

Augustine's And Aquinas's Existential Metaphysics—A Profound Common Ground

DR. BARRY DAVID¹

1.) INTRODUCTION. In this paper, I probe two prominent claims, contradictory in certain respects, concerning the relationship between aspects of Thomas Aquinas's metaphysics and Augustine's.² The first is that while Thomas's metaphysics is *existential*, focusing on "existence" as the core attribute of God and "central perfection" comprising creatures,³ Augustine's metaphysics is *essentialist*, defining both God and creature in terms of *what they are* at the expense of *that they are*.⁴ The second claim is that Thomas's metaphysics is the proper and

¹ Department of Philosophy, Ave Maria University, 5050 Ave Maria Boulevard, Ave Maria, Florida, 34142-9505.

² It is well recognized that both Augustine and Thomas take a profound metaphysical view of reality ordered by *philosophia*, the pursuit and love of Wisdom, but Thomas is more a 'metaphysician's metaphysician.' Amongst other things, he has analyzed Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and various commentaries thereon, explicitly treated the discipline of metaphysics in a number of contexts; and, as J.F. Wippel remarks, "a well worked out metaphysics existed in his own mind and can be recovered from his various writings." (*The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000], xvii.) Augustine, on the other hand, anchors his analysis of being in key metaphysical insights and principles (e.g. *Confessiones* [conf.] 7.9.13-16.22 and *De natura boni*) that would allow one to recover from his writings at least the beginnings of a systematic metaphysics (see R.J. Teske, "Saint Augustine as Philosopher: The Birth of Christian Metaphysics," *Augustinian Studies* 23 [1992], 7-32, 13-17; and J.F. Anderson, *Augustine and Being* [The Hague: Nijhoff, 1965], 1-11). But, unlike Thomas, he "has no metaphysics in the Aristotelian sense of a discipline that transcends the considerations of physics." V. Bourke, *The Essential Augustine* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1974), 43.

Recent studies of Augustine's metaphysics include: S. Macdonald, "The divine nature," *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, edited by E. Stump and N. Kretzmann (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2001), 71-90; Teske, "Saint Augustine as Philosopher: The Birth of Christian Metaphysics,"; E. Zum Brunn, *St. Augustine: Being and Nothingness*, trans. R. Namad (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1988); and J.F. Anderson, *Augustine and Being*, *op. cit.* Recent studies of Thomas's metaphysics include: A. Kenny, *Aquinas on Being*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); J. Haldane (editor), *Mind, Metaphysics, and Value in the Thomistic and Analytical Traditions*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002); W.N. Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002) and *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being-God-Person* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); and J.F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (2000) and "Metaphysics," *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, edited by N. Kretzmann and E. Stump, (New York; Cambridge University Press, 1993), 85-127.

³ According to Clarke, Thomas's "... metaphysical vision of all real beings as diverse, limited participations in the one central perfection of the act of existence opens up quite a new perspective... apparently unique in the history of Western thought: it shifts the whole center of gravity in the study of real beings from the *essences* and forms, the *what* in things, to their *act of existence* as the central core, the positive "guts," so to speak, of all the positivity and perfection that is in them—the "existential turn," as it has been called. Most of Western philosophical thinking, from Plato and Aristotle on down through the modern philosophy—have been *essentialist* in this sense, that while they acknowledged the *fact* of existence as a kind of brute fact or minimum static state presupposed for further study, once this is verified or taken for granted, they paid little further attention to it, focusing almost entirely on *what* things are, their *natures*, and *how* they act. In St. Thomas, what was taken by others as the *minimum*, to which all other perfections were added, now becomes the *maximum*, the core and fullness of all perfection in which all the diverse essences share by limited participation, and the ground for all further growth in perfection." (*The One and the Many*, *op. cit.*, 88. See also Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics*, *op. cit.*, cc. 3-5.)

⁴ As Clarke writes: "St. Augustine defines *being* without qualification as *the immutable*. Hence for him God alone truly is, because he is *always what he is*, self-identical, whereas creatures neither are always, nor are they at any one time all that they are: they are not yet what they will be and are no longer what they were, because they are changing" (*The One and the Many*, 110). Clarke's claim stands in the tradition of E. Gilson, *Introduction à l'étude de Saint Augustin*, (Paris: J. Vrin 1943)—translated as *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, by L.E.M. Lynch (New York: Random House, 1960), 21-23; *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, (New York: Random House, 1955), 71;

authentic development of Augustine's. As one commentator writes: "If the essential values of St. Augustine's thought are considered in their integrity, it must be admitted ... that the sole metaphysical systematization of that thought which remains *essentially* Augustinian is the Thomistic synthesis."⁵ Thomas's teaching, he thinks, is fundamentally Augustinian insofar as it elucidates what Augustine wanted to make clear but could not due to his "faulty" Neoplatonic philosophical equipment.⁶ This commentator seems to hold that Augustine's and Thomas's metaphysics are distinguished specifically, rather than generically, and that the former is related to the latter as matter or potency is related to form/actuality. So, while both views advocate that Thomas's metaphysics is more accurate, the reason for this is disputed.

I intend to evaluate these assertions by comparing key aspects of Augustine's and Thomas's respective accounts of i) God as *Esse*; and ii) creatures as participating *esse*. Because my comparison is relatively unique and my thesis urges that certain aspects of the 'conventional wisdom' be modified, I place large portions of Augustine's and Thomas's respective arguments in this essay's main body and footnotes. Most importantly, my conclusion consists in three related points. First, Augustine and Thomas share an existential emphasis within their metaphysics. Therefore (i.e. second), Thomas's metaphysics can be classified as "*essentially* Augustinian" not only insofar as it clarifies and develops specific doctrines held by Augustine—that is, as actuality/form (Thomas's metaphysics) is related to potentiality/matter (Augustine's metaphysics)—but, more truly, because Thomas's metaphysics is grounded in and deepens significantly *a generally Neoplatonic doctrine of participation developed along existential lines* that is shared with Augustine and even mediated, in some (hard to quantify) measure, to Thomas through him. Consequently, while it is true that Thomas counts Augustine amongst his inheritance and develops significantly his thinking, what ultimately makes Thomas Augustinian is at the same time what makes Augustine Thomistic, namely their shared Christian-Neoplatonism.⁷ Third, while the distinction between

"Notes sur l'être et le temps chez saint Augustin," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 2 (1962), 205–223, 206–208; and B.J. Cooke, "The Mutability-Immutability Principle in St. Augustine's Metaphysics," *Modern Schoolman* 23 (1946), 175–193; and 24 (1947), 37–49, 39–42. A contrary view is argued by M.T. Clark, "Augustine on Immutability and Mutability," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 74 (2000), 7–27, 8–14, J.F. Anderson, *St. Augustine on Being*; and J.M. Rist, "Augustine, Aristotelianism, and Aquinas: Three Varieties of Philosophical Adaption," *Aquinas the Augustinian*, eds. M. Dauphinais, B. David, and M. Levering (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 79–99, 81–88; and implied by i) S. Macdonald, "The divine nature," 81–86, ii) L. Ayres, "Being (*esse/essentia*)," *Saint Augustine through the Ages: an Encyclopedia*, ed. A. Fitzgerald, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 96–98; iii) D.X. Burt, *Augustine's World: An Introduction to His Speculative Philosophy*, (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1996), 240; iv) Rist, *Augustine; Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 257–258; and v) E. Zum Brunn, *St. Augustine: Being and Nothingness*, 97–118. For discussion of certain excesses and receptions of Gilsonian *existential Thomism*, see W.J. Hankey, "From Metaphysics to History, from Exodus to Neoplatonism, from Scholasticism to Pluralism: The Fate of Gilsonian Thomism in English-Speaking North America," *Dionysius* 16 (1998), 157–188.

⁵ J. Maritain, "Augustinian Wisdom," in *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. G.B. Phelan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 325. J.F. Anderson (*St. Augustine on Being*, *op. cit.*, 5–11) agrees with Maritain's interpretation but does so by analyzing Augustine according to the manner of Gilsonian Thomism, namely, that Augustine's metaphysics is informed, above all else, by the *Bible*—especially by *Ex. 3.14*—and employs aspects of Neoplatonic metaphysics as instrumental cause (*idem*, 16, 30, 35, 61, 75–76).

⁶ Maritain, *op. cit.*, 313.

