is the most gifted or favored of all visible creatures. It is to man alone that God wants to be united in the most intimate and interior manner.”¹¹⁰ Aquinas

¹⁰⁵ ST I, q. 45, art. 1. (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. All references to the *Summa Theologiae* are taken from <http://www.newadvent.org/summa>).

¹⁰⁶ cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph McInerny (Indiana: Dumb Ox Books, 1961), ¶ 1770, ¶ 2499, ¶ 2518. Henceforth, this will be referred to as CMA.

¹⁰⁷ cf. CMA, ¶ 1778-1780

¹⁰⁸ “Itself a compound of matter and form, man is only one among an enormous number of natures, that is to say, of material bodies each one having its form” (Gilson, p. 377).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

¹¹⁰ Jose Antonio Aureada, OP, “The Concept of Grace in St. Thomas Aquinas: (II) The Nature of Theological Participation,” *Philippiniana Sacra*, vol. 29, no. 87 (1994), p. 421. In this article, Fr. Aureada also contends that the Divine image is present in creation in many ways: *vestigium Dei*, *imago naturalis Dei* and the *imago supernaturalis Dei*. In this sense can we say that every creature is an image (*vestigium Dei*) of God. But only the human person is an *imago naturalis Dei*.

also says that, “since man is said to be after God’s image in virtue of his intelligent nature, it follows that he is most completely after God’s image.”¹¹¹

Moving further, Aquinas also holds that only the human person is given the grace to participate in Divine life.¹¹² Aureada counsels that only man is “supernaturally capable of knowing and loving God imperfectly by the theological virtues of faith and love, and perfectly once he comes face to face with him in the Beatific Vision.”¹¹³ The human person is potentially open to grace because he/she already has the natural image of God; only the human person “can know and love God himself *explicitly*.”¹¹⁴

Quite clearly then, Aquinas’ philosophy has also established the human person’s uniqueness from the other entities of this world. The human person is not simply composed of matter and form, but is rather endowed with “rationality” that flows from his being created in the image and likeness of God. Such rationality is the reason why every human person is rendered “accountable” and “responsible” for his/her every decision and action, as God has commanded man to “have dominion over the world” (Gen. 1:28).

Aquinas then views the human person as a moral being. Freedom is part of the ontological constitution of the human person. It is the logical consequence of the person’s rationality. Aquinas himself claims that only the rational soul possesses dominion over its acts, and it is in this respect that it differs from other beings. Aquinas’ understanding of human freedom is significantly colored by his understanding of the concrete existence of the human person.

However Eleonore Stump argues that contemporary philosophical reflections on the freedom of the human person follows a tradition that is non-Thomistic whereby freedom is perceived to be a property of only one component of the human person: the will. In contrast, Stump contends that “for Aquinas, freedom with regard to willing is a property primarily of a human being, not of some particular component of a human being.”¹¹⁵ Human choice is an activity of both the intellect and the will. Stump claims that Aquinas “takes the will to be not a neutral faculty but a bent inclination.”¹¹⁶ Aquinas himself says, “the will is a hunger, an appetite for goodness.”¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ ST I, q. 93, q.4, c.

¹¹² cf. ST III, q.11, a.1

¹¹³ Aureada, p. 432.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 432. He further adds, “there is in man’s *esse natura* itself... an obediential potency, a potency to image the divine according to its very divinity.”

¹¹⁵ Eleonore Stump, “Aquinas’ Account of Freedom,” in *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, Brian Davies, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 275.

¹¹⁶ Stump, p. 276.

¹¹⁷ ST I, q. 82, a.1.

For Aquinas, that which presents a thing to the will as good is the intellect. Rationality is then constitutive of the ontological constitution of a moral being. The intellect clearly influences the choice of a person because “the intellect presents to the will as good certain things or actions under certain descriptions in particular circumstances, and the will wills them because it is an appetite for the good and they are presented to it as good.”¹¹⁸ In addition to the intellect, human passions also affect a personal choice. The passions – sorrow, fury, fear, greed, etc. – can also influence the intellect because in the grip of such passion, something will seem good to a person which might not seem good to him otherwise.¹¹⁹ Human freedom is an activity not just of the will but rather of the entire human person. This, according to Stump, separates Aquinas even from the contemporary theorists on human freedom.

