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Thomas Aquinas, the real distinction between esse and essence, and overcoming the conceptual imperialism

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Thomas Aquinas, The Real Distinction Between *Esse* and Essence, and Overcoming the
Conceptual Imperialism of Metaphysics

A Thesis

Presented in

Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June, 2010

By

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Abstract

“Thomas Aquinas, The Real Distinction Between *Esse* and Essence, and Overcoming the Conceptual Imperialism of Metaphysics” treats the relation between thought and being within medieval metaphysics, especially as it relates to the distinction between essence and existence. The dissertation argues against a prominent strand of Thomistic interpretation (i.e., Existential Thomism), which holds that Aquinas’s real distinction between whatness (i.e., essence) and thatness (i.e., existence) constitutes a rupture with the dominant essentialism of metaphysics. I contend such a distinction, which would make existence into an act of being irreducible to the categories of conceptual thought and knowledge, introduces a signifier that, in its primary and proper signification of God, deprives creatures of the very perfection it was introduced to signify (i.e., actual existence). It thus fails to identify an ontological perfection in creatures really distinct from the intension and extension of the concepts “substance” or “thing.” I then turn to the thought of Duns Scotus to show that the mere identification of existence with essence does not entail “conceptual imperialism.” Although situated in the period of medieval scholasticism, such a study resonates with more contemporary philosophical critiques of the limitations and presuppositions of metaphysical knowledge and intelligibility.

In his *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics: A Study in the Greek Background of Mediaeval Thought*, Joseph Owens notes an unforeseeable consequence of Aristotle's cursory treatment of being *per accidens* as unscientific. Set against the dominance of 'being in the categories,' 'being *per accidens*' nearly falls to the status of "non-being" for Aristotle. Although Aristotle begins the *Metaphysics* with the oft-cited "being is said in many ways," being *per accidens* comes to occupy a marginal role in this text—treated in a few short chapters of Book Epsilon—and an increasingly marginal role in the ensuing tradition of metaphysics, both which tend to think being around substance. Being *per accidens* is that realm of being, Aristotle states, with which no science, whether theoretical, practical, or productive (*poietike*), need bother.¹

In what might be read as a marginal issue in the history of philosophy, Owens identifies an important move in the direction of medieval "existentialism," even though unrecognized and unintended by the Philosopher himself:

From the viewpoint of the much later distinction between essence and the act of existing, this treatment [of being *per accidens* as unscientific] must mean that Aristotle is leaving the act of existence entirely outside the scope of his philosophy. The act of existing must be wholly escaping his scientific consideration. All necessary and definite connections between things can be reduced to essence. The accidental ones do not follow from the essence. They can be reduced only to the actual existence of the thing. There is no reason in the essence of a carpenter why he actually is a musician. The reason has to be explained in terms of the actual existence of the two habits in the same man. Likewise, the results of free-choice cannot be explained in terms of essence. They form an existential problem.²

¹ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 2 vol. trans. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge: The Loeb Classical Library 271, 287, 1933-1935), 1026b4-7.

² See Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, 2nd ed, rev. (Toronto, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1963), 309; and *Ibid.*, "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being in the Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies* XX (1958): 19-23.

The essence of the carpenter can render *no reason why* she is also a musician. “Without why,” accidental being stands outside the necessary and definite connections governed by the domain of essence. Science (*scientia*) grounds beings by offering an account of the reason why: she is risible *because* she is human. Her human essence explains certain properties such as being capable of laughter. An account is thereby rendered. The fact of her also being a musician and a carpenter, however, cannot be derived from her human essence. Not all carpenters are also musicians. Such a fact, Owens explains, can only find ground as a matter of actual existence. The domain of the existential problem does not offer itself to scientific considerations as it is *without why*. Thus, actual existence as “being *per accidens*” suffers from groundlessness.³

