

An Expository Analysis on Aquinas' Notion of *Separatio* as the Realistic Inception of Human Cognition

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Abstract

In his interpretation of the initial apprehension of reality, Aquinas designates two basic intellectual processes through which being is comprehended. According to Aquinas, the mind's second operation, that involves judgement is responsible for the perception of being as real and existing. This judgment is also known as *separatio*. The other, as the first immediate apprehension, communicates an incomplete notion of being by way of *simplex apprehensio*. In a bid to understand being holistically, following Thomas Aquinas' depiction, some Thomist scholars, like Gilson, Maritain, Fabro, and others have stressed the role of judgment. Others too, have had various nuances of the notion and role of judgement in the cognition of being as real and its attributes. These attempts brought about the quasi-perennial irresolute controversy of the place of judgment in the metaphysical apprehension of being as actual. In this study, I wish to determine Aquinas' proper distinction of *separatio* from the first intellectual act of apprehension as the proper place of metaphysics given its *modus operandi*. For this investigation, questions 5 and 6 of Thomas Aquinas' commentary on Boethius' *De Trinitate* are very significant as Aquinas vividly articulated the function of *separatio* as abstractive judgment in these discourses.

Keywords: Abstraction, Being, Intellect, Intuition, Knowledge, *Separatio*, *Simplex Apprehensio*,

1. Introduction

The concept of *separatio* in the metaphysics of Aquinas is a central one. Although real, like any other Thomistic metaphysical theme, it

attracts lots of controversies around it. In Thomistic terminology, all certainty in human realistic cognition is dependent on it. In Aquinas, there are two intellectual operations involved in the apprehension of being in reality. They are *separatio* and *simplex apprehensio*, first and second intellectual operations respectively. *Separatio*, the main theme of this study, is articulated as the real judgmental level in human cognition. Yet, Thomistic scholars disagree on its real place in cognition of *ens* and every other attribute of being. *Separatio*, as Aquinas postulates, is not the first instantaneous indeterminate perception of *ens* because of the natural component of judgement in its composition. The essence of *separatio* is the understanding of being that constitutes the content of metaphysics. In this respect, *separatio* differs from the other kind of apprehension of *ens qua ens* and its components. *Separatio* is an active operation, which brings about precision in human cognition of any reality.

On the other hand, Aquinas equates the human intellect (*intellectus intuitivus*) at the first stage of operation to the divine and angelic.¹ At this phase, the human intellect possesses a kind of cognition one could identify as imperfect and unprocessed general knowledge. This moment is likened to the instantaneous *simplex apprehensio* in the human context with which most philosophical erudite scholars contend. Most experts agree on *simplex apprehensio* but differ on the mechanism of this apprehension. Does the immediate appreciation include judgment, or is it just 'simple' as the term suggests? This can be ascertained subsequently. In order, therefore, to have a full grasp of the notion of the first and second operations in Aquinas, it is worthwhile to examine a few other Thomistic and Thomist scholars' submissions in this respect.

To aid our discourse and assessment of *separatio* as realistic cognition of being, I shall begin by a brief examination of the above-mentioned correlate of *separatio*, namely, *simplex apprehensio* coupled with Aquinas' postulation on abstraction. This is because the notion of abstraction is inherently situated in the discourse of the apprehension of being (*ens*) since, for Aquinas, it

¹ See Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*, (*De Ver*) q. 16, a. 1.

is a mental separation (*abstractio*) of the intelligible specie. Another reason for the inclusion of abstraction is that in another text, Aquinas equates it with the first level of human knowledge as the understanding of the indivisibles. The pithy examination of both simple apprehension and abstraction are necessitated for elucidation because they constitute the holistic notion of Aquinas' thesis on the knowledge of being as a reality. Thereon, I shall, consider, through expository analysis, diverse submissions on the Thomistic notion of *separatio*. Subsequently, I shall do an epigrammatic assessment of the submissions and hopefully conclude with an accent to the proven significance of Aquinas' notion of *separatio* in the understanding of being, the *primum cognitum* (first known) in reality.

2. A Quick Glance at the Thomistic Concepts of *Simplex Apprehensio* and Abstraction

According to Aquinas, *simplex apprehensio* is the indistinct human way of cognition of reality as it is. That is to say, it is the imprecise knowledge of 'what is.' This simple apprehension is immediate, instantaneous, and without intellectual judgemental procedure. For Aquinas, it is the spiritual mode of cognition, which appropriately belongs to God and other spiritual entities, the angels. So, human knowledge of being at this stage, is inexplicit vague. On this kind of intellective knowledge, Aquinas asserts:

The human intellect does not acquire perfect knowledge by the first act of apprehension; but it first apprehends something about its object, such as its quiddity, and this is its first and proper object; ... But the angelic and the Divine intellect, like all incorruptible things, have their perfection at once from the beginning. Hence the angelic and the Divine intellect have the entire knowledge of a thing at once and perfectly.²

² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (ST), I, q. 85, a. 5. Et similiter intellectus humanus non statim in prima apprehensione capit perfectam rei cognitionem; sed primo apprehendit aliquid de ipsa, puta quidditatem ipsius rei, quae est primum et proprium obiectum intellectus; ... Intellectus autem angelicus et divinus se habet sicut res incorruptibiles, quae statim a principio habent suam totam