Notably, Aquinas also distinguishes freedom of action and freedom of willing.¹²⁰ Hence, for Aquinas, the fruition of human freedom lies in the “act” that concretizes the internal decisions made by the person, otherwise, freedom gets impeded. Aquinas says, “even when the will itself is not compelled or coerced in any way, the members of the body can be impeded by some external cause so that they don’t follow the command of the will.”¹²¹ Moreover, Aquinas also points out the concept of “voluntariness.” The authenticity of human action is a combination of a free and voluntary act. An act is voluntary when it directly flows from the inner inclinations of the human person, and is not influenced by anything external to the doer of the action. Aquinas describes a voluntary action in the following words: “that they act and that they act for an end, the movement of such things are said to be voluntary: for the word voluntary implies that their movements and acts are from their own inclination.”¹²²

The doer’s culpability and responsibility over an action is measured by the degree of voluntariness by which the action is done because voluntariness is considered to be a “special case of being moved by an intrinsic principle.”¹²³ Voluntariness becomes a necessary prerequisite for the doer’s accountability over his acts (as to whether s/he deserves rewards and praises for a good act, or reprimand and punishment for an evil act) for, “while extrinsic principles may influence human volition, as for example we sometimes do when we persuade one another by arguments, causes external to the agent cannot effect a voluntary act of will on that agent’s part, either directly or indirectly.”¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ Stump, p. 276.

¹¹⁹ cf. ST I-II, q.9. a.2.

¹²⁰ cf. Stump, p. 281.

¹²¹ ST I-II, q. 6, a.4.

¹²² ST I-II, q.5, a.1, resp.

¹²³ ST I-II, q. 6, a.1.

¹²⁴ Stump, p. 284

Authenticity then, if we are to employ an existentialist term in Aquinas' philosophy, lies in the "voluntary character" of human action. Any voluntary act of a person is an authentic human action. Aquinas admits that there are instances that even violence are exercised in order to affect the will of a moral agent, but such violence can only affect the 'commanded acts' of the will... "as regards to the will's own proper act, violence cannot be done to the will."¹²⁵ Aquinas further claims that "it is contrary to the nature of the will's own act that it should be subject to compulsion and violence... a man may be dragged by force, but it is contrary to the very notion of violence, that he be dragged by his own will."¹²⁶ Otherwise, violence never occurred and there was rather a free choice of the agent to submit himself/herself to the will of the aggressor.

With the foregoing then, it is important for us to see that Aquinas was really aware of the existential import of human freedom and decision making. Aquinas is mindful that a human person decides and acts in the context of a community, a 'world,' that could possibly influence human decisions. Aquinas' emphasis of the moral character of the human being informs us that he is emphatic of the fact that the human person "makes" decisions, and such decisions constantly affirm his/her nature as a human person.

Freedom then becomes the locus for the human person to educe its potentiality and actualize its Being. Aquinas is aware that the human person, as a creature patterned in the image and likeness of God, is also constantly called to return to God. Human life is a journey to actualize human potentials, which finds their perfection in being one with God.

IV. Articulating a Thomistic Stance on the Question of Being

A. Aquinas and the Oblivion of Being

Having been able to present the gist of the Heideggerian critique against the metaphysics of the west followed by some highlights on the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas, we have now reached the culminating task of this study, that is, to present an apology for the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas.

The first issue that needs to be addressed is the case of onto-theology understood as the oblivion of Being. Part II above has presented Heidegger's critique against substance ontology, which treats substance as primary over being.

¹²⁵ ST I-II, q. 6, a.4.

¹²⁶ ST I-II, q. 6, a.4.

Gilson's treatment of the Christian philosophy of Aquinas has highlighted Aquinas' metaphysics of *Esse*. This has led several Thomists to argue that this particular facet of onto-theology (metaphysics as oblivious of Being) cannot be leveled against Thomistic metaphysics. Thomas Aquinas' insistence on the importance of *esse* in bringing reality to the *ens* separates him from the substance ontology of Plato and Aristotle, and even from the metaphysics of the Scholastics which placed primacy on essence and treats *esse* only as a mode of essence. When Aquinas emphasized the real distinction of essence and existence, as shown in his discussion in *On Being and Essence* about the distinctions of material beings, intelligences and God, Aquinas has anticipated Heidegger's existentialism. For Aquinas, it is *esse* that concretizes essence in the reality of a particular *ens*. This is the reason why for Aquinas, it is not sufficient to know the essence of an entity, for it becomes another question whether such entity exists or not. In fact, all other perfections proceed only when a thing (*ens*) is actually existing. Existence is a being's first and most basic perfection.

