

# **Reportatio**

## **The Essential and Accidental Character of Being in St. Thomas Aquinas, and the Historical Controversy Surrounding the Problem of the Real Distinction**

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## Reportatio\*

# THE ACCIDENTAL AND ESSENTIAL CHARACTER OF BEING IN ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, AND THE HISTORICAL CONTROVERSY ON THE “PROBLEM OF THE REAL DISTINCTION”

## INTRODUCTION

Any philosophy worthy of the name must be learned from things and neither from texts nor professors. The texts will be actually only our guide and the professor's function can only be to point out and show how to analyze the texts. Compare the words of St. Augustine:

Cum vero de iis agitur quae mente conspicimus, id est intellectu atque ratione, ea quidem loquimur quae praesentia contuemur in illa interire luce veritatis, qua ipse qui dicitur homo interior, illustratur et fruitur: sed tunc quoque noster auditor, si et ipse illa secreto ac simplici oculo videt; novit quod dico sua contemplatione, non verbis meis. Ergo nec hunc quidem doceo vera dicens, vera intuentem: docetur enim non verbis meis, sed ipsis rebus, Deo intus pandente, manifestis. (*De Magistro*, c. 12, #40; *PL* 32, 1217)

Knowledge in Augustine is a divine illumination in which God manifests things themselves interiorly to us. The things themselves are still the revealing factor in realistic philosophies, and not the teacher. Take Aristotle, e.g.:

All men desire by nature to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer seeing (one might say) to everything else. The reason is this, that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things. (*Met. A*, 1, 980a21-26, trans., Ross, ed. 1942, Vol. IV)

The love of wisdom, of the pursuit of wisdom, is a desire, even stronger than this, to seek in things themselves their understanding, and no man can teach this. But, in practice, there is a place for “guidance” from one who is a real philosopher. But men who are philosophers are so rare, that we have to go to the works of former philosophers, in the past. In this textual work,

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\* *Reportatio* is a copy of a lecture by a Master by his students in medieval universities—this particular *reportatio* was put together in Michaelmas semester 1956-57 at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies. I have edited it extensively to bring it more in line with Fr. Owens style and to get rid of infelicities of expression due to the hurried nature of the work. Professor Al Wingel was part of the team whose other members are unknown to me. I want to thank them for their work and hope they approve of this edition. Fr Owens I think would approve of the work, although it is not an approved edition of his lecture notes. Ed.

there is a place for the guidance of the professor of philosophy (not always a philosopher), of whom (fortunately or unfortunately) there are very many. Cf. E. Gilson, the Marquette University Aquinas Lecture, *The History of Philosophy and Philosophical Education*.

The last eight centuries show us that the best guide is St. Thomas Aquinas. We do not intend to learn from his texts, but again from things. His doctrine of being extends to all that exists (or can exist), as seen in the light of the most ultimate principles attainable by the human mind. Let us ask: has his doctrine of being achieved concise expression in any of the many metaphysical formulae in which his works abound? Of course, all compact formulations will to some extent fail to grasp the whole.

Perhaps we can learn of St. Thomas' doctrine of being from his commentators? As history has shown, this method is fraught with danger, although it is a possible way to get at his thought.

We shall now extract some of these compact passages, and will find a serious problem to be solved. Hence these texts will not suffice alone; they will lead us on to further investigation into his thought.

## ESTABLISHING THE PROBLEM

### FIRST GROUP OF TEXTS

Solus Deus est essentialiter ens. (*SCG* II, 53)

God alone is essentially being. English Dominican Fathers trans.

...quaelibet natura essentialiter est ens. (*De Ver.*, q.1, a, 1, c. Mandonnet ed.; *Quaest. Disp.* vol.I, p.3a)

This last quotation does not seem very "Thomistic" in Latin, and even causes difficulty when it is translated it into English: "Every nature is essentially *a being*"; does it matter whether we use "being" or "a being" or not. Compare:

Unumquodque enim est ens per essentiam suam. (*De Ver.*, q.21, a.1, obj.1; *ed.cit.*, vol.1, p. 506b)

Creatura habet esse per essentiam suam. (*ibid.*,q.21, a.5, obj.2; *ed.cit.*, vol.I. p.518b)

Nulla enim res naturae est quae sit extra essentiam entis universalis, quamvis aliqua res sit extra essentiam hujus entis. (*ibid.*, q.21, a.1, c.; *ed.cit.*, vol.I, 508a)

Each quotation is terse, concise, leaving no room for ambiguity. God alone from his very nature

can be said to be. And yet every nature or reality is essentially said to be being. But only God requires of his essence the predication of existence. In short, the texts seem to involve a “contradiction”.

Is the situation here parallel to the history of the critiques of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*? According to many commentators, an insoluble contradiction pervades the Aristotelian doctrine of being. The singular is the only reality; and yet, in other places, the universal is the only reality. Is St. Thomas subject to the same criticism? Is he at one and the same time following Aristotle and yet attempting to justify the Christian doctrine of creation? Calling being essential to creatures, and yet predicating it of God alone, so that being would have to be *given* to creatures? In short, is he trying to sit on both sides of the fence and thus teaching a radically contradictory doctrine of being? Compare Aristotle’s text with the comment:

...for 'one man' and 'man' are the same thing, and so are 'existent man' and 'man', and the doubling of the words in 'one man' and 'one existent man' does not express anything different (It is clear that the two things are not separated either in coming to be or ceasing to be): and similarly 'one existent man' adds nothing to 'existent man', so that it is obvious that the addition in these cases means the same thing, and unity is nothing apart from being. (Arist. *Met.* Γ, 2, 1003b26-33; Ross trans.)

Quaecumque duo praedicantur de substantis alicujus rei per se et non per accidens, illa sunt idem secundum rem: sed ita se habent unum et ens, quod praedicantur per se et non secundum accidens de substantia cujuslibet rei. (St. Thomas, *In IV Met.*, 1.2, #554, Marietti (Cathala) ed.)

St. Thomas’ commentary follows Aristotle exactly. And yet St. Thomas will also often quote the saying of St. Hilary: “In God, being is not an accident.” Is this a question of semantics? It would seem not; since the same word *ens* is used in all cases. Would the use of the definite article with the word “being” indicate a difference of meaning? If so, it would have to be justified by something else, for “man is animal” and “man is an animal” would be understood by all as the same thing. If “being” and “a being” are different, there will have to be something about the word “being” and not just a grammatical change, to show that in one sense being is essentially predicated of creatures; and in another sense, it is accidentally predicated of creatures. If so, we may be able to find a metaphysical foundation for a coherent doctrine of being in St. Thomas, and not a tissue of contradictions.

## SECOND GROUP OF TEXTS

...accidens dicitur *large* omne quod non est pars essentiae, et sic est esse in rebus. (*XII Quodl.*, a.3, ad 2<sup>um</sup>, Mandonnet, p.430)

Esse est accidens, non quasi per accidens se habens, sed quasi actualitas cujuslibet substantiae. (*II Quodl.*, a.3, ad 2<sup>um</sup>, Mandonnet,

In the wide sense, being or existence in creatures is an accident; in the narrow sense, of course, accident refers to that which is added to a substance, in accordance with the order of the Aristotelian categories. On the other hand, Thomas is just as clearly saying that being in creatures is not an accident.

Et sic dico quod esse substantiale rei non est accidens, sed actualitas cujuslibet formae existentis, et sic propriae loquendo non est accidens. (*XII Quodl.*, a.5, c., Mandonnet, p.430)

In the latter, he explicitly faces the problem that in one sense to be is an accident in created things, but speaking properly it is not. One of these two meanings, is called a wider sense [*large*] of the word accident and in this sense, being is an accident; and yet, just as legitimately, in the proper sense of the word, being is not an accident. What does this mean? Is it just a distinction invented *ad hoc* to meet a difficulty? The obvious proper sense is Aristotelian; the wide sense goes beyond the categories.

In its narrowest meaning: an accident is what does not pertain to the essence of a thing. If it does do so pertain, it is not an accident. But to say being is and is not an accident is to say it is and is not within, or belonging to, or part of the essence. This is the same contradiction previously noted in the first group of texts.

There is an historical background present here. The early objections to Thomas's doctrine during his lifetime took this tack.

### THIRD GROUP OF TEXTS

In creatures, being does not flow or proceed from the essence of a thing:

Ens ... participatur sicut aliquid non existens de essentia rei. (*II Quodl.*, a.3, c., Mandonnet, p.43)

Impossibile est autem quod esse sit causatum tantum ex principiis essentialibus rei. (*ST I*, q.3, a.4, c.)

... quod aliquid sit sibi ipsi causa essendi ... Hoc autem est impossibile. (*SCG I*, c.22)

Non potest autem esse quod ipsum esse sit causatum ab ipsa forma vel quidditate rei. (*De Ent.*, c. 4, Roland-Gosselin ed., p.35, ll. 6-7)

And yet, in many ways, he makes his own the Aristotelian dictum that 'being (*esse*) flows from the form of the thing, from its essential principles':

Quamvis hujus esse suo modo forma sit causa. (*De Ent.*, c.2, ed. Roland-Gosselin, p.10, l.7.)

Sed cujuslibet compositi esse dependet ex componentibus, quibus remotis, et esse compositi tollitur et secundum rem et secundum intellectum. (*In I Sent.*, p.8, q.4, a.1, c., Mandonnet, vol.I, p.219)

Et hoc quidem esse in re est, et est actus resultans ex principiis rei, sicut lucere est actus lucentis. (*In III Sent.*, D.6, q. 2, a. 2 resp.)

Esse enim rei, quamvis sit alius ab ejus essentia, non tamen est intelligendum quod sit aliquod superadditum ad modum accidentis sed quasi constituitur per principia essentiae. (*In IV Met.*, 1.2, n.558, Marietti ed.)

This last citation is the best known. The position is often summarized in the well-known formula:

...esse per se consequitur formam creature. (*ST*, I q.104, a.1, ad 1<sup>um</sup>)

The one set of texts means that being in a thing does not follow from the essence but comes from outside the essence; the other, that the thing is constituted by the principles of the essence, and follows essentially, per se, from the nature of the thing. In former it is an accident; in the latter it is not an accident. This is said too often and too variously to be set aside by a semantic criticism. In the context, explanations are often given especially to avoid such a misunderstanding. Hence, the apparent contradiction has deeper roots. St. Thomas realized the difficulty and so did his contemporaries. The earliest to misunderstand him in this way was Siger of Brabant. In the *reportata* of his lectures of 1272-1274, he maligns the doctrine of St. Thomas, using the very words of St. Thomas himself. Between the two extremes, being is accidental and being is essential to creatures, he says:

Ponunt autem quidam media modo, quod esse est aliquid additum essentiae rei, non pertinens ad essentiam rei, nec quod sit accidens, sed est aliquid additum: quasi per essentiae constitutum sive ex principiis essentia. (*Quaest. de Met.*, Q.7, Introd., Graiff ed., p.16, ll, 21-24)

This echoes the expressions of St. Thomas and has the texts of St. Thomas in mind. This sketch of Siger's seems to sum up very neatly the Thomistic doctrine, but in such a way that it becomes incomprehensible.

To be (*esse*) is something superadded to the essence of the thing, that does not belong to the essence of the thing, yet which is not an accident, but is something superadded as if it were, so to speak, constituted by the essence, or out of the principles of the essence. (E. Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, (P.I.M.S., 1949), p.68)

Siger has no quarrel with the final statement as a conclusion that being is constituted by the es-

sence, but he cannot understand how St. Thomas gets there:

Etsi conclusio vera sit, modum tamen non intelligo, quie esse quod pertinet ad rem, aut est pars essentiae rei, ut materia vel forma, aut res ipsa composita ex his, aut accidens ... Sed dicere quod esse sit aliquid additum essentiae rei, ita quod non sit res ipsa, neque pars essentiae ut materia vel forma, et dicere quod non sit accidens, est ponere quartam naturam in entibus. (*ibid*, ll. 40-42)

Primo pono quod in causatis ipsum esse pertinet ad essentiam causerum, ita quod res et ens non significant duas intentiones. (*ibid.*, ll.40-42)

Thus Siger believes that being is identical with the thing itself and is constituted by the principles of its essence. This is sound Aristotelianism. There is another position, that all things outside God have an efficient cause, and that in this sense only is being an accident, because accidents are caused: for a table to be white requires a cause of its whiteness. So Algazel:

Et esse de quo queritur per an est, est accidens et quod ipsa res est, scilicet ei de quo queritur per quid est; omne autem accidens alicui, causatum est; si enim esset ens per se, non esset accidens alii. (Algazel, *Met.* Muckle ed., p. 53, ll.15-17; II, s.1)

This is very fine and derived from revealed doctrine, but to reduce the statement, “being is accidental”, purely to the statement, “being is caused”, makes the former, as such, meaningless. The essentialists object that to maintain in a literal interpretation of St. Thomas that *esse* is super-added, cannot be reconciled with Aristotle's doctrine. That is certainly correct but why should that be the case? Gilson, *ibid.*, offers a sound critique of this interpretation from a narrow Aristotelian background.

Godfrey of Fontaines, Th.M., (d.1304), reports Siger’s affirmation that the Thomistic expression of this doctrine, if taken literally, contains an evident self-contradiction. It both affirms and denies the same thing. [Cf. *Quaest. de Met.*, Graiff, ed. cit. *supra.*] This apparent self-contradictory character still clings to the position, e.g., texts in St. Thomas apparently both pro and contra the real distinction.

Siger solves the whole thing very simply. St. Thomas is Aristotle, and his other inept formulas may be discarded. But is Siger not overlooking the most distinctive aspect of Thomistic doctrine and ignoring Thomas’ constant assertion that the being of a creature is other than its essence?

In choosing St. Thomas as a guide, one accents metaphysics as the science of being and so the present problem: is there a contradiction in the very formulation of the Thomistic doctrine of being? The long history of the problem shows abundantly that it is a doctrinal, and not a semantic, difficulty.



## FOURTH GROUP OF TEXTS

Being is the most common of all characteristics:

Res ad invicem non distinguuntur secundum quod habent esse; quia in hoc omnia convenient. (*SCG*, I, c.26.)

Ipsum esse quod est communissimum ... (*Opusculum, de Subst. Separ.*, c.6 ed. Perrier, p.150, vol.I, # 43)

Being is looked upon in the same way as the other common predicates in the Porphyrean tree: Socrates is rational, animal, and finally being. Things are not distinguished from one another by their being: but all coincide in the common characteristic of being. On the other hand:

Quidquid est in genere, secundum esse differt, ab aliis quae in eodem genere sunt; aliter genus de pluribus non praedicaretur. (*SCG*, c. 25)

Omnia quae sunt in genere uno, communicant in quidditate ... differunt autem secundum esse. (*ST*. I, q.3, a.5, c)

Plura individua sub una specie contenta different secundum esse et tamen conveniunt in una essentia. (*Comp.Theol.*, c. 13)

...esse non potest poni in definitione alicujus generis et speciei, quia omnia particularia uniuntur in definitione generis vel speciei, cum tamen genus vel species non sint secundum unum esse in omnibus. (*LX Quodl.*, a 5, ad 2<sup>um</sup>, Mandonnet, p. 347)

Being is unique and diverse in every individual. The very condition of things having common specific and generic characteristics is that they differ in being; in the latter they have no community. Being is not placed in the definition of anything, since being is different in every individual and the definition contains only common notes, whereas a genus unites all individuals in one common character. And yet, because being is common, it can be the subject of the single science of metaphysics:

Quaecumque communiter unius recipient praedicationem . . . pertinent ad unius scientiae considerationem: sed ens hoc modo praedicatur de omnibus entibus; ergo omnia entia pertinent ad considerationem unius scientiae, quae considerat ens ut ens. (*In IV Met.*, 1.1, #534)

Sicut autem uniuscujusque determinati generis sunt quaedam

communia principia quae se extendunt ad omnia principia illius generis, ita etiam et omnia entia, secundum quod in ente communi-  
cant, habent quaedam principia quae sunt principia omnium entium. (*In Boeth. de Trin.*, q.5, a.4, c)

Thomistic being is then at one and the same time, most common and most individual. Just as an essential note, e.g., humanity, unifies all individual men, being unifies all things that are. It seems to be the widest essential feature of things pertaining to essence. On the other hand, it is contrasted with a note of an essence in that it diversifies its instances. Compare:

Esse diversum est in diversis. (*De Ent.*, c. 5, Roland-Gosselin. ed., p.37, ll.20-21)

Esse autem in quantum est esse non potest esse diversum. (*SCG II*, c.52)

If there is a contradiction, do we have to choose between these views, or can we take both at face value as necessary for a comprehensive view and yet attempt to explain the texts as involving a consistent doctrine of being, since the position that regards these passages as contradictory is a falsification of Thomas's doctrine.

Our investigation has to be metaphysical, since metaphysics is the science of being and this problem is one that concerns the nature of being.

## METAPHYSICS AS A SCIENCE

What is the purpose or goal of a metaphysical investigation? It is long-drawn-out and tiring; and metaphysicians never seem to agree. Does this mean nothing can be attained by it? Is there any prospect of a solution? If not, it would be very frustrating for the normally-constituted human mind. Is metaphysics a science with no real object (Kant)? Or an immature stage in the development of human thought, which, after a fond backward look, we can forget (Comte)? Are metaphysical statements neither true nor false, but sheer nonsense (logical positivism)?

What is the material object of metaphysics (as plants are for botany; planets and stars, for astronomy; the structure and activity of bodies insofar as they are subject to measurement, for physics)? Let us first inspect its etymology.

Andronicus of Rhodes, about the middle of the first century B.C., arranged the books of Aristotle in such a way that the ones treating "primary philosophy" came after the ones on natural philosophy, or physics; whence "τὰ μετὰ τὰ φύσιχα". Is this word then the result of a mere historical accident?

More recent scholarship has shown that the term was used by the Peripatetics at the end of the third century B.C. (at the earliest), long before Andronicus' edition, e.g., by Hermippus of Smyrna and Ariston of Chios (head of the Lyceum a century after Aristotle's death). Cf. Paul Moreaux, *The Ancient List of the Works of Aristotle* (Louvain, 1951), pp.312ff. When Ariston was head of the school, ten books were collected as "metaphysics" and in Ariston's list (the oldest extant), they came right after Aristotle's lost mathematical books, following the Aristotelian

division of the speculative sciences: *op. cit.*, pp. 313-315. If mere order were involved in the name, the primary philosophy should have been called meta-mathematics. Hence we conclude that it means much more: either that, pedagogically, the primary philosophy rises out of or follows the study of physics; or that the Aristotelian theology treats of subjects beyond the scope of the physical sciences. [Owens further opinion is to be found in "Aristote—Maitre de ceux qui savent" *La Philosophie et les philosophes* (Montreal, Bellarmin and Descl e, Paris –Tournai, 1973) in English "Aristotle: Master of Those Who Know", *Aristotle: The Collected Papers of Joseph Owens*, Ed. John R. Catan (New York: SUNY Press, 1981), pp. 1-11 especially note 6, page 181. There he shows that the story is made up from the whole cloth. Ed.]

In either case, it is known that these books have as their subject the separated substances, since the eternity of motion demands principles which are higher than those that explain motion, namely, form and matter (hylomorphism).

Avicenna follows this opinion:

... divinae scientiae non inquirunt nisi res separatas a materia secundum existentiam et definitionem. (*Met.*, Tr. I, c. 1, A)

... propterea definitur scientia divina sic, quod est scientia de rebus separatis a materia definitione et definitionibus. (*ibid.*, c.2, E)

However, St. Thomas protests against Avicenna that metaphysics does not investigate God and separate substances, but common being, being in its most general and widest aspect:

Ejusdem autem scientiae est considerare causas proprias alicujus generis et genus ipsum ... Unde oportet quod ad eandem scientiam pertineat considerare substantias separatas, et ens commune, quod est genus, cujus sunt praedictae substantiae communes et universales causae. Ex quo apparet quod quamvis ista scientia praedicta tria consideret, non tamen considerat quodlibet eorum ut subiectum, sed ipsum solum ens commune ... Nam cognitio causarum alicujus generis, est finis ad quem consideratio scientiae pertinent. (*Comm. in Met.*, Proem.)

Res divinae non tractantur a philosophis nisi prout sunt rerum omnium principia; et ideo pertractantur in illa doctrina in qua ponuntur illa quae sunt communia omnibus entibus, et quae habet subiectum ens inquantum ens. (*In Boeth. de Trin.*, q.5, a.4, c)

This is disappointing, since the human mind is eager to know about God and the soul: we want clear, exact, explicit knowledge about them, since they are so important, socially and privately. Hence such metaphysics would be highly useful.

But if, contrary to Aristotle, metaphysics does not treat of God and the separate (spiritual, immaterial) substances, but common being and the transcendentals, and the most general divisions of being, what is its usefulness? Can't we get along without such an abstruse, remote from daily life, researches?

What are some other historical types of metaphysics? For Plato, the dialectic of Ideas; for Hegel, logic; for Bergson, intuition beyond being and what the intellect can manipulate; for Collingwood, the location of the ultimate presuppositions and assumptions of the sciences. The question: what is metaphysics? cannot be answered historically. Since there are so many views, there is no all-embracing and agreed upon answer. At least one thing can be said: metaphysics deals with ultimates, but to avoid an impasse, we can simply choose one teaching, e.g., St. Thomas'.

Furthermore, of what use is metaphysics? Briefly, there is no use. Men desire to know apart from any practical utility whatever. Cf. Aristotle, *Met.*, A, 1, 980a21-6 (Ross, 1924<sup>2</sup>), Vol. IV, cited above. Metaphysics is entirely beyond the order of utility. Usefulness presumes the purpose of furthering something else, being for the sake of something else. But metaphysics is valued as such; it is valued in itself. It is not subordinated (or instrumental) to another like *ousia* itself.

This would not convince any twentieth-century man, because of modern cultural presuppositions, whether or not he could formulate an answer. His attitude derives from Dewey's preoccupation with utility for human material progress, which is accepted as an unquestioned fact.

But how could any sincere Christian accept the notion of a science which has as its end not God but one's own metaphysical contemplation "of the separate substances" which is a kind of idolatry. Of course, Aristotle had no such problem:

Therefore it must be of itself that the divine thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things), and its thinking is a thinking on thinking. (Arist. *Met.* A, 9, 1070b34-35-35)

If thought is on account of its object, for the sake of its object; it is inferior to its object. But the highest possible substance demands that its thought be on a level with its object and not inferior to it. This is possible only if its thinking is its own thought [or the knowing is the known, Ed.]. Metaphysics similarly is an end in itself, all other sciences serve it.

For inasmuch as it is most architectonic and authoritative; and the other sciences, like slave-women, may not even contradict it, the science of the end and the good is of the nature of Wisdom. (*ibid.* B 2, 999b10-12)

But in the Christian view all sciences are subordinate to sacred theology and all this in turn to the supernatural life; as are all natural things. Metaphysics, then, has a usefulness in the Christian scheme of things. If it offered scientific knowledge of God and spiritual substances, it would certainly be Christianly useful. But does it?

## METAPHYSICS IN THE MODERN WORLD

Physical scientists have already come to see that there has to be a science outside the rigid method of exact mathematics (to which alone, the term "science" has been given in the last few centuries), in order to regulate the use of its own discoveries, and this they call political science, and it is truly a science. Perhaps, over the years, political scientists will see the need of a meta-

physical science, outside political science, to keep the nations from self-destruction. Metaphysics is regaining some of its lost prestige in the modern academic philosophical world; recall Kant's estimate:

Time was when metaphysics was entitled the queen of all the sciences; and if the will be taken for the deed, the preeminent importance of her accepted tasks gives her every right to this title of honor. Now, however, the changed fashion of the time brings her only scorn; a matron outcast and forsaken, she mourns like Hecuba: 'Modo massima rerum, tot generis natisque potens nunc trahor exul, inops. (*Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface to the First Edition, [trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London, 1929), p.7-8 (viii)])

If it were generally accepted as a science, which provided certain knowledge of God and the soul, then political science would not hesitate to use it as given to them by metaphysical scientists, just as they use the conclusions of the physical scientists. But, in today's world, does it hold any serious public interest? Hardly. Even the existentialists say that although the *Quinque Viae* are flawless, they can lead to no real conviction. This echoes Hume's view of Berkeley: "His arguments admit of no criticism, but they produce no convictions". Compare also Pascal:

C'est la coeur qui sent Dieu. Et non la raison. Voilà ce que c'est que la foy. Dieu sensible au Coeur non à la raison. (*Pensées*, Tourneur, ed., #278, p. 312)

Le coeur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connait point. (*ibid.*, #277)

It would be the task of others to bring the knowledge given by such a metaphysics into practical affairs, bearing a relation to it like that of the engineer to physics. But some think that philosophy is something personal and peculiar to each philosopher. And this seems to be historically true. Reality is rich and admits of many aspects, one's whole metaphysics develops in dependence on the principles selected as a starting point. However, there are extrinsic, but no intrinsic reasons why the principles of St. Thomas's metaphysics could not be compatible with all individual personal shadings and developments. It would not be generally accepted just on the basis of adequate exposition, but this does not mean that any intrinsic reasons stand in its way. Those who reject it are moved by extrinsic reasons.

Such metaphysics would be very useful for some people whose intelligence demands an understanding of their faith, that their religious beliefs may be integrated into the totality of their life. But, granted that a metaphysics of God and the separate substances could play an important role in human life, what of St. Thomas's metaphysics? What role could it, play? And is it possible to bring it to bear on the problems of ordinary Christian life?

By way of contrast, let us not confuse Thomistic metaphysics with the Wolffian general metaphysics or ontology found in neo-Scholasticism, e.g., Weibermann's *Ontology* (Baltimore, 1951), which declares at the outset that it will not consider infinite Being. God is here relegated to natural theology and the soul to rational psychology. In St. Thomas, is this division between "general metaphysics" and "natural theology" justified? Nowhere. On the contrary, in fact, *pas-*

*sim*, St. Thomas calls metaphysics “philosophical theology”, the “divine science” and they are identical. He has no notion of a general metaphysics, which is not thereby a study of God.

### WHY IS METAPHYSICS CALLED DIVINE IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT ITS SUBJECT IS COMMON BEING?

It receives this appellation not from its end or purpose. (See the *Comm. in Met.*, Prooem. and *In Boeth. de Trin.*, c.5, a.4, c. ) Thomas also approves Avicenna and cites him: “Cognitio enim Dei finis est hujus scientiae.” (*Met.*, tr.I, 4) God and separate substances are not the subject, but the end or purpose which the study of the science of metaphysics attains. The reason for this conception of the science is not hard to see: God and the separate substances are not presented immediately to the mind, directly, or as evidence; the intellect is immediately concerned with the world of sensible things. On the other hand, if they were the subjects of metaphysics (and not its conclusion), they would have to be given to the science of metaphysics as the conclusions of another science (since they are not immediate present to the mind); and this is precisely the position of Aristotle:

We must consider, then, how this matter stands, for the discovery of the truth about it is of importance, not only for the study of nature, but also for the investigation of the First Principle. (*Phys.* VIII, 1, 251a5-8)

But it is impossible that movement should either have come into being or cease to be (for it must always have existed), or that time should. For there could not be a before and an after if time is; for time is either the same thing as movement or an attribute of movement. And there is no continuous movement except movement in place, and of this only that which is circular is continuous. (Arist. *Met.* Λ, 6, 1071b6-11)

Natural philosophy concludes by showing us that the motion of the world is eternal: and traceable to the immobile part of the eternal movent, i.e., the soul of the outermost celestial sphere. This gives the data for metaphysics to prove that there is an external object, by which this soul is ‘moved as towards a final end, to sustain its eternal motion.’ Averröes also maintained versus Avicenna, that the philosophy of nature established the object of metaphysics. This is still controversial, cf. e.g., Vincent Smith, “The Prime Mover: Physical and Metaphysical Considerations”, *PACPA.*, Vol. XXVIII (1954), who upholds the Averröes-Aristotelian position.

There is no object or meaning to metaphysics until natural philosophy provides it. Many scholars point out that this notion destroys the distinctive aspect of Thomistic metaphysics, which begins from things directly evident and immediate to the human intellect, and not from the evidence or conclusions of another science. Cf. St. Thomas:

... et similiter philosophus primus non probat principia quae tradit

naturali, per principia quae ab eo accipit, sed per alia principia per se nota. (*In Boeth. de Trin.*, q.5 a. 1, ad 9<sup>um</sup>, Wyser ed., p.31, ll.17-19)

... ens autem et essentia sunt que primo intellectu concipiuntur, ut dicit Avicenna in primo libro sue *Metaphysice*. (*De Ent.*, Prooem., R-G. ed.p.1; n.2, Avicenna, *Met.*, tr.I, cap.6.f. 72bA, Venice 1508 ed.)

Being is the most evident, first concept of the intellect, in which all things are resolved; it is the subject and starting-point of metaphysics; and God and the separate substances are its goal. Note how the *Quinque Viae* begin from sensible things. These considerations establish the importance of the place of metaphysics in the individual and his social life. How then is “Being as such” in St. Thomas’s metaphysics so rich and full a notion as to lead to God and the soul? Isn’t it the accidentality of being in creatures that leads to God as “He Who Is”. Whereas the essentiality of being in creatures shows that if an essence itself contains no principle of corruption, then it is not subject to decomposition, since it is impossible that its *esse* be separated from it, and hence the basis of the spirituality and immortality of the human soul (and angels).

Manifestum est enim quod id quod secundum se convenit alicui, est inseparabile ab ipso. Esse autem per se convenit formae quae est actus ... Impossibile est autem quod forma separetur a seipsa. Unde impossibile est quod forma subsistens desinat esse. (*ST. I*, q.75, a.6, c.)

God and the soul are thus part of metaphysics. Calling the subject of metaphysics “being-as-such” thus does not preclude their inclusion. The practical need is thus satisfied, and the possibility of a general science, such as many demand today, is left open: one that assigns the merits, place, and interconnection of the other sciences by investigating their subjects under the aspect of the being of those subjects. It expressly starts from ordinary being which is immediately evident in the sensible world and thus aims to attain scientific knowledge of God and the supersensible world.

How can the ordinary beings of the sensible world provide sufficient content for the transition to the supersensible world?

It has long been held among modern thinkers that the “concept of being” adds no determination to the other concepts of the thing. It would seem to be devoid of content, adding no intelligible content to the particular natures of things. Thus it cannot on this account provide the subject of a science nor indeed a concept or object of conception. On this ground, Kant rejects metaphysics, and others, e.g., Collingwood, who wishes to restore it, abandon the traditional notion.

What has brought on this state of affairs? A conceptual or logical norm of self-identity has been applied to being in the manner of Plato. The rule is that comprehension (or connotation) is inversely related to extension (or denotation). What is not often notice is that the rule only applies to univocal concepts. In keeping with this understanding, therefore, Hegel identifies being so conceived with nothing. This path then is sterile and leads to no science of the “concept of being”.

There has been a revival of the non-logical conception of being and Sidney Hook has attacked this revival both in its existential and Thomistic garb in *The Quest for Being* (Acts of the International Philosophical Congress, Vol. 14, 11<sup>th</sup> Congress, pp. 17ff.)

What is at issue are various meanings attached to the notion of being, for example, "It is" means "it is there" or "da-sein". Is being just a fact, a meaningless here-and-now? Being is inextricably wrapped in every reality, so that if you take away the reality, there is apparently nothing left. In ascending the Porphyrean tree, when you substract substance, it seems that being is gone. As Kant said, 100 possible thalers and 100 real thalers have exactly the same conceptual content simply as concepts. But even ordinary awareness tells us that there is something odd here.

## History of the Notion of Being Prior to St. Thomas

### PARMENIDES

The nature of being was made so rich in content at the door of Western culture by *Parmenides of Elea*, that it included all other natures and allowed no others to survive. It was indestructible, eternal, unique, all-encompassing. The subject and the predicate in the statement "[It] is" were identical. Even to say "Being is" involves duality, there is only "IS". Parmenides is the first metaphysician; the previous men were physicists [*naturales*]. If we consider the subject of metaphysics to be being, then it begins with Parmenides, and the development of the course of Western thought has been powerfully influenced by the Eleatic's poem. It is hard to avoid commencing any study of a problem touching being without starting at his text. Here the case for the richness of the concept of Being is presented at its strongest.

Parmenides lived in the first quarter of the fifth century B. C. In the sixth century A. D., Simplicius mentions that Parmenides' book is becoming rare, and so he quotes a number of long passages from it. *Comm. in Phys.*, crit. ed., p.144, ll. 25-8. But the work was a literary unit, eventhough it has come down to us in fragments, and thus it should be read as a whole. The poem has three parts:

1. An apocalyptic introduction to the following doctrine.
2. The first part *On Truth*, often quoted, and best preserved, 90% of the original is extant. This contains the doctrine on Being. There is little doubt then that the most important observations have all been handed down.
3. The conclusion *On Opinion* that gives the opinions on how things appear to mortal men. It is estimated that only 10% of this part is extant. The nature and purpose of this section is much disputed. It is a doctrinal conclusion rising from the first two parts, since it is accepted that the poem is a unit, working out successively one continuous theme and all proceeding from a single philosophical interpretation.

So the problem of the accidental and essential character of being goes back to the start of Western culture. We must inspect the character of being as it is revealed in the poem of Parmenides in



order to see the background against which St. Thomas developed his thought on being.

*The Prooem* is an elaborate introduction after the manner of Hesiod in introducing the *Theogony*, wherein the goddesses appear to him at the foot of Mount Helicon and tell him of the generations of the gods; and thus Hesiod represents himself as inspired by divinities to tell the truth to men. Likewise, Parmenides claims a divine inspiration to tell men the truth about all that is. He uses the symbols and imagery of the poetry and art of the epoch he lived in, in order to be understood by his contemporaries. This does not imply mystery or mysticism; he is merely conforming to literary usage of his day in using verse.

This introduction opens with Parmenides in a chariot drawn by mares, with blazing axles, following the road marked out by the goddesses, and led by sun-maidens. The chariot leaves the realm of dark and night, and rises to that of light and day. The maidens cast off their veils before the gate dividing the two realms. Parmenides says that he has traveled to the full extent of his heart's desire. All along the way, the road is uttering and the mares are pondering many things.

Interpretation:

1. Parmenides starts with the plurality of things in the world of darkness, which becomes for him the road, the means, to the light above. There is no abstraction of the unity of being at the start; rather the multiple things of the sensible world are the starting-points and the means.
2. There is a sharp contrast between the abode of darkness (ignorance), which is the world where men live, and the abode of light (knowledge) whose own proper region is above the sensible world.
3. The forces which elevate Parmenides to the region of light are female—the mares, the goddesses, the sun-maidens, the numerous feminine terms in Greek a fact which moved Aristotle and Aetius (a Greek doxographer) to claim that Parmenides called darkness male and light female.

Parmenides is then ushered into the presence of the goddess, who receives him graciously, tells him of the newness of his knowledge, and that it is beyond all that men have ever achieved before. The keys, which open the portal to this knowledge are those of “requital” or “versatile changes”; and they are held by *Dike*, the manifold punisher or avenger, who keeps all plurality in balance and order. The keys seem to symbolize the thing or permanent element that supports all plural things—that is in the things themselves and opens the door to a higher knowledge of the—things of everyday sensible experience. The goddess says she will teach Parmenides two ways of looking at things:

1. The perfect, unmoved, stable, permanent way of well-rounded truth, which gives knowledge unchanging and complete in itself.
2. The way of opinion and appearance: how men came to see things in the way they do: How things come to be represented as an ever-flowing plurality. This leads to continually changing and never complete knowledge.

## THE SECOND PART OF THE POEM

It describes the Way of Truth. The goddess speaks:

The first way maintains that [it] is and that [for it] not to be is impossible. This is the oath of conviction that follows the truth. But the second asserts that [it] is not and [for it] not to be is of necessity. The latter oath, I tell you, is not to be explored. For (that which) is not you neither can know, for this is beyond your achieving, nor can you express it in words. For that which is possible to know is identical with that which can be.

In the Greek text, no subject is expressed for the Greek verb (ἐστὶν) throughout the poem, Parmenides seems very careful never to express a subject for this verb. In English we can only write [it], impersonal. There was a good reason for this emphasis: Parmenides was trying to show that nothing else can exist but being; and the phrase “being is” would be worse than a tautology, it would imply that something else than being can be, even. E.g., “rain rains” implies that something else besides rain could rain.

This expression (ἐστὶν) is not abstract, but a finite form of the verb (εἶναι), and it is impersonal and may be translated as: “that which exercises the act of being”. From the Proem and the works of his predecessors, it would seem that this “being” is identified with all the sensible things we know, as the readers would understand it—whatever it is, is in the world of sensible experience, nature, which all have seen. But Parmenides is careful not to imply a distinction between “what” and “is” in the idea “what is”. All we can say of all that is, is that [it] “is”. Just the one notion, Being, is expressed, and that in a finite way. On this notion must all thinking be based, and it contains its own necessity as is seen in the form in which he uses it. “Is” simply means “not to be is impossible”. Although this is all to be explained, now it is just given as a fact communicated to him by the goddess. She shows how this way of “not to be” is impossible: (that which) is not, cannot be known or expressed. We cannot conceive that there is nothing at all—you may try, but it cannot be done; all thinking is in terms of being. And if [it] is not, it is necessary that [it] can not be.

The goddess warns against the *third way*, which now, as a matter of fact, all mortals are treading. This way combines “to be” and “not to be”. Both are given some character of reality, both are regarded as being, and yet later, in another way, they are radically distinguished as mutually contradictory. This is the “road continually self-reversing”. Being and not-being are the same (both are real) and are not the same. Parmenides then goes on to give the characteristics of being and the “proofs” of each: it is ingenerable, indestructible, without end, unchangeable, whole, continuous, with no past, or future. What is comes from what is or what is not. Now it could not come from what is not, for what is not is inconceivable. Nor could it come from what is, since what is, is already, and there is nothing beyond being from which it could come. Therefore, it cannot change or alter; it provides no basis for parts, it is unique, simple, and eternal.

We see the first metaphysician of the West isolating “is”—the universe is, things are—and grappling with being. He goes on to make it so rich in content that there is no 'something' or 'what', which is, but being just is. Nothing besides being (ἐστὶν) is or ever will be:

... οὐ δὲν γὰρ ἔστιν ἢ ἔσται ἄλλο πᾶρεξ τοῦ ἔοντος (Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* Vol.I, p.238, Fr.8, ll.36-7).

Parmenides isolates the notion of being as a pure form, and the process ends in a juggernaut that pulverizes everything in the plurality he started from. There is no flaw in his argumentation, once we accent his sharp, uncompromising distinction between being and non-being.

The only escape is to show that something other than being is. We must start with the fact that things are and have being; but must show that they are in some way other than their being and in some way, apart from it. Their being is different from themselves and does not absorb them in such a way as to identify itself with them and make their natures its nature. We must show that they are not their being and still are, lest we destroy their very plurality and mutability. Otherwise, Parmenides' logic takes over and goes on to unite all things in a single huge self-identical, essential being. Compare St. Thomas:

Si sit aliquod esse per se subsistens, nihil competit ei nisi quod est entis in quantum est ens. (*SCG* I, c.52, Leon. ed., XIII, p. 387b, ll. 14-15)

If being is identical with the subject, which is (i.e., subsistent being), you cannot find a place in it for anything which does not follow from being-as-such, e.g. differentiation, plurality, change. Further, being can be universally predicated of all things, but strictly only of God:

...aliquid esse sine additione dicitur dupliciter. Aut de cujus ratione est ut nihil sibi addatur: et sic dicitur de Deo: hoc enim oportet perfectum esse in se ex quo additionem non recipit; nec potest esse commune, quia omne commune salvatur in proprio, ubi sibi fiat additio. Aut ita quod non sit de ratione ejus quod fiat sibi additio, neque quod non fiat, et hoc modo ens commune est sine additione. In intellectu enim entis non includitur ista conditio, sine additione; alias numquam posset sibi fieri additio, quia in sui ratione non dicit aliquam additionem, sed potest sibi fieri additio ut determinetur ad proprium... Ita etiam divinum esse est determinatum in se et ab omnibus aliis divisum, per hoc quod sibi nulla additio fieri potest. (*In I Sent.*, D.8, q.4, a.1, ad 1<sup>um</sup>; Mand.ed. I, p. 219)

... Aliquid cui non fit additio, potest intelligi dupliciter. Uno modo, ut de ratione ejus sit quod non fiat ei additio; sicut de ratione animalis irrationalis est, ut sit sine ratione. Alio modo intelligitur aliquid cui non fit additio, quia non est de ratione ejus quod sibi fiat additio; sicut animal commune est sine ratione, quia non est de ratione animalis communis ut habeat rationem; sed neque de ratione ejus ut careat ratione. Primo igitur modo, esse sine additione est esse divinum; secundo modo esse sine additione est esse commune. (*ST* I, a.3, q.4, ad 1<sup>um</sup>)

Quia enim id quod commune est per additionem specificatur vel individuatur, aestimaverunt divinum esse, cui nulla fit additio, non esse aliquod esse proprium, sed esse commune omnium; non considerantes quod id quod commune est vel universale sine additione esse non potest, sed sine additione consideratur; non enim *animal* potest esse absque *rationali* vel *irrationali* differentia, quamvis absque his differentiis cogitetur. Licet enim cogitetur universale absque additione non tamen absque receptibilitate additionis; nam si *animali* nulla differentia addi potest, genus non esset; et similiter est de omnibus aliis nominibus. Divinum autem esse est absque additione non solum in cogitatione, sed etiam in rerum natura: nec solum absque additione, sed etiam absque receptibilitate additionis. Unde ex hoc ipso quod additionem non recipit nec recipere potest, magis concludi potest quod Deus non sit esse commune, sed proprium; etenim ex hoc ipso suum esse ab omnibus aliis distinguitur quod nihil ei addi potest. (SCG I, 26; Leon.ed. XIII, p. 82b13-35)

Things, in order to be plural, different, and changing, cannot be identified with the being, which they possess. Or else we will have either Parmenides' devouringly rich meaning of being, absorbing everything possible into itself; or being emptied of all content, and the conceptual state of a hundred real thalers is exactly the same as the conceptual state of a hundred nonexistent thalers. We must be able to predicate being of a thing, without identifying the thing with being as taken in the purity of its own meaning, as extensible to all that which is. Each thing cannot be all that which is. Thus, peculiarly in St. Thomas, the notion of being >is accidental to things: outside of, apart from the essence or nature of the thing'.

This doctrine maintains the reality of the sensible world, whereas Parmenides had to explain tortuously why his view so blatantly contradicted experience, and how things appear so convincingly to men as multiple and changing. The traditional contrast made is really between the first and third ways, and not between Parmenides and Heraclitus. The people Plato calls Heracliteans are actually on the third way, and only supply a contrast in view of his interpretation of Heraclitus. Heraclitus was a moralist, and not interested in the doctrine of being as such.