³ In terms of understanding the *existentiality* as the heart of all predication, Owens elsewhere acknowledges: “The problem, however, becomes more difficult in the case of predicates that remain within the category of substance, and in general wherever the predicate is a generic characteristic of the subject. ‘Socrates is a man,’ for example, or ‘Man is an animal,’ may seem at first sight beyond the need of existential synthesis and above the conditions of time. Yet there is nothing in the nature of ‘man’ that requires it to be found in Socrates.” Joseph Owens, *An Interpretation of Existence* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1968), 34. Owens on multiple occasions notes Aquinas’s unmarked move to equate ‘being as the truth of propositions’ with ‘being *per accidens*.’ At first, this equation may seem unwarranted as ‘being as the truth of propositions’ covers both substantial and accidental being. But Owens defends Aquinas’s conjoining of being *per accidens* and being as the truth of propositions. He states: “Of these the first two ways listed in Book E of the *Metaphysics* were being *per accidens* and being in the sense of the true. Being *per accidens* meant that something happens to be found with something else, as for instance in the statement ‘The carpenter *is* a musician.’ There is nothing in the nature of the carpenter as such that requires him to be a musician. That he is a musician is entirely accidental to the fact that he is a carpenter. The verb “is,” accordingly, expresses in this case something accidental to the nature of the subject as such. It expresses being *per accidens*. It of course presupposes being *per se*, for it is concerned with the principal type of being, namely as found in any of the categories. It is concerned with a carpenter and with music, both of which are types of being that are found in the predicaments. But the being expressed by the verb in this proposition is not a type of being found in any of the categories. It is something over and above any predicamental being. It is *per accidens* in regard to the principal type of being, that is, the being that is limited to the necessary grooves of the categories.” Owens, “The Accidental and Essential Character of Being,” 4. Owens’ reason for aligning the two types of being (*ens*) is that it allows him to demonstrate that we humans grasp *esse* not through the intellect’s operation of simple apprehension (as we would grasp an essence or a normal predicamental accident such as “hot” or “white”) but through the complex operation of judgment. Thus, our intellect does not immediately *intuit esse*, but demonstrates it through the formation of propositions derived from the simple essences grasped in the first operation. This is why Owens rejects *intellectus essentiae* as constitutive of the “real distinction” between essence and *esse*, as though such an argument that relies on the simple operation of *intellectus* could reveal the distinction between the two. See below Chapter I Section 4; Also Chapter VI Section 2.

As indicated by Owens, however, and as will be explicated in what follows, such an act of existence, or “*esse*,” remains incidental to essences in a way not completely eliminable by essential *scientia*. Instead, as Jean-Luc Marion has aptly stated: “*Esse*, not on the hither side of essence like the accident but beyond it, nevertheless happens to it as an incident, as *the* incident par excellence.”⁴ Marion prefers to translate being “*per accidens*” as “incidental being” so as to not confuse the categorial being of predicable accidents with the being that falls upon or befalls something completely outside the essential domain. Following Marion in this translation, we will show how the status of actual existence as *incidental* with respect to the categorial being of substances marks a fault line between an orthodox Aristotelian essentialism and an existentialism that problematizes the very foundation from which Aristotelian *scientia* begins. Thus, whereas Aristotle can relegate the incidentality of actual existence to the unintelligible “ground” of matter due to its non-identity with the source of intelligibility, form, once the Aristotelian problematic is taken over by Christian thought, in particular that of Thomas Aquinas, actual existence need no longer be abandoned to groundlessness. Instead, as

⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Towards a Phenomenology of Givenness*. trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 155. As Marion states in fn. 49: “As a general rule, I understand (and translate) *sumbebekos* as *incident*. I use *accident* only when I stick to the narrow and metaphysical concept within the limits that Aristotle often sought to restrict it. The translation by *incident* corresponds to that of the German *Zufälligkeit*, *zufällig*, ‘what falls and arrives upon’.” Ibid 355. Aquinas himself notes this difference between “accident” in the sense of the nine categories and “accident” as one of Aristotle’s four predicates and Porphyry’s five universals. See *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, t. 24/2: *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis*. ed. J. Cos. (Roma-Paris: Commissio Leonina-Éditions Du Cerf, 2000), a. 11, resp. Hereafter “*De spiritualibus creaturis*.” “Accidental” in the latter sense thus might better be translated as “incidental” to avoid ambiguity in terms of *praedicamental* accidents (i.e., accidents in the nine categories opposed to substance) *predicable* accidents (i.e., one of the five universal ways of linking a subject to a predicate). Unlike the essential ways of linking a subject to a predicate (i.e., as genus, species, property, or quality), the incidental copula proposes a contingent fact about something (i.e., a subject term) that does not derive from its essence. Because even a *praedicamental* accident can be a genus, in which case it is linked to its species *essentially*, not incidentally (e.g., color is the genus of whiteness), Aquinas argues that the two senses must differ. For Porphyry’s confusion of the categories with the predicables, see Ernst A. Moody, *The Logic of William of Ockham*. (New York: Sheed and Ward Inc., 1935), 66-77.

part of the total order of being, the first cause provides for such being *in the same way* and to that extent that it is the total and immediate cause of all being. For this reason, Owens states: “St. Thomas takes great pains to show that the contingent as well as the necessary must be immediately caused by the Primary Being. For Aristotle, on the contrary, Being *per accidens* finds its ultimate explanation in matter.”⁵

To understand this sentiment of Owens, reiterated by Marion, and echoed by a chorus of “existential Thomists,” we must understand the question of being, that is, of *esse*, and its centrality to any *existential* Thomism. “*Esse*” is a difficult term to translate in philosophical contexts. It literally is the Latin infinitive “to be.” To continually translate the “*esse*” of something as its “to be” becomes cumbersome in English (e.g., the “to be” of creatures). An alternate possibility is to use “being,” which seems to be the most common practice. The problem with “being,” however, is that it is indistinguishable from the participle “*ens*,” which also must be translated as “being.” “*Ens*” more technically refers to “a being,” which may or may not have being (*esse*), and is a transcendental predicate convertible with “good” and “one.” Thus, there can be a “being of reason” (*ens ratione*) that lacks *esse* (e.g., a phoenix). The problem is that the English “being” can translate either term. For example, with the English title of Aquinas’s text *On Being and Essence*, which will be a central source in this work, “being” here translates “*ente*” (*De Ente et Essentia*) the ablative form of “*ens*.” Although “*esse*” comes to play a crucial role in this text, it is after and alongside a discussion of “*ens*.” Thus, using “being” to translate both “*esse*” and “*ens*” would give no indication to the reader that two separate issues are being discussed.

⁵ Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, 309-310.

Another possibility, which I have instituted to this point, would be to translate “*esse*” as some variation on “existence.” This would seem to solve the problem of beings of reason: what, for example, a phoenix lacks is “existence,” and although it is a certain type of being (*ens*) it is different from other beings (i.e., existing beings). This translation is problematic in its own right. Although this seems to be what Aquinas has in mind by “*esse*” in the early *De Ente et Essentia*, “*esse*” comes to enjoy a wider sense both in his own writings and in the works that follow him. One of the problems is how to refer to essential “being,” which—at least for some scholastic thinkers, even if not for Aquinas—enjoys its own status apart from the register of existing things. In order to account for the necessary status of eternal truths apart from the order of existing things (e.g., “A rose is a flower”), a thinker like Henry of Ghent would go so far as to distinguish “*esse essentiae*” (essential being) from “*esse existentiae*” (existential being). This is one of the problems with translating “*esse*” as “existence.” An even more basic problem is that in Latin there is a word for existence, “*existentia*” and the verb form “*existere*.” To equate “*esse*” simply with “existence” would leave nothing for “*existentia*” to translate.

Another less common translation (or over-translation) is “act of being.” Although this translation captures the sense in which “*esse*” is most often used in the tradition following from Aquinas, again there is a Latin phrase that more accurately corresponds to “act of being,” namely “*actus essendi*.” Here “*essendi*” is being used as it will be also be used in the formulas: “*forma essendi*,” “*virtus essendi*,” “*natura essendi*,” and “*ratio essendi*.” The problem of translating “*esse*” seems to be on the side of English in that our infinitive does not reflect the compactness of the Latin (as does, for example, the German “*sein*”) and its distinction from participle and gerund forms. Thus, in what follows, I will keep

the Latin “*esse*” as much as possible. Quite often, however, the discussion will require a decision between one of the aforementioned options, where I will nevertheless indicate that the English term translates “*esse*.” This will be of particular importance in contexts where both “*ens*” and “*esse*” is under discussion.

