

Andrzej Maryniarczyk, S.D.B.

John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin
Poland

PARTICIPATION: A *DESCENDING ROAD* OF THE METAPHYSICAL COGNITION OF BEING

The theory of participation in the structure of existential metaphysics was discovered to be the most general “road” in the wisdom-oriented cognition of being, and at the same time as the most far-reaching road to the mystery of being.¹ This theory is the crowning point and completion of metaphysical cognition. It shows the necessary connection and ordering of being to the Absolute. The theory of participation situates the cognition of being and of all reality in the perspective of the Absolute’s existence.²

With the description of participation as a “descending road” in the cognition of being, we are restricting ourselves to the presentation of how participation is understood in realistic metaphysics (while we shall leave aside the history of the question). We will show the aspects of participation that provide a foundation for wisdom-oriented cogni-

Editio prima (in Polish): Andrzej Maryniarczyk SDB, *O przyczynach, partycypacji i analogii* [On Causes, Analogy, and Participation] (Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, 2005), 87–100.

¹ This is because we indicate the ultimate reason for the existence of contingent and non-necessary beings.

² This is the indication of the deepest reason for the existence of being.

tion, and we will show the specific character of participation-oriented cognition as a “descending road.”³

When we see in the world the fact that there are many beings, and we indicate that the particular beings exist in a compositional way, we face the task of learning about a new problem: how can we define and determine the relations between beings and between the elements within a being? Although the theory of participation has roots that go back to Plato, and so to a philosophy in which the pluralism of being was rejected and which accepted an identity-based conception of being, participation finds its ontological rational justification only (and ultimately) in the pluralistic and compositional conception of being.⁴

A Terminological Explanation

The term “participation” (μέθεξις) is from the words *pars* (a part) and *capere* (to take hold of). The expression *partem capere* or *partem habere* means to possess some part in a whole, or to get some part from a whole.⁵ Zofia J. Zdybicka explains that the word “participation”

means a relation that occurs between two realities, where one of the members of the relation, which usually contains a series of elements, is to the other as a part to a whole, as many to one, as

³ Here the primary point is to preserve the existential character of cognition. Cf. Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, “Metafizyczne rozumienie rzeczywistości [The Metaphysical Understanding of Reality],” *Zeszyty Naukowe KUL* 29:1 (1986): 9 ff; *Prospect for Metaphysics. Essays of Metaphysical Exploration*, ed. I. Ramsey (London 1961); Stanisław Kamiński, “Wyjaśnianie w metafizyce [Explaining in Metaphysics],” in his *Jak filozofować? [How to Philosophize?]* (Lublin 1989), 165 ff.

⁴ This would be typical of the Platonic-Parmenidean conception of cognition in which the moments of contemplation, recollection, and beholding are emphasized. In that approach there is no aspiration to apprehend any relations within a being or between beings.

⁵ St. Thomas described participation as follows: “Est autem participare quasi partem capere” (*Expositio libri Boetii De ebdomadis*, in his *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, cura et studio Fratrum Paredicatorum (Roma 1992), lect. 2), and “Nam participare nihil aliud est quam ab alio partialiter accipere” (*In Aristotelis libros De caelo et mundo*, cura et studio R. M. Spiazzi (Taurini 1952), lib. II, lect. 18, n. 6).

the imperfect to the perfect, the non-identical to the self-identical, the limited to the unlimited, the similar to the identical, that which possesses to that which is, the composite to the simple, the derivative to the original, the caused to the uncaused. Thus participation means a share in a certain whole, which implies the existence of some whole (a unity or community), and kinship, a community between parts and a whole (plurality and unity) and between particular parts.

We should make a clear distinction between the term “participation” used in everyday language and the technical term, the philosophical or theological term. In everyday language the term “participation” means a share or membership. It may refer to various realms (material, mental-moral, social, cultural) which imply the existence of some sort of a whole, unity, or fullness (an absolute one or a relative one): a material one (a given estate), a moral one (a fullness of suffering or joy), a cultural one (some sort of cultural creativity or receptivity). This constitutes the participated reality (a whole, a fullness, a unity, a relative perfection).⁶

We will only proceed, however, as far as the philosophical context of how the term “participation” is understood and attempt to show the role of participation in cognizing reality.