Because the poem is a literary unit, the Third Part follows, rounds out, completes, and brings to its logical conclusion the doctrine of the first two parts. Here the goddess is to show the origin and descent of the opinions of men:

At this point I cease my reliable theory (Logos) and thought, concerning Truth; from here onwards you must learn the opinions of mortals, listening to the deceptive order of my words. (D-K, Fr.8, ll.50-53, Vol.I, p.239; trans. Freeman, *Ancilla*, p.44)

There is no mention of a new subject being introduced; he is still represented as following the Way of Truth, but explaining, looking at "opinion", which has an objective meaning here, that is, the way things appear to men—criticizing it according to the principles of his doctrine of being, but still giving his own doctrine. Cf. Frankel, *Journal of Classical Philology*, I (1946), p.170b.

There is only one form; but mortals choose by convention (not by reason or the nature of

things) to establish two basic forms, only one of which ought to be named. They illegitimately introduce a second form and give it equal status with the one basic form. Whence a radical duality is introduced into the constitution of things:

They have established (the custom of) naming two forms, one of which ought not be (mentioned): that is where they have gone astray. They have distinguished them as opposite in form, and have marked them off from another by giving them different signs: on one side the flaming fire in the heavens, mild, very light (in weight), the same as itself in every direction, and not the same as the other. This (other), the same as itself and opposite: dark Night, dense and heavy body. This world-order I describe to you throughout as it appears with all its phenomena, in order that no intellect of mortal men may outstrip you. (*D-K*, fr. 8, ll.353-59, Vol.I, pp.239-40; Freeman, trans.pp.44-5)

What are these two principles? Fire, which is the same as itself in every direction, self-identical in the same way as being, and not the same as the other, in fact sharply distinguished from it (as being from not-being)—this is the form in which mortals conceive being, i.e., as light or fire. Not-being is conceived by them as darkness. This is just the way in which Aristotle read Parmenides, as positing two principles: the hot or fire, as the existent; and the cold or earth, its opposite, as the non-existent. These are seen in sensation: one in the line of being, one in the line of not-being.

This would be the case on the theory set forth in Parmenides, for he says that the things into which change takes place are two, and he asserts that these two, viz., *what is* and *what is not*, are Fire and Earth. (Arist, *De Gen.et Corr*, I, 3,318b6-7)

...but Parmenides in places seems to speak with more insight. For, claiming that, besides the existent, nothing non-existent exists, he thinks that of necessity, one thing exists, viz, the existent and nothing else (on this we have spoken more clearly in our works on nature); but being forced to follow the observed facts, and supposing the existence of that which is one in definition, but more than one according to our sensations, he now posits two causes and two principles, calling them hot and cold, i.e., fire and earth; and of these he ranges the hot with the existent, and the other with the non-existent. (Arist. *Met.* A, 5 986b27-987a2)

This is precise testimony, reliable as usual on the facts, and not an interpretation in line with the viewpoint of his philosophy. Compare:

But since all things are named Light and Night, and names have been given to each class of things according to the power of one or

the other (Light or Night), everything is full equally of Light and invisible Night, as both are equal, because to neither of them belongs any share (of the other). (*D-K*, fr.9, ll. 1-5, Vol.I, pp.240-41; Freeman, p.45)

Also, Aristotle insists that being for Parmenides is something sensible; Parmenides was a “materialist” by repute in ancient times. After quoting him, Aristotle continues:

But the reason why these thinkers held this opinion is that while they were inquiring into the truth of that which is, they thought 'that which is' was identical with the sensible world. (Arist, *Met.* I, 5, 1010a1-3)

Plato agrees on this point: for Parmenides the world perceptible to the senses was that which is, and not the immaterial. Parmenides and Melissus had no other idea of being than that which is perceived: extended quantity.

If then the whole is, as Parmenides says—‘On all sides like the mass of a well-rounded sphere, equally weighted in every direction from the middle; for neither greater nor less must needs be on this or that’—then being, being such as he describes it, has a center and extremes, and having these, must certainly have parts, must it not? (Plato, *Sophist*, 244E; *LCLS*. ed., trans. Fowler, p.367)

The opposite form is the earth, which is by itself, and is darkness and ignorance, and yet is set up in human cognition as though it were something that is. These two are irreducible, nor do they ever participate in each other, but different things are named as participating in different proportions of one or the other. And yet the combinations of the two are continually changing, producing the whole changing process of the universe.

The degree of light any man has is the degree to which he understands. Whence we can give a meaning to the symbolism of the *Proem*, the rise to the level of pure light being equivalent to seeing things from the viewpoint of being alone—only for a few rare moments. This is why the third part was necessary, for seeing things as we usually do. Darkness as a matter of fact is set up by human cognition; whereas only by isolating the element of being and light and becoming more and more absorbed in it do we then see what really is in all things. There is no reality in the second principle, and he two cannot participate each other.

### PLATO'S *PARMENIDES*

Plato in the *Parmenides* takes up this problem, and concludes that he has to recognize, besides participation in the Ideas by sensible things, participation within the Ideas. The *Sophist* pursues the question further. The Eleatic stranger in the *Sophist* is compelled to acknowledge that not-being in some sense exists, hence it is one of the Forms, and even has a nature, that of “otherness”:

THE ELEATIC STRANGER: 'I have another still more urgent request to make of you.'

THEAETETUS: 'What is it?'

STR.: 'Do not assume that I am becoming a sort of parricide.'

THE.: 'What do you mean?'

STR.: 'In defending myself, I shall have to test the theory of my father Parmenides and contend forcibly that after a fashion not-being is and on the other hand in a sense being is not.'

THE.: 'It is plain that some such contention is necessary.'

STR.: 'Yes, plain even to a blind man, as they say; for unless these statements are either disproved or accepted, no one who speaks about false words, or false opinionCwhether images or likenesses, or imitations or appearancesC or about the arts which have to do with them, can ever help being forced to contradict himself and make himself ridiculous.' (Plato, *Sophist*, 241D; ed. cit., p.355)

The only solution: parricide. Plato continues to develop the argument in *Sophist*, 248A-256E, ed. cit., pp. 379-415. There is to be a nature, which is to be called "not-being", and is to communicate to things "otherness", by which they are other than their being, or contrasted to it. Plato sees only *nothing* as opposed to *being* (quite right for his meaning of *being* however, for some reason, he does not even consider "being" in the other sense—"existence", and so can only contrast nothing with being). And since (if one grants Parmenides' basic views), for things to be many, they must be composed of that-which-is and something else, all must be composed of being and not-being, or being and otherness, not of nature or essence and existence.

### ARISTOTLE, IN THE *METAPHYSICS*

(Books K, B, E first part, and I, which are parallel)

Aristotle asks how just one nature can be both self-identical and yet account for the differences of all other things (since for Aristotle, a form is just one definite characteristic). But he still has to face the Parmenidean problem and does so by noting the equivocality of the term "being".

There are many senses in which a thing may be said to 'be', but all that 'is' is related to one central entity, one definite kind of thing, and is not said to 'be' by a mere equivocation. Everything which is healthy is related to health, one thing in the sense that it preserves health, another in the sense that it is a symptom of health, another because it is capable of it. And that which is medical is relative to the medical art, one thing being called medical because it possesses it, another because it is naturally adapted to it, another because it is a function of the medical art. And we shall find other words used similarly to these. So, too, there are many senses in

which a thing is said to be, but all refer to one starting-point; some things are said to be because they are substances (οὐσιαί), others because they are affections of substance, others because they are a process towards substance, or productive or generative of substance, or of things which are relative to substance, or negations of one of these things or of substance itself. It is for this reason that we say even of non-being that it is non-being. (Arist., *Met.*, Γ 2, 1003a33-1003b10)

...being' has many senses and is not used in one only; it follows that if the word is used equivocally and in virtue of nothing common to its various uses, being does not fall under one science (for the meanings of an equivocal term do not form one genus); but if the word is used in virtue of something common, being will fall under one science. The term seems to be used in the way we have mentioned, like 'medical' and 'healthy'. For each of these also we use in many senses. Terms are used in this way by virtue of some kind of reference, in the one case to medical science, in the other to health, in others to something else, but in each case to one identical concept. For a discussion and a knife are called medical, because the former proceeds from medical science, and the latter is useful to it. And a thing is called healthy in a similar way; one thing because it is indicative of health, another because it is productive of it. And the same is true in the other cases. Everything that is, then, is said to >'be' in this same way; each thing that is is said to 'be' because it is a modification of being qua being or a permanent or a transient state or a movement of it, or something else of the sort. (Arist., *Met.*, K, 3, 1060b32-1061a10)

The example, health, is *homonymous* (equivocal) by reference to one nature. Whereas being is found in *one* nature only, all others are denominated being by reference to that one (πρὸς ἓν). Nature is treated by the philosophy of nature, and is one kind of being:

But since there is one kind of thinker who is above even the natural philosopher (for nature is only one particular genus of being), the discussion of these truths also will belong to him whose inquiry is universal and deals with primary substance. (Arist., *Met.*, Γ 3, 1005a33-5)

But metaphysics treats of the primary (οὐσίᾳ), an instance of being, entity, or substance. The nature of being is found only in separate substances, the object of "theology or first philosophy":

There must, then, be three theoretical philosophies, mathematics, physics, and what we may call theology; since it is obvious that if the divine is present anywhere, it is present in things of this sort.



And the highest science must deal with the highest genus. Thus, while the theoretical sciences are to be more desired than the other sciences. This is more to be desired than the other theoretical sciences. For one might raise the question whether first philosophy is universal, or deals with one genus, i.e., some one kind of being;... We answer that if there is no substance other than those which are formed by nature, natural science will be the first science; but if there is an immovable substance, this science must be prior and must be first philosophy, and universal in this way, because it is first. And it will belong to this science to consider being as being. (Arist., *Met.*, E, 1,1026a17-32)

...the first science deals with things which both exist separately and are immovable. (*ibid.*, a15-16).

Compare *Met.*, K, 7, 1064a1-6, and 15, which also leads to the conclusion that the nature of being is found only in the separated substances, but all other things are so denominated in reference to it, insofar as they try as much as possible, as best they can, to imitate the insolubility and permanence of immaterial substance. They do not contain the nature of being within themselves. So the problem now focuses on the necessity of locating what is other than being in the definite nature of the individual things that we call beings.

But if their natures are not being, how is it that we call them beings? Only by reference to the primary instance, which alone contains it. Secondary instances are not being narrowly speaking at all. Only the primary instance is. How are we to reconcile this with the position that everything is essentially being, in its substance, compare *Met.*, Γ, 2, 1003b26-33..

The nature in reference to which things are denominated being lies outside every nature except the nature of the primary instance—as follows from the example of health, and the medical art. The nature from which the denomination is taken, although in each case extrinsic to the things so-called, can be predicated of them in view of their relation to the primary instance of that nature. Things are identified with their being, but this being is being by reference only. Only the separated substances are correctly spoken of as beings. The reference to the primary instance of being is *essential* to all their natures; things are then identified with their own “beingness” and still remain outside of, or apart from, the nature of being. The difficulty now is: are sensible substances still existent, if they are so far removed from being?

We already have a basis for the essentiality of being to all things, although things are not identified with being-as-such, but they can only be called a being through a relationship that is extrinsic to their nature. Aristotle seems to be reasoning against a Platonic background of the sharp distinction between being and becoming (the traditional Parmenidean vs. Heraclitean flux of universal becoming, but this juxtaposition is the result of Plato's need to find a opposite to Parmenidean permanence in the dialogue and is not rooted in the fragments of Heraclitus, in fact a better candidate would have been Cratylus): for Aristotle, being is eternal, immutable, necessary, etc., as contrasted with the changeable things in the sensible world. How, in spite of their becoming can they be called a being? Being must be an homonymous or equivocal term, applied in various ways to a plurality of things. Being *per accidens* is ruled out as a source because as a cause it is no place in Aristotelian metaphysics, and furthermore is irrelevant to any science:

Since 'being' has many meanings, we must first say regarding the *accidental*, that there can be no scientific treatment of it. (Arist., *Met.* E, 2, 1026b2-5)

Since 'being' in general has several senses, of which one is 'being' by accident; we must consider first that which 'is' in this sense. Evidently none of the traditional sciences busies itself about the accidental... That a science of the accidental is not even possible will be evident if we try to see what the accidental really is. We say that everything either is always and of necessity (necessity not in the sense of violence, but that which we appeal to in demonstrations), or is for the most part, or is neither for the most part, nor always and of necessity, but merely as it chances;... The accidental, then, is what occurs, but not always nor of necessity, nor for the most part. Now we have said what the accidental is, and it is obvious why there is no science of such a thing; for all science is of that which is always or for the most part, but the accidental is in neither 'of these classes.' (Arist., *Met.*, K, 8, 1064b15-1065a6)

Beings are, only through reference to one nature, but the reference is essential to them. The accidentality of being (*ens*) will arise only in the Arabian commentators as a result of the Islamic religious tradition. St. Thomas also received it from the Fathers, especially St. Hilary.

Parmenides allows no room for a substance, which could be; being entirely suppresses any "thing", any "what". This is opposed to the modern assertion that the what or thing is so rich that there is no content left for being, which then becomes the emptiest of all notions. Consult Newton Stalnick, "Freedom and Existence", *Review of Metaphysics*, IX (1955), p. 28. If we try to generalize the notion of being by abstracting it beyond its particulars, we end with a sheer existence without quality, hardly even amenable to human conception, a mere terminus of abstraction. However, if this is not recognized, then we end in a pure Eleatic monotone. The "what is" is the only thing with any content, the only fruitful notion of being.

This is the same background. that has always existed in the science of being:

And indeed the question which was raised of old and is raised now and always, and is always the subject of *aporia*, viz., What being is, is just the question, what is *ousia*. (*Met.* Z, 7, 1028b2-4)

Does the modern way offer any solution to the Parmenidean paradox? If one admits that things really are, and then gives being no content at all, then is not one identifying things with their own being? And then we cannot escape the toils of Parmenidean logic again. Is there a way in which a thing can be identified with its being and yet not be subsumed by its being?

The only being identified with its being is the subsistent Being of God; and the arguments for the unity and simplicity of God in the *De Ente et Essentia* follow exactly the same line as the Parmenidean logic:

Invenitur enim triplex modus habendi essentiam in substantiis. Aliquis enim et sicut Deus cujus essentia est ipsumsummet esse suum: et ideo inveniuntur aliqui philosophi dicentes, quod Deus non habet quidditatem:vel essentiam quia essentia sua non est aliud quam esse suum. (*De Ente.et Essentia*, c. 5; R-G. ed., p.37, ll. 10-17, Maurer trans., p.60)

Nec oportet, si dicimus quod Deus est esse tantum ut in errorem eorum incidamus qui Deum dixerunt esse illud esse universale quo quolibet res formaliter est. Hoc enim esse quod Deus est huius conditionis est quod nulla sibi additio fieri possit... Esse autem commune sicut in intellectu suo non includit additionem, ita non includit in intellectu suo aliquam precisionem additionis...(ibid., R-G, p.37, l. 22 to p.38, l.4; ll.9-12)

## AVICENNA OF BOKHARA

But being, in some way is also accidental, as the Patristic background testifies. However, in the *Comm. in Met.*, St. Thomas is concerned especially with the doctrine of the Muslim theologian, Ibn Sina or Latinized as Avicenna (980-1037). In his works the accidentality of being comes to the fore. This is also against the background of the Qu'ran in which Allah is the only *necesse est [necessary being]*, who is by His own necessity; all things other than Him derive their being from Him; hence in some way their being is beyond their essence:

... unaquaeque res habet certitudinem propriam quae est ejus quidditas. Et notum est quod certitudo cujusque rei quae est propria ei, est praeter esse, quod multivocum est cum aliquid. (*Met.*, Tr. I, c. 6 Venice 1508 ed., fol. 72v, col. 1 C)

*Certitudo* is Avicenna's technical term for essence, as can be seen from the meaning he gives it here, as well as its context. Using the famous example of equinity, Avicenna establishes this point by considering the nature of equinity in itself. He notes that it can be either in this or that individual or in the mind. Of itself it is not bound to any one of these ways of existing, that is, it is not tied to any of these ways in which it can exist:

Unde ipse equinitas non est aliquid nisi equinitas tantum; ipsa enim ex se nec est multa nec unum. Nec est existens in his sensibilibus nec in anima. Nec est aliquid horum potentii vel effectui, ita quod hoc contineatur intra essentiam equinitas. (*Met.*, tr.V, c.1, ed. cit., fol.86v, col.1. Cf. *Log.*, ed. cit., fol. 11r, col.2)

The text affirms that existence is accidental to the essence, so far as the essence itself is concerned using the example of the essence of horse or equinity.:

Dicemus ergo quod naturae hominis ex hoc quod est homo, accidit quod habeat esse... (*Met.*, tr.V e.i ed. cit., fol. 87v, col.1A)

The Arabic term used, which was translated *accidit*, has rather the notion of “following upon” “postea cum esse sequitur eam”, *ibid.*, so that in some way, being follows upon essence, although mainly, of course it comes causally from or out of the *Necesse Esse*. Cf. the *Compendium Metaphysicae*, a work not known to the Middle Ages:

...sed quidditas est quod quid est, ut puta, homo vel equus, aut intellectus aut anima; postea hoc aliquid connotatur per hoc (scilicet, *quod*), est unum et existent... Unitas est qualitas quaedam inherens in essentia rei.

(*Compendium Metaphysicae*, I, tr.3, c.2; Caramè ed; (Rome, 1926), p.28)

On the Arabic word for *accidit*, see Goichon, *The Distinction of Essence and Existence in Avicenna*, (Paris, Desclée, 1937), pp. 90-1 and pp.8ff. On just the status of essence alone, see Gerard Smith, “Avicenna and the Possibles”, *New Scholasticism*, XVII (1943), pp.37-9. Even though Avicenna, in other respects, says that the existence of things is necessary in relation to their first Cause—their procession from God is necessary; nevertheless, in themselves, regarding their being and essence, existence is just like an accident in Aristotle, following upon οὐσία, from the point of view of the substance of things.

## AVERRÖES OR IBN RUSHD (1126-98)

This is how Avicenna's doctrine appeared to Averröes, who was the son of a judge in Córdoba, Spain also called the Commentator. He maintained that if being was an accident to things as, “Avicenna repeatedly says”, then it must be either a first intention—in which case it would be one of the categories and not a transcendental, and would not pass over (transcend) into the category of substance or else it is a second intention (a mental species)—in which case it is not real, and cannot be said to be.

Si significaret (ens) etiam accidens in re, ut pluries repetit Avicenna:sequeretur de necessitate unum duorum, scilicet vel quod illud accidens est de secundis intelligibilis seu intentionibus vel de primis. Si de primis, tunc de necessitate erit unum ex novem predicamentis; neque transscenderetur nomen entis ad substantiam, neque ad alia predicamenta accidentis, nisi ex eo quod accidit eis illud predicamentum; vel dabitur hic unum genus accidentium commune ipsis decem predicamentis, et hoc totum est falsum vituperabile ... Si fuerit autem ex secundis intelligibilis, quorum esse est in intellectu, tantum, hoc non est impossibile. Nam una ex rebus, de quibus diximus, nomen entis transsumi, est haec, et est synonymum ad verum. (*Epitome in Met.*, tr.1, Venice 1574 ed., fol.358r,

Hence, for Averröes, a real accident must be an Aristotelian accident; no other sort is conceivable.

### WILLIAM OF AUVERGNE (c.1180-1249)

William, Bishop of Paris (1225-1228) faced the same problem. Being does not belong to the thing of itself. It was not identified with the substance of the thing, and yet it was not an accident, since accidents follow upon the substance of a thing. Rather it is something other than and better than either; beyond the all categories. He reacts to Aristotle's essentiality of being and Avicenna's accidentality of being. William had approached the issue from the side of the good and values:

Gratia intellectione omnium quae sunt, et aliud et melius omnibus his quae sunt, ostenditur ipsum esse. Non potest dicitur accidere esse, secundum se; sed necessario omni substantia et addidente melius est, pro cuius omissione omnequodque damnum sui essentiae negligit. (*De Trin.*, c. 7, (Paris 1674) ed., suppl. to Vol. II, p. 9, col. A)

These two currents enter immediately into the background of St. Thomas. William acknowledges them and says neither are right; being is different from both substance and accident and it does not fit into the Aristotelian categories and yet is superior to any, even the first, that of οὐσία. This is part of the historical background against which St. Thomas develops his thoughts. The starting-point is clear: the sensible, tangible things of the material universe. Now what is meant when it is said that these things, immediate to us, are? In the wake of Gabriel Marcel, it is common to speak of the *Mystery of Being*; but however marvelous the later developments of metaphysics are, there is something very evident in the simple fact that this or that thing is:

Quia vere ex compositis simplicium cognitionem accipere debemus, et ex posterioribus in priora devenire, ut a facilioribus incipientes convenientior fiat disciplina: ideo ex significatione entis ad significationem essentiae procedendum est. (*De Ente et Essentia*, c.1; R.-G. ed., p.2, ll.4-8)

Being is the most open, manifest, and primary of all 'evidences', and only in this immediacy does metaphysics as a speculative science have its starting-point. What is meant when being is predicated of anything in the sensible world? Is it so rich that all else is destroyed, or is there something in a thing beyond its nature; although only an extrinsic reference to a primary instance of being; or participation in an Idea of being together with an Idea of non-being or otherness; or is it neither a substance nor an accident; or is it accidental to things? Can being be maintained in the notion of St. Thomas without the ostensible contradiction to which Siger, for example, reduced it in Thomas's own lifetime?

## ST. THOMAS' NOTION OF BEING

It is a study of the things of the sensible world themselves that will give us the answer. The texts of St. Thomas, like those of any other philosopher, can only serve as a guide. Compare the original quotations above. The every nature is essentially *ens* (a being), but God alone is essentially *ens* (being). This cannot be maintained without contradiction unless the participle *ens* is used in two different but related, yet somehow opposite senses. There seems to be an equivocation or ambiguity in the word itself. Compare St. Thomas's criticism of Avicenna:

...similiter deceptus est ex equivocatione entis. (*In X Met.*, 1.3, Spiazzi, Cathala ed., #1982)

Equivocation in this sense is not a pejorative term, but quite respectable. It comes from the Latin "equivocus" and stands for the Greek ὁμώνυμα used in Aristotle to denote "things said in many ways" whether they were things, words, or concepts. The name may be identical, but, the definition as denoted by the name is different as well as the referent, while the things themselves are called equivocal and so are the terms, and the concepts. The same word (νοχ) (ὄνομα) is applied to things which have different definitions, but one and the same name. Compare the example in Aristotle of a man and a painting both called ζῷον.

For example, a man and a painting are both called a ζῷον. With these the name is common, while the definition as denoted by the name is in each case different each. (*Arist. Cat.*, c.1, 1a2-4).

These are not entirely unrelated definitions; the latter developed metonymically.

Boethius, *I Comm. in Cat.*, PL 64, 166BC, classifies five different types of equivocation:

### 1. *Equivocal by chance*

There is nothing in the thing itself that causes the same name to be used, eg. "Alexander" signifying the son of Priam and Alexander the Great.

### 2. *Equivocal by design*

a. *by similitude*, e.g., calling the man [*homo verus*] and his picture [*homo pictus*] ζῷον.

b. *by proportion*, as a principle is in a numerical unity, so a point in a line.

c. *by common origin*, e.g. "medical", attribution to things related to one term.

d. *by reference* to one, e.g., "health" with reference to a vegetable.

It was through Boethius that the early scholastics became acquainted with Aristotle, and thus the technical philosophical terminology of scholasticism came to be fixed, with a broader sense for *equivocal* than *equivocal by chance*, which is all it has in neo-Scholasticism. The use Thomas makes of the term would often be paralleled today by the term *analogical*. In his day, it meant

simply not univocal.

Etymologically, the words “*equi-vocal*” and “*uni-vocal*” could have easily been reversed in Aristotle, and are often used in the opposite application, but the numerical prefix must be regarded as referring to the things or to the definitions of the things. The application of the words had not been so fixed in Aristotle's time as in the Scholastics period.

St. Thomas' criticism of Avicenna then does not refer to an equivocation of “Being” by chance, but to the fact that there are two senses to the word *ens* and that Avicenna has failed to distinguish them. The passage continues:

... Nam ens quod significat compositionem propositionis est praedicatum accidentale, quia compositio fit per intellectum secundum determinatum tempus. Esse autem in hoc tempore vel illo est accidentale praedicatum... (*ibid.*)

In the *Peri hermeneias*, Aristotle defines and delimits the function of the verb as something that signifies according to time:

A verb is that which, in addition to its proper meaning, carries with it the notion of time. No part of it has any independent meaning, and *it is a sign of something said of something else*. I will explain what I mean by saying that it carries with it the notion of time. ‘Health’ is a noun, but ‘is healthy’ is a verb; for besides its proper meaning, it indicates the present existence of the state in question. (*De Int.*, c.3, 16b6-9)

St. Thomas continues:

Sed ens quod dividitur per decem praedicamenta significat ipsas naturas decem generum secundum quod sunt actu vel potentia. (*ibid.*)

There is thus a twofold division of being, the same as that given in the *De Ente et Essentia*:

Sciendum est igitur quod sicut dicit Philosophus in quinto *Metaphysice* ens per se dicitur dupliciter. Uno modo, quod dividitur per decem genera. Alio modo, quod significat propositionum veritatem. (*De Ent.*, c.1; Roland-Gosselin ed., p. 2, ll.8-12)

When commenting on Aristotle, Thomas claims that this is Aristotle's division. But, actually . . .

But since Being as expressed without qualification is meant in many ways, of which one was seen to be Being per accidens, and another Being as the true and not-Being as the false, while besides these there are the schemata of predication (for instance, the ‘what’,

quality, quantity, the 'where', the 'when', and whatever else, there is that which is potentially or actually. (*Met.* E, 2, 1026b33-b2)

Compare *Met.* Δ, 7, 1017a7-b9. Here Aristotle gives the full classification of being as:

1. *Being per accidens*, e.g., “the carpenter is a musician”, i.e., music does not belong essentially to carpentry.
2. *Being “as true”*, being in relation to the intellect or mind.
3. *Being* as found in the categories.
4. *Being* as act and potency.

What St. Thomas has done is to group Aristotle’s first two divisions together into one, containing “being as true”, and “being per accidens”. He sets Aristotle’s third division off from this first class; it contains being as a “super-genus”, e.g., “Socrates is man, animal, living body, substrate, and finally being”. And then he reduces Aristotle’s fourth division to this second class of his own. For whether a man exists or not, we put him under the categories, just as in the Porphyrean tree given here, ending in οὐσία. Four classes or meanings of “being” in Aristotle have become two in St. Thomas, by the simple expedient of combining the first two and the second two.

### ST. THOMAS' FIRST MEANING OF BEING

Let us investigate his doctrine of predication as found in the composition of propositions and in accidental predication. Aristotle usually uses the term 'consignify' of verbs to say that they consignify time; consult the quotation from the *De Int.* on the previous page. Further on, he uses it in a broader, looser sense, and St. Thomas takes full advantage of the fact:

Ideo autem dicit quod hoc verbum *est* consignificat compositionem, quia non eam principaliter significat, sed ex consequenti. Significat enim primo illud quod cadit in intellectum per modum actualitatis absolutae; nam *est* simpliciter dictum significat in actu esse et ideo significat per modum verbi.

Quia vero actualitas quam principaliter significat hoc verbum *est*, est communiter actualitas omnis formae, vel actus substantialis vel accidentalis, inde est quod, cum voluimus significare quamcumque formam vel actum actualiter inesse alicui subjecto, significamus illud per hec verbum *est*, simpliciter cuidem secundum praesens tempus, vel secundum quid secundum alia tempora. (*In Periherm.* vel *De Int.*, 1, 1.5, Leon, ed. #22)

What then is the relation between these two *sense* of Aristotle— *being per accidens*, and *being as the truth* of propositions—when combined into one by St. Thomas: What *est* signifies is that a form or act is in some subject, and its composition (in the intellect) is only consignified. When



*est* is a copula, in every case, what we are ordinarily signifying is not some mental composition, but rather the actuality of a certain form outside the mind. “*Est*” is not the logical principle of copulation except “*ex consequentia*”; it is chiefly a sign of the reality of some thing among real things. The basic actuality of everything is its being, its “to be”— without that it could not be any of those things expressed by its substantial or accidental predicates; hence being must be predicated of it *in a prior way*. If a thing does not exist, neither is it white or black. That a thing exists, is expressed by “is” without a predicate. The addition of a predicate makes “is” signify the basic actuality of every form, quality, or other actuality. By itself, the verb “is” signifies actuality absolutely— the act of all substantial or accidental acts.

The composition of a proposition in the mind is signified only “*ex consequenti*”. The copulative sense is not what the verb “is” signifies principally, but rather the being of something outside the mind; an actuality *ad extra*. One, then, the intentional composition, is the consequence of the other, and follows upon it.

So when the participial form, *ens*, is used to signify composition in the mind, it is an accidental predicate, for the reason that it is in this or that particular time. Ordinarily we do so simply for the present, but modification of the verb, secondarily; we can refer to past or future. This analysis presupposes the Platonic and Aristotelian doctrine that essences are eternal as is the world and hence above the temporal conditions, and that the essential predicates are necessary to a thing. While on the other hand, being of things forming the general run of propositions of human discourse is in time, and not necessary and eternal. The intellect makes composition in determined circumstances of time. A thing exists now and again, it is not eternally necessary, and therefore the basic actuality signified by “is”, with or without predicates, is not of its essence. In this meaning, then, being is accidental to sensible things.

Note that the finite, infinitive, and participial forms of the verb are all used with the same meaning, and that therefore we are not basing a philosophical distinction on a difference of grammatical forms.

Being is the basic or absolute actuality of any substantial or accidental form, and it signifies something accidental to its subject.

### ST. THOMAS' SECOND MEANING OF “BEING”

“*Ens quod dividitur in decem genera*”, the categories or predicaments, signify the natures of the ten genera as they are, actually or potentially. Thus this meaning unites the last two of the four Aristotelian senses. Being here can signify or refer to any nature contained in any one of the categories, and in this case it is an essential predicate, for being thus qualified is of the essence of the thing. The subject term ‘Socrates’ as we ascend the Porphyrean tree expresses his essence, and all the predicates therein as being. This procedure implicit in the Aristotelian distinction between “*an est*” and “*quid est*” is well-known among the scholastics. Aristotle developed it in the *Post\_Anal.* II, cc. 1-10, 89b23-94a19. Compare with St. Thomas:

Ens autem non ponitur in definitione creaturae quia nec est genus, nec est differentia. Unde participatur sicut aliquid non existens de essentia rei; et ideo alia ouaestio est *an est et quid est*. Unde cum omne quod est praeter essentiam rei dicatur accidens, esse quod

pertinet ad quaestionem *an est* est accidens; et ideo... *Socrates est* est de accidentale praedicato; secundum quod importat entitatem rei, vel veritatem propositionis. Sed verum est quod hoc nomen ens secundum quod importat rem cui competit esse sic significat essentiam rei, et dividitur per decem genera (*II Quodl.*, a.3, c., Mand.ed., p.43.)

Here he begins by recalling Aristotle's assertion that *ens* is neither a genus nor a difference and hence not in the definition of a thing. Note the many ways that Aristotle uses to refer to being:

... it is by demonstration that the being of everything must be proved—unless indeed it were to be its essence; and since being [τὸ ὄν] is not a genus, it is not the *essence* of anything. Hence the being of anything as fact is a matter for demonstration. (*Post. An.* II, c.7, 92b13)

[Εἶτα καὶ δι' ἀποδείξεύς φάμεν ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι δείκνυσθαι ἅπαν ὅτι ἔστιν, εἰ μὴ οὐσία εἴη. τὸ δ' εἶναι οὐκ οὐκ οὐσία οὐδενί· οὐ γὰρ γένος τὸ ὄν. ἀπόδειξις ἄρ' ἔσται ὅτι ἔστιν. ὅπερ καὶ νῦν ποιοῦσιν αἱ ἐπιστῆμαι. (*Post. An.* II 7, 92b13ff.)]

Nor is *ens* a supreme genus at the apex of the Porphyrean tree. Here again St. Thomas follows Aristotle:

...if the universals are always more of the nature of principles, evidently the uppermost of the genera are the principles; for these are predicated of all things. There will be, then, as many principles of things as there are primary genera, so that both being and unity will be principles and substances; for these are most of all predicated of all existing things. It is not possible that either unity or being should be a single genus of things; for the differentiae of any genus must each of them both have being and be one, but it is not possible for the genus taken apart from its species (any more than for the species of the genus) to be predicated of its proper differentiae; so that if unity or being is a genus, no differentiae will either have being or be one. (*Met.*, B 3, 998b17-27)

Being is predicated most universally of all things, and hence even of differences. But differences lie outside the genus: rationality is not animality—and hence being is not a genus. Nothing lies outside of being, not even differences; hence being can be predicated of differences, but cannot be a genus, because a genus could not be predicated of differences. Rationality is, or is a way of being; and so is animality.

St. Thomas concludes from these considerations that being does not pertain to the essence of

a thing, but he has used the Aristotelian argument to say the opposite of what Aristotle had concluded, namely, that the being and the essence or nature of a thing coincide. This is in keeping with the Medieval's usage of sources and is clearly a departure from Aristotelianism. What follows is even a clearer twist of the wax nose of Aristotle—for Thomas goes on to say that this is the reason for the Peripatetic distinction between *an est*— whether it exists, or is it?— and *quid est*— the inquiry about the essence of a thing. He says we can always know the latter, without necessarily knowing anything about the former:

Omnis autem essentia vel quidditas intelligi potest sine hoc, quod aliquid intelligatur de suo esse facto; possum enim intelligere quid est homo vel phoenix, et tamen ignorare an esse habeant in rerum natura... (*De Ent*, c. 4, R-G. ed. p.34, ll.12-14)

We can know *what a phoenix is*, or *what a mountain of gold is*, without knowing *whether or not such a thing is* or ever was. Hence the two questions are different. How did Aristotle understand this distinction? He seems to come to exactly the opposite conclusion from Thomas: we cannot know *quid est* (τί ἐστίν) unless we either first or thereby know *an est* (εἰ ἔστιν).

When we are aware of a fact we seek its reason, and though sometimes the fact and the reason dawn on us simultaneously, yet we cannot apprehend the reason a moment sooner than the fact; and clearly in just the same way we cannot apprehend a thing's definable form without apprehending that it exists, since while we are ignorant whether it exists we cannot know its essential nature. Moreover we are aware whether it exists or not some-times through apprehending an element in its character, and sometimes accidentally, as, for example, when we are aware of thunder as a noise in the clouds, of eclipse as a privation of light, or of man as some species of animal, or of the soul as a self-moving thing. As often as we have acci-dental knowledge *that the thing exists*, we must be in a *wholly negative state as regards awareness of its essential nature*; for we do not have genuine knowledge even of its existence, and to search for a thing's essential nature when we are unaware that it exists is to search for nothing. On the other hand, whenever we apprehend an element in the thing's character there is less difficulty. Thus it follows that the degree of our knowledge of a thing's essential nature is determined by the sense in which we are aware that it exists. Let us then take the following as our first instance of being aware of an element in the essential nature. Let **A** be eclipse, **C** the moon, **P** the earth's acting as a screen. Now to ask whether or not the moon is eclipsed is to ask whether or not **B** has occurred. But, that is precisely the same as asking whether **A** has a defining condition; and if this condition actually exists, we assert that **A** also actually exists. Or again we may ask which side

of a contradiction the defining condition necessitates: does it make the angles of a triangle equal or not equal to two right angles? When we have found the answer, if the premises are immediate, we know the fact and the reason together; if they are not immediate, we know the fact without the reason, as in the following example: let **C** be the moon, **A** the eclipse, **B** the fact that the moon fails to produce shadows though she is full and though no visible body intervenes between us and her. Then if **B**, failure to produce shadows in spite of the absence of an intervening body, is attributable to **C**, and **A**, eclipse, is attributable to **B**, it is clear that the moon is eclipsed, but the reason why is not yet clear, and we know that the eclipse exists, but we do not know what its essential nature is. (*Post An.* II, 8, 93a16-b3)

In this example, with respect to a lunar eclipse, an observer on the moon would know immediately both what it is and that it is, but an observer on the earth would know that it is, but not what it is without much involved reasoning. This passage makes it quite clear that *Aristotle is not referring to real existence* when he asks *an est*: rather it is something known simultaneously with or previously to *quid est* and must refer to the question “Is it a being (οὐσίᾳ)?” i.e., something free from contradiction, a possible. This is a partial, inchoative cognition of a thing, after which you can ask what it is. *An est for Aristotle still remains in the nature of a thing, where the thing and its being are identical*, as in the famous passage (*Met.* Γ, 2, 1003b26-7). This is not St. Thomas’ interpretation of *an est*: “does it exist?” as accidental being. Rather being is something essential to the thing’s nature: non-self-contradiction, or possibility to be.

In the text of St. Thomas, *est*, *ens*, *esse*, and *entitas* are all used to mean being. The grammatical form indicates no difference. After speaking of St. Thomas’ first meaning of being, it refers to the first of the fourfold Aristotelian divisions of being. Then it goes on to Thomas’ second meaning: the subject of being, or that which is (*ens*). This is the thing to which such being (the act of existing, in the first sense) belongs, the subject of the act of being, the essence of the thing, the nature, and in this sense, it may be divided into the ten categories, the Aristotelian highest genera.

## THE TWO MEANINGS OF “BEING” COMBINED

It can be said that a thing *has* “being” (first sense) and also *is* a “being” (second sense). *Ens* (that which is, the subject) can denote both *what a thing is* and *what it has*. Cf. Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, p.15: “The fundamental ambiguity of the word ‘being’...” It can be either a *subject* or an *act*, but there is no way of reducing one sense to the other; the two senses are fundamentally different. This is the “equivocatio” which Thomas says deceived Avicenna (*quia est* is equivalent to *an est*). *Being is either the act, which actuates the subject or the subject in which the act is received.*

These two senses are clearly opposed: the first is something beyond essence and hence “accidental”, while the second is the very essence of a thing, and not at all accidental. Since the two senses are opposed, St. Thomas can use the term *ens* restricted to the first sense, and thus in a

way temporarily excluding the second meaning:

...in quolibet genere oportet significare quidditatem aliquam,... de cuius intellectu, non est esse. Ens autem non dicit quidditatem sed solum actum essendi. (*In I Sent.*, D.8, q.4, a.2, ad 2<sup>um</sup>, Mand. ed., I, p.223)

There is an immediate opposition or contrast between quiddity and the being of a thing. *Esse* and *ens* are used interconvertibly in the first or accidental sense, the act of being. For the moment, *ens* and *esse* are restricted just to this sense. This is a peculiar usage for modern philosophers, who, since C. S. Peirce, are interested in making terms clear, precise, and definite, e.g., by logical analysis, each with only one sense, and then applying them. But the whole movement of Aristotelian metaphysics depends on the multiple meaning of terms “things said in many ways” (πολλαχῶς λεγόμενα), which are used now one way, now another, occasionally restricted, occasionally widened: e.g., the term οὐσία (substance = form or substrate = the composite). This exasperates modern commentators on Aristotle. St. Thomas is following Aristotle’s practice here, now using *ens* in the wider sense, now in the restricted sense. The above quotation uses the first sense: the being that a thing has, is outside the thing. This is a perfectly legitimate procedure against an Aristotelian background, though considered “confusion” by modern logical standards.

Thus, too, St. Thomas sharply contrasts the meaning of *ens* with the infinitive *esse* that means the act of being, and thus restricts *ens* only to the second sense:

Aliud autem significamus per hoc quod dicimus esse, et aliud per hoc quod dicimus quod est; sicut et aliud significamus per hoc quod dicimus currere, et aliud per hoc quod dicimus currens. Nam currere et esse significantur in abstracto, sicut et albedo. Sed quod est, id est ens et currens, significatur sicut in concreto, velut album. (*In De Hebdomadibus*, c.2. *Opuscula*, Mand. ed., I, p.171)

This is the work of Boethius, known in the Middle Ages as *De Hebdomadibus*, is found in Migne’s *Patrologia Latina*, under the title *Quomodo Substantiae . . .* Compare the parallel passage:

Sed dicendum est quod verba infinitivi modi, quando in subjecto ponuntur, haberit vim nominis: unde et graeco et in vulgari latina locutione suscipiunt additionem articulorum sicut et nomina. Cuius ratio est quia proprium nominis est, ut significet rem aliquam per se existentem; proprium autem verbi est ut significat actionem vel passionem. Potest autem actio significare tripliciter, uno modo, per se in abstracto, velut quaedam res, et significatur per nomen; ut cum dicitur actio, passio, ambulatio, cursus, et similia; alio modo, per modum actionis, ut scilicet est egrediens a substantia et inhaerens ei ut subjecto, et sic significatur per verba aliorum modorum, quae attribuuntur praedicatis. Sed quia etiam ipse processus vel inhaerentia actionis potest apprehendi ab intellectu et significari ut res quaedam, inde est quod ipsa verba infinitivi modi, quae

significant ipsam inhaerentiam actionis ad subjecta, possunt accipi ut verba, ratione concretionis, et ut nomina prout significant quasi res quasdam. (*In De Int.*, Bk. I. 5 Leon. ed. # 5)

In these texts, in English, the present participle used substantively signifies *the act*, e.g., “running”, in Latin it means when used substantively, *the one who does the act* “the runner”, while the infinitive “esse” used as substantive refers to the act. E.g., “currens”= “cursor” the one “running”, the “runner”. And “currere” = “cursus” the “act of running”.

*Quod est* is *ens* and *currens*, the subject of the act in question, signified in the concrete, in the second sense of *ens*—one who is (‘or one who runs’). The other sense of the infinitive is simply the act of running or the act of being, prescinding from anyone having the act, signified in the abstract.

Thus we may contrast *ens* and *esse*, the former having the two senses described above, the latter with the first sense of *ens* only. There is frequently a restriction of the term *ens* also to that which is, without denying that *ens* might also have the first sense. This exclusion is done for St. Thomas’ own purposes. Compare the whole first chapter of the *De Ente et Essentia*.

The more usual way and the general rule in St. Thomas’ works is that *ens* refers to the second meaning of being only; while *esse* refers to the fact, for all practical purposes. *Ens* is then “a being” in English. But in a surprisingly large number of texts, he gives it two senses, or uses it of God, where it must only have the first sense. For example:

Solus Deus est essentialiter ens; omnia autem alia participant ipsum esse. (*SCG. II*, 53.)

Thus Thomas contrasts the subject and the act, but he can express both by the participial form [*ens*]. This usage is more frequent than is usually thought to be, but still it is not the usual one.