The above Thomistic extract evidences the fact that the initial human apprehension is, so to speak, unclear but necessary for further/real knowledge. It is a kind of *prima facie* phase, which introduces the intellect to its existent elaboration. However, as distinct from the human method, this is the moment of real knowledge for the angelic and divine intellects because they need no procession in their direct intuitive modality of apprehension.³ This implies that, in God and the angelic creatures, the instant of perfect knowledge is identifiable with *simplex apprehensio*, which is concurrently first immediate ‘judgment’ (not syllogistic but *tanquam iudicans*) within the identical intuition.⁴ As Sanguineti corroborates, unlike the rational being (*esse*), the judgment of these spiritual entities is not a kind of *compositio*.⁵ It is, rather, spontaneous, intuitive, and holistic.

Viewed from another aspect, the first operation, as seen in another popular Thomistic text regarding the nature (*quid est*) of a thing, is a mental separation (*abstractio*). Equally, the second can be considered as the receiver of the being of things (*respicit esse rei*).⁶ In this passage, instead of the word *iudicium*, Aquinas uses *compositio et divisio*, a term of an Aristotelian background (that is *De Anima*), wherein the first mental operation is referred to as *intelligentia indivisibilium* i.e. the understanding of the indivisibles.⁷ On this mental composition of the conceived contents,

perfectionem. Unde intellectus angelicus et divinus statim perfecte totam rei cognitionem habet.

³ *ST*, II-II, q. 49, a. 5, ad 2.

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles Vol. SCG*, I, Ch.57, n.11: “Tum ex hoc quod inconveniens forte aliquibus videretur si deus syllogizare non posset. Habet enim syllogizandi scientiam tanquam iudicans, et non sicut syllogizando discurrens.”

⁵ See Sanguineti, J. J., ‘Los Principios de La Racionalidad En Santo Tomás’, *Espíritu* XLI (1992): 109–37, 121.

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *In Librum Boethii De Trinitate.*, *In De Trin*, q. 5, a. 3. “Prima quidem operatio respicit ipsam naturam rei, secundum quam res intellecta aliquem gradum in entibus obtinet, sive sit res completa, ut totum aliquod, sive res incompleta, ut pars vel accidens. Secunda vero operatio respicit ipsum esse rei, quod quidem resultat ex congregatione principiorum rei in compositis vel ipsam simplicem naturam rei concomitatur, ut in substantiis simplicibus.”

⁷ Shields, *Aristotle: De Anima*, 430a 25–30.

although unstated, the existential level is assumed and implied, such that aspects that are not necessarily connected determine the operation. On the other hand, the abstraction cannot be proven amidst the features that are only essentially connected.

The foregoing fact is reflected in Fabro through his hypothesis on the Thomistic notion of intellectual abstraction. Accordingly, Fabro proposes that abstraction is the fundamental role of intelligence from which arises its first awakening and the presentation of the essential intelligible contents. He enunciates further that it belongs to the intellectual abstraction to bring about the contents and the relations which appertain to reality, as reality, – that is, *esse in quantum esse*.⁸ One sees further a dual Thomistic notion of *abstractio*, which carries the import of complementarity in the first two intellectual operations in the knowledge of *ens* (being) and similar notions. In the following extract, for instance, Aquinas asserts:

Abstraction may occur in two ways: First, by way of composition and division; thus we may understand that one thing does not exist in some other, or that it is separate therefrom. Secondly, by way of simple and absolute consideration; thus we understand one thing without considering the other. ... This is what we mean by abstracting the universal from the particular, or the intelligible species from the phantasm; that is, by considering the nature of the species apart from its individual qualities represented by the phantasms. ... And so the intellect would be false if it abstracted the species of a stone from its matter in such a way as to regard the species as not existing in matter, as Plato held. ... For it is quite true that the mode of understanding, in one who understands, is not the same as the mode of a thing in existing: since the thing understood is immaterially in the one who understands, according to the mode of the intellect, and not materially, according to the mode of a material thing.⁹

⁸ See Fabro, C., *Percezione e Pensiero*, Roma: Editrice del Verbo Incarnato, 2008, 329–332, esp. 329.

⁹ *ST*, I, q. 85, a. 1, ad 1: “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod abstrahere contingit dupliciter. Uno modo, per modum compositionis et divisionis; sicut cum intelligimus aliquid non esse in alio, vel esse separatum ab eo. Alio modo, per

According to Aquinas, the mind abstracts in two ways: a.) either by the complex mode through composition and division as is the case on the second level of operation of the intellect; or, b.) in *simplex apprehensio* in the first concepts of *ens* and first principles (which is simple). The latter implies a direct incomplete intuition of the material sense data. As mentioned earlier, Aquinas, in his ingenuity, proposes that the simple level *per se* belongs to the spiritual entities (God and the angels); so, about this phase, he continually lays emphasis on that which falls to the mind as a ‘unity’ or unrefined.