⁷ By Neoplatonism, I mean a mode of philosophizing, common to late ancient and early medieval pagan philosophers like Plotinus (204/5–270 A.D.), Porphyry (234–305 A.D.), Iamblichus (245–325 A.D.) and Proclus (412–485 A.D.) which integrates the insights of Plato and Aristotle while taking Plato's "top-down" (L.P. Gerson, "What is Platonism?," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 43.3 [2005], 253–276, 261) metaphysics as foundational and Aristotle as one of Plato's most profound and decisive interpreters. This school of philosophy is commonly said to begin with Plotinus and finish, in a way, with emperor Justinian's closing of Athens' Platonic Academy in 529 A.D. (*Neoplatonic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*, edited and with introduction by J. Dillon and L.P. Gerson [Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2004], xiii–xxii). While using different terminology, Aristotle develops Plato's doctrine of participation, viz. that everything's formal structure and orientation depends on Supreme Divinity (*Republic* 6, 505a–511e), by holding that Supreme Divinity/God is ultimately responsible for the composition and, therefore, orientation of all non-divine substance (e.g. *Metaphysics* 2.2; and 12.7–10). As Thomas Aquinas well notes, however, Aristotle does not propound a doctrine of creation, i.e. does not maintain that everything

Augustine's and Thomas's philosophical equipment is certainly due to differences in their inheritances (for example, Thomas has at his disposal both Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and ample commentaries thereon) this too, like the relative difference in insight, might be explained (at least in some measure) in terms of differences in their Christian-Neoplatonism since, rightly understood, Thomas's focus on *esse* and development of his existence-essence distinction is a consequence of his more rigorous analysis of being as participated. Taken altogether, then, while the first commentator overstates the difference between Augustine's and Thomas's metaphysics, the second commentator justifiably claims that their metaphysics are essentially alike and that Thomas's approach develops Augustine's for the better. Nevertheless, while both commentators, in their own manner, assert that the principal difference between Augustine's and Thomas's approaches to metaphysics lies in Augustine's dominant Neoplatonism and/or Thomas's Aristotelianism, our investigation shows that what actually draws these approaches together is Thomas's and Augustine's shared Christian-Neoplatonism—and that Thomas's Christian-Neoplatonism gives impetus to his development of a more advanced existential doctrine.

2.) AUGUSTINE ALSO HAS AN EXISTENTIAL EMPHASIS. When we analyze their fundamental metaphysical perspectives, it is evident that Augustine and Thomas share a participation-centered⁸ or “top-down”⁹

belonging to something, insofar as *it exists*, depends on God (*S.T. I*, 44.2) [see also n. #16 below]. This teaching of existential participation belongs, in one way, to Plotinus (e.g. *Ennead* 5.1.6-7) and to the Pagan-Neoplatonists in general and, in another way, to Arabic- (e.g. Al-Kindi's *Liber de Causis*) and (see below) to Christian-Neoplatonism.

By Christian-Neoplatonism, I refer to a profound deepening of the Neoplatonic insight that non-divine being depends for its being on God. This results not only from the influence of divine revelation but, more significantly, from a more rigorous emphasis on the shared doctrines of participation and substance as these apply to Man. Augustine, for instance, argues in *conf.* 7.9-23 (and in the *City of God/de civitas Dei [civ. Dei]* 10.23) that the essential difference between pagan- and Christian-Neoplatonism is found neither in treatments of the Godhead nor of the ontological dependence of finite substance on Supreme Divinity and that Man (as a soul-body composite), and consequently Human Community, is fashioned for eternal union with God (*conf.* 9.10.23-25), i.e. for the City of God. Rather, it is found in the cogency of the Christian claim of ‘The Word made flesh,’ i.e. that God provides a way for Man to attain to His Heavenly Community (*conf.* 7.9.13-15), the City of God. Contrary to the views of the pagan-Neoplatonists, who hold that all beings depend for their being on God but deny the possibility, at least when it comes to Man in particular and the sublunary realm in general, of ultimate unity with God, Christian-Neoplatonism claims that Man as such, i.e. this collective of soul-body composites, is structured for eternal beatitude. Hence, in these respects, Augustinian Christian-Neoplatonism departs from pagan Neoplatonism by its more rigorous teaching that human being depends ultimately on God. As a Christian-Neoplatonist, Thomas agrees with Augustine on these points while departing from both Aristotle and the Pagan-Neoplatonists (e.g. *Quaestio Diputata de Anima 1 & Super Epistolam Pauli Apostoli, 1 Cor.* 15: 17-19).

So, the remote genus in which Augustine and Aquinas stand is Platonism but Plato's essentialist doctrine is clarified and deepened by certain of his successors like (i) Aristotle, also an essentialist, and (ii) the Pagan-Neoplatonists and the Christian-Neoplatonists, each of whom uphold existential participation. Hence, Aquinas and Augustine are Platonists by remote genus, Neoplatonist (and consequently existential) by proximate genus, Christian-Neoplatonist or Christian-Platonist by species (in which respect, they are more existential than the [Pagan] Neoplatonists), and they differ individually.

For discussion of Thomas's Platonism see: R. Schenk, “From Providence to Grace; Thomas Aquinas and the Platonisms of the Mid-Thirteenth Century,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 3.2 (2005), 307-320; W.J. Hankey, *God in Himself: Aquinas' Doctrine of God as expounded in the Summa Theologiae* (New York, N.Y.; Oxford University Press, 1987); *idem*, “Aquinas and the Platonists,” *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages: A Doxographic Approach*, edited by S. Gersh and M.J.F.M. Hoenen, with the assistance of P. Th. van Wingerden (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), 279-324; *idem*, “Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot,” *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, ed. L. Ayres and G. Jones, (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 139-184; *idem*, “Making Theology Practical: Thomas Aquinas and the Nineteenth Century Religious Revival,” *Dionysius* 9 (1985), 85-127; and R.J. Henle, *Saint Thomas and Platonism: A Study of “Plato” and “Platonici” Texts in the Writings of St. Thomas*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956).

⁸ I define *participation* the same as Clarke (“The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas,” *Explorations in Metaphysics*, 89–101, 93), namely, that there is “1) a source which possesses the perfection in question in a total and unrestricted manner; 2) a participant subject which possesses the same perfection in some partial or restricted way; and 3) which has received this perfection in some way from, or in dependence on, the higher source.” In terms of the

metaphysics (i) whose philosophical origin, as such, is traced by each to Greek antiquity—and especially to Plato¹⁰ and (ii) containing a strong existential dimension. While Augustine seems to trace the latter to Plato (though he readily ascribes it to Platonism generally),¹¹ Aquinas maintains it is introduced into the philosophical tradition, after Aristotle, by those philosophers ‘considering being qua being,’¹² i.e. identifying existing or being (*esse*) as a primary attribute of God and the core attribute of all non-divine or finite substance. Despite their slightly different notions of the history of philosophy, Augustine and Thomas agree that the universe consists in an array of ontologically distinct substances¹³ depending for their being on Supreme Divinity. Each claims that all non-divine beings exist because of and in some ontological likeness to God; He alone cannot not-exist, and any thing else existing *is* because He, as First Maker Unmade, causes it.¹⁴

Citing Plato and Aristotle as his (most ancient) authorities,¹⁵ Thomas explains in *S.T. I*, q. 44, a. 1—as elsewhere—that beings (that is, all substances receiving their being from another) participate in one Self-Subsisting Being who IS most perfectly (*perfectissime est*) i) insofar as they *are* and ii) therefore for all that constitutes them as beings.¹⁶ Thomas writes:

It must be said that every being in any way existing is from God [*omne quod quocumque modo est a Deo esse*]. For whatever is found in anything by participation [*per participatione*] must be caused in it by that to which it belongs essentially [*causetur in ipso ab eo cui essentialiter convenit*], as iron becomes ignited by fire. Now it has been shown above ... that God is the essentially self-subsisting being [*quod Deus est ipsum esse per se subsistens*]; and also it was shown ... that self-subsisting being must be one [*quod esse subsistens non potest esse nisi unum*], as, if whiteness were self-subsisting, it would be one, since whiteness is multiplied by its recipients. Therefore all beings apart from God [*omnia alia a Deo*] are not their own being [*non sint suum esse*], but are beings by participation [*sed participant esse*]. Therefore it must be that all things which are diversified by the diverse participation of being [*omnia quae diversificantur secundum diversam participationem essendi*], so as to be more or less perfect [*ut sint perfectius vel minus perfecte*], are caused by one First Being [*causari ab uno primo ente*], Who possesses being most perfectly [*quod perfectissime est*].

relationship we are exploring, that the creature participates in God for its being means that it depends on Him as first cause of the material, formal, efficient, and final causes by which it is constituted.

⁹ I use this term in the sense of Gerson, “What is Platonism?” *op. cit.*, 259. Gerson (261) maintains that “the key” to the Platonic worldview is “that the universe is to be seen in a hierarchical manner...understood uncompromisingly from the top-down. The hierarchy is ordered basically according to two criteria. First, the simple precedes the complex and second, the intelligible precedes the sensible. The precedence in both cases is not temporal, but ontological and conceptual...The ultimate explanatory principle in the universe, therefore, must be unqualifiedly simple.”

¹⁰ For Augustine see *conf.* 7.9.13-16.22 and *civ. Dei* 8.1-11. For Thomas, see *inter alia S.T. I*, 44.1.

