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Piotr Roszak

Aquinas on the Being in God and in Proper Nature **Akvinski o biti v Bogu in lastni naravi**

Abstract: Among the many debates concerning God's relation to the world, the teaching of the existence of the idea of created beings in the eternal Word is noteworthy. This brings the question of exemplarity, which denotes not only the similarity of the effect to the cause, but also the asymmetrical relationship that exists between the Creator and creation, which is one of transcendence. This opens up the question of how creatures exist in their own nature and what epistemological significance it has to know things in the light of the Word. God is not the first but the last object of human knowledge. For Thomas Aquinas, this opens up a number of interesting questions about the cognition of things in God, and thus guides soteriological and eschatological reflection. For Aquinas, being in God would mean that there is dependence in existence because God conserves the *esse* of all things, but also that the creature is related to the divine essence when it is in God as in the power of the agent or as in the knower. At the same time, although the existence in God, first as an idea, is more perfect, because of God's perfection, nevertheless, to exist in own nature is more perfect from another perspective. This seems to be a very important claim against the occasionalist approach, according to which a being does not have its own nature because God acts in its place. For Aquinas, God's respect for the nature of created beings marked the proper understanding of divine action in the world.

Keywords: divine ideas, intellect, will, exemplarism, Thomas Aquinas, soteriology

Povzetek: Med številnimi razpravami o Božjem odnosu do sveta velja omeniti nauk o obstoju ideje o ustvarjenih bitjih v večni Besedi. S tem se poraja vprašanje eksemplarizma, ki ne označuje le podobnosti učinka z vzrokom, temveč tudi asimetrično razmerje, ki obstaja med Stvarnikom in transcendentnim stvarstvom. To odpira vprašanje, kako stvarstva obstajajo v svoji lastni naravi in kakšen epistemološki pomen ima spoznavanje stvari v luči Besede. Bog ni prvi, temveč zadnji predmet človeškega spoznanja. Za Tomaža Akvinskega to odpira številna zanimiva vprašanja o spoznavanju stvari v Bogu in usmerjanju soteriološkega in eshatološkega razmisleka. Biti v Bogu bi za Akvinskega pomenilo, da v obstoju obstaja odvisnost, ker Bog ohranja *esse* vseh stvari – pa tudi, da je bitje povezano z Božjim bistvom, kadar je v Bogu kot v moči agensa ali kot v

spoznavalcu. Hkrati je sicer obstoj v Bogu (najprej kot ideja) popolnejši zaradi Božje popolnosti, vendar pa je obstoj v lastni naravi popolnejši z drugega vidika. Zdi se, da je to proti okazionalističnem pristopu – po katerem bitje nima lastne narave, ker namesto njega deluje Bog – zelo pomembna trditev. Za Akvinskega je Božje spoštovanje narave ustvarjenih bitij zaznamovalo pravilno razumevanje Božjega delovanja v svetu.

Ključne besede: Božje ideje, razum, volja, eksemplarizem, Tomaž Akvinski, soteriologija

1. Introduction

Tradition tells us that Saint Thomas Aquinas wept upon beginning of his prayer with the second verse of Psalm 11, which says: “truths are decayed from among the children of men” (Psalm 11:2 *diminutae sunt veritates a filiis hominum*, Vulgate) which reminded him of his defects (of science and age) for the *onus magisterii* that was being imposed on him in Paris (Tocco 1996, 40; Casanova 2021).¹ It is striking that this biblical quote appears already in an article of *De Veritate* in the first question regarding truth to indicate where the truth is most *primo et proprie*:

“The divine understanding consists properly and principally in Truth itself; it exists in human understanding properly and secondarily; but in things it exists improperly and secondarily, because it exists in them only in relation to the other two truths. The truth of the divine understanding is only one, and from it derives many truths in the human understanding, ‘as if from the single face of a man many images appeared in the mirror’, as the *Glossa* says with regard to the psalmist’s verse: ‘Truths are decayed from among the children of men.’ On the other hand, the truths that are in things are many, as are the essences of things.” (*De veritate*, q. 1 a. 4c.)

