

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.

1. The research leading to these results was made possible thanks to the generous support of the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), which also supported my stay at Fordham University, New York, where the research was carried out. Project: *Plato as seen by Aristotle, as seen by Medieval Commentators on the Metaphysics between the 1230s and the 1350s*. Grant Number: 199854. I am very thankful to Ryan Shields as well as to an anonymous reviewer for their valuable comments on earlier versions of this paper.