Hence, if Aquinas gives priority on *esse* over essence, then he has successfully moved beyond the essentialist tradition that was rather popular during his time. Heidegger's critique hits the weakness of essentialism, something which may not be entirely true for the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas.

A rejoinder to this issue has however been pointed out by later Heideggerians, who have argued that onto-theology does not only mean "forgetfulness of Being" but rather refers to the oblivion of the ontological difference between Being and beings. For these Heideggerians, Aquinas becomes part of onto-theology because even Aquinas' metaphysics of *esse* remains oblivious of the difference between Being and beings.

The Scholastics' oblivion of the ontological difference is pointed out in Heidegger's *Basic Problem of Phenomenology*, which argues that the Scholastic distinction of *essentia* and *existentia* further complicates the problem of onto-theology. The Scholastic distinction articulates only one side of the ontological difference – Being, but it still leaves its pair – being – into oblivion.

We could however point out that Aquinas' *esse* is even given primacy, not just over essence, but also over *ens*. This is better illustrated in Aquinas' teaching on creation, whereby he goes beyond Aristotle's concept of change. In creation, Aquinas has clearly illustrated the importance of *esse* as the principle that brings into the open the reality of the *ens*. Creation bestows on *ens* its *esse*, making *ens* a reality.

Moreover, we also notice that *esse*, for Aquinas, is more than the "instantiation" of the essence. Otherwise, it is reduced to a mere mode of essence. *Esse* is the coming-to-be from nothingness. For Aquinas, it is *esse* that defines the *ens*, that is, the *esse* makes essence a particular reality in a concrete *ens*.

This is the reason why Thomistic metaphysics goes beyond the metaphysics of “making” that became popular with the Latin mindset of the Middle Ages. *Esse* is more than the replacement of forms, from the old to new. It is rather an emergence of an entirely new entity made real by the principle of *esse* that makes real and particular the principle of essence.

This has allowed Thomists to argue that Aquinas is not oblivious of the ontological difference. Aquinas’ metaphysics is aware of the distinction of Being and beings, as it has highlighted the distinction of *esse* even from *ens*.

B. Aquinas on the Overcoming of Metaphysics

Because of metaphysics’ onto-theological constitution, Heidegger has proposed an overcoming of the metaphysical tradition. Heidegger believes that the contemporary overemphasis on technology and technical knowledge, at the expense of meditative-philosophical thinking, is the ultimate consequence of onto-theology. Heidegger calls for a new way of thinking, which should be authentically philosophical.

Heidegger proposes that the new way of thinking must be oriented to Being, and he believes that this can only be possible if the Dasein is involved. For Heidegger, only the Dasein is able to articulate Being.

Heidegger however says that onto-theology has overlooked Dasein. The entire onto-theological tradition treats the human person either as bundle of essences or as a triumphant subject. But the Dasein – as an entity that is situated in the world – creates his Being as he interacts with the world. The Dasein sees Being as the world views Being, but it, at the same time, projects its understanding of Being to the world. The new type of thinking then throws away the complacency of onto-theology, and rather invites vigilance.

Aquinas on the other hand remained to be a metaphysician throughout his philosophical life. His metaphysics is a tool for his theologizing, hence as a believer and theologian, he continues to employ his metaphysics. However, there were also several authors who highlighted his near death mystical experience, and claims that the incident is Aquinas’ version of overcoming metaphysics. Caputo was earlier cited to have argued for this through what he calls as Aquinas’ religious aletheiology.

Nevertheless, we have also cited above that Aquinas has accommodated Aristotle’s metaphysical principles of potency and act, and follows Aristotle’s lead in saying that all things (except God) have latent potentialities that need to be actualized. In human persons, this is made possible through human freedom.