“To diminish” would mean breaking the unity of the truth of the divine intellect, which is like a prism by which light is “split” or bifurcates. By placing truth in the divine understanding that always knows everything in act (q.1, a.2, ad 4), St. Thomas affirms that something is said to be true more in relation to the truth of the divine understanding than of the human. In the three levels he mentions (divine understanding, human understanding, and things) the relationship to the truth occurs in different ways, and he gives an example that also serves to answer our main question: a “healthy” meal refers to health and its quality as food. Thus, the first truth is like the “health” through which the rest is healthy. Thus, the truth applies properly not to what derives from the first truth, but to its exemplar (divine understanding). This means that things imitate “the divine truth unequally /.../ that which is received differently in the things which derive from the exem-

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plar, when it is in things it is not properly called truth, but it is when it is in that which is exemplary" (q. 1, a. 4, resp 6, ad obj.). A similar way of thinking is present in article 6 of question 4, in the *sed contra*, where St. Thomas recalls that *verius*, that which is more true, is predicated according to the measure of truth (*mensura veritatis*), which is in the exemplar (q. 4, a. 6, s. c. 3). It is precisely this concise article 6 which will be at the center of our reflection, and which will be accompanied by an article of the q. 18 of the *Summa Theologiae* and chapter 13 of the fourth part of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, with references to Biblical commentaries.

The question about that which is "more true" (*verius*) corresponds in general to the question of "measure", since gradation assumes that "a thing is said true insofar as it imitates its exemplar in the Word. Thus, things are truer in the Word than in what they are in themselves." Thus, the idea of *verius* leads to the discovery of the true foundation of things created in God, while their existence in Him in no way diminishes the proper being of each thing. Without denying this, Thomas emphasizes the eternal constitution of the creature in the Word: the reasons for things in the Word are important for determining the form and direction of nature (Doolan [s.a.], 251).

As St. Thomas is convinced that human understanding does not establish the truth of things (because it is not always in action), but receives the science of things, in order to answer the question of what is most true, we must consider the first part of the answer that St. Thomas offers by distinguishing two orders: the truth of the thing and the truth of the preaching. Hence, Aquinas says that "the truth of creatures is found in two places: in the things themselves and in the understanding" (*De veritate*, q. 1, a. 6c.). Already in question 1 of *De Veritate* he recalled that truth is diversified in our understanding in two ways: by the diversity of known things and by the different ways of understanding them, which he expresses with the example of Socrates' walking, which is a single thing, although because of our way of knowing it is divided into different conceptions.

It is a distinction between two orders that appears several times in the Thomistic writings (e.g., when he deals with things *in se* and *quoad nos*), and tries to harmonize two perspectives important for St. Thomas's way of thinking: the proper being of creatures, whose existence in their own nature is primordial, while at the same time not forgetting that the effects come from causes by similarity or assimilation, opening the possibility of knowing the cause by virtue of this exemplary nature.

The main claim of this article consists in showing Thomas Aquinas's anti-occasionalist approach, that is, his emphasis on the proper nature of each created being that is not ignored by God and is not something accidental. This respectful approach to the nature of beings does not contradict their origin in God's idea, which is a characteristic feature of Platonic thought. In this way, we are able to discover how Aquinas combined the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions in a manner that corresponds to and expresses the revealed truth of the Christian faith.

This paper will have three parts. In the first, we will analyze the conceptual framework in which the Angelic Doctor moves when commenting on the aforementioned article 6 of *De Veritate*, in particular the relation between the cause and its effect, as well as the double ontological and epistemological order. In the second part, we will try to answer what being is for the creature in its own nature and the *esse in Deo*. Finally, we will ask ourselves about the difference between living in the Word and the life of the creature, while also outlining a theological dimension of the doctrine of divine ideas that helps to understand the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption.

2. The Search for *verius esse*: The Importance of Distinguishing between Two Orders

The starting point of the answer in article 6 of question IV of *De Veritate* that interests us here is very striking. Thomas begins by showing the difference between the cause and its effect, saying that people sometimes concentrate so much on the effect that they fail to see its cause, which, while provoking the effect, nevertheless goes unacknowledged in our way of speaking, failing as it does to directly attribute effects to their causes. So it is, says St. Thomas, with pleasures, the sun, but also with colors. Therefore, "it is not properly said that pleasures delight, but that they are for us a cause of delight /.../ as the sun cannot be called hot, although other things are heated by it" (*De veritate* q. 4, a. 6c.). In no way does this show weakness or imperfection, but the supereminence of the order of causes.

