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***ENERGEIA AND ENTELECHEIA –  
FIRST AND SECOND ACT.  
OPERARI SEQUITUR ESSE IN ARISTOTLE  
AND AQUINAS***

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**Abstract**

The term “act” is difficult to grasp since it is one of the simple notions which can be comprehended only by analogy. But it is also one of the most important concept in Aristotle and Aquinas. This paper attempts to have a closer look to the term in peripatetic perspective, especially dealing with the connection of the act with the demonstration of immortality of the soul. The first part discusses the two terms *energeia* and *entelecheia*, concentrating on the difference between them which can be seen in the text of Aristotle. Second part deals with the application of those two types of acts in philosophy of Aquinas, especially when he uses them to demonstrate that the existence of action per se must point at existence per se. It also shows that Aquinas seems to link those two terms with the concepts of first and second act, to cover the gap which occurred when two Greek terms (*energeia* and *entelecheia*) were rendered by one Latin term *actus*.

**Keywords:** St Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle, act, first act, second act

„ENERGEIA” I „ENTELECHEIA” JAKO PIERWSZY I DRUGI AKT:  
ZASADA „OPERARI SEQUITUR ESSE” WEDŁUG ARYSTOTELESA  
I ŚW. TOMASZA Z AKWINU

**Streszczenie**

Termin „akt” jest trudny do ujęcia, ponieważ jak stwierdza św. Tomasz jest to jedno z pojęć pierwotnych, których się nie definiuje i można jedynie określić je przez analogię. Termin ten jednak odnosi się do jednego z najbardziej podstawowych pojęć filozofii arystotelesowsko-tomistycznej. Już od czasów Stagiryty akt był rozumiany na dwa sposoby i sam Arystoteles ujmował to przy pomocy dwóch terminów *entelecheia* oraz *energeia*. Problemem, gdzie ogniskowało się znaczenie owych terminów było zaś zagadnienie duszy i jej działań. Jeszcze większego znaczenia nabierają one w filozofii św. Tomasza z Akwinu, gdzie działanie duszy, jakim jest poznanie intelektualne, stało się punktem wyjścia dla uzasadnienia nieśmiertelności duszy ludzkiej. Akwinata rozwijając rozumienie aktu wskazuje na nowy podstawowy akt bytu jakim jest akt istnienia i w tym nowym kontekście właśnie możliwe jest zastosowanie zasady *operari sequitur esse* do wykazania tego, że dusza może istnieć po śmierci. Jednak w język łaciński staje przed problemem rodzącym się z tłumaczenia obu greckich terminów (*entelecheia energeia*) jednym słowem *actus*. Pewną próbą rozróżnienia dwóch typów aktów w łacińskiej terminologii św. Tomasza wydaje się jego interpretacja rozumienia sformułowań „pierwszy akt” i „drugi akt”.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Arystoteles, Tomasz z Akwinu, akt, pierwszy akt, drugi akt

An act (*actus*) is one of the fundamental concepts of understanding reality in peripatetic philosophy. When Aristotle describes it in the famous passages of *Metaphysics* Θ, he says that the meaning of an act “can be seen in the particular cases by induction, and we must not seek a definition of everything but be content to grasp the analogy”<sup>1</sup>. Commenting on this, Aquinas calls actuality a simple notion and “simple notions cannot be defined, since an infinite regress in definitions is impossible. But actuality is one of those first simple notions. Hence it cannot be defined”<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, as in case of all simple notions, we can only point at some specific cases of actuality as analogical examples, and because of that the very

<sup>1</sup> *Met.* XI, 6, 1048a, 35–8 δῆλον δ’ ἐπὶ τῶν καθ’ ἕκαστα τῆ ἐπαγωγῆ ὁ βουλόμεθα λέγειν, καὶ οὐ δεῖ παντὸς ὄρον ζητεῖν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ἀνάλογον συνορᾶν.