The English idiom and grammatical construction provides, in most cases, a way of distinguishing the two senses that was not available in Latin. The indefinite article “*a*” restricts it to the second sense. So also the definite article “Man is *the* being of which I have been speaking”. Also certain adjectives do so: “*any* being is transcendently good (= any thing which is); also: “*every* being”. In the first sense, it is used without any article, and this is the act. E.g., “Being is the act of essence”; “God is essentially being”; or with the definite article and followed by a possessive: “*The being of a thing* is that which makes it to be and actuates the essence”. The different uses are not always clearly marked. So the definite article can be used in both senses, in which case, as in Latin, we can only rely on the context. Nevertheless, this is rare, and the meaning is usually clear in English.

## THE MEANING OF THE INFINITIVE “ESSE”

*Ens* and *esse* have been seen to be interconvertible in the first sense, the act of being. Are they so also in the second sense; can *esse* be the subject of being? Marx, *The Meaning of Aristotle’s Ontology* (The Hague, 1954) p.43, explains the meaning of Aristotle’s phrase, τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι “the what-was-being”, “the *what IS being*,” for the imperfect of the verb can signify past, present, or

future—indefinite time. The Greek uses the infinitive, “to be”, [εἶναι] as a verbal noun. In English, the corresponding verbal noun is the present participial form “being” as in “to run” and “running”.

What this means for Aristotle is seen by collecting instances of his usage. It is the “form” of things—not the (τί ἐστίν) [*quid est*], but the ‘being of man’, “of blood”, sometimes in the infinitive form: εἶναι τοῦ ἀνωρόπου, εἶναι τοῦ αἵματος etc., meaning the “form of man”, the “form of blood”, and so forth. It is then extended to refer to any formal aspect of a thing, e.g., the dividing and uniting of past and future time in a point of time present—these aspects are not the same, but are both formal, and hence their being is different. Compare this passage with the Oxford translation:

Οὕτω καὶ τὸ νῦν τὸ μὲν τοῦ χρόνου διαίρεσις κατὰ δύναμιν, τὸ δὲ πέρας ἀμφοῖν καὶ ἐνότης· ἔστι δὲ ταῦτὸ τὸ ἢ διαίρεσις καὶ ἢ ἔνωσις, τὸ δ' εἶναι οὐ ταῦτὸ.

Ross' translation is:

So the ‘now’ also is in one way a potential dividing of time, in another the termination of both parts, and their unity. And the dividing and the uniting are the same thing and in the same reference, but in *essence* they are not the same. (*Phys. IV, 13, 222a17-20*)

Thus εἶναι pertains entirely to the order of *essence* and does not denote anything over and above essence according to its formal aspect.

This signification passed to the Latins through Boethius, who used *esse* in this sense of *form*. Boethius wrote a letter called by the Middle Ages *De Hebdomadibus*, to a certain deacon in which he uses *esse* throughout to denote forms, e.g.:

Diversum est, tantum *esse* aliquid, et esse aliquid in eo quod est; illic enim accidens, hic substantia significatur. (*PL 64, p.1311 C*)

*Esse* in both cases means something that is to be found in the ten categories. Also, he distinguishes these forms from the *quod est*, which is the composite of matter and the form or *esse* which he calls the *forma essendi*.

Diversum est *esse* et id quod est. Ipsum enim *esse* nondum est. At vero quod est, accepta essendi forma, est atque consistit.” (*ibid. B*)

The thing, that is, the composite, having received the form of being, is and is constituted. Compare:

Quid est autem esse rei? . . . Nihil aliud est nisi definitio. (*In Isag. Porph.*, ed.2a, IV,c.14, *CSEL*, Brandt ed., vol. 48, p.273 l.13)

The definition signifies what the thing is—*ens* denoting the subject of being, placed in the ten categories, the nature or essence. This is how he understands and uses *esse*.

In the Latin translation of Avicenna, the infinitive is frequently used to signify what the thing is, the nature:

...esse materiae est esse receptabile tantum... (*Met.*, tr.IX, c.4, Ven. ed., Fol. 104v, B)

And yet it was also used to signify the being which is accidental to a thing, not belonging to its nature: . *Esse* was used by the Medievals to translate two Arabic words of different roots; *essentia* to translate ten Arabic words from different roots. See Goichon, *The Avicennian Distinction between Essence and Being*, pp.15-17, 29ff.

William of Auvergne writes:

Oportet autem te scire, quia *esse* duas habet intentiones, et unas earum est residuum a circumventionem et varietate accidentium, et hoc est quod proprie nominatur essentia sive substantia, et accipitur in intentione hac cum hujusmodi determinatione intentio quae est esse omnia, vel alia; et significat, illum solum quod definitive oratione significatur sive nomine speciei. Hoc est igitur quod dicitur substantia rei, et ejus esse, et ejus quidditas, et hoc est esse quod diffinitio significat, et explicat, et hoc igitur dicitur rei essentia. Secunda autem intentio hujus quod est esse, est illud quod dicitur per hoc verbum est de unoquoque et est praeter uniuscujusque rationem. In nullius autem ratione accipitur esse, quidquid imaginati fuerimus, sive hominem, sive asinum, sive aliud, ut in ratione ejus, esse intelligamus; eo solo excepto de quo essentialiter dicitur; ejus namque essentia nisi per ipsum esse intelligi non potest, cum ipsa et ejus esse omnimodo sint una res. (*De Trinitate*, c.2, Paris 1674 ed., p.2b, in Suppl.)

The first notion is the same as that of Boethius; the second is what is meant when “is” is predicated of anything—what is signified here is outside, beyond the essence, nature, or concept of anything whatsoever except in the case of God, where *esse* and the thing itself are one.

This second form of expression sounds very much like St. Thomas on the act of being. But William is teaching that *esse* has two senses, a double definition that corresponds exactly to the double definition of *ens* used by St. Thomas. In the Paris background, which relied heavily on William of Auvergne, it is not surprising to find St. Thomas reporting the *meaning* of the word in his time:

Sciendum est quod esse dicitur tripliciter: uno modo, dicitur esse ipsa quidditas vel natura rei, sicut dicitur quod definitio est oratio significans quid est esse; definitio enim quidditatem rei significat. 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. (*In I Sent.*, D. 33, q.1, a.1, ad 1<sup>um</sup>)



[\*This is a quotation from the *De Anima*, where Aristotle uses *esse* [εἶναι] to signify the formal aspect of a thing, as above. Just as *actus secundus* [*operatio-ἐντελέχεια*] is a further addition, e.g., vital operation, to the essence of a living thing, and is different from that *essence*, so is *esse* in the second *sense* here. Ed.]

Tertio modo dicitur *esse* quod significat veritatem compositionis in propositionibus, secundum quod *est* dicitur copula. Secundum hoc est in intellectu componente et dividente quantum ad sui complementum sed fundatur in *esse* rei, quod est actus essentiae. (*ibid.* cont.)

Again the second and third senses here are correlated: the truth of propositions and the act of being, as in the two corresponding senses of *ens*. Thus we also have two senses of *esse* joined in one. The truth of propositions is merely the act of being as it is expressed in the intellect.

There is no historical or grammatical reason why St. Thomas should not have used *esse* in the same double sense as *ens*. That is precisely the way the Latin infinitive developed later: “a human being”, i.e., in the sense of essence, the subject of the act of being, is given by the infinitive in some Romance languages: “un essere umano”, Ital., and “un être humain”, Fr.

Two questions arise: why does St. Thomas distinguish so carefully between *esse* as the act of being and as the truth of judgments? why does he use *esse* only in the sense of the act of being later on, when in the Latin tradition he should have been able to ‘use it in the two senses of act and subject, just like *ens* or “being” in English?

The distinction between *esse* as known and *esse* as the act of essence has specific application to our knowledge of God:

Dicendum est quod *esse* dupliciter dicitur. Uno modo significat actum essendi. Alio modo significat compositionem propositionis, quam anima adinvenit conjungens praedicatum subjecto. Primo igitur modo accipiendo *esse*, non possumus scire *esse* Dei, sicut nec ejus essentiam: sed solum secundo modo. Scimus enim quod haec propositio quam formamus de Deo, cum dicimus *Deus est*, vera est. Et hoc scimus ex ejus effectibus... (*ST I*, q.3, a.4, ad 2<sup>um</sup>)

Taking *esse* in the first *sense*, we cannot know God’s act of being, just as we cannot know His essence. But we can know the truth of the proposition “God exists” from his effects— as a reasoned, demonstrated conclusion. Compare:

Nec hoc debet movere, quod in Deo idem est essentia et *esse*, ut prima ratio ponebat. Nam hoc intelligitur de *esse* quo Deus in seipso subsistit, quod nobis quale sit ignotum est, sicut ejus essentia. Non autem intelligitur de *esse* quod significat compositionem intellectus. Sic enim *esse* Deum sub demonstratione cadit, dum ex rationibus demonstrativis mens nostra inducitur hujusmodi propositionem de Deo formare qua exprimat Deum *esse*. (*SCG I*, 12,

Leon.ed. XIII, p.29a7-11)

Ens et esse dicitur dupliciter ut patet *V Met.* Quandoque enim significat essentiam rei sive actum essendi; quandoque vero significat veritatem propositionis, etiam in his quae esse non habent; sicut dicimus quod caecitas est, quia verum est hominem esse caecum. Cum ergo dicit Damascenus, quod esse Dei est nobis manifestum, accipitur esse Dei secundo modo, et non primo. Primo modo est idem esse Dei quod est substantia; et sicut ejus substantia est ignota, ita et *esse*. Secundo autem modo scimus quoniam Deus est, quoniam hanc propositionem in intellectu nostro concipimus ex effectibus ipsius. (*De Pot.*, q.7, a.2, as 1<sup>um</sup> Mand. ed., II, p. 253a)

Père Sertillanges, O.P., in his translation of *Summa Theologiae, Dieu*, vol.II, pp.383-4, (Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1926), points out that in the sentence “God is”, the verb does not signify real being, but is merely the logical bond of a true proposition. It should be added, of course, that as St. Thomas says, this sense—the logical copula—is grounded in real existence.

The value of this distinction rests the distinction between mediate knowledge of existence—the truth of a demonstrated proposition or conclusion—and immediate knowledge of existence—knowing the act of existence in itself. The former is based on real existence through the immediate grasp of being in the effects, whence we conclude to the existence of the cause. This distinction must be used in demonstrations of God’s existence, for we do not grasp his existence immediately.

...licet causa prima quae Deus est, non intret essentiam rerum creatarum; tamen *esse*, quod rebus creatis inest, non potest intelligi nisi ut deductum ab esse divino; sicut nec proprius effectus potest intelligi nisi ut deductus a causa propria. (*Ibid.* q.3, a.5, a 1<sup>um</sup> Mand. ed., II, p. 56b)

Turning to the second question: why St. Thomas does not, as a matter of fact, use *esse* to denote the subject of being, but rather restricts it even to the act of being only and contrast it with nature or essence, even when commenting on Aristotle and Boethius? Compare for instance, the citation (*In I Sent.*, D. 33, q.1, a.1, ad 1<sup>um</sup>) where Thomas changes the sense of Aristotle’s parallel term from the subject to the act of being. It is difficult, if not impossible, to make out a case that he has made his own *passim* the use of *esse* for nature or essence.

There is no objective reason in philosophical circles at least. Since this usage was a refined philosophical usage, and not common parlance in ordinary or vulgar Latin, as we have shown above. Why then make this restriction? The only apparent answer is that it was an arbitrary one. Yet it yet would be difficult to find a philosopher who more strongly resisted the temptation to coin new terminology. Rather he uses traditional terms, with meanings already fixed, no matter how difficult it will be for them to bear the weight of his new, fresh, and original metaphysical thought. It was singularly unfortunate for later scholars, since then the originality of his thought becomes difficult to grasp.

Thus to express himself forcibly, without cumbersome explanations at every point, he had to

fix on one verbal form for his new notion— one term at least in the vocabulary of being by which he could signify only the act of being, lest at all times he should have to indicate which of the two senses of *ens-esse* he was using. This is characteristic of St. Thomas' self-effacement, putting his own new doctrines in the mouths of Aristotle and Boethius, reinterpreting then in a way entirely different from what their texts say but not pointing this out or giving us a reason why. Thomas never tells us why he does this or that, and does not seem to think the personal aspect of his thought will be of interest to us. [One notable exception, and a classic locus—*De Pot.*, q.7,a.2, ad 9<sup>um</sup>: “Hoc quod dico esse, etc.”]

*Esse* does not translate well in English idiom by “to be”. The best English translation is “being”, for example “Alia est res et esse ipsius”, “A thing is different from its being”; “Res habet esse”, “A thing has being”. In Latin, the infinitive signifies in the abstract, the participle in the concrete; in English, both the infinitive [to be] and the participle [being] signify in the abstract, and a noun of agent in the concrete. Unfortunately the participle in English is far less vivid than the Latin infinitive—a disadvantage in translating. Thus the infinitive is to be preferred in English, whenever usable, since the participle is more abstract than its own infinitive, when the participle is used, it must be with connotations as if Hamlet had said “Being or not being, that is the question...” The participle in English ends up almost as abstract as “beingness”, “whiteness”, etc.

But St. Thomas gives precisely that reason for using *esse*, because it can signify *in abstracto*, like “currere” and “cursus” (*In De Hebd.*). So the above argument against abstraction hardly be used against “being” in English. Thus the fundamental condition is satisfied; but “being” carries St. Thomas' intentions too far into the abstract, too far from the verbal character of the very exercising of an act, into the realm of the substantive possession of some quality— this can only be noted and emphasized. Rarely does a translation completely satisfy, and this is not one of those exceptional cases.

From this vantage point, we can criticize other translations, e.g., “existence”. In this case, there is no absolute objection; it signifies very abstractly and thus fulfills one condition. And indeed St. Thomas uses it to express the act of being, but very seldom:

Post considerationem divinae perfectionis, considerandum est de ejus infinitate, et de existentia ejus in rebus: attribuitur enim Deo quod sit ubique et in omnibus rebus, in quantum est, incircumscribibilis et infinitus. (*ST. I, q. 7, a.1, Proem.*)

...res per se non fallunt, sed per accidens. Dant enim occasionem falsitatis, eo quod similitudinem eorum gerunt, quorum non habent existentiam. (*ibid. q.17, a.1, ad 2<sup>um</sup>*)

But there is another objection: in the historical background of centuries of controversy on the real composition, “existence” has come to be considered as one kind of being, and essence as another; there are two kinds of being, and existence adds something to “esse essentiae”. Whereas in St. Thomas, the contrast is always between being and essence, and all the being is on one side of the duo. We do not have two beings, but one composed being.

“Natura essendi”, the “nature of being” is used synonymously with *esse*, but with an apology for the fact that the course of the argument demanded it; for St. Thomas' usual procedure is to

contrast the *esse* and nature of a thing.

Sed sicut hic homo participat humanam naturam, ita quodcumque ens creatum participat, *ut ita dixerim*, naturam essendi: quia solus Deus est suum esse. (*ST. I, q.45, a.5, ad 1<sup>um</sup>*; emphasis added)

Cum autem Deus sit ipsum esse subsistens, manifestum est quod natura essendi convenit Deo infinite absque omni limitatione et contractione; unde ejus virtus active extendit se infinite ad totum ens, et ad omne id quod potest habere rationem entis. (*III Quodl., a.1, c., Mand.ed., p.71*)

Oportet quod (res) ab aliquo, esse habeant, et oportet devenire ad aliquid cujus natura sit ipsum suum esse, alias in infinitum procederetur. Et hoc est quod dat esse omnibus, cum natura entitatis sit unius rationis in omnibus secundum analogiam. (*In II Sent., D 1, q. 1 c. Mand.ed. II, p.12*)

Thus we will find being called a nature or *ratio*, but St. Thomas is still careful to either apologize, or to distinguish it from the nature of a thing. [cf. second quotation] No fixed or quasi-mechanical grammatical norm is possible. We can only translate and hope that the sense of St. Thomas will be preserved. “Being” is the regular translation of Anton Pegis, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*, cf. vol.I, p.54. Fr. Armand Maurer uses “the act of being” for *esse*, and reserves “being” or “ens”, in his *On Being and Essence*. But, although doctrinally sound, this introduces an interpretation into one’s translation.

## THE MEANING OF THE NOTION OF “ESSENCE”

The texts quoted above give a clear notion of the meaning of *ens* and *esse*, but frequently another word is used from the same root— *essentia*— and this is consistently what is expressed by a definition, the subject of being and it is different from the act of being. The contrast is always between *essentia* and *esse*.

Is this required by the etymology of the term? It is evidently derived from the same root as *ens* and *esse*: but from a putative participle *essens*, together with the abstract ending -*tia*. Compare *pati, patiens, patientia*. Literally, its best translation would be “beingness”. The grammarian Quintilian first mentioned it.

Et haec interpretatio non minus dura est quam illa Plauti *essentia* atque *queentia*, sed ne propria quidem... (*Inst. Or. II, 14, 2*)

Apparently it was formed to translate οὐσία, for the derivation is parallel:

esse— (essens)— essentia,  
 εἶναι— ὄν, οὐσα, ὄν— οὐσία

*Ens, entitas* as a participial form of *esse* was not coined until Middle Latin.

It seems meant to suggest what the etymology implies: the “beingness” of things in the background of the Aristotelian metaphysics. There is nothing in its etymology to prevent its signifying the act of being *in abstracto*; in fact, it should be capable of the meaning St. Thomas gives to *esse*. Morphologically it is better fitted to express the act, like *currere*, than to express the subject of being. It was used thus by St. Augustine:

Res ergo mutabiles nec simplices proprie dicuntur substantiae.  
 Deus autem si subsistit, ut substantia proprie dici potest, inest in eo aliquid tanquam in subjecto et non est simplex . . . nefas autem est dicere ut subsistat et subsit Deus bonitati suae, atque illa bonitas non substantia sit vel potius essentia, neque ipse Deus sit bonitas sua, sed in illo sit tanquam in subjecto, unde manifestum est Deum abusive substantiam vocari, ut nomine usitatioe intelligatur essentia, quod vere ac proprie dicitur; ita ut fortasse solum Deum dici oportet essentiam. Est enim vere solus, quia incommutabilis est, idque nomen suum famulo suo Moysi enuntiavit, cum ait: ‘Ego sum qui sum’; et ‘dices ad eos: Qui est, misit me ad vos’.”  
 (*De Trin.* VII, 5, 10; *PL.* 42. 942)

*Essentia* is properly to be reserved to God alone, as being without a subject, or substance. The metaphysics of Aristotle was the influence that enabled *ousia* or *essentia* alone to be said of the subject of being.

In the *Categories*, *ousia* primarily refers to the individual who is the subject of predication. In the *Metaphysics*, *ousiai* primarily refer to the forms of things, since, for Aristotle, form alone is the ultimate primary instance of being. Boethius in translating the logical works regularly uses *substantia* to translate *ousia*, but in his own theological works, he uses *essentia* as a parallel to the usage of *ousia* by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*. In Latin, *essentia* was used early on as synonymous with *substantia* [etymologically substance transliterates the Latin *sub-sto*= “to stand under” and its present participle “substans” “that which stands under” or the subject of accidents and that transliterates the Greek ὑποκείμενον with the same meaning, “that which stands under” thus referring to the subject that supports accidents, Ed.], and it is this usage against which Augustine registers his mild protest. Cf. E. Gilson, “Notes on the Vocabulary of Being”, *Med. Stud.* VIII (1946), pp. 15-58.

## STUDY OF THE DE ENTE ET ESSENTIA

(References are to the Roland-Gosselin edition)

For these reasons, *essentia* soon came to mean the subject of being, throughout early scholasticism. History and not the word’s morphology, then, led to its general use in this sense in the early thirteenth century, and St. Thomas simply takes this meaning over. As far as the meaning of

the “subject of being” in the Thomistic metaphysics, we have a special work on essence and its relation to being, written by St. Thomas in his early thirties, 1254-56, sometime before his *Summa Theologia* and the *De Ente et Essentia*. Although early, it is yet surprisingly rich in metaphysical ideas so much so that few other texts are necessary for an understanding of his whole metaphysics. However, the question remains: is there any change from this doctrine in the later texts? Some scholars says so, e.g., A. Little, *The Platonic Heritage of Thomism* (Dublin, 1951), p.103, who says this work contains an immature doctrine, later changed. At the least it can be said that there is no notion in the later texts of his repudiating this work. We are safe, then, in assuming that it is practically complete in itself, and at first glance, it does seem to need little supplementing. The other “development” theory of the Thomistic notion of essence would bear the burden of its own defense, anyway. It would require an approach to St. Thomas’ works with a preconceived theory of the later texts, into which they fit, but not the *De Ente et Essentia* itself.

## PROOEMIUM

Being and essence are what the intellect first conceives, a position taken from Avicenna. Thomas then proposes to treat “quid nomine entis et essentiae significetur” [*De Ente*. p.1, ll.3-8] Apparently Thomas considers them as closely bound up with one another. The word “conceives” does not necessarily mean just simple apprehension, what we call conception today but all acts of the intellect. Thus being and essence are not separated by us, but appear as very closely bound.

## THE MEANING OF THE NOTION OF ESSENCE

**First Characteristic of Essence.** In Chapter I, he proceeds as though *ens* or being were the composite notion, and *essence* a simple notion (relatively), and a component of the composite notion which is *ens*. This is the first characteristic of essence: *ens will be a composite of it and something else*. A process of analysis of *ens* (as *quoad nos*; more known, or evident to us) is necessary in order to isolate the correct notion of essence. [*De Ente* p.2, ll.4-7]

**Second Characteristic of Essence.** Citing Aristotle, Thomas states that *ens per se* has a twofold meaning: *being divided according to the categories* and *being which signifies the truth of propositions*. Actually, Aristotle’s division is, of course, twofold; and in addition, Aristotle says only being as act and potency and as divided into the genera is *being per se* while being as truth and as the composition of propositions is *being per accidens*, relying on the former. See *Met.* E, 2, 1026a33-b2; 7; 1017a7-b9.

The reason why St. Thomas has called a meaning of “being” *per se* where Aristotle had called it *per accidens* is because he has given it the new sense of the *act of being, as well as the composition of propositions*; where as there never occurs in Aristotle a notion of being different from that of the subject of the act thus there is no act over and above being as form:

But since combination and separation are in thought and not in the

things, and that which is in this sense is a different sort of “being” from the things that are in the full sense (for the thought attaches or removes either the subject’s ‘what’ or its having a certain quality or quantity or something else), that which *is* accidentally and that which *is* in the sense of being true must be dismissed. For the cause of the former is something indeterminate and that of the latter is some affection of the thought, and both are related to the remaining genus of being, and do not indicate the existence of any separate class of being. Therefore let these be dismissed, and let us consider the causes and the principles of being itself, qua being. (*Met. E 4, 1027b30-1028a5*)

These divisions are made in Aristotle for a different purpose and in a different background. The being, which is divided into the genera is for St. Thomas the essence or subject; and the truth of propositions is the act of being. Hence the relation of the two is described in a somewhat different way, for we have a different purpose. The sense of the truth of propositions is described as anything phrased affirmatively, even though nothing positive about reality is implied using, e.g., negative and privative notions, which “nihil ponent in re”. And in this sense, even these notions, e.g., “caecitas”, can be called *entia*. Also, e.g., “affirmation is the opposite of negation,” where the copula sets up “negation” as being, although nothing positive is constituted *in rerum natura*. In another locus, it is explained more clearly, in reply to an objection what one can say of anything at all that it is *ens*, and so it is true to say that the deformity of sin is a being, since one can say that “there is deformity in sin.”

Ad tertium dicendum quod ut supra dictum est, ens dicitur dupliciter, uno modo, quod significant essentiam rei extra animam existentis, et hoc modo non potest dici ens deformitas peccati, quae privation quaedam est; privationis enim essentiam non habet in rerum natura. Alio modo secundum quod significant veritatem propositionis, et sic deformitas dicitur esse, non propter quid in re esse habeat, sed quia intellectus componet privationem cum subjecto, sicut formam quondam. (*In II Sent. D. 37, q. 1, a.2, ad 3<sup>um</sup> Mand. ed., II p.947*)

The intellect here takes a real subject and then composes it with a privation, as though that lack, e.g., of sight, were a form, and thus could be added to a subject. In one sense, then, *ens* is made by the intellect, in the composition of a real subject with a form, which need not be the case *in rerum natura*. The notion of essence is not given by this sense. In the other sense, as divided into the ten categories, *ens* is restricted to some positive reality—“aliquid in re ponit.” It must “posit” something. In this sense, privations and negations are not beings, not the subject of the act of being. Blindness as such can have no act of being inhering in it. Being does not inhere in it but in some other subject, e.g., the animal which is deprived of sight. Although for St. Thomas, being is not the act of a privation or negation, in Aristotle, they are beings by reference (πρὸς ἕν); they are ultimately referred to the being of something. Essence is therefore positive, and St. Thomas goes on to show that the word comes from *ens* as the subject of being

and therefore *must* be positive. Essence refers to being as divided into the ten categories, not the truth of propositions; substance, accidents are beings in the subject sense. What is the background of this doctrine? In Avicenna:

Unaqueque enim res habet certitudinem qua est id quod est . . . et hoc est quod fortasse appellamus esse proprium; nec intendimus per illud nisi intentionem esse affirmative, quia verbum *ens* signat etiam multas intentiones, ex quibus est certitude qua est unaquaque res; et est sicut esse proprium rei. (*Met.* Tr. I, c.6, Ven. 1508 ed. Fol. 72v, col. A)

St. Thomas does not use *esse* equivocally, like *ens*, as Avicenna does here, but he does use “positive” for Avicenna’s “affirmative”. In other places, he also uses “affirmative” of essence:

Non autem invenitur aliquid affirmative dictum absolute quod posit accipi in omni ente, nisi essentia ejus, secundum quam esse dicitur; et sic ponitur hoc nomen *res*, quod in hoc differt ab ente, secundum Avicennam in princ. *Met.*, quod *ens* sumitur ab actu essendi, sed nomen rei exprimit quidditatem sive essentiam entis. (*De Veritate* q.1, a.1, cl., Mand.ed., p.3b)

**The Third Characteristic of Essence.** Finding the sense of essence in current speech, he says that it is that which gives the definition of the thing. This is based on the fact that it divides being into the ten categories and hence, in general, is that which places anything in a category—which is precisely what definition expresses—and it constitutes a thing in its (proximate) genus and (ultimate) difference.

**The Fourth Characteristic of Essence.** A definition expresses or states what a thing is, the “quid est”, and therefore is called “quiddity” or “whatness”, which must then be also synonymous with essence. Thomas goes on to identify essence with the Aristotelian phrase τὸ τὸ ἦν εἶναι—the form, or what the thing is, being in the sense of form. Thomas offers a translation “hoc per quod aliquid habet esse quid” [that by which a thing is constituted as having a what]. In this manner essence is related to quiddity. Essence is also called a form in Aristotle, as this explanation leads Thomas to assert; and so we can say “form” for “essence”, if we regard it as something like the Avicennian “certitude”. There is no effort for the present to distinguish form and essence; we are only seeking what is conceptually intelligible in the thing. Later Thomas includes matter in the essence, and this is, of course, a principle of unintelligibility for him, but now the form-essence distinction is not fundamental.

**Fifth Characteristic of Essence.** Being in the sense of essence can be called “nature”, but Thomas specifies that he is using it in the sense of “omne illud quod intellectu quocumque modo capi potest” a rather inclusive statement. This is taken from Boethius; the context is as follows:

Natura igitur aut de solis corporibus dici potest, aut de solis substantiis, id est corporeis atque incorporeis, aut de omnibus rebus



quae quocumque modo esse dicuntur. Cum igitur tribus modis natura dici posit, tribus modis sine dubio definienda est. Nam si de omnibus rebus naturam dici placet, talis definition dabitur quae res omnes quae sunt possit includere. Erit ergo hujusmodi: *Natura est earum rerum quae, cum sint, quoquo modo intellectu capi possint.* (*De duabus naturis*, I; PL 64, 1341 B-C; *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, LCLS, pp. 77-79) [emphasis added]

Keep in mind that the notion of “intellectus” is restricted here to the ambit of Boethius’ thought. For him, being is the definition of the thing, and hence by intellection he means conceptualization. Thus not contradicting St. Thomas’ further sense of being as act and still intelligible [not conceptually i.e., not contained in the definition of the thing].

**Sixth Characteristic of Essence.** A thing is called “essence” insofar as “per eam et in ea” a thing has being [*res habet esse*]. This is a very succinct form, and for the moment there is no further explanation; but later Thomas refers to this phrase as meaning that essence is a principle or cause of being as well as a subject of being. Essence is a relatively simple component of ens, because it applies to both simple and composite things, both to God and angels, and to natural things which have matter. Hence the definitions of natural things differ from the definitions of mathematical, because the latter abstract from sensible (but not intelligible) matter. Thus they can be multiplied without changing the form: 2, 2, 2, 2 are all the same--they differ only materially. In this Thomas is following Aristotle:

But only the parts of the form are parts of the formula, and the formula is of the universal; for ‘being a circle’ is the same as the circle, and ‘being a soul’ is the same as the soul. But when we come to the concrete thing, e.g., *this* circle, i.e., one of the individual circles, whether perceptible or intelligible (I mean by intelligible circles the mathematical, and by perceptible circles those of bronze or wood)—of these there is no definition, but they are known by the aid of intuitive thinking or perception; and when they pass out of this complete realization [entelechia] it is not clear whether they exist or not; but they are always stated and recognized by means of the universal formula. But matter is unknowable [inconceivable] in itself. And some matter is perceptible and some intelligible, perceptible matter being for instance bronze and wood and all matter that is changeable, and intelligible matter being that which is present in perceptible things not qua perceptible, i.e., the objects of mathematics. (*Met. Z*, 10, 1036a1-12)

To return to the difficulty, which has been stated with respect to both definitions and to numbers, what is the cause of their unity? In the case of all things which have several parts and in which the totality is not, as it were, a mere heap, but the whole is something besides the parts, there is a cause; for even in bodies contact is the

cause of unity in some cases, and in others viscosity or some such quality. And a definition is a set of words, which is one not by being connected together, like the *Illiad*, but by dealing with one object. What, then, is it that makes man one: why is he one and not many, e.g., animal, biped, especially if there are, as some say, an animal-in-itself and a biped-in-itself? Why are not these forms themselves the man, so that men would exist by participation not in man, nor in one form, but in two, animal and biped, and in general man would be not one but more than one thing, animal and biped? Clearly, then, if people proceed thus in their usual manner of definition and speech, they cannot explain and solve this difficulty. But if, as we say, one element is matter and the other is form, and one is potentially and the other actually, the question will no longer be thought to be a difficulty. For this difficulty is the same as would arise if 'round bronze' were the definition of 'clock'; for this word would be a sign of the definitory formula, so that the question is, what is the cause of the unity of 'round' and 'bronze'? The difficulty disappears, because one is matter, the other form. What, then, causes this—that which was potentially to be actually—except, in the case of things which are generated, the agent? For there is no other cause of the potential sphere's becoming actually a sphere, but this was the essence of either. Of matter some is intelligible and some perceptible, and in a formula there is always an element of matter as well as one of actuality; e.g., 'the circle is a plane figure' (*Met.* H 6, 1045a7-35)

Now the form can be abstracted from some matter, the intelligibility of whose essence does not depend on matter of that sort; but the intellect cannot abstract form from the sort of matter on which the intelligibility of essence depends. Consequently, since all accidents are related to substance as form to matter, and since the nature of every accident is to depend on substance, any accidental form cannot possibly be separated from substance. Accidents, however, befall substance in a definite order. Quantity comes first, then quality, then passions and motion. So quantity can be considered in substance before the sensible qualities, in virtue of which matter can be called sensible are understood in it. Quantity then does not depend on sensible matter with regard to the nature of its substance, but only on intelligible matter. For, after accidents have been excluded, substance remains intelligible only to the intellect, because the sense powers do not reach a comprehension of substance. And it is mathematics, which considers quantities and the properties of quantities, such as figures and the like, which treats of abstract entities of this sort. (*In Boethius De Trin.* q.5, a 3, c., Maurer trans. p.29)

**Conclusion:** essence contains both matter and form; both enter into the definition of the thing. Boethius, Avicenna, and Averroes are claimed as authorities for this position, although Averroes tends to identify form and essence. Reason, as well as authority, establish this view; since the *esse* of a composite substance is not only the *esse* of form but also of matter; not just one or the other exists, is, or has being, but the total composite. The composite things itself is or has being.

The position is obvious and is part of the common Aristotelian current in the Middle Ages; it is a 'dead' Aristotelianism, since it is detached from its original context such that anyone could use all the terms in anyway that he pleased—it is given brought to life through each man in and through his philosophy. Compare:

Since anything which is produced is produced by something (and this I call the starting-point of the production), and from something (and let this taken to be not the privation but the matter; for the meaning we attach to this has already been explained), and since something is produced (and this is either a sphere or a circle or whatever else it may chance to be), just as we do not make the substratum (the brass), so we do not make the sphere, except incidentally, because the brazen sphere is a sphere and we make the former. For to make a 'this' is to make a 'this' out of the substratum in the full sense of the word. (*Met.*, Z 8, 1033a24-31)

The form or matter of natural things is generated only *per accidens* in view of the fact that the thing as whole comes into being.

**Seventh Characteristic of Essence.** Essence is that "secundum quod res esse dicitur." Essence is 'that through which or according to which a thing is', 'that on which being depends', a principle as well as being a subject. The phrase 'according to' indicates that it is a formal principle according to which a thing has its being. Matter as the subject of form is not excluded, since it then would be the ultimate subject of a thing—but, not being a form, how can it enter into the essence when essence is a formal principle of being—"quamvis hujus esse suo modo forma sit causa". This new statement indicates that the least that can be gathered is that there is a specific way in which form is the "cause of being." Compare Aristotle:

And this is the *substance* of each thing (for this is the primary cause of being)...(*Met.* Z 7, 1041b26)

It is clear, then, from these facts, that, since its substance is the cause of each thing's being...(*Met.* Z 7, 1043a2)

Form is the cause of being both to matter and the composite, for it causes the thing to be what it is. The term 'substance' translates the Greek οὐσία which can mean form in the *Metaphysics*. St. Thomas takes this term with marked qualifications, '*in suo modo*'. Form is not the exclusive cause of being, but *in its own way* it is the formal cause of being. The meaning of this phrase remains to be seen. For St. Thomas the principle cause of being is the efficient cause:

. . . mathematica accipiuntur ut abstracta secundum rationem, cum tamen non sint abstracta secundum esse. Unicuique autem competit habere causam agentem, secundum quod habet esse. Licet igitur ea quae sunt mathematica habeant causam agentem, non tamen secundum habitudinem quam habent ad causa agentem, cadunt sub

consideratione mathematici. Et ideo in scientiis mathematicis non demonstrator aliquid per causam agentem. (*ST I*, q.44, a1, ad 3<sup>um</sup>)

Notwithstanding this primacy of efficient causality, form is a cause too, and this may indicate how being, in the line of formal causality may be essential to every nature; while in the line of efficient causality being is accidental to a thing. The causality of form is necessary and essential; and thus, if we distinguish two orders of causality we may be able to reconcile the essentiality and accidentality of being. But none of this is stated in the *De Ente et Essentia*. In things composed of two principles the two principles exert causality in two different ways, but only one exerts formal causality and that is the essence.

Now as the subject of being, essence functions like the Aristotelian matter. Both are the subjects of their respective acts, matter of form, essence of esse. Consider the difference in the way these two function. In Aristotle, matter is not at all a cause of form, it does not exercise actuality at all, and is not a cause of the material composite. But essence for St. Thomas is also the cause and principle of the being, which it receives and of which it is the subject; and it is this in virtue of form alone of its two components.

The *De Ente et Essentia* goes on to face an objection against matter in essences. Matter is the principle of individuation whereas the definition is universal but essence with matter would seem to be individual and therefore could only apply to one being. The solution is that it is not in every one of its acceptations that matter is a principle of individuation, but only as ‘*materia signata*’, i.e., matter sealed, stamped, impressed, designated—but which? The phrase is derived from the Latin translation current of Avicenna, where ‘*materia demonstrata*’ is used in the same sense. Hence perhaps ‘designated’ is the best translation. It connotes the notion of pointing at or marking out with the finger—“this” individual. In pointing to a thing, we add no more intelligible or formal aspect, but just designate some individual. No intelligibility is added by this act. The concept of the essence of a material thing already contains matter and form, whence nothing is added to essence by pointing out a thing that has such an essence. An important consequence follows from the above considerations.

## THE DOCTRINE OF ABSTRACTION OF AN ESSENCE WITH OR WITHOUT PRECISION

In explaining how matter enters into the individuation of singular things, St. Thomas has shown that only designated matter does so. The universal, with natural things (*res naturae*), contains matter just as much as the individual, but it is not ‘designated’ or pointed out. The universal has all that the individual does; there is no addition of anything to the universal in order to constitute the individual, but merely the designation of matter under certain dimensions. This is a traditional doctrine rooted in Aristotle:

But man or horse and terms which are thus applied to individuals,

but universally, are not substance but something composed of this singular formula and singular matter treated as universal; and as regards the individual, Socrates already contains in him individual matter, and similarly in all other cases. (*Met.* 10, 1035b27-31)

The universal (καθόλον) contains this singular form (τόδε τι) and this singular matter (καθ' ἕκαστον) considered as universal, but only this singular form and matter, considered as singular enter into the individual. They could not exist in the actual thing except in that way. St. Thomas repeats this, but takes it as an occasion to develop something that goes far beyond Aristotelian metaphysics. "Designated matter" is not found in Aristotle, but the equivalent doctrine is present for he says that it is not found in the definition of the nature as such, but would be placed in the definition of the individual if the individual could be defined.

The essence of man, for example, contains such matter, but is reduced to the individual only by pointing at it. The individual Socrates contains nothing that the original essence did not contain, the original species, that is, of "man". The only thing we do to get the individual is to point him out.

This is made to proceed to a rather far-reaching conclusion, namely, that this too, is the only way in which *genus and species differ*. However, the "designation" of a species is through the constitutive differentiae. Thus the species contains, to carry the parallelism further, nothing that the genus does not contain before it. We merely "point out the differentiae. The doctrine of abstraction with and without precision is developed on this basis. This doctrine has been neglected ever since by later scholasticism, and even by neo-scholastics. Why? There are two possible explanations: either it was regarded as the result of an early Avicennian influence on Thomas and something discarded in his maturer works; or else the interpretation of Avicenna given by Giles of Rome, Henry of Ghent, and Duns Scotus became the standard even among "Thomists". The doctrine seems very strange to modern ears, and strikes us as utterly novel and quite difficult to fit into any later mold or framework or the neo-scholastic manuals, for example. It must therefore be approached very open-mindedly, without such an attempt being made.

Hec autem determinatio uel designatio que est in specie respectu generis, non est per aliquid in essentia speciei existens, quod nullo modo in essentia generis sit. (*De Ente*, R-G ed. p.11, ll.19-21, c.2)

The generic notion, "animal", e.g., contains everything the species man contains—the only difference is that in "man" the "animal" is designated, pointed out to one of its inferiors. This is a *formal designation*, since the specific differences are formal; whereas the reduction of a species to the individual is by a *material designation*. Thus the genus does not receive or come to contain any more content, when the specific difference is added; just as nothing is added to the species when it is reduced to the individual. All that occurs is that a more determinate, defined notion is posited, since the differentiae are located or pointed out—but nothing new has been put into it. This is a hard doctrine for modern ears, for genera for centuries have been regarded as complete, finished concepts in themselves, to which other complete and finished concepts are added (the differences), and the sum of the these two complete entities is the species at least since the time of Descartes, we thought in terms of "clear and distinct ideas", each complete in itself. On this basis, Descartes is quite right: the scholastic and Aristotelian concepts are vague and obscure.

They are not conceived after the manner of Bradley's "ideas", based on Herbart's "reals", either. Bradley said that when concepts are so considered as finished and incomplete, they lead to inconsistencies that human reason cannot remove—whence for him, somewhat like Hegel, metaphysics is an inconsistent reason working on making its inconsistent concepts more and more consistent. Compare Aristotle's critique:

It is clear also from these very facts what consequence confronts those who say the Ideas are substances capable of separate existence, and at the same time make the form consist of the genus, and the differentiae. For if the Forms exist and 'animal' is present in 'man' and 'horse', it is either one and the same in number or different. (In formula it is clearly one; for he who states the formula will go through the same formula in either case). If then there is a 'man-in-himself' who is a 'this' and exists apart, the parts also of which he consists, e.g., 'animal' and 'two-footed', must indicate 'thises' and be capable of separate existence, and substances: therefore, 'animal', as well as 'man' must be of this sort. Now if the 'animal' in the 'horse' and in 'man' is one and the same, as you are with yourself, how will the one in things that exist apart be one, and how will this 'animal' escape being divided from even itself. (*Met. Z* 14, 1039a24-b2)

If you give a generic concept its own identity, completeness, consistency in itself, so that it is perfectly *self-identical* then it cannot be predicated of many, and, as Bradley pointed out, strict predication is impossible. Naturally, Aristotle is arguing against Plato that the Forms are not round and complete in themselves, else they would have no application to reality. In fact, as Aristotle says such a genus as 'animal' is not even self-consistent enough to exist as a reality.

St. Thomas implies that the concept contains much more than is seen in itself; in Berkeley's terms, it has much more *esse* than *percipi*. This is very different from the idea of concepts as definite and clear but impoverished, e.g., 'animal' meaning only the note of possession of sentient life, whence to define man, something new is added, namely, the note of rational life. This view claims as its support:

It is not possible for the genus taken apart from its species (any more than for the species of the genus) to be predicated of its proper differentiae. (*Ibid.* B 3, 998b24-25).