Cogitated this way, it might seem demonstrable that ‘judgment’ would fall entirely into accidental unity, that is, only empirically verifiable, outside the circle of the Aristotelian concept of science. Nonetheless, Aquinas ultimately cognises that to the second intellectual operation, *separatio*, is evidently articulated the metaphysical enterprise, while abstraction is somewhat connected with the science of nature.¹⁰

Aquinas, on his part, was very precise, but subtle in his declarations about this phase of the intellect’s operation. On this, he dedicated much attention, as mentioned earlier, in his commentary on Boethius’ *de Trinitate*. Yet, he proposes immediately the second phase of the human mind’s operation, to confirm where real (explicit) distinction and judgment commences. This signifies a sort of implicit integration in the human condition amid the first operation of the intellect and the second, because the human mind is not completely unalloyed or untainted by matter.

modum simplicis et absolutae considerationis; sicut cum intelligimus unum, nihil considerando de alio. ... Et hoc est abstrahere universale a particulari, vel speciem intelligibilem a phantasmatibus, considerare scilicet naturam speciei absque consideratione individualium principiorum, quae per phantasmata repraesentantur. ... Unde falsus esset intellectus, si sic abstraheret speciem lapidis a materia, ut intelligeret eam non esse in materia, ut Plato posuit. ... Est enim absque falsitate ut alius sit modus intelligentis in intelligendo, quam modus rei in existendo, quia intellectum est in intelligente immaterialiter, per modum intellectus; non autem materialiter, per modum rei materialis.”

¹⁰ See *In De Trin*, q. 5, a. 3. The most probable supposition herein about this Thomistic understanding, as can be accentuated here, is that Aquinas habitually comprehends essence as the essence of sensible things and tries to determine the object of metaphysics according to the Aristotelian articulations of Boethius.

However, one recalls that through *simplex apprehensio*, the intellect has a first instantaneous knowledge of reality as *ens*, and the *principia prima* (exemplified in the PNC¹¹), which are the tools with which to judge other realities in 'being'. However, as accentuated above, in a brief commentary on Aristotle, Aquinas specifically states:

We must realize that, ... the intellect has two operations: one called the "understanding of indivisibles," by which it knows what a thing is, and another by which it joins and divides, that is to say, by forming affirmative and negative statements.¹²

In the above citation, Aquinas underpins two components of the mind's activity that contemporary scholastic scholars could classify as simple apprehension and judgment. In the *simplex apprehensio*, as Aquinas proposes, *ens* is apprehended vaguely, together with the PNC in a primitive way through the senses without 'explicit' judgment. Nevertheless, this is not existential; the act of being is imperfect. Put differently, one can deduce that through simple apprehension, the intellect simply knows 'what' without any affirmation and negation.¹³

Besides, in the above extract, Thomas Aquinas proposes that the two intellectual operations correspond to dual principles in realistic things. On this, Aquinas proffers that the first operation concerns the nature of a thing by whose virtue the known object has a rank amongst beings (and that is where we discover *ens*).

¹¹ PNC is the principle of non-contradiction, the archetype of the first principles, which according to Thomas Aquinas substantiates, form part of the first conceptions of the mind.

¹² In *De Trin*, q. 5, a. 3: "Oportet videre, qualiter intellectus secundum suam operationem abstrahere possit. Sciendum est igitur quod secundum philosophum in III de anima duplex est operatio intellectus. Una, quae dicitur intelligent indivisibilium, qua cognoscit de unoquoque, quid est. Alia vero, qua componit et dividit, scilicet enuntiationem affirmativam vel negativam formando."

¹³ Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*, Medieval and Renaissance Society: Monographs of the Society for Medieval & Renaissance Philosophy. Catholic University of America Press, 2000, 24. Wippel vividly explicates: "... By simple apprehension (which must not be confused with sense perception), the intellect simply knows what something is without affirming or denying anything of it." (Ibid. 24).

This implies that *ens* is simply known by its essence at this point as ‘that which is’, and for the intellect to make this simple assertion is an implicit judgment. The second, according to Aquinas, is focussed on the *esse* of a thing. The subsequent enunciated here does not essentially indicate *ratio* but the activity of the intellect that belongs to *compositio et divisio*. The said *esse* is from the unification of the principles of a thing, if composite, or an accompaniment of the thing’s simple nature, when simple.¹⁴ The first phase of the mind’s operation is the actual motive for Aquinas’ relation of the human intellect to the angelic or divine intellect. The character of the *statim* portrayed here is usually with deficiency or indistinctness; even when not specified, it is obvious. While this stage of human insight is close to the angelic, it falls short of the clarity of the angelic and simplicity of the divine, that is why it is non-existential. Thus, Aquinas in a number of discourses resolutely indicates the essential disparity about them. The significance of ‘simplicity’ of intuition, as Sanguineti succinctly identifies, does not necessarily imply the intuited entity according to Aquinas’ proposition.¹⁵ To this point, we deduced that the first instance of knowledge is an incomplete and non-realistic intellectual activity. It is the constituent of the immediate comprehensive act of the intellect, in which is found the following realistic intellectual operation.