Next, Saint Thomas locates the first origin of the creature in the Word, which is not like the human word or the species that aid in the mediation of intellection, because in the Word everything that is contained in divine science is expressed and is itself identified with the same divine essence. In it is centered the foundation of everything created and from this perspective Aquinas reflects on the triple divine causality (efficient, final, and exemplary) that explains the created being (Enriquez and Montoya 2021). As María Jesús Soto-Bruna observes, the vocabulary Aquinas employs to describe the being of things in God is noteworthy: *contineri*, *comprehendi* or *conservari* (Soto 2001, 26).

The impact of the thought of Dionysius Areopagite on Aquinas is well known. In several passages of his commentaries on the works of Dionysius, Thomas warns (more than 70 times) of a pantheistic reading that does not take into account that we know God by His causality (Rourke 2005, 255). If *omne agens agit sibi similis*, then there is a similarity between the cause and its effect, or better still: in the cause the effect pre-exists, although this does not mean that God is the "substance" or "essence" of created things. "Only as cause and origin can God be considered the life of living beings or the essence of existing things." (255) For this reason, St. Thomas affirms that "God is everything in all things in a causal way" (*In De divinis nominibus*, cap. VII, lect. 4). God is the life of the living beings only as their cause and origin, by way of exemplariness, not by entering formally (or essenti-

ally) into the constitution of the creature. If someone were to hold this, it would be evidence of an *intellectus perversus*, says Aquinas (*Contra Gentiles*, lib. 1, cap. 26, n. 10).

The doctrine on exemplarity does not “bring” God closer to the creature, but rather reminds us of the asymmetrical relationship that exists between the Creator and creation, which is one of transcendence (Carroll 2008). The creature does not reflect the reciprocity of similarity, which is proper to that which is related according to the mode of the cause and the thing caused. The creature represents God (and resembles or is similar to Him) to the extent that it has perfection, but not according to its own species, but points towards a “sublime principle, in the form of which the effects are lacking, but from which, nevertheless, they harbor some similarity”. With this, he shows the path of access to what intelligence is in its essence: starting from sensible things, existing in one’s own nature, in a plurality that expresses the richness of the divine being (subject of order), we arrive at the invisible, to the ultimate foundation of the world, to God as a condition of intelligibility and being (Horvat 2017).

The subject of *verius esse* cannot be understood without Aquinas’ thesis that truth is found mainly in thought and then in things, which leads him to say in the *Summa theologiae*, q. 16, that

“it is said that things are true because they resemble the image of the species in the divine mind. Example: It is said that a stone is true stone when it possesses the nature of the stone, according to the previous conception existing in the divine understanding.” (I, q.16, a.1c.)

Thomas considers what *verius* is at different levels. For example, we can find confirmations of the sentence: *esse increatum est verius quam creatum* (*De Veritate*, q.4, a.6, s.c. 1). We find a very clear explanation of the meaning of how he uses *verius* in question 18 of the *Prima Pars* in the *Summa theologiae*, in his inquiry into the nature of *ratio rei naturalis*. Here one clearly observes his correction of Platonism, in which the decisive constituent (the *ratio*) of a thing derives from its form, and hence the true man was the one who was separated from matter. Nevertheless, Saint Thomas opts for a rather Aristotelian position, remembering that matter is the *ratio rei*. This does not change that the *verius esse* is found in the divine mind because there it remains uncreated. However, the way he possesses this *esse* changes because the truest being exists in his own nature more than in the divine mind because material being belongs to the truth of man’s existence (*Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 18, a. 4, ad 3.). Although the character of *esse* is nobler in the divine mind (and also in the mind of an architect who designs a house), nevertheless in the Word it is found in potency, not in act, and something is more suitably known when it is in act rather than in potency.

In line with other fundamental distinction for Aquinas, that between *res significata* and *modus significandi*, it should be noted that, except for the material ones, the rest of creatures are found most truly in God, because it is found in a

simple way (Platovnjak 2022). In his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Thomas gives the example of four men, of whom one knows a lot of natural philosophy, another geometry, and another grammar, but the fourth knows the three sciences, so that these are in him in a simple, non-composite way (*In I Sent.*, d. 35, a.1, a.1, ad 2).