<sup>2</sup> *Sententia Metaphysicae* lib. 9 l. 5 n. 4. Nam prima simplicia definiri non possunt, cum non sit in definitionibus abire in infinitum. Actus autem est de primis simplicibus; unde definiri non potest. (transl. J. P. Rowan).

notion of actuality is difficult to describe and grasp. But the problem becomes even more complex when we note that Aristotle himself distinguished two kinds of actuality. First, actuality can be understood as a description of the internal principle of being. In such case, form (*forma*) is called an act; in Aquinas also an act of being (*ipsum esse*) can be called in this manner. Secondly, Latin *actus* could mean a single operation or action of the power, like an act of will. Although all those types are called in Latin with the same term (*actus*), Aristotle uses two different Greek words ἐντελέχεια and ἐνέργεια.

The main question of this paper is to ask how those two kinds of acts relate to each other, since it is crucial to Aquinas as regards such an important question as the demonstration of the immortality of the soul. His reasoning is based on what later will be called a popular Thomistic saying *operari sequitur esse* (or *actio sequitur esse*). However, before starting any deliberation, two issues must be clarified. When I consider action or operation, I do not understand it in the current meaning used in the philosophy of action. In my inquiry I consider action as any act which may be performed by any human power. This is a broader metaphysical sense of action, which is different from the modern meaning, where it is understood as performed by an agent for a purpose and is guided by intention. Although philosophy of action attempts to determine the difference between such actions and any other involuntary types of behavior, in a broader sense, which I would like to study, even growing or seeing can be considered. In other words, I am interested in action, or operation as such, without any specification.

Secondly the problem of a relationship between two types of *actus*, which I would like to call actuality and action<sup>3</sup>, seems to be even more interesting in the context of the present concepts built on personalism. While Aquinas seems to underline that action can be performed because of the way a being exists, i.e., its action points at actuality and is possible because of actuality, modern authors more often speak about action which determines and defines the way a human is. A good example is Karol Wojtyła, who elaborated the idea that action (in a narrower moral sense) can determine the way a human develops as a person<sup>4</sup>. In my opinion, such opposite influence is possible only thanks to the first one, which seems more basic. Therefore, in my paper I shall concentrate on Aquinas's understanding of the relationship, on how actuality defines action.

<sup>3</sup> I owe this terminology to J. Beere, see: *Doing and Being. An Interpretation of Aristotle's "Metaphysics" Theta*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, especially his discussion on terminology, pp. 211–213.

<sup>4</sup> K. Wojtyła refers to *operari sequitur esse* mainly in his *Acting person (Osoba i czyn)*, Kraków 1969, p. 191), but he also refers to it in other contexts, like explaining the relationship between theory (*esse*) and praxis (*operari*) (*Teoria e prassi: un tema umano e cristiano*, in: *Teoria e Prassi: atti del Congresso internazionale Genova – Barcellona '76*, Neapoli 1979, pp. 31–41).

## ACTION AND ACTUALITY IN ARISTOTLE

At the beginning, let's get back to Aristotle and his distinction between ἐντελέχεια and ἐνέργεια. First, we must note that having in mind the impossibility of giving proper definition of an act, the distinction between those two types of actualities is not an easy task. Those terms are sometimes presented as synonyms, but *energeia* implicitly invokes *ergon*, while *entelekheia* invokes *telos*. It is worth noticing that although the term ἐντελέχεια already existed in the philosophical context, ἐνέργεια was most probably Aristoteles's invention. Although the combination of *en* and *ergon* can be found in earlier writings, the term ἐνέργεια appears for the first time in the works of Aristotle. Discussing the etymology, he derives it from the term τὸ ἔργον meaning "a deed" or "a thing done"<sup>5</sup>. However, it seems to be an abstract noun derived from the adjective ἐνεργός, which means "active", "affective" or "busy"<sup>6</sup>. It seems that introducing the term in *Metaphysics* Θ, Aristotle coined it as an exercise of capacity (δύναμις), like actions of the human soul<sup>7</sup>. But it also seems to be more than that; it is a realization and fulfilment. Speaking on the human soul, Aristotle says that existence according to nature means not only having the capacity of learning, but rather the actual possession of knowledge<sup>8</sup>. Therefore ἐνέργεια can be understood as the kind of action which has its own limit, while a simple change does not imply the end. Consequently, it has its natural end, while a change could be held as having no point of completion. Aristotle shows it by his example of a house: building a house (change) is something different from having a house built (ἐνέργεια)<sup>9</sup>. D. Bradshaw comments that this is the kind of "teleological self-closure" which is atemporal and seems to describe reaching the potential of the given nature as such without any timebound specification<sup>10</sup>. At this point, action-ἐνέργεια seems to have the meaning closer to ἐντελέχεια, since it is rather the state of being which has reached its potential than the action itself. Therefore, in this regard they seem to be synonymous, which is important because we observe the overlapping of mutual semantic fields of action and activity. When it has reached its natural potential, it exists in the state of actuality rather than perform any kind of action. It seems so also because, as I mentioned above, the very term ἐντελέχεια invokes *telos* – end/completion/perfection.