3. Aquinas and Some Thomists on the Thomistic Notion of *Separatio*

The Thomistic notion of *separatio* is connected to his notion of being. Based on this background, many Thomists have incorporated its discourse into the concept of being; others are yet to

¹⁴ See *In De Trin*, q. 5, a. 3. Aquinas uses *esse* here in a loose sense because in another place he differentiates three shades of *esse* in his commentary on the sentences. There is an *esse* of the level of cognition, which he classifies as actual existence, another one he regards as the very nature and quiddity of a thing, and finally the *esse* that signifies the truth of composition, i.e. of judgment. See *In I Sent*, d. 33, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1.

¹⁵ *De Ver*, q. 2, a. 13: “Non potest dici discursus in scientia ex hoc quod duo videt, si illa duo uno intuitu videat; quod accidit in divina scientia, per hoc quod omnia per unam speciem videt.”

give it adequate attention; still others, like Wippel,¹⁶ found it a central component in the Thomistic metaphysical endeavour. Authors, like Owens, describe it essentially as a specific aspect of judgment in the investigation into the existential being.¹⁷ I consider it necessary in this quest to delve into the analysis of *separatio* because of its significance in the thomistic formulation of the original human knowledge and for its major role in the apprehension of the *primum cognitum*. The reason is for a better appreciation of its operational mode. In the commentary on *De Trinitate* of Boethius, Aquinas affirms:

Consequently, the consideration of substance without quantity belongs to the order of separation rather than to that of abstraction. We conclude that there are three kinds of distinction in the operation of the intellect. There is one through the operation of the intellect joining and dividing which is properly called separation; and this belongs to divine science or metaphysics.¹⁸

The above excerpt is a lead to Aquinas' main view on *separatio*, the second intellectual operation that forms our principal quest in this study. Consistent with some Thomists such as, Gilson, Maritain, Elders, Schmidt, Mondin, Wippel, Owens, Sanguinetti, McInerny, and others within a Thomistic metaphysical understanding, judgment is being contested as essential in the notion of 'being'. If the proposition for the need of 'judgment' in 'being' is true, consequently, the 'what' of the thing's nature is inexorably known through conceptualisation whilst existence is known as something 'accidental' to nature. Yet, that is not all about the suppositions that there are. As Wippel notes, in order to have a non-restrictive

¹⁶ Wippel, 'Metaphysics and "Separatio" According to Thomas Aquinas'. *The Review of Metaphysics* 31, no. 3 (1978): 431–70.

¹⁷ See Owens, J., 'A Note on the Approach to Thomistic Metaphysics', *The New Scholasticism* 28 (1954): 454–76, esp. 474–476.

¹⁸ In *De Trin*, q. 5, a. 3. "Substantia autem, quae est materia intelligibilis quantitatis, potest esse sine quantitate; unde considerare substantiam sine quantitate magis pertinet ad genus separationis quam abstractionis. Sic ergo in operatione intellectus triplex distinctio invenitur. Una secundum operationem intellectus componentis et dividensis, quae separatio dicitur proprie; et haec competit scientiae divinae sive metaphysicae."

notion of 'being' or, rather for a balanced understanding about 'being', a negative judgment (*separatio*) is necessary. Therefore, this conveys Aquinas' opinion that *separatio* is distinctive of metaphysics because the latter is the science of 'being as being'.¹⁹ Primarily, *separatio* is conceived as negative judgment in the sense of being separated from matter. However, *separatio* can be extended both to a union (*compositio*) and an existential separation (*secundum esse*). This is a specific illumination of Aquinas. Accordingly, the holistic 'being' in metaphysics is determined by this notion, and that is the core of the various beliefs and elucidations about the characteristic category of judgment; namely, *separatio*. So, only 'judgment' can assure a person that his/her notion of being comprises being as existing, an *est* as well as an *id quod*, which entails an 'is' in conjunction with a 'that which'.²⁰ On this basis, special consideration is sought regarding this particular species of judgment in Aquinas, the second operation of intellect, which Aquinas sometimes refers to as *separatio*.²¹ Basically, in recent years, significant interest has been shown in the inquiry about this form of 'judgment' as generally essential to the act-of-being, and, particularly, at the core of metaphysics.

In view of the foregoing, some Thomistic scholars point to Aquinas' proposal on *separatio* as one that provides access to realistic metaphysics. As such, this judgment (*separatio*) refers to being (*esse*). Thus, metaphysics should be engaged in the knowledge of the act-of-being.²² Given the above, can, one, suggest that metaphysics, as a result of *separatio*, indicates exclusively the act-of-being of things? It is apparently so, since Aquinas explicitly states that this *separatio* appertains to the second operation (or judgment) of *intellectus*, which concerns the act-of-being.²³ In the same vein, De Raeymaeker advocates that Aquinas assigns to

¹⁹ See *In De Trin*, q. 5, a. 3.

²⁰ See Wippel, 'Metaphysics and "Separatio" According to Thomas Aquinas', 431.

²¹ See *In De Trin*, q. 5, a. 3.

²² See Elders, L., *The Metaphysics of Being of St. Thomas Aquinas in a Historical Perspective*, Leiden; New York; Köln: E. J. Brill, 1993, 21.