The Ontic Foundations of Participation

In the monistic vision of the world and the identity-based conception of being, the entire order of relations is an illusion, and so it is missing the purpose to speak of participative existence. An explanation that appeals to participation is not a metaphysical explanation, but it is another version of noetics (the theory of cognition). So it is not strange that although Plato introduced the term “participation” (μέθεξις), Aristotle strongly criticized the appeal to participation as a form of causation. According to Aristotle, Plato regarded

⁶ Zofia J. Zdybicka, *Partycypacja bytu [The Participation of Being]* (Lublin 1972), 19–20.

it as impossible for a general definition to refer to something from the world of things that are constantly changing. And he called this second kind of being ‘ideas’, stating that all perceptible things exist separately from them, and have from them their names, since by participation in ideas many individuals that are one in name with them exist. But if it is a question of participation, then he merely used another name. For indeed the Pythagoreans say that things are through participation in numbers, but Plato changes the terminology and says that they exist by participation. However, what this participation in ideas or imitation would consist in was not explained.⁷

Participation as a metaphysical theory to explain reality takes on a proper and not illusory meaning in a conception of being and reality where we are dealing with the real order of relations (within beings or between beings), and so, in a pluralistic vision of the world and in a compositional conception of being. However, here as well we can find, as it were, two trends in explanation: the Aristotelian trend in which the description of relations (within a being and between beings), and the determination of relations is made completely sufficiently within the theory of the four causes, and without any appeal to participation; and the Thomistic trend where the theory of participation seems to be indispensable for metaphysical cognition to be “complete.”⁸

The Aristotelian world, which exists by necessity, does not mediate its existence in anything or anyone. It only mediates the “form” of

⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 987 b 7–14. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1933, 1989), 987 b 7–14: “[T]hat there can be no general definition of sensible things which are always changing. These entities he called ‘Ideas’, and held that all sensible things are named after them sensible and in virtue of their relation to them; for the plurality of things which bear the same name as the Forms exist by participation in them. (With regard to the ‘participation’, it was only the term that he changed; for whereas the Pythagoreans say that things exist by imitation of numbers, Plato says that they exist by participation—merely a change of term. As to what this ‘participation’ or ‘imitation’ may be, they left this an open question.)”

⁸ This follows primarily from the existential conception of cognition.

its existence. Thus this was purely “formal” mediation, explained in the theory of causes where the formal cause was the highest reason for the being of things.⁹ Thus the theory of causes sufficiently explained the fact of relations within beings and between beings, and in the theory of potency and act, only the unity of cognitive apprehensions and the coherency of the holistic vision of the world were guaranteed.¹⁰

In Thomistic metaphysics the question is presented differently. The world does not exist by necessity. A composite being is a contingent being. Thus not only the reason for the organization of matter to a proper type of being requires explanation, but above all the very fact of matter’s existence needs to be explained. Moreover, not only does the very fact of the existence of a being require explanation, but also that which constitutes the content of that existence needs to be explained. For indeed nothing in a being is necessary, and nothing is explained through itself. And thus the whole of being and the world requires explanation. For indeed a being in its existence is “mediated” and that mediation concerns the whole of the being, and so it does not concern existence alone, but also concerns content.¹¹

In this way, participation in realistic metaphysics appears as a “descending road” in our understanding of the existence of reality. We treat participation in Thomas’ metaphysics as a completion of cause-oriented explanation, and primary as a completion of analogical explanation. For indeed if analogy allows us to see in plurality the fact of “unity” that the analogically single act of existence gives to a being, then participation shows us the fact of the unity in which the concrete individual being “participates” and whereby it exists. Thus by participation we learn about the fact of “imparted” and “given” existence, re-

⁹ In this also we can see the essence of Aristotle’s essentialism.

¹⁰ Hence in the Aristotelian system, the theory of participation did not appear. Cf. Marian Wesoly, “Arystotelesowa koncepcja wyjaśniania naukowego [Aristotle’s Conception of Scientific Explanation],” *Studia Filozoficzne* 22:3 (1978): 121–131.

¹¹ We would like to show (or emphasize) the derivative character of a being not only in existence, but also in what it is and how it is.

membering also that it is a question of the whole of a being, and so, it is a question of the fact that a being exists and of how it exists.¹²

We can speak of participation in realistic metaphysics as the “descending road” in our cognition of the existence of a being by unveiling the being’s connection with the Absolute, and we can speak of it as a way of predicating the nature of that mediation—participation. Of course, participation becomes a realistic theory by the fact that it has a foundation in the way reality exists—in being.¹³

When we appeal to participation in metaphysics, we explain the relation between non-necessary beings and the Absolute, between the principal cause and instrumental causes, and between elements within a being. Moreover, we speak of the participation of a being in the good, truth, and beauty of the Absolute. However, in addition to that, we speak of the participation of a being in unity, separateness, and factuality (concreteness, content-possession).¹⁴ And thus by participation we can learn about and explain the “mediated” mode of existence of a being, and we can indicate the type of this mediation.