Whence they conclude that Aristotle says that the differences lie outside the ambit of the genus; it does not contain its own differences; they must be added. Apparently, St. Thomas could not take anything for granted about this teaching among his listeners—unlike the 'dead' Aristotelianism of the period—for he goes on at great length to explain it. (*De Ente* R-G ed., c. 2, 12, ll.11-13)

Reason indicates to us that if 'animal' is only a part of 'man' then the proposition 'man is animal' is false. For the whole cannot be predicated of the part. All that can be said is that it *has* the part. For the identity necessary for predication, the complete identity implied by the copula is

specific or generic predication, 'animal' must be of a whole with 'man'. He uses a carefully developed example. "Body" can signify in two ways. 'Body' can be a genus, including the differences 'animate' and 'inanimate', and so forth; or else a part, as opposed to soul. "Body" cannot function as a predicate in the sense of a 'part': "Man is a body" is not true, if we mean it as one of the integral constitutive components, or parts of man. But as meaning any quantified matter of three dimensions, and only in this generic sense, not as exclusive of both 'animate' and 'inanimate' and even the addition of other further perfections, then it can function as a predicate. Thus 'Man is an animal', i.e., a being of a sentient nature, not excluding the possible note of intellectual nature and everything else. Thus the *genus does not prescind from* the addition of further perfections. However in the former sense of an integral part, informed by the soul, it can be conceived in such a way as to exclude the higher perfections, *to prescind from* the addition of further natures. In this case any further perfection added to it is extrinsic to it. In this sense, body is an integral material constituent part of animal, which is now regarded as composed of body and soul; whence we must say that 'Man has a body'—not 'is'—while in the generic signification we could say 'is'. (R-G, p.13, ll.5-10)

The genus then contains in itself implicitly the notion of everything the subject contains. "Socrates is a body": in the genus is contained implicitly everything that Socrates contains. The reason is as follows. The soul is what makes a body a body, enables it to have three dimensions, determines it to be that in which three dimensions can be designated. As substantial form, it gives the body the nature of body. Hence body as a genus hardly excludes the soul, as it does when it is taken as an integral part, but rather includes it. On the other hand, it could also be an inanimate body, and thus does not exclude either. Of itself, it is neither and yet contains both implicitly. Thus it is itself "distinct" in the Cartesian sense; as a matter of fact, it implicitly contains contrary notions.

Et ideo cum dicebatur corpus est quod habet talem formam ex qua possunt designari tres dimensiones in eo, intelligebatur quaecumque forma esset, sive animalitas, sive lapideitas, sive quaecumque forma alia. (R-G, p. 14, ll.6-10, c.2)

The generic notion contains implicitly, in itself, all those forms of which it can be predicated.

Sic forma animalis in forma corporis continetur implicite, prout corpus est genus ejus. (R-G, p.14, ll.10-11. c.2)

The genus signifies the differentiae indifferently. Any form whatsoever that can be denoted by the species is denoted whole and entire by the generic notion. The genus is the full nature or form, containing implicitly all that these more explicit specific notions express. If 'animal' were to denote exclusively the possession of sentient life, it would exclude all other characteristics that would be added; they would be extrinsic and the combination of the two would be the species. In this case it is not the genus, but a concept abstracted *with precision*, as in the phrase, "that brings out the 'brute' in a man."

. . . Genus significant indeterminate totum id quod est in specie.  
(*ibid.* p.16, ll.1-2, c.2)

If this is so, clearly the *last* differentiae will be the substance of the thing and its definition, since it is not right to state the same thing more than once in our definitions; for that is superfluous. And this does not happen; for when we say 'animal endowed with feet and two-footed', we have said nothing other than 'animal having two feet'; and if we divide this by the proper division, we shall be saying the same thing more than once—as many times as there are differentiae.

If then a differentia of a differentia be taken at each step, one—the last—will be the form and substance. (*Met Z* 12,1038a19-26)

Thus also, the ultimate difference contains already within itself all the genera which go before it. The genus signifies the *totum* [the whole] of which it is predicated, not just a part.

An objection arises; the genus signifies a 'whole' [*totum*] essence; only once essence is in the genus. But stone, man, and horse are all bodies and therefore all have the same full essence. The solution:

. . . unitas generic ex ipsa indeterminatione vel indifferentia procedit. (*ibid.* p. 19, ll.16-17)

The very indistinctness or confusion is what makes a generic notion possible, gives it unity as a genus. 'Animal' in itself is not determined to either 'rational' or 'irrational' and is indifferent to both, whence it includes and can be predicated of both. The genus is not conceivable as closed, rounded, self-contained, to which something may be added. It signifies a indeterminate form, the same form that is signified determinately by the differentiae. Generic unity does not involve that all species have the same essences; one essence, one species.

Proceeding in the same way—the species signifies that is in the individual, essentially, but indistinctly. But if the species is taken *with precision* from designated matter, the individuating principles; in this way, it too becomes a part. For example, given 'humanity', you must add something new and extrinsic to come up with 'Socrates', namely, his individuality. Since 'humanity' (a species abstracted *with precision*) is a part, you cannot say 'Socrates is humanity', but rather 'Socrates has humanity', as before with genera, with precision. In this latter case, the individuality is extrinsic to the species and must be added before we have the individual. The part cannot be predicated of the whole. Thus the essence or specific notion can have a twofold sense.

Essence, which is predicated can be therefore taken as the *totum*, and this contains everything which is in the individual, abstracted *without precision*. The distinction between essence and being will then be the same as the distinction between a thing and its being. But as abstracted or taken *with precision*, essence will only be part of the individual. In the first sense, essence is that which is, the thing, which is, everything in the nature of the thing itself, individuation not excluded, e.g., '*a man*'. In the second sense, it is not the thing which is, but the complex of formal and material principle that make up the specific notion as contrasted to the individuating principles, e.g., '*humanity*'. And in this last sense, it cannot be the subject of real being; it cannot exist. Only in this last sense can an essence exist. One should not, then, strictly, regard essence abstracted with precision as what is distinct from the being of the thing. But we find it so used in St. Thomas. Apparently this is because the Latin translation of Avicenna so used it in terms of a distinction between essence taken with precision and being. This is usually found in places



where his vocabulary reflects the reading of Avicenna, for example:

Tertia ratio subtilior est Avicenna, tr.V *Met.* (1) et tr. IX (c.1).  
Omne quod est in genere, habet quidditatem differentem ab esse,  
sicut homo; humanitatis enim ex hoc quod est humanitas, non de-  
betur esse in actu; potest enim cogitari humanitas et tamen ignorari  
an aliquis homo sit. (*In I Sent.* D.8, q.4, a.2, c Mand. Ed. I p.222)

Of course, this could also result from the fact that any scientific study is based on the universal rather than on the individual, and therefore essence taken with precision is used more often than the other—for, with precision, when the matter, which is in itself unintelligible, is left aside; we have only the intelligible principle remaining, which are the only possible object of scientific inquiry.

In addition, since *esse* in any case does not result from the essential principles of a thing, one can say being is accidental to the essence abstracted with precision, and there can be no serious objection. All it means is that being is not to be found as an essential principle of a created thing, but is rather accidental to it.

Essence abstracted with precision signifies after the manner of a form as a part; but, without precision, it is identical with the whole subject of being, matter and form, only lacking the designation to a particular individual, and is said to signify after the manner of a *form of the whole*. This first sense is often called signification as a *form of the whole*:

Et dicitur quod est forma totius non quidem quasi superaddita  
partibus essentialibus materiae et formae sicut forma domus super-  
additur partibus integralibus ejus, sed magis est forma, quae est to-  
tum, scilicet formam complectens et materiam; cum praecisione  
tamen eorum per quae material est nata designari. (p.22, ll.12-18)

Thus even taken with precision, it includes matter and is again not fully rounded out, completed, and finished in itself.

One forms a notion by regarding the individuals and considers their essence by excluding indistinctly everything in the individual that is contained in the species, and everything in the individual and species that is contained in the genus.

Et ideo relinquatur quod ratio generic ver speciei conveniat essen-  
tiae secundum quod significatum per modum totius, ut nomine  
hominis vel animalis prout *implicite et indistincte continent totum  
quod in individuo est.* (R-G, c.3, p.23, ll.25-29; [emphasis added,  
Ed.]

Nature or essence taken in this way can be considered in different ways: (1) in its own notion; (2) as it has being in different ways in the mind or in reality. Whence we may arrive at the teaching, namely, that essence or nature taken in itself, has no being at all, not even any minimal sort of intelligibility. This is the peculiarly and uniquely doctrine of St. Thomas that set him apart from

every other metaphysician in the entire history of philosophy.

## ESSENCE IN ITS ABSOLUTE CONSIDERATION

This doctrine is arrived at as follows. After concluding that the generic or specific nature contains implicitly and indistinctly everything that is in the individual, St. Thomas says that nature or essence taken in this way, standing for the thing itself, can be considered in two ways [note that it is a *consideration* and not necessarily real existence]:

. . . uno modo, secundum rationem propriam, et haec est absoluta consideration ipsius, et hoc modo nihil est verum de ea nisi quod convenit sibi secundum quod hujusmodi. . . (c.3, p. 24, ll.2-5)

Rationality and animality and essential notes such as belong only to “man”, but accidents like ‘white’ or ‘black’ are outside the nature. There is nothing surprising about this; it is good Aristotelianism. But he pursues it even further and goes on like Avicenna to show that *unity* is outside the essence.

...unde et quaeritur utrum ista natura sic considerata possit dici una vel plures, neutrum concedendum est, quia utrumque extra intellectum humanitatis, et utrumque potest sibi accidere. (c.3, p. 24, ll.10-13)

He is carefully avoiding the term “is” or “being”—*considerare, dicere, convenire*, prevail throughout. Suppose we sharpen the contrast and ask if a nature is one or not one, phrased as an absolute contradiction. We then can’t ask either question: neither pertains to what is being talked about here. Unity then, is accidental to nature in its absolute consideration— if plurality belonged to it as such, it could never be found as a unity in the individual, e.g., the whole of humanity in Socrates. Neither does unity belong to it as such, for then it could not be multiplied in individuals, found in many. But it can be found in either one or many; therefore neither unity nor plurality is essential to a nature in its absolute consideration. Just as it was in Avicenna, this doctrine is connected with the teaching that being is accidental to a nature. Nature can have being two ways:

Haec autem natura habet duplex esse: unum in singularibus us, et aliud in anima...(R-G, c.3, p.25, ll.9-10)

Different types of accidents follow on each of these types of being: the accidents of the real order are those among the predicaments, e.g., color, size, shape, and hardness; the accidents of the logical order are those among the predicables, e.g., genus, species and predicate.

Et tamen ipsi naturae secundum primam considerationem, scilicet absolutam, nullum istorum esse debetur. (R-G, c.3, p.25, 1.12-p.26,

1.1)

All of these modes of being are accidental to it, absolutely considered, not required of it as such.

Secundum Avicennam in sua *Metaph.* triplex est alicuius naturae consideration. Una, prout consideratur secundum esse quod habet in singularibus; sicut natura lapidis in hoc lapide et in illo lapide. Alia vero est consideration alicujus naturae secundum esse suum intelligibile; sicut natura lapidis consideratur prout abstrahit ab utroque esse; secundum quam considerationem consideratur natura lapidis, vel cujuscumque alterius, quantum ad ea tantum quae per se competent tali naturae. (*VIII Quodl.* a.1, c. Mand. ed.,p.298)

There is nothing in humanity as such, that requires being in reality or being in the mind. In themselves, they could just as well be or not be. The same line of proof is used as Avicenna's. If human nature essentially required being, being would be confined to one individual, e.g., Socrates; and if it required not being, then an individual of this nature could never be. It could be human nature without being in Socrates, but when it is in Socrates, it is human nature. See the citation from Avicenna, (*Met.* Tr. V, c.1 Ven. 1508 ed. Fol. 86, v., col 1). It seems the same doctrine; in itself, nature taken absolutely is neither one, many, or existent in any way.

Si quis autem interrogaverit nos de equinitate, secundum contradictionem, scilicet an equinitas ex hoc quod est equinitas, sit aliquid vel non . . . non erit responsio nisi secundum negationem, quidquid illud fuerit. (*Ibid*)

No matter which side of the contradiction is posed—is it an individual or not an individual—the answer can only be a negative one.

Thus St. Thomas is repeating, at least in form, Avicenna's doctrine. No type of being, whatsoever, pertains to the essence taken in its absolute consideration.

...homo, in quantum est homo, non habet quod sit in hoc singulari vel in illo; patet ergo quod natura hominis absolute considerate abstrahit a quolibet esse, ita tamen quod non fit praecisio alicujus eorum. (c.3, p.26, ll.6-10)

The very nature considered absolutely abstracts but does not prescind from any way of being. This must be understood in the sense of the previous considerations on abstraction. Genus and species can be abstracted with or without precision, but an essence or nature can never abstract from being with precision. Nature can only be abstracted from being without precision: the absolute consideration can never go so far as to prescind a nature from being as well as to abstract it. Thus nature considered this way can have any way of being, but is not bound to anyone of them. As long as you consider it as bound to one of these, you are not considering it absolutely. Nevertheless, nature taken this way is open to being in any of the ways in which it can be.

St. Thomas' doctrine in working and even in content seems the same as Avicenna's here. But

we must sound a warning. See Etienne Gilson, *L'etre et L'essence* (p.127); *Being and Some Philosophers* (p.81). Avicenna remarks or observes that the definition of an essence does not include its existence and St. Thomas makes the same observation as his starting-point. But we cannot hastily conclude that both will follow the same line of metaphysical doctrine. The essence of a thing is its *esse proprium*. There are three kinds of *esse*: (1) the essence, (2) the being of real existence, (3) cognitional existence. The “*proprium esse rei*” abstracts from the two other ways of being of a thing.

However, St. Thomas' conclusion, from the same starting-point as Avicenna is much wider, *essence* in its absolute consideration abstracts from “*esse in re*” and “*esse in anima*”, it still retains its “*esse proprium*”. Thus he does not exclude all from the essence absolutely considered—he allows it a being “proper to essence”. Since essence already has a being proper to itself, the other two types of being are added to it, and are thus accidental to the essence in its proper being.

But St. Thomas from the start says that it abstracts from all being whatsoever, if we take his texts at face value. Thus he recognizes no other type of being but being in reality or being in the mind. Nature in its absolute consideration is not spoken of as something that is, but it is a *consideration*. There is never a nature in its absolute being before your mind—what you see or now directly is only the nature in reality or the nature in the mind, and nature taken absolutely is only a further consideration, amounting to the fact that nature itself is not bound down to either kind of being.

Thus in the Latin translation of Avicenna, we already have something that looks like the *esse essentiae*, proper to essence, of Giles of Rome, Henry of Ghent, and Duns Scotus: in some, e.g., Cajetan, BaZez, and John of St. Thomas (also Giles) regarded as really distinct from the *esse actualis existentiae*; and in others, as not really distinct e.g., Suarez. But in the texts of St. Thomas such a problem as it is discussed in all later scholasticism could never arise.

Another point is the proper intelligibility of essence in itself. St. Thomas will say that an essence taken in itself has no proper intelligibility. Since intelligibility follows on being, then essence is only intelligible as in reality or in the mind. Whereas Scotus, writing against an Avicennian background, speaks of common natures, natures absolutely considered, as the first object of the mind. Similarly, for St. Thomas, as such, they have no truth, unity, and so on.

Alia autem entia dicuntur per posterius inquantum aliquod esse participant quod non est idem quod ipsa sunt . . . ita quod quamcumque rationem essendi aliquid habeat, non sit sibi nisi a Deo, sed defectus essendi sit a seipso. (*In II Sent. D. 37, c.1, a. 2 soln.*, Mand., ed. II, p. 964)

If essence is to be defined in terms of being, then it must only be defined negatively, as a lack or defect. Of course, the text of the *De Veritate*, agrees with Avicenna: essence does have to be something positive; but where Avicenna has said “*esse*”, Thomas substitutes “*dictum*”. However when essence is expressed in terms of being, it is compared negatively, in a negative relation.

Of itself, essence is positive, but it has no being whatever. A created essence of itself is a nothing (it is not—negation of the act of being); it has to receive being from outside itself, but it is not nothingness where we mean by this latter non-being abstracted from being with precision (negate being in the conceptual sense of the subject). Essence cannot be abstracted with precision from being, to the point where we say it cannot be or is not even potentially being. It must be ab-

stracted from being without precision i.e., it has no being of its own nature; but as opposed to nothingness, it can be, and is open to being, or in potency to being. It is not excluded or shut out as when we say “non-being”; thus far, as potential, it is positive. St. Thomas also says or speaks of essence as naturally having no being:

Quaelibet autem res praeter Deum habet esse ab alio. Ergo oportet quod secundum naturam suam essent non ens, nisi a Deo esse habet . . . et ita non esse quod ex se habet naturaliter, est prius quam esse quo ab alio habet, etsi non duratione. (*In II Sent. D. 1, q.1, a.5, ad 2<sup>um</sup> arg. in contra, Mand., ed. II, p. 38*)

Essence absolutely considered is just *non-ens, non-esse*, and this is prior to the *esse* it receives from another. If it is not in any way, how can it be so known, how can it terminate an act of cognition? It is first seen that an essence exists in reality as an individual, then that it exists in the mind as a universal; then we abstract it from these different ways of being, by comparing and finding it is not bound down to either, but without precision. This is its absolute consideration, based on a doctrine that is the same as Parmendes and Aristotle:

Nam unumquodque, quantum habet de esse, tantum habet de cognoscibilitate . . . (*SCG, I, 71 Leonine edition, XIII, p.207b15-17*)

Thus essence in absolute consideration is never known directly; presented to us as an immediate object of a cognitive act—the intellect never gazes upon it directly this way, but only as it is in reality or the mind.

The argument of *VIII Quodl.*(a.1, c.) requires further elucidation. The background of the article is neo-Platonic (Pseudo-Dionysius), where essence in its absolute consideration is prior to being both in reality and in the mind. But his citation has to do with things coming from God, and Thomas is trying to be in accord with the Dionysian expression. Whence he puts essence absolutely considered in the mind of God only.

Harum quidem trium considerationum duae semper uniformiter eundem ordinem servant: prior enim est consideration alicujus naturae absoluta quam consideration jus secundum esse quod habet in singularibus: . . . tertia consideration naturae quae est secundum esse quod habet in intellectu, non semper habet eundem ordinem ad alia considerations. Consideratio enim naturae secundum esse quod habet in intellectu qui accipit a rebus, sequitur utrumque aliarum considerationum . . . Sed consideration naturae secundum esse quod habet in intellectu causante rem, praecedit alias duas considerations . . .

Sicut autem se habet intellectus artificis ad artificata, ita se habet intellectus divinus ad omnes creaturas; under uniusquisque naturae causatae prima consideration est secundum quod est in intellectu divino; secunda vera consideration ipsius naturae absolute; tertia

secundum quod habet esse in rebus ipsis . . . quarta secundum esse quod habet in intellectu nostro . . . intellectus divinus est ratio naturae absolute consideratae, et in singularibus; et ipsa natura absolute considerata et in singularibus est ratio intellectus humani et quodammodo mensura ipsius. (*ibid.* Mand. ed. pp. 298-99).

Another difference in Avicenna and St. Thomas' doctrine of essence is that Avicenna conceived it as something upon which being followed, "accidit": in some places the Latin translation uses "sequitur". Essence is already constituted in some. Immediately there is a possible ready to receive being in reality if it is in the mind. It is the fundamental object of human cognition, as the Aristotelian form was. On it all things follow. But in St. Thomas, essence as known exists in the mind or in reality prior to its absolute consideration. All other effects presuppose being; the first effect of God in things is *ipsum esse*, and all else is founded on this.

Primus autem effectus Dei in rebus est ipsum esse quod omnes alii effectus praesupponunt, et supra quod fundantur . . . Non enim alicujus essential est suum esse, quia esse absolutum et per se subsistens non potest esse nisi unum . . . (*Comp. Theol.* C. 68, Mand. ed. *Opusc.* Vol.,II, p. 37)

[Compare SCG, II, 43, Leon. #8 also Gerard Smith, "Avicenna and the Possibles", *New Scholasticism* XVII (1943), 340-57 and Norris Clarke in the collection, *Progress in Philosophy* on the question of "esse possible". Ed.]

Another issue: essence according to its absolute consideration—is it the object of logic or metaphysics? Actually, since it is what receives being, it is not the object of any science, but common to both the cognitive and real order. It is the object of logic insofar as it exists in the mind, and the object of metaphysics insofar as it exists in reality. In itself, it has no being, and is therefore the object of no science.

Thus Thomas takes the threefold division of essence given by Avicenna as his starting-point, but ends with an essence in its absolute consideration being nothing at all. The problem is how such an essence is related to the being, which it takes on in the mind or in reality. This issue is taken up in the text of *De Ente et Essentia*. Now, with the immediate concern of establishing that here is potency in the angels, but it incidentally implies the relation of essence and being in every creature.

## THE RELATION BETWEEN ESSENCE AND BEING

First of all, nature, as such contains no being, for it can be understood without anything being known as whether or not it exists:

Omnis autem essential vel quidditas potest intelligi sine hoc quod aliquid intelligitur de esse suo: possum enim intelligere quid est homo vel phoenix et tamen ignorare an esse habeat in rerum natura. (R-G, c.4, p.34, ll.10-5).

An essence can be understood and it is not known whether or not it has existence or not. Of course, if you enquire about what it is, *esse* is given to it by the mind; and your mind will recognize this and implicitly attribute *esse* to it as mental. Anything that is thought is in the mind, never essence as such which would be nothing. Being is not to be found in the quiddity of the thing. Conclusion:

Ergo patet quod esse est aliud ab essential vel quidditatis . . . (*ibid.*)

This doctrine has many difficulties attached to it. (1) It is a poor induction to just point to this or that example; there is no universality in the conclusion. (2) In addition, the argument seems to jump from *intelligere* to *esse*, passing from a distinction in the realm of the cognitional to one in the order of reality.

The next step would be to universalize this observation as applying to every nature whatsoever, allowing one possible exception, that is, the being whose nature it is to be. Whose nature is being? This entity would have to be unique and primary. Whence in all other beings *essence* and *esse* would be different. In St. Thomas, this first assertion about all beings is not categorical or apodeictic, but exceptions are allowed.

. . . nisi forte sit aliqua res cuius quidditatis sit suum esse nisi una et prima, quia impossibile est quod fiat plurificatio alicuius nisi per additionem alicuius differentie; sicut multiplicantur natura generis in species vel per hoc quod forma recipitur in diversis materiis, sicut multiplicatur natura speciei in diversis individuis, vel per hoc quod est unum absolute et aliud in aliquo receptum, sicut si esset quidam color separatus, esset aliud a calore non separato ex ipsa sua separatione. (R-G, c. 4, p.34, ll.15-24)

A being whose nature is to be cannot be multiplied, and is hence unique and as a corollary, primary. As a preliminary, he sketches the things are multiplied. He makes no effort to justify this threefold division; readers would accept it implicitly.

The first member of the division is from Aristotelian logic bequeathed by Boethius, the second from Aristotelian metaphysics and physics coming through the Arabic commentators, a common heritage of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The third alternative seems to be Platonic: absolute and participated instances, a 'separated heat'. In the second and third the notion of reception is to be found. The question arises then in what respect do the second and third differ or are do they both involve the reception of form? They are at least different in this respect: in the second all forms are received; there is participation in every instance; in the third, one is the absolute instance and only the rest may be said to participate or to receive. The Greek philosophers had tried to account for the plurality of things and these are the three solutions current in the Middle Ages. Nothing was known of any others, e.g., Democritus. This is why there is no attempt to justify these alternatives.

St. Thomas then goes on to show that a thing whose nature is being cannot be made plural in any of these ways:

Si autem ponitur aliqua res que sit esset tantum ita ut ipsum esse sit

subsistens, hoc esse non recipient additionem differentie quia iam non esset *esse tantum* set esse et preter hoc forma aliqua. (*Ibid.* 1.27)

Thomas is taking for granted that if being is allowed to enter into the essence of a being, it excludes all other notes, and being alone pertains to it: “*esse tantum*”. This involves accepting the argument of Parmenides. If being is allowed to enter the essence and thus belongs to the nature of a thing, if a thing or subject of being and its being are identified, then being destroys the “thing” or “subject”. There remains no plurality, structure, differentiation, nothing else but “is” [ἔστιν] and there are no things or subject that is. Compare:

Quia tamen quaelibet forma est determinative ipsius esse, nulla earum est ipsum esse, sed est habens esse. (*In De Heb. C.2 Mand. Opuscula I, p.176*)

The nature of form is to determine, restrict being—hence, once being has a form added, the being is no longer the subject itself, but the form becomes the subject. There is no longer an *ipsum esse*, but a form having esse [*habens esse*]. The addition of a form is how a genus is reduced to the species. As in Aristotle, the genus may be looked at as quasi-matter—“intelligibile matter”, with the species as forms actualizing it. But cannot be done to being, because once it has been determined, the relations cannot be reversed and the form added become the subject having being. Once a formal note is added to an alleged quidditative being, being is placed outside the essence added. Thus a specific note as a form cannot be added to thing whose nature is being—this being will be set outside the things nature and made an act, not the subject. To add a formal note will add a difference which being, since it is in the essence will not allow.

Et multo minus recipient additionem materiae quia iam esset esse non subsistens sed materiale. (*Ibid.*)

This is an *a fortiori* argument: if formal addition is impossible, since being would no longer be the subject, much more so for material addition, for the matter would be the subject now, the matter that is existing would be *what* exists and being would not be *what* is. Therefore the third alternative is the only possible one:

Under relinquitur quod talis res, quae sit suum esse, non potest esse nisi una. (*Ibid.*)

There is no proof: the third “Platonic” possibility already involves that the absolute instance be only one and primary.

Unde oportet quod in qualibet alia re preter eam aliud esse suum et aliud quidditas vel natura seu forma sua. (R-G, c. 4, p.34, ll.30-32)

In every one besides the absolute instance, *esse* is other than nature, quiddity, essence, or form used as a synonymous with these.



Thomas tacitly accepts the third alternative that reflects the Platonic doctrine of participation. This is different from the Aristotelian notion of form, remaining of the same nature in all instances, but multiplied by reception into different matters. If made to exist separated from matter, it loses its nature, its very essence. Therefore he had to object to the Platonic theory of forms. Eliminate matter and the essence is destroyed. A *material* form made to exist in itself and apart becomes immaterial, which is contradictory or absurd.

While the theory presents difficulties in many ways, the most paradoxical thing of all is the statement that there are certain things besides those in the material universe, and that these are the same as sensible things except that they are eternal while the latter are perishable. For they say there is a man-himself and a horse-itself and health-itself, with no further qualification—a procedure like that of people who said there are gods, but in human form. For they were positing nothing but eternal men, nor are the Platonists making the forms anything other than eternal sensible things. (*Met.* B 2, 997b5-12)

. . . the imperishable substances which exist apart from the individual and sensible substances. They make them, then, the same in kind as the perishable things (for this kind of substance we know)—‘man-himself’ and ‘horse-itself’, adding to the sensible things the word ‘itself’. Yet even if we had not seen the stars, none the less, I suppose, would they have been eternal substance apart from those which we knew; so that now also if we do not know what non-sensible substances there are, yet it is doubtless necessary that there should be some. (*ibid.* Z 16, 1040b32-34)

All Plato can do is take this sensible nature and add the characteristic ‘eternal’ and so on. Hence the Aristotelian separate forms are of a different nature from any other material form. A material form cannot be separated from matter, cannot exist except as received in matter. Therefore this Platonic doctrine of participation that St. Thomas uses here is absurd on Aristotelian principles.

So how can this Platonic doctrine be accepted and be brought into congruence with Aristotle’s doctrine of matter and form? Let us put aside but not forget this difficulty for the time.

Being is like a Platonic form then for it is participated by many things and yet at the same time subsists by itself separately found in its absolute condition, unique, and other than any participated instance of it. Is it then other in nature from the secondary instances, like an Aristotelian separated form—or does it come under our understanding of such a nature at all? St. Thomas is only concerned with whether or not subsistent being can be made plural or whether it is singular in nature although it stands in relation to all other instances as primary which seems to be the Platonic doctrine of participation. In all other things, secondary instances, being is different from, or other than, the nature or quiddity.

The use of Platonic doctrine indicates that being cannot be treated as an Aristotelian form. And yet it cannot be a Platonic form, or it would be subject to Aristotle’s criticism which Thomas himself as an Aristotelian would be quite well aware. So we are led to believe that for St.

Thomas being must be conceived as something beyond the merely formal to avoid contradiction.

Thus the principle that essence is other than *esse* extends to all things, except for the primary instance, for that whose essence involves being can only be one.

At this point our conclusion is only hypothetical. We are not reasoning at this point as though the actual existence of such a being has been established here. Thomas' treatment in the *De Ente et Essentia* has nothing to do with the so-called Anselmian "ontological argument". If being is a nature, then it is a nature different from, other than, any nature in the sensible or supersensible world, with the exception of the nature of the one subsistent being.

What is the "other than"? How are they different and related? This is has not yet been delineated. The argument at this point is inchoative and incomplete.

Let us take up the second difficulty. The argument to a real distinction seems to be based on a difference or distinction in acts of cognition or the existence of a twofold act. But does this necessarily involve a twofold character in reality? Could there not be just one object grasped in two different ways, that is, by two different acts, each insufficient in itself to grasp the whole object? What are these two acts?

Sola oratio perfecta facit quiescere intellectum, non autem nomen, neque verbum si per se praedicatur. Si enim dicam 'homo', suspensus est animus audientis, quid de eo dicere velim; si autem dico 'currit', suspensus est eius animus de quo dicam. Sed dicendum est quod cum duplex sit intellectus operatio, ut supra habitum est, ille que dicit nomen vel verbum secundum se, constituit intellectum quantum ad primam operationem, quae est simplex conceptus alicuius, et secundum hoc, quiescit audiens, qui in suspensio erat antequam nomen vel verbum proferretur et eius prolatio terminaretur; non autem constituit intellectum quantum ad secundam operationem, quae est intellectus vel dividens, ipsum verbum vel nomen per se dictam: nec quantum ad hoc facit quiescere audientem. (*In Perihermeneias* Bk. 1, l.5. Leonine Ed. #17)

In the first way; the intellect grasps the formal element or characteristics of a thing—what it is—in the second way, it grasps the being of a thing:

Cum in re duo sint, quidditas rei, et esse eius, his duobus respondet duplex operatio intellectus. Una quae dicitur a philosophis\* formatio, qua apprehendit quidditates rerum, quae etiam a Philosopho, in III *De anima*, dicitur indivisibilium intelligentia. Alia autem comprehendit esse rei, componendo affirmationem, quia etiam esse rei ex material et forma composita, a quo cognitionem accipit, consistit in quadam compositionem formae ad materiam, vel accidentis ad subjectum. (*In I Sent.* D. 38, q.1, a 3, soln., Mand. ed. I, p. 903)

The first act of the intellect attains the thing according to its quiddity. The second act attains the thing insofar as it is. By judgment the name of the second act we come to know a thing's being, that it is being.

Prima quidem operatio respicit ipsam naturam rei, secundum quam res intellectum aliquem gradum in entibus obtinet, sive sit res completa, ut totum aliquod, sive res incompleta, ut pars vel accidens. Secunda vero operatio respicit ipsum esse rei, quod quidem resultat ex congregatione principiorum rei, in composites, vel ipsam simplicem naturam rei concomitatur, ut in substantis separatis. (In *Boeth. de Trin.*, q.5, a. 3, c., Weyser ed. p.182, ll.7ff.)

These acts are never separated, they occur together in every act of cognition since a quiddity is never found without being; essence in its absolute consideration is never a direct object of cognition, but just a consideration that essence is bound to neither of the two ways in which it is:—a subsequent abstraction. One of these two operations never takes place in isolation from the other. “Abstraction and judgment are never separated in the mind, for being and essence and never separated in reality.” (Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, pp.202-203) Thus even an essence in the mind (e.g., a phoenix) is never grasped or conceived without at least the judgment of its intentional existence—otherwise, with no being, it could not even be conceived. In this case, the question remains if it exists in reality (*esse in rerum natura*). If that is known immediately, then the judgment is objectively as well as simultaneously conceiving it.

There is no priority in time of conceptualization to judgment, as if essence had its *esse proprium* (Avicenna), or things had common natures immediately evident to us (Duns Scotus).

As yet, Thomas makes no definite answer to the question whether on the basis of this difference in intentional acts [simple apprehension and judgment], we can speak of a difference in reality. Prima facie it does not seem possible. The path to this distinction lies in the following: first, we must prove that this unique nature, whose nature it is to be, exists; then this will allow us to say that being and nature are different in all other beings. Thus the real distinction is based on the existence and uniqueness of the nature of *esse* “to be”. Thus before the real distinction can be established one must prove that being is a nature and that nature is the one we call God. Then in creatures being will be seen to be not just an aspect of their natures.

When the argument about the difference of intentional acts is taken out of this context, it does not conclude to the real distinction. No leap from the intentional to the real order is possible. Thus it is no small wonder that there is so much controversy when some Thomists present this reasoning out of context, as independent in itself, and not a preliminary remark. Many therefore say, Descoqs, that it is an invalid argument. Both sides have plausible reasons, since the truth is between their extremes—actually the argument as found in the *De Ente et Essentia* is a preliminary stage laying the basis for a further demonstration, thus inchoative, and introductory; but still valid as reasoning, though not to the conclusion that many seem to think. As a single proof for the real distinction, it is neither valid nor invalid. We do find it alone:

In quocumque enim aliud est essential, et aliud esse eius, oportet quod aliud sit quo est, et aliud quo aliquid sit. Nam per esse suum de quolibet

dicitur quod est, per essentiam vero suam de quolibet dicitur quid

sit. Unde et definition significans essentiam, demonstrate quid est res. . . (*Comp. Theol.*, c.11, Mand. ed. *Opuscula II*, p.6)

But the existence of God has already been proven (c.3 *ibid.*) and is its context. The statements about the intentional distinction only serve to develop the real distinction.

Cornelio Fabro, *Participation in St. Thomas*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. p. 219-220 calls this argument, as many do, the “logical argument”. But is it logical? The nature being considered is in its absolute consideration—common nature, common to both orders of being (mental and real) and bound to neither. Hence it is not even the “logical-ontological” argument, which Fabro calls it later. Suarez can and will make this reasoning the basis of an argument to deny the real distinction, by limiting the nature here to its consideration in the logical order. This approach is to be avoided since the nature considered is so in its absolute consideration.

If being is different from the nature can it follow from it? St. Thomas goes on to ask another hypothetical question and answer it. (c. 4, p.35, ll.3-11) The reasoning is quite compact. It seems to be a disjunctive syllogism: major, minor, and conclusion. The efficient cause is considered as something other than that which receives the effect or is affected. Similarly:

Omne autem quod convenit alicui quod non est de essentia eius  
convenit ei per aliquam causam. . . (*SCG I*, c.22, Leon, #6).

There is no proof given for this premise; it was accepted by all at the time, a tradition handed down especially by the Arabs. For instance, Algazel’s *Metaphysics*, tract.II, Muckle ed. p.53, ll. 15-17. But although St. Thomas does not justify it, we must see his reason for not doing so.

It is already established that all but the unique nature “to be” would have being that is not their nature. Now in these other beings, we ask: would their being be caused by their nature or by some extrinsic principle? Clearly a thing (like risibility in man) can be outside the nature and yet be caused by the principles of the nature, and contained implicitly and indistinctly in them. The ultimate specific difference (“rational” in this case) contains in this way all other specific differences and individual notes. All the specific differences of material things are unknowable to man, as specific differences. We cannot *deduce* individual characteristics from the specific differences that contain them, but we must sensibly experience individual differences and characteristics.

Risibility follows from rationality, which is a principle of human nature; but it is not human nature, and is caused by the principles of that nature. The question is: can being follow from human nature, or any other finite nature? There is no real distinction between the capacity of being able to laugh and human nature; it *is* the human nature, as a principle of operation or action. By the fact that he is rational, man has an essence ordered to a certain act called laughing. Faculties or capacities although different from nature or substance follow from it and are caused by it and yet are not *really* distinct from it. The property of a triangle that all three angles summed, for example, are equal to 180 degrees. This fact is not contained in the nature of triangle, but yet adds nothing real over and above that nature. Is being other than the nature in this sense, namely, that it is different from, follows upon it, but adds nothing to its reality and therefore is not really distinct from it? This alternative is only mentioned to be rejected, when we look more closely at causality. It is mentioned that being has to be caused efficiently, not formally, as risibility is in man.

Let us summarize. Being must be proven to be a real nature, if we are to prove that in any other thing that it is really not logically distinct from the nature. And to do this, we must see that it cannot be caused by anything in the nature, but must have an extrinsic cause.

It is true that you may know what a nature is, without knowing that it exists. Being is at least accidental to the nature as nature, in its absolute consideration. .

If the nature of anything were identified with its being, then it would be the unique and primary instance of being and could not coalesce with any other nature.

Since being is at least accidental to natures is it possible that it be caused by anything in that nature, that is, that it be an accident of that follows from the nature as is the case with risibility in man? This question will be answered negatively in the study of causality, and then the argument will be able to show that there is a nature “to be” and that it is therefore unique, and cannot coalesce with any other nature (which we have not yet shown) and that therefore, all other beings have a real distinction between their nature and their being.

## THE THOMISTIC EXPRESSION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF CAUSALITY

Efficient causality is the only type of causality that can cause being. This implies that the cause of being is absolutely speaking an efficient cause. A thing has an efficient cause insofar as it has being:

Unicuique autem competit habere causam agentem, secundum quod habet esse. (*ST I* q.44, a.1, ad 3<sup>um</sup>)

Eo quod fit faciens dat esse. (*De Potentia*, q.3, a.1, obj.17, Mand. ed. II, p.42a)

Being is not a formal characteristic that can follow on formal causality, since it adds nothing formal or essential to nature as such or essence as such. This is simply to say that being is accidental to the essence, without saying that the two are really distinct or not.

Now can essence in itself considered as apart from its being (abstracted without precision or in its absolute consideration) function as an efficient cause? Can it cause it being? The answer is in the negative, the real issue is why not? Simply put because a thing cannot be the cause of itself. This implies that to cause the being of anything is to cause the thing itself. The being is thus viewed in priority to the essence. It is not as in the case of risibility, where to cause this quality is not to cause the whole essence—where the essence can be viewed as prior, and risibility as subsequent on it, that is, following on it in formal sequence. An essence, to cause its own being, would be causing itself. Being is in absolute priority to the thing itself; and if it causes a thing's being, the thing itself follows on its own being.

Impossibile est autem quod causa secunda ex propria virtute sit principium esse in quantum huiusmodi; hoc enim est proprium causae primae; nam ordo effectum est secundum ordinem causarum. Primus autem effectus est ipsum esse, quod omnibus aliis effectibus praesupponitur et ipsum non praesupponit aliquem alium

effectum. (*De Potentia*, q.3, a.4, c, Mand. ed. II, p. 52a)

The priority of being with regard to the nature is an absolute. Not “what” is produced first, for the “what”, is the thing. The act of the thing or nature has priority over the thing or nature. There is no other effect unless in priority to it, we have its being. Being is prior to quiddity or nature as far as efficient causality is concerned. It cannot presuppose, for its efficient cause, the essence or nature that follows on it. What is most basic in a thing is its being. He even interprets Proclus’ “Being is the first of creatures” in this way:

Id autem quod est commune omnibus intelligentiis distinctis est esse creatum primum, de quo quidem praemittit talem propositionem: ‘Prima rerum creatarum est esse et non est ante ipsam creatum aliud.’ Et hanc etiam propositionem Proclus in suo libro ponit 138<sup>am</sup>, sub his verbis: ‘Omnium participantium divina proprietate et deificatorum primum est et supremum ens.’... Videtur tamen non esse eius intentio ut loquatur de aliquo esse separato, sicut Platoniei loquebantur, neque de esse participato communiter in omnibus existentibus, sicut loquitur Dionysius, sed de esse participato in primo gradu entis creati, quod est esse superius. Et, quamvis esse superius sit et in intelligentia et in anima, tamen in ipsa intelligentia prius consideratur ipsum esse quam intelligentiae ratio, et similiter est in anima; et propter hoc praemisit quod est supra animam et supra intelligentiam. (*In Lib. De Causis*. 1.4, Saffrey 1954 ed., pp. 27, 29; Mand.ed., I, pp.213ff.)

Also, to cause the being of a thing, by this very fact is to cause the quiddity of a thing. He replies to an objection that creation terminates only in being, that this is all God produces; and since the quiddity, the thing itself, is different from its being, it is not produced by God:

Ad secundum dicendum, quod ex hoc ipso quod quidditati esse attribuitur, non solum esse, sed ipsa quidditas creari dicitur; quia antequam esse habeat, nihil est, nisi forte in intellectu creantis, ubi non est creatura, sed creatrix essentia. (*De Pot.*, q.3,a.5,ad 2<sup>um</sup>, Mand.ed. II, 56b)

Ad decimum septimum dicendum, quod Deus simul dans esse, producit id quod esse recipit: et sic non oportet quod agat ex aliquo praesistenti. (*De Pot.*, q.3,a.1,ad 17<sup>um</sup>, Mand.ed. II. 45a)

God in producing being simultaneously produces that which receives the being. God does not have to make a thing out of something pre-existing. The thing is not already there and then God gives being to it. This idea of an essence, which is nothing in itself and is yet a receptacle of being— is subsequent to being and yet receives it—is original with St. Thomas. Later scholastics all regard essence as having a being of its own in order to receive being. In St. Thomas, an act of being is *created determined*, since the essence it actualizes must be created simultaneously. Gil-

son expresses this difficult notion by the coinage “autodetermination.”

Chaque essence est posée par un acte d'exister qu'elle n'est pas et qui l'inclut comme son autodétermination. . . . c'est donc la hiérarchie des actes d'exister qui fonde et règle celle des essences, chacune d'elles n'exprimant que l'intensité propre d'un certain acte d'exister. (*Le Thomisme* (1944), pp. 54-55)

Every being that is produced (cannot be being as a pure nature, for this would be unproduced) contains in itself a limitation, determination, which is the thing that is. To produce being implies producing as subsequent on it and posterior to it, though simultaneously in time, the quiddity that is its limitation.

Hence an essence that produces its own being, produces itself. If, apart from its being, it acts in producing its being, then its action or operation is both prior to its being, and—as based on a nature which presupposes being—subsequent to it, in the same respect, which is impossible.

Quidquid est in aliquo quod est praeter essentiam ejus, oportet esse causatum vel a principiis essentiae, sicut accidentia propria consequentia speciem, ut risibile consequitur hominem et causatur ex principiis essentialibus speciei; vel ab aliquo exteriori, sicut calor in aqua causatur ab igne. Si igitur ipsum esse rei sit aliud ab ejus essentia, necesse est quod esse illius rei vel sit causatum ab aliquo exteriori, vel a principiis essentialibus rei: quia nulla res sufficit quod sit sibi causa essendi, si habeat esse causatum. Oportet ergo quod illud cujus esse est aliud ab essentia sua, habeat esse causatum ab alio. (*ST I*, q.3, a.4, c.)