¹¹ Augustine, *civ. Dei* 8.1-11.

¹² For Thomas, see *S.T. I* 44.2.

¹³ For Augustine, *substantia* is the proper name for self-standing created realities: see, for example, *conf.* 4.16.28 (describing what he learned, at the age of twenty, from studying Aristotle’s *Categories*); 7.12.18; 8.1.1; and *De Trinitate (Trin.)* 5.1.3.

¹⁴ See Augustine, *civ. Dei*, 5.9, and *conf.*, 11.4.6-13.16; Aquinas, *S.T. I*, 2.3.

¹⁵ See *nn.* 16 & 17 for aid to interpretation.

¹⁶ Thomas writes (*S.T. I*, 44.2): “Hoc igitur quod est causa rerum in quantum sunt entia, oportet esse causam rerum, non solum secundum quod sunt talia per formas accidentales, nec secundum quod sunt haec per formas substantiales, sed etiam secundum omne illud quod pertinet ad esse illorum quocumque modo.”

(<http://www.corpusthomicum.org/oe.html>). By his important remark, Thomas signals that he shares in the teaching of existential participation rather than in any of the earlier and, in a manner, essentialist teachings holding either that ‘corporeal substance is uncreated’ (which view he ascribes to the earliest philosophers) or that ‘matter is uncreated’ (which view he ascribes both to Plato and to Aristotle). Hence *S.T. I*, 44.1 cites Plato and Aristotle as authorities in an attenuated manner since, although their words can imply more, they only give witness to a part of Thomas’s complete teaching on participation.

Hence Plato said (*Parmen.* xxvii) that unity must come before multitude; and Aristotle said (*Metaph.* ii, text. 4) that whatever is greatest in being [*maxime ens*] and greatest in truth [*maxime verum*], is the cause of every being [*omnis entis*] and of every truth [*omnis veri*]; just as whatever is the greatest in heat is the cause of all heat.¹⁷

Since there is controversy about Augustine's relation to the doctrines that i) God is *ipsum esse per se subsistens*; and ii) creatures are participated *esse*,¹⁸ I cite below four prominent passages making clear i) his participation-centered perspective and ii) existential emphasis therein. The first text is *conf.* 11.4.6 where Augustine introduces the metaphysical principles guiding his entire account of divine creation in *conf.* 11.5.7-13.38.53:

See heaven and earth exist [*Ecce sunt caelum et terra*], they cry out aloud that they are made [*clamant, quod facta sint*], for they suffer change and variation [*mutantur enim atque variantur*]. But in anything which is not made and yet *is* [i.e. God], there is nothing which previously was not present—which is not the case with those things subject to change and variation. Heaven and earth also cry aloud that they have not made themselves [*Clamant etiam, quod se ipsa non fecerint*]: 'The manner of our existence shows that we are made [*Ideo sumus, quia facta sumus*]. For before we came to be, we did not exist to be able to make ourselves [*non ergo eramus, antequam essemus, ut fieri possemus a nobis*].' And the voice with which they speak is self-evidence. You, Lord, who are beautiful, made them for they are beautiful. You are good, for they are good. You are, for they are [*qui es: sunt enim*]. Yet they are not beautiful or good or possessed of being [*nec ita sunt, sicut tu*] in the sense that you their Maker are. In comparison with you they are deficient in beauty and goodness and being.¹⁹

This argument allows us to make two important observations. First, Augustine's doctrine of participation depends on analyzing being by the principles that i) the immutable is superior to the mutable²⁰; and ii) nothing can bring itself into existence but depends for its existing on being made by some maker(s)—a doctrine of efficient causality.²¹ Second, Augustine understands existing as the pre-eminent excellence in God and comprising creatures.

As we have read, Augustine holds that insofar as "heaven and earth" exist, they are made; insofar as they are made, they undergo change and variation. Now, since to be made is to exist and to exist is to be mutable, mutability relates to existing as effect relates to cause. Furthermore, that "heaven and earth" are mutable signifies both that they are made—since nothing can bring itself into existence—and that whatever excellences (commonly

¹⁷ *ST I*, 44.1, "Whether it is necessary that every being be created by God?" in *The Summa Theologica of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1948), 229. I have cited only one passage from Thomas since it is commonly agreed that he holds this doctrine; other passages are cited in section iii) of this paper. For recent discussion of Thomas's doctrine of participation together with extensive bibliography, see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas, op. cit.*, 94–131. Concerning Thomas's attributing doctrines of creation to Aristotle and Plato see: L. Dewan, "St. Thomas, Aristotle, and Creation," *Dionysius* 15 (1991), 81-90; and M.F. Johnson, "Did St. Thomas Attribute a Doctrine of Creation to Aristotle," *New Scholasticism* 63 (1989), 129-155, and "Aquinas' Changing Evaluation of Plato on Creation," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 66:1 (1992), 81-88.

¹⁸ As Wippel remarks ("Metaphysics," *op. cit.*, 98), Aquinas understands created substance to participate in *esse* in three ways, namely "(1) as participating in *esse commune* (existence in general); (2) as participating in subsisting *esse* (God); (3) as participating in the *esse* (act of being) that is intrinsically realized in the existing creature." My project in this paper focuses on assessing the degree to which Aquinas and Augustine share understandings #2 and #3.

¹⁹ *Conf.*, 11.4.6. The English translation, which I have altered in places and to which I have added Latin, relies on *Confessions*, trans. H. Chadwick (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 224. Augustine writes: "Ecce sunt caelum et terra, clamant, quod facta sint; mutantur enim atque variantur. Quidquid autem factum non est et tamen est, non est in eo quidquam, quod ante non erat: quod est mutari atque variari. Clamant etiam, quod se ipsa non fecerint: 'Ideo sumus, quia facta sumus; non ergo eramus, antequam essemus, ut fieri possemus a nobis.' Et vox dicentium est ipsa evidētia. Tu ergo, Domine, fecisti ea, qui pulcher es: pulchra sunt enim; qui bonus es: bona sunt enim; qui es: sunt enim. Nec ita pulchra sunt nec ita bona sunt nec ita sunt, sicut tu Conditor eorum, quo comparato nec pulchra sunt nec bona sunt nec sunt" (http://www.augustinus.it/latino/confessionioni/conf_11.htm).

²⁰ *Cf. conf.*, 7.1.1. By holding rigorously to this principle, Augustine can distinguish himself from all ancient materialisms, especially from the Manichaeans and Stoics.

²¹ *Cf. Ibid.*, 11.5.7; and *civ. Dei*, 5.9: "Nihil fieri si causa efficiens non praecedat."

named perfections and/or transcendentals) they possess, namely, goodness, beauty, and being, depends on their having been made by God. So, in terms of creatures, (i) existing (that is, having been made) is metaphysically prior to mutability and (ii) therefore (looking at creatures from the perspective of their participated excellences) prior to the participated beauty, goodness, and being they possess. However, if there is no God Who (described from the perspective of the participated excellences) is Beauty, Goodness, Being, and Maker, there is no existing, mutable, good, and beautiful creature. The overall sense, then, of *conf.* 11.4.6, is that God's Existing is his pre-eminent excellence and the sufficient condition for creatures existing and whatever other participated excellences are found therein.²²

That Augustine's doctrine of participation contains a strong existential dimension is confirmed by the following passages in which is summarized what one recent commentator has called Augustine's "deepest insight into the divine nature"²³, learned through his study of *the books of the Platonists (libri Platoniorum)*²⁴ and confirmed by Scripture, namely, that God is Being/*Esse/Essentia*:

[1] God said, "I am He Who Is" [*Ego sum qui sum*] (Ex 3:14). For God is existence in a supreme degree [*Deus summa essentia sit*]—He supremely is [*hoc est summe sit*]—and He is therefore immutable [*et ideo inmutabilis sit*]. Hence He gave existence [*esse dedit*] to the creatures He made out of nothing; but it was not his own supreme existence [*sed non summe esse sicut est ipse*]. To some He gave existence [*dedit esse*] in a higher degree [*amplius*], to some in a lower [*aliis minus*], and thus He arranged a scale of existences of various natures [*atque ita naturas essentiarum gradibus ordinavit*]... Thus to this highest existence [*ei naturae quae summe est*] from which all things that are derive their existence [*qua faciente sunt quaecumque sunt*], the only contrary nature is the non-existent [*contraria natura non est, nisi quae non est*]. It follows that no existence is contrary to God [*Ei quippe quod est non esse contrarium est. Et propterea Deo*], that is, to the supreme existence and the author of all existence whatsoever [*id est summae essentiae et auctori omnium qualiumcumque essentiarum, essentia nulla contraria est*].²⁵

²² This passage also shows how Augustine's doctrine of existing as pre-eminent excellence is arrived at by applying to reality the principles of i) efficient causality; and ii) that the mutable is inferior to the immutable.

²³ S. Macdonald, "The divine nature," *op. cit.*, 82.