<sup>5</sup> *Met.* IX. 8. 1050a. 22–23.

<sup>6</sup> J. Beere, op. cit., p. 155. Beere also notes that the earlier existence of the term is also possible, but it seems less likely.

<sup>7</sup> *Protrep.* 64. 5–7.

<sup>8</sup> *De anima* II, 5. 417 a. 27–28.

<sup>9</sup> *Met.* 1048 b. 28–35.

<sup>10</sup> D. Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West. Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom*, Cambridge US, 2004, p. 12.

However, there is still a difference, because to exist in ἐνέργεια means something different than in ἐντελέχεια<sup>11</sup>. To see the difference, we must have a closer look at Aristotle's usage of the later term. Aristotle typically uses ἐντελέχεια to describe the form as being an act, which makes being what it is. He usually calls the soul ἐντελέχεια of the organic body like in the famous definition of the soul from *De anima* II<sup>12</sup>. It is significant that when defining the soul he starts it with a discussion on substances, first the material one – the body, and then argues that the soul cannot be material, but must be something different. He also mentions two kinds of actuality here, when he says: “matter is potentiality (δύναμις), form actuality (ἐντελέχεια); and actuality is of two kinds, one as e.g. knowledge, the other as e.g. reflecting”<sup>13</sup>. Having given the definition of the soul, he explains that the soul is activity of the first kind:

„Now, there are two kinds of actuality corresponding to knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and to reflecting (θεωρεῖν). It is obvious that the soul is an actuality like knowledge; for both sleeping and waking presuppose the existence of the soul, and of these waking corresponds to reflecting, sleeping to knowledge possessed but not employed, and knowledge of something is temporally prior”<sup>14</sup>.

Commentators have some problems with explaining those passages, but it is clear that the soul is actuality which allows man to perform any kind of action. However, to comprehend Aristotle's analogy it is worth explaining further what he could have in mind. Although it seems logical that one must perform some action to obtain knowledge, and therefore getting knowledge seems to be prior to knowledge, it could be understood in a manner which we observe in ancient commentators<sup>15</sup>. In the process of cognition, knowledge can be prior to reasoning in the sense that to perform any kind of reasoning or reflecting one must have something to reflect upon.

<sup>11</sup> J. Beere strongly argues against understanding *entelecheia* as actuality, see. pp. 213–218.

<sup>12</sup> In fact, he calls the soul ἐντελέχεια when he repeats the definition. The first time he states that “the soul must be a substance in the sense of the form of a natural body having life potentially within it.” (τὴν ψυχὴν οὐσίαν εἶναι ὡς εἶδος σώματος φυσικοῦ δυνάμει ζωὴν ἔχοντος) (*De anima* II, 1, 412a. 19–21.). Coming back to the definition he explains: “the soul is an actuality of the first kind of a natural body having life potentially in it.” (διὸ ἡ ψυχὴ ἐστὶν ἐντελέχεια ἢ πρώτη σώματος φυσικοῦ δυνάμει ζωὴν ἔχοντος) (*De anima*, II, 1, 412a. 27–28).

<sup>13</sup> *De anima* II, 1, 412a, 10–11, ἡ μὲν ὕλη δύναμις, τὸ δ' εἶδος ἐντελέχεια, καὶ τοῦτο διχῶς, τὸ μὲν ὡς ἐπιστήμη, τὸ δ' ὡς τὸ θεωρεῖν.

