



**Studi
sull'Aristotelismo
medievale
(secoli VI-XVI)**



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Abstract: In questo articolo ricostruisco la critica di Sigieri di Brabante all'argomento di Tommaso d'Aquino che muove dalla partecipazione per arrivare alla distinzione reale tra essenza ed essere. Sigieri ritiene che la nozione di partecipazione di Tommaso debba essere sostituita da quella di imitazione (o partecipazione imitativa). La prima, basata sulla distinzione tra la natura del partecipante (l'essenza) e la natura che viene partecipata (l'essere), comporta la distinzione reale. Ma tale distinzione non esiste se gli esseri partecipano di Dio, e non dell'essere, per imitazione. Sostengo che la critica di Sigieri è carente. La sua ricostruzione non rende giustizia alla concezione di Tommaso della partecipazione e della distinzione reale. Inoltre, la nozione di partecipazione (imitativa), come descritta da Sigieri, era già stata utilizzata da Tommaso stesso. Dopo una riflessione sulle ragioni della divisione tra i due pensatori, valuterò le loro proposte dal punto di vista di una metafisica della creazione.

Participation or Imitation?

Siger of Brabant vs Thomas Aquinas¹

David Anzalone

University of Lucerne

Abstract: In this paper, I reconstruct Siger of Brabant's criticism of Thomas Aquinas's argument from participation to the real distinction between essence and being. Siger believes that Thomas's notion of participation should be replaced by imitation (or imitative participation). The first, based on the distinction between the participant's nature (the essence) and the nature which is participated in (being), entails the real distinction. But there is no such distinction if beings participate in God, and not in being, by imitation. I argue that Siger's criticism is found wanting. His reconstruction does not do justice to Thomas's understanding of participation and of the real distinction. Furthermore, the notion of (imitative) participation, as described by Siger, was already used by Thomas himself. After having reflected on where the two thinkers part ways, I will evaluate their proposals from the point of view of a metaphysics of creation.

Keywords: Participation, Imitation, Thomas Aquinas, Siger of Brabant, Real Distinction, Being, Essence, Medieval Philosophy, Metaphysics, Creation, God-World Relationship.

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1. Introduction

For more than eighty years, the metaphysical notion of participation has been at the centre of much work in the history of medieval philosophy, particularly in Thomistic metaphysics. Cornelio Fabro, Louis-Bertrand Geiger, Rudi Te Velde, John Wippel, and Gregory T. Doolan, just to name a few, have made significant contributions to recovering the centrality of this notion in Aquinas's thought and illustrating its various facets². Much has been written on the relationship between participation and Thomas's real distinction between essence and *esse* in creatures. As Fabro and Wippel showed, Thomas frequently argues that if creatures are beings (*entia*) by participation in *esse*, their essence cannot be identical to their *esse*³. That this was an important inference for Aquinas can be seen from the fact that it frequently occurs not only in the thought of the Dominican master but also in many medieval reconstructions of his thought made by his followers and adversaries. Among such adversaries is Siger of Brabant, who, at least⁴ in his *Questions* on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, vehemently rejected Thomas's real distinction⁵.

In this paper, I reconstruct Siger's criticism of Aquinas's argu-

2. Doolan (2008), Fabro (1939, 1961), Geiger (1942), Te Velde (1995), Wippel (1987, 2000). Giovanni Ventimiglia (2020, pp. 14-16) explains how, within a context emphasizing the originality of Aquinas's metaphysics of being, the studies conducted by Fabro, and particularly Geiger, were crucial for the recovery of (neo)platonistic elements in his thought.

3. Both Fabro (2005, pp. 215-235) and Wippel (1984, pp. 150-157) provide numerous source texts. I here mention for our purposes *In De Hebdomadibus*, l. 2; *In II Post. Anal.*, l. 6; *Sum. Theol.*, I, q. 44, a. 1, co.

4. Some passages in his later *Quaestiones Super Librum de Causis* (1275-1276) suggest that Siger changed his mind and accepted Aquinas's real distinction. In that work, in order to prove that God is *ipsum esse subsistens*, Siger relies on the same argument from participation that he refutes in his commentary on *Metaphysics*: «sed est causa prima ipsum esse per se subsistens. Aliter enim, sicut concludit ratio facta ad hoc, causa prima non primo esset, nam quod sic est quod ipsum esse est et solum tale, primo est; et nisi causa prima sic esset quod esset ipsum esse per se subsistens, tunc igitur esse esset ab ea participatum; ex quo sequeretur quod in causa prima esset compositio quaedam ex ipso esse participato et natura participante et potentiali» (Siger of Brabant, *Quaestiones super librum de causis*, A. Marlasca (ed.), Éditions de l'Institut supérieur de philosophie, Louvain 1972, q. 9 bis, p. 59, 21-27). See also Maurer (1990, pp. 133-135); Marlasca (1972, p. 21, n. 20); Van Steenberghen (1977, pp. 291-292).