The two orders, ontological and epistemological, appear as the key in the question dedicated to the knowledge of the angels. St. Thomas observes that “the knowledge of things in the Word is more perfect than the knowledge of them in their own nature, insofar as the Word represents itself more clearly to each thing than the created species” (*De Veritate*, q. 8, a. 16, ad 11). Thomas then stresses that the existence of things in themselves is truer, not by the nature (or degree) of the being they possess, for in the Word they exist in a nobler way, but by reason of knowledge. As we do not know things as the Creator knows them (by knowing Himself), we have knowledge through created forms, which points to being in nature itself as the path of knowledge more proper to man. In other words, epistemologically, where a thing is by its essence it is truer than when it is by similarity; but ontologically it is necessary to distinguish two types of similarity: the one that causes things (the Word) and the one caused by the things that leave their mark. Thus, we have to distinguish the “exemplary similarity” and its “imitative similarity” (*In III Sent.*, d. 27, q. 2, a. 4, qc 3, ad 1). In the first case (similarity which causes), things are truer in the *exemplar* (*De veritate*, q. 4, a. 6, ad 1). From the perspective of this creationist metaphysics of Saint Thomas, which explains the plurality of existing things through the doctrine of the Word, which is the source of all the variety that exists and the *ars plena rationum*, a concept inherited from Saint Augustine and later developed by Eriugena and Anselm (McIntosh 2012), the unity in which the plurality of things participates is understood in a more eminent and noble way (*eminenter, nobilior, excellentior*). In *De substantiis separatis* Saint Thomas states that every effect is found in an *eminentius* way, when it exists according to the mode of the cause (*De substantiis separatis*, cap. 14c). However, this does not imply a devaluation of the sensible world, but an analogical way of thinking about the relationship between both modes of existence, in the Word and in itself (Llamas Roig 2022). It is worthwhile here to reflect on the value of the *esse in propria natura* that indicates a metaphysical option Aquinas employs to illustrate, on the one hand, his attitude towards the earlier philosophical tradition, and on the other an openness towards the contemplation of reality (Platovnjak and Svetelj 2022).

2.1 The Value of the Being in Proper Nature

The emphasis Saint Thomas places on the value of *esse in propria natura* within his realistic metaphysics, on being in its own nature, which is the consequence of the important distinction between the Creator and the created, is well-known (Sołowski 1982). St. Thomas, by emphasizing the creature’s own being in opposition to the Islamic *kalam* (the origin of occasionalism), maintains that beings possess their own nature. With this he does not deny the reality of the ideas of things in God, although he does not understand them as Plato did, who granted them an

existence apart from the divine mind: *vanum et superfluum est ponere aliqua exemplaria separata*, writes Saint Thomas (DeHart 2017; Austin 2017). In addition, and this is his second correction of Plato (*In De Anima*, lib. 1, lect. 8, n. 1), where the Platonic doctrine spoke of a plurality of ideas, St. Thomas admits only one idea, which is the Son, the Word. As Pasquale Porro observes, this is noteworthy here because it represents one of the greatest changes in Aquinas's thinking during his lifetime; namely, his distancing himself from the vocabulary of the "idea" in favour of *rationes*. This change (the correction of Plato) serves to underline the various ways of knowing by God, and not the variety of things in God, which is impossible to reconcile with the divine *simplicitas*, and which was implied by the theory of ideas.

It turns out, then, that existing in one's own nature is not something accidental, as in the Platonic theory, but substantial. Thomas had already underlined this in his *Commentary on the book of the Sentences*, proposing four possible ways of considering the *esse creaturae*: in its own nature (1), in our knowledge of it (2), in God (3), and in its common form (4). In comparing (1) and (3) St. Thomas affirms that things are truer in God because they exist in the manner of their cause and not in their own way of existing. This means that in God they are *per esse increatum* and not as *creatum*, in which *minus est de veritate essendi quam in esse increato*. The comparison between (2) and (4) indicates that, from the epistemological perspective, the truest being is that which exists substantially and not accidentally. However, Thomas warns that everything changes if it is something material or intellectual; in the latter case, sometimes (*aliquando*) the thing is truer in its similarity than in itself (*In I Sent.*, d. 36, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2).