<sup>14</sup> *De anima* II, 412a, 23–27. δὲ λέγεται διχῶς, ἡ μὲν ὡς ἐπιστήμη, ἡ δ' ὡς τὸ θεωρεῖν. φανερόν οὖν ὅτι ὡς ἐπιστήμη· ἐν γὰρ τῷ ὑπάρχειν τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ ὕπνος καὶ ἐγρήγορσις ἐστὶν, ἀνάλογον δ' ἡ μὲν ἐγρήγορσις τῷ θεωρεῖν, ὁ δ' ὕπνος τῷ ἔχειν καὶ μὴ ἐνεργεῖν· προτέρα δὲ τῇ γενέσει ἐπὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἡ ἐπιστήμη.

<sup>15</sup> We can find a similar statement in Basil the Great, who applies it to obtaining the knowledge of God (*Ep.* 235, 1, 12–14), but it is explained in detail by Augustine of Hippo, *De quantitate animae* I, 7, 12.

Therefore, the first stage seems to be accepting or affirming a statement as true and thus having a belief that this statement is true. This affirmation of truth usually relies on the authority of someone who passes the knowledge. Only when we obtain the knowledge, we can perform a demonstration or any kind of reasoning, to pass from relying on the external authority of others to the authority of our own reason, which no longer merely believes that the statement is true, but knows it. Therefore, having the knowledge could be temporary prior to reasoning like other actions (e.g. sleeping and running) are possible because of having the soul. As we shall see below, Aquinas explains this passage in a different way, although his interpretation will not provide a clear answer to the statement of temporal priority of knowledge.

In this passage, Aristotle uses ἐντελέχεια in two different meanings: general – ἐντελέχεια as actuality (there are two kinds of actuality) and specific – ἐντελέχεια means being in actuality (a kind of an act different from ἐνέργεια). It is possible that Aristotle uses ἐντελέχεια as a general term because of its relation to *telos*. Nevertheless, we can see that for Aristotle there is an intrinsic relationship between those two types of acts. Action implies activity; in order to reflect upon something one must have something to reflect on, and to sleep and run one must have a soul which allows such actions. Therefore, action is dependent and posterior to actuality.

### OPERARI SEQUITUR ESSE AND THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

Aquinas uses the relationship between action and actuality in his demonstration of the immortality of the soul. It is not my intention to follow the demonstration as such, since it has been already thoroughly examined by Fran O'Rourke<sup>16</sup>, but I would like to focus on the intrinsic relationship between those two types of *actus*. The key to Aquinas's argument is the statement that since the soul can perform an intellectual action which occurs without dependence on any physical organ, the soul must also be able to exist without a body. Aquinas concludes:

“Therefore the intellectual principle which we call the mind or the intellect has an operation *per se* apart from the body. Now only that which subsists can have an operation *per se*. For nothing can operate but what is actual: for which reason we do not say that heat imparts heat, but that what is hot gives heat. We must conclude, therefore, that the human soul, which is called the intellect or the mind, is something incorporeal and subsistent”<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> F. O'Rourke, *Immortality of the Soul in Plato and Aquinas*, in: *Platonic and Neoplatonic Thought – and Action Essays in Honour of Andrew Smith*, „Classical Association of Ireland” 2020, vol. 27, pp. 249–260.

<sup>17</sup> ST I, q.75, a. 2, co. “Ipsum igitur intellectuale principium, quod dicitur mens vel intellectus, habet operationem per se, cui non communicat corpus. Nihil autem potest per se operari, nisi quod per se subsistit. Non enim est operari nisi entis in actu, unde eo modo aliquid operatur, quo est. Propter

Here, we can find *operari sequitur esse* between the lines. Aquinas says that only something which subsists *per se* can have an action/operation *per se*. He adds that to perform an action is nothing else than being in actuality, and that something is in the way it operates (*Non enim est operari nisi entis in actu, unde eo modo aliquid operatur, quo est*). In the case of the human soul, such operation which is not accidental but substantial to it is the intellectual one.