5. Regarding Siger's rejection of the real distinction and its influence, see Imbach

ment from participation to the real distinction between essence and being. Siger believes Aquinas's notion of participation should be replaced by imitation (or imitative participation). The first, based on the distinction between the participant's nature (the essence) and the nature which is participated in (being), entails the real distinction. But there is no such distinction if beings participate in God, and not in being, by imitation.

I argue that Siger's criticism is found wanting. His reconstruction does not do justice to Aquinas's understanding of participation and of the real distinction. Furthermore, the notion of imitative participation, as described by Siger, was already used by Aquinas himself. After having reflected on where the two thinkers part ways, I will evaluate the two proposals from the point of view of a metaphysics of creation.

2. Siger's Reconstruction of Aquinas's Argument from Participation

There are four critically edited *reportationes* of *Questions* on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* attributed to Siger of Brabant. The *reportationes* of Munich (books II-V, henceforth M) and Vienna (book V-VII, henceforth V) have been edited by William Dunphy, and those of Cambridge (books II-VII, henceforth C) and Paris (books II-VII, henceforth P) have been edited by Armand Maurer. Furthermore, Johannes Vennebusch edited three further questions on *Metaphysics* under the title of *Questiones metaphysice tres* (henceforth Q3). Maurer had also previously edited a *quaestio* on the distinction between essence and being found in a commentary on *Metaphysics* contained in Ms. Cambrai 486 (books I-V, henceforth Cm) which he initially thought was to be attributed to Siger⁶. However, he

(1981); König-Pralong (2005); Maurer (1990); Secretan (2007). On the same debate in the context of the Parisian Faculty of Arts, see also Ebbesen (2014, pp. 287-292).

6. Maurer (1949).

then changed his mind and thought it belonged to the work of a pupil of Siger's who freely used the lectures of his master⁷. Siger's commentaries on *Metaphysics* can be safely dated between 1270 and 1277⁸, still, perhaps, more precisely, between 1272 and 1275⁹.

M, C, P, as well as Q3 and *Cm*, all include a *quaestio* – M also includes a further *quaestio*¹⁰ – on the relationship between essence and being¹¹. The version contained in P is shorter – as is the case with other questions – and does not include any argument regarding the notion of participation. On the contrary, the objectors of M, C, Q3, and *Cm* all offer an argument in favour of the real distinction from the notion of participation. I here reproduce the text found in M (*Utrum esse in causatis pertineat ad essentiam causatorum*):

*Item, omnia entia sunt per participationem Primi entis, ita quod nihil est ens per se aliud a Primo; ergo, cum in his quae sunt entia per participationem differunt esse participatum et natura participans, quare differt esse ab essentia.*¹²

Beyond the terminological differences, the arguments all present the same structure. Henceforth, I will refer to this as the PC (participation-composition) argument.

1. All (created) beings are (exist) through participation in the First being, which is equivalent to saying that they are through participation in being. [Assumed]

7. Maurer (1956).

8. Ebbesen (2014, p. 278).

9. Maurer (1983, pp. 14-15).

10. M, as well as Q3, do not provide an answer to the argument from participation in their *quaestiones*. This is why M reposes the question in Book III, q. 2, p. 90, 3-8: «Super quaedam prius dicta redeamus: tactum enim fuit de esse, utrum esse sit de essentia rei. [...] Ratio dicenda nunc non fuit soluta superius». He provides his answer in the *respondeo* (M, III, q. 2, pp. 90-91, 12-20).

11. M, o, q. 7; M, III, q. 2; C, o, q. 7; P, o, q. 2; Q3, q. 1.

12. M, o, q. 7, p. 43, 55-58, emphasis is mine. Cf. C, o, q. 7, p. 31, 38-41; Q3, q. 1, p. 177, 61-66; *Cm* in Maurer (1949, 230).

corollary to 1) only the First being is *ens per se* or *ens per essentiam*.

2. In all beings that exist through participation, the *natura participans* and the *esse participatum* differ. [Assumed]
3. Therefore, in all created beings, essence and being (*esse*) differ¹³.

While he does name Brother Thomas when reconstructing other arguments, Siger does not name him in any of the reconstructions of this argument. Nevertheless, the move from participation to the real distinction, even though it takes different forms, is frequent in Aquinas. This is why authors like Fabro and Wippel¹⁴ did not hesitate to attribute this argument to Thomas.

Now, premise 1 is uncontroversial to Siger¹⁵, unlike premise 2, which, according to Fabro, plays a key role in Thomas's argument. This is why he includes it in his reconstruction of the general argument from participation¹⁶.

This principle is explicitly formulated in Aquinas's *Commentary* on Aristotle's *Physics*, Book VIII, in a broader discussion concerning the causal dependence of heavenly bodies on the first mover.