Elsewhere the explanation is in much greater detail:

...sequitur quod aliquid sit sibi ipse causa essendi. Hoc autem est impossibile: quia prius secundum intellectum est causam esse quam effectum: si ergo alisibi ipsi esset causa essendi, intelligeretur esse antequam haberet esse, quod est impossibile: —nisi intelligatur quod aliquid sit sibi causa essendi secundum esse accidentale, quod est esse secundum quid. Hoc enim non est impossibile: invenitur enim aliquod ens accidentale causatum ex principiis sui subjecti, ante quod esse intelligitur esse substantiale subjecti. Nunc autem non loquimur de esse accidentali, sed de substantiali. (*SCG I*, 22; Leon. ed., p.68b, #6, ll. 9-21)

The only possible exception to this would be in reference to some kind of accidental being; but the substantial being of the thing is understood before this— and this later is what the argument is concerned with here. Being can be accidental and still be caused by the principles of an existent essence. Priority of being as well as its accidentality is the prerequisite of this argument. The accidentality of being is based on the principle:

... quidquid est in aliquo praeter essentiam ejus, inest ei accidentaliter... (*Comp. Theol.*, c.66; *Mand.ed, Opusc. II, 36*)

Being is not subsequent and accidental to the essence of a thing, nor simultaneous and included, but prior and accidental. Thus being must come from an extrinsic principle. It is accidental and so must depend on some substance—not on the substance of which it is the being, for it is not subsequent on but prior to this substance—but on some other substance.

Thus, the “Principle of Causality”, namely that “That which is not caused by the principles of the thing itself is caused by another”, when found in St. Thomas, always implies a reason why it is true: the reason is the priority and accidentality of being. The neo-Scholastic controversy as to whether it is self-evident, a postulate, or required by the intelligibility of things can find an answer here. It is a deduced principle, based on the primacy of *esse*.

## THE ACCIDENTALITY OF BEING AND THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The accidentality of being, just in itself, does not point to the need of the thing to depend on another for being, for qualities, etc., are accidental to substances but not necessarily caused by another. Why being depends on an extrinsic cause is because it is prior to the substance in which it inheres. Now this notion of an accident that is prior to the substance that is its own is impossible in Aristotle. For him, every accident is causally posterior to its substance; and thus much misunderstanding arises in studying Aristotle and St. Thomas as though they are in agreement on this point. There is also much confusion in contemporary Thomistic attempts to establish the Principle of Causality or to claim it as self-evident. St. Thomas explains the properly Aristotelian notion of accident as follows:

...*ens* non potest esse genus substantiae et accidentis; quia in ipsa ratione *entis*, substantia, quae est *ens per se*, prioritatem habet respectu accidentis, quod est *ens per aliud et in alio*. (*In Periherm.* 1.8, Leon.ed. I, p. 36b,#6)

The meaning of these prepositions is clear enough, except note:

Respondeo dicendum quod istae propositiones, **a** et **per**, in hoc differunt; quia **a** designat tantum habitudinem principii per modum efficientis; sed **per** designat habitudinem principii secundum quodlibet genus causae; unde omne illud quod est **ab** aliquo, est **per** illud; sed non convertitur. (*In I Sent.*, D.32, q.2, a.2, soln.2, soln. 1; *Mand.ed. I, p.754*)



## DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROOF FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The preposition **ab** in the phrase **ab alio** means only efficient causality. However, **per** means any of the four types of causality, and thus is well suited for expressing the Aristotelian notion of accident. Hence all things **ab alio** are **per aliud**, but the converse is not true. The general designation **per aliud**, in the order of efficient causality, is better expressed as **ab alio**. A substance's being is by or from another, because it is both accidental and prior to the substance. (R-G, c.4, p.35, ll. 10-11)

But if that something else also *has* being, that is, if its being is also accidental to *it*, then its being is caused by another, not itself, and so on. In this process of search for an efficient cause of being, we must eventually reach a being whose being is not accidental to itself—a thing or nature that does not *have* being, but its Being:

Et quia omne quod est per aliud reducitur ad illud quod est per se, sicut ad causam primam, oportet quod sit aliqua res quae sit causa essendi omnibus rebus ex eo quod ipsa est esse tantum; alias iretur in infinitum in causis, cum omnis res quae non est esse tantum habeat causam sui esse, ut dictum est. (R-G, c.4, p.35, ll. 11-16)

**Per aliud** here substitutes for the **ab alio**, but is merely a more generic formula, still referring to efficient causality particularly.

The reason given for the fact of the existence of the nature “to be” is that otherwise there would be an infinite regress in causes. None of the causes, in question then, is of itself able to cause the effect, for each is a complete nothing in regard to being, not having it of itself, but having being of another. And nothing added to itself even infinitely still gives nothing. Thus the cause is to be sought in a thing or subject not different from its being, or with being accidental to it, but whose nature is to be, which is identified with its being. This is no longer hypothetical, but the positive proof that there is a real nature that is being. And what was shown hypothetically before now follows: that this nature is unique and primary. Being-itself is different from all other things; hence in the others, being is not only accidental to the essence, but really distinct from it—else, if their natures were their being, really, there would be more than one nature “to be”—which Parmenides showed to be impossible.

What is the relation of beings to the nature Being? In the case of an Aristotelian accident, the **per aliud** refers to the same substance as does the **in alio**: the substance is the cause of its own accidents. While when St. Thomas speaks of being as accidental to a substance, it must be caused **per aliud**, which is even other than the substance in which the accident inheres, as **in alio**. The two prepositional phrases refer to two different substances and not to one as in Aristotle. The substance from which being comes is the nature Being, and that in which it inheres, the nature that receives being. To make the notion of this being precise that is accidental in all things but God, he goes on to investigate the notion of reception:

Omne autem quod recipit aliquid ab aliquo est in potentia respectu illius, et hoc quod receptum in eo est est actus ejus.)R-G, c.4, p.35, ll.19-21)

The fact that anything as subject receives something from another implies that it is in potency to that other. This is similar to the Aristotelian natural philosophy in which the form is received by the matter as its act, the matter being the recipient and designated by the Aristotelian term potency. Proportionally the relations are similar. For St. Thomas, the thing receives its being and is in potency to its being. Essence is analogously related to *esse* as potency to act (as essence without precision, which is identical with the thing itself). In regard to the accidentality of being, we can use the Aristotelian terms “act” and “potency” to express a thing and its being. This is something of which Aristotle had no notion, and does not come from his philosophy. But the relation was one of being received and the Aristotelian terms to denote such a relationship were present and understood by all the 13th century students, rather than coin new terms, St. Thomas used these.

*Actus* is the Latin translation of the Greek ἐντελεχεία, which would mean “that which has its end or perfection in itself”. It is peculiarly Aristotelian and was coined by him. For him, the original word was ἐνδελεχεία that meant the permanent—a Platonic notion of eternity as perfection. This change of vocabulary helps to support theories of Aristotle’s development. Another word for the same concept was ἐντελεχεία, which means the state of being in activity or ‘operation’.” The Greek word was common in the adjectival form, ἐνεργεία, but this noun was another of Aristotelian coinage. The adjective denoted something “working”, “operating”, “acting”.

Ergo oportet quod ipsa quidditas vel forma quae est intelligentia sit in potentia respectu esse quod a Deo recipit; et illud esse receptum est per modum actus... (R-G, c.4, p.35, ll. 21-24)

Thus there is potency in the angels, and an angel is related to its being as potency to act. It, as a thing, receives being. There is no matter and form in a separated substance, except equivocally, so calling being a form and the thing matter. There is a relation of proportionality between these various relations:

a thing : subject or potency .  
its being : act or actuality

The thing, in terms of the accidentality of being, is the “*in quo*”: that in which being inheres.

Intellectus autem noster hoc modo intelligit esse quomodo invenitur in rebus inferioribus a quibus scientiam capit, in quibus esse non est subsistens, sed inhaerens. (*De Pot.*, q.7, a. 2, ad 7<sup>um</sup>, Mand.ed. II, p. 253b)

This last is the term for an accident, “inherent”, as opposed to a substance, “subsistent”, to be a “what”. *Esse* is the “what”, the thing or nature or substance only in God’s case. And our knowledge, of course, does not begin with God.

Sic ergo in angelis est compositio ex essentia et esse, non est compositio sicut ex partibus substantiae, sed sicut ex substantia et eo

quod adhaeret substantiae. (II *Quodl.*, a.3, c., Mand.ed., p.43)

The “*in alio*” is the subject in which being inheres, while the “*per aliud*” refers to something other than the subject; whereas, with an Aristotelian accident, both phrases refer to the same thing, the subject in which an accident inheres.

Thus, when we are speaking of the being that makes a substance exist (“substantial being”); in common with an Aristotelian accident, it is other than that in which it inheres—it inheres in another which it makes to be, as act in potency; but it is different from an Aristotelian accident in this, that it does not come from used nor is it caused by the substance in which it inheres, but from or by another substance whose nature is “to be”. A difficulty at once arises: how can being inhere in a thing which is not, in itself; must not a thing already be in some sense in order to receive being? The difficulty comes from thinking in Aristotelian terms here; in St. Thomas, neither essence taken as such, nor *esse* taken in itself is a reality. There is only one reality, with two components.

## THE REALITY OF THE ESSENCE—BEING COMPOSITION

From the way in which being is related to essence as act to potency, we see indicated that the composition is there in the thing itself, it is a real structure of finite things, outside the mind, not just a matter of aspects of things grasped by two mental acts that are needed to comprehend the unit, whole things. It is not as though the intellect were too weak to grasp reality in one act, conception; and hence had to perform a second operation to arrive at being as a further aspect of essence, but known by another act. Even in the case of God, the nature whose nature is “to be”, we have to express His reality as “He Who Is”, phrasing it in terms of a subject different from its being, although we insist that in Him, nature and being are identified:

Hoc autem quod est esse, in nullius creaturae ratione perfecte includitur; cujuslibet enim creatura esse est aliud ab ejus quidditate; unde non potest dici de aliqua creatura quod eam esse sit per se notum et secundum se. Sed in Deo esse suum includitur in ejus quidditatis ratione; quia in Deo idem est quid est et esse, ut dicit Boetius et Dionysius; et idem est an est, ut dicit Avicenna; et ideo per se et secundum se est notum. Sed quia quidditas Dei non est nobis nota, ideo quoad nos Deum esse non est per se notum, sed indiget demonstratione. Sed in patria, ubi essentiam ejus videmus, multo amplius erit nobis per se notum Deum esse, quam nunc per se notum quod affirmatio et negatio non sunt simul verae. (*De Veritate*, q.10, a.12, c., Mand. ed., I, p.269ab)

The reason for this difficulty with God is the weakness of our intellect; but since as was proved above, he exists, and he must be the unique case, and cannot coalesce with any other nature. Consequently our distinction of acts of knowledge with regard to the knowledge of finite things is based on a real structure in them. Thus once being is established as a nature, any other nature will have an act of being other than itself, the thing that is, and the whole finite being will be

structured this way. This is a real composition, not just in the human intellect as in the case of our knowledge of God as Someone Who Is. Implied in this is the reasoning of Parmenides, that if the nature of being enters into the thing or essence, a finite thing becomes impossible, all limit is excluded from it.

There are three texts for the *real* composition. We must investigate each, for they contain explicit statements of the doctrine to which the *De Ente et Essentia* leads. The first:

...omne quod est in genere substantiae, est compositum reali compositione; eo quod id quod est in praedicamento substantiae, est in suo esse subsistens, et oportet quod esse suum sit aliud quam ipsum... (*De Ver.*, q.27,a.1, ad 8<sup>um</sup>, Mand. ed. I, p.693b)

A thing is in reality composed of itself and being which is other than itself—thus it is not completely self-identical. This real composition is distinguished from a composition that is just mental:

...ad hoc quod aliquid sit in praedicamento aliquo accidentis, non requiritur quod sit compositum compositione reali, sed solummodo compositione rationis ex genere et differentia.(*ibid.*)

The text, although explicit, is an aside in a treatise on grace: Q. 27, *De Gratia*.

The second text is:

...sicut esse et quod est different in simplicibus secundum intentiones, ita in compositis different realiter; . . . in simplicibus necesse est quod ipsum esse et id quod est sit unum et idem realiter. Si enim essent aliud realiter, id quod est et ipsum esse iam non esset simplex sed compositum. (*In De Hebd.*, c.2, Mand.ed.*Opusc.*I, p.175-6)

This is a difficult text to understand without knowing the Aristotelian background. The word “intentiones” is not Aristotelian. It first occurs in the Latin translations of Arabic works in the Middle Ages. The Arabic word only means a “concept”, “notion” or “idea”. Why this word, with its root meaning of “stretching out” was used by the translators is still unknown. Some suggest the dynamism of thought, e.g., in Avicenna, but this is just speculation. Later scholastics will, of course, exploit the etymology; but here it does not connote its root meaning.

The real question is: why the plural “simplicia”? When as we have already seen, in St. Thomas’ adaptation of Parmenides’ doctrine, only one being, God, can be described in the way that “simple beings” are described here, the fact is that here he is commenting on Boethius and finds himself using the Aristotelian terminology. However, “simple” for Aristotle referred to the many separated substances, without matter. They are a kind of plurality; but St. Thomas has begun to talk instead about *esse* and *essentia*—and in this order, the notion “simple”, for him, can only refer to one Being. Elsewhere, when the same problem arises, he justifies this usage of Aristotle’s terms by citing Scriptural uses of the plural with regard to God:

Et hoc modo philosophi in ea pervenerunt, quod patet (*Rom. I:20*): 'Invisibilia Dei per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta conspiciuntur.' Unde et hujusmodi res divinae non tractantur a philosophis nisi prout sunt rerum omnium principia, et idea pertractantur in illa doctrina, in qua ponuntur ea quae sunt communia omnibus entibus, quae habet subjectum ens in quantum ens, et haec scientis divina dicitur. Est autem alius modus cognoscendi hujusmodi res, non secundum quod per effectus manifestantur, sed secundum quod ipsae seipsas, manifestant. Et hunc modum Apostolus I *Corinth. 2:11*: 'Quae sunt Dei, nemo novit nisi Spiritus Dei. Nos autem non spiritum hujus mundi accepimus, sed spiritum qui a Deo est, ut sciamus.' Et ibidem: (2:10) 'Nobis autem revelavit Deus per spiritum suum.' Et per hunc modum tractantur res divinae, secundum quod in seipsis subsistunt et non solum prout sunt rerum principia. (*In De Trin. 5, 4, c., Weyser ed., p. 48, ll.15-27*)

St. Thomas and also Boethius before him are taking Aristotelian terms and understanding them in a sense they never had in Aristotle. A really simple thing (God) is conceived by the mind compositely, but the composition is real in finite things. Again, this text is an aside, the occasion being a text of Boethius' *De Hebdomada*, to be explained. The last text:

Actus autem qui mensuratur aeterno, scilicet ipsum esse aeterni, differt ab eo cuius est actus re quidem. . . esse autem quod mensuratur aeternitate, est idem re cum eo cuius est actus, sed differt ratione tantum; et ideo aeternitas et nunc aeternitatis non differunt re sed ratione tantum; in quantum scilicet ipsa aeternitas respicit ipsum divinum Esse, et nunc aeternitatis quidditatem ipsius rei, quae secundum rem non est aliud quam suum esse sed ratione tantum. (*In I Sent., D.19,q.2,a.2, soln., Mand. ed. I, p. 471*)

Throughout, the contrast is between "re" and "ratione tantum", real and intentional difference, by reality or by reason alone. Time, according to Aristotle is the numbering of motion with respect to a 'before' and 'after'; and since creatures like the angels (spiritual beings) are not subject to motion, and yet they are not eternal, but they have *aevum*, in medieval terminology: the *duration* of spiritual beings. Thus this text emphasizes a real difference of the subject (thing) and its *esse* even in angels; whereas with God, our mind working as usual, knows Him in these terms, but the distinction is only logical or mental, since there is really an identity in Him of subject and *esse*.

There is a problem here, namely, there are only three texts in which St. Thomas speaks of a *real* composition: — and these are all occasional texts. On the other hand, when he is explicitly and professedly studying being and essence, although the argument leads in that direction, he does not formally stress it. In spite of the fact that these are formal texts—in which he states that the thing in reality is composed of itself and being, and that the two are not just logically distinct, by some merely intentional process—nevertheless, the term "real" is used only three times in all the voluminous works of St. Thomas to qualify the "distinction". It never occurs in the direct treatments of being; where it occurs, it is formal, but occasional. There can be no objection to

Thomas' use of the term, since he does use it; but the question then arises: how operative or important can it be? We have seen already what it means in his metaphysics— the 'real' is distinguished from the 'intentional' or 'logical'.

The point is that "real" is not a wide enough term to cover the essence—being distinction, or the thing and its being composition. The difference is true even in the intentional order, where the being again comes from another, not from the essence or thing itself, but from the knowing subject, and ultimately from the First Cause. Cf. *In II Sent.*, D.37, q.1,a.2, ad 3<sup>um</sup>, Mand. ed., p. 947, which continues:

Unde sicut ex compositione formae ad subjectum vel ad materiam, relinquitur quoddam esse substantiale vel accidentale; ita enim intellectus compositionem privationis cum subjecto per quoddam esse significat. Sed hoc esse non est nisi esse rationis, cum in re potius sit non esse; et secundum hoc quod in ratione esse habeat, constat quod a Deo est. (*ibid.*)

The deformity of sin is not a being, except in the mind, where it does have *esse rationis*, or *esse in intellectu*, but is still different from this being. Here its being can only come from the thinking subject conceiving it, though ultimately from God. The medieval mentality needed no such explanation on reality vs. intentionality as we have had to give; it was not touched by idealism. And so no one would question the difference of a permanent real chair and the chair as known by subjects, or the similarity between the two. But today, on account of the nineteenth century background of idealism and the scholastic controversies on the reality of this distinction, we must point out that when speaking of real things, St. Thomas qualifies the 'distinction' by 'real', but in general treatments of being, he never qualifies it, for it applies to both ways of being.

We know that in later scholastic work, *esse* and essence have often been considered as two realities, two things. This creates the problem: can *esse* and essence in created beings be regarded as in any way real, apart from each other? Do we have two realities as components, or one reality, a composite of two principles?

If *esse* be set apart from the essence and considered in opposition to it, how can we keep from identifying it with the nature "to be", God? To have a finite reality at all must we not have a composition at once? We cannot look on created existence as a reality apart from essence without Parmenides' reasoning applying at once, which leads to an identification of it with God.

Compare extension, which in Aristotle demands part outside of part, a process which potentially could be continued indefinitely until the smallest two actual adjacent parts, the ultimate parts, would turn out to be unextended. And, nevertheless, they provide the components of extension. Similarly, essence and being are not realities in themselves but when they are—they are always together—a reality is thus constituted. To grasp this we must review the doctrine that, considered in itself, essence abstracts from all being. It is equivalent to nothing; though potentially (i.e., insofar as it can be) it is not utter nothingness, which would preclude even the possibility of being. Essence can be or receives being.

## ESSENCE AND THE TRANSCENDENTALS

The most complete and extensive treatment of these notions by St. Thomas includes among them *unum, verum, bonum, aliquid*, and *res*. They are introduced as follows:

Enti non potest addi aliquid quasi extranea natura, per modum quo differentia additur generi, vel accidens subjecto; quia quaelibet natura essentialiter est ens. . . sed secundum hoc aliqua dicuntur addere supra ens, in quantum expriment ipsius modum, qui nomine ipsius entis non exprimitur. Quod dupliciter contingit: uno modo ut modus expressus sit aliquis *specialis modus entis*: sunt enim diversi gradus entitatis, secundum quod accipiuntur diversi modi essendi; et juxta modos accipiuntur diversa rerum genera . . . Alio modo ita quod modus expressus sit modus *generaliter consequens omne ens*; et hic modus dupliciter accipi potest: uno modo secundum quod consequitur omne *ens in se*; alio modo secundum quod consequitur unumquodque *ens in ordine ad aliud*. (*De Ver.*, q.1, a.1, c.)

Elsewhere, the only ones usually mentioned are *unum, verum, bonum*. They are occasionally called 'transcendentia' by St. Thomas; the term 'transcendentalia' seems to have originated with Suarez, who claimed he obtained it from Joannes Javellus, O.P. But it does not appear in any of the known works of Javellus. St. Thomas simply calls them 'nomina transcendentia'—the idea is that of 'leaping over' the categories, or of 'climbing over' all the divisions of being. There is room for many others besides the standard three he usually mentions: some suggest 'pulchrum', etc.

St. Thomas' doctrine is consistently that these are bound up with being, which is also one of them, and are not founded on the essence. We have seen that unity is spoken of this way in the *De Ent.*. What about truth?

Ratio veritatis fundantur in esse et non in quidditate. (*In Sent.*, D. 19, q.5, a.1, ad 7<sup>um</sup>, Mand.ed. I, p. 489)

Convenientiam vero entis ad intellectum exprimit hoc nomen verum...ad tertium dicendum quod dicitur, 'Diversum est esse et id quod est', distinguitur actus essendi ab eo cui actus ille convenit. Ratio autem entis ab actu essendi sumitur, non ab eo cui convenit actus essendi. (*De Ver.*, q.1, a.1, c. and ad 3<sup>um</sup> in contra, Mand.ed. I, p.5a)

These texts mean then that essence as such forms no basis for truth. Nothing true can be said of essence as such—there is no truth until being is involved, the being of the essence. 'Man', 'horse', 'animal' leaves a question mark about truth. We must affirm that 'man is rational', 'Horse is irrational', before the aspect of truth can enter. An essence must have being to have truth. As long as the essence either has real or intentional being, it can be true. Intentional being,

as a kind of being, is of course sufficient.

...ad minus enim oportet quod illud de quo aliquid enuntiatur, sit apprehensum; et ita habet aliquod esse ad minus in intellectu apprehendente; et ita constat quod semper veritati respondet aliquod esse; nec oportet quod semper respondet sibi esse in re extra animam. (*In I Sent.*, *ibid.*, ad 5<sup>um</sup>)

Here the statement is that in order to have truth, you always have to have some kind of being—truth and being correspond. And for this, at least being in the intellect is necessary and sufficient. The statement does not necessarily have to have real being—only the intentional being that is given by the act of judgment. When we speak then, e.g., of a definition as true, we do so because of the very fact that it has being in the mind; and the truth of a definition does not come from the nature as such, in itself, but from its intentional being.

Quidditatis esse est quoddam esse rationis et secundum istud esse dicitur veritas in prima operatione intellectus...per quem modum dicitur etiam definitio vera. (*In I Sent.*, *ibid.*, ad 7<sup>um</sup>)

On the *esse intellectus* and the act of composition, see *In II Sent.*, D. 37 q.1,a.2, ad 3<sup>um</sup>, Mand. ed., II, p. 947.. According, then, to the being which a thing has, whether in the intellect or in reality, it has truth, When a thing is not real, then, it can only be true according to its being in the mind, and not according to the essence itself. Compare:

Unumquodque cognoscibile est secundum quod est in actu, et non secundum quod est in potentia, ut dicitur in IX *Metaphys*: sic enim aliquid est ens et verum, quod sub cognitione cadit, prout actu est. (*ST I*, q.87. a. 1, c)

This accords, then, with St. Thomas' constant teaching that a thing has being or truth only insofar as it is in act. The truth of the possibles, e.g., does not belong to them as possibles, but according as they are actually known in some intellect—whether as apprehended in act by some created intellect or as known by the divine intellect. “We should however recall that the being which is attributable to the possible conceived by us is being—conceived—by—us. Now, that sort of being (being—conceived—by—us) is not the possible—which—can—exist.” (Gerard Smith, “Avicenna and the Possibles”, *New Schol.*, XVII [4Oct.,1943]), p.352. Thus neither being nor unity nor truth belongs to a created essence in itself, that is, in its absolute consideration.

Likewise, essence in itself has no goodness, either, since goodness is again one of the transcendentals.

Essentialis enim bonitas non attenditur secundum considerationem naturae absolutam, sed secundum esse ipsius; humanitas enim non habet rationem boni vel bonitatis nisi enim in quantum esse habet. (*De Ver.*, q.21,a.5,c., Mand.ed., I. p.528a.



Why the phrase “essential” goodness? It is because the essence, as a nature, determines the operation or action, which is always towards a goal, and involves the use of accidents, faculties, needed for action. Absolutely speaking, goodness then depends on accidents as well as on the essence, since it needs them for the perfecting or completion that is its good. There is a necessity, then, when speaking of the goodness that belongs to the essence alone apart from operation with accidents, to qualify it by “essentialis”, to distinguish it from the good that is involved in the perfection or completion of an essence in operation. So goodness, then, is just like truth and unity, does not follow on essence taken absolutely but on the being which that essence acquires. A thing has truth, unity, goodness in accordance as it has being.

In tantum est autem perfectum unumquodque in quantum est actu,  
unde manifestum est quod in tantum est aliquid bonum in quantum  
est ens; esse enim est actualitas omnis rei. (*ST*, I, q.5, a.1, c)

A thing is perfect or good insofar as it is actual, and since being is the act of everything, a thing is perfect or good insofar as it is. Note that *ens* is used in the sense of the act of being here, for it is resumed in the more usual word esse following it. Compare:

Omnis enim nobilitas cujuscumque rei est sibi secundum esse.  
(*SCG*, I, 28 Leon. ed. XIII, p. 86a, ll.7-8)

Insofar as the other transcendentals are concerned, St. Thomas does not treat them explicitly, but they too would all depend on being, not essence in itself; and we do have as a matter of fact the text of Avicenna, *Met.* V c.1, Ven.ed., fol.86v, cols.1-2. But St. Thomas simply mentions them as being transcendentals. The same principles would apply to them in this background.

Other considerations on goodness (problems connected with the essentiality of being) will be seen later, but would carry us too far afield here.

The doctrine that essence in itself, in its absolute consideration, implies neither being nor any of its transcendentals St. Thomas apparently means us to take quite literally and seriously.

## ESSENCE AND FIRST PRINCIPLES

Likewise, the first principle of demonstration, the so-called “Principle of Contradiction” (or non-contradiction) — “A thing cannot be and not be in the same respects”—is not founded on essences in themselves, but on being. “Tree” is neither contradictory nor non-contradictory. Even conceptually adjacent to attributes: “rational tree”, non-rational tree”, there is neither contradiction nor non-contradiction, unless a judgment is made—“Trees are non-rational” i.e., being, whether intentional or real, is at issue.

Ad hujus evidentiam sciendum est quod, cum sit duplex operatio intellectus; una, qua cognoscit quod quid est, quae vocatur indivisibilium intelligentia; alia, qua componit et dividit: in utroque est aliquod primum. In prima quidem operatione est aliquod primum quod cadit in conceptione intellectus, scilicet hoc quod dico ens;

nec aliquid hac operatione potest mente concipi, nisi intelligatur ens.\* Et quia hoc principium ‘Impossibile est esse et non esse simul’, dependet ex intellectu entis, sicut hoc principium.’ ‘Omne totum est majus sua parte,’ ex intellectu totius et partis: ideo hoc etiam principium est naturaliter primum in secunda operatione intellectus, scilicet componentis et dividensis. (*In IV Met.*, 1.6, Cathala ed., #605.

The first principle of demonstration is thus being placed in the order of *esse*—located in the second operation of the intellect, intentionally— expressed by its Aristotelian designation, but equivalent to what we would call judgment. Note the doctrine of the opening lines of the *De Ent.*, which is being repeated: the presupposition of the concept of being in all knowledge.

[\*We suggest that this is a participle, since if it is the first operation of the intellect that is being discussed here, St. Thomas has in mind, particularly the active component of the composite concept of being. In other words, “aliquid” (as Latin word order would indicate) is the subject of “intelligatur”. A thing must be considered as being, if we are to make an abstraction, form a concept. Simple apprehension is inseparable from judgment. This is the only interpretation of the text consistent with the texts given above on the dependence of truth on being. It is a rare use of the word, but has other justifying instances in Thomas’ *Commentary on IV Metaphysics*. The doctrine of knowledge is quite complicated. Ed.]

Compare:

First then this at least is obviously true, that the word ‘be’ or ‘not be’ has a definite meaning, so that not everything will be ‘so and not so’. Again, if ‘man’ has one meaning, let this be ‘two-footed animal’; by having one meaning I understand this: — if ‘man’ means X then if A is a man, ‘X’ will be what ‘being a man’ means for him...(*Met.* I 4,1006a30-35)

Throughout this passage, Aristotle bases the first principle of demonstration on form or essence, which is finished or complete in itself for him.

But in St. Thomas, a form or essence has yet to receive the act of being as its ‘*complementum*’, to complete or finish it. Considered apart from being, it is not complete or finished, and is not determined to one or another side of a contradiction. It must be before the principle of non-contradiction will apply and verified of it. A thing is composed then of itself and “something” else—we can see the contrast between this and the later Leibnizian Principle of Identity. However, this does not mean that the two constituents, as things, come together to make a third thing. There is *essence* and the composed being, but there is no third thing, for it still, as a thing (*essence*), is the same thing:

1. Videtur quod angelus substantialiter non componatur ex essentia et esse. Essentia enim angeli est ipse angelus, quia quidditas simplicis est ipsum simplex. Si ergo angelus componeretur ex essentia et esse, componeretur ex seipso et alio. Hoc autem est inconveniens. . .

Ad primum ergo dicendum, quod aliquando ex his quae simul junguntur, relinquatur aliqua res tertia, sicuti ex anima et corpore constituitur humanitas, quae est homo, unde homo componitur ex corpore. Aliquando autem ex his quae simul junguntur, non resultat res tertia sed resultat quaedam ratio composita; sicut ratio hominis albi resolvitur in rationem hominis et in rationem albi; et in talibus aliquid componitur ex seipso et alio, sicut album et ex albedine. (II *Quodl.*, a.2, ad 1<sup>um</sup>)

To understand this fully, we must note the following texts:

Illud autem quod est maxime formale omnium est ipsum esse...  
(*ST.* I, q.7, a.1, c.)

Esse autem est illud quod est magis intimum cuilibet, et quod profundius omnibus inest... (*ST.* I, q.8, a.1, c.)

...inter omnia, esse est illud quod immediatus et intimus convenit rebus... (*De An. Q. Un.*, a.9, c.)

Thus, although being is the most fundamental and intimate element or aspect to a thing, it is not the thing. The thing itself is not what is most basic to it— but to be itself, it must have this basic constituent. If there is no *esse*, then there is no Socrates. On the subject of the intimacy of being, compare:

Hoc quod dico esse est inter omnia perfectissimum: quod ex hoc patet quia actus est semper perfectior potentia. Quaelibet autem forma signata non intelligitur in actu nisi per hoc quod esse ponitur. Nam humanitas vel igneitas potest considerari ut in potentia materiae existens, vel ut in virtute agentis, aut etiam ut in intellectu: sed hoc quod habet esse, efficitur actu existens. Unde patet quod hoc quod dico esse est actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum. Nec intelligendum est quod ei quod dico esse, aliquid addatur quod sit eo formalius, ipsum determinans, sicut actus potentiam. (*De Pot.*, q.7, a.2, ad 9<sup>um</sup>)

A thing thus has to be composed of itself and an other-than-itself even to be a thing. A created thing then is not perfectly self-identical, and in fact cannot be perfectly self-identical, even in order to be a thing, or to be the thing it is. Compare:

Invenitur igitur in substantia composita ex materia et forma duplex ordo: unus quidem ipsius materiae ad formam, alius autem *ipsius rei* iam compositae ad esse participatum. Non enim est esse rei neque forma eius neque materia ipsius, sed aliquid *adveniens rei* per formam. (*De Subst. Sep.*, c.6, #45, p.151, Perrier ed. [emphasis])

added])

Leibniz split up the Aristotelian first principle of demonstration into two principles— that of identity and that of non-contradiction. The latter did have a medieval background, although not under that designation, but under the Aristotelian one; but the former did not appear at all in the Middle Ages.

And I have sufficiently shown in my *Theodicaea*, that this *moral necessity* is a good thing, agreeable to the divine perfection; agreeable to the great principle or ground of *existences*, which is that of the *want of a sufficient reason*: whereas *absolute and metaphysical necessity*, depends upon the other great principle of our reasoning, that of *essence* that is, the principle of identity or contradiction: for what is absolutely necessary, is the only possible way, and its contrary implies a contradiction. (*Letters to Dr. Samuel Clarke* (London, 1717 ed., p.163), Duncan ed., *The Philosophical Works or Leibniz* (Yale, 1908), p.348, #10)

Thus he insisted, as Aristotle did, that both were principles of essences. There is no difference essentially here from the Aristotelian metaphysics.

In order to *be* itself, an essence has to have something more than itself: it has to be. There can be, of course, Thomistic phrasings or usages of the Principle of Identity, but it must be carefully redefined. As stated by Leibniz, it is not a first principle for St. Thomas. An essence cannot be self-identical unless it *is*; and then only because it *is*. If we take it as it was taken in Leibniz, we will have a St. Thomas no different from Aristotle; whereas it is quite clear that on this point he has gone far beyond Aristotle.

Modern texts usually identify this principle with the Principle of Contradiction, but there is a wide range of discussion on what it actually entails. Clarke in his logic purports that it is: “Every being is identified with its own nature.” From what we have seen, St. Thomas could not agree with this.

And while Maritain explains this principle in terms of subject and predicate, this explanation still entails a bit of maneuvering because it is not as simple as “A is B” for St. Thomas—for we cannot conceive of A without the simultaneous “A is” or of B without the simultaneous “B is”:

...ad cujus evidentiam considerandum est quod hoc verbum *est* quandoque in enunciatione praedicatur secundum se; ut cum dicitur ‘Socrates est’: per quod nihil aliud intendimus significare, quam quod Socrates sit in rerum natura. Quandoque vere non praedicatur *per se*, quasi principale praedicatum, sed quasi conjunctum principali praedicato ad connectendum ipsum subjecto: sicut cum dicitur, ‘Socrates est albus’ non est intentio loquentis ut asserat Socratem esse in rerum natura, sed ut attribuat ei albedinem mediante hoc verbo *est*; et ideo in talibus, *est* praedicatur ut adjacens principali praedicato. Et dicitur esse tertium, non quia sit tertium praedictum, sed quia est tertia dictio posita in enunciatione,

quas simul cum nomine praedicato facit unum praedicatum, ut sic enunciatio dividatur in duas partes et non in tres. (*In II Periherm.*, 1.2, Leon. ed., #2)

There is no perfect identity between subject and predicate in the sentence, "Socrates is"; that would be true only of God.

William of Auvergne and Cajetan before and after St. Thomas did not have this notion at all, but regarded essences as self-identical before they came to be.

Cajetan ne serait-il pas soucieux de renforcer la distinction ontologique de la substance, afin de préparer pour l'*esse*, qui chez Thomas active la forme, un récepteur déjà pleinement constitué?... Il se représente l'essence de la substance déjà constituée avant de recevoir l'existence, alors qu'avant l'existence, il n'y a rien. Gilson, E., "Cajetan et L'existence", *Tijdschrift voor Philosophie*, XV, #2, (June, 1953), p.274 and p.275:

This in spite of the fact that for Thomas, essence considered by itself is literally nothing. In addition to the text in *De Pot.*, q.3, a.5, ad 2<sup>um</sup> is further supported:

4. Praeterea, quod non habet esse nisi ab alio, in se consideratum, non est . . . Ad quartum dicendum quod illud habet esse ab alio, in se consideratum, est non ens, si ipsum sit aliud quam ipsum esse quod ab alio accipit... (*De Pot.*, q.3, a.13, ad 4<sup>um</sup>)

Potest autem quis dicere quod id quod participat aliquid est secundum se carens illo; sicut superficies quae nata est participare colorata, secundum se considerata est non color et non colorata. Similiter igitur id quod participat esse oportet esse non ens. Quod autem est in potentia ens et participativum ipsius, non autem secundum se est ens . . . Si igitur per hoc quod dico non ens removeatur solum esse in actu, ipsa forma secundum se considerata est non ens, sed esse participans. (*De subst. separ.*, c.6, Perrier ed. *Opusc.*, pp.150-51, ##44-5)

Gilson carefully looks at this question in *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto, 1952<sup>2</sup>), pp.224-27:

How could *esse* be distinct from *essentia*, they say, since unless it exists essence is nothing? How can essence be composed with that apart from which it is not? And true enough, the thing is logically impossible; but it is metaphysically possible because to the metaphysician 'Socrates est' does not mean that Socrates *has* the predicate *to be*, but that Socrates *is* a being. The metaphysician says that there is in the being Socrates, as the act of its formal essence,

'*aliquid fixum et quietum in ente\**, namely *esse*, in virtue of which Socrates is a 'being'. For indeed, outside of being there is nothing. (*ibid.*, p.226)

For Aristotle, in logic or according to the logical order, the primary *ousia* (*entity, substance*) means the individual composite of form and matter. The secondary *ousiai* are the predicables, genus or species. In the metaphysical order, the primary *ousia* is form, i.e., the primary instance of being. So for Thomas, the composite is open to the analysis of *esse* and *essence*, and in the metaphysical order, that essence is not, apart from *esse*. Compare:

The truth is that *what is* or *ens* considered from the point of view of its quiddity or whatness can lay no claim to exist. The reason for the existence of *what is* cannot be found in itself. Strictly speaking, such beings are not; they only have being and only in virtue of what they *have* can they be said to be. (Phelan, G., *Abundant Spring*, "Being and the Metaphysician")

There is only one reality, *res*, the thing as such. This is not a distinction of reason but a distinction that is actually, truly, and existentially present independently of the consideration of the human mind. Otherwise everything would *be* the *being* as described by Parmenides.

## HISTORICAL GENESIS OF THE PROBLEM OF THE "REAL DISTINCTION"

Strangely the composition of *esse* and *essence* has been viewed in neo-Scholastic circles as one involving two realities. Many have looked at it as a distinction between two things. Despite its ubiquity this view should be looked upon with suspicion; how could essence be a reality or thing, unless it was placed *in rerum natura* by the act of its being or *esse*? Some examples:

...sicut esse est duplex, scilicet existentiae et essentiae, ita duplex est realitas essentiae et existentiae, et licet nulla res componat cum sua realitate, tamen cum hoc stat, quod componat cum existentiae; unde essentia hominis in reali praedicamento, substantiae scilicet, reponitur: posita autem in rerum natura fit realis realitate existentiae...

Existencia enim substantiae est substantia, et existencia accidentia est accidens . . . St. Thomas autem ex fundamentis in dubitatione praecedenti positus opinatur intelligentias et qualibet creaturam esse compositas ex actu et potentia, sicut ex duabus rebus distinctis realiter, esse scilicet et essentia...Dicimus igitur in proposito intelligentias cum subsistant habere in se quidditatem et existentiam adunatas, ut potentiam et actum, et sic compositas esse ex duabus rebus realiter distinctis. (Thomas del Vio, Cardinal Cajetan, *In De*

*Ent.*, c.5, Laurent ed., pp.158-59, 161; ##101-102, q.12)

Many contemporary Dominicans and texts follow Cajetan. For instance:

...c'est distinguer l'une de l'autre deux realites... (F.X. Marquart, *Revue Thomiste*, XXXII (1926), p.67)

Therefore positive perfection and the absence of more perfection are opposed realities in the finite thing, or are really distinct. (A. Little, *The Platonic Heritage of Thomism* (Dublin, 1951), p.213)

Omnes concedunt in rebus creatis essentiam et existentiam aliquo modo distingui, cum essentia earum optime concipi possit sine existentia. 'Possum enim intelligere', ait S. Thomas (*De ente et ess.* c.5), 'quid est homo vel phoenix, et tamen ignorare, an esse habeat in rerum natura.' Controvertitur autem, utrum inter essentiam et existentiam intercedat distinctio realis an rationis tantum. Et quaestio non est de essentia possibili (de qua agimus paragrafo sequenti), sed reali, in rerum natura existente, et proinde individua. Quaeritur enim, in individuis creatis existentibus sitne alia realitas essentia, alia existentia, ita ut ipsum individuum ex duabus realitatibus in rerum natura existentibus et independenter a mentis consideratione distinctis, essentia et existentia, coalescat. Quaestio igitur est de distinctione reali *positiva* inter essentiam actualem existentem et ejus existentiam, non de distinctione reali *negativa* inter essentiam mere possibilem et existentiam (seu essentiam existentem), quam omnes admittunt tamquam inter realitatem actualem existentem (essentiam actualem existentem) et ejus negationem (essentiam mere possibilem). (Gredt, *Elem.Phil.Arist.-Thom.*, Vol. II, pp.104-5, #704,2)

Ad solvendas difficultates nota: a) Inter merum nihil et existentiam datur tertiam: realitas essentiae. Haec realitas potest vocari 'esse', at non est 'esse' existentiae, sed esse essentiae, i.e., realitas physica essentiae, identificata cum ipsa essentia. Realitas essentiae jam est actus, at non est actus ultimus (existentia), sed relate ad actum ultimum, ad existentiam, se habet ut potentia: est *potentialis* existentia, potentia subjectiva, physica, quae actuatur per existentiam. (ibid., p.111, #707, 4)

What generated this confusion of the composition of two things? This requires a special study and a different background than that of St. Thomas. To understand it is necessary to see what happened to the Thomistic doctrine after 1274 the year of Thomas's death.

Thomas had inherited the accidental nature of *esse* from Avicenna, and seems always ready to side with him against Aristotle, who said every substance is essentially a being. And yet Thomas does side with Aristotle in these texts:

Sciendum est autem quod circa hoc Avicenna aliud sensit. Dixit enim quod unum et ens non significant substantiam rei, sed significat aliquid additum. Et de ente quidem hoc dicebat, quia in qualibet re quae habet esse ab alio, aliud est esse rei, et substantia sive essentia ejus: hoc autem nomen ens, significat ipsum esse. Significat igitur (ut videtur) aliquid additum essentiae . . . Sed in primo quidem non videtur dixisse recte. (*In IV Met.*, 1.2, Cathala ed., ## 556, 558)

Another locus:

Hoc autem non considerans Avicenna posuit quod unum et ens sunt praedicata accidentalia, et quod significant naturam additam supra ea de quibus dicuntur. (*In X Met.*, 1.3, Cathala ed., #1981)

Thomas criticizes this in the following paragraph and continues:

Nam ens quod significat compositionem propositionis est praedicatum accidentale, quia compositio fit per intellectum secundum determinatum tempus. Esse autem in hoc tempore vel in illo, est accidentalis praedicatum. Sed ens quod dividitur per decem praedicamenta, significat ipsas naturas decem generum secundum quod sunt actu vel potentia. (*ibid.*, #1982).

To the extent that he sides with Avicenna, Thomas might seem to side also with **William of Auvergne**:

Quoniam autem ens potentiale est non ens per essentiam tunc ipsum et ejus esse quod non est ei per essentiam, *due sunt revera*, et alterum accidit alteri, nec cadit in rationem nec quidditatem ipsius. Ens igitur secundum hunc, modum compositum est et resolubile in suam possibilitatem sive quidditatem et suum esse. (*De Trin*, c, 7 Paris 1674. ed., Suppl. emphasis added)

It might seem to some that Thomas did not go much beyond this statement, except in stressing the character of *esse* as act and the complement of essence as potency. In any case, the question is obviously not disputed before the time of Thomas.