It should be noted that Aquinas uses versions of this argument in his other works<sup>18</sup>, where we can find some more extensive explanation of the intellectual operation of the soul. It is special because no other action of the soul can be called substantial, i.e., operation *per se*, but why is it such a kind of operation? For Aquinas, there are two characteristic features which make intellectual activity a unique operation of the soul. First of all, intellectual activity has features which bodily activity cannot have – it is self-reflective. As F. O'Rourke has demonstrated, this conviction has its origins in Proclus and was passed to Aquinas by *Liber de causis*<sup>19</sup>. Intellectual activity is then intrinsically linked with the soul itself. Because it is operation *per se*, the soul can exist *per se* and be *hoc aliquid*. Another characteristic feature of intellectual activity is its immateriality since it does not need any bodily organ and therefore transcends matter. St Thomas also usually demonstrates immateriality of both the soul and of the intellectual activity. In *Questio disputata de anima* he states that:

“However, it is essential to consider something further with respect to a rational soul, for not only does it acquire intelligible species, free from matter and the conditions of matter, but also in its essential operation no bodily organ has any share, so that there would be a corporeal organ of understanding in the way that an eye is the organ of seeing, as is proved in Book III of the *De Anima*. Thus it is necessary that an intellective soul operate *per se*, inasmuch as it possesses an essential operation in which the body does not share”<sup>20</sup>.

In this passage, soul and intellect are used interchangeably. But as regards intellectual action of the soul we can even say not only that it does not require any bodily organ, but is also free from any material conditions (*conditionibus materiae*).

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quod non dicimus quod calor calefacit, sed calidum. Relinquitur igitur animam humanam, quae dicitur intellectus vel mens, esse aliquid incorporeum et subsistens”.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *II Sent.* 19.1.1; *Questio de Anima* a. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. F. O'Rourke, op. cit., p. 252.

<sup>20</sup> *Questio de Anima* a.1, co. “Sed adhuc aliquid amplius proprie in anima rationali considerari oportet: quia non solum absque materia et conditionibus materiae species intelligibiles recipit, sed nec etiam in eius propria operatione possibile est communicare aliquod organum corporale; ut sic aliquod corporeum sit organum intelligendi, sicut oculus est organum videndi; ut probatur in III de anima. Et sic oportet quod anima intellectiva per se agat, utpote propriam operationem habens absque corporis communiione” (tr. Robb, p. 47) A similar demonstration of the immateriality of intellectual cognition and the soul can also be seen in *Con. Gen.* II, 50.



However, intellectual action can be called that way only when we consider its very nature, but it is somehow dependent on the physical reality since it receives its intellectual forms from the senses. The same can be said about the soul itself. It is *hoc aliquid* in itself, but it is not completely independent from material cognitions since it is the soul of a physical body. In the following passage, Aquinas explains further the meaning of operation and existence *per se*:

And because each being acts insofar as it is actual, it is necessary that an intellective soul possess an independent *per se* act of existing which is not dependent on its body. For forms which have an act of existing which depends on matter or on a subject do not possess *per se* operations; heat, for instance, does not act, but rather something which is hot. And for this reason later philosophers decided that the intellective part of the soul is something which is *per se* subsistent<sup>21</sup>.

Here, we see the stress placed on the actuality of *esse*. A human soul must have an act of existence which is independent from the body and is an act of existing *per se* (*esse per se absolutum*) because otherwise it could not be called being actual. It can act because it is in actuality (*secundum quod est actu*). To explain this, Aquinas brings up an opposite example of the souls whose existence depends on matter or subject, which do not have subsisting *esse*. It is easy to perceive that the analogy of heat is used here in an exactly opposite way to what we have earlier seen in *Summa theologiae*. Although in both cases the analogy illustrates the statement that only what is in actuality can have action *per se*, previously it showed that the soul has operation *per se*, while in this passage material beings are pointed out as not having such operation. Moreover, there is a problem to which actuality we refer saying that only something which is in actuality can have operation: do we mean *esse* or form? Both are actualities and I think that form is even a better candidate to claim that it has operation. As we have seen in the passage above, Aquinas also speaks about the soul that it should have an independent existence (*oportet quod anima intellectiva habeat esse per se absolutum*). So form seems to have both existence and action.