13. Among the texts quoted by Fabro (2005, pp. 236-258), which include texts from both Thomas's doctrinal allies and enemies, some present a similar reconstruction. To these texts, one must add the *quaestio Utrum esse sit de essentia in rebus creatis* contained in Cambridge Peterhouse 192, 186ra-188ra, which at first glance presents many similarities with Siger's question. This Anonymous reconstructs the argument as follows (here is a corrected transcription): «[...] per Thomam esse est quod participatum ab essentia. Sed participatum non est de essentia participantis, quia idem non participat se. Igitur esse non, etc.» (Cambridge Peterhouse 192, 186va, henceforth *CPh*). On this *Commentary*, see also Donati (2014).

14. Fabro (2005, pp. 237-238); Wippel (2005, p. 161).

15. Premise 1 also appears as an *oppositum* in the question *Utrum ens possit ab aliquo ente participari*, which will be analysed below: «Oppositum apparet. Dicimus enim tantum Ens primum esse ens per essentiam, et omnia alia entia esse participatione Primi Entis» (C, III, q. 20, p. 122, 11-12).

16. Fabro (2005, p. 235, emphasis is mine): «Omnis creatura dicitur (esse) ens per participationem. Sed omne quod est per participationem oportet quod dividatur in *participans* et *participatum*, ita quod omne *participans* componatur ex *participante* et *participato*, tamquam ex potentia et actu. Ergo omnis creatura componitur [realiter] ex actu et potentia in linea entis quod est ex *participato* et *participante*: *participans* dicitur essentia vel suppositum, et quod est *participatum* ipsum esse seu actus essendi». Cf. Porro's reconstruction (Porro 2012, pp. 196-197).

Sed dato quod corpus caeleste non sit compositum ex materia et forma, adhuc oportet in ipso ponere aliquo modo potentiam essendi. Necessae est enim quod omnis substantia simplex subsistens, vel ipsa sit suum esse, vel participet esse. Substantia autem simplex quae est ipsum esse subsistens, non potest esse nisi una, sicut nec albedo, si esset subsistens, posset esse nisi una. *Omnis ergo substantia, quae est post primam substantiam simplicem, participat esse. Omne autem participans componitur ex participante et participato, et participans est in potentia ad participatum.* In omni ergo substantia quantumcumque simplici, post primam substantiam simplicem, est potentia essendi.¹⁷

Thomas argues that even if heavenly bodies are not composed of matter and form, they still have some potency, the *potentia essendi*. In this broad discussion, PC's second premise is used to conclude that participants are in potency with respect to being, which is an act. Having seen how Siger reconstructs Aquinas's argument, I will now analyse his answer.

3. Siger's Answer to Aquinas's Argument from Participation

In his *quaestiones* on the real distinction mentioned above, Siger provides an answer to the PC argument on two occasions, in M and C. I here reproduce M's answer, found in Book III, q. 2 (*Utrum esse sit de essentia rei*).

Dico quod duplex est modus entis per participationem: unus per participationem imitationis; alius per participationem univocationis, ut album ipsum est album per participationem albedinis, quae est univoca. In talibus autem oportet quod sit compositum ex participante et participato. In entibus autem ipsa essentia Primi non est participata per participationem univocationis, sed imitationis,

17. In *VIII Phys.*, l. 21, nr: 1153, emphasis is mine.

in hoc quod ista imitantur Primum. In his autem non oportet quod participans et participatum differant: unde Plato mutavit nomen imitationis et assumpsit ipsum pro participatione univocationis.¹⁸

Siger distinguishes two kinds of participation: univocal participation and imitative participation. The first, both ‘real’ and ‘logical’, to use Fabro’s terminology, applies to qualities such as colours, as when white bodies participate in whiteness (really) or to genera, as when the species ‘man’ participates in ‘animality’ (logically) in that there is within it something different from the nature of animality¹⁹. This kind of participation involves composition between the participant and the nature which is participated in. Siger argues that neither God nor being, as we shall see, are participated in, whether really or logically, in this way. Creatures participate in God by imitative participation. God is the perfect exemplar of all things. All other things decline from his perfection and imitate him insofar as it is possible (*secundum quod possibile est* or *aliquo modo*²⁰, in Siger’s words). Siger, as well as the Anonymous of Cambrai, understand this notion of participation by imitation in a hierarchy of beings in which some created beings are closer and some are further from God («aliqua entia imitantur primum magis de prope et alia minus de prope»)²¹.