Aquinas, as a Christian, affirms the basic truth revealed in the Book of Genesis: that the human person is gifted with something that is not given to the rest of creation. Being created in the image and likeness of God, the human person has rationality and freedom. Quite clearly, for Aquinas, the person's ontological constitution as rational being is the very foundation of his actions.

Some commentators on Aquinas argue that the latter follows the Augustinian scheme of *exitus-reditus*. A.I. Mennessier, quoting from Aquinas' *Compendium of Theology*, describes man's journey as a "return to God of the creature who has emanated from Him and who must cover the whole distance from the created to the uncreated."¹²⁷ Mennessier further describes the *Summa Theologiae* in the following words:

St. Thomas had to arrange altogether the *factual datum* of which the Bible in its two Testaments bears witness: the history of man, his sin, his freedom before the gratuitous initiatives of a God who establishes personal relationships between His creature and Himself – and this requirement of intelligibility which prompts the theologian of the thirteenth century to inquire about the reasons of things, to endeavor to discern under the contingency of history the permanent values which creative Wisdom establishes. *Emanation-Return*: such will be the plan of the *Summa: Exitus-Reditus*. Can the creature, issued from God, have a destiny other than to rejoin its source?¹²⁸

Mennessier even added that the "movement of return of the creature toward a God who, having made man to His image, intends to consummate in him, by the gift of his own blessed light, the appetite for happiness which moves the whole universe."¹²⁹

This description of the Thomistic project will surely be relevant in our attempt to understand and articulate Aquinas' answer to the question of Being, for it suggests that in Aquinas' philosophy, the human person is oriented towards that pilgrimage of going back to the Father. This pilgrimage is the background of the individual person's finite human existence, and this must have colored the person's concrete choices and decisions. For Aquinas, the authenticity of the decisions of the human person does not simply reside in his personal and authentic encounter with the world, but more so, in the person's appropriation of his/her earthly life to his ultimate aim of journeying back to God. There is, in Aquinas, an invitation for every human person to be truly vigilant over his/her choices and actions because s/he needs to be faithful to that path of his/her *reditus* to God.

¹²⁷ Quoted in A.I. Mennessier, *Pattern of a Christian According to St. Thomas Aquinas*. (New York: Alba House, 1992), p. 16.

¹²⁸ Mennessier, p. 15.

¹²⁹ Mennessier, pp. 15-16.

Moreover, Aquinas admits that there are two things that could possibly affect the voluntary and free act of man: happiness and oneness with God. He says that “as far as the specification of its (the human will) act is concerned, there is no object other than happiness in this life and God in the next, which by its nature necessarily moves every human will to want that.”¹³⁰ This means that human freedom is always oriented towards that which could truly satisfy our human nature.

Hence, the satisfaction of human nature is the universal end of our human freedom. This is what Aquinas and Aristotle call as happiness. However, the means for such a common end is never uniform for all humanity. We all aspire to be happy, but we all vary in terms of the object and the means of our happiness. Aquinas says, “as to the aspect of the last end, all agree in desiring the last end, since all desire fulfillment where their last end consists. But to the thing in which this aspect is realized, all men are not as free to their last end: since some desire riches as their consummate good.”¹³¹ Though expressed in the milieu of the medieval age, this clearly states that for Aquinas human actions are never pre-determined despite the admission that all human persons are equally created in the image and likeness of God and that all are oriented towards a *reditus* to their maker. Aquinas has clearly established the fact that every human person is individually accountable for his/her own journey as each will endeavor to realize the Divine image in him/her. Every person, situated within the Divine plan for the world, needs to discern for the means that would actualize his/her Being.

For Aquinas, the human person as a creature is subjected to the principle of motion that governs all beings in the world. Aquinas defines motion as “the actuality of a being in potency.”¹³² There is however a distinction between rational and irrational appetites: the former is obviously a faculty of rational beings like human persons and angels, while the latter is a faculty of irrational beings like animals. The human person then, as possessor of rational appetites, is pregnant with possibilities. But it is the human person’s decisions over the possibilities made available before him/her that will form and shape him/her as a person. In other words, human freedom allows him/her to actualize his/her being. Aquinas believes that the human person matures and grows based on the kind of choices and decisions s/he takes. It is this need to actualize the self in the face of countless possibilities that invite the human person to ask for his/her Being.¹³³

¹³⁰ ST I, q. 82, a.2 – parenthetical note added.