Two cases or examples that Aquinas considers in *De veritate* help to clarify the Thomistic value of being in one's own nature. One is the distinction between the knowledge of an angel in the morning and in the evening; the other is the question of the manner in which Adam knew things in paradise (Roszak 2022).

First, in explaining the nature of the morning and evening knowledge of an angel (in terms of principle and term) Aquinas states that "a thing is known in the Word when the thing itself is known in its own nature through the Word and, in return, it is known in its own nature when it is known by some created forms" (*De veritate*, q. 8, a. 16c). So, "morning" knowledge refers to knowing in the Word *secundum quod exit ab arte divina*. The name of this knowledge comes from the comparison with the morning light that appears after the night, which recalls the Creation, because the creature receives the *esse* that he did not previously possess. In this context, the knowledge of the evening means knowing what exists in its own nature (*In II Sent.*, d. 12, q. 1, a. 3c).

Secondly, he considers the subject of knowing things in their own nature, when Saint Thomas asks himself in what way Adam knew in paradise. He explains that there are two ways of knowing things *in propria natura*. First, as a statement. In this sense Adam did not know all creatures, because all were not yet in their own nature; or rather they were, albeit imperfectly, "since all the things that have been produced afterwards were in some way found in the works of the six days" (*De*

veritate, q. 18, a. 4, ad 10). The second way in which we know things existing in our own nature is *per modum definitionis*, that is, by knowing the “nature” of a thing, the *quid est* of being. In this way, we can know the non-existent things (e.g., what a lion is, even if lions might not currently exist), and this was the kind of knowledge that Adam could have had.

2.2 *Creatura in Deo: The Modes of Existence in the Word*

Without contradicting the value of *esse in propria natura*, Saint Thomas highlights a way of linking the created with the Creator. The concept introduced by Aquinas to explain the relationship between the Creator and the created is that of *similitudo*, which emphasizes the infinite intimacy of God with respect to things and keeps intact His transcendence and the unity of God with respect to the multiplicity of creation (and also shows the maximum perfection of God - *Contra Gentiles*, II, 45). In this way, he preserves the un-participated transcendence of God and his presence in creation that he describes precisely in terms of *per similitudinem* (*De Potentia*, q. 7, a. 5, ad 7; Roszak and Huzarek 2019). Everything that exists is due to God, like the lines that come from the center of a circle, or an image printed on the wax, although Aquinas adds that between the Creator and the created there is still less possibility of substantial contact. All things need the Word to be able to exist because the creation is a *dare esse* – “without Him nothing was created” (Jn 1:3). It is so with all the effects that pre-exist in their cause: in a similar way, created things pre-exist in the Word. This pre-existence is not based on the capacity of the existence that the thing has in itself, but on the power of the cause. At the same time, God loses nothing of his fullness, but remains transcendent, which is proper to spiritual goods (e.g. in the case of the science shared by the wise, and who does not lose it by sharing it). This life in the Word does not deny the identity or being of things, which do not exist in God according to their individuality, but above all shows the foundation of their truth (Huzarek 2021).

Next, St. Thomas observes that “the being that the thing possesses in the Word is not different from the being of the Word” and this is how he understands St. Anselm’s phrase in the *Monologium* on the creative essence (*creatrix essentia*) in the Creator. Being in God would mean two things for Aquinas: on the one hand, being in existence because God conserves the *esse* of all things; in this way, the *esse creaturae* is distinguished from the existence of God and this sense of being in God is not the *creatrix essentia* (*De potentia*, q. 3, a. 16, ad 24). But there is a second way in which the creature is found in the divine essence, when it is in God (*in intellectu creantis*) *sicut in virtute causae agentis* or as in the knower. These two types are reflected in the *Summa theologiae* when St. Thomas says:

“Creatures are in God in a double way. One, insofar as they are contained and maintained by divine power. As we say that something is in us because it is in our power. In this way, it is said that creatures are in God as they are in themselves. In this sense we must understand what the Apostle said: ‘In him we live, we move and have our being’, since our living, our being

and our movement are caused by God. The other way, in that things are in God as in those who know them. In this way they are in God for their own reasons, which in Him are not distinct from their essence. Therefore, things, being in God in this way, are of the divine essence. And because the divine essence is life, but not movement, in this line it is said that in God things are not movement, but life." (*Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 18, a. 4, ad 1)