Even without a single word or phrase to translate the term, however, the general philosophical meaning of “*esse*” emerges around and in confrontation with a forgetfulness of being qua actual existence. According to Owens, and more largely to “existential Thomism,” Aquinas’s treatment of being as actual existence thus marks a chasm in a history of metaphysics whose dominant tendency has been to think being as essence. “Existential Thomism” is a reading of Aquinas’s philosophy that emphasizes the real distinction/composition between essence and *esse* in created beings as central to Aquinas’s philosophy. The core claim, I would argue, is that Aquinas introduces an unprecedented existential dimension to metaphysics fundamentally incommensurable with the previous forms of Platonic and Aristotelian essentialism. In *Being and Some Philosophers*, Etienne Gilson—perhaps the most polemical of all existential Thomists—clearly expresses what is at stake:

[...] any being results primarily from its act of existing as from one of its primary constituents, for, if the form is what makes it to be such a being, ‘to be’ is what makes it to be a ‘being.’ Precisely because existence reaches substance *in* and *through* its form, forms have to receive existence in order that they become ‘beings.’ But Thomas Aquinas could not posit existence (*esse*) as the act of a substance itself actualized by its form, without making a decision which, with respect to the metaphysics of Aristotle, was nothing less than a revolution. He had precisely to achieve the dissociation of the two notions of form and act. This is precisely what he has done and what probably remains,

even today, the greatest contribution ever made by any single man to the science of being.⁶

Thus, according to existential Thomism, the question of being that commences and sustains Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and the subsequent tradition of "essentialism," is not the existential problem *that* anything be at all.⁷ Despite this polyvalent sense of being, all of these ways pertain to being something, the primary of which is being a substance. The question of being concerns *what* something is as set against being something else (e.g., being substantially, not being accidentally; being said of many not just being in one), and not *that* something is at all as opposed to being nothing. Unable to think being apart from the conditions of essential intelligibility, *esse* has been forgotten as an extra-intelligible remainder whose incidentality is unable to meet the conditions for abstract conceivability. With the exception of Aquinas, who thinks being from the perspective of actual existence

⁶ Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Toronto, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), 174. The story Gilson and other existential Thomists tell is that Aquinas synthesizes Boethius with Avicenna to create a new problematic, misread by Giles of Rome, that of the *composition/distinction* of *esse et essentia* in finite beings. Gilson wants to rescue a pure thinking of being as existence, which he believes is the true revolution of Thomism and which separates Thomism from metaphysical systems and conceptual imperialism/essentialism. For an excellent analysis of Gilson's polemic, especially against Cajetan's (mis)reading of Aquinas, see Ralph McInerny, *Praeambula Fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006). I would include in this list, *at least*, the following: Etienne Gilson; Joseph Owens; Jacques Maritain; William E. Carlo; Cornelio Fabro; and (most recently) Victor Salas. Jean-Luc Marion, I would argue, is an inheritor of this tradition, although he departs from it in a number of ways that will come to light throughout this inquiry, especially around the issue of onto-theology. See below.