²⁴ See *conf.*, 7.9.13-16.22, and *civ. Dei*, 8.1-11. Augustine does not identify the specific authors, translators, and titles of the pagan-Platonist books he read just before becoming a Christian-Platonist but research has made clear that these include various works by Plotinus and Porphyry wherein are clarified, criticized, synthesized, and developed key doctrines of Plato, Aristotle, and their later interpreters. In *Confessiones* 7.9.13, Augustine introduces these texts in this way: "... procurasti mihi ... quosdam Platoniorum libros ex graeca lingua in latinam uersos..." For recent commentary on the identity of these books and what Augustine learns from them see: P. King, "Augustine's Encounter With Neoplatonism," *The Modern Schoolman* 82.3 (2005), 213-226; R.D. Crouse, "Paucis Mutatis Verbis: St. Augustine's Platonism," *Augustine And His Critics*, eds. R. Dodaro and G. Lawless (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 37-50; J.M. Rist, *Augustine; Ancient Thought Baptized*, 3, 8 (n.11); J.J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), vol. 1, xlv-xlvi; vol. 2, 421-4; C.J. Starnes, *Augustine's Conversion* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1990), 182-3, 202-3; and P. F. Beatrice, "Quosdam Platoniorum Libros: The Platonic Readings of Augustine in Milan," *Vigiliae Christianae* 43 (1989), 248-81. As L. Ayres remarks, it should be kept in mind that the Neoplatonism Augustine becomes acquainted with at that time is highly eclectic. "The Fundamental Grammar of Augustine's Trinitarian Theology," *Augustine And His Critics*, 51-76, 53-5.

²⁵ *Civ. Dei*, 12.2; translation (Latin is added) is by H. Bettenson, *City of God*, (New York; Penguin Books, 1972, 1984), 473. On God as *Unlimited Existence* see also *conf.*, 13.31.46: "By the Spirit we see that everything which in some degree has existence is good; since it derives from Him who does not merely exist in some degree since He is existence." Augustine writes: "Per quem videmus, quia bonum est, quidquid aliquo modo est: ab illo enim est, qui non aliquot modo est, sed est, est."

In the remainder of *civ. Dei* 12.2 Augustine explains that *essentia* derives from *esse* and signifies what the Greeks call *ousia* (substance). However, in *Trin.* 5.2.3 and 7.5.10, he asserts that creatures are better named substance (*substantia*), while God is properly called being (*essentia*): *Trin.*, 5.2.3: "Est tamen sine dubitatione substantia uel si melius hoc appellatur essentia, quam graeci 'ousia' uocant.... Et ideo sola est incommutabilis substantia uel essentia quae deus est, cui profecto ipsum esse unde essentia nominata est maxime ac uerissime competit." *Trin.*, 7.5.10: "Res ergo mutabiles.... Vnde manifestum est deum abusiue substantiam uocari ut nomine usitatore intellegatur essentia, quod uere ac proprie dicitur ita ut fortasse solum deum dici oporteat essentiam. Est enim uere solus quia

[2] When I first came to know You, You raised me up to make me see that what I saw is Being [esse], and that I who saw am not yet Being [esse]... And You cried from far away: “Now, I am Who am” [*ego sum qui sum*] (Ex 3.14)... And I considered other things below You, and I saw that neither can they be said absolutely to be [*nec omnino esse*] or absolutely not to be [*nec omnino non esse*]. They are because they come from You [*esse quidem, quoniam abs te sunt*]. But they are not [*non esse autem*] because they are not what You are [*quoniam id quod es non sunt*]. That which truly is [*id enim vere est*] is that which unchangeably abides [*quod incommutabiliter manet*].²⁶

[3] These philosophers [that is, the Platonists] ... have seen ... that, in every changeable thing, the form [*speciem*] which makes it that which it is [*qua est quidquid illud est*], whatever be its mode of nature [*quoquo modo et qualiscumque natura est*], can only be through Him who truly is [*qui vere est*], because He is unchangeable [*quia incommutabiliter est*]. And therefore, whether we consider the whole body of the world, ... all the bodies which are in it, ... all life, ... sensation, ... intelligence, ... all can only be through Him who absolutely is [*ab illo ... qui simpliciter est*]. For to Him it is not one thing to be [esse] and another to live ... to understand, ... to be blessed... But to Him to live, to understand, to be blessed are to be [*hoc est illi esse*].²⁷

At certain points in these passages, Augustine identifies God as “immutable” rather than as *esse* or *summa essentia sui*²⁸ but “immutable” is intended as explanatory in part rather than in whole. In each text, *esse* is primary—though this is not always immediately evident. In the first selection, God is identified as immutable (*inmutabilis*) because He is in the highest degree (*hoc est summe sit*); hence, *esse* relates to *inmutabilis* in the manner that cause relates to effect. It is clear in the second passage that *esse* is primary and *incommutabiliter* secondary insofar as the latter is introduced to convey, according to the manner of degree, what it means that God is *esse*. The third text states that God “truly is” (*vere est*) because “He is unchangeable” (*incommutabiliter est*); however, the overall sense is that *esse* is God’s principal attribute.²⁹ Divine immutability is cited at the outset because of context; Augustine intends to distinguish creatures—thus far classified as “mutable”—from God; therefore, he defines God initially as immutable. But to clarify what he means by God—and therefore by immutability—God is subsequently distinguished as *esse*. A similar logic applies to Augustine’s account of creatures in these passages; they are principally defined as limited *esse*, secondarily distinguished as “nature” and/or “mutable.” Finally, the first and third passages also show that Augustine is clear on the distinction between *existing* and *mode of existing*—but more on that in a moment.

The decisive point at present is this: judging by the evidence cited above, Augustine and Aquinas agree that i) God is *Unlimited Existing*—that is, in God Existing is “the basis on which the other attributes rest, the root from

incommutabilis est, idque suum nomen famulo suo Moysi enuntiauit cum ait: Ego sum qui sum.” For Augustine, then, God is best named by *esse* or its derivate *essentia* (See Ayres, “Being (*esse/essentia*),” *op. cit.*, 98); for Thomas, on the other hand, *essentia* can mean “essence” rather than “being” (for example, his treatise *De ente* [being] *et essentia* [essence]); and God is best named *ipsum esse per se subsistens*. This shows that Augustine and Thomas have similar conceptions but different vocabularies.

Augustine’s concentration on *esse* as the primary divine attribute distinguishes his understanding of divinity from Plotinus’s subordination, in his divine triad, of Intellect-Being to the One (See Clark, “Augustine on Immutability and Mutability,” 13, and Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 70); and Porphyry’s One in Whom existence (*hyparxis*), power or life (*dynamis*), and intelligence (*nous*) are apparently rated equal. For textual evidence and discussion of the Porphyrean triad, see J.J. O’Meara, *Porphyry’s Philosophy from Oracles in Augustine* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1959), 118–122; and J. Dillon, “Logos and Trinity: Patterns of Platonist Influence on Early Christianity,” in *The Philosophy in Christianity*, ed. G. Vessey (Cambridge/New York/Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1–13, 8–13.

²⁶ *Conf.*, 7.10.16–11.17; translation (Latin is added) is by Chadwick, 123–124.

²⁷ *Civ. Dei*, 8.6; translation (Latin is added) is from Bourke, *The Essential Augustine*, 59. Cf. *De moribus ecclesiae*, I, 11, 19; *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 121, 6–8; 127, 15; 134, 4; *In Johannis evangelium tractatus*, 99.4; *Trin.* I, 1, 2; *civ. Dei*, 11.10, 3; *Epistula*, 187.6; *Sermo*, 241, 2, and 342, 3.

²⁸ Cf. *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 135 (134); and *In Johannis evangelium tractatus*, 38.8–9, where God is identified as *ipsum esse*.

²⁹ Cf. *De natura boni*, 19 (c. A.D. 399).

which they spring”³⁰; ii) God’s Existing is that in which creatures ultimately participate; and iii) participated existing is the pre-eminent excellence comprising creatures.

3.) COMPARING AUGUSTINE’S AND THOMAS’S EXISTENTIAL ANALYSIS OF CREATURES. Since we have established that Augustine and Aquinas share a participation-centered metaphysics with a strong existential dimension, let us now determine the relative degree that each is existential and therefore to what extent Thomas’s metaphysics can be described as “essentially Augustinian.” To this end, I leave aside for now issues pertaining to audience, context, integration of inheritances, and methodology—which a complete study of the matter would need to include—and focus entirely on the following philosophical problem: how does one express accurately the participated structure of creatures? It is one thing to maintain that created substances participate in divine *esse* but quite another to show how they are structured as such. What we are looking for, therefore, is an account of created substance identifying principles intrinsic to the creature manifesting its i) existing; ii) existing in this manner (that is, *as such*); and iii) participating.