In my opinion, those ambiguities need further discussion, and the core of the problem seems to be an important change to Aristotle: actuality becomes twofold here. Aquinas does not speak about the form/soul as such, which was ἐντελέχεια for Stagirite, but here the soul is what actually subsists. Therefore, we can see that there is another actuality here, the actuality of *esse*. Aquinas then refers to an act of being (*ipsum esse*) and we no longer deal with the problem of two types of

<sup>21</sup> *Questio de Anima* a.1, co. “Et quia unumquodque agit secundum quod est actu, oportet quod anima intellectiva habeat esse per se absolutum non dependens a corpore. Formae enim quae habent esse dependens a materia vel subiecto, non habent per se operationem: non enim calor agit, sed calidum. Et propter hoc posteriores philosophi iudicaverunt partem animae intellectivam esse aliquid per se subsistens”.



actuality – form and action, but rather the problem becomes the relationship between the act of being and action. So the main question to answer is how action is dependent on existence and what is the role of the third type of actuality – form.

### FIRST AND SECOND ACT

We can find some clues in other Aquinas's works where he refers to relationships between form and the act of being. First of all, it is worth having a closer look at how he uses the terms which usually describe the relationship between two types of actuality, calling them first act and second act. Those terms seem to be good candidates for covering the gap in Latin terminology, where ἐντελέχεια and ἐνέργεια are both rendered by *actus*.

The most typical use of those terms can be found in *De potentia*, where Aquinas explains that first act is form and second act is operation/action<sup>22</sup>, and it is also presented in *Summa theologiae*, where Aquinas discusses the powers of the soul. Here the soul is called the first act as the subject of its powers, which are ordained to the second act<sup>23</sup>. But this distinction seems to have a wider scope since we can also use them in other cases. In *Summa theologiae*, St. Thomas refers to two kinds

<sup>22</sup> *De potentia*, q. 1 a. 1 co. "...actus autem est duplex: scilicet primus, qui est forma; et secundus, qui est operatio: et sicut videtur ex communi hominum intellectu, nomen actus primo fuit attributum operationi: sic enim quasi omnes intelligunt actum; secundo autem exinde fuit translatum ad formam, in quantum forma est principium operationis et finis." We can find this standard use of those terms also in: ST I, q. 105, a. 5, co.

<sup>23</sup> ST I, q. 77, a. 1, co. "For the soul by its very essence is an act. Therefore if the very essence of the soul were the immediate principle of operation, whatever has a soul would always have actual vital actions, as that which has a soul is always an actually living thing. For as a form the soul is not an act ordained to a further act, but the ultimate term of generation. Wherefore, for it to be in potentiality to another act, does not belong to it according to its essence, as a form, but according to its power. So the soul itself, as the subject of its power, is called the first act, with a further relation to the second act. Now we observe that what has a soul is not always actual with respect to its vital operations; whence also it is said in the definition of the soul, that it is *the act of a body having life potentially*; which potentiality, however, *does not exclude the soul*. Therefore it follows that the essence of the soul is not its power. For nothing is in potentiality by reason of an act, as act". (Nam anima secundum suam essentiam est actus. Si ergo ipsa essentia animae esset immediatum operationis principium, semper habens animam actu haberet opera vitae; sicut semper habens animam actu est vivum. Non enim, in quantum est forma, est actus ordinatus ad ulteriorem actum, sed est ultimus terminus generationis. Unde quod sit in potentia adhuc ad alium actum, hoc non competit ei secundum suam essentiam, in quantum est forma; sed secundum suam potentiam. Et sic ipsa anima, secundum quod subest suae potentiae, dicitur actus primus, ordinatus ad actum secundum. Invenitur autem habens animam non semper esse in actu operum vitae. Unde etiam in definitione animae dicitur quod est actus corporis potentia vitam habentis, quae tamen potentia non abiicit animam. Relinquitur ergo quod essentia animae non est eius potentia. Nihil enim est in potentia secundum actum, in quantum est actus).

of acts in intellectual cognition, which can be seen as his own understanding of what Aristotle wrote about two types of acts in human cognition (see above). Here, passive intellect, which is a potential power, can be called both first and second act. Discussing the distinction between passive and active intellect he states:

“But three of these are distinct, as three states of the passive intellect, which is sometimes in potentiality only, and thus it is called passive; sometimes it is in the first act, which is knowledge, and thus it is called intellect in habit; and sometimes it is in the second act, which is to consider, and thus it is called intellect in act, or actual intellect (*intellectus adeptus*)”<sup>24</sup>.