**Siger of Brabant** at the close of Thomas' academic career, notes three opinions, pointing up the fact that some disagreement is arising:

Diversae sunt opiniones circa hoc. Aliqui dicunt quod res est per dispositionem additam essentiae suae, ita quod secundum ipsos res et ens non sunt ejusdem intentionis ita quod esse est aliquid addi-



tum essentiae. Haec est opinio Alberti Commentatoris . . . Sed contra: quicquid est universaliter in re est effectus Primi Principii, et nihil est eorum quae pertinent ad rem in re ipsa neque essentialiter neque accidentaliter, quin reducat in Primum Principium; ergo haec distinctio nulla est, scilicet inter essentiam rei et esse per hoc quod unum sit effectus Primi Principii et aliud non . . . Alia opinio est eadem in ratione. Quidam dicunt sic, quia vident Avicennam ponere quod ratio entis et rei sunt diversae intentiones; et hoc non ponit, ut videtur, Aristoteles, sed contradicit ... (*Quaest. in Met.*, Intr. q.7, soln., Graiff ed., p.14, ll.86-100; p.16, ll.17-20)

So, with Aristotle, Siger rejects the opinion of Albert and Avicenna that “the essence is of itself and its being from the First Principle”, on the grounds that the essence is also from God. Essence is not something self-explanatory, and only being given to it by God—all things are from the First Principle.

Hence Siger already conceives the essence by itself as some reality of its own; at least he accepts the Avicennian terms of the discussion, namely that essence is self-explanatory or in some way real independent of the accident, being. But he sides with Aristotle and identifies an essence and its being, because all things are caused by God—not just the being of an essence, but the essence itself. Throughout, the two are conceived as two separate things. He goes on directly to mention the third opinion, of “certain ones”, namely St. Thomas, which is an “intermediary opinion” but rejects it insofar as he cannot understand how it could be explained.

**Giles of Rome** gives us our next evidence of the situation. An Augustinian priest born in 1247 (Egidio Colonna), he was active in the 1290s, and died in 1316. Late in the year 1276, he published his *Theoremata de Corpore Christi*, containing fifty propositions. Prop.XXIX mentions that many were tiring the students about being and essence in creatures, and that:

Multi, cum loquuntur de esse et essentia in solis verbis sustentantur... (*ibid*)

Many are dealing only with words Giles says and proposes to write in detail about this question later. In his oral teaching, he was already taking a leading part in the discussion. Why does he say others were missing the point? He lists some of the formula that were then in use:

...quod esse accidit cuilibet creaturae et dicit aliquid receptum in natura cujuslibet entis creati et facit realem differentiam in rebus creatis. (*ibid.*)

These formulae more or less express the view of St. Thomas. But Giles immediately says that they are not enough but are merely explanations of prior disputes. What must be shown is:

...quomodo ergo habeat ista realis distinctio et utrum essentia et esse possunt dici duae res et quomodo esse fluit ab essentia et est actus ejus. (*ibid.*)

Thus he gives a hint that his later doctrine will be concerned with a distinction between two things. The doctrine was finally fully developed in *Theoremata de Esse et Essentia*. Giles gives as his reason for investigating the problem:

Quia tota causa quare nos investigamus quod esse sit res differens ab essentia ex hoc sumitur ut possimus salvare res creatas esse compositas et posse creari et posse esse et non esse, quia non creatur per se quod est potentia tantum nec quod est actus tantum, sed quod est compositum ex utrisque, sic etiam non dicimus aliquid posse esse et non esse, nisi quod est hoc modo compositum. Et quis omnia ista salvare possemus si diceremus omnia esse composita ex materia et forma, ideo hoc posito forte difficile esset ostendere quare oporteret quod esse esset res realiter ab essentia differens et superaddita illi. (*Th. de E. et E.*, Th.19, Hocedez ed., p.129, ll.1-11)

Thus the whole reason for the problem is the doctrine of creation, which must be safeguarded. Note that *esse* has already been made into a *res*. *Res* would be said of accidents, and so in the same way it is said of *esse*, as superadded to the essence. "Thing" might be a little too strong a translation here; perhaps it would be better to say reality. But compare:

Sed quia posset aliquis dicere quod sicut materia et sua extensio, quae ejus determinatio dici potest, non sunt duae res sed hujusmodi extensio est solum quidam modus se habendi quam habet materia ex eo quod est quantitati conjuncta, sic essentia et esse non sunt duae res realiter differentes, sed esse est quaedam determinatio essentiae et quidam modus se habendi, quem habet essentia ex eo quod est ab aliquo agente producta. Hoc enim stare non potest. Nam nisi materia conjungeretur quantitati quae realiter differt ab ipsa, non competeret ei illa extensio nec illa modus essendi qui realiter non differt ab ipsa. Non possumus ergo dicere quod ipsi essentiae vel cuicumque rei creatae competat determinatio per esse, nisi sit in illa re aliquod esse ab ea realiter differens et distinctum, sicut nec materiae competit extensio per quantitatem nisi sit in ea quantitas quae sit ab ea realiter differens. Dicemus ergo quod sicut materis formaliter extenditur per quantitatem, sic essentia formaliter existit per esse. Et, sicut materia et quantitas sunt duae res, sic essentia et esse sunt duae res realiter differentes. (*ibid.*, Th.19, Hocedez ed., pp.133-34)

Thus essence has its own reality just as matter, and *esse* is a reality as much as quantity. The composition is one of two things. This is the least that he says. On essence, compare:

Imaginabimur enim quod in rebus materialibus, in quibus habet lo-

cum propositio tacta, est forma partis et forma totius, esse autem quod causatur a forma totius est realiter differens ab ipsa quidditate et ab ipsa forma totius, vel ab ipsa essentia, ut si humanitas est in homine forma totius, esse quod causatur ab ea est realiter differens ab ipsa, ut dicamus hominem esse compositum ex humanitate et esse, sive ex essentia et esse. Nam ipsa humanitas, cum sit tota essentia hominis et tota quidditae ejus, dicta est forma totius, quia dicit totum per modum formae. Esse autem quod causatur a forma totius ut in decima nona propositione patebit, est res differens ab ipsa forma. Sed esse quod causatur in materia a forma partis est quidam modus essendi et est quaedam determinatio materiae, non est res tertia differens a materia et a forma, nec est illud esse de quo dicitur quod omnes res creatae sunt compositae ex essentia et esse. Unde in propositione octava dicebatur quod licet in rebus materialibus videatur reperiri *duplex esse*, unum quod causatur a forma partis et aliud quod fluit a forma totius, unum tamen illorum est esse simpliciter, ut aliud quod causatur a forma totius, aliud vero non est esse simpliciter, sed modus essendi potent nuncupari, ut illud quod fluit a forma partis.

Volumus itaque ad praesens rationibus evidentis declarare quod esse quod fluit in materia a forma partis non est res tertia, differens ab utrisque. Ostenditur enim quod hujusmodi esse non est res realiter differens ab essentia. Et quia quando nos loquimur de esse, intelligimus de eo esse quod ponit in numerum cum essentia, ex quo esse et essentia omnia creata dicuntur esse composita, propter quod bene dictum est quod hujusmodi esse quod fluit a forma partis non est esse simpliciter, sed magis est modus essendi ...

Sed cum non possit intelligi talis natura composita nisi intelligatur ipsa perfectio per quasi materia perficitur et forma perficit, si perfectio illa diceret ipsum esse rei, tunc esse esset de ratione quidditatis rerum et non possent intellegi res nisi intelligenentur esse; quoniam tamen constet hoc esse falsum, dicendum est quod perfectio illa materiae est solum quidam modus essendi vel quidam modus se habendi, vel est quaedam determinatio materiae per formam, non est autem quaedam res tertia realiter differens ab utrisque...

Bene ergo dictum est quod esse et perfectio causata in materia a forma partis, non est illud esse de quo dicimus rem componi. ex essentia et esse, nec hujusmodi perfectio sive esse ponit in numerum cum ipsa essentia vel cum materia et forma, ut ab eis realiter differens dici possit, sed est solum quaedam determinatio materiae quae communi nomine quidam modus essendi vel quidam modus se habendi poterit nuncupari. (*ibid.*, Th. 16, Hocedez ed., pp.101-2; 110, ll. 8-17; 111, ll.9-16)

Thus *essense* even has its own proper *esse*, though this is not really distinct from essence. This sounds like Avicenna's *esse proprium*. Note the "duplex esse". Thus essence is actual in itself, but its own actuality is not enough to make it exist by itself:

Dicere itaque possumus quod, licet essentia in qua suscipitur esse dicat de se aliquam actualitatem, quam non dicit materia quia materia est potentia pura in genere entium, illa tamen actualitas quasi importat essentia non est tanta quod sufficiat ad hoc quod essentia existat et ad hoc quod sit in rerum natura. (*ibid.*, *Th.5*, Hocedez ed., p.21, ll.9-15)

Note, incidentally, that the background of this question is a comparison of creation with generation:

Unde sicut forma non est id quod per se generatur, quia nec habet per se esse, sed est generationis terminus, vel est generationis ratio, quia in tantum aliquid generatur in quantum suscipit formam, ita quod generatio est via in formam, sic esse creaturarum non est id quod per se creaturarum non est id quod per se creatur quia non habet per se esse sed est terminus et ratio creationis, quia in tantum aliquid creatur in quantum habet esse. (*ibid.*, *Th. 5*, Hocedez ed., p.20, ll.3-10)

This will be significant in Cajetan. See Gilson, "Cajetan et L'Existence", *Tijdschr. voor Phil.*, XV, 2, (June, 1953), p.274.

Concerning angels, Giles of Rome, again giving essence a proper actuality, says:

Dicemus ergo quod essentia angeli non est tantae actualitatis quod possit actu existere nim a Primo Angente detur ei actualites aliqua essentiam ipsam complens et perficiens, quae actualitas communi nomine dicitur esse. Nam si essentia angeli tantae actualitatis esset quod posset actu existere absque eo quod adderetur ei alia actualitas, *vel aliud esse*, nullomodo essentia illa posset creari nec posset non esse. (*ibid.*, *Th. 19*, Hocedez ed., p.150, ll.7-14)

Again, too, reference is made to "duplex esse" and a reality proper to essence in itself. Giles, then is proposing a distinction between two things in created being, and gives the essence its own actuality apart from *esse*. He has announced his notion of essence as distinct from existence. Essence was something that had its own proper being, and therefore its own proper actuality—and this was sufficient to make the essence intelligible in itself. And to it another *esse* had to be added in order to make it exist; not to make it intelligible or actual, but just to put it into existence. Such an essence is actual, a reality, a thing; and the existence added to it is also a thing. The distinction between essence and *esse* is a distinction between two things.

**Henry of Ghent**, roughly a contemporary of Giles, born at Tournai or Ghent in Flanders, was a

canon at Tournai. In 1274 we find him as archdeacon of Bruges, and later at the Paris Faculty of Arts. From 1276 on, he was on the Faculty of Theology. In 1277, he was on the commission of Archbishop Tempier that drew up the theses for condemnation. He died in 1293. In a *Quodlibet* for Christmas, 1276, he defends the position that a creature is its own being.

In generali autem erat quaestio utrum creatura ipsa sit suum esse. Et arguebatur quod non. Primo, quia cum ipsa creatura sit quid subsistens, si ipsa esset suum esse, ipsa esset subsistens esse. Subsistens esse est purum, quod non est nisi Deus. Creature ergo esset Deus. Hoc autem falsum est. Ergo etc. Secundo, quia si creatura non esset aliud re a suo esse, cum ipsum esse in quantum huiusmodi non est limitatum, et ita in initum, esset quaelibet creatura in natura sua infinita. Quod falsum est; ergo et primum similiter. Tertio, quia si creatura non est aliud re a suo esse, cuius ipsum esse non potest a seipso separari, esse non posset separari a re creata, et sic esset omnino incorruptilibus. Quod falsum est. Quarto, ad idem est auctoritas Boetii qui dicit in libro *De Hebdomadibus*: Ita diversum est esse et id quod est; quod non esset verum si idem re essent creatura et esse ejus. Ergo etc. Item in eadem: Quod est accepta essendi forma est atque consistit; sed quod accipit, aliud est re ab eo quod accipit. Ergo etc. Item, in *Hebdomade* secunda: Fit participatio cum aliquid jam est. Et in *Hebdomade* quinta: Omne quod est participat eo quod est esse ut sit. Ergo quod est in se jam est aliquid ante esse quod participat. Hoc autem non esset nisi essent diversa re. Ergo etc. Item, *Hebdomade* sexta: Omni composito aliud est esse, aliud ipsum est.

Quod non esset si idem essent re. Ergo etc. (*I Quodl.*, q.9, Paris ed. 1518, Fol. 6v)

Thus the objections that he has to face are: (1) If a creature were its own being, it would be subsistent being and therefore unique and primary and no different from God. This is the whole Parmenidean tradition known generally in the Middle Ages, found in St. Thomas' *De Ente et Essentia* and in Giles of Rome; (2) If the creature were not "*aliud re a suo esse*", then it would be unlimited and so infinite. This is ultimately Plotinus and neo-Platonists, common to all, including Giles and St. Thomas. (3) If being were identified with the creature itself, it would be inseparable from the creature and therefore creatures would be incorruptible. This is from Avicenna: being must be accidental to creatures otherwise it would be necessary. (4) The difference, from Boethius' authority, between *quod est* and *esse* in creatures.

Et sic in quacumque creatura esse non est aliquid re aliud ab ipsa essentia additum ei ut sit, immo ipsa sua essentia qua est id quod est. Quaelibet creatura habet esse in quantum ipsa est effectua et similitudo divini esse, ut dictum est... Et peccavit Avicenna multum cum aestimavit quod ens et unum significant dispositiones essentiae, et unum et ens reducuntur ad essentiam dispositam et non

sunt dispositiones additae essentiae sicut est dispositio in albo et nigro... Et sic omnibus modis oportebit dare quod res quaelibet habet esse par suam essentiam, ut esse non sit res aliqua addita essentiae. (*I Quodl.*, q. 9, Paris ed. 1518, Fol., 6v-7r)

In the response, Henry defends the position that everything has being through its own essence; being is not a thing or reality added to the essence. This immediately places his arguments in the background of Giles. He is arguing against Giles, not against St. Thomas. Whether he considered Giles and Thomas equivalent is another question. At least this is against Giles, who had written earlier in the year and taught a distinction of two things.

In this place also, Henry develops the doctrine that also appears at least in Giles' later works, of a "duplex esse,"

Et est hic distinguendum de esse secundum quod distinguit Avicenna in quinto in fine *Metaphysicae* suae, quod quoddam est esse rei quod habet essentialiter de se, quod appellatur esse essentiae; quoddam vero quod recipit ab alio, quod appellatur esse actualis existentiae. Primum esse habet essentia creaturae essentialiter, secundum tantum participative in quantum habet formale exemplar in Deo, et per hoc cadit sub ente quod est commune essenziale ad decem praedicamenta, quod a tali esse in communi accepto imponitur. Et est illud esse rei definitivum quod de ipsa ante esse actuale solum habet existere in mentis conceptu de quod dicitur quod definitio est oratio indicans quid est esse. (*ibid.*, Fol., 7r)

This is the *locus classicus* for the term "esse essentiae". It was apparently coined by Henry; and it is later taken up by Giles. The notion of actuality is emphasized in the second type of being, to set it off from the first. A long controversy, which will last for centuries, will be couched in these terms. Note that the Aristotelian is used in the last sentence, as it is known through Boethius. Henry of Ghent takes from Avicenna this distinction between two *esse*'s: one which is proper to the thing, in which it is defined, and the other of actual existence. For him, "actual" just does not seem to refer to existence in the mind (although it would for St. Thomas); he regarded it as potential. The *duplex esse* is made to correspond to *esse in re* and *esse in intellectu*, and only the former is actual. This will change later as Jean Paulus, *Henri de Gand* (Paris: Vrin, 1938), p. 34, notes this *esse essentiae* is an innovation in Latin Scholasticism, and capital from the point of view of its later development.

The fully developed doctrine is this: essence is the nature, and apart from any existence, and in this, its absolute consideration, it is given its own *proper esse* (*proprium esse*), just as it was in Avicenna. The Avicennian origins of this doctrine are clear.

Est igitur intelligendum quod circa quidditatem et naturam rei cuiuscumque triplicem contingit habere intellectum verum et unum falsum. Triplicem quidem habet intellectum verum sicut et tres modos habet in esse. Unum enim habet esse in natura extra in rebus, alterum vero habet esse rationis, tertium vere habet esse essen-

tiae. Animal enim acceptum cum accidentibus suis in singularibus est res naturalis; acceptum vero cum accidentibus suis in anima est res rationis; acceptum vero secundum se est res essentiae, de qua dicitur quod esse ejus est prius quam esse ejus naturae vel rationis. (*III Quodl.*, q. 9, Paris ed. 1518, Fol. 61v.)

This passage was written about the year 1273/9. Now there is a threefold *esse*. The first two correspond to the two ways a thing can be in St. Thomas. But here, unlike St. Thomas, Henry regards the essence conceived absolutely as having its own proper type of being, where St. Thomas said it abstracted from all being whatsoever and was in itself nothing. Thus for Henry, essence conceived without anything that comes to it from being in the mind or from being in reality, has its own proper sort of being. He and St. Thomas, working from the same Avicennian texts, at least for their vocabulary and general background, do not at all agree.

In any case, in the light of this doctrine, Henry can answer the objections to a creature being identified with its own being. He says that an “intentional distinction” is sufficient, between *esse essentiae* and *esse actualis existentiae*, to counter any of those arguments. A creature will no longer be subsistent, infinite, necessary, or its own being. There is only a distinction of reason that is between two concepts between the *esse essentiae* and the essence itself.

Si loquamur de primo esse creaturae, illud sola ratione differt ab essentia creaturae nec potest ei abesse quia non habet illud ab alio effective, sed solum formaliter. Unde propter identitatem rei et inseparabilem concomitantiam rationis utriusque esse, scilicet talis et essentiae rei, potest dici de essentia creaturae quod ipsa est suum esse participatum formaliter licet non effective, sicut de Deo dicitur quod est ipsum esse simpliciter et absolute non participatum neque formaliter neque effective.

Si vero loquamur de secundo esse creaturae, illud licet non differt re ab essentia creaturae, non tantum differt ab illa sola ratione inquantum intellectus diversis conceptionibus capit, de ea quod est et quod tale quid est substantia vel accidens, sed etiam differt ab illa intentione, qua quantum ad tale esse, ipsa essentia creaturae potest esse et non esse. Esse enim habet inquantum alterius effectus quidem est, non esse autem habet de se, et in illud non esse cadit quando ille qui fecit quod est conservari desinet; et ideo de tale esse non potest concedi quod essentia creaturae est esse suum quia esse essentiae non existens in actu potest esse non ens, sicut prius fuit ens. In solo autem Deo verum est quod de tale esse loquendo ipse est suum esse, et in hoc excedit simplicitatem omnis creaturae. (*I Quodl.*, q.9, Paris 1518 ed., Fol. 7r—v)

If the “being of an essence” is not taken in Henry’s peculiar sense of the *esse essentiae*, then St. Thomas’ position on this point would be exactly opposite: namely, the statement that the being of an essence is other in reality from the essence itself (though not another thing). Henry gives no indication that anybody ever seriously advanced this opposite position. Apparently, it seems he

has no familiarity with St. Thomas' position, no idea that anyone else had ever spoken this way, of a real rather than a rational distinction between an essence and the being of an essence. And so with his audience, he takes it for granted.

Let us move momentarily to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and Père Mandonnet:

La question que souleve ici Henri n'est pas celle de la distinction réelle à établir entre l'essence et l'existence ainsi qu'il s'exprimera plus loin. Non. C'est celle de la distinction de l'entre de l'essence d'avec l'essence elle-même. C'est, on le voit, une subtilité sans objet, une pure logomachie. L'être de l'essence et l'essence sont une seule et même chose, une identité qui ne se prête pas même a une distinction de raison, comme le pretentre bientôt Henri de Gand.  
"The first disputes on the real distinction between essence and existence" 1276-87, *Revue Thomiste*, XVIII, 191C, pp. 756-57.

Thus he calls this rational distinction between an essence and its being a pure "logomachy" [logic chopping]—Henry is going too far; there is an identity. He supposed to be expounding the doctrine of St. Thomas but he has no conception of it at all. He accepts Henry's terms as the terms of the argument. This indicates how strongly this distinction has been couched in terms different from those of St. Thomas.

*Esse essentiae* (or the essence, from which the latter is only rationally distinct) or not, in regard to actual existence, the *esse essentiae* need not have it. But in God the two are intentionally the same; we can't make the intentional distinction here.

First of all, it is clear that this intentional distinction is not in things (a real distinction), yet not in the mind only (a rational distinction). A thing is related to its being (*esse essentiae* is related to *esse actualis existentiae*) in a different way for Creator and for creature—this is what Henry seems to mean. In bringing up this intentional distinction, he means to argue against the position that *esse existentiae* and *esse essentiae* are two different things: —which is the position of Giles.

Then he proceeds positively to show that a creature is its own being and brings forward three arguments in favor of this point.

Primo, si nihil in creaturis haberet esse per suam essentiam, sed per rem additam suae essentiae, nihil in creaturis esset ens per se.  
(*ibid.*, fol, 7r.)

A creature does not have to have a thing added to it in order to exist. This is in the background of Aristotle. If a thing had to be added to a creature to make it be, nothing would be in the category of substance; everything, even substance, would be an accidental union. This clearly shows the notion that Henry is defending: existence is not an accident in the Aristotelian sense, but essential to a being. This is the same position that St. Thomas took when facing and opposing the peculiarly Avicennian notion of the accidentality of being

Secundo, quoniam si illud esse sit res aliqua super essentiam creaturae, cum non sit dare quod sit Deus et res increata, erit ergo res



creata. Res autem quaelibet creata de se habet non esse, et si habet esse, hoc est participatum et acquisitum. Si ergo esse acquisitum et participatum semper aliud sit in re ab eo quo acquiritur et participatur, de illo esse illius rei additae essentiae primae creaturae per quam habuit esse, quaero utrum sit aliud re ab essentia illius rei cui acquiritur; et tunc aut erit procedere in infinitum, aut status erit in aliqua essentia cui acquiritur esse quod nullo modo est aliud re ab illa essentia cui acquiritur, et qua ratione statur in una essentia natura creata, eadem ratione et in qualibet. (*ibid.*, fol. 7r.)

Everything gets its being from another, so if the *esse existentiae* were a thing it would have to receive being from another (unless it were God): thus it would have to be created, and would need another to create it or give it being, and so on to an infinite regress. As with Averröes arguing against Avicenna (and Siger against St. Thomas), he asks in Aristotelian terms what this *esse actualis existentiae* could be, if it is really a thing distinct from essence: matter, form, substance, accident as follows:

Tertio, quoniam, illud esse quod ponitur esse re aliud ab essentia quae ipsum participat: Quaero aut est substantia aut accidens; medium enim non est ponere nisi creatorem, qui neque est substantia neque accidens praedicamenti alicujus... Si dicas quod sit accidens; substantia ergo habet esse per suum accidens; et ita non per se et prima, sed accidens illud per quod habet esse, magis est ens per se et prima; quod est contra philosophiam et omnem rationem. Est quod sit accidens: dico in quo praedicamento accidentis est. Quod si attentes novem genera accidentium, non sufficiunt tibi. Si dicas quod est substantia, est ergo substantia materia aut forma aut compositum, quia plures modos non habet. Si dicas quod materia, tunc de essentia creaturae quaero an sit materia an forma an compositum; si habebit tunc materia materiae, aut forma habebit esse per materiam aut composito erit materia alia a qua habet esse, quae omnia sunt absurda. Si dicas quod componitur, hoc non potest esse quia omnis talis substantia est per se subsistens. Si dicas quod forma quia ibi vis esse, aut ergo substantialis, aut accidentalis. Si accidentalis: per illam, non habet esse substantia ut dictum est. Si substantialis: aut est per se subsistens, et tunc est essentia quaedam et intelligentia quae habet esse per suam essentiam a se indifferentem; si vera sit alteri inhaerens et informans, tunc ipsa est essentia rei vel pars essentiae quae in ipsa creatura creatur, et sic omnibus modis oportebit dare quod res quaelibet habet esse per suam essentiam, ut esse non sit res aliqua addita essentiae. (*ibid.*, fol.,7r.)

Clearly, throughout, these reasons are concerned with *esse existentiae* as a thing. And a second concern is, what would that real distinction do to the doctrine of creation? Something would be presupposed, namely an *esse essentiae*, to the addition of this second thing, existence. The real

distinction (now understood as between two things) cannot be valid then.

The doctrine against which Henry is arguing is not that of St. Thomas that we have examined, in which essence in its absolute consideration is nothing in itself and the terms of the real distinction are not things. Essence for Thomas is not a type of being but rather a “defectus essendi”.

The controversy between Giles and Henry went on over the years over something that was not a Thomistic problem, and they are not at all concerned with St. Thomas. For the history of the controversy, see Mandonnet’s article; or the more recent and better-written “Les disputes de Henri de Gand et de Gilles de Rome sur la distinction de l’essence et de l’existence” by Jean Paulus in *AHDLMA XIV* (1942), pp. 323-58. There is no report of any definite conclusion being arrived at. But the point is that both sides agreed on the terms of the debate, a distinction of two things. Whether in reality, these are one or two things. And of course, this all presupposed that essence is actual in itself, a reality already constituted, to which the *esse* comes afterwards as a new thing. There is no question at all of Thomas’ primacy of existential act; rather, this is Avicennian, where the basic core of *esse proprium* of the thing is the essence, and existence is the ultimate act.

This problem, phrased in the Aegidian terms, becomes a standard question in the *Quodlibet*’s from then on, for about 75 years, because of its connection with creation. It was always in the terms given by Giles and Henry, and having nothing to do with St. Thomas’ metaphysics. Those so-called defenders and disciples of St. Thomas, for example, the Dominicans, of course try to take a position on this question. But they don’t receive it from St. Thomas. Rather, they take sides in the dispute on Henry’s and Giles’ terms, and then support it with texts in St. Thomas for either side—for as usual, when someone is approached with questions that are inconceivable in his framework, such texts for either side of the questions can be found. Only when he is asked questions that belong in his philosophy, will the contradiction disappear. Fr. Hocedez, S.J. in his Introduction to his edition of the *Theoremata de Ente et Essentia* of Giles, pp. 82-117, displays the expected result. He takes a survey of the 14th century Dominicans, for 75 years after St. Thomas’ death, and gets a typical survey result: one third are for the real distinction, one third against, and one third have no opinion.

As a matter of fact, there was no recognized position of St. Thomas on this subject even in 1313, when the Dominican Order commanded its members to teach nothing different from those doctrines which are commonly accepted as those of St. Thomas. There does appear a curious attribution to St. Thomas later, the *Totius Logicae Summa*—“incipit logica beati Thomae”, which is found in many 15<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts, of the *Opera Omnia*, and in one MS. that has a possible date from 14<sup>th</sup> century. See Grabmann, *Works of St. Thomas Aquinas*, (1949), pp.237-42. It was put at the beginning of the codices and later attributed to St. Thomas himself. Grabmann concludes that it is definitely not genuine; it is not in the early lists or codices, and is unheard of before the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. An interesting passage in it reads:

Ubi nota quod in creaturis esse essentiae et esse actualis existentiae differunt, ut duae diversae res. . . (Mand. ed. *Opusc.*, Vol. 5, p.23.  
*ibid.*, Tr. II, c.2)

These phrases do not occur in the entire *Opera Omnia* of St. Thomas. Thus by a mistaken attribution, he has been given a position in the Giles-Henry controversy, and it is clearly Giles’ posi-

tion.

**John Capreolus**, O.P. (d. 1444) was the man who initiated what is popularly known as the Thomistic school and is called “*princeps Thomistarum*”, the founder. In studying the notion of being and the different types that are found, he admittedly takes as his starting-point Henry of Ghent.

Quia, sicut Henricus, et bene, mea iudicio, essentia habet duplex esse, scilicet esse essentiae et esse existentiae. (*Defensiones, In II Sent.*, D.1, q.2, a.3, Turin ed., 1900, Vol. III, p.76a)

The *duplex esse* appears in the Giles of Rome controversy, and Henry takes it admittedly from Avicenna. Ultimately its foundation is in Aristotle, of course. Capreolus says Henry is right. Thus the being that the essence has in itself is one being and then there is the existence that it can receive. Essence then has some actuality of itself, apart from existential act. Then an essence apart from being can be the foundation of necessary and perpetual truth. It has some truth of its own (whereas for St. Thomas, quiddity has no truth in itself but only insofar as it is). This follows in Capreolus’ doctrine, of course:

Ex quibus patet quod omnis propositio de primo modo dicendi per se, et de secundo, est necessaria et perpetuae veritatis. Cum ergo quidditas rosae convenit rosae in primo modo dicendi per se, sequitur quod necessaria conveniat ei. Quod etiam quidditas rosae non conveniat ipsi rosae per aliquam causam agentem extrinsicam, ita quod aliqua causa efficiens sit causa quod rosa sit rosa, ostendit Lincolniensis. (*Defensiones, In I Sent.*, D.8, q.1, a.1, concl.1, Turin 1900 ed., I, 303c)

The title of this work of Capreolus is meant to signify “defenses of the theology of St. Thomas”. Note the reference to Robert Grosseteste of Lincoln, a 13<sup>th</sup> century Franciscan, with whom this example of the rose originates. It is perpetuated in the whole logical tradition. The source is Aristotle:

Essential attributes are (1) such as belong to their subject as elements in its essential nature (e.g. line thus belongs to triangle, paint to line; for the very being or ‘substance’ of triangle and line is composed of these elements, which are contained in the formulae defining triangle and line): (2) such that, while they belong to certain subjects, the subjects to which they belong are contained in the attribute’s own defining formula. Thus straight and curved belong to line, odd and even, prime and compound, square and oblong, to number; and also the formula defining any one of these attributes contains its subject—e.g., line or number as the case may be. (*Post. An.* I, 4, 73a35-73b1)

Here Aristotle is giving the four ways of “dicendi per se”, of which the chief two are when some-

thing pertains to the definition of a subject, and when there is a necessary subject, some accidents needing a substance of which to be predicated, e.g., “snubness” implying a nose. Note how Aristotle speaks of the “being” of a thing necessarily containing certain elements, since it is the essence. This concurs with Capreolus’ view of the “esse essentiae”, essence with same actuality of its own.

This argument will become traditional in the Thomistic school. The existence of a thing has an efficient cause; but its essence it has in itself. A rose is because of some cause; but a rose is a rose in view of no cause but in virtue of itself. This duplicity of being from Grosseteste is as follows: there is one kind that terminates an efficient cause’s operation, and one which the thing has in itself. This fact that one is caused and one self-possessed will be a traditional argument in the Thomistic school for the two kinds of being.

Truth follows on being; essence has a being of its own; hence it has truth of its own— nothing could be simpler in the Giles of Rome background.

**Thomas del Vio, Cardinal**, called Cajetan, O.P. is the leading figure in the Thomistic school (1469-1534). On the real distinction, he begins:

Et scito quod ista quaestio est subtilissima, et propria antiquis metaphysicis: a modernulis autem valde aliena, quia tenent non solum in Deo, sed in omni re, essentiam identificari existentiae illius. Sit ergo nostra haec quaestio; ad alias autem erit quaestio specialis, de distinctione esse ab essentia universaliter. (*In S. T. I, 3, 4, Leon. ed. IV, pp. 42-3*)

His first comment on this article is to say that in his own time, the real distinction appears very abstruse and proper to the ancient metaphysicians (this would mean up to the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century), but very remote to the modern. Nobody discusses it anymore, and it has been settled against the real distinction. Nevertheless, he undertakes to prove it against Scotus (there are live Scotist schools around.). There is a real distinction between essence and existence—this is a position he feels no one else is taking now. In his commentary on the *De Ente et Essentia*, Cajetan words the question this way:

QYESTIO XII. Utrum esse actualis existentiae et essentia distinguantur realiter; an intelligentias sint compositae ex actu et potentia. Circa supradicta duae dubitationes sunt. Prima est, an esse actualis existentiae et essentia distinguantur realiter. Secunda est, an intelligentiae sint compositae ex actu et potentia. Circa primum tria agenda sunt: primo ponetur opinio Scoti; secundo ponetur opinio S. Thomae; tertio respondebitur argumentis in oppositum. (*In De Ent., c.5, q.12, Laurent ed., p. 153, ##97-8*)

This *esse actualis existentiae* does not appear at all in Thomas, but comes first in Henry of Ghent. Thus the very formulation of the question is Henrician. He lists two opinions on this: Scotus’ and St. Thomas’. He reports Scotus as saying they are really the same, although there is a

distinction of a quiddity and its mode. This is fairly accurate, especially in the light of contemporary Scotistic interpreters. Essence and existence are really the same but have modal distinction:

Quoad primum, Scotus in *III Sent.* (D.6, q.3) Opinatur esse actualis existentiae et essentiam rei esse idem realiter, licet distinguantur ex natura rei, sicut modus intrinsecus et quidditas eius est, sicut nec albedo distinguitur a suo modo intrinseco gradu scilicet ut tria vel quattuor. (*ibid.*; Laurent ed., pp.153-4, #99)

The opinion of St. Thomas is that the “intelligences” (i.e., the angels) and every creature are composed of act and potency as of two things really distinct:

Quoad secundum, opinio S. Thomae, ab eo posita in illi contra Gentiles (cap. LII), est quod in omni creatura quidditas et eius esse actualis existentiae distinguitur realiter, ... Dicimus igitur in proposito intelligentias cum subsistant habere in se quidditatem et existentiam adunatas, ut potentiam et actum, et sic compositas esse ex duobus rebus realiter distinctis. Scotus autem sententiam tenere potest suam absque alterius laesione sed linguam coercere debet. (*ibid.*; Laurent ed., p.156 #100, p.161, #102)

Thus the matter is not one of a *res* and a *modus* but of a *res* and a *res*. Existence is not a mode superadded to a thing but another thing. The result he also calls “realities”:

Ad quartum dicitur quod sicut esse est duplex scilicet existentiae et essentiae, ita duplex est realitas essentiae et existentiae, et licet nulla res componat cum sua realitate, tamen cum hoc stat, quod componat cum realitate existentiae; unde essentia hominis absolute in reali praedicamento, substantiae scilicet, reponitur: posita autem in rerum natura fit realis realitate existentiae. (*ibid.*; Laurent, ed., p.158, #101)

This *duplex esse* we have seen first in Giles of Rome and Henry of Ghent. It seems by now pretty well established in the Thomistic tradition. Essence is one thing; existence another. Essence is one reality; existence another. And the distinction is one between two things. Well, one might reply that the language here results from a reaction on Cajetan’s part against Scotus. The notion of “two things” is simply a way of strongly contradicting the modal distinction. The reason for Cajetan’s position is negative, a denial of the modal distinction, and no more. He is simply arguing in Scotistic terms.

This explanation would be a plausible explanation if someone were unfamiliar with the background, that is, the tradition running through Capreolus back to Henry of Ghent. But Cajetan’s supporting arguments leave no room for doubt by what he has been inspired in reaching his position.

The first argument he presents for Scotus' side of the question is as follows:

Primo arguit, ut ipse dicit, contra fundamentum St. Thomas sic: Manente eadem ratione monet idem effectus; sed tota ratio, quare ponitur ab istis essentiam differre ab esse, est propter indifferentiam essentiae ad esse et non esse, nam, ut dicunt, lapis est in potentia, ut sit et non sit: ergo ubi talis indifferentia invenitur, ibi ponenda est talis distinctio; sed ita est, quod est consimilis indifferentia esse ad esse et non esse, esse enim rosae in hieme non est, in vere autem est, consimilis etiam indifferentia est essentias ad essentiam et non essentiam, essentia namque creaturae ab aeterno non est: ergo esse difert realiter ab esse et essentia differt ab essentia, quod est ridiculum. (*In De Ent., ibid.*, Laurent ed. p. 154, #99)

If these components were simple each would have to be created; if they are composite, then they are ever more contingent, and there is a further question about their creation. This is familiar: the example of the rose is from Capreolus; and this is the argument Henry of Ghent himself used to defend his own position. Thus Cajetan is not only using the language of Henry, but has in mind the arguments of Henry against Giles of Rome. He is thinking in these terms. His use of the word "thing" is not just a semantic device or a semantic problem, but he actually thinks of it in the sense of Giles of Rome. The first argument he gives in answer is exactly that which Giles gave 250 years before:

Ad argumentum ergo contra hanc rationem factum dicitur quod falsum est quod esse sit indifferens ad esse et non esse, et essentia ad essentiam et non essentiam: nihil enim est indifferens ad aliqua duo, quorum alterum sibi determinat in sua diffinitione, constat autem quod esse est de intellectu esse et essentia de intellectu essentiae. Quod autem esse rosae in hieme non sit, sed in vere, hoc ideo est quia essentia rosae, cui semper sua praedicata quidditativa adsunt, ad actum essendi non pervenit, et non ideo quia ipsum esse sit indifferens. Cum autem addit quod essentia est indifferens ad essentiam et non essentiam, quia non est ab aeterno, non videtur intelligere vocem propriam; ex negatione enim actus essendi ab aeterno bene sequitur quod rosa sit indifferens ad esse et non esse, sed non quod bene sequitur quod rosa sit indifferens ad esse et non esse, sed non quod sit indifferens ad rosam et non rosam, ut enim dicunt Alpharabius, Avicenna, Algazel, et Albertus, sive rosa sit, sive non sit, semper est rosa, et semper est substantia corporea, etc... (*ibid.*, Laurent, ed., p. 158, #101).

It is well to notice also how, as the ultimate authority in argumentation for his position (which he calls that of St. Thomas'), Cajetan always gives Aristotle and the Aristotelian commentators pride of place, not St. Thomas. He bypasses the latter and seems to think that Thomas' meta-

physics just repeats Aristotle's.

These questions are all summarized and discussed in Gilson, E. "Cajetan et L'existence", *Tijdschrift voor Philosophie*, XV, 1953, pp. 267-86. Note also the following text given as one of the Scotist arguments in defense of their position:

Praeterea. Esse existentiae si est distinctum realiter a quidditate, non est substantia, nec accidens. . . Quod enim non sit accidens, ut concessum ponitur. Quod autem non sit substantia, probatur, quia aut est materia, aut forma, aut compositum; nullum illorum est apud Thomam: ergo etc. (*ibid.*, Laurent ed., p. 155, #99)

Cajetan is again presenting one of Henry of Ghent's arguments. He is thinking in terms of the controversy with Giles of Rome. Likewise in Cajetan, not only truth, but all the transcendentals follow on nature considered absolutely:

His praelibatis, ad dubium dico quod transcendentia non sunt praedicata propriis naturae secundum suam absolutam considerationem, neque secundum esse in singularibus, neque secundum esse in intellectu, sed sunt praedicata communia naturae quomodolibet acceptae, convenientia non solum concomitative sed et causaliter. Et de natura quidem tam secundo quam tertio modo accepto, patet: ex hoc enim quod homo in singularibus invenitur, entis, unius, rei, et reliquorum rationem habet. Similiter ex hoc quod habet esse in intellectu ens est altque modo indivisum, etc.; et debetur enim sic sibi aliquod esse, licet rationis. De natura autem primo modo assumpta, ex dictis patere potest, et ex eo quod in quocumque invenitur posterius transcendens, invenitur et prius. Manifestum est autem de posterioribus transcendentibus, quae sunt unum, res aliquid, etc., quod conveniunt naturae absolute. Unde de homine, absoluto loquendo, ista est vera: Homo est ens. Unde et St. Thomas dicit super *X Metaph.*, ubi supra, quod ens praedicat naturas decem generum, secundum quod sunt actu, vel potentia, et non tantum secundum quod sunt actu. (*In De Ent.*, c.4, V 96; Laurent ed., p. 89, #56)

The problem to be proved is not so much that the transcendentals are predicates of essence in its absolute consideration, but that they belong to the essence in every kind of consideration. Take the nature in the first way (its absolute consideration)—wherever one transcendental is, the others are. In the absolute consideration, "Homo est ens" is true. And he cites St. Thomas: *In X Met.* here, naturally but, as we have seen, this is only one side of Thomas' position.

The only real difficulty here is that Thomas has said in the text Cajetan is commenting on (*De Ente*, c.3, R-G. ed., p.24, ll.11-13) that nature in its absolute consideration is neither one nor many:

Dubium secundo est circa dictum S. Thomas in littera in assignatione secundae differentiae, quo dicitur quod natura absolute sumpta nec unitatem nec pluralitatem habet. Videtur enim hoc esse impossibile, cum id quod unum non est diffinibile non sit, ut dicitur VII *Metaph.*, 2, immo nec intelligibile, ut habetur IV *Metaph.*, 3. (*ibid.*; Laurent ed., p. 90, #57)

Note again the resort to Aristotle, and the puzzlement that there could be any contradiction between Aristotle = *veritas* and St. Thomas. He goes on to answer the question:

Dico quod natura absolute sumpta habet unitatem quamdam: ut efficaciter concludit ratio adducta quae est S. Thomas in tractatu de natura generis. Et quando quaeritur aut illa unitas est numeralis aut specifica, dico quod est unitas formalis quae alia est a numerali, sicut divisio formalis alia est sed est fundamentum unitatis specificae et unitatis genericas. Hae enim praevent. Quod autem in littera dicitur quod natura absolute sumpta, nec est una, nec est plures, intelligendum est de unitate et pluralitate numerali. (*ibid.*, Laurent ed., p. 94, #61)

Here is the text of St. Thomas that he is citing:

Et ideo unum quod convertitur cum ente, non importat privationem divisionis entis quae est per quantitatem: quia ista divisio pertinet ad unum genus particulare entis, et non posset cadere in definitione unius, cum sit particularius quam ipsum unum quod definitur; sed dicit privationem formalis divisionis, quae est per opposita, cujus radix prima est affirmatio et negatio... (*De Natura Generis*, c.2, Mand.ed. *Opusc.* V, p.223)

Of course, Father Mandonnet recognizes this work of St. Thomas' as spurious and wrongly attributed to him. Cajetan uses it to deduce that we can apply to the doctrine of the *De Ente et Essentia* and to observe that there St. Thomas is speaking only of numerical unity. When we ask if essence in its absolute consideration has numerical or specific unity, we must answer: neither. In itself, essence has formal unity, which is neither numerical nor specific. It is a unity less than that which essence has in individuals (numerical), but more than that which it has in the mind (specific).