²³ See *In De Trin*, q. 5, a. 3.

metaphysics a higher status than the quidditative domain so as to focus on *esse*.²⁴ Owens articulates an analogous notion, because this act-of-being must be the appropriate inquiry of metaphysics.²⁵ Phelan expresses the same opinion.²⁶ These interpretations are challenged by an older essentialist notion of scholars, like Descoqs, who upholds that the act- of-being is not concomitant to this subject matter, because the 'being' in 'thing' is always contingent and is always a personalised act of existence whereas a scientific act surveys the 'necessary' and the 'universal'.²⁷ Still other Thomists hold that inasmuch as metaphysics pertains to essence, it is also, efficiently, being.²⁸ However, others, such as Wilhelmsen, believe that Aquinas' notion is that metaphysics depends on the perception that the act-of-being is not a theme, or on the non-existence of being itself.²⁹ As such, the arrangement (of the subject and predicate) of the customary expression in every statement would be refuted in all metaphysical affirmations. The problem in this suggestion could be the lack of difference between our propositional declarations about the optimal, incorporeal being and those of created things. I shall avoid delving into more details in this aspect of the analysis, as it is not directly our central focus. A full discourse on it may constitute a major digression to the main investigation. My concern is to discover how *separatio* is a major attribute in foundational knowledge and designation of being in reality. Nevertheless, a reference to the above (as I have done) is necessary since, in the realistic perspective, the *esse* of metaphysics

²⁴ See De Raeymaeker, L., 'La Profonde Originalité de La Métaphysique de Saint Thomas d'Aquin', *Die Metaphysik Im Mittelalter: Ihr Ursprung Und Ihre Bedeutung: Miscellanea Mediaevalia*, II (1963): 14–29, 28.

²⁵ See Owens, J., 'A Note on the Approach to Thomistic Metaphysics'.

²⁶ See Phelan, G. B. and A.C. Pegis, ed., 'A Note on the Formal Object of Metaphysics', In *Essays in Modern Scholasticism*, 47–51. Westminster MD, 1944.

²⁷ Descoqs, P., *Institutiones Metaphysicae Generalis: Éléments d'Ontologie*. Paris: G. Beauchesne, 1925, 100.

²⁸ See Maritain, J., *Sept leçons sur l'être et les premiers principes de la raison speculative*. Paris: P. Téqui, 1936.

²⁹ See Wilhelmsen, F. D., 'The Concept of Existence and the Structure of the Judgement: A Thomistic Paradox'. *The Thomist* 41 (1977): 317–49, 339. "... the insight that the *esse* is not-being-a-subject."

(an indirect thing here) is a real *esse*. It is the nub of judgment in Aquinas, which makes 'being' real.³⁰

Moreover, one reads in Owens that the notion of 'being' as sensible and supersensible is comprehended only through the judgmental operation of separation. He depicts 'being' as, non-quantitative, beyond-sensible, non-mobile, non-temporal, excluding its perceptible instances. Following the above-stated, 'being' is, as it were, a supersensible 'being'. 'Being' may be experienced in sensible things as 'separated' from the sensible commitments only through this act of judgment.³¹ This indicates that 'separation' is the activity that adds the existing feature to the abstract idea. Therefore, existence is known not by conceptualisation but by the judgmental notion, which, for Owens, is separation. According to him, in order to be real, the features of categories and conceptualisation are 'separated' from existence through this 'act'. This separation, as mentioned, is in contradistinction with abstraction.³² Owens believes *separatio* is a judgment different from abstraction through which we know the distinction between the mode of the knowledge of natures in the human intellect and the modality of the knowledge of 'being'.³³

Schmidt highlights that the notion of *separatio*, as a procedure proper to metaphysics, has continued to receive increasing attention in the recent years given its vitality in the area. Considering the commentary on *De Trinitate*, Schmidt reasons that, for Aquinas, metaphysics, in the strict sense, proceeds through *separatio* rather than by abstraction.³⁴ Wippel's notion, reflected earlier, shares a common ground with Schmidt.³⁵ Consequently, this *separatio* appertains to judgment instead of simple

³⁰ See Elders, L., *The Metaphysics of Being of St. Thomas Aquinas in a Historical Perspective*, 13–24.

³¹ See Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, Christian Culture and Philosophy Series. Center for Thomistic Studies, 1985, 96–97.

³² See Owens, J., *An Interpretation of Existence*, Houston (TX): Center for Thomistic Studies, 1985, 50.

³³ See Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 370.

³⁴ See Schmidt, R. W., 'L'emploi de la séparation en métaphysique', *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 58 (1960): 373–93, 392–393.

³⁵ See Wippel, 'Metaphysics and "Separatio" According to Thomas Aquinas', 431.

apprehension, and comprises negative judgment. The place of *separatio* is found not in the first conception of being, typified in the sensible quiddity, but in the progression from the first concept to that of 'being'. According to Schmidt, this *separatio* is a procedure to transcend all the particular modes or limitations, and it is pertinent to every condition of 'being'. Thus, there is an ascendant and descendant notion of *separatio*. *Separatio* contains both the transcendental notion of being and the existential attribute, so that one can conceive of 'being', as it is, transcendental in unity with existence. Subsequently, this notion of *separatio* simultaneously includes the possible, the potential, the accidental, and the incomplete in the identical concept. Separation, therefore, serves the knowledge of the intrinsic and extrinsic principles and the attributes of 'being'.³⁶ It does not limit being, but is a distinctive way through which being unfolds and attains the comprehensive subject of metaphysics. I consider this understanding a more all-inclusive one regarding this investigation.