Augustine’s doctrine. I commence with Augustine, arguing that we find tension and, therefore, ample room for development in his thinking since, *in terms of metaphysical principles*, he ultimately identifies the existing and participating aspects of creatures *from the outside* rather than *from the inside*. In other words, he distinguishes those aspects in terms of citing the creature’s relationship with God (for example, as made by God) instead of from the perspective of its intrinsic metaphysical structure. This is visible where he defines creatures as i) mutable; ii) constituted by measure, form, and order; and iii) composites of form and matter.

Where creatures are classified as “mutable,” mutability is coupled with predicating “immutability” of God to signify the *Unlimited Esse* God is from the *limited esse* that is creature. However, while this distinguishes the creature from God, defined as “immutable,”³¹ it does not *of itself* convey the creature’s aspects of existing and participating,³² that is, a major part of what it means to be given existence (*dedit esse*).³³ Of course, “mutable” might represent a metaphysical principle if by this is designated formless matter (see below) but, so far as I can tell, Augustine does not use the term in that sense in the contexts cited above; instead, “mutable” signifies *the creature as a whole* rather than its composing principles or parts. Nevertheless, even if Augustine means formless matter, then, by his own standard, “mutable” must be distinguished as a secondary principle since of *what is* it only describes some component of the *what*. As it stands, then, “mutable” falls short of the fundamental insight that creatures are participating *esse*.

A similar conclusion applies to “measure, form, and order” (*modus/species/ordo*) and/or “measure, number, and weight” (*mensura/numerus/pondus*).³⁴ On the one hand, Augustine maintains that every creature is measured, formed, and ordered—that is, an individual substance distinguished by its species, and related accordingly to other beings and God. This demarcates the creature from God and distinguishes creatures from each other insofar as some are better and/or less measured, formed, and ordered than others.³⁵ On the other hand, Augustine holds that creatures receive their measure, form, and order from God.³⁶ He means, therefore, that whatever is structured

³⁰Cooke, “The Mutability-Immutability Principle,” *op. cit.*, 42, but said by him with reference to the attribute “immutability.” See Macdonald, “The divine nature,” *op. cit.*, 84-85, and Anderson, *St. Augustine and Being*, *op. cit.*, 12-18.

³¹ For example, *conf.*, 11.4.6; *civ. Dei*, 12.2 and 8.6 (cited above); and *De natura boni*, 1: “The highest good, than which there is no higher, is God, and consequently He is unchangeable good, hence truly eternal and truly immortal. All other good things are only from Him, not of Him. For what is of Him is Himself. And consequently if He alone is unchangeable, all things that He has made, because He has made them out of nothing, are changeable.” (Bourke, *op. cit.*, 48.) Augustine writes: “Summum bonum, quo superius non est, Deus est; ac per hoc incommutabile bonum est, ideo vere aeternum et vere immortale. Caetera omnia bona non nisi ab illo sunt sed non de illo. De illo enim quod est, hoc quod ipse est; ab illo autem quae facta sunt, non sunt quod ipse. Ac per hoc, si solus ipse incommutabilis, omnia quae fecit, quia ex nihilo fecit, mutabilia sunt” (http://www.augustinus.it/latino/natura_bene/natura_bene.htm).

³² Cf. Cooke, *op. cit.*, 37-49; and Clark, *op. cit.*, 18-21.

³³ *Civ. Dei*, 12.2.

³⁴ For example, *De Genesi ad litteram*, 4.3.7.

³⁵ For example, *De natura boni*, 3.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 3 and 10; and *De libero arbitrio voluntatis*, 2.20.203.

as such participates, but this insight is only achieved by joining together the insights distinguished separately above. As principles, measure, form, and order function better than “mutable” since they disclose what structures “mutability”; however, they share the same deficiency.

Analysis of creatures as form-matter composites brings the same conclusion. For example, in *conf.* 12–13 Augustine maintains that every created substance is constituted of form and (ultimately *formless*) matter (*informis materia*)³⁷; apart from these two co-principles no substance can be³⁸; and between these principles, form is the more decisive insofar as it determines the thing to be *this* (rather than *that*) be-ing.³⁹ On the other hand, Augustine maintains that both formless matter⁴⁰ and form are ultimately from God.⁴¹ Therefore, while he means that to be a composite is to participate, his principles signify what the creature is. Describing the creature as a composite does a better job of distinguishing its ontological structure than “mutable” and “measure/form/order,” but it does not manifest its *existing* and *participating*.

By now it should be clear that there is ample room for development in Augustine’s account of the metaphysical structures of creatures. Judging by his foundational Neoplatonic understanding of God as *Esse* and creature as participating *esse*, Augustine’s overall analysis is justly characterized as having an existential emphasis. Moreover, he rightly distinguishes principles identifying the *what*, that is, the mode of being, of creatures, as well as explanatory of the changes they undergo, and by which they come-to-be and/or cease-to-be (*Confessiones*, 12.6.6). He also recognizes a crucial difference between predicating “existing” and “nature” of creatures. However, just as *participating* implies some intrinsic principle(s) manifesting the creature’s mode of being, it also suggests some intrinsic principle(s) disclosing its existing and ontological dependence. By his very own standards, then, Augustine’s understanding of the creature both implies and requires development.

Aspects of Thomas’s doctrine. By contrast, Thomas’s metaphysical analysis of creatures prominently features a doctrine of *existential* participation.⁴² This is not only because he deliberately analyzes God as *Esse*⁴³ but because he *explicitly* identifies participating *esse* as the core perfection comprising creatures. Contrary to Augustine, Thomas’s insight into participating *esse* both informs *and* is transposed into the creature’s ontological structure in the form of a metaphysical co-principle, namely, *existence (actus essendi)*, coupled with a correlative co-principle, namely, *essence (essentia)*, accounting principally for the creature’s mode of existing, and that are related to one another as act relates to potency. As a result, that creatures are *participated existing* is made clear both from the inside, namely, as composed of what has been *received*, and from the outside, that is, as created by God (as having received their being through another). This develops what we found in Augustine.

It is well known that this crucial aspect of Thomas’s metaphysics is succinctly stated in *De ente et essentia*, 4–5.⁴⁴ While arguing that intelligences/angels must be composites of some kind, he writes:

³⁷ *Conf.*, 12.3; 13.33.48; formless matter is named *hyle* in *De natura boni*, 18.

³⁸ *Conf.*, 12.1–5, 29; 13.33.48.

³⁹ For example, *De libero arbitrio voluntatis*, 2.17.172–177; and *civ. Dei*, 8.6. For Augustine, this means that form is ‘prior in origin’ to matter (see *conf.* 12.29).

⁴⁰ *De natura boni*, 18; *conf.*, 12.7.7.

⁴¹ *Civ. Dei*, 8.6: “The form [*speciem*] which makes it that which it is, whatever be its mode or nature, can only *be* through Him who truly *is*, because He is unchangeable,” (Bourke, *op. cit.*, 59). Cf. *De libero arbitrio voluntatis*, 2.17.172–173.

⁴² I say ‘features’ (rather than ‘centers’) since Thomas’s existential analysis of creatures draws its existence-essence distinction from one use of the act-potency distinction. According to Thomas, (following Aristotle—e.g., *Metaphysics* 12.2-6), act-potency can be employed analogically to describe each of non-substantial change, substantial change, and the mode of being of substance itself. Additionally, as will see above, Thomas’s novel existence-essence distinction specifies his act-potency analysis of creatures such that the act/potency or act alone mode of describing what constitutes creatures is viewed as potency (in the sense of essence) relative to act (now designating what causes the thing’s existing). This, of course, does not mean that Thomas’s existence-essence teaching is simply Aristotelian for it is obviously his more fundamental existential outlook which governs his various usages of act-potency and development of the existence-essence distinction.

⁴³ For example, *S.T.* I, q. 3, a. 4, “Whether Essence and Existence are the same in God?”; and *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, 7.2, “Is it God’s substance or essence to exist?”

⁴⁴ For extensive analysis of *De ente et essentia* and bibliography, see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, *op. cit.*, 132–176; S.A. Long, “On the Natural Knowledge of the Real Distinction of Essence and Existence,”

Now a thing's attributes are caused either from within its nature (like a human being's sense of the ridiculous) or by some extrinsic source (like light in the atmosphere by the sun). But the very existence of a thing [*quod ipsum esse*] cannot be caused by its own form or whatness [*quiditate rei*—I am talking of agent causality—because then something would be causing itself and bringing itself into existence, which is impossible. So everything in which existence [*esse*] and nature [*natura*] differ must get its existence from another. And because all getting from another must eventually lead to something possessing of itself, there must be something which can ultimately cause everything's existence because it is its own existence [*ipsa est esse tantum*]; otherwise the causes would go on for ever, with everything which is not just existence requiring a cause of its existence, as we have said. Clearly then intelligences are form and existence [*forma et esse*], and get their existence from a first existence which is just existence: that is, the ultimate cause, God.