Having distinguished the two notions of participation and having explained that participation by imitation does not involve composition, Siger attributes their distinction to Plato, apparently following Aristotle’s account of Plato’s philosophy in the first book of *Metaphysics* (I, 6). I open a short historical parenthesis on this issue. In Chapter Six²², Aristotle explains how Plato responded to the Heraclitean problem of knowledge by introducing the Forms,

18. M, III, q. 2, pp. 90-91, 12-20. Cf. C, o, q. 7, p. 36, 12-20.

19. M, III, q. 21, p. 149, 18-20.

20. C, o, q. 7, p. 36, 17-18 and C, III, q. 20, p. 122, 28.

21. Cm. 71vb. Cf. *CPh*, 180vb-181ra: «Set illa perfectio non est eiusdem rationis set est sola imitatio eius que in quibusdam entibus maior, in quibusdam entibus minor, secundum quod res propinquius se habent ad primum uel remotius in ordine essendi».

22. On this chapter see Steel (2012).

i.e., the eternal objects of scientific definition. The sensibles, Plato said, exist through participation in the Forms. Regarding the introduction of the notion of participation, Plato wasn't that original of a philosopher. He just changed the name by replacing the notion of imitation the Pythagoreans had coined. Aristotle adds that both the Pythagoreans and Plato did not inquire into the meaning of these notions²³. Now, Siger's version of the story is more ambiguous. M and C offer different versions of the last sentence:

(M) unde Plato mutavit nomen imitationis et assumpsit ipsum pro participatione univocationis.

(C) Et ideo *l^o huius* dixit Aristoteles quod nomen imitationis mutavit Plato in nomen participationis. In tali autem participatione non differt participatum et participans.²⁴

In both texts, Siger is meant to have provided enough motivation to explain Plato's terminological choice, in contrast to what Aristotle believes. (C)'s version is coherent with Aristotle's story, i.e. it records the terminological change Plato made, but seems to be problematic from a philosophical point of view. *Prima facie*, we are told that Plato changed the name of imitation to that of mere participation. However, the following sentence presupposes that he is talking about imitative participation. It is in this kind of participation that there is no distinction between that which participates and that which is participated in. (M) is more at odds with Aristotle's story and is difficult to interpret. It is not clear what the referent of *ipsum* should be, and how one should read the preposition *pro*. To keep a coherent philosophical explanation, it seems to me that one should read the passage as follows: Plato changed the meaning of imitation, adopting a new meaning instead of (*pro*) univocal participation²⁵. In this way, Siger's train of

23. *Met.* I, 6, 987b 10-14.

24. C, o, q, 7, p. 36, 18-20.

25. Compare these passages to this one from the Anonymus Zimmerman: «Ad rationem dicendum quod omnia entia entia sunt participatione primi, sed

thought is easier to understand. If participation is imitation, there is no distinction between that which participates and that which is participated in, which would ground their composition. This is why (*unde*) Plato changed the meaning of imitation²⁶.

4. Evaluating Siger's Criticism

I now offer a brief evaluation of Siger's reconstruction and criticism of Aquinas's argument. It seems to me that Siger misconstrues both Aquinas's understanding of the relation between essence and being and of the way in which things participate in God and being. I will treat these two issues separately.

As for the first aspect, it seems to me that the main problem is Siger's belief that the second premise of PC entails that essence and being are two distinct and separable components. This can be seen when analysing the *quaestio* of «Whether being can be participated in by some being» (*Utrum ens possit ab aliquo ente participari*)²⁷, where he uses premise 2 of the PC argument to make the case that being cannot be participated in (in the sense of mere participation). Let us take a look at the *quod non*:

cum dicitur "Omne ens participatione compositum est," dicendum quod aliquid potest esse ens participative vel formaliter, sicut cum dicitur 'lignum est album' quia participat albedine formaliter, vel imitative sicut Plato dicebat quod entia sunt entia participatione ipsius primi ita quod imitentur ipsum primum. Unde nomen imitationis mutavit in nomen participationis et e converso. Tunc dico quod ens participatione formaliter compositum est, non tamen oportet quod hoc sit verum de eo quod est ens participatione per imitationem. Sic autem entia ista dicuntur entia participatione. Ideo etc.» (Anonymus Zimmermanni, in Cambridge, Peterhouse 152, fol. 7vb, as quoted in Ebbesen 2014, p. 308, n. 74).

26. The reception of this Aristotelian passage in the Latin tradition is very problematic, already from a textual point of view (cf. *Aristoteles Latinus*, vol XXV 2, p. 22, ll. 3-6; *Aristoteles Latinus* vol XXV 3.2, p. 28, ll. 441-445; Arabic-Latin translation in Averroes, *In I Met.*, t. 6, 8ra). I am preparing a more detailed study on this issue.

27. C, III, q. 20; M, III, q. 21; P, III, q. 9. I also found parallel questions in *Cm*, 71va-71vb (*Utrum possit esse aliquod ens per participationem*), and *Cph*, 180va-181ra (*Utrum aliquod possit esse ens per participationem*). Beyond sharing some similarities with Siger, these questions have a different structure. *Cm* is closer to Siger (M) than *Cph*.