In line with Schmidt, Sanguineti asserts that only metaphysics can effect a real separation, since it looks at the whole being (*esse*) of *ens* and not just an abstract feature of its entirety. He deduces that Aquinas designates *separatio* in the Commentary of Boethius *De Trinitate* as pertained to metaphysics (that is, its process).³⁷ Sanguineti affirms further that *separatio* is the natural process of spontaneous knowledge because, through it, humans know things as they are. This is in accord with a real union or division of actual constituents, according to reality, with the continuance of intelligence in the sensitivity or *conversio ad phantasmata* and in the formation of judgment. So, metaphysics assumes the *suppositum*³⁸ as its object, which is really 'separated' in its totality, and not according to 'this' or 'that' other abstract feature.³⁹ Furthermore, Sanguineti interprets the Thomistic hypothesis that metaphysics comprises the subsistent whole. Metaphysics deals

³⁶ See Schmidt, R. W., 'L'emploi de la séparation en métaphysique', 393.

³⁷ See Sanguineti, J. J., *La Filosofía de La Ciencia Según Santo Tomás*, Pamplona: EUNSA, 1977, 134.

³⁸ See *ST*, III, q. 2, a. 2.

³⁹ See Sanguineti, J. J., *La Filosofía de La Ciencia Según Santo Tomás*, 136–137.

with *separabilia*, and enunciates the separable and the separated in being (*esse*). Considering this fact, Sanguineti confirms its methodology as *separatio*.⁴⁰ This denotes a real separation in propositions and not the rational separation or the inverse, which is abstraction.⁴¹ Accordingly, Sanguineti establishes that when *esse* is discarded, then *separatio* applies only to some properties; so to speak, abstraction converts to *separatio*, which is the error that Aquinas cautions against Platonic formalism. For this reason, he maintains that to posit abstraction as the metaphysical method matches with losing the *suppositum* and *ens*. This is because the *suppositum* possesses the act-of-being (*esse*) and is the whole (by participation) in which all accidents unite.⁴²

McInerny concisely expresses an equivalent opinion with Sanguineti on the notion of *separatio*, demonstrated in reality through metaphysics. For him, *separatio* is not simply a notional separation of *esse* or existence. Rather, metaphysics is separated in reality and rests on the fact of the judgment that, in real existence, there are realities independent of and separate from matter and motion. Consequently, he designates *separatio* as appropriately about reality.⁴³

Mondin, instead, considers that Aquinas has a special place for *separatio* by using it as one of his inductive-phenomenological terminologies that describes “that which belongs to ‘being’ as such” or rather, that which belongs to the formality of being, from that which belongs to ‘being’ inasmuch as it receives a specific determination, that is, of ‘this’ or ‘that’ ‘being’.⁴⁴

Besides, inasmuch as Wippel articulates the major notions reflected above with the main concern about establishing the relationship between *separatio* and metaphysics, he categorically states that consideration of being, as non-material, belongs to *separatio*. He pithily affirms that *separatio* is a negative-judging

⁴⁰ See *In De Trin*, q. 5, a. 4.

⁴¹ See Sanguineti, J. J., *La Filosofía de La Ciencia Según Santo Tomás*, 147.

⁴² See Sanguineti, J. J., 140.

⁴³ See McInerny, R., *St. Thomas Aquinas*, 92.

⁴⁴ See ‘B. Mondin, “Il Momento Ascendente della Metafisica di S. Tommaso d’Aquino,” in *Rivista Di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica* 55 (1963), 287–316,’ 294.

activity through which one is able to differentiate one thing from another with the consciousness that the actual one is excluded from that other. Wippel equally states that through *separatio*, Aquinas demonstrates that substance, which is the intelligible matter of quantity, can exist exclusive of quantity. Separation, therefore, is a method by which the mind clearly acknowledges and sustains that the 'being' and the 'reality' of something are not established on its corporeality or mutable nature or quantity. Through separation, one can affirm negative immateriality that is the neutral nature of being.⁴⁵ Accordingly, *separatio* offers a general notion of the fundamental subject of metaphysics underlined in diverse aspects and stages, in other words, 'being'. Wippel expounds that for Aquinas, over and above the immaterial, *secundum esse et rationem*, e.g. God and intellectual substances, those are similarly said to be separate from matter, exclusive of matter, like, *ens commune*. Consequently, Wippel ascertains that this sort of immateriality, articulated in *ens commune*, is the subject of metaphysics.⁴⁶ Thus, Aquinas submits:

... something can exist separate from matter and motion in two distinct ways: first, because by its nature the thing that is called separate in no way can exist in matter and motion, as God and the angels are said to be separate from matter and motion. Second, because by its nature it does not exist in matter and motion; but it can exist without them, though we sometimes find it with them.⁴⁷

Albeit the foregoing seems contextually dissimilar from the immediate analysis it directly elucidates the notion of separation and Aquinas'/Wippel's cogitations on the diverse sorts of immaterial *separatio*. And so, it illumines the question of *separatio*

⁴⁵ See Wippel, 'Metaphysics and "Separatio" According to Thomas Aquinas', 441–442.