Cajetan is supposed to be arguing against Scotus; but on this point his doctrine is not only similar to Scotus' in wording; it is in fact original, as a doctrine, with Scotus. To bolster his own ideas about essence in its absolute consideration, Cajetan has had to go outside his own Thomistic tradition and into the tradition he believes he is combatting. The transcendentals belong to essence as such even without existence, then, and therefore it must be true that it has a being and



actuality of its own in this state.

[A note on our use of the word “Thomist”. This word does not necessarily mean that Dominicans especially are fond of saying, the term “Thomist” has to be taken in an analogical way. It has been held all along in theology that Thomist doesn’t necessarily mean “of St. Thomas”. Often no justification for the “Thomistic” position in theology can be found in St. Thomas. Compare Mullaney, “created Personality”, *New Schol.*, XXIX, 1955, pp. 369-402. He tries to prove that the Thomistic notion of personality is present commonly and identically in Capreolus, Cajetan, and John of St. Thomas, and then goes on to prove that as it was expressed in these Thomists, so it is present in the texts of St. Thomas. Thus he takes for granted that “Thomist” does not necessarily mean the same as “found in St. Thomas”. He regards this as something to be proven on individual questions. Ed.]

**Domenico BaZez**, O.P. (1528-1604), our next Thomist must be viewed in a more complicated way than we viewed Cajetan, when the question was relatively simple and a dead issue. When BaZez takes up the question, it is alive and far more complicated, having been discussed ever since Cajetan first raised it. After asking what the nature of *esse* is, he asks about the real distinction of essence and *esse*:

Dubitatur ergo primo, quid sit existentia... Dubitatur secundo circa distinctionem ipsius *esse* ab essentia in rebus creatis, utrum distinguatur ab essentia? (*In S.T.* I, q.3, a.4, Madrid ed. 1934, pp. 142a and 145b.

First he lists the arguments against it, the first of which states that if they were distinct, God could separate and conserve them separately:

Arguitur primo pro parte negativa. Nam si distinguitur realiter ab essentia, sequitur quod Deus possit separare esse ab essentia, et utrumque conservare. Probatur: nam cum duae res sunt realiter distinctae nihil vetat quominus possit Deus unam sine sua conservare. (*ibid.*, p. 145b)

Thus BaZez is going to defend the real distinction and the first opposing view implies that it is a distinction between two real things, going on to argue that God could separately conserve them. In answering, he accepts without hesitation this Gilesian phrasing of the problem. He does not controvert at all his opponent’s implication that there are two things or realities in Giles’ sense.

Ad argumenta in principio posita respondetur. Ad primum negatur sequela: nam pari ratione probaretur quod materia prima possit esse sine forma vel quod actio vitalis possit esse sine principio vitali: quod nos contradictionem implicare existimamus. Dicimus ergo quod etiam si aliqua duo distinguantur tamquam res a re si tamen alter illorum intrinsece dependentiae ordinem habeat ab altero quantum ad rationem essendi, non potest sine illo conservari. (*ibid.*, p. 147b)

The objection falls then not because of the “two things” being wrong, because essence is not a thing or reality apart from *esse*. But rather the approach is that there is an intrinsic dependence of these two things on each other. (Especially in the light of Gilson’s interpretation of BaZez, would not the “*etiam si*” with the subjunctive indicate that he is here simply conceding the position of his opponent for the sake of argument, and does not regard it as fact? The second objection is:

Secundo arguitur. Si esse distinguitur ab essentia realiter, sequitur, quod sit actus purus, ac proinde esset Deus. Probatur acquela. Nam si realiter distinguitur ab essentia, est actus non includens aliquid potentialitatis, ergo actus purus. Antecedens probatur. Quia ipsum esse non habet unde compatat sibi potentialitas, nisi ex eo quod identificatur cum essentia: alioquin si ipsum esse componeretur ex actu et potentia, daretur processus in infinitum. (*ibid.*, p. 146a)

If the essence is really distinct, then *esse* would be Pure Act, and therefore infinite, and really God. Compare the Parmenidean objection that Henry of Ghent makes against Giles’ real distinction. Even the infinite regress is repeated here, and *esse* is again considered as a thing. BaZez answers the objection:

Ad secundum respondetur, nego sequelam. Ad probationem respondetur quod ipsum *esse* quamvis realiter distinguatur ab *essentia*, limitatur tamen ex eo quod recipitur in essentia. Unde non est actus purus, sed imperfectionem potentialitatis habet nam ex propria ratione existentiae, sed quia receptibile est. Et in hoc differt ab esse increato, quod non distinguitur ab essentia. (*ibid.*, p. 147b)

Thus he does not say that *esse* is not a nature or thing but the act of a nature different from itself. BaZez does instead clearly conceive *esse* as a *res*, with both act and potency. The potency is not derived from its aspect as existence but from its receptibility. The third objection is practically the same:

Tertio. Si esse distinguitur realiter ab essentia, sequitur quod per se ipsum existit. Probatur sequela: quoniam actus essendi cum nihil potentialitatis includat, non potest per alium actum existere, ac proinde per semetipsum existet, quod soli deo proprium est. (*ibid.*, p.146a)

Look at existence from the viewpoint of the nature of existence, he answers, and the objections stand, but existence is received. This is the same answer again.

Ad tertium similiter negatur sequela propter eandem rationem. (*ibid.*, pp. 147b-148a)

Thus the fourth and sixth objections center on the accidental nature of a composite or union of two things (*rei*) *esse* and *essence*. The background is Aristotle's doctrine that to be a *per se unity*, one constituent has to be pure potency and the other act otherwise the composite will be a *unity per accidens* (*unum per accidens*).

Sexto. Si esses distinguitur realiter ab essentia, sequitur quod in compositis materialibus sit duplex compositio realis substantialis, altera ex materia et forma, altera ex esse et essentia; ac per consequens esset compositum per accidens. (*ibid.*, p. 146b)

BaZez says in answer that essence is in pure potency in relation to existence; although not in itself purely potential:

...respondetur quod essentia substantiae non se habet ut pura potentia sicut materia prima respectu formae substantialis; sed nihilominus ipsamet essentia rei comparata ad actum essendi habet se simpliciter ut potentia respectu illius. Neque inconvenit quod simul ipsa essentia intrinsece habet suam formalitatem specificam. Quoniam haec ipsa habet intrinsecum ordinem ad esse tanquam ad primam et ultimam actualitatem. (*ibid.*, p. 148a)

The fifth objection is as follows:

Quinto. Si inter esse et essentiam est distinctio realis, sequitur quod sit distinctio inter duo extrema realia et realiter existentia; consequens est falsum, ergo. Sequela probatur: quia distinctio realis est relatio realis, quas necessario debet esse inter duo extrema realia realiter existentia. Minor vero probatur: quoniam essentia ut distincta ab existentia non est actu a parte rei; ergo non potest esse alterum extremum distinctionis realis ab altero extreme, quod est existentia. (*ibid.*, p. 146a)

A real distinction is a real relation and therefore has to be between two really existent extremes. Thus you are placing existence in both extremes and therefore there is no real distinction after all.

Ad quintum concedo sequelam, et nego minorem. Ad probationem respondetur quod ipsamet essentia actualiter est a parte rei; actuata tamen per existentiam a se realiter distinctam, eo pacto quo materia et forma realiter distinguuntur, et inter illas est relatio realis. (*ibid.*, p.148a)

Take the Aristotelian example of matter and form. Neither can exist without the other, but there is a real relation between them. (Of course, even matter and form are distinct as "res a re" in

Giles. This does not mean at all that essence could exist in reality without *esse*, BaZez is rightly careful to point out. But still his position conceives the distinction as one between two things, if he respects the terms of the objection, which put it that way. And it seems that he does.

Having seen these objections and answers let us examine the body of the discussion on this point. He lists three principal opinions.

In hac difficultate sunt tres sententiae principales. Prima sententia asserit, essentiam et esse a parte rei nullo modo distingui, sed solum distingui nostris conceptibus, fundamentum tamen habentibus in re. Quae distinctio solet dici rationis ratiocinatae...Putant enim essentiam et esse non aliter differre, quam cursum et currere. Secunda sententia est Scoti in *III Sent.*, D.6, q.1 ... quam etiam sequitur Magister Soto in *II Physic.* q. 2. Ajunt ergo praedicti doctores existentiam distingui ab essentia non solum rationis distinctione, sed ex natura rei formaliter, vel realiter formaliter, et non tamquam res a re, ut inquit Soto supra. Ratio hujus sententiae potissima est. Quoniam hac via videntur sibi auctores hujus sententiae melius satisfacere argumentis, quae fiunt contra sententias extremas. Tertia sententia tenet quod essentia distinguitur ab esse, tanquam res a re, ita ut non solum haec propositio sit falsa in sensu formali, 'essentia est esse', sed etiam haec, 'essentia est res quas est esse'. Hanc sententiam tenet Capreol. in 1., d. 8, q. 1; Cajet. in opusc. *De ente et essentia*, c.5 q.10, Ferrariansis, 2 *Cont. Gent.*, c. 52 .... Et videtur esse sententia D. Hilarii lib. 6, *De Trinit.* qui est locus citatus a D. Them, in argumento Sed contra... (*ibid.*, p. 146b)

Thus some hold a conceptual distinction with a foundation in reality. Some hold a modal distinction; and here BaZez' view of this position is a little different from Cajetan's, but truer to Scotus' own view. It is a real distinction (which Cajetan thought it was not), but only formal, between a mode and a thing. Then finally some hold that this is not far enough, that it is a real distinction of a thing from thing (*res a re*).

Note that this discussion is constructed after the fashion of the age, the early seventeenth century. Moralists at that time were listing opinions and then looking for the most probable—which is a fine method for the moral sciences, where probability is all one can get. But it is not a good method for metaphysics or speculative theology, where one should be tracing things back to first principles.

He cites Capreolus, Cajetan, Sylvester of Ferrara, and the father of the Church, St. Hilary, as defending this distinction of two things. All the leading Thomists hold this.

Multo probabilier sententia est et ad rem theologican magis accommodata, quod *esse* realiter tanquam res a re distinguitur ab *essentia*. Haec conclusio videtur esse D. Tho, in loca citatis. Et probatur. Quia modus constitutivus suppositi realiter distinguitur tanquam re a re ab ipso supposito, sicut dictum est articulo praece-

denti, ergo multo magis esse distinguitur ab essentia. Probatur consequentia: tum, quia *esse* non competit supposito... tum etiam quia modus constitutivus suppositi magis intrinsecus est supposito, quam *esse*. Nam ille ponitur in definitione suppositi, *esse* autem non ponitur, sed solum ordo ad esse est intrinsecus omni rei. (*ibid.*, p.147a)

Thus the last of these three opinions is the more probable (provable). This conclusion also seems (only seems; it is not too sure) to be that of St. Thomas. The first reason is that any mode constitutive of a supposite is distinct as a thing from the supposite, and therefore all the more so *esse*, making essence a supposite. By now, subsistence is being called a thing. This is peculiar to BaZez; the term “subsistence” appears late in Cajetan’s writings, and is never regarded by him as a thing.

Probatur secundo. Esse est receptum a causa efficiente, et ab ea pendet in fieri et conservari, essentia vero per se primo competit creaturae absque dependentia a causa efficiente; est enim perpetuae veritatis, quod Petro conveniat esse hominem. Quod autem Petrus existat, habet dependentem a causa efficiente, ergo non potest esse eadem res cum essentia. Probatur tertio. Vera potentia, et verus actus realiter distinguuntur, sicut materia et forma: sed essentia est vera potentia respectu actus essendi, ergo realiter tanquam res a re distinguuntur. Probatur quarto. Si esse creaturae esset eadem res cum essentia creaturae, sequitur quod esse non sit realiter receptum in essentia: quoniam eadem res non recipitur in seipsa. Si autem re vera non sit in essentia, ipsum esse receptum erit illimitatum ad infinitum simpliciter, sicut et ipse Deus. (*ibid.*, p. 147e)

Of the remaining arguments, the second is exactly the same as Capreolus’ Lindonian argument. The third is based on a real distinction as between two things for any act and potency. The fourth speaks of one thing being received in another, and says this is demanded for *esse*.

Sententia tamen Scoti secundo loco posita, et sententia M. Soto, quae parum differt ab illa, potest probabiliter sustineri, et argumenta quae contra illam fiunt ab assertoribus tertiae sententiae, poterunt hoc exemplo dissolvi, videlicet... (*ibid.*, p. 147b)

BaZez has already proven his case, and yet the opinion of Scotus, which De Soto is defending has a certain provability and can be probably maintained. There follows a defense composed by BaZez of this position. Thus it is looked as a case of probability on both sides. But the opinion of St. Thomas is definitely regarded as that of the Thomists: that there is a real distinction between two things.

Nos tamen sententiam D. Thomae, ut intelligit Capreolus et Cajetan sequimur. (*ibid.*, p. 147b)

**Francisco Suarez, S. J. (1548-1617)**, treats the subject of the distinction between essence and *esse* at great length. The scholastic controversy can be most profitably studied as it is treated by him. He marshals an innumerable number of opinions in a correct and orderly way, and is an excellent historian of the scholastic controversies. He introduces the treatment:

Postquam dictum est de primo ac praecipuo ente, quod et est totius metaphysicae primarium objectum, et primum significatum et analogatum totius significationis et habitudinis entis, dicendum sequitur de altro membro in prima divisione proposito, id est, de ente finito et creato... prius declarandum est in quo posita sit communis ratio entis creati seu finiti, quod in hac disputatione propositum est... SECTIO I. An esse et essentia entis creati distinguantur in re. (*Disputationes Metaphysicae*, D.31, Vives ed. *Opera Omnia*, Paris, 1856-77, Vol. XXVI, p. 224b)

[Note that the correct translation of the title of this work is “Metaphysical Discussions”, not “Disputations”.) Ed.]

He proposes to treat of finite being after having treated of infinite being. The fundamental characteristic of finite being, the distinction of being and essence, has to be treated first. He lists different “sententiae” on this question—in the same atmosphere of probabilism and authority—citing BaZez. His choice is that there is a distinction of reason with a foundation in reality, between actual existence and actual essence; this is enough to enable us to make the necessary theological statement that in a creature its actual existence is not essential to it.

Tertia opinio affirmat essentiam et existentiam creaturae, cum proportione comparata, non distingui realiter, aut ex natura rei tanquam duo extrema realia, sed distingui tantum ratione... Haec opinio tertia sic explicanda est, ut comparatio fiat inter actualem existentiam, quasi vocant esse in actu exercita, et actualem essentiam existentem, quam vacant esse in actu exercita, et actualem essentiam existentem. Et sic affirmat haec sententia existentiam et essentiam non distingui in re ipsa, licet essentia, abstracte et praecise concepta, ut est in potentia, distinguatur ab existentia actuali, tanquam non ens ab ente. Et hanc sententiam sic explicatam existimo esse omnino veram. Eiusdem fundamentum breviter est, quia non potest res aliqua intrinsece ac formaliter constitui in ratione entis realis et actualis, per aliud distinctum ab ipsa, quia, hac ipso quod distinguitur unum ab alia, tanquam ens ab ente, utrumque habet quod sit ens, ut condistinctum ab alio, et consequenter non per illud formaliter et intrinsece. Sed quia vis hujus rationis et plena decisio hujus quaestionis, cum salutionibus argumentorum, pendet ex multis principalis, ideo ut distinctius procedatur, et absque terminarium aequivocatione, quam vereor esse frequentem in hac

materia, paulatim procedendum est, et distinctis sectionibus singula sunt explicanda. (ibid., S.1, ##12-13, p. 228b)

The first thing to be investigated is the status of essence before its production into real existence by God: of course, it does not really exist.

SECTIO II. Quid sit essentia creaturae, priusquam a Deo producat... Principia statuendum est, essentiam creaturae, seu creaturam de se, et priusquam a Deo fiat, nullum habere in se verum esse reale, et in hac sensu, praecisa esse existentiae, essentiam non esse rem aliquam, sed omnino esse nihil. (ibid., S.2, #1, p. 229a)

However, it is objective potency; that is, an object of knowledge. The use of the term "objective" in this way is common at that time and persists until Descartes. But since it is a potency, it can exist.

Atque hoc etiam modo dicitur talis essentia, antequam fiat, realis, non propria ac vera realitate quam in se actu habeat, sed quia fieri potest realis, recipienda veram entitatem a sua causa, quae possibilitas (ut statim latius dicam) ex parte illius solum dicit nam repugnantiam, ut fiat; ex parte vera extrinsecae causae dicit virtutem ad illam afficiendam. Atque eodem et ratione, esse, quod appellant essentiae ante effectiorem, seu creationem divinam, solum est esse potentiale objectivum... (ibid., S.1, #1, pp. 229b-230a)

Actual essence when it exists is called real subjective potency. It is a real and actual subject, receiving the further actuality of existence. A subjective potency to being would have to be an actual essence. The distinction between objective potency and subjective potency is not questioned; in fact, it is defended.

...hoc esse in potentia objectiva nullum dicit potentiam realem et positivam, quae actu sit. Secunda, nam vel talis potentia manet in re producta, vel nam manet. Si nam manet, nihil reale et positivum esse potest; quomodo enim illud ens, qualecumque esse fingatur, si aliquid positivum et reale esset, destruetur per productionem entis in actu? Si vera illa potentia manet in re producta, jam illa potentia non est objectiva tantum, sed etiam subjectiva, nec res fierent ex nihilo, sed ex praesupposita potentia, tanquam ex subjecta, vel materia ex qua fit res. Tertio, supra ostensum est in essentia possibili priusquam fiat, nihil rei esse (propria loquendo de re positiva et actuali); ergo non potest in esse potentia realis positiva; omnis enim potentia realis positiva, est res aliqua vera, seu in aliqua realitate et entitate fundata. (ibid., S.3, #2, p. 233b)

What is at stake here is not the question of a distinction of subjective and objective potency, but whether an actual essence and its actual existence are distinct.

... non est dicendum essentiam actualem distingui a potenciali quia habet existentiam... tamen... separatur essentia actualis a potenciali, per suamet entitatem actualem, quam habet in ratione essentiae realis.

SECTIO IV. An essentia creaturae constituatur in actualitate essentiae per aliquod esse reale, indistinctum ab ipsa, quod nomen habet et rationem existentiae. (ibid., SS.3-4, p. 255a-b)

This statement of the question, he follows with clear and flawless arguments that nothing real has to be added to an actual essence to make it exist, and nothing real can be added. So there is no real or modal distinction between actual essence and actual existence. The arguments are clear and the reasoning without flaw; and his report of scholastic opinions is very accurate. The question remains: how can one establish a conceptual distinction when a real difference has been rejected? And how can one show the concept of being to be any more than a broad and utterly empty concept, the most universal essence, as Kant and Hegel held?

Let us go back over the distinctions and clarifications of terms that Suarez develops in the course of the argumentation, to see how he reached his position.

Suppono autem per esse nos intelligere existentiam actualem rerum, ne sit aequivocatio in verbis, nec sit necessarium postea distinguere de esse essentiae, existentiae, aut subsistentiae, aut veritatis propositionis. Nam esse essentiae, si vere condistinguitur ab existentia, nihil rei addit ipsi essentiae, sed solum differt ab illa in modo quo concipitur vel significatur... Esse autem subsistentiae, et contractius est quam esse existentiae; hoc enim substantiae et accidentibus commune est, illud vera est substantiae proprium... Esse autem veritatis propositionis, ex se non est esse reale et intrinsecum, sed est esse quoddam objectivum in intellectu componente, unde convenit etiam privationibus.(ibid., S.1, #2, pp. 224b-225)

Thus the last two types may be excluded from this discussion: the last because it is only in the mind; the third because it is only concerned with one category of being, substance. This narrows down the acceptance of the first two senses. Only the first two types count, existential and essential being.

[A note on the translation of these formula “esse essentiae” and “esse existentiae”. The natural translations are “the being of an essence” and “the being of existence”, but we cannot manipulate a living language, as we could a dead one to perpetrate such harsh phrases, out of conformity with usage. Genitive prepositional phrases in English, as genitives in Latin, are ambiguous; they can be either qualitative or possessive, referring to the kind of thing or what the thing has. Taking the notion of existence, one would have to see its genitive in this phrase as qualitative “that



kind of esse which is existence". No one ever held existence to possess being, to be a subject of being. Hence we can preserve the natural translation "existential being".

But with essence, it could be either: something different from and possessed by essence (this is what "esse essentiae" would mean as a phrase in St. Thomas, i.e. connecting that essence is the subject of being); or else qualitative, and thus referring to "the kind of being that essence is", in itself. Only with the latter sense could we say "essential being" in English. In the former, possessive sense, in which a distinction would fall between "essence" and the "esse essentiae" which it has, the English translation would have to be "the being of an essence". Ed.]

In Suarez, in undertaking to explain carefully with all the precision of a legally-trained mind the various senses of these terms, has said that anybody who puts a distinction between "esse essentiae" and "esse existentiae" will have to claim that essence and "esse essentiae" are the same, identical. No one will dream of placing a real distinction between these latter two; they are only rationally distinct. This is exactly the same statement as Henry of Ghent made about the "esse essentiae". And Suarez proceeds in exactly the same way. Neither scholar made any effort to explain this, but took it far granted. Neither seems to be conscious that anyone ever took the genitive in "esse essentiae" as possessive (which is what St. Thomas did); and therefore the controverted distinction is not present here. Suarez clearly understands the phrase as the English translation "essential being" would convey—the kind of being that coincides with essence. Any distinction here will be that between two ways of conceiving the same thing or between two words for the same thing. A real distinction is not to be looked for here: merely a conceptual one.

...haec constitutio non fit per compositionem talis esse cum tali entitate, sed per identitatem omnimodam secundum rem. Probatur primo ex dictis, quia essentia actualis differt a seipse potenciali immediate per suam entitatem; ergo per illammet habet illud esse actuale, per quod constituitur, etc. Secundo declaratur in hunc modum: nam vel essentia actualis distinguitur ex natura rei ab existentia, vel non. Si non, manifestum est nullum habere esse distinctum, quo in tali actualitate constituatur. Si vera distinguitur, ergo etiam distinguitur ex natura rei esse essentiae actualis ab esse existentiae actuali; ergo esse essentiae actualis non distinguitur ex natura rei ab actuali essentia, aliocum in infinitum procederetur; ergo in omni opinione illud esse quo constituitur essentia actualis, ut sic, non potest esse distinctum ex natura rei ab ipsa. (*ibid.*, S.4, #3, p. 235b)

He also uses the term "esse essentiale" as a synonym for the "esse essentiae", from which it is certain that he understands the genitive as qualitative.

...certum est, in re existente ipsam essentiam esse actu ens, et consequenter esse essentiale illius esse actuale esse. (*ibid.*, S.2, #11, p. 232b)

Thus the English translation “essential being” is quite justified. It is a kind of being, indeed; but it is straightway identified with essence and considered as one term of a controverted real distinction, differing from existential being. It coincides with the essence and is contrasted to existential being. It is really the essence itself.

His acceptance of the term is in full accord with the long history of the expression and its usage since Henry of Ghent. The phrases were always seen as having a qualitative genitive; the “esse essentiae” was consequently identified with the essence and with the esse proprium of Avicenna.

Si vera loquamur sub his nominibus ‘esse essentiae’ et ‘esse existentiae’, utrumque habet eundem significandi modum, et subordinatur eidem modo concipiendi. (*ibid.*, S.6, #19, p. 248a)

So the translations are the same; the relations of the terms are both to be understood in the same way; they are both qualitative genitives. An exact parallelism must be maintained in order to understand Suarez’ thought. The possessive genitive which would allow essence as a subject of being and thus allow it to be really different from its being is not even recognized or known. No interpretation of these phrases is recognized that could conform to the metaphysics of St. Thomas. A rediscovery of St. Thomas is precluded from the very beginning, since the question is differently phrased from the start. Suarez has no notion of an essence’s absolute consideration abstracting from “quolibet esse”, either. The “esse essentiae” will remain, even in this condition.

...sicut essentia creatura ut sic ex vi sui conceptus non dicit quod sit aliquid reale actu habens esse extra causas suas, ita esse essentiae ut sic, praecise in illo sistendo, non dicit esse actuale, quo essentia extra causas constituitur in actu... (*ibid.*, S.1, #2, p. 225a)

Considered objectively, the essence is potency; but in itself that does not imply that it really exists. The “esse essentiae” does not imply any real being of the essence outside its causes. Note in this text, that in Suarez, as opposed to St. Thomas, the terms “precision” and “abstraction” are identical. The essence here can prescind from actual being, and this also can be expressed by the word “abstract”. In St. Thomas, the essence could not prescind from actual being—it could abstract, but not prescind.

...ergo esse essentiae creaturae ut sic ex se praescindit ab esse actuali extra causas, quo res creata fit extra nihil, quod nomine esse existentiae actualis significamus. (*ibid.*)

Essence can either be or not be; it is either possible or actual. It is a type of being but a type of which actual existence cannot be predicated in itself. It has possible being: a type of being which does not have actual existence, which is not in itself actual. It prescind from all actual being—using “precision” in a different sense from that of St. Thomas.

Suarez has said that he would establish a real identity between actual essence and actual existence with a conceptual distinction. But there is still an ambiguity latent in his treatment, since he

has said now that the essence or essential being was not actual. He faces this later and clarifies two senses of essential being. One is just as it is in itself—merely a possible, before the creature exists, considered in its causes, or objectively as the object of cognition in the intellect—cognitional being. In this way, it is not real being.

...advertendum est, aequivocationem esse posse in primo memoro, scilicet, esse essentiae. Duobus enim modis attribuitur rebus creatia. Uno modo, secundum se, etiam ut nondum sunt factae, neque actu existentes. Et hoc modo esse essentiae non est verum esse reale actuale in creatura, ut demonstratum est, sed est esse possibile, et revocatur ad illud tertium membrum de esse veritatis propositionis seu cognitionis; nam ut ostendimus, essentiae creaturarum hoc modo tantum habent vel esse in causa vel objective in intellectu... et ideo peculiariter tribuitur rebus creatis esse essentiae antequam existant, ut denotetur illam veritater fundari in esse potenciali apto ad existentium. Alio modo sumitur esse essentiae, ut actu convenit creaturae jam existenti, et hoc esse est sine dubia reale et actuale, sive re, sive ratione tantum ab existentia distinguitur. (*ibid.*, S.2, #11, p. 232b)

The “esse possible” coincides with the “esse essentiae” as such. The distinction is therefore a question now of possible, essential, cognitional being as opposed to actual, existential, real being. It is not a question of essence as against “esse vel in intellectu vel in rerum natura” as it was for St. Thomas, but rather a question for Suarez of “esse in intellectu” as against “esse in re”. The former is also called objective potency—the object of the intellect.

In the second way, essential being is already actual. As you find it outside the mind, it is without doubt real and actual. Thus in answer to the questions: Is essential being real or not? Is it actual or not? We can say that in itself, before existence, it is merely possible; but when existing, all have to admit that it is real and actual.

But even with these clarifications, there is still a problem. Suarez is forced to admit that “real” can have another sense in which it can be used for a “reale possible” and a “reale actuale”, not just the latter.

Jam enim supra declaravi essentiam creaturae, etiam non productam, esse aliqua modo essentiam realem... Unde recte Cajetanus, de Ente et essentia, cap. 4, quaest. 6, ait, ens reale dupliciter accipi: uno modo, ut distinguitur contra ens fabricatum ab intellectu (quod proprie est ens rationis); alia modo, ut distinguitur contra non existens actu. Essentia ergo creaturae secundum se est ens reale prima modo, scilicet in potentia, non vera posteriori modo, et in actu, quod est proprie ens reale... (*ibid.*, S.2, #10, p. 232a)

As a result of these distinctions after distinctions, the whole problem gets steadily more and more complicated. In this first sense of “esse essentiae”, there is a negative restriction: you have to

consider it before creatures exist. If we look at the background of the controversy, we could expect essence in itself or “esse essentiae” to be indifferent both to cognitional and actual existence, and common to both. This would be the state of the question right back through Henry to Avicenna. But Suarez has here, for practical purposes, as he usually does, limited “esse essentiae” to merely cognitional being. It must have this apparently arbitrary restriction of non-actuality. Actual essence then is real being; potential essence is cognitional being. He does not emphasize the distinction between essential being just in itself (which would be common to possible and actual being) and possible essential being at all. Whereas in the tradition essential being is three kinds: possible, actual, and according to itself (*secundum se*).

The other term of the distinction is being or existence, the actual existence of things outside their causes. It is described:

Nam per existentiam res intelligitur esse aliquid in rerum natura; oportet ergo ut et ipsa aliquid reale sit, et sit intima, id est, intra ipsam rem existens. Nec enim res esse potest existens per aliquam extrinsecam denominationem, vel aliquod. ens rationis; alioquin quomodo existentia constitueret ens actu reale, et extra nihil?  
(*ibid.*, S.1, #2, p.225a)

Note that here “*intima*” is taken in a different way than in St. Thomas where it means that existence is intrinsic to the thing.

Certum est apud omnes, existentiam esse id quo formaliter et intrinsece res est actu existens; quanquam enim existentia non sit proprie et in rigore causa formalis...(*ibid.*, S.5, #1, p.237b)

Existence is the *intrinsic* constituent that makes a thing *formally* existent. The way in which this “intrinsic” is understood will prejudice the whole question. It can be contained in and within the scope of essence; and then, of course, there will be no real distinction. On the other hand, although in St. Thomas *esse* is the most intimate constituent to a being, it still comes to an essence *ab extra, extrinsece*. The doctrine of being found in St. Thomas is thus not a party to this controversy at all. Which is to be expected in the light of history: “Certum est apud omnes..”

The being of actual existence is not merely extrinsically denominated of an essence. It is intrinsic to the existent when the existent is considered as a composite of essence and existence, in some way. Of course, anyone who holds a real distinction has to hold that existence is extrinsic to essence.

The entity of essence and the entity of existence, if they were composed, would constitute one individual existent.

Sic ergo philosophandum esset de entitate essentiae et entitate existentiae, si essent distinctae, componerent enim unum, verbi gratia, hoc existens, respectu cuius existentia se haberet ut actus intrinsecus et formalis; tamen respectu entitatis essentiae nullo modo posset intrinsece illum constituere aut componere, quia una ab alia

condistingueretur ut entitas simplex ab entitate simplici. Nec dici potest quod entitas essentiae sic concepta et distincta non sit actualis, quia alias non componeret realiter, quia entitas in potentia objectiva non facit realem compositionem cum actu. Sic ergo aperte constat, entitatem existentiae distinctam ab entitate essentiae non posse requiri ut intrinsece constituat ipsam entitatem essentiae in sua propria actualitate. (*ibid.* S.6, #3, p.242b)

The side upholding the real distinction holds that there are two entities really distinct. Hence the existence would be indeed intrinsic to the existent, but extrinsic to the essence. It could in no way constitute the essence intrinsically. The essence is something somehow completely constituted in itself—and existence is not its formal act, but that of the composite. Essence in itself is complete and finished, a simple entity, receiving existence as something extrinsic to itself. What type of being corresponds to this type of existence? The “esse existentiae”, existential being. The distinction then is one of essential being and existential being. Suarez still finds difficulty: for just as essential being is either actual or potential, so existential being can be either potential or actual. The existence of this table two hundred years ago was potential existence. So we must be very precise and say it is a question of a distinction between actual existential being and actual essential being.

In the historical background, for Suarez, the distinction with which he is concerned is one between two types of beings: not one term which lacks all being in itself, on the one hand, and its being—the act by which it is first made to be—as the other term. Existence is a type of being which presupposes another type as prior to it, and is not the most fundamental actuality of a thing.

Sed praecipue demonstratur ratione, quia talis entitas, addit actuali essentiae, nec potest illi formaliter conferre primam (ut ita dicam) actualitatem seu primam rationem entis in actu, qua separatur distinguitur ab ente in potentia... (*ibid.* S.6, #2, p. 242a)

Essence already has that primary aspect of actuality, and this cannot be conferred on it by anything added. In St. Thomas, the most fundamental act is the esse of a thing, not “essential being” or essential actuality, independent of esse.

Ex hoc autem modo concipiendi nostro fit, ut in re sic concepta, praescindendo ab actuali entitate, aliquid consideretur tanquam omnino intrinsecum et necessarium, et quasi primum constitutivum illius rei, quae tali conceptioni objicitur; et hoc vocamus essentiam rei... (*ibid.*, S.6, #15, p. 246b)

For Suarez, on the contrary, essence is the most fundamental, the primary constituent of the thing. Not the existential being, but something on the side of essence is the more fundamental, constitutive, first act. The thing already is (and this essential being is its fundamental being) before it is in existence.

## CONCLUSION OF THE CONTROVERSY IN SUAREZ

Suarez traces the historical problem and finds that there are certain opinions that have been held, especially concerning created existence (as the basis for the problem of the distinction):

[Prima sententia affirmans distingui realiter.]

De hac igitur existentia creaturae variae sunt opiniones. Prima est, existentiam esse rem quamdam distinctam omnino realiter ab *entitate essentiae*\* creaturae. Haec existimatur esse opinio D. Thomae, quam in hoc sensu secuti sunt fere omnes antiqui Thomistae. Loca D.Thom. praecipua sunt: 1 part., q. 3, art. 4 ; 2 Contra Gent., cap. 52; De Ente et Essentia, c. 5; 4 Metaph.,lect.2. Quae sic interpretatur Capreol., in 1, dist. 8, art. 1, q. 1; Cajet., loc.cit. 1 part., de Ente et essentia; Ferrar., dicta loco cont. Gent.' Soncin., in 4 Metaph., quaest. 12; Javellus, tract, de Transcendent. Item Aegid., in 1, d. 2, quaest. 4, art. 1; et latissime de Ente et Essent., q. 9; et sequent.; et Quodl. 1, q. 2. Citantur etiam Albert., super lib. de Causis, propos. 8; Avicen., lib. quinto suae Metaph., cap. primo. (*ibid.* , S.1, #3, p.225a)

[\*The term “entity” here comes from Cajetan who was arguing against a Scotistic background. It has the same meaning as “esse essentiae”; the question was phrased thus: were essence and existence distinct as entity from entity, or as entity from mode? Note that Suarez is cautious in attributing this opinion to St. Thomas, just as BaZez was, but he reports all the Thomists as firmly holding it, and includes Giles of Rome. He remarks that Albert and Avicenna have been cited in support of this opinion. He may well have good reason for hesitating to attribute it to St. Thomas, since these formulae are nowhere found in St. Thomas. In the passages he cites on the distinction, Suarez must have seen that there was no place for the qualification “real”, no identification of esse with an entity or reality, and no notion of any being or actual essence apart from existence. So he has good reason to be cautious. Ed.]

On Nedellec, Giles of Rome, and other early followers of Thomas (within seventy-five years of his death), and on the Thomists, he is on sure ground. Dr. Norma Wells, unpublished thesis, U. of T. (1955), *The Distinction of Essence and Existence in Francisco Suarez* (supervised by Prof. Gilson), concluded that the arguments of the Thomists are here correctly reported and presented by Suarez. In their view, existence or existential being is a thing or a “res” really distinct from the entity of the essence. Essence is a reality in its own right, and the only question is: is it or is it not the same reality as the reality of existence?

Argumenta, quibus haec sententia suaderi solet, multa sunt. Primum, quia praedicata essentialia conveniunt creaturae absque interventu causae efficientis; propter hoc enim ab aeterno fuit verum dicere, hominum esse animal rationale; sed existentia non convenit

creaturae, nisi per causam efficientem, et idea non potest creatura dici actu esse, nisi facta sit; ergo esse creaturae est res distincta ab essentia ejus. . . (*ibid.*, S.1, #4, pp.225a-b)

The first argument offered by them is that the essential predicates belong to creatures apart from and independently of an efficient cause. They cannot be the same reality as that which has its reality from the efficient cause; no thing can both come and not come from a given efficient cause. This seems to be a distinction of efficient and formal causality. This was Capreolus' argument ("a rose is a rose..."; or take Peter the man, whether he exists or not) and has become traditional, e.g., BaZez cites it. It is presented exactly as it has been actually stated.

Secundo argumentor, quia esse creaturae est esse receptum in aliqua; ergo in essentia, non enim potest excogitari aliud in quo recipiatur; ergo est res distincta ab essentia, non enim potest eadem res in seipsa recipi. Primum antecedens probatur, quia esse irreceptum est esse per se subsistens ex vi suae actualitatis; nam est omnino abstractum a subjecta vel potentia, in qua recipiatur; est ergo esse perfectissimum et summum, atque adeo purus actus—et infinitum quid in ratione essendi; ergo repugnat esse creaturae esse omnino irreceptum. . . (*ibid.*, S 1, #5, p. 225b)

The second argument states that otherwise, without the "real distinction", there would be no distinction between the being of creatures and the being of God. This is a fair representation of the argumentation of Giles, Capreolus, and especially Cajetan. It shows that the arguments are geared to prove that existence is a reality which is a different reality from that reality which is essence.

And Suarez reports it with no distortion of the original views of these men. The third argument is not too significant for us on this question.

Quarto, in substantia composita ex materia et forma, esse est quid distinctum a materia et a forma, et a natura composita ex utraque; ergo est res distincta a tota essentia talis substantiae. . . Neque etiam esse posset illa entitas idem cum tota essentia composita ex materia et forma, quia non potest simplex entitas esse eadem res cum re composita ex rebus distinctis; nam involvitur aperta repugnantia; si ergo tale esse est simplex entitas, oportet ut sit res omnino distincta a tali essentia. (*ibid.*, S. 1, #7, p. 226a-b)

The fourth argument concludes that existence is a reality distinct from the whole essence; it is a simple reality, so it cannot be the same as a reality composed of two different realities (matter and form). This argument is common in textbooks and manuals contemporary with Suarez, but it is not in the tradition of the Thomists up to that time; it is something new. No doubt it was being used by the Thomists in Suarez' own time; in fact, the list of authors he has given above does not seem to be directly taken from the authors themselves, although he probably did read them later

as a preparation to his writing here. Wells' (see above) work indicates that the details of the arguments, and the phrasing, and the line-up of authorities cited above, tends to show that much here was probably taken from the lists of authorities usually given at that time in the schools.

The other arguments are in no way adverse to the interpretation that the position being defended is the distinction of two realities, but only the ones we have reviewed here explicitly say so.

The position of the modal distinction is treated briefly by Suarez—the Scotistic view.

[Secunda sententia ponens distinctionem modalem].

Secunda sententia est, esse creatum distingui quidem ex natura rei, seu (ut alii loquuntur) formaliter, ab essentia cuius est esse, et non esse propriam entitatem omnino realiter distinctam ab entitate essentiae, sed modum ejus. Haec opinio tribuitur Scot., in 3, dist. 6, quaest. 1; et Henric., Quodl. 1, q. 9 et 10; ... Eandem opinionem tenuit Soto, 2 Phys., quaest 2; et in 4 Sent., dist. 10, quaest. 2; et nonnulli moderni eam sequuntur... illa distinctio satis est ut unum extremum sit per divinam potentiam separabile ab alio, quamvis non sufficiat ad mutuam seu convertibilem separationem, ut in superioribus dictum est. Ex quo potest haec sententia confirmari; nam, licet essentia creata sit separabilis a proprio esse, e conversa tamen ipsum esse non est separabile ab essentia creaturae; quatenus enim factum non est, nec verisimile est fieri posse ut conservetur existentia albedinis non conservata albedine, et homo habeat existentiam albi, et non sit albus, et sic de aliis; ergo signum est, non esse realem distinctionem inter essentiam et existentiam, sed tantum modalem. . . (*ibid.*, S. 1, # 11, pp. 227b-228a)

Created being is not another thing, but a mode of essence, for there is no case of existence being conserved while the essence is destroyed, so it must be a made.

However, *can* it be conserved apart from the essence? If so, they would seem to be two things. And yet there is no such case, and it is truly impossible; so there is only a modal distinction. A mode and its essence are never separated. Suarez rejects the view, for he cannot see how one can consistently deny the real distinction and maintain the modal. Existence even here is finally considered as something which (what) exists—an incomplete being, but as much a being as accidents or parts of essences. Both opinions given so far as are radically existentialist, in the sense that for them existence is a thing that is. This resembles modern existentialism; but for Thomas, being is never a *quod*, but a *quo*, and “the what” is the thing or essence.

For Suarez, the notion of reality is present on both sides of a real or a modal distinction and includes the idea of actuality; for him, what is real is actual. Whence, in the third opinion (his aim), the question is phrased in these terms. He arranges these opinions in the same order as BaZez; the positions are stabilized by now: reality and reality vs. reality and mode. Third question is as follows: Actual existence and actual essence are not distinct in reality, although essence considered abstractly and with precision is a potency and distinct from actual existence as non-being from being. See S. 1, #13, p. 228b.



A procedure rooted in moral discussions is taken with these positions ranged as “opinions”, and this is the one, which he will accept. The procedure resembles BaZez’.

Actual existence is carefully explained and opposed to any sort of potential existence. And note that he always speaks of an essence actually existing, as the one term of the controverted distinction. For Suarez, the saving distinction for the doctrine of creation is the abstract consideration of essence (prescinding from existence—which you could not do in Thomas), where it is distinct from actual essence (= actual existence) as non-being from being. The reason why he has to add “as in potency” (“ut in potentia”) to qualify this consideration is that the abstract consideration of essence should be applicable to both potential and actual essence, but he usually reserves it for the former. This is his restriction of the notion of actuality seen above, S.2, #11, p. 232b..

A thing cannot be formally and intrinsically constituted as a real and actual being by something distinct from itself. An ens constituted as an ens by something else is impossible, for both would then be beings, and could not constitute each other intrinsically. Suarez has insisted on the notion “intrinsic” and the full force of it comes out here. It had caused difficulty in BaZez; he had claimed that existence was intimate to a thing, but when pressed in argumentation, it came down to this, that an *orda ad existentiam* was intimate or intrinsic to a thing.

In the same place, S.1, #13, p.228b. Suarez points out the fallacy of the Thomistic position (in this historical background): each term of the distinction, as a res or entity, is already a being; and they cannot therefore be formally or intrinsically constitutive of each other. The first statement of his text could be taken literally as a rejection of St. Thomas’ position; but as he goes on, we see him taking the distinction between the thing itself and what constitutes it as a being, as a distinction between two beings. Which is entirely out of touch with the problem or question St. Thomas was asking and answering.

Essence, once in actuality, actually a being, and not potentially (these two are distinct) is not distinct from existence, for it is already a being. Essential being can be either actual or potential. Of itself, essence prescinds from actual being. Before being produced by God, the essence of a creature does not have true or real being—it is nothing.—S.2, #1, p.229a.. In Cajetan, he finds and admits another sense of the word “real”, but does not allow it as a true sense; namely, that of the “real possible” which *can* exist—as opposed to that of the “real actual” which does exist. The essence of a creature before creation is real in the first sense, but not real in the second, which is the true and proper sense of the term. Hence, properly speaking, “real” means “actually existing” and does not include the potentially existent. The creature before creation is not truly real. Without existential being, essential entity is in itself, nothing. It has only an objective (i.e., it can be known, it is an object of knowledge) potential being, which is really an extrinsic denomination from the power of God. This is how it can be called a being before creation: only in a potential sense, and as an *ens rationis*, knowable, but not actually a being. If we attribute actual being to the uncreated creature in any way at all, it can only be the actual being of its Cause. In other words, there is no reality in this essence itself; there is only reality for it in the power of the cause or in the act of a subject thinking of it. In itself, it is potential.