Et quod non videtur, quia omne ens per participationem alicuius compositum est ex natura participante et participata, quae quidem de necessitate diversae naturae sunt. Si igitur esset aliquod ens per participationem entis, ipsum compositum esset ex ente et natura diversa ab ente. Quod autem diversum est ab ente nihil est. Quare ipsum compositum esset ex nihilo et aliquo, quod est impossibile.²⁸

In the *respondeo*, Siger dismisses this argument by providing the same distinction between univocal participation and participation by imitation and argues that there is no univocal participation in God or in being.

Now, concerning the relationship between essence and being, it must be clear that for Aquinas, essence and being are two distinct yet inseparable and co-occurring components, just like matter and form are. Or, to take an example by Gyula Klima, the trilaterality and triangularity of a triangle are distinct yet inseparable²⁹. It is not possible to have one without the other. Furthermore, Siger's understanding does not capture the relationship between essence and being one finds in Aquinas. After all, we are talking about being. Essence cannot be something apart from being. This worry is similar to the one that moved Geiger's reflections on participation: taking the analogies of reception, limitation, and contraction to the extreme, he was worried that the receptive subject, i.e. the essence, was somehow something else prior to the received being. Composition, he thought, presupposed the prior existence of the parts. Therefore, he only recognised a secondary role to participation by composition, prioritising participation by similitude. However, being is an act. Actualisation and determination to 'this'

28. C, III, q. 20, p. 122, 5-10; M, III, q. 21, p. 149, 1-6. Cf. *Cm*, 71va: «Quia in eo quod est ens differt natura participans ab eo quod participatur. Ab ente autem <nichil> est diuersum. Ergo nichil est ens per participationem entis». Cf. *CPh*, 180va-180vb: «Natura participans est quid aliud a natura participata, sicut patet in ferro quod est calidum per participationem. Aliud enim est ferrum et aliud caliditas. Consimiliter aliud erit ens et aliud quod participat ens. Aliud ab ente est non ens, igitur si aliquid esset per participationem, aliquid componeretur ex ente et non ente, quod est impossibile».

29. Klima (2019, p. 11).

or 'that' being happen simultaneously³⁰. The essence is non-being only relative to the act of being, just as matter is non-being relatively to the form. Such a monstrous composite as the one Siger fears could never exist.

Siger, then, does not account for how being or God are participated in, according to Aquinas. At first, it must be noted that the argument from participation involves being. It does not involve God directly. The being which is participated in, that is to say, received and from which the essence is distinct, is the *actus essendi* of the creature and, in a distinct sense, the *esse commune*. But when he answers to the PC argument, Siger conflates the two objects of participation. As I hinted in my reconstruction of the argument, he already conflates the two when he reconstructs the first premise: created beings are beings through participation in the First being. In his answer, he argues that beings are by participation in the First being but that such participation is by imitation. If this is so, he is not answering the PC argument, which concerns participated being. He is just explaining what participation in God amounts to, according to him. God is not participated in univocally or essentially as whiteness is. In fact, His essence is not received in the things that participate in Him.

Siger is more accurate when discussing the *quaestio* concerning the participation in being. In his *respondeo*, Siger argues that being *tripliciter dicitur*. It can indicate a separate universal in the way of Plato (*Met.* III, 4). Such an *ens*, just like any other separate universal, does not exist, and therefore cannot be participated in, in any way. *Ens* can also be said to mean God, the *ens per essentiam*, and finally, the *ens commune*. Regarding God, he once again puts forward the distinction between univocal participation and

30. *De Pot.*, q. 3, a. 5, ad 2: «Ad secundum dicendum, quod ex hoc ipso quod quidditati esse attribuitur, non solum esse, sed ipsa quidditas creari dicitur: quia antequam esse habeat, nihil est, nisi forte in intellectu creantis, ubi non est creatura sed creatrix essentia». *De Potentia*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 17: «Ad decimum septimum dicendum, quod Deus simul dans esse, producit id quod esse recipit: et sic non oportet quod agat ex aliquo praeexistenti». Wippel (2000, pp. 128-129).

imitative participation with the result of conflating the two objects of participation again³¹. The *ens commune*, which exists only *secundum considerationem*, on the other hand, cannot be participated in. There isn't anything in the thing which is different from the *ratio* of being (*ratio entis*). Instead, such a difference is found, for example, in the case of the species 'man' participating in 'animality'. Everything is being *per suam rationem*³². Being is a substantial predicate of a thing³³.

Having seen how Siger construes Thomas's notion of participation, I will now turn to Thomas himself. I will proceed by focusing first on the way created beings participate in *esse*, and then on the way in which they participate in God.

