



Elliot T. Polsky

University of St. Thomas (TX) | PhD Candidate
<https://philpeople.org/profiles/elliott-polsky>
c/o Center for Thomistic Studies
3800 Montrose Blvd., Houston, TX 77006

AoS: Thomas Aquinas, Medieval Metaphysics and Philosophy of Language / Logic

AoC: Formal Logic, Ancient Philosophy, Thomistic Anthropology

Education

PhD cand., Philosophy, University of St. Thomas (TX)

Dissertation: “Thomas Aquinas on the Accidentality and Essentiality of Being in Light of His Arabic and Logico-Grammatical Sources”

Director: Brian Carl. Committee: Thomas Osborne, Domenic D’Ettore

MA, Philosophy, University of St. Thomas (TX) (*summa cum laude*), May 2019

BA, Philosophy, Economics, Catholic studies, University of St. Thomas (MN) (*sum. c. laude*)

Academic Positions

Adjunct Faculty, Philosophy, University of St. Thomas (Houston, TX), 2020–present

Publications

1. “Why are Accidents Included under Being *per se*?” *Nova et Vetera* [English ed.], forthcoming. [Winner of the 2023 Leo Elders Junior Scholar Essay Contest.]
2. “The Modern Semantic Principles Behind Gilson’s Existential Interpretation of Aquinas [Part 2],” *Studia Gilsoniana*, forthcoming.
3. “The Modern Semantic Principles Behind Gilson’s Existential Interpretation of Aquinas [Part 1],” *Studia Gilsoniana*, forthcoming.
4. “The Semantics of Divine *Esse* in Boethius.” *Nova et Vetera* [English ed.], forthcoming.
5. “The Real Distinction Between Supposit and Nature in Angels in Thomas Aquinas.” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 97, forthcoming.
6. “Secondary Substance and *Quod Quid Erat Esse*: Aquinas on Reconciling the Divisions of ‘Substance’ in the Categories and Metaphysics.” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 96, no. 1 (2022): 21–45.
7. “*Secunda Operatio Respicit Ipsum Esse Rei*: An Evaluation of Jacques Maritain, Étienne Gilson, and Ralph McInerny on the Relation of *Esse* to the Intellect’s Two Operations.” *Nova et Vetera* [English Ed.] 19, no. 2 (2021): 895–932.

8. “In as Many Ways as Something Is Predicated ... in That Many Ways Is Something Signified to Be’: The Logic Behind Thomas Aquinas’s Predication Thesis, *Esse substantiale*, and *Esse in rerum natura*.” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 93 (2019): 263–92.
 9. “Thomas Aquinas on Grace as a Mysterious Kind of Creature.” *Studia Gilsoniana* 10, no. 3 (2021): 545–78.
 10. “Thomistic Special Relativity: Interpreting Length Contraction and Time Dilation without the Fourth Dimension.” *Proceedings: Sixth World Conference on Metaphysics*, 2015, 1157–1169.
-

Presentations

- “The Real Distinction between Supposit and Nature in Angels in Thomas Aquinas.” Presented at American Catholic Philosophical Association Annual Meeting, Houston, TX, November 2023.
- “The Meaning of Existence and the Copula from Kant to Alexander Pfänder: The Modern Context for Maritain and Gilson’s Existentialism.” Presented at Speculative Philosophy Research Group, Center for Thomistic Studies, University of St. Thomas (TX), October 5, 2023.
- “Avicenna, Averroes, Boethius, and Aquinas: Which *Esse* is Composed with Creatures.” Presented at the Center for Thomistic Studies Colloquium Series, University of St. Thomas (TX), September 29, 2023.
- “The Thomistic Debate about the Accidentality of *Esse*.” Presented at Speculative Philosophy Research Group, Center for Thomistic Studies, University of St. Thomas (TX), September 7, 2023.
- “The Real Distinction between Supposit and Nature in Angels in Thomas Aquinas.” Presented at International Congress of Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, MI, May 2023.
- “In as Many Ways as Something is Predicated ... in that Many Ways is Something Signified to Be’: The Logic Behind Thomas Aquinas’s Predication Thesis, *Esse substantiale*, and *Esse in rerum natura*.” Presented at American Catholic Philosophical Association Annual Meeting, Minneapolis, MN, November 2019.
- “Either the Popular Free Will Defense or Aquinas, Not Both: Why Aquinas’s Ontology Entails Divine Sovereignty over the Created Will.” Presented at American Catholic Philosophical Association Annual Meeting, Dallas, TX, November 2017.