To correctly conceive the way of being in God, St. Thomas, in considering the goodness of God (and the manner in which it relates to good), insists on distinguishing the relationship between cause and effect in the case of the univocal cause and the equivocal cause: "The similarity of the effect is uniformly found in the univocal cause; on the other hand, in the equivocal cause it is found in a more sublime manner, as the heat is more sublime [*excellentiori modo*] in the sun than in the fire." (I, q. 6, a. 2c) This is so because it exists according to the virtue of the cause, in this case, the first cause, whose existence is more noble than the thing existing in itself. By way of summary, Saint Thomas indicates some characteristics of the existence of things in the Word that we can summarize in the following way:

Creatures are potential in the Word. This "potential" in the context of the existence of things in the Word must be understood as active power: "an active power is more perfect than the act that is its effect, and in this way, it is said of the creatures that they are potential in the Word." (*De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 6, ad 3) They do not have their own operations, although they are more noble operations, because they are efficient causes of things and of their operations. Things in the Word exist "under a certain aspect" (*secundum quid*), not *simpliciter* (q. 8, a. 16, ad 11).

3. *Implicite – explicite*

These distinctions thus ordered by the Angelic Doctor allow for the use of a specific language for dealing with the relationship between the Creator and the created. It is the term *implicite*. In another question of *De Veritate*, Saint Thomas asked himself if all beings desire God and responded positively, indicating that "all knowing beings also implicitly know God in any cognition" (*De Veritate*, q. 22, a. 2, ad 1; Huzarek 2015), and also in everything they desire, there exists implicitly the desire for God. It is the consequence of the status of the first cause by which they are able to act, and because it is the ultimate goal, which is the desired end in all secondary ends. Nevertheless, Saint Thomas is not content to simply show this, but, by an illuminating example, emphasizes the dignity of rational creatures, proceeding explicitly to their desire for God:

"Resolving conclusions in their principles, or the second causes in the first ones, is proper only to the rational power, which is the reason why only the rational nature can redirect the secondary ends to the same God by

certain way of resolution, so that God himself is explicitly desired. And just as in the demonstrative sciences the conclusion is only rightly known by resolution to the first principles, so the appetite of the rational creature is only properly ordered in the explicit appetite for God himself, in act or in habit." (*De Veritate*, q. 22, a. 2c)

This way of thinking appears in *Contra Gentiles* when it affirms that God is the cause not only of what subsists naturally but of all intellectual knowledge that is derived from the divine intellect. That is why he calls the Word the *ratio intellectus divini* and says it can be known just as a teacher's knowledge can be deduced from that of his disciple (*Contra Gentiles*, lib. 4, cap. 13, n. 11). Any knowledge of the truth creates the opportunity to know God.

God is not, then, the first object of human knowledge, as Saint Thomas affirms in his *Commentary on De Trinitate*, but rather the last: human knowledge is a path to the knowledge of God. All this is inscribed in the Thomistic understanding of nature (with the famous definition that sees in nature an *ars divina* that corresponds to the concept of self-organization), which is far from understanding God in the key of the "God of the Gaps", as the one that moves nature "from the outside" (and as one more cause among other causes). Furthermore, it corresponds to the very nature of human knowledge, which consists in passing from what one does not know to a new science.

4. Living in the Word: What Is the Truest Life?

From what has been analyzed it follows that creatures, in so far as they are in God, are one single thing, which points towards the discovery of identity and unity (Šijaković 2020). The created world, with its plurality, reflects, or better, imitates the divine perfection not for being a single thing, but in virtue of its diverse degrees and forms of being. Creation, exercising its activity, which is possible thanks to the gift of God, lives as it imitates God: thus 'more life' is always related to imitating God.