Thomas believes that created beings participate both in *esse commune*³⁴ and in their individual act of being (*actus essendi*). Just like Siger, Thomas believes that the *esse commune* is separate from existing things only *in intellectu*. The *esse commune* is the universal concept of being abstracted from all the acts of being pertaining to the creatures³⁵. Therefore, to say that created beings participate

31. C, III, q. 20, p. 122, 20-31. Cf. M, III, q. 21, p. 149, 10-14.

32. M, III, q. 21, p. 149, 15-20: «Sed potestne aliquid esse ens per participationem entis communis? Dico quod non, quia tunc oportet quod illud esset compositum ex natura participantis et participati, quae inter se essent diversa. Unde omne quod est ens, est ens per suam rationem: homo enim est animal per participationem animalitatis, quia est aliquid in ipso quod differt a natura animalitatis; non tamen est ens per participationem entis, quia nihil est in ipso quod sit differens ab ente vel a ratione entis, et sic patet ad illud». Cf. P, III, 9, p. 415, 5-10. *Cm*, 71va: «Nichil autem est ens per participationem entis communis predicabilis de omnibus, quia in ente per participationem necesse est quod participans sit diuersum ab ente in communi. Ab ente autem in communi nichil est diuersum. Ideo etc.».

33. C, III, q. 20, p. 122, 32-35: «Tertio modo dicitur ens ipsum commune, non secundum esse separatum a singulis entibus, sed solum secundum considerationem abstractum. Et istud est substantiale praedicatum de omnibus entibus, et non est participatum ab aliquibus entibus». Neither M nor C justify Wippel's (2005, p. 161) reconstruction which derives the non-participated character of the *ens commune* from its non-existence *secundum esse*.

34. I don't discuss K. Kremer's (1966) identification of *esse commune* and *esse subsistens* in this paper.

35. *Contra Gentiles* I, 26: «Quod est commune multis, non est aliquid praeter multa nisi sola ratione: sicut animal non est aliud praeter Socratem et Platonem et alia animalia nisi intellectu, qui apprehendit formam animalis expoliatam ab omnibus individuantibus et specificantibus; homo enim est quod vere est animal; alias sequeretur

in *esse commune*, is to say that by participating in their own acts of beings, they partially share in the *esse commune* without exhausting its fullness³⁶. Now, that created beings participate in their act of being, therefore means that their essence principle is responsible for the limitation of being. This is where composition enters the picture. But such participation, however, is analogical and not univocal, as Siger deems it to be³⁷.

Participation in God is different from participation in being but implies it. Since creatures participate in God, they participate in being. Creatures participate in God as their cause³⁸. God is the efficient cause responsible for the being of essence-esse composites. Nevertheless, God is also the final, and finally, the exemplar cause of essence-esse composites, insofar as they imitate him³⁹. Perhaps Siger is closer to Thomas than he would admit.

As Doolan explains, in several texts, Thomas appears to point to a double exemplarism of the divine essence⁴⁰. In two texts from *De Potentia*, Thomas writes that there is a twofold analogical likeness (*similitudo*) between God and creatures. Creatures imitate God in that they imitate their corresponding divine idea in their own manner (*suo modo*). And they imitate the divine nature insofar as they are and are good⁴¹. It is an analogical and not univocal likeness because, in the first case, the divine idea enjoys a

quod in Socrate et Platone essent plura animalia, scilicet ipsum animal commune, et homo communis, et ipse Plato. Multo igitur minus et ipsum esse commune est aliquid praeter omnes res existentes nisi in intellectu solum». See also Kerr (2015, p. 62).

36. Wippel (2000, p. 116).

37. Klima (2000).

38. *Sum. Theol.* I, q. 44, a. 1, co: «Si enim aliquid invenitur in aliquo per participationem, necesse est quod causetur in ipso ab eo cui essentialiter convenit [...] Deus est ipsum esse per se subsistens [...] omnia alia a Deo non sint suum esse, sed participant esse».

39. *Sum. Theol.* I, q. 44, a. 3 and a. 4.

40. *Quodl.* IV, q. 1, a.1, co. *In I Sent.*, d. 2, q. 1, a. 2, co. Cf. Costa (2012, p. 437).

41. *De Pot.*, q. 3, a. 4, ad 9: «quamvis inter Deum et creaturam non possit esse similitudo generis vel speciei; potest tamen esse similitudo quaedam analogiae, sicut inter potentiam et actum, et substantiam et accidens. Et hoc dicitur uno modo in quantum res creatae imitantur suo modo ideam divinae mentis, sicut artificiatam formam quae est in mente artificis. Alio modo secundum quod res creatae ipsi naturae divinae quoddammodo simulantur, prout a primo ente alia sunt entia, et a bono bona, et sic de aliis».

different mode of being with respect to the creature itself, while in the second case, the divine nature is *superexcellens omnium rerum*⁴². The first concerns the way in which things are (their modes, in Geiger's terminology)⁴³, and the second concerns the transcendental perfections (absolute perfections in Geiger's terminology) that are attributed to the creatures that participate in the act of being. Furthermore, the first corresponds to the essence of a created thing, while the second corresponds to the *esse* of a created thing. Following this account, creation amounts to God knowing his nature as imitable, i.e. knowing the divine ideas, and, through an act of his will, creating essences and their corresponding acts of being in which the creatures participate as they imitate the divine nature itself⁴⁴.