Thus it is a question of the indication of the holistic connection of a being with the Absolute. When we speak of participation with respect to “what a being is,” we should emphasize that the “assimilation” of the concrete thing does not consist in the fact that a being is in its external structure a “reflection” or “gleam” of the Absolute, as was the case in Platonic participation, but that “a being is” and that “it is what it is” by a necessary connection with the Absolute. The Absolute is thus the ultimate reason not only for the existence of being, but also for its endowment of content. A being as a whole participates in the existence

¹² Hence we want to connect the theory of participation with the transcendentals, so in this way to show more clearly the holistic connection of a being with the Absolute.

¹³ For indeed the holistic connection of a being with the Absolute is indicated.

¹⁴ In this way, the transcendentals are typical of the holistic connection of being with the Absolute, and they do so in a more complex way presented by the metaphysical theory of causes.

of the Absolute as the Creative Cause.¹⁵ This is the deepest reach available to man into the “mystery” of being, and the discovery of that mystery “from above,” from the side of the Absolute. This type of the interpretation of participation is marked by the character of being as composed of essence and existence, the transcendence of the act of existence in relation to the element of content, and the universality of the act of existence.¹⁶

The Function of Participation

We describe the heuristic function of participation in realistic metaphysics as the “descending road” of wisdom-oriented cognition of being and of all reality.¹⁷

In realistic metaphysics participation is considered as a theory that explains the relation of non-necessary beings to the Absolute from three perspectives: with respect to efficiency, exemplarity, and finality or teleology, and so it considers participation both in existence and in similarity. In practice, however, participation is connected with the theory of the causes and of causal explanation. Therefore it seems that in realistic metaphysics in which we primarily emphasize the existential character of cognition (and of all metaphysical knowledge), participation should be connected with the transcendentals and with the theory of the transcendentals. In this way we expand the scope of participation-based predication, and what is most important, we avoid certain problems, especially those that appear in explaining the similarity of beings to the Absolute.¹⁸

¹⁵ Cf. Zdybicka, *Partycypacja bytu*, 184 ff.

¹⁶ Cf. *id.*

¹⁷ We obtain universality by the universalization of the transcendental apprehension of the concrete thing, and on the basis of analogy in existence we transfer it to reality as a whole.

¹⁸ This approach does not differ essentially from the interpretation of participation that Zofia J. Zdybicka, for example, presents. The example is merely shifted to the causation as a whole (and so to content and to existence) that the transcendental express.

Of course, this interpretation is not contrary to the interpretation of participation in terms of the causes, but it allows us to look at reality from a difference perspective. For indeed the transcendentals indicate aspects of the way a being exists, and each of transcendentals, as it is an ultimate or critical apprehension of being, refers us ultimately to the Absolute. Moreover, in the transcendentals we apprehend and express the holistic “picture” of being, and so the holistic connection of being with the Absolute.¹⁹

In connection with this, it no longer makes sense to make a distinction between the function of participation as explaining relations of origin, and the function that explains relations of the similarity of a being to the Absolute. In the transcendentals we emphasize the unity of a being (the unity of content and existence), and so its holistic connection with the Absolute.²⁰

Hence in the transcendentals we can show the apprehension of the “moments” that in connection with participation-oriented cognition provide a foundation for our knowledge of being and of reality as a whole. These aspects are as follows: making-into-a-being, content-making, making-into-one, making-into-a-subject (sovereignty), making-into-truth, making-loveable, and making-perfect.

If we proceed in this way, we avoid, as it were, a kind of dualism in interpretation that creeps in when one accents the explanation of the relation of existence and ignores the relation of similarity to the Absolute. That would entail a radicalization of the previous interpretation of the theory of participation in realistic metaphysics, and a radicalization of the concept of similarity. This would be nothing new, but merely a

¹⁹ The specific character of the transcendentals is that they connect a being composed in the aspect of content and existence with its ultimate term, which is the non-composite being, the Absolute.