Now whatever acquires something from another has a potentiality [*in potentia*] for what it acquires, a potentiality that what is acquired actualizes; so the very whatness or form which an intelligence is has a potentiality for the existence it acquires from God, and the acquired existence actualizes it [*et illud esse receptum est per modum actus*]. So there is potentiality and actualization [*potentia et actus*] in intelligences, though if we called that form and material we would equivocate in the way ... we would equivocate were we to say intellectual substances, like bodily substances, underwent change, or took on or were subject to form (all of which seem to apply to material things as such).⁴⁵

For present purposes, I distinguish five crucial components in Thomas's teaching.

- 1.) A thing's (substance's) attributes are either caused by its nature or caused in it by another.⁴⁶
- 2.) A thing's existence, however, can't be caused by its nature or essence since that would mean it brings itself into existence—which is impossible.
- 3.) Therefore, any substance wherein nature differs from existence must receive its existence from another.
- 4.) Since no thing can bring itself into existence, those substances receiving their existence from another must ultimately receive their existence from some ontologically supreme substance (namely, God) in whom there is no distinction between nature and existence, that is to say, whose nature is to exist. Otherwise those in whom nature and existence differ are both cause and effect in the same respect; that is to say, in them nature and existence both do and do not differ—which is impossible
- 5.) Every substance except God, then, is a composite of the co-principles (i) *existence*, what makes *to-be* a given substance, and (ii) *essence*, the *whatness or identity* distinguishing one substance from another by determining its act of existence to *this* manner or instance of being. In composed substances, nature/essence is related to existence as potency (that which becomes form or substance through the agency of act) is related to act (that is, substance or form—and therefore whose activity can make to be and/or or develop substance or form). Hence, while the act of

Nova et Vetera (English) 1 (2003), 75–108; and J. Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965). A good starting point for analysis of the classical roots of the existence-essence distinction (with bibliography) is D. Bradshaw, "Neoplatonic Origins of the Act of Being," *The Review of Metaphysics* 53 (1999), 383–401, and K. Corrigan, "Essence and Existence in the *Enneads*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. L.P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 105–129.

⁴⁵ The translation, which I have modified in places, is by T. McDermott, *Essence and Existence*, in *Aquinas: Selected Philosophical Writings* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 90–113, 105. Thomas writes: "Omne autem quod ... intellectualibus et corporalibus ..." (<http://www.corpusthomicum.org/oe.html>).

⁴⁶ For Thomas's analysis of the four causes see *De principiis naturae*. Augustine presupposes but does not have the same doctrine. For example, see *conf.* 11.5.7 where he describes making in a manner consonant with the four causes apart from actually distinguishing the four causes. What each of the four causes signifies is ultimately identified, namely, material, form, agent, and purpose; but the causes themselves, as metaphysical principles by which to describe all making, are not identified. This parallels the essential difference between Thomas's and Augustine's explanations of creatures as participating *esse*, namely, Thomas both distinguishes and exercises the metaphysical principles which Augustine presupposes and implicitly employs.

existence (*actus essendi*) is the principal participated attribute or perfection comprising composite substances,⁴⁷ essence—related to existence as matter is related to form—is the pre-eminent potency. Hence, every creature can be described as an act-potency composite whereby act is specified by existence and potency by essence.

Nevertheless, although the act-potency distinction as such originates with Aristotle,⁴⁸ Thomas's specification thereof in his existence-essence distinction is a new development related to its predecessor, in certain respects, as form to matter—or, put differently, analogously rather than univocally—because it is rooted in his Neoplatonic existential perspective. Analyzed in terms of its Aristotelian background, Thomas's existence-essence distinction is the result of his synthesizing two related usages of act-potency, one primary the other secondary.⁴⁹ On the one hand, existence stands to essence as act stands to potency since existence makes the essence to-be. On the other hand, however, essence is related to existence as act relates to potency since it limits the act of existence to *this existing substance*. Therefore, while existence is primarily act and secondarily potency, essence is primarily potency but secondarily act. What distinguishes Thomas's first use of act-potency is twofold. To begin with, while he agrees with Aristotle that act is more truly the cause of something than potency, he does not identify act with substantial form but *as that which causes substantial form*—and, for that matter, everything else belonging to the substance—to be. Aristotle did not make that distinction—or if he did it was implicit. By the same principle, potency is not what the thing is made from, that is to say some substance or potentiality (as marble is related to a statue) but what is altogether non-being (cannot-be) apart from the act of existence. That is also new. In this respect, then, Aristotle's and Thomas's doctrines are related analogously. Thomas's second use of act-potency—wherein potency limits the *actus essendi* to this substance/mode of being—is similarly viewed but in this instance he reverses key aspects of the original act-potency doctrine. Whereas for Aristotle act identifies *what the thing is* (and is more truly the cause of the thing than potency,) and potency designates *what it is made from*—for example, act is the form wooden desk and potency is the wood—Thomas in this instance makes (i) potency designate *whatness* and (ii) both act and potency designate *what from*. Taken altogether, then, while it remains that act is more truly the cause than potency, each principle is identified with essence and existence. Each of these principles, then, has a primary and secondary identification but, most important, i) *that the thing is*—a new distinction—is determined by the act of existence; ii) *what the thing is* is principally determined by potency rather than by act—another new doctrine; and iii) *what the thing is made from* is determined more (or at least as much) by act than by potency insofar as it causes the potency to-be—another new teaching. Hence, each of these distinctions modifies significantly aspects of the act/potency analysis found in Aristotle.

What accounts for these crucial modifications? As the differences stated above attest, it is determined by Thomas's bedrock understanding (shared with Augustine) i) that God is *Esse* and ii) creatures are participated *esse*. This is because if participation in divine *Esse* causes a substance *to be*, it must also cause *to be* both i) every-

⁴⁷ In *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, 7.2, ad 9, Thomas writes (the translation, which I have modified in places and to which I have added Latin, is by McDermott, 207–208): “What I am calling *esse* [being in being] is of all things the most perfect [*quod hoc quod dico esse est inter omnia perfectissimum*]. Clearly this is so, since act is always more perfect than potency [*quia actus est semper perfectio potentia*] and no form whatever can be understood actualized except by thinking of it as in being. Human-being or fire-ness can be thought of as existing (*existens*) potentially in some material or virtually in some cause, or even in mind, but only by being in being is it made actually existent. So clearly what I am calling *esse* is the actualization of all actuality, and consequently the perfection of all perfections [*quod dico esse est actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum*]. Nor should we think anything is ever added to ... *esse* in the way forms are added [to matter], or actualization to potentiality: for anything added in that way is different in essence from that to which it is added, but nothing outside existence can be added to it, since nothing exists outside existence except the non-existent, and that cannot be either form or matter. So existing is determined by other things not as potentiality by actualization, but rather as actualization by potentiality, in the way we include in definitions of forms their appropriate matter to differentiate them, saying, for example, that the soul is the actualization of a natural organic body; it is in this way that we distinguish this existence from that existence, as existence in this or that sort of nature. And this is why pseudo-Dionysius says that though living things are more excellent than existent things, existence is more excellent than life: for living things do not only have life but, together with life, have existence.”

⁴⁸ See Aristotle, *inter alia*, *Physics* 3.1; and *Metaphysics* 9.1-8.

⁴⁹ Cf. Clarke, *The One And The Many*, *op. cit.*, 80-90.

-thing composing the substance, and ii) the mutual relations therein of its composing principles. And, as Thomas notes himself, *inter alia*, in *S.T. I*, 44.2, this new perspective requires rethinking and restating the nature and relationship between the composing principles distinguished by Aristotle. What is needed, in other words, is a ‘new beginning’ of sorts in the analysis of finite substance. Therefore, Thomas’s impetus and ability to articulate philosophically the participationist/existential perspective resulting in his existence-essence distinction requires his reconsidering and transforming key aspects of the act-potency distinction he inherits from Aristotle. Hence, his novel and subtle specification of act-potency by existence-essence is motivated by his Christian-Neoplatonic doctrine of participation. Relative to Aristotle, then, Thomas’s existence-essence distinction represents new wine in new wineskins.