In this section, I have evaluated Siger's reconstruction and criticism of Aquinas's argument from participation. I have shown how Siger misconstrued both Aquinas's understanding of the relationship between essence and *esse*, and his understanding of participation. Aquinas's views do not result in the constitution of any of the monstrous composites Siger tries to avoid. There will never be any composite of being and (absolute) non-being, and certainly not a composite of God's essence and the creature's essence. Beings do not participate in God by having a part of his essence. God is their efficient cause and exemplar cause.

In the next section, I will consider Aquinas's and Siger's proposals. After pointing out their similarities and differences, I will evaluate them from the point of view of a metaphysics of creation.

42. *De Pot.*, q. 7, a. 7, ad 6: «Ad sextum dicendum, quod inter creaturam et Deum est duplex similitudo. Una creaturae ad intellectum divinum: et sic forma intellecta per Deum est unius rationis cum re intellecta, licet non habeat eundem modum essendi; quia forma intellecta est tantum in intellectu, forma autem creaturae est etiam in re. Alio modo secundum quod ipsa divina essentia est omnium rerum similitudo superexcellens, et non unius rationis. Et ex hoc modo similitudinis contingit quod bonum et huiusmodi praedicantur communiter de Deo et creaturis, non autem ex primo».

43. Geiger (1942, pp. 232-233).

44. Doolan (2008, p. 223).

5. Siger and Aquinas Reconsidered

As one can see, Siger and Thomas both agree that creatures participate in God by imitation⁴⁵. However, Siger's concept of imitation seems less elaborate than that of Thomas. In the same way as Thomas, he views imitation as analogical. Still, he does not seem to have advocated for double exemplarism, since he did not buy into the real distinction between essence and *esse*. He did endorse exemplarism on the side of the divine ideas, which are identical to the divine essence⁴⁶. A divine idea is an exemplar. It is the extrinsic form in resemblance of which something is made⁴⁷. It exists in God in a superexcellent way and, therefore, is not of the same *ratio* as the things that imitate it⁴⁸. A divine idea is only one way in which God's essence might be imitated. There is more than one way, hence the different degrees of perfection and the following ontological hierarchy. Now, a Thomist who believes in double exemplarism could concede that Siger is able to account for the essence of created things through this kind of exemplarism. But what about their *esse*?

In the *quaestio* on essence and *esse*, Siger considers another ratio that moved Thomas (*movit fratrem Thomam*), according to which everything except the First is composed. The intelligences are not composed of matter and form. Therefore, they are composed of essence and *esse*. *Esse* does not pertain to the essence⁴⁹.

Siger answers that created beings move away from the First, not through composition, but by having a higher degree of potentiality and a lesser degree of actuality. The First has no potential or passive nature. Some things are closer or further from God as they participate more or less in the nature of being in the same way

45. Wippel (2005, p. 162).

46. Siger of Brabant, *Quaestiones super librum de causis*, A. Marlasca (ed.), Publications Universitaires, Louvain 1972, q. 17, pp. 77-80.

47. Siger of Brabant, *Compendium super librum de generatione et corruptione*, B. Bâzan (ed.), Publications Universitaires, Louvain 1974, pp. 139-140.

48. C, III, q. 9, p. 98, 12-14.

49. M, o, q. 7, p. 42, 48-52; C, o q. 7, p. 31, 30-34; Q3, q. 1, p. 177, 51-59.

in which numbers participate more or less in the first unity. Intelligences, which have a higher degree of actuality than material composites, are closer to God. In this sense, they participate more fully in being since being is an act. And God is pure act⁵⁰.

We now understand Siger's picture more clearly. The tight relationship between essence and being is such that for Siger to be is to be a substance, to be an essence. No internal constituent is needed to account for the fact that something is. This is why he shows no embarrassment in identifying *ens* and *esse*. *Esse*, Siger writes, «significat essentiam per modum actus maximi»⁵¹. It is nothing but the actuality of the essence, which is itself already an act, and not a distinct act of existence⁵².

Étienne Gilson thought that this meant that for Siger, God could only be the cause of being in the Aristotelian sense of essence and not the cause of existence. Rightly understood, however, the notion of creation implies the possibility that the world might not have existed, even if it were eternal. The essence must be in potency with respect to its *esse*. Siger's God, then, is ultimately not a creator; or better, creation, i.e. the possibility that the world might not have existed finds no place in Siger's account of *esse* and essence, in the same way as it does not find any place in Aristotle's ontology⁵³.