It is not surprising that in *De Veritate* Saint Thomas asks about the nature of life in the Word, and begins by recalling that living means "what has in itself a principle of movement or operation" (*De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 8c), which, he warns, should not be understood as a local movement (e.g., growth), but rather as moving oneself towards certain operations, and this operation has to be the same being (because, following the Aristotelian definition in *De anima*, "to live is the being of the living one"). Since no operation or activity of man is his being, then none can be considered in the strict sense as life, but rather as a "sign of life". In the Word, however, understanding is His being and for this reason the similarity of the thing in the Word (which is *productiva et motiva* with respect to the creature existing in his own nature) is His life. Thanks to this similarity, the creature moves itself (in the broad sense of *movere*, of course); and that is why St. Thomas

affirms, albeit *quodammodo*, that this similarity of the creature in the Word is the life of the creature (and not a simple sign of life). The life that corresponds to the creature in the Word does not belong, however, to the nature of the creature, but rather shows its participation in life. The analogy to the architect's mind in which the idea of a house "lives" (or the idea of a chest, an example he takes from Saint Augustine) does not properly express this, because it is about incomparable things, although we can understand something *per analogiam*, since the *esse intelligibilis* of the idea in the mind of the architect belongs "to the genre of life" (*De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 8, ad 2).

All of the above medieval discussions clearly indicate the importance of respecting the proper nature of created beings. This is particularly valid in the current debate on divine action in the world, which is set against the occasionalist temptation to see God's power as diminishing the proper action of creation. God in his providence is respectful of our nature, which is not moved from the "outside" by God, as one could imagine within the mechanistic framework (Oleksowicz 2021), but from the "inside," in an analogical way. Besides, life on Earth has its proper value, which is a reminder that life is not simply a product of a chance event and that it is instead rooted in God's will (Strobel 2021; Gelabert-Ballester 2022).

5. Conclusions

There is a famous biblical story, taken up by many painters, of the blessing of Isaac. The patriarch Jacob tries to simulate the hand of Esau, his brother, to obtain the blessing of the firstborn. Isaac recognizes the voice of Jacob, but feels that the hand is that of Esau, and thus grants the blessing to the one who pretends to be his first-born son. In the doctrine that we have expounded about the value of existing in one's own nature, without losing the link with the Creator, the voice of Aquinas is sometimes difficult to distinguish (as it was in the case of the old Isaac) from the philosophical ideas borrowed from Plato or Aristotle. His preference for the Aristotelian ontology that unites spiritualized intelligence, rooting empiricism, and fascination with the particular is clear here (Boland 1996, 322). The "hand" seems to be Platonic, but the voice, the message and the coordinates of thought are Aristotelian.

What good does this reflection of Saint Thomas's on what is truest serve? We have already seen the historical reasons, his correction of Platonism, but the key question would be: what can I or should I consider when seeing something? The doctrine on the Word opens up the metaphysics of creation, in which the Word is "exemplar" (with respect to the Father) and "*similitudo*" (with respect to the created world), and makes possible the created intelligibility of the universe. Each creature is woven into the fabric of creation on the basis of the *rationes* in God, and this is the necessary background for fully understanding the created being. With this, we discover the foundation of creation in God and how Saint Thomas perceives the presence of God in nature: not as one who takes the place of a

thing's proper nature, but as the One who gives the reason for its existence.

It is not simply a question of putting a “contemplative twist” (as McIntosh’s expressed it) on the doctrine of ideas in the mind of God from Origen and Augustine, allowing one to “taste” their presence in the created world, but rather of also opening up a specifically soteriological, theological perspective: the restoration of the thing born of the divine idea and which has been disfigured (by sin), so that it can return to its fullness when it is renewed by the Word, the *ars Patris* who knows the fullness of the life of all creatures. In short, redemption is possible precisely because the eternal truth of creatures exists within the Word. The doctrine on ideas or reasons in God is thus reinterpreted by Aquinas in Trinitarian form and shows the Word as the redeeming source of grace for creatures since by Christ the union with his *verius esse* is established in God (Doolan 2008). For Aquinas, when the creature finds its true being in the Word, we are not simply confronted with a noetic act but are being presented with a new creation, a restoration of its truth (McIntosh 2012, 379; Platovnjak 2018). So, it is not just about showing the authorship of things in the Word, but rather the value of that knowledge and a way of knowing God through a particular *deductio*, as Saint Thomas says when considering the theme of creation. This effort is supported by the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, by which *in natura humana Deus Pater impressit Verbum* (In Ioan., cap. VI, lect. 3).

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