⁷ Joseph Owens argues that from Greek metaphysics, scholastic philosophy inherited two basic conceptions of being: one from Plato and another from Aristotle. And yet neither of these conceptions, the Platonic *ens perfectissimum* (*being as most perfect being*) or the Aristotelian *ens commune* (*being as most common being*), could be taken over wholesale by medieval philosophy. Being as the subject of metaphysics (i.e., a human science) could not be simply about the *ens perfectissimum*, which was the Christian God transcending human experience. Nor could it limit itself to the abstract and vague *ens commune*, which would be empty of all content (as had been the case with Parmenidean metaphysics). The problem with such an abstract concept, Owen argues, is that it excludes the most perfect being, God, who must stand outside and above the mere *ens commune* shared by sensible beings. Owens goes on to discuss how in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle attempted to fill in the abstract concept of being with content ranging from *ousia*, to essence, to even the more Platonic supersensible first mover. Owens notes that such a tension between being as the most empty of all concepts and being as identifiable with one of the aforementioned options has caused deep interpretive difficulties, not only for the text itself, but more broadly for the science of metaphysics (i.e., What is metaphysics' object?: God, substance, being, etc.?). Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, 35-68.

without reducing substances to unknowable bundles of concrete facticity as was the trend of the “existentialists” of their own century,⁸ existential Thomists have sought to return to the unthought of essentialist metaphysics and to institute another beginning for metaphysics around a thinking of being as actual existence.⁹

This other beginning for metaphysics would restore being qua actual existence to the domain of metaphysical thinking without reducing such to the demands of what Gilson calls “conceptual imperialism.” On this matter, he states: “...the first and most necessary condition for things to become objects of scientific knowledge is to be purified of the slightest trace of existence. A perfect case of conceptual imperialism, if there ever was one!”¹⁰ Conceptual imperialism can be defined as the reduction (or attempted reduction) of all being without remainder to essential principles. As without why, *esse* cannot be

⁸ One, of but many examples, from the works of Gilson, Owens, or Maritain, can be found in the opening lines of Maritain’s *Existence and the Existent* (1948): “This brief treatise on existence and the existent may be described as an essay on the existentialism of St. Thomas Aquinas. The ‘existentialism’ of St. Thomas is utterly different from that of the ‘existentialist’ philosophies propounded nowadays. If I say that it is, in my opinion, the only authentic existentialism, the reason is not that I am concerned to ‘rejuvenate’ Thomism, so to speak, with the aid of a verbal artifice which I should be ashamed to employ, by attempting to trick out Thomas Aquinas in a costume fashionable to our day...I am not a neo-Thomist. All in all, I would rather be a paleo-Thomist than a neo-Thomist. I am, or at least I hope I am, a Thomist. For more than thirty years I have remarked how difficult it is to persuade our contemporaries not to confuse the philosopher’s faculty of invention with the ingenuity that inspired the art of the dress designer. A Thomist who speaks of St. Thomas’s existentialism is merely reclaiming his own, recapturing from present-day fashion an article whose worth that fashion itself is unaware of; he is asserting a prior right.” Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantieri and Gerald B. Phelen (New York: Pantheon Books, Inc. 1948), 1.

⁹ “At the beginning of this inquiry we asked how it was that, if being is the first object of the human mind, so few philosophers have seen it as the first principle of philosophical knowledge. The answer is now at hand, namely, the overwhelming tendency of human understanding to sterilize being by reducing it to an abstract concept...It has ceased to be a ‘beginning.’ Where being no longer plays the part of a beginning, another beginning has to be found...Once existence has been removed, there always remains, in being, something for which existenceless being provides no rational explanation. The chronic disease of metaphysical being is not existence, but the tendency to lose existence. To restore existence to being is therefore the first prerequisite to restoring being itself to its legitimate position as the first principle of metaphysics.” *Being and Some Philosophers*, 213-214. To begin his *An Interpretation of Existence*, Owens invokes nothing less than the following passage from Heidegger’s *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1953): “But still a question, *the* question: Is ‘being’ (*Sein*) a mere word, and its meaning a haze or the spiritual (*geistige*) destiny of the West?” Although neither Owens nor Gilson agree with Heidegger’s understanding of being, they share a certain affinity with him around the need to return metaphysics and also humanity to the forgotten “other beginning,” which has been covered over by essential dominance.