⁴⁶ See Wippel, 457.

⁴⁷ *In De Trin*, q. 5, a. 4. "... secundum quod dupliciter potest esse aliquid a materia et motu separatum secundum esse. Uno modo sic, quod de ratione ipsius rei, quae separata dicitur, sit quod nullo modo in materia et motu esse possit, sicut deus et Angeli dicuntur a materia et motu separati. Alio modo sic, quod non sit de ratione eius quod sit in materia et motu, sed possit esse sine materia et motu, quamvis quandoque inveniatur in materia et motu."

in immateriality thereby fortifying their reasons. In line with Wippel, Elders offers *separatio* a wider interpretation worth investigating. According to Elders, *separatio* associated with the constitution of metaphysics is an insight, which articulates that not every 'being' is constituted of matter. From this assumption, he presents an idea of a new concept of 'being'. Hence, the role of *separatio*, regarding metaphysics is mutually distinct from abstraction. Abstraction is intrinsically oriented and goes together with scientific declarations in philosophy of nature as well as metaphysics, whereas *separatio* is an external factor.⁴⁸ If one counts on Elders' analysis, the significance of *separatio* in the knowledge of being becomes palpable. *Separatio* will, then, indicate an external condition for the cognition of being, but is that just the sole inference? If one considers it simply as an external condition, then, it does not appertain to the intrinsic features in the cognition of a reality, such as, 'being'. I believe *separatio* has much more import than the extrinsic, reflecting on the very analysis of Elders. It is better to reserve a personal opinion, since a precise and apposite interpretation to it, is largely dependent on one's approach to the holistic argument and the sort of analysis.⁴⁹

Likewise, according to Elders, it is remarkable that the first judgment articulates both dissimilarity and separation. The reason is that, by so doing, it opens the way for further intellectual deliberations. So, the mind has more competence to reason further into implications of that which it apprehends as universal knowledge. To accentuate metaphysics, Elders suggests that this method (*separatio*) is repeated when one attains the fundamentals of metaphysics: the mind arrives at a conviction that it is not essential for 'being' to 'be' of matter. The *intellectus*, then, attains a fine insight that it cannot relinquish the immaterial, the rational being's spiritual aspiration.⁵⁰ Accordingly, Elders recaps that, when one arrives at metaphysics this vision becomes more incisive for

⁴⁸ See Elders, L., *The Metaphysics of Being of St. Thomas Aquinas in a Historical Perspective*, 23.

⁴⁹ See Ugobi-Onyemere, *The Knowledge of the First Principles in Saint Thomas Aquinas*. Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, 2015, 151–52.

⁵⁰ See Elders, L., 'Le Premier Principe de La Vie Intellective', *Revue Thomiste* 62 (1962): 571–86, 582.

the universal and novel contemplation on being. Conclusively, he asserts that through this negative observation (*separatio*), the mind becomes free to penetrate beyond matter to grasp 'being' holistically (*ens commune*). In doing so, it could rise to the exclusively Different, the First of all principles.⁵¹ One can sum up Elders' outlook with the Thomistic notion on the sort of 'immateriality', applicable to *ens commune*, which is accomplished by *separatio* as portrayed in Aquinas' citation below:

We say that being and substance are separate from matter and motion not because it is of their nature to be without them, ... but because it is not of their nature to be in matter and motion, although sometimes they are in matter and motion.⁵²

Though they seem to accentuate different interpretations of *separatio* in Aquinas' notion from the texts of *De Trinitate*, most Thomists, who cogitated on this discourse, tried to underline the importance of *separatio* to 'being' in the Thomistic metaphysics, and one cannot undermine its indispensable nature. Balmaseda Cinquina, who discusses *separatio* as one of the 'habits', demonstrates its essential feature in expressing that through *separatio* the rational being has the maximum authentic universality that recognises the intimacy and commonness of all being and its act-of-being, without resorting to any. Furthermore, according to Balmaseda Cinquina, if the first science is wisdom, if it exercises a function of *sapientia* as habit, it is precisely because of *separatio*.⁵³

To this notion, whatever the argument may be, I supplement that despite the fact that Aquinas did not employ *separatio* in many of his works, he still gave it precedence in the determination of the 'act-of-being'. It is the negative 'judgment' that offers metaphysics

⁵¹ See Elders, L., *The Metaphysics of Being of St. Thomas Aquinas in a Historical Perspective*, 152.

⁵² In *De Trin*, q. 5, a. 4 ad 5. "Ad quantum dicendum quod ens et substantia dicuntur separata a materia et motu non per hoc quod de ratione ipsorum sit esse sine materia et motu, ... sed per hoc quod de ratione eorum non est esse in materia et motu, quamvis quandoque sint in materia et motu."