²⁰ Of course here we are taking as our foundation an earlier interpretation of the transcendentals, which shows the holistic mode of the existence of being in various aspects. Cf. Leo J. Elders, *Die Metaphysik des Thomas von Aquin in historischer Perspektive*, übers. K. Hedwig, Bd. 1 (Salzburg 1985), 175 ff., and Louis-Bertrand Geiger, *La participation dans la philosophie de S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris 1942).

return to a way of understanding that Thomas often emphasized in the *Summa theologiae*. Let us examine this more closely.

The basic cognitive function of the discerned “moments” of participation-oriented cognition is to show the “holistic” connection of a being with the Absolute (“that it is”, and “how it is”). Thereby we avoid the formal picture of the Absolute as he who constructed the world or as the first mover who does not have any further knowledge of the world.²¹

The discovery of the most fundamental relation between a non-necessary being and the Absolute is expressed when participation-oriented cognition reaches the mystery of its “being-made-a-being”. Participation thus unveils the ultimate reason for “being-made-a-being,” the Absolute. The discovery of this relation is at the same time an occasion to try to describe the character of the relation. This is a unilateral relation: beings participate in the Absolute as in the reason for their existence, but not conversely. This is the most general and holistic way to understand the meaning of the existence of being, by showing its “being-made-a-being” in the Absolute. Here we also have an apprehended aspect of “assimilation” or “being-made-similar,” since “being-made-a-being” concerns the fact that a being is (or exists) analogically, just as the Absolute is or exists, but it also concerns the aspect of “how it is.” However, the Absolute “is existence,” while everything else “has existence” that has been imparted by the Absolute. Thus this is an “assimilation” that is seen and described from the perspective of existence. In this way each transcendental within participation-oriented cognition shows “from above” in different aspects the ultimate reason for the existence of being, and for a particular sort of existence.²² Thus

²¹ In this way the holistic connection of the world with the Absolute will be shown, and not merely the formal connection (cf. Elders, *Die Metaphysik des Thomas von Aquin*, 184).

²² Cf. Krąpiec, *Metafizyczne rozumienie rzeczywistości*, 9 ff.

participation-oriented cognition further on will be an explanation of various actions of how a being is made into a being by the Absolute.

The aspect of “making-content” that is indicated by the transcendental *res* allows us to answer the question whether there is some similarity between the content-based aspect of the world and the Absolute. It seems that when participation is connected with the transcendentals, the problem of similarity should be presented differently at all. Similarity is usually connected with the content-based side of a being. Meanwhile, in existential epistemology where cognitive apprehensions concern what is content-based in a being and that which content-possession actualizes, the problem of participative “assimilation” or “being-made-similar” must find a proper interpretation. “Assimilation” primarily concerns the whole of a being, and so it concerns the mode of the “fulfillment of a being” as a being. Hence the moment of “being-made-a-content” is indicated. This “content-making” mode of existence (or realization) in being is the determination that each being receives at the moment it is brought into existence. The concrete individual being participates in the Absolute holistically (“that it is”, and “how it is”).²³ Let us remark that here we are not searching for any “assimilation” to the Absolute, whether by reflection, imitation, or modeling, but we are indicating the holistic origin of a being from the Absolute, and so we are indicating the connection of the relation of existence and content in a non-necessary being with the Absolute.²⁴

The aspect of “being-made-into-one” is the next stage in the discovery of the connection of a contingent being with the Absolute in participation-oriented cognition built on the transcendental *unum*. The non-contradictory mode of existence, existence not divided into being and non-being, is an expression of “assimilation,” “attendance,” or the

²³ Cf. Zdybicka, *Partycypacja bytu*, 151 ff.

²⁴ Cf. *id.*, 171. We read in St. Thomas: “Unde [Deus] participatur a rebus, non sicut pars, sed secundum diffusionem processionis ipsius” (*Summa theologiae*, I, 75, 5, 1).

participation of composite and contingent being in the Absolute's unity.²⁵

If we indicate the participation of being in unity—this aspect of the participative existence of being in the unity of the Absolute does not concern the qualitative or quantitative aspect, but primarily concerns the non-contradictory mode of existence. By participating in the existence of the Absolute, a being also participates in the unity of that existence, which means in His non-division “into being and non-being.”