So passive intellect which has knowledge (*scientia*) can be called first act, while it can be called second act when it considers (*considerare*) something. We can see that here also two states of passive intellect refer to two types of acts described above in *De anima*, and therefore the term first act refers to ἐντελέχεια, while second act refers to ἐνέργεια. Such usage of first and second act is not limited only to intellect, but it can be applied to each of human powers. Even vegetative powers can be called this way since Aquinas says that in the growth of a foetus the sensitive soul is dormant, but the vegetative soul with regard to it is in the state of first act since it allows it to perform its actions by making the organs of senses grow<sup>25</sup>. Therefore we can conclude that first act is a term which describes the soul and the power with regard to the fact that they are the principles of second act – action. In this sense, to perform any action one must have a soul which has powers appropriate to its level of perfection, whether it is vegetative, sensitive, or intellectual. But the soul is not a direct principle of action, since there is a power which is in between the very essence of the soul and the action. So with regard to second act power is first act directly, while the soul is first act indirectly; however both are necessary for operation to be performed. The term second act can be used only to describe action itself. This means that we cannot call power second act with regard to the soul which is first act.

<sup>24</sup> ST I, q. 79, a.10, co. “Alia vero tria distinguuntur secundum tres status intellectus possibilis, qui quandoque est in potentia tantum, et sic dicitur possibilis; quandoque autem in actu primo, qui est scientia, et sic dicitur intellectus in habitu; quandoque autem in actu secundo, qui est considerare, et sic dicitur intellectus in actu, sive intellectus adeptus”.

<sup>25</sup> ST I, q. 118, a. 2, ad. 4. “In this matter, the vegetative soul exists from the very beginning, not as to the second act, but as to the first act, as the sensitive soul is in one who sleeps. But as soon as it begins to attract nourishment, then it already operates in act.” (In qua quidem materia statim a principio est anima vegetabilis, non quidem secundum actum secundum, sed secundum actum primum, sicut anima sensitiva est in dormientibus. Cum autem incipit attrahere alimentum, tunc iam actu operatur).

Having this in mind, we can return to the question of the relationship between form and the act of being. In a puzzling passage of the *Commentary on Sentences*, Aquinas characterizes three meanings of *esse* and calls *esse* a first act: “In the second sense *esse* means the actuality of the essence; as living, which is the *esse* of a living thing, is an actuality of the soul: not its second actuality, which is its operation, but its first actuality”<sup>26</sup>. It seems that here the act of being (*esse*) is called first act of the essence, but even more puzzling is the explanation given by analogy, that it is “*esse* of the living thing (*esse viventibus*)”. Commenting on this passage Anthony Kenny explains that *esse* here does not mean that a living being is in the category of living things, but rather: “is it his life, his history, his life story?”<sup>27</sup> This, however, needs further explanation, and Kenny evokes other passages from *Commentary on Sentences* which offer an explanation “of the Latin expression ‘quo est’ (literally, ‘that by which is’) Aquinas says that that by which one is is *esse*, the actuality of being, just as that by which one runs is the activity of running.” In yet another place, Aquinas brings forward a frequently used example of shining which is the actuality of light<sup>28</sup>. This last analogy is explained further in *Summa theologiae*, where he comments on Aristotle’s definition of the soul considering in what sense the soul can be called an act:

“Whence it is clear that when the soul is called the act, the soul itself is included; as when we say that heat is the act of what is hot, and light of what is lucid; not as though lucid and light were two separate things, but because a thing is made lucid by the light. In like manner, the soul is said to be the *act of a body*, etc., because by the soul it is a body, and is organic, and has life potentially. Yet the first act is said to be in potentiality to the second act, which is operation; for such a potentiality *does not reject* – that is, does not exclude – the soul”<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> *I Sent.* 33, 1, ad. 1, MM, 766. “Alio modo dicitur esse ipse actus essentiae; sicut vivere, quod est esse viventibus, est animae actus; non actus secundus, qui est operatio, sed actus primus”, (tr. A. Kenny, p. 57).

<sup>27</sup> A. Kenny, *Aquinas on being*, Oxford 2002, p. 58.

<sup>28</sup> A. Kenny, op. cit., p. 59. He refers here to *I Sent.* 8, 5, 2, MM, 279: “Potest etiam dici ‘quo est’ ipse actus essendi, scilicet esse, sicut quo curritur est actus currendi” and *III Sent.* 6, 2, 2, MM, 238; Et hoc quidem esse in re est, et est actus entis resultans ex principiis rei, sicut lucere est actus lucentis.