“Thomistic Special Relativity: Interpreting Length Contraction and Time Dilation without the Fourth Dimension.” Presented at Sixth World Conference on Metaphysics, University of Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain, November 2015.

Reading Groups and Seminars

Speculative Philosophy Research Group (SPRG), Center for Thomistic Studies, University of St. Thomas, August 2023–present.

Uncertainty, Confidence, and Truth in the Sciences: Thomistic Philosophy and Natural Science Symposium, sponsored by the Thomistic Institute, The Catholic University of America, July 12–16, 2023.

Aquinas and “the Arabs” International Working Group (AAIWG), “Luis Xavier López-Farjeat, *Classical Islamic Philosophy: A Thematic Introduction*,” organized by Atefe Esmaili, Seth Kreeger, Nicoletta Nativo, Pooya Heybatollahi, Richard Taylor, Fall 2022–Spring 2023.

The City of God and Modernity: Culture and Ecclesiology, sponsored by the Institute for Human Ecology and the Thomistic Institute, The Catholic University of America, June 12–17, 2022.

Service Work & Other Employment

Copyeditor, The Catholic University of America Press, June 2020–present

Referee for *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 2019–present

Academic Affiliations

Affiliate Member, *The Sacra Doctrina Project*

Member, *American Catholic Philosophical Association*

Selected Awards and Grants

Leo Elders Junior Scholar Essay Contest, Fall 2023 (\$750)

Sponsor: Leo Elders Foundation

Title: “Why are Accidents Included under Being *per se*?”

Thomas D. Sullivan Medal for Best Undergraduate Philosophical Essay, Spring 2017 (\$500)

Sponsor: University of St. Thomas (MN), Philosophy Department

Title: “What to Make of Modes of Names: Filling an Important Gap in Aristotle’s *On Interpretation*”

Delta Epsilon Sigma National Research Essay Contest Champion, Spring 2017 (\$500)

Topic: *From Theology to Art: How the Development of Dominican Theology Motivated the Preaching of Dominican Sponsored Artists*

Young Scholars Research Grant, Summer 2015 (\$4,000)

Sponsor: University of St. Thomas (MN), Grants and Research Office

Topic: *Special Relativity without the Fourth Dimension: Interpreting Einstein's Physics with Aristotle's Definition of Motion*

Mentor: Thomas Feeney, PhD, MPhil, MSt

Collaborative Inquiry Grant, Spring 2015 (\$1,500)

Sponsor: University of St. Thomas (MN), Grants and Research Office

Topic: *Biology's Accidental Species: The Compatibility of Multiple True Taxonomies with Aristotelian Essentialism*

Mentor: Mark Spenser, PhD

Center of the American Experiment, Research Assistant, Summer 2014 (\$1,500)

Mentor: Mitch Pearlstein, PhD

Topic: *How Religious Institutions and Leaders Can Better Promote Healthy Marriages*

Languages

English (native)

Latin (passed PhD reading proficiency exam Spring 2018)

French (passed PhD reading proficiency exam Spring 2021)

DISSERTATION

Title: “Thomas Aquinas on the Accidentality and Essentiality of Being in Light of His Arabic and Logico-Grammatical Sources”