Thomas’s reasoning can be expressed like this:

i) I (this human person) am comprised of a host of attributes (or perfections) including *existence*, but each of these attributes depend decisively on the latter. For example, *my* attribute *living body* depends on *my* attribute *substantial form soul*; but this attribute—like *body*—cannot bring itself into existence. Hence, *my* soul (the act of *my* body) and *body* depend for their being upon the attribute *existence*. That is *my* principal attribute and, in this respect, everything else comprising me—classified by the attribute *essence*—depends upon it as *potency* is related to *act*. However, as I must exist in a determinate way, it is also true that *essence* determines *existence* as act determines potency. In other words, since I am a human being, *my* act of existing is calibrated to *my* essence. So, existence and essence have a symbiotic relationship whereby *existence* is prior in order.

ii) But the constituting attributes or principles *existence* and *essence* cannot bring themselves into existence. By the logic of efficient causality these principles must be caused by something existing, namely, substance(s). Since no substance can be the efficient cause of itself, it follows that *my* being—and therefore *my* constituent co-principles existence and essence—depends on other substances.

iii) However, *my* being cannot derive principally from substances that are also existence-essence composites. Indeed, because no thing—including an order or collective of inter-acting composed substances—can bring itself into being; and since an order of composed substances must have some efficient cause; it follows that this order depends upon some non-composed substance whose essence is Existing/Existence. In other words, each composed substance depends on God as first cause and represents a limited participation in His Existing. To hold otherwise implies that I i) am not a composed substance or ii) have brought myself into being or iii) am God.

That i) God’s Essence is Existing and ii) *essence* constituting creatures participates in Him is made clear by the following. To begin with, as God is first cause of composed substances; since participated *esse*, the primary principle or perfection comprising such substances, is related to all other constituting perfections—namely, to *essence*—as act is related to potency; and because God is pure, Unlimited Existing; it follows that His Existing *is*, in a pre-eminent way, all participated perfections—the plenitude of *esse* and *essentia*. On the latter point, Thomas writes:

God’s essence is identified with his own very existence; so that some philosophers have denied any essence [*essentiam*] or whatness [*quiditatem*] to God at all, because He has not essence distinct from his existence [*essentia sua non est aliud quam esse eius*].... Existence in God is of such a sort that it cannot be added to, distinct therefore from all other existence by its very purity; as... the book of Causes [*Book of Causes*] says: “its own pure goodness makes the first cause, pure existence, individual.” ... That God is simply existence does not mean He has to lack other perfections and excellences. Rather He possesses every perfection of every genus—his perfection is without qualification ...—possessing them more excellently than anything else can because in Him is unified what in others is diverse. And this is because all these perfections belong to Him simply as existing; just as someone exercising the activities of all qualities through one quality would possess all qualities in that one, so God in his very existing possesses all perfections.⁵⁰

Therefore, insofar as all composed substances participate in the God whose Essence is Existing, every essence constituting these substances must have God as first cause.

⁵⁰ *De ente et essentia*, ch. 5. (Translation [Latin is added] is by McDermott, 106–107.) Thomas writes: “Aliquid enim est ... omnes perfectiones habet” (<http://www.corpusthomicum.org/oe.html>).

What does all this mean concerning our metaphysical analysis of created substances? We distinguish their composition by employing higher- and lower-order metaphysical principles predicated analogously of higher- and lower-order substances, according to which can be signified how, of what, and why they are composed. To begin with, angels and men are described as act-potency composites whereby act is specified by existence and potency by essence. Moreover, as existence-essence composites are made i) from something else, ii) by some efficient cause, and iii) for some purpose, there are also presupposed Thomas's doctrines of the four causes (and participation). Since the principles existence and essence designate what constitutes a given substance, they are employed in the manner of material cause; formal cause is the substance made, namely, this angel or this man; efficient cause is the ultimate maker, namely, God; and the final cause is why God creates, namely, so that the creature can participate in His "pure goodness." (In other words, all composed substances exist by participation in God.) Therefore, following from and like the principles i) participation, ii) the four causes, and iii) act-potency, existence-essence is predicated analogously of finite substance.

Beneath existence-essence, we identify other principles guided by participation, the four causes, and act-potency (used in terms of the philosophy of nature) but accounting especially for the *essence* of substances and the substantial and accidental changes undergone by bodily substances. While humans are composites of *form* and *matter*, distinguished as the *substantial form soul* and *body*, angels are described as *form* since they are understood as non-composite (that is, non-bodily) intelligences.⁵¹ *Form* and *matter*, therefore, also signify analogously—according to the substance of which they are predicated. While *form* said of bodily substance distinguishes species and, within each species, *matter* (*since each individual is a composite of matter and form*) distinguishes individuals, *form* distinguishes one angel from another since each is its own species.

Therefore, because angels and men are, first of all, participated substances and consequently act-potency composites whose existence and essence are received from God, what is designated by *form* with respect to the angels and *form* and *matter* (and *soul* and *body*) with respect to humans has more to do with essence than existence. In other words, I (that is, this human being) can be described from one direction as a composite of substantial-form-soul and matter (human soul and body); this *distinguishes what I am* from God and angels on the one hand and from animals and plants on the other hand. Used in another way, these principles—like *substance* and *accident*—can also distinguish the changes I undergo as a composite of soul and body, and by which I come to exist and cease to exist. So, they distinguish *what* and, to some limited degree, *how* I am.

The principles *form* and *matter*, however, do not convey my participating existing. It is true that I would not exist apart from my soul and body, and that my soul actualizes my body; but neither my soul nor body cause themselves to be. This is also the case with one use of the principles act and potency in the manner of form and matter since act can signify soul while potency can distinguish body. Used in this way, soul and body, whether described here as a composite of form and matter or of act and potency, depend on some act of existence causing them—and therefore me—to be. The most foundational aspects of my substance, then, are designated by the principles existence-essence (related to one another as act relates to potency and, secondarily, as potency relates to act), since they signify unequivocally that i) I exist; ii) I exist *as this*; and iii) my existing is received (from another).⁵²

How, then, does Thomas's metaphysical analysis of creatures compare with Augustine's? To begin with, he shares an existential understanding wherein all finite substances i) participate in the God Who is *Existing Itself*; ii) are composed of participated co-principles; and iii) are distinguished from each other by employing higher-order and lower-order metaphysical principles. These principles, ultimately exercised from the perspective of a metaphysical understanding of God as *Subsisting Existing* and *Creator*, are predicated analogously of finite substance to explain various aspects of existing.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, cc. 2–5.

⁵² Therefore, describing an angel as *form* or a human as *form and matter* or *soul and body* means, in each instance, what is only potentially existing, that is, the *what* of *what is*, and requires, to exist, an act of existence. On the other hand, describing an angel or human as an existence-essence composite *manifests*—albeit in a very general way—all of *what is* and the received character thereof. That is why the principles *form*, *form and matter*, and *soul and body* (and *substance/accident*) principally describe essence and depend on and signify analogously the more fundamental principles existence-essence and act-potency though the latter pair, having a wide analogical signification, can also be used to describe from and matter.

However, Thomas's emphatic participation-centered analysis is more existential and, in this respect, has the happy consequence of clarifying, ordering, and developing the insights shared with Augustine. Following from his key doctrines of participation, the four causes, and act-potency, Thomas's existence-essence distinction allows him to both analyze at length that God is Unlimited Existing and make crystal clear the *existing*, *mode of existing*, and *participating* aspects of finite substance. By contrast, Augustine *understands* the creature in essentially the same manner—even so far as distinguishing between its *existing* and *nature*; however, he does not identify *specific principles within the creature* disclosing existing and participating, and distinguishing them from *nature*. Rather, as he recognizes, the principles he cites signify *nature*—in which respect his analysis can appear *essentialist*. Consequently, Thomas's Christian-Neoplatonic existence-essence distinction elucidates something that Augustine's analysis both presupposes and requires.⁵³

4.) CONCLUSION. With these thoughts in mind, we reconsider the claims stated at the outset. First, against the assertion that Thomas's metaphysics is “existential” and Augustine's “essentialist,” we see that each contains a strong existential dimension. But in the areas we have examined, Thomas is such *to a greater degree* than Augustine. On this score, then, Augustine and Thomas differ individually rather than by species.

The second claim, more reasonable than the first, is that Thomas's metaphysical teaching is “essentially Augustinian” since he developed rightly Augustine's doctrine in a manner impossible to Augustine because of his “faulty” Neoplatonic—read non-Aristotelian—philosophical equipment. We have not made a complete study and comparison of Augustine's and Thomas's metaphysics, but in light of i) their shared participation-centered metaphysics and existential understanding of substance and ii) Thomas's extension thereof by his existence-essence distinction, we can certainly classify Thomistic metaphysics as Augustinian in some respects. The point, however, is neither that Thomas's metaphysics is a species of Augustinian metaphysics; nor that Thomas found in Augustine the primary inspiration for his existence-essence distinction. Such claims would be outlandish since the existence-essence distinction—together with the principles act-potency informing it—Thomas employs to *develop* the insights he shares with Augustine are appropriated and/or developed from sources Augustine could not be acquainted with, namely, Aristotle, Boethius, Pseudo-Dionysius, Avicenna, Maimonides, and the *Liber de Causis*.⁵⁴ However, it is clear that Thomas's distinction i) depends on his sharing with Augustine a common emphasis on the existential aspect of creatures and ii) develops this outlook in a manner agreeable with that direction in Augustine's thought. Therefore, Thomas can be described as Augustinian because he i) shares with Augustine fundamental insights into God as *Esse* and creatures as participating *esse*, ii) is influenced by Augustine in such matters at least in some general way, and iii) develops accordingly these shared insights. Nevertheless, in terms of Thomas's specific insights, Augustine's doctrines stand as material cause or potentiality. Since Thomas's i) teaching in these matters is more profound and developed, and ii) interest in metaphysics is broader and better defined than Augustine's, it would be presumptuous to hold otherwise.⁵⁵ Hence, if we take into account the various factors and perspectives considered above, Thomas's metaphysics is “essentially Augustinian” in at least these two ways: i) as individuals in a species share a common nature (*viz.* Christian-Neoplatonism) that is mediated, in some way, by one individual (Augustine) to another (Thomas), and ii) as actuality (Thomas's metaphysics) is related to potentiality (Augustine's metaphysics). All told, this