<sup>29</sup> ST I, q. 76, a. 4, ad. 1. “Unde manifestum est quod in eo cuius anima dicitur actus, etiam anima includitur; eo modo loquendi quo dicitur quod calor est actus calidi, et lumen est actus lucidi; non quod seorsum sit lucidum sine luce, sed quia est lucidum per lucem. Et similiter dicitur quod anima est actus corporis etc., quia per animam et est corpus, et est organicum, et est potentia vitam habens. Sed actus primus dicitur in potentia respectu actus secundi, qui est operatio. Talis enim potentia est non abiiciens, idest non excludens, animam”.

As we see an important addition is that when we say about shining being the activity of light we should not understand it as talking about two different things. We can say the same about running and the runner or heat and a hot thing. Therefore, *esse* is, as A. Kenny notes, “a fully fledged predicate;”<sup>30</sup> it is something real, but not in the sense that essence possesses it, but rather that essence is in the state of shining, running, being hot. Of course, the difficulty of interpretation here also involves previously noted remark about the concept of an act, which also applies to *esse*. Since it is one of the first simple notions it can be explained only by analogy. However, in the text quoted above there is yet another interesting thing. It seems that the soul can in a sense be called potentiality – *esse* cannot be called potentiality in any sense. The soul can be perceived as potential because it is first actuality and a principle which makes operation possible. But can we say that *esse*, which allows operation to exist and be real, is not in a sense a potentiality? Apparently not. *Esse* is not potential in any sense. In my opinion, *esse* can be treated as a source of actuality in a particular being. Therefore its relation to form is different from the relation of form to action. We can observe here from another perspective certain closeness of those two types of actuality, which was observed by L. Dewan, naming the *esse* the sort of “universal form”, which is limited to a species by a particular form of certain being<sup>31</sup>. We can see it better by the example of life, which in itself can be understood as a kind of actuality and a set of activities. As Aquinas underlined in the passage quoted above, the soul is a principle of life, but the soul and the body are the same living substance, and living in the soul is not different from the life of the body; this is one life. Therefore the soul without the body is not a living organism; it would be only a conceptual life of the human species, or the life of an angel. However, in a living human his life must express itself in actions since we also cannot call someone alive if he does not perform any organic processes, does not move, etc. Similarly, *esse* without form is not the *esse* of something concrete, unless of course we do not think about God, who is his *esse*. In other words, *esse* must have some specific form, which particularizes it.

Those remarks lead us to yet another brilliant explanation provided by L. Dewan, who notes that we can see the relationship between form and *esse* in the context of the causal hierarchy of lower and higher beings. In a higher being, form is closer to *esse* because they are simpler, to the point when it is identical with *esse* in case of God<sup>32</sup>. In this hierarchy, a higher activity can exist without the lower, but the lower cannot exist without the higher. Action cannot exist without

<sup>30</sup> A. Kenny, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>31</sup> L. Dewan, *Form and Being. Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics*, Washington 2006, p. 195.

<sup>32</sup> L. Dewan, op. cit., p. 200: “The causal situation thus includes higher and lower (i.e. active and passive) natures, higher and lower grades of form (and higher and lower grades of *esse*, whether *esse* is seen as identical with form or merely concomitant with form). We should realize the difference between the two levels. They are two levels such that the upper level can be without

power, power without form, and form without *esse*. Therefore, action (especially action *per se*) points at *esse*, because without it there could be no action. We probably can say that this is also the reason why they share the same characteristics of being *per se*.

Finally, it is worth coming back to the question of the terminology of first act and second act. We can say that *esse* can be called first act only in relation to essence, but it is the first act in the different sense than form, since it cannot be said that it is in any way a potentiality. The only way it can be limited in its relation to essence is by making *esse* individual. In other words, it is not a pure act only, because it is a first act of the concrete essence. But form and power can be called first acts, while being in the sense in potentiality, since they are dependent on other acts which define them. Finally, action is only a second act, and cannot be called first act since it only is dependent on form and power.

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the lower, but the lower cannot be without the higher. The being of the one is, as such, dependent, while the being of the other is, as such, independent”.

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