¹³¹ ST I-II, q.1., a.7. resp.

¹³² CMA, ¶ 1770.

¹³³ Stephen Wang even claims that our choices, as expressions of our freedom, allow us to create ourselves. He says, “So, our personal identity, which is constituted in relation to the goods that we seek, becomes established. We re-create ourselves by seeking a particular form of perfection in a particular good. This is the sense in which Aquinas believes that we constitute ourselves through our free choices,” in “The Indetermination of Reason and the Role of the Will in Aquinas’ Account of Human Freedom,” *New Blackfriars*, vol. 90, Issue 1025 (January 2009), p. 129.

We recall what has been earlier said that human freedom is highly colored by the intellect and not just by the will. In fact, we can say that human freedom is limited by the extent of the agent's knowledge. A person can only decide freely and voluntarily on things that s/he knows, otherwise, the decision taken may not be fully free and voluntary. The realization of a personal choice is always limited by the world in which the person is situated. The journey back to the Creator is always personal precisely because it is done within the individual person's context. Aquinas even describes human choice as "the choosing of one of the two, or the choice which involves reason; for it is what a man intends that he does, although this occurs only if he is in that state in which he is capable of acting and the patient is present."¹³⁴ This means then that the human person's actualization of the self, as s/he endeavors to go back to the Father, is always limited by the world where s/he is in. Aquinas would even say further that "every human potency must act when it desires the object of which it has the potency, and in the way in which it has it. And it has the power of acting when the patient is present and is so disposed that it can be acted upon; otherwise it could not act."¹³⁵ This clearly shows that the human self-actualization is largely limited by personal context, which is the world of the agent. The human person can do certain things because s/he is free, but the human person can only do as much because of this ontological limitation. It is this interplay of the person's ultimate vocation to return to God and the ontological limitation of his/her world that will provide the impetus, within the Thomistic system, for every individual to confront the question of Being.

We can safely say then that Aquinas' teaching on the nature of the human person as a moral being, who is both rational and free, has accomplished Heidegger's existential project. In this sense, Aquinas' metaphysics is not an onto-theology.

V. Conclusion: Aquinas and the God-talk of Christian Philosophy

The immediately preceding sections (IV.A and IV.B) have attempted to show that Aquinas' metaphysics is outside the onto-theological tradition criticized by Heidegger. This apology is meant to show that Aquinas has endeavored to authentically articulate the question of Being.

However, we could not also escape a noticeable difference between the philosophical thoughts of Heidegger and Aquinas, that is, in the issue of God-talk in philosophy. Whereas Heidegger relies solely on the "world" in which the Dasein is thrown as the locus for Being and openly claims that the new way of thinking that

¹³⁴ CMA, ¶ 1820.

¹³⁵ CAM, ¶ 1820.

he proposes is a god-less thinking, Aquinas rather argues that Being can never be articulated apart from the ultimate vocation of humanity, which is to journey back to God. As a moral being, the fullness of the exercise of human freedom is in the discernment of the individual agent's particular means of pursuing his *reditus* to God. Aquinas holds that this world shall simply provide the means for man to actualize his being, as s/he takes his path of *reditus*, but it is clear in Aquinas that the exercise of freedom in the world is never solely an issue of *my* Being in the world. It is always situated within the entire context of God's plan for the world.

When Heidegger admits that the Dasein articulates his Being through the choices that he/she makes, which is also his/her way of paying attention to Being, Aquinas rather believes that a person's Being is always colored by God's image in him/her, and s/he therefore needs to appropriate his/her personal existence within the Divine plan. Instead of treating the latter as a "pseudo-thinking," as Heidegger says Christian philosophy is, Aquinas rather sees in it an authentic encounter with Being because every attempt to discern for the will of God is also at the same time an invitation to find meaning in the world. The world, both for Aquinas and Heidegger, shall color the choices that a person would have to make, even if for Aquinas, the fullness of freedom goes beyond the offers of this world. That is, Aquinas firmly believes, one's Being rests on his/her final and ultimate place in the presence of God in the next life, and is rather not found within the confines of this world.

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