⁵³ By the logic of existential participation, the metaphysical principles that Thomas establishes in the creature also make more evident the creature's dependence upon and likeness to God. This is because the creature's composition by distinctions means that its Maker has non-participated distinctions in which participate the creature's existence and essence. In *S.T.* I, 45. 7 (“Whether in Creatures is necessarily found a Trace of the Trinity?”), Thomas cites Augustine (*Trin.*, 6.10) to support his argument that in each creature is found a representation of the Trinity (*repraesentatio Trinitatis*) according to the manner of a “trace” (*per modum vestigii*) insofar as it i) subsists in its own being (*creatura subsistit in suo esse*)—signifying dependence on the Father viewed as creator; ii) is determined by form to a particular species (*habet formam per quam determinatur*)—suggesting dependence on the Word conceived in the manner of exemplar cause; and iii) is ordered or related to something else (*habet ordinem ad aliquid aliud*)—disclosing dependence on the Spirit inasmuch as his love orders the creature to its end. I take these to signify much the same distinctions as I have identified above, namely, existence, essence, and participating. In this respect, then, Aquinas's analysis agrees with and develops Augustine's insight into the trinitarian character of creatures.

⁵⁴ I refer to the sources cited in *De ente et essentia* and *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, 7.2.

⁵⁵ Obviously, Thomas benefits from having at his disposal i) more treatises in and engaging metaphysics and ii) over eight hundred years of philosophical development between Augustine's death and his own public career.

commentator's representation of the relationship between Augustine's and Thomas's metaphysics is more accurate than the other's. That said, what about the second commentator's charge that Augustine is limited by "faulty" Neoplatonic (that is, non-Aristotelian) philosophical equipment? We have not distinguished here anything intrinsically wrong with Augustine's equipment—which is not to say that the claim is untrue. It is evident, however, that (relative to Thomas) Augustine has less philosophical resources, his range in metaphysics is limited, and he would have benefitted significantly from studying first-hand Aristotle's writings. On the other hand, we have seen that Thomas integrates and develops his existence-essence distinction within a fundamentally existential Neoplatonic metaphysical perspective which by its very nature—as even Augustine's hybrid notions of efficient cause, substance, form, and matter attest—includes and integrates, in various manners, "Aristotelian" inheritances.⁵⁶ Additionally, Thomas's more penetrating analysis of God as *Esse* and creatures as participating *esse* shows that, in this respect, he is more intensively Neoplatonic (since more Christian-Neoplatonic) than Augustine. Therefore, when weighing the relative merits of Augustine's and Thomas's philosophical equipment, the principal distinction is perhaps better stated as between a less-developed and a more-developed Neoplatonism (or Christian-Neoplatonism) than between Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism.

Why, then, are the commentators cited at the outset misleading? Our analysis suggests this is because, in various ways, they misinterpret Thomas and impose that distortion on Augustine. To begin with, it is evident that each commentator, albeit in different manners, describes the difference between Augustine's and Thomas's metaphysics in terms of Thomas's subordination of Neoplatonism and/or Augustine's loyalty to Neoplatonism. Therefore, while our first commentator holds that Augustine's Neoplatonism makes his metaphysics 'essentialist', the other implies that it keeps Augustine's metaphysics from being properly philosophical or scientific.⁵⁷ According to the first commentator, Thomas's metaphysics is unique because its *unprecedented* emphasis on *esse* enables it to integrate into a superior synthesis the chief insights, on the one hand, of *Neoplatonism*—identified as participationist and essentialist but as non-Aristotelian—and, on the other hand, of *Aristotelianism*—identified with act-potency and as essentialist but as non-Platonic/non-participationist.⁵⁸ Thomas, he implies, both i) subordinates essentialist emphases and ii) links together the participation and act-potency emphases in these competing philosophies by focusing on *Esse* as the core attribute of God and participated *esse* as the core attribute of creatures. Insofar, then, as Thomas's doctrines of God, participation, and creatures are uniquely integrative because uniquely existential, his metaphysics is distinguished from any other. Hence: "The final result of the fusion of the two theories into a single coherent synthesis can thus properly be called neither Aristotelianism nor Neoplatonism. It is something decisively new, which can only be styled "Thomism.""⁵⁹ Consequently, Thomas is set against Augustine by classifying the latter as a Neoplatonist-essentialist who, lacking Aristotle's act-potency distinction (which is true) and Thomas' philosophical acumen (problematic) propounds an essentialist doctrine of participation (false), subordinating existence to essence in his analysis of substance. For his part, our second commentator maintains that "the main difference between St. Augustine and St. Thomas in the philosophic and noetic order ... [is] ... the substitution of efficient causality, the dominant Aristotelian-Thomistic note, for *participation*, the dominant Augustinian note."⁶⁰ On his view, then, Thomas's metaphysics is superior since it analyzes being in light of an Aristotelian-Thomistic doctrine of efficient causality rather than in light of an ambiguous Neoplatonic doctrine of participation. Despite their particular differences, these commentators agree that Thomas's metaphysical teaching surpasses Augustine's because it's loyalty to Aristotelian philosophy enables it to reform, in one way or another, a Neoplatonic doctrine of participation. While the first commentator claims that Thomas's metaphysics employs Aristotelianism as a prominent material cause, the second maintains it is almost his formal cause.

⁵⁶ Concerning Thomas's fundamentally secondary or subordinate citing of Aristotle, see the still provocative remarks of M.D. Jordan, *The Alleged Aristotelianism of Thomas Aquinas* (Toronto; Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1992). But note Hankey's qualification of Jordan's remarks in "Aquinas and the Platonists," *op. cit.*, 280.

⁵⁷ Maritain, *op. cit.*, 320.

⁵⁸ Clarke, "The Limitation of Act by Potency in St. Thomas: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism?", *op. cit.*, 65-88, 79-81.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 81.

⁶⁰ Maritain, *op. cit.*, 324.

We have seen, however, that Thomas's relationship with Augustine—and therefore with Neoplatonic and Aristotelian doctrine—is significantly different from the above. As a fellow Christian-Neoplatonist,⁶¹ Thomas shares with Augustine i) the impetus to provide a metaphysically precise account of God and creatures and ii) a doctrine of participation emphasizing the existential aspect of God and creatures—and this, in fact, is what drives his existence-essence distinction. Therefore, what distinguishes Thomas from Augustine *essentially* is neither his existential emphasis *per se* or helpful mastery of Aristotelian philosophy (including Aristotle's act-potency doctrine); nor is it Augustine's 'Neoplatonism.' Rather, it is Thomas's reformation, development, and more extensive application to being of the generally Neoplatonic, but specifically Christian-Platonic, doctrine of existential participation he shares with Augustine. And Thomas fortifies and develops this outlook by handling accordingly his Aristotelian and non-Aristotelian philosophical inheritances. Recognizing Thomas's Christian-Neoplatonism, therefore, has the positive result of drawing him together with Augustine, allowing a more accurate interpretation of each thinker's metaphysical consideration of being, and explaining better the nature, cause, and importance of i) Thomas's differences from Augustine and ii) how he develops Augustine's teaching.

In sum, our study of specific aspects of Augustine's and Thomas's metaphysics shows that Augustine is more Thomistic and Thomas more Augustinian than is commonly asserted. However, this is ultimately because, as Christian-Neoplatonists, they share and seek to develop along *existential* lines a common Neoplatonic understanding that finite substance depends for its being on Supreme Divinity. Within the context of this profound common ground, Thomas extends the doctrine of existential participation employed by Augustine.

⁶¹ Until 1268 A.D., approximately six years before his death, Thomas (1225-1274 A.D.) thinks that the *Liber de Causis* might have been written by Aristotle (Clarke, "The Limitation of Act by Potency in St. Thomas: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism?" *op. cit.*, 78). Since *Liber de Causis* is actually a work of monotheistic Neoplatonism, this implies that, for the bulk of his career, Thomas's interpretation of Aristotle might have been occurring through a Neoplatonic lens. In other words, he may have ascribed existential characteristics to Aristotle's account of the relationship between God and the cosmos that Aristotle himself had not claimed.