St. Thomas’ notion of an essence having two kinds of esse—*in re* and *in intellectu*—does not appear here at all. Suarez is concerned with a distinction of actual essence (*in re*), a being, outside the mind, from whatever other essence there is, existing in the mind, as potential, and not a reality or being. “Real” and “actual”, for him, refer only to what is existing outside the mind. As

potential or in the mind, essence cannot form the first term of a “real distinction”, because that is always between two realities. He takes this far granted in the background of the discussion. And potential being is not a reality.

The doctrine of Avicenna and Scotus that the possibles have objective truth has led quite effectively to the notion that the creation of God is not somehow a complete production of being. Suarez shows, in the Christian background, quite clearly that the possibles are not realities, they have no actual being; and thereby the doctrine of creation is preserved. However, there is no suspicion on his part throughout that he is concerned with a true sort of existence when he is dealing with intentional existence. The esse an essence has in the mind is only by an extrinsic denomination.

The next step is to show that potential essential being is to actual essential being as non-being to being. This is called a real negative distinction (as opposed to the real positive distinction denied above), since one term is a non-being or unreality. Or else it can be called a rational distinction, since one term is only conceived by the intellect.

igitur, quod illud esse in potentia, seu illa potentia objectiva non possit esse res aliqua vera et positiva in ipsa re, quae in potentia esse dicitur, prima est evidens ex dictis numero praecedenti... Secundo, nam vel talis potentia manet in re producta, vel nam manet. Si non manet, nihil reale et positivum esse potest; quomodo enim illud ens, quaecumque esse fingatur, si aliquid positivum et reale esset, destrueretur per productionem entis in actu? Si vera illa potentia manet in re producta, jam illa potentia non est objectiva tantum, sed etiam subjectiva, nec res fierent ex nihilo, sed ex praesupposita potentia, tanquam ex subjecto, vel materia ex qua fit res. Tertio, supra ostensum est, in essentia possibili priusquam fiat, nihil rei esse (proprie loquendo de re positiva et actuali); ergo non potest in ea esse potentia realis positiva; omnis enim potentia realis positiva, est res aliqua vera, seu in aliqua realitate et entitate fundata. (*ibid.*,S.3, #3, p. 233b)

This is an objective potency, not a subjective; it is not the potential essential being that is the subject out of which a thing is produced. The potency that he has in mind as distinguished from actuality is not the subject of a creative act, pre-existing the creative act. It does not remain in the thing; and is not the subject out of which the thing is produced. Objective potency is not a thing or a being, for once the thing is produced, it disappears; it is not subjective or receptive potency.

Nam, si sit sermo de essentia in actu respectu essentiae in potentia, minus proprie dici videtur addere illi existentiam, quia additio realis non fit proprie, nisi enti reali, nam aliquid entitatis habet cui additio fit; diximus autem essentiam in potentia nihil habere entitatis; non ergo ei fit additio, proprie loquendo, nisi fortasse secundum rationem, quatenus essentia in potentia objectiva apprehendi-

tur per modum entis, propriusque diceretur essentiam, ut actu ens, distingui per existentiam actualem a seipsa, ut est in potentia. Unde, si sit sermo de essentia in actu, nullo modo dici potest, juxta hanc sententiam, quod essentia existens addat existentiam supra essentiam in actu, quia essentia, quae est ens actu, formaliter et intrinsece includit existentiam; per illam enim constituitur ens actu, et distinguitur ab ente in potentia, juxta hanc sententiam, ut dictum est. Quapropter frequentius utuntur illo modo loquendi auctores, qui existimant esse distingui ex natura rei ab essentia creaturae, ut patet ex superius citatis, inter quos Aegid.; Quodl. 1, quaest. 7, ait, 'esse imprimi essentiae dum creatur et fit existens.' Quod dictum si intelligatur de essentia in potentia prout erat, vel potius cogitabatur ante effectum Dei, vel est omnino falsum, vel impropriissimum ac metaphoricum; quo modo enim potest actus imprimi ei quod nihil est? Actus enim non imprimitur nisi potentiae receptivae: essentia autem sub ea consideratione non est in potentia receptiva, sed mere objectiva. Igitur, ut illa locutio et similes aliquem verum sensum habere possint, juxta praedictam sententiam, necesse est intelligi de essentia in actu, quae comparata ad esse, est potentia receptiva illius, non tamen est actualis essentia, nisi dum actu recipit actum essendi. (*ibid.*, S. 3, #5, p. 234a-b)

Essential potential being cannot be a subjective or receptive potency, or the doctrine of creation falls; and this is so common to the three opinions that none could hold otherwise. For subjective receptive potency—the matter or subject of an act—is something real, positive, and actual. Objective potency is only in the mind of the knower; it is the possibility of a thing which is *not* produced, and thus contains a negation.

Suarez' real distinction is in the order of essence, if at all. One has to say that actual essence is distinct from potential essence by its own actual entity. Essence, when actual, is made actual by the fact that it is an essence outside the mind, not by something different from itself. No further real *esse existentiae* or existential being is necessary to constitute it as a thing or a real being, when it is a thing or a real being outside the mind. This would be impossible and superfluous. He goes on to prove that actual essential being is identical with actual existential being.

Dico tertio; illud esse, quo essentia creaturae formaliter constituitur in actualitate essentiae, est verum esse existentiae... Probatur autem haec assertio variis modis. Primo, quia hoc esse praecise sumptum satis est ad veritatem hujus locutionis de secundo adjacente, essentia est ergo illud est vera existentia... (*ibid.*, S. 4, # 4, pp. 235b-236a)

St. Thomas would certainly agree with this first argument: once an essence has any esse at all, it exists, and no further "esse existentiae" can be added. If "esse essentiae" be taken as "the being of an essence", then that essence is fully in existence.

Secundo argumentor, tam simpliciter quam ad hominem: nam huic esse actu-alis essentiae conveniunt omnia quae tribui solent existentiae, imo et illa omnia, propter quae auctores primae et secundae sententiae existimant, existentiam distingui ex natura rei ab essentia; ergo est verum esse existentiae. Antecedens probatur, nam prima hoc esse essentiae actualis non est aeternum, sed temporale; nam, ut supra ostensum est, creaturae nullum esse reale ab aeterno habuerunt, sed esse essentiae, prout distinguitur ab esse existentiae, dicitur esse aeternum, quod non potest esse verum nisi de illo esse potenciali; ergo esse actuale sicut temporale est, ita etiam est vera existentia. Deinde, hoc esse convenit creaturae contingenter seu non necessaria, quando quidem et priusquam fieret, illud non habuit, et potest, posteaquam illud habet, illo privari; sed istae sunt conditiones existentiae, propter quas maxime censetur distingui ab essentia; nam essentia dicitur non convenire rei contingenter, sed necessaria et inseparabiliter; ergo hoc esse actualis essentiae habet conditiones omnes existentiae. (*ibid.*, S.4, #5, p. 236a-b)

The second argument shows that actual essential being has all the characteristics usually attributed to existence: temporality, contingency, etc. Necessity is not in actual essential being, but in potential or possible being only. All the characteristics that are supposed to distinguish *esse essentiae* and *esse existentiae* are possessed by *esse essentiae*. Therefore, it itself is true *esse existentiae*. This is the being of actual existence. Given the terms of the argument, this point is not contradicted by the texts of St. Thomas. Rather, St. Thomas would agree. We now proceed from the point of view of existence.

Est ergo hoc verum esse existentiae... Tertio declaratur hoc ipsum ex propria ratione existentiae; nam esse existentiae nihil aliud est quasi illud esse, quo formaliter et immediate entitas aliqua constituitur extra causas suas, et desinit esse nihil, ac incipit esse aliquid; sed huiusmodi est hoc esse, quo formaliter et immediate constituitur res in actualitate essentiae; ergo est verum esse existentiae. (*ibid.*, S.4, ##5-6, p. 236b)

This third argument states that *esse existentiae* is what is supposed to posit a thing outside of nothingness, outside its causes. But that is exactly what the being of an actual essence does. So the two are not different. The whole point is to show that essential being or actual essential being is real existential being. For an essence to be no longer potential but actual is for it to be outside its causes. What makes it actual is that which makes it exist.

Now for Thomas the very first actuality of a thing, which makes all other actualities in it to be is *esse*, which is immediate and intrinsic to a thing. Again, for Suarez, once it receives its act of being, the essence is actual. And this being of an essence is formally and immediately constitutive of the essence in all its actualities. There is no disagreement here.

Given their starting-points and their background, these arguments are flawless. They show that existential being and essential being are the same being. In the real thing, there is only one kind of being. Once this is established, he can proceed to the historical controversy and show that in the terms given therein, created essence, actual outside its causes, is not really different from its being as one thing from another.

Si ea quae diximus satis a nobis probata sunt, non est difficile ex eis colligere quid sit in proposita quaestione, et de opinionibus sectione prima relatis sentiendum. Dicendum est enim prima, essentiam creatam in actu extra causas constitutam non distingui realiter ab existentia, ita ut sint duae res seu entitates distinctae. In hoc conlusione suppono significationem terminorum, et distinctionem jam declaratam de essentia in potentia vel in actu. Suppono etiam non esse sermonem de subsistentia vel inhaerentia, sed de proprio esse existentiae. Probari igitur potest conclusio sic exposita ex Aristotele, qui ubique ait ens adjunctum rebus nihil eis addere; nam idem est ens homo, quod homo; hoc autem, cum eadem proportione, verum est de re in potentia et in actu; ens ergo actu, quod est proprie ens, idemque quod existens, nihil addit rei seu essentiae actuali, ex sententia Aristotelis, qui ita loquitur III Metaph., c. 2; libr.5, c.1; libr. 10, cf. Quem imitatur Averroes, eisdem locis, reprehendens Avicennam. (*ibid.*, S. 6, # 1, pp. 241b-242a)

Again this is an accurate *reportatio*. He is in line with the controversy; his phrasing squaring with it exactly. He refers to Aristotle for the statement that existing adds nothing to an actual essence, a being. And this is also shown by reason, for the first, basic actuality of a thing constitutes it outside potentiality. Thus it is already constituted an entity; any further entity to be added to it would be impossible.

...neque etiam potest esse necessaria sub aliqua ratione causae, proprie, vel reductive, ut essentia habeat suam entitatem actualem essentiae; ergo nulla ratione fingi potest talis entitas distincta.  
(*ibid*)

*Esse existentiae* added to actual essence makes no difference. It cannot confer the first, most fundamental, aspect of being in act; for the essence already has that basic actuality which puts it outside potency. *Esse existentiae* would not even be necessary for this purpose. The first, most basic actuality in a thing, for Suarez, is, of course, *esse essentiae*. And it performs all the functions that *esse existentiae* is supposed to perform. It is superfluous and useless to invoke the latter for an effect already completed.

Suarez does say that it is contradictory for an entity to be constituted—entitatively—by something outside itself; and herein he does contradict St. Thomas. Because he does not conceive of “*esse essentiae*” as a possessive phrase, but as qualitative (“essential being”), essence and *esse essentiae* are for him identical. They would not be so in St. Thomas, where “*esse essen-*

*tiae*” would mean “the being of an essence”, the being that an essence possesses. But Suarez has at least made it clear that *esse essentiae* and *esse existentiae* have precisely the same formal aspect of being: the *esse essentiae* does all the things, has all the effects, all the characteristics of *esse existentiae*. An actual being and an existent signify the same thing, and even the same formal aspect of a thing.

... Concludimus, ens actu, et existens, eandem rem et rationem formalem significare: ideoque fingi non posse esse existentiae, distinctum ab illo esse, quo unaquaeque res in actualitate suae essentiae constituitur. (*ibid.*, S. 5, # 11, p. 240b)

Actuality and existence are the same notion. The being of essence, the being of actual essence, is the same as the being that we call existence. To conclude, he shows that a modal distinction cannot be present either.

Atque hinc ulterius inferimus, hujusmodi entitatem existentiae dicta modo distinctam, non solum superfluum esse, sed plane impossibilem. (*ibid.*, S. 5, # 12, p. 240b)

Any further mode of essential entity would be as superfluous and impossible as an added entity. Concerning Suarez’ own conclusion that they are not really but conceptually distinct, *cum fundamento in re*? How can Suarez claim this, when he has said that they are the same, both as things and as notions? The whole probative force of his arguments against the real distinction has been strongly brought to bear just on this point. How then can he appear to arrive where he does? It seems it would be safe to say he does not succeed.

Suarez has said the last word on this controversy. There is no need of it ever being reopened in these terms; of making being (existence) so accidental that it becomes another thing, another being. Suarez’ arguments against this position are flawless and final.

## ESSENCE, UNITY, AND GOODNESS

In his various writings, St. Thomas is consistent in defending, with Averroes and against Avicenna, the idea that unity and goodness are not added like accidents to a nature or substance. Presented with Aristotle’s text:

If, now, being and unity are the same and are one thing in the sense that they are implied in one another as principle and cause are, not in the sense that they are explained by the same definition (though it makes no difference even if we suppose them to be like that—in fact this would even strengthen our case) ...; and if, further, the substance of each thing is one in no merely accidental way, and similarly is from its very nature something that is:— all this being so, there must be exactly as many species of being as of unity.

(*Met.* IV, 2, 1003b22-33)

St. Thomas comments as follows:

Unum igitur quod est principium numeri, aliud est ab eo quod cum ente convertitur. Unum enim quod cum ente convertitur, ipsum ens designat, super- addens indivisionis rationem, quae, cum sit negatio vel privatio, non ponit aliquam naturam enti additam. Et sic in nullo differt ab ente secundum rem, sed solum ratione. Nam negatio vel privatio non est ens naturae, sed rationis, sicut dictum est. Unum vera quod est principium numeri addit supra substantiam, rationem mensurae, quae est propria passio quantitatis, et primo invenitur in unitate. Et dicitur per privationem vel negationem divisionis, quae est secundum quantitatem continuam. (*In IV Met.*, 1.2, Cathala ed. #560)

He shows that unity adds nothing to a nature. It adds the aspect of indivision, which is a privation. As negative and adding nothing positive, it cannot be an accident. In the text of Aristotle

...οὐδέν ἕτερον τὸ ἓν παρὰ τὸ ὄν. (*ibid.*, ll. 31-32)

Thus the first term of the question is an *ens*, a given being that exists. Does the unity that follows on being add anything to this? No; it is no accident; it is already there. He upholds Aristotle and Averroes against Avicenna here.

Sciendum est autem quod circa hoc Avicenna aliud sensit... Dicebat autem quod hoc unum convertitur cum ente, non quia significat ipsam rei substantiam vel entis, sed quia significat accidens quod inhaeret omni enti... De uno autem hoc dicebat, quia aestimabat quod illud unum quod convertitur cum ente, sit idem quo illud unum quod est principium numeri... De uno autem non videtur esse verum, quod sit idem quod convertitur cum ente, et quod est principium numeri. (*ibid.*, ##556, 557, 559)

Avicenna is confusing this essential negative unity with the unity that is the principle of number— in the accidental category of quantity. The latter is a positive form that follows on a substance and is a positive accident. We must distinguish the unity that is essential, transcendental, and negative from the unity that is positive, accidental, and quantitative.

Once a thing is constituted a being, unity is essential to it. With respect to the transcendentals, Thomas always considers them as following on being; and so this does not contradict the doctrine of essence in its absolute consideration being neither one nor many. We do not have essence in its absolute consideration here tied down to either type of being; but an essence that has being—otherwise, we would not be considering the transcendentals.

With respect to goodness, we have a rather different picture; the background is that of more

ancient authorities, e.g., St. Augustine, Boethius, and the *Liber de Causis*.

Sicut ens multiplicatur per substantiale et accidentale, sic bonitas multiplicatur; sed tamen inter utrumque differt. Quia aliquid dicitur ens esse absolute propter suum esse substantiale, sed propter esse accidentale non dicitur esse absolute: unde, cum generatia sit motus ad esse; cum aliquis accipit esse substantiale, dicitur generari simpliciter; cum vera accipit esse accidentale, dicitur generari secundum quid; et similiter est de corruptione, per quam esse amittitur. (*De Ver.*,q.21,a.5,c.Mand.ed.)

Distinguish substantial and accidental being. What makes a thing to be is its substantial being, simply and properly speaking; it is made to be through its accidents, only *secundum quid*, in a secondary way. It is a being in and through its essential principles; and its accidental principles only make it to be *secundum quid*.

De bono autem est e conversa. Nam secundum substantialem bonitatem dicitur aliquid bonum secundum quid, secundum vera accidentalem dicitur aliquid bonum simpliciter; unde hominem injustum non dicimus bonum simpliciter, sed secundum quid, in quantum est homo; hominem vera justum dicimus simpliciter bonum... In se ipso autem aliquid perficitur ut subsistat per essentialia principia; sed ut debita modo se habeat ad omnia quae sunt extra ipsum, non perficitur nisi mediante accidentibus superadditis essentiae; quia operationes quibus unum alteri conjungitur, ab essentia mediante virtutibus essentiae superadditis progrediuntur; unde absolute bonitatem non obtinet nisi secundum quod completum est secundum substantialia et secundum accidentalia principia. (*ibid.*, cont.)

Goodness, however, is founded on perfection; and a thing is not simply perfect unless it has all the perfections of its nature. These it acquires, and this acquisition means of accidental perfections. A thing has to have acquired accidents before it has the perfection its nature demands. Hence goodness is the exact reverse, in relation to essence, from being; a thing is good (complete, perfect) *simpliciter*, through its accidental principles; but it is good *secundum quid* only, through its essential principles.

Quidquid autem creaturae perfectionis habet ex essentialibus et accidentalibus principalis simul conjunctis, hoc totum Deus habet per unum suum esse simplex; simplex enim ejus essentia est, ejus sapientia et justitia et fortitudo, et omnia hujusmodi, quae in nobis sunt essentiae superaddita. Et ideo ipsa absoluta bonitas in Deo idem est quod ejus essentia; in nobis autem consideratur secundum ea quae superadduntur essentiae. (*ibid.*, cont.)



God is absolutely good, however, through his substantial being, since there is no distinction in him of substance, being, or accidents. The meaning of essence is clear here: it is being set in distinction from accidents, as substance.

Sed adhuc inter Dei bonitatem et nostram alia differentia invenitur. Essentialis enim bonitas non attenditur secundum considerationem, naturae absolutam, sed secundum esse ipsius; humanitas non habet rationem boni vel bonitas nisi in quantum esse habet. Ipsa autem natura vel essentia divina est ejus esse; natura autem vel essentia cuiuslibet rei creatae non est suum esse, sed esse participans ab alio. Et sic in Deo est esse purum, quia ipse Deus est suum esse subsistens; in creatura autem est esse receptum vel participatum. Unde dico, quod si bonitas absoluta diceretur de re creata secundum suum esse substantiale, nihilominus adhuc remaneret habere bonitatem per participationem, aicut et habet esse participatum. Deus autem est bonitas per essentiam, in quantum ejus essentia est suum esse. Et haec videtur esse intentio Philosophi in *lib. de Causis*, qui dicit, solam divinam bonitatem esse bonitatem puram. (*ibid.*, cont.)

Even if a thing could be hypothetically said to be simply or absolutely good through its essential principles, paying no attention to accidents, this would still be from esse and essence in its absolute consideration would have nothing of the good. Goodness based on substantial being (even though really only goodness in a secondary way) is still participated and presupposes an ordination to the First cause. The next section is pure hypothesis again.

Sed adhuc alia differentia invenitur inter divinam bonitatem et creaturae; bonitas enim habet rationem causae finalis. Deus autem habet rationem causae finalis, cum sit omnium ultimus finis, sicut et primum principium; ex quo oportet ut omnis alius finis non habeat habitudinem vel rationem finis nisi secundum ordinem ad causam primam; quia causa secunda non influit in suum causatum nisi praesupposito influxu causae primae, ut patet in *lib. de Causis* (Prop.1); unde et bonum quod habet rationem finis non potest dici de creatura, nisi praesupposito ordine Creatoris ad creaturam. (*ibid.*, cont.)

Both hypothetical statements are developed to meet the language used by his auctores. This doctrine is the foundation of Thomas' constant teaching that evil can exist only in the good.

...malum importat remotionem boni. Non autem quaelibet remotia boni malum dicitur. Potest enim accipi remotio boni et privative et negative. Remotio igitur boni negative accepta, mali rationem non

habet; alioquin sequeretur quod ea quae nullo modo sunt, mala essent; et iterum quod quaelibet res esset mala, ex hoc quod non habet bonum alterius rei, ut pote quod homo esset malus, quia non habet velocitatem caprae, vel fortitudinem leonis. Sed remotia boni privative accepta, malum dicitur; sicut privatio visus caecitas dicitur. Subjectum autem privationis et formae est unum et idem, scilicet ens in potentia: sive sit ens in potentia simpliciter, sicut materia prima, quae est subjectum formae substantialis et privationis oppositae; sive sit ens in potentia secundum quid et in actu simpliciter, ut corpus diaphanum, quod est subjectum tenebrarum et lucis. Manifestum est autem quod forma per quam aliquid est actu, perfectio quaedam est, et bonum quoddam: et sic omne ens in actu, bonum quoddam est. Et similiter omne ens in potentia, in quantum hujus modi, bonum quoddam est, secundum quod habet ordinem ad bonum: sicut enim ens in potentia, ita et bonum in potentia. Relinquitur ergo quod subjectum mali sit bonum. (*ST. I, a.8, q.3, c*)

The subject of evil is always a good; evil is a defect of good; and such a privation could not exist (if we consider it as an inhering accidental form) unless a good were already there in which it could inhere.

...necessae est dicere quod omne malum aliquo modo causam habeat. Malum enim est defectus boni quod natum est et debet haberi. Quod autem aliquid deficiat a sua naturali et debita dispositione, non potest provenire nisi ex aliqua causa trahente rem extra suam dispositionem: non enim grave movetur sursum nisi ab aliqua impellente, nec agens deficit in sua actione nisi propter aliquod impedimentum. Esse autem causam non potest convenire nisi bono; quia nihil potest esse causa nisi in quantum est ens; omne autem ens, in quantum hujusmodi, bonum est. Et si consideremus speciales rationes causarum, agens et forma et finis perfectionem quandam important, quae pertinet ad rationem boni: sed et materia, in quantum est potentia ad bonum, habet rationem boni. (*ST. I, q. 49, a.1, c*)

Goodness adds a positive aspect to a thing. In support of the fact that Thomas holds that even substantial goodness derives from the *esse*:

...creatura non solum est a Deo secundum essentiam, sed secundum esse suum, in quo praecipue consistit ratio bonitatis substantialis; et secundum perfectiones superadditas, in quibus consistit bonitas absoluta; et haec non sunt essentia rei. Et praeterea ipse respectus quo essentia rei refertur ad Deum ut ad principium, est aliud quam essentia. (*De Ver.*, q. 21, a.5, ad 5<sup>um</sup>)

. . .hoc modo essentia denominatur bona sicut et ens; unde, sicut habet esse per participationem, ita et bona est per participationem; esse enim et bonum communiter acceptum est simplicius quam essentia, quia communius; cum dicantur non solum de essentia, sed etiam de eo quod per essentiam subststitit, et iterum de ipsis accidentibus. (*ibid.*, ad 6<sup>um</sup>)

In the eighth objection of this same article, a real difficulty develops:

Praeterea, si creatura est bona per aliquam bonitatem superadditam essentiae: cum omne quod est, bonum ait; illa bonitas, cum sit res quaedam, bona erit. Non autem alia bonitate, sed per essentiam suam; quia sic iretur in infinitum. Ergo eadem ratione poterit esse quod creatura ipsa esset bona per suam essentiam. (*DeVer.*, q. 21, a.5, obj. 8)

Thomas' answer is extremely significant for his doctrine of being, especially in the light of the background we have seen, of the Thomists' position that *esse existentiae* was a *res*, *ens*, or *entitas*, different from the entity that it actualized.

Ad octavum dicendum quod hoc modo bonitas rei dicitur bona sicut essentia rei dicitur bona, et sicut esse rei dicitur ens\* non quia ejus sit aliquid aliud esse; sed quia per hoc esse res esse dicitur, et quia hac bonitate res dicitur bona; unde, sicut non sequitur quod ipsa substantia rei non dicatur per esse aliquod quod ipsa non sit, quia ejus esse non dicitur ens per aliquod esse aliud ab ipso: ita praedicta ratio non sequitur de bonitate, sequitur autem de unitate, de qua introducit eam Commentator in *IV Metaphysicorum*: quia unum indifferenter se habet ad hoc quod respiciat essentiam vel esse: unde essentia rei est una per se ipsam, non propter esse suum: et ita non est una per aliquam participationem, sicut accidit de ente et bono. (*ibid.*, ad 8<sup>um</sup>)

[\* "Ens" here is undoubtedly not a noun, but rather the participle, and therefore used adjectivally, for it stands in perfect parallel construction with two other adjectives. It is simply a predicate adjective like "bona", and does not here mean "a being", "an entity". When you say a thing is, you mean it is made to be by an act other than itself. But when you say an esse or act of being is; you do not mean that it has another act added to it by which it is made to be, but that it "exists" in itself by virtue of the very fact that it makes some thing to exist. This almost anticipates the argumentation between Giles and Henry, Suarez and BaZez, etc. especially in the reasoning they invoked about the infinite regress, as making the separate reality of *esse existentiae* impossible. Once a thing is a being, it is one essentially, but it is not thereby good. Everything is essentially one insofar as it is essentially being, and so no participation is necessary to make a thing one.

With unity, there is a negative, and not a positive aspect to be participated. Ed.]

...unum quod convertitur cum ente, dicitur secundum rationem negationis, quam addit supra ens; bonum autem non addit negationem super ens, sed ejus ratio in positione consistit; et ideo non est simile. (*ibid.*, ad 1<sup>um</sup>)

In summary, an existent thing or nature is:

essentially) ENS per essentiam

accidentally)ENS per participationem — considered above,

essentially) UNUM per essentiam ONLY—essentially one in the same sense that it is essentially ens.

accidentally) BONUM (per participationem ONLY—a thing is not good through its essence.

Through its substance, as opposed to accidents, it is not simply good.

## THE ESSENTIALITY OF BEING

We enter now into the final phase of the consideration of our topic. So far we have considered only the accidentality of being, being insofar as it is essential to God only, and does not flow from the essence of the creature. To be accidental, it must be other than and different from the essence of a thing, regardless of any consideration of the human intellect. We have had to probe the long history of the controversy over the distinction between the two, in order to understand the full meaning of the otherness of being from essence—that *they are not two realities, but two principles*. There is a distinction in the reality itself, and a composition of the thing with its being, as of potency with act. Again, it is not a composition of two realities to produce a third. Without this composition, there would not be a finite reality at all.

The other side of the picture, based on the other set of texts, is far more difficult to understand and far more controverted. Its understanding, nevertheless, will come easily and rapidly, in the light of the considerations which we have already made in the course of this study. On the other side of the problem of the relation of essences to their being, St. Thomas consistently maintains with Aristotle and against Avicenna that every nature is essentially a being—that being is not a mere accident. It is not a question of his maintaining now one position, now another; rather, there is a real feeling that there is no contradiction between the two. It seems as though he is certain that both aspects must be constantly maintained together, in order to explain finite reality, without ending on the one hand with Avicenna and on the other with Parmenides. Let us consider some of his texts, with their long explanations of this aspect of being.

...esse per se consequitur formam aera, supposito tamen influxu.  
Dei: sicut lumen sequitur diaphanum aeris, supposito influxu solis.  
Unde potentia ad non esse in spiritualibus creaturis et corporibus  
caelestibus, magis est in Deo, qui potest subtrahere suum influxum,

quam in forma vel in materia talium creaturarum. (*ST. I*, q. 104, a.1, ad 1<sup>um</sup>, Leon.ed.)

He uses the same illustration here as was used in the *De Ente*. Transparency in a medium was regarded as a quality, a proximate and immediate potency, in medieval physics, enabling a medium to receive light.

...quia diaphanum semper est in ultima dispositione ad lucem, statim ad praesentiam lucidi, in actu illuminatur. (*SCG II*, 19; Leon. Ed. XIII, p. 308b22-3)

The whole essence of diaphaneity was to prepare air to receive light. This was its complete function as a quality.

...Diaphanum est aeri principium lucendi quia facit eum proprium subjectum luminis. (*SCG II*, 54)

Note that Thomas will be able on the basis of this metaphor to call essence the “principium essendi”. The diaphanum, then, makes air the proper subject of light. This is not in any efficient sense, but in the sense of formal causality, which is a regular use of the verb *facere* —“to make”—both in common English parlance and in St. Thomas’ technical language. There are many examples to support this usage in Thomas. We say, for example in English, “The color makes the table brown”, and this is in the sense of a formal cause.

...Aristoteles dicit in II *De An.* quod non secundum quod aqua neque secundum quod aer, diaphanum est; sed quoniam est natura eadem in his utrisque, et in perpetuo et superiori corpore. Et eadem ratione, lumen, quod est actus diaphani, est eiusdem naturae in inferioribus corporibus et in caelesti corpore. (*In II De Cael.*, 1.14, Leon.ed. # 8)

This is another example of the same terminology as used in the realm of being. This metaphor for essence of transparency follows the same terminology wherever it occurs in the texts of St. Thomas’.

The ultimate efficient cause of the being of a thing, i.e., the influx of God, is mentioned here as functioning along with another cause, as the sun and the diaphanum are related in functioning together. But note that the latter can cause light only when the influx of the sun is there. This is the way in which being is caused by form; form is the principle of being as its subject, a potency to be. Form of its very nature requires being, but only if the efficient causality of God is operating there.

Diaphaneity is an accidental form, the formal cause of light, immediately making the air potential to light, but only actually doing so if the sun is there operating efficiently. Similarly, form of its very nature is meant to be a potency to being. The creature therefore determines of itself its own being, in a formal sense. Its form has as its very purpose, not as some accidental function, to

determine the kind of being that the creature is. This is done *per se*, it belongs to it essentially and it is the form's whole function. This "tendency" is so strong that the form in itself has a striving only to being and not to not-being. So much so that in separated substances, their contingency (or potency to non-being) is more on the side of *esse* than on the side of the form; God being able to create or not create them, and to withdraw his efficient causality.

Dupliciter ergo potest contingere quod in natura alicujus rei non sit possibilitas ad non esse. Uno modo per hoc quod res illa sit forma tantum subsistens in esse suo, sicut substantiae incorporeae, quae sunt penitus immateriales. Si enim forma ex hoc quod inest materiae, est principium essendi in rebus materialibus, nec res materialia potest non esse nisi per separationem formae; ubi ipsa forma in esse sua subsistens nullo modo poterit non esse: sicut nec esse potest a seipso separari. Alio modo per hoc quod in materia non sit potentia ad aliam formam, sed toto materiae possibilitas ad unam formam terminetur; sicut est in corporibus coelestibus, in quibus non est formarum contrarietas. Illae ergo solae res in sua natura possibilitatem habent ad non esse, in quibus est materia contrarietati subjecta. Aliis vero rebus secundum suam naturam competit necessitas essendi, possibilitate non essendi ab earum natura sublata... Relinquitur ergo quod non est impossibile Deum res ad non esse reducere; cum non sit necessarium eum rebus esse praebere, nisi ex suppositione suae ordinationis et praescientiae; quia sic ordinavit et praescivit, ut res in perpetuum in esse teneret. (*De Pot.*, q.5, a.3, c, Mand.ed. II, pp.176-77)

So much is the form a cause of being, that the potency to non-being in spiritual creatures is not in the nature of the creatures themselves, but from the existential side, the accidentality of their *esse*. The angel can be annihilated; but this possibility lies not in the angel itself but in God. The matter mentioned in this text is the celestial matter in the heavenly corporeal bodies, which were moved by the separated substances (in medieval astronomy), not terrestrial matter. Celestial matter was considered potential only to local motion, not to substantial change, i.e., corruption or generation.

So seriously is this doctrine taken that it becomes the principal metaphysical proof of the immortality of the human soul.

...Anima autem humana non posset corrumpi, nisi per se corrumpere. Quod quidem omnino est impossibile, non solum de ipsa, sed de quolibet subsistente quod est forma tantum. Manifestum est enim quod id quod secundum se convenit alicui, est inseparabile ab ipso. Esse autem per se convenit formae, quae est actus. Unde materia secundum hoc acquirit esse in actu, quod acquirit formam: secundum hoc autem accidit in ea corruptio, quod separatur forma ab ea. Impossibile est autem quod forma separetur a

seipsa. Unde impossibile est quod forma subsistens desinat esse.  
(*ST. I, q.15, a.6, c*)

To separate the human soul from being would be practically speaking, to separate the human soul from itself; so essentially (*secundum se*) does being belong to a form that is not dependent on matter and can be considered in itself as an act. In this way does Thomas prove the immortality of the human soul and the angels. Being belongs so essentially to a separated or separable form that it cannot, in considering the thing itself, be taken away from it. Thomas is not just stretching a point here, but is quite intentionally teaching a profound and serious metaphysical doctrine.

Considering the form itself, then, we cannot separate being from it, if it be human or angelic. In this way, we can see that form is truly a principle of being, of its very nature. And yet it cannot exercise this function of essentially determining a being by formal causality, unless it is therein also made to be, by an efficient cause lying outside itself (accidental to it)—without the influx of an efficient cause, and ultimately the primary efficient Cause, God. When this influx is present, the form determines the act of being that is its own proper act and that makes it (efficiently) to be. God could not create, or be the efficient cause of a being, without the necessary mediation of a formal cause. In other words, he could not create anything that was not finite.

...esse naturale per creationem Deus facit in nobis, nulla causa agente mediante, sed tamen mediante aliqua causa formali; forma enim naturalis principium est esse naturalis: et similiter esse spiritualis gratuitum Deus facit in nobis nullo agente mediante, sed tamen mediante aliqua forma creata, quas est gratia. (*De Ver.*, q.27, a.1, ad 3<sup>um</sup>, Mand.ed. I, p.693a)

God uses no instrumentality in creation, in the line of efficient causality. There is no intermediate efficient cause, but there is an intermediate formal cause. The efficient causality comes from God, but the formal causality from somewhere else. In the line of formal causality, God “depends” on a natural form (which is nevertheless created, by being made to be), which is truly a principle of the created thing’s being. In this way is it true that a thing is, through its form.

Deus esse naturale creavit sine media efficiente, non tamen sine medio formali. Nam unicuique dedit formam per quam esset.  
(*Quaest.Disp. De Caritate*, a.1, ad 13<sup>um</sup> Mand.ed., Vol. III, p. 272b)

God created natural being without an intermediary efficient cause, but with an intermediary formal cause. He gives the form being, but is dependent on that form in the line of formal causality.

Form is the subject of and in potency to being, and thus causes it in the sense of determination. Formal causality of its very nature is a determinative, defining, limiting causality. Form is a determinative or limiting principle of being; and in creatures, it is other than the being (the “to be”, the act), though not other than that which is.

Si ergo inveniantur aliquae formae non in materia... tamen quaelibet forma est determinativa ipsius esse; nulla earum est ipsum esse, sed est habens esse. (*In De Heb.*, c, 2; Mand.ed., I, p. 176)

Every form is a *habens esse* “having being”, a subject of being; it is not being itself, but determines being. This is a peculiar situation. Usually, the ‘subject’ is what is determined, and the formal determining is done by what is received, in Aristotle. But the form here in St. Thomas is treated conversely; it is the subject which receives and yet, as potency, it does the determining—not in its function as act. The conclusion is that we should be very careful and cautious here about conceiving this metaphysical situation in the background of Aristotelian principles.

Esse enim quod hujusmodi est, est aliud secundum essentiam ab eo cui additur determinandum... (*De Pot.*, q.7, a.2, ad 9<sup>um</sup>, Mand.ed., II, p.245a)

*Esse* is added to an essence in such a way that it is determined by the potency that receives it. Form itself is not actual; without the being that it receives, it just is not present, it is nothing; and yet when actualized by being it determines being, as a potency.

Here St. Thomas’ own notion differs very radically from Aristotle, Avicenna, Suarez, and all metaphysicians. Objections to this effect: How can essence be different from that without which it is nothing?— simply fail when we see that in St. Thomas, form does not determine *esse* after the manner of an act or in its function as an act of matter, as it does in Aristotle. Rather it does so as a potency.

Unde non sic determinatur esse per aliud aicut potentia per actuni sed magis sicut per potentiam... (*ibid.*)

In this way, then, no actuality need be considered as functioning in form in priority to, or independently of, or without presupposing, being. As a (formal) cause, it must be prior to the reality it helps to effect, but this (formal) priority does not require any actuality, but merely the potentiality to be. And only insofar as it is, does form have any actuality; and this actuality is always follows on being. Being is then the effect on which all other effects depend. Thus you cannot approach this problem, conceiving of first a matter, then a form, then existence (in order of causal priority); rather we must say that first, an act of being is created, but as limited, and therefore with an essence.

In relation to matter, form is its act and complement, but only as made actual by its potential determinative relation to being. Thus form does give essence a positive character, an aspect of reality; but apart from being, even this is merely potential. The essence is, of itself, positive; but this quality is there only as potency. It is the being of an essence that enables the form, now functioning as act, to make an essence something positive. The determining or limiting principle of a being is something positive, even though everything positive about it comes from the act of being that it receives, and presupposes that act of being in order to be actually positive, and not just potentially.



Thus the Platonizing example of being as an extended color, going only to certain limits, which represent the essence— “just so much white surface”—or of being as water which is limited by a container which represents the essence, is fallacious. This is to conceive being along the lines of Platonic participation. For what you really have in this metaphor is a quiddity or an essence, circumscribed. Now the only time the “*what you have*” (the quiddity or essence, like color— which is a quality, or water—which is a thing, a substance, a nature) is *being*, is in God. This example offers the notion of *being*, limited in a purely negative or privative way; whereas it is really limited in reality by something positive, a positive essence. Once you consider being as a nature, as this metaphor does, you can no longer limit it, as the brilliant reasoning of Parmenides proved. Beware of such examples.

In composite things, neither matter nor form, nor *esse* exists, but the *thing exists* (i.e., the essence abstracted without precision). We cannot conceive being with parts. Rather, the act of being has to make something positive to exist; but that something or form is nothing before receiving the act of being. It receives it as potency receives (potency in regard to being, although it is act in regard to matter). It is immediately made an act, and actually positive, by receiving the act of being. It then determines, as proper potency and as positive (though made positive by being) its own act of being.

Per hoc enim in compositis ex materia et forma dicitur forma esse principium essendi quia est complementum aubstantiae cuius actus est ipsum esse, sicut diaphanum est aeri principium lucendi quia facit eum proprium subjectum luminis. (*SCG*. II, 54, Leon.ed. XIII, p. 392a20-25.)

Form is a principle of being (incomposite substances) because it is the complement of the substance whose act is to be; just as the diaphanum makes air the proper subject of light.

...gratia, secundum quod est qualitas, dicitur agere in animam non per modum causae efficientia, sed per modum causae formalis: sicut albedo facit album, et justitia justum. (*ST*. I-II, q.110, a.2, ad 1<sup>um</sup>)

Here the usage of the term “*facit*” is explained and can be applied in the preceding text cited. In one *locus*, Thomas even says:

...forma facit esse. . .(*SCG*. I, 26, Leon.ed. XIII, p. 82a15);

but the same idea holds true in that context. Efficient causality does not apply to this usage of *facere* in any of these texts.

Form, just in itself, determines the thing to being and not to not-being; but it always presupposes the efficient causality that gives the act of being and alone enables it to exercise its formal causality. Essence denotes something of its very nature meant to be, insofar as in itself this lies, i.e., as a formal, determining cause. This whole order to being is not accidental to it, but its very *ratio*. In itself, it is just potential, but *per se* a potency to being; it is the *proper* subject of being.

And thus, in this way, being—to be—is not accidental to it, but demanded by it and essential to every nature. Thus we still remain within the categories when we ascend the Porphyrean tree and end in “being”, because every quiddity contained in the categories is ordered to be, essentially.

From this viewpoint, the being of a thing is not the final accident added to a complete nature already finished and there waiting, but it is required to constitute the *nature as nature*, to make an essence function *as an essence*. All this is derived from the consideration of created essences alone. But these creatures are not sufficient to actualize themselves, to give what their essences demand as potencies. Being *is* proper to them. In a profound sense, in the line of formal causality, a creature is a being essentially—in its own proper order. But it cannot, as an efficient cause, cause itself. Being does not flow from the essential principles of a thing in this way, in the line of efficient causality.

Created being thus does not follow formally from God after the Platonic manner a participation; a creature is sufficient to itself as formal cause; provided it be efficiently caused. Its efficient causality must be sought in another: this is all that “participation” means in St. Thomas. His doctrine of being cannot be approached in an exclusively Avicennian, Neo-Platonic, or Aristotelian framework. It will conform in parts and in certain selected texts; for it has faces, which make it similar to each. But it is different from all other doctrines, and must be looked at for itself, for what it peculiarly and originally is.

Human intellection cannot reduce the complexity of its object to one simple principle. We say *ens* is the ultimate one object of the intellect: but we cannot reduce this to a simple starting-point, by being deceived by the equivocation of the term. No essence is known or abstracted without being known as being, a simultaneous judgment taking place. The first object, therefore, to which all our knowledge is reduced, is a composite notion, but it is the starting-point of all metaphysical reasoning. The relatively simple notions, essence and *esse*, embodied in this complexity, are derived from it by analysis.

This fundamental ambiguity of our most primary knowledge cannot be escaped. As known to man, it always presents two sides. From the essence side, being is essential to things; from the *esse* side, being is accidental to things. Being is individual and different in everything that exists, when attained in the judgment; but when conceptualized as an act for metaphysical treatment, you have the most common of all notions, the most general of all predicates. And yet, *at the same time*, this notion is the most unique and diverse we can have, since it is inseparable from the act of judgment. The ambiguities of our opening pages cannot be reduced by human intellection to an oversimplification. Metaphysics must always start here in order to unfold and develop well. Essence, being in reality, and being in the mind are the three basic considerations after *ens*; and from these does the progress begin towards a knowledge of God and the separated substances. We have not taken this path, but have rather emphasized the necessity of keeping the basic insights in mind all through any course in a genuinely “Thomistic” metaphysics.

## FINIS