⁵³ See Balmaseda Cinquina, M. F., 'Separatio y Otros Hábitos Intelectuales', *Studium* 9 (2006): 311–20, 319.

its true nature. In my mind, the Thomistic *separatio* is a vital element for metaphysics to thrive in the fundamental knowledge of all things starting from ‘being as being’ and the fundamental metaphysical principles. Metaphysics ‘is’ the science of ‘being’ (material/immaterial) because of the ‘negative judgment’ of the intellect (*separatio*); even the ‘basic principles’ are nominated as such, as a result of the indispensable character of this intellectual function.⁵⁴

Subsequently, on the problem of how *esse* is known, Gilson, using some Thomistic texts, develops a noetic maxim whereby the human person knows immediately and instantly by his intellect the existence of things he perceives through the senses. Both activities are essential for realistic knowledge. Although the distinction between abstract knowledge and judgment are fundamental, it does not also suggest a separation. This implies that abstraction and judgment are not separated in reality. On this view, Gilson upholds Aquinas’ belief that ‘being’ is the first to fall on the mind but that is not to suggest that it is an abstract perception. The notion behind this Thomistic hypothesis is that the first is always the sensible grasp.⁵⁵

There is then the first that falls into the mind, and with it, in actual *separatio*, a first in the intellective operation of judgment. Nonetheless, in few instances, as in formal rational faculty, there could be separation of reason from the intellect. Examples are the purely axiomatic and logical forms of reasoning, which do not constitute my main investigation about reality in human knowledge.

4. A Concise Critical Assessment of the Problem

Considering the above ruminations, it is ascertainable that the human *simplex apprehensio* is at the representational aspect of essence, that is, deficient of actuality in being. The simple apprehension, though tacit, is an implied judgmental act which is

⁵⁴ See Ugobi-Onyemere, *The Knowledge of the First Principles in Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 152–53.

⁵⁵ See Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952, 203–204.

completed at the *compositio et divisio*. This is where the factual depiction of the human comprehension of *ens* impressively appears. Hence, the realistic human venture to 'know' is a complementary act of *simplex apprehensio* through *compositio/divisio*. Thus, the acknowledgement of being (*ens*) is in the act which is analogous to the verbal act *Ego Sum*, as it were, a composite. This composite is an archetype of the Thomistic notion of *ens* that *aliquid est* (something is) is a fruit of intuition ordered by an implicit judgment. As Wippel suggests, what we discover through the original judgment of existence is being (*ens*) or something similar. Once the intellect understands this, it expresses it in a notion or complex: 'that which is'.⁵⁶

Therefore, the first conceptions of the intellect cannot be the 'real' product of *simplex apprehensio* as some Thomists inaccurately understood. Aertsen, for example, categorically asserts that there is no implicit judgment in the initial grasp of *ens* as the existentialist Thomists affirm.⁵⁷ For him, the actual enunciation of the primary concept of the intellect is in *simplex apprehensio*. Additionally, he thinks that, at this point of *simplex apprehensio*, there is a unity of delineation as in transcendental *unum*.⁵⁸ Inversely, it is obvious that the reality of human apprehension is more complex than the unalloyed incorporeal exercise as Aertsen upholds.

Consequently, Aquinas' insightfulness is typically detected in this inquiry because, inter alia, he demonstrates a perceptive ingenuity. It is astounding that a problem arises in this Thomistic proposition amongst eminent Thomists. One may attribute the mentioned problem to the Thomistic manner of exposition. However, as Aquinas submits, "The perfect act of the intellect is complete knowledge, when the object is distinctly and determinately known; whereas the incomplete act is imperfect

⁵⁶ See Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*, 44.

⁵⁷ See Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas*, Studien Und Texte Zur Geistesg. E.J. Brill, 1996 180.

⁵⁸ See Aertsen, 207.

knowledge, when the object is known indistinctly, and as it were confusedly.”⁵⁹

5. Conclusion

The earlier introduction and discourse on the nature, operations, and cognitive modes of *intellectus*, abstractive intuition, serve as a lead into the present investigation properly termed *separatio*. *Separatio* in realistic philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, as we ascertained, is the key to proper human knowledge, because of its judgemental endowment in human cognition. Although not a thing in itself, it is an indispensable operation of the mind that enables it to sift any knowable reality through judgment. It involves an intellectual activity that Fabro considers the higher level in *conversio*.⁶⁰ It is the point of integration in human understanding, so to speak, an intermediary between simple intuition and intellectual abstraction. At this point, apart from the *primum cognitum*, propositional notions and/or other judgments are formed by the intellect.⁶¹ It is, analogously, the heartbeat of the intellectual act because it is moment of distinction that renders knowledge actual. Even though *separatio* entails a rigorous intellectual activity, it is part of the most instantaneous acts of the human intellect that facilitates human knowledge of being-as-being and other realistic knowledge in Aquinas’ description.

Therefore, this analysis has established that *separatio*, as assumed, is the proper place of metaphysics in the knowledge of being as real.

⁵⁹ See *ST*, I, q. 85, a. 3: “Actus autem perfectus ad quem pervenit intellectus, est scientia completa, per quam distincte et determinate res cognoscuntur. Actus autem incompletus est scientia imperfecta, per quam sciuntur res indistincte sub quadam confusione.”

⁶⁰ See Fabro, C., *Percezione e Pensiero*, 266–267; 127–32.

⁶¹ See *ST*, I, q. 85, a. 5.