The aspect of “being-made-a-subject” (sovereignty), and so the aspect of individual qualification and separateness that the transcendental *aliquid* indicates, is the next step on the road to explain the relation of the world to God. It indicates participation in separateness and in individuality. Hence the “subjectivity,” “individuality,” “personality,” and the “definiteness” of every being is not what arrives to it, as it were, but it is a consequence of having been made into a being. In this way every ontic individual, every separate being, is separate because it has its origin in the one, separate, and individual being that is the Absolute.²⁶

The next aspect of the participative mode of the existence of being is described by the transcendental *verum*. This transcendental concerns the aspect of “being-made-into-a-truth” (rationality). This means that in participation-oriented cognition we indicate the origin of being also with respect to its intelligibility. Thus rational “life” as a whole, the entire rational order of being, which includes every existing being, is imparted to a being in the same way as existence is imparted to it. This assimilation in the “truth-based” mode of the existence of a being does not concern any qualitative aspect of a being, but it indicates the mode of the realization of each contingent being as a vehicle of truth.²⁷

²⁵ We are referring here to one of the functions of the transcendentals that they perform in our cognition of the being.

²⁶ Cf. Zdybicka, *Partycypacja bytu*, 174 ff.

²⁷ Both here and in the preceding transcendentals we would like to show that it is not only a question of the moment of agreement or correspondence between a being and an

In turn the aspect of “being-made-loveable,” and so, the aspect of participation “in the good of the Absolute” is apprehended and unveiled in participation-oriented cognition on the basis of the transcendental *bonum*. Assimilation “in the good” is not an indication of some sort of qualitative feature in a contingent being, but it shows the next aspect of the participation of a being that, when originating from the Absolute, is realized as an “act” of the will and in its action “toward the good” is fulfilled. As in the case of the truth, here we also discover the necessary connection of a being with a will. A being is a vehicle of the good, since it is necessarily connected with the will of the Absolute, and it has the will of the Absolute inscribed in under the form of an end-purpose.²⁸

The aspect of a being’s “being-made-perfect” as a synthesis of truth and the good is unveiled by the transcendental *pulchrum*. The integrity and perfection of a being is an expression of its participative mode of existence. The moment of perfection, which is connected with the act of existence that realizes the composite concrete thing, is the most universal and general expression of the “assimilation” of contingent being to the Absolute. Beauty, which is a mode of the existence of a concrete being, and is a synthesis of the good and the truth, is also an indication of the most holistic moment of assimilation (or participation) of a contingent being to the Absolute.²⁹

intellect, but also it is a question of the holistic connection of a being with an intellect (the fact that the being is, what it is, and how it is).

²⁸ Here, as above, we are emphasizing the holistic character of mediation in the good. Analogically, as when we consider the truth, we read in St. Thomas: “Quod enim totaliter est aliquid, non participat illud, sed est per essentiam idem illi; quod vero non totaliter est aliquid, habens aliquid aliud adiunctum, proprie participare dicitur” (*In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio*, cura et studio R. M. Spiazzi (Taurini 1977), lib. I, lect. 10, n. 4).

²⁹ Here the transcendentals would show most fully the unity of the transcendental model (cf. Zdybicka, *Partycypacja bytu*, 176 ff.; H. Berger, “Der partizipationsgedanke in Metaphysik Kommentar des Thomas von Aquin,” *Vivarium* 1 (1963): 115–140).

This type of interpretation of participation in metaphysics allows us to grasp the holistic connection between being and the Absolute, and to understand the character of that connection. Above all, we see the transcendence of the Absolute (an absolute transcendence) as the ultimate and first cause of the fact “that a being is,” and that it is “as it is.” In addition, we avoid all types of anthropomorphization in the interpretation of the “moment” of assimilation. It is indicated that this “similarity” does not concern the qualitative aspect of a being, but concerns its entire origin from the Absolute in the fact “that it is” and “how it is.” The separateness of the being and the analogical character of existence are preserved.

The nature of this similarity cannot in any way be described in terms of qualities, since all the transcendence of God would then be lost (both in existence and in cognition). Therefore participation “from above” unveils the “mystery” of the existence of a being, and in this way it completes the process of understanding reality.³⁰

Conclusion

To conclude we will try briefly to show the specific character of participative cognition by discerning its fundamental wisdom-oriented moments. The end-purpose of participative cognition was to describe or determine the relation between a contingent being and the Absolute.

1. For the sake of precision, it is not a question here of a relation as such, and so it is not a question of a formal description of a relation, whether or not the relation is reflexive or not. Nor is it a question of describing the relation in terms of causes: the formal (exemplar), efficient, or final cause. Rather it is a question of trying to describe how a finite and contingent being is related “in its entirety” to the infinite and

³⁰ Cognition by participation shows, on the one hand, the unity of the world with the absolute, and on the other hand it shows the separateness of the Absolute.

necessary being, the Absolute.³¹ And thus, the question is about what sort of connection a contingent being has with the Absolute.