Description: This dissertation addresses ongoing debates concerning St. Thomas's apparently incompatible claims about the accidentality and essentiality of being (*esse*) to creatures. It offers a significant revision of standard accounts both of the substance of his doctrine and its sources. Since Pierre Duhem and Étienne Gilson, it has usually been thought that Aquinas derives his teaching on the accidentality of *esse* to creatures from Avicenna by way of William of Auvergne and that his understanding of *esse* as an “act” was his own unique contribution to Avicennian thought. Very little attention has been given, however, to the Latin text of Averroes used by Aquinas or to the precedence for his technical terminology—his phrase “substantial being” (*esse substantiale*) and his notion of *esse* as an “act”—in the twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Latin logico-grammatical traditions. I argue that when attention is given to these understudied sources, it becomes clear that Aquinas's notion of *esse* as composed with creatures as an “act” is not at all Avicennian. On the contrary, it is a critique of William of Auvergne's novel Avicennian interpretation of Boethius in favor of a more traditional, twelfth-century one, formulated in language inspired both by Averroes's *Metaphysics* commentary and the earlier Latin logico-grammatical tradition.

Dissertation Outline:

Ch0: Introduction; Recent Attempts to Solve the Problem of the Accidentality and Essentiality of Being

Ch1: The Modern Origins of the Existential Reading of Aquinas in Maritain, Gilson, and Wippel

Ch2: Why is Every Predication a Predication of Being

Ch3: Being *per accidens* and *per se*

Ch4: Aquinas's Averroistic Critique of William of Auvergne and Avicenna

Ch5: The Essentiality of Being: What is "*Esse substantiale*"? Why is *Esse* an "Act" and "Accident"?

CENTER FOR THOMISTIC STUDIES COURSEWORK

Fall 2017

PHIL 5304 Thomistic Metaphysics (R.E. Houser)

PHIL 5345 Bioethics (Steven Jensen)

PHIL 6393 Thomistic Existentialism (John F.X. Knasas)

Spring 2018

PHIL 5314 Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature (Thomas Osborne)

PHIL 5359 Philosophical Latin (Michael Boler)

PHIL 5393 Contemporary Thomism: Personalism (John Hittinger)

Fall 2018

PHIL 5317 Philosophy of Nature / Philosophy of Science (John Hittinger)

PHIL 5338 Introduction to Thomistic Ethics (Fr. Joseph Pilsner)

PHIL 6393 Analytic Thomism (Christopher Martin)

Fall 2019

PHIL 5312 Natural Law (Steven Jensen)

PHIL 5398 Metaphysics of Jacques Maritain (John Hittinger)

PHIL 6392 Independent Study: "History of Formal Logic" [I.M. Bocheński, *History of Formal Logic*; Jan Łukasiewicz, *Elements of Mathematical Logic*; *ibid.*, *Aristotle's Syllogistic from the Standpoint of Modern Formal Logic*] (John Hittinger)

Spring 2020

PHIL 5332 Aquinas's Commentary on the Metaphysics (Brian Carl)

PHIL 5334 Contemporary Logic (Christopher Martin)

PHIL 5363 Grace (Mirela Oliva)

PHD & MA COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS READING LIST | SPRING 2019, FALL–SPRING 2020–21

Ancient | Plato, *Republic* and *Phaedo*; Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics*, *Politics*, *Posterior analytics*, *De anima*; Plotinus, *Enneads* (selections)

Medieval | Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will* and *On Christian Teaching*; Anselm, *Proslogion*; Aquinas, *De ente et essentia*; *ST I*, qq. 1–13, qq. 44–46, qq. 75–87, I-II, qq. 1–20; Scotus (selections); Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* (complete)

Modern | Descartes, *Meditations*; Leibniz, *Monadology* and *Discourse on Metaphysics*; Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*; Kant, *Prolegomena*

Contemporary | Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (complete); Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*; Frege, "Sense and Reference"; Russell, "On Denoting" and "Descriptions"; Wittgenstein,

Philosophical Investigations I; Quine, “From a Logical Point of View” and “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”

Thomistic | Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*; Jacques Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics* and *Existence and the Existent*; Yves Simon, *Philosophy of Democratic Government*; Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*