50. M, pp. 47-48, 8-30, emphasis is mine: «[...] Bene tamen invenio quod quae sunt citra Primum recedunt ab ipso et multiplicantur per hoc quod accedunt ad potentiam. Et causa huius est cum nullum aliorum sit ita actus purus sicut Primum. Hoc tamen non concludit quod habeant diversas essentias. Item, recedunt a Primo per participare, quia quaedam participant de ente magis et minus, quia quanto magis accedunt ad Primum, tanto plus participant de ente: sicut species numeri per comparisonem ad unitatem, quia una magis perfecta, alia minus, nec inveniuntur nec possunt inveniri duae species numeri quae sint aequaliter se habentes ad principium numeri quod est mensura numerorum, ut unitas; nec etiam in continuis inveniuntur duo quae aequaliter se habeant ad suam mensuram. Ita similiter in substantiis: cum Primum sit mensura omnium entium, in rebus, non potest esse quod aliqua duo aequae perfecte appropinquent ipsi Primo et quod habeant diversam naturam. Unde Aristoteles: in speciebus numeri semper una species magis perfecta, alia minus. [...]». C, pp. 35-36, 83-00. Q3, q. 1, p. 182, 219-231.

51. M, o, q. 7, p. 46, 68-69.

52. Gilson (1962, p. 80) makes this distinction.

53. Gilson (1962, p. 80): «[...] la notion de création n'implique pas que le monde n'ait pas toujours existé, mais elle exige que le monde puisse ne pas avoir toujours existé. Cette "possibilité" de ne pas être est précisément ce qui manque au monde d'Aristote

However, one might question the accuracy of such an objection. Siger's definition of *esse* as the actualisation of an essence occurs in an argument concerning the dependence of all things on God. There is some truth in what Boethius and *alii magni* say, i.e. that *esse* is derived from God, and that what pertains to the essence derives from the essence itself. However, the actuality pertains to its essence insofar as it is an effect of God⁵⁴.

From what we have seen before, it is clear that God imbues all essences with a certain degree of being. Siger writes that created things participate in being only partially⁵⁵. And so, Siger can argue that there is a certain potency to be in all things other than the First, from which he is able to prove the existence of a unique, efficient cause of all things⁵⁶. Everything is dependent on God, the *ens per essentiam*.

But there might be something more to Gilson's objection. Perhaps creation not only implies causal dependence on God but also contingency. As Fernand Van Steenberghen explains, it seems⁵⁷ that Siger, influenced by neo-platonic philosophy, «never considered the optional nature of creation»⁵⁸. For Siger, the world is dependent on God, yet necessary. This, however, does not depend on his rejection of the real distinction but rather on his understand-

et de ses disciples authentiques, pour que le problème de son origine radicale puisse se poser. Pour que ce problème puisse se poser, il faut que l'existence soit autre chose que la simple actualisation de l'essence comme telle».

54. M, o, q. 7, p. 46, 65-74: «Verum est quod Boethius et alii magni dixerunt quod res est id quod est ex se ipsa, esse autem habet ex Primo Principio; et in solo Primo Principio posuerunt multi "est" esse pertinens ad essentiam. Illud aliquid veritatis habet, quia esse significat essentiam per modum actus maximi; sed convenit substantiae rei habere naturam et modum actus secundum quod effectus Primi Principii; ideo potest dici quod esse est ex Primo Principio magis proprie et de aliis minus proprie. Item, esse videtur actum primum significare; sed nulla est natura in rebus quin ad naturam potentiae accedat ex aliquo principio; ideo ad essentiam Primi magis pertinet esse». C, o, q. 7, p. 34, 39-49; Q3, q. 1, p. 182, 209-218.

55. M, III, q. 12, p. 111, 61-63.

56. M, III, q. 8, p. 105, 28-42.

57. Van Steenberghen constantly tries to *nuance* Siger's conclusions, which are at odds with the Christian faith, showing the uncertainties of Siger himself.

58. Van Steenberghen (1977, p. 307): «Il semble que Siger n'a jamais envisagé le caractère facultatif de la création». See also Duin (1954).

ing of God and His relationship to the world⁵⁹. We don't need the real distinction to affirm causal dependence on God. There might be other reasons we need it. Perhaps it might be needed to account for creation. But this requires further discussion.

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59. Van Steenberghe (1942, pp. 608-609) explains that this necessity involves both God as a cause and the effects themselves, which have an intrinsic necessity. Nevertheless, they receive their being *ab alio*. In this text, Van Steenberghe writes that this doctrine «is not unrelated to Siger's refusal to hold the real composition of being and essence» (p. 608, translation is mine). Rewriting an almost identical passage in 1977 (p. 305), he deletes this part of the sentence.

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