

Mgr Krzysztof Ośko OP

Existence and God. Critical Analysis of Barry Miller's Metaphysics

Australian philosopher Barry Miller (1923-2006) was a representative of analytical Thomism who exhibited an original approach to general metaphysics and natural theology. From the systematic point of view, Miller was inspired primarily by Thomas Aquinas' concept of God as Subsistent Existence. Hence, Australian philosopher's work is focused on three main tasks: defending the concept of existence as a real property of the individual, formulating an argument for the existence of God based on the real difference between a thing and its existence, and defending the coherence and religious adequacy of the concept of God as Subsistent Existence. The most distinctive points of Miller's thought include the thesis that his account of existence allows the formulation of an argument from contingency that does not invoke the principle of sufficient reason, and the attempt to account for the coherence of the notion of Subsistent Existence by means of the category of limit case. As far as the method is concerned, Miller follows analytic philosophy in examining reality as expressed in language. In particular, Australian philosopher employs the thesis (inspired by the philosophy of Gottlob Frege) of parallelism between the structure of an atomic sentence, analyzed in terms of function and argument, and the structure of a concrete object, analyzed in terms of property (corresponding to the function) and individual (corresponding to the argument of the function).

The main task of the dissertation is to examine whether Miller's metaphysics represents a successful development of Aquinas' metaphysics, allowing for a better expression and justification of Aquinas' theses concerning the act of existence, as well as the existence and nature of God. Additionally, I examine how the employment of the ideas and methods drawn from the analytic philosophy influenced the results achieved by Miller. In terms of the method the dissertation is divided into two parts. In the first part, I present a synthetic reconstruction of Miller's metaphysics as a whole. In the second part, I discuss selected points of Miller's metaphysics, presenting them against the background of Thomas Aquinas' argument for the existence of God formulated in *De ente et essentia*. I discuss each of the chosen issues starting with a presentation of Thomas Aquinas's solutions and the difficulties raised against them (by analytic philosophers, among others), as well as modern Thomist responses. Then I analyze Miller's response, examining the soundness and validity of his arguments and assessing to what extent the Australian philosopher's proposal can serve to refine the Thomistic position.

The dissertation consists of seven chapters grouped into two parts. The first part, entitled "Presentation of Barry Miller's Metaphysics," consists of three chapters, dedicated to the main

topics addressed by the Australian philosopher: the concept of existence, the argument for the existence of God, and the problem of the nature of God. Part two, entitled “Discussion of Selected Elements of Barry Miller’s Metaphysics,” consists of four chapters. In Chapter Four, I examine how Miller presents the relationship between the individual and its existence. I argue that Miller’s proposal needs substantial modification in order to save its consistency. In addition, I show that Miller’s “new paradigm for existence” in its final formulation bears similarities to the interpretation of Aquinas put forth by William Carlo and William Norris Clarke, and is likewise exposed to the charge of blurring the distinction between God and creature. Chapter Five examines whether and how Miller’s account of the relationship between the individual and its existence can be a starting point for a metaphysical argument for the existence of God. I show that, contrary to Miller’s declarations, his argumentation is not successful without the principle of sufficient reason. In Chapter Six, still in the context of the argument for the existence of God, I examine Miller’s argument against the possibility of the infinite series of intermediate causes of existence. I show that Miller’s argument can be successful only when it is based on the simplicity of the first cause of individuals distinct from their instances of existence. Finally, Chapter Seven concerns Miller’s account of the doctrine of the simplicity of God. In particular, I address two issues. First, I argue that the category of the limit case, if properly interpreted, makes it possible to abrogate the charge of blurring the distinction between God and creature. Second, I analyze the way in which Miller seeks to show that God, understood as Subsistent Existence, is a necessary being. I argue that, as is the case with the argument for God’s existence, Miller needs to strengthen his argument by appealing to the principle of sufficient reason.

The analysis of Miller’s metaphysics allows to formulate the following conclusions. Miller presents two illuminating images that help to better grasp some of Aquinas’ key intuitions. The metaphor of the bounding of the instance of existence by the individual helps to grasp the approach adopted by Aquinas who distinguishes between the essence and the existence without granting the former an actuality independent of the act of existence. The analogy of the limit case, on the other hand, helps to understand the balance between God’s transcendence and creatures’ likeness to God. As for the application of ideas and methods drawn from the analytic philosophy, I find the distinction between the two senses of existential “to be” borrowed from Peter Geach most fruitful. However, the strongest point of Miller’s proposal is not the formal clarification of Thomas Aquinas’ position, but the invention of clear and original metaphors that elucidate Aquinas’ intuitions.