2. In the above description we can indicate that this connection concerns not only the fact “that a being exists” but also the fact concerning “how a being exists.” Thus it concerns the fact that the “whole” of an existing being (and of the world) participates in the Absolute. This “participation” is characterized by the fact that everything “what a contingent being has,” “what it is,” and “that it is,” comes from the Absolute and due to the Absolute, while the Absolute is not in any way determined by the existence of a contingent being.

The Absolute is transcendent in existence and in cognition. Only the reality of a contingent being that is being realized is revealed in participation-oriented cognition as a reality that is mediated in the existence of the Absolute, its ultimate cause. And, while in the cause there is everything that is in the effect, the effect cannot exhaust the cause.³²

3. Since we use participation-oriented cognition, that is, the “descending road,” we discover the moment of “assimilation” and “participation” of contingent beings. This description, however, is not an attempt to determine the measure of similarity and intensity of the reflection or the fidelity of the copy to the model, but in it we see universal dependence.

4. Thus it is a kind of cognition that indicates the ultimate reason of similarity between contingent beings.³³ That type of cognition does not consist so much in seeing “similarity,” “community,” and “unity” in plurality and variety, as it consists in discovering the ultimate reason for this “similarity,” “community,” and “unity.”³⁴

³¹ So it is a question of describing the nature of the relation between the world and the Absolute.

³² This is the classical position.

³³ Cf. Zdybicka, *Partycypacja bytu*, 178 ff.

³⁴ Thus we are dealing with a specific type of cognition. This is not content-oriented cognition. In it we affirm the necessary and transcendental connections between the world (a being) and the Absolute.

5. The moment of wisdom in participation-oriented cognition is expressed in the fact that when we discover the Absolute as the ultimate reason for the fact “that being is,” and “how it is,” at the same time we see His transcendence in existence and in cognition. Thus everything that a contingent being is (the being’s content and existence), the being possesses due to the Absolute. Thus the similarity in no way concerns the qualitative aspect of a being, and so it cannot be expressed in the concepts of “reflection,” “model,” “gleam,” etc., terms that are often connected with participation-oriented cognition, but here the similarity indicates the complete origin of the contingent being from the Creative Cause. Thereby, in the realm of the content-endowment of a being we indicate the ultimate reason without resorting to explanation in terms of “non-being” or “chance.”

6. In this way in the framework of participation, we see the unity of the existence of reality, on the one hand, and the separateness of reality, on the other; the transcendence of the Absolute, and at the same time the immanence of the Absolute; the similarity of the world, and at the same time the variety of the world. Participation-oriented cognition as a whole becomes a completion of analogical cognition.

7. Participation-oriented cognition is also a completion of cause-oriented cognition, which concerns not only existence, but also the content-endowment of being as it shows the supra-categorical relation between finite beings and the Absolute. It unveils the complete dependence of finite beings upon the Absolute in the formal aspect, the efficient aspect, and the final or teleological aspect. For when a being participates in existence, it participates in everything that belongs to that existence (as necessary to be a being), and so in thing-ness (content-possession), unity, separateness, the truth, the good, and beauty.³⁵

Translated from Polish by Hugh McDonald

³⁵ Above all, it unveils before us the holistic connection (mediation) of being with the Absolute (cf. Berger, *Der Partizipationsgedanke im Metaphysik der Thomas von Aquin*, 115 ff).

**PARTICIPATION: A *DESCENDING ROAD* OF
THE METAPHYSICAL COGNITION OF BEING**

SUMMARY

When we see in the world the fact that there are many beings, and we indicate that the particular beings exist in a compositional way, we face the task of learning about a new problem: how can we define and determine the relations between beings and between the elements within a being? Although the theory of participation has roots that go back to Plato, and so to a philosophy in which the pluralism of being was rejected and which accepted an identity-based conception of being, participation finds its ontological rational justification only (and ultimately) in the pluralistic and compositional conception of being. With the description of participation as a “descending road” in the cognition of being, we are restricting ourselves to the presentation of how participation is understood in realistic metaphysics (while we shall leave aside the history of the question). We will show the aspects of participation that provide a foundation for wisdom-oriented cognition, and we will show the specific character of participation-oriented cognition as a “descending road.”

KEYWORDS: participation, Absolute, cognition, being, transcendentals, metaphysics.