¹⁰ Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 106.

accounted according to “necessary and definite connections” in the essential economy. This existential “trace” instead reveals the existential forgetfulness of Aristotelian essentialism: the latter can account for why this is a rose, or why a rose is a flower, but not why this *is*. As a brief respite in the history of being, Gilson argues, Thomistic metaphysics has offered a remedy for the chronic disease of essentialism; the remedy—to think the existential actuality of being beyond categorial conceivability—would restore being to its proper function as beginning.¹¹ Such a forgetfulness of *esse*, Gilson maintains, has led to the conceptual imperialism of metaphysics in which being, deprived of its true dynamism, must become an adequate object for conceptual knowledge and the static determinations it lends to *scientia*. *Esse* qua actual existence becomes but a synonymous iteration of already conceived formal determinations, redundant in the essential economy of “things.” And upon confronting the groundlessness of actual existence and in order to provide a balanced account for all things, conceptual imperialism attempts to eliminate the existential remainder.

According to Gilson, both Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism practice conceptual imperialism insofar as their failure to think being as existence leads to a forgetfulness of actual existence. Thus, the two traditions dominating western metaphysics both engage in forms of conceptual imperialism, but not necessarily in the same way or with the same results. The latter tradition thinks being as unity, and in seeking intelligibility for the whole of being, Gilson argues, Neoplatonism eventually leads to an unintelligible

¹¹ Existential Thomists mobilize such groundlessness against “the conceptual imperialism” of Aristotelian essentialism. Gilson, for example, states: “Yet, unless [a notion of being] be thus conceived, what is left of being is little more than its empty shell. Why should philosophers use such an empty shell for their first principle of human knowledge? Any particular aspect of being is then bound to look preferable because, be it even abstract quantity, it corresponds at least to some ‘thing.’” Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 213.

transcendent cause of intelligibility itself *beyond being*. Soon or later, he argues, Neoplatonism becomes mysticism.¹² Aristotelianism, on the other hand, even when it sets itself against Platonism and Neoplatonism, does not overcome such essentialism. As Gilson states: “Being may be more complex than Plato’s selfhood, without including existence. It might be, for instance, substance.”¹³ Thus, a mere rejection of one or the other does not accomplish an overcoming of existential forgetfulness. Both traditions of essentialism when faced with “existential” considerations find some way to reduce the entirety of being to essence—the “selfhood” of Forms for Platonism and substance for Aristotelianism—and thereby eliminate any existential remainder.

To cite one notable example in the history of Aristotelian metaphysics, Gilson raises Averroes’s attempts to reduce being to substance: “Thus far, Averroes seems quite successful in his effort to rid philosophy of existence, but it still remains for him to solve a problem, namely, the very one which Avicenna himself had tried to solve: the relation of possible beings to their actual existence.”¹⁴ “To rid” (or “to purify,”) any trace of existence from philosophy is the goal of conceptual imperialism. According to Gilson, Averroes attempts to purify the essential order by reducing all questions of actual existence back to substance: existential considerations come to be disregarded as conceptual redundancies. Implicit in this statement is that even those who may appear to make the “existential turn” (e.g., Avicenna) have failed to do so. Although Avicenna seems poised to make such an existential turn insofar as he begins by separating the conditions of something’s possibility from its actual existence, Gilson warns that such his metaphysics quickly relapses into essentialism. Unlike Aquinas—and here is where

¹² Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 39-40

¹³ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

Gilson's consternation lay—Avicenna grounds the existential remainder, or the non-implication by something's essence that *it actually is*, in a derived or emanated necessity.¹⁵ All actual existence necessarily *overflows* from the necessity of the first, thereby rendering everything else necessary through its causes (*ab alio*), even if not through itself (*per se*). Aquinas's existential problematic, as will be seen more clearly below, in a large part responds to such inflation of necessity. Thus, although Aquinas saw himself as inheriting an older tradition in terms of such a distinction between essence and *esse*, and drew upon resources offered by Boethius, Avicenna, the *Liber de causis*, and others, existential Thomists have argued at great length for Aquinas as the originator of the existential problematic—a “revolution in metaphysics” as Gilson terms it.¹⁶

In rough summation, existential Thomism can be characterized by an attempt to recapture a purer form of *esse* from the essentialist sway of metaphysics, but also from bastardized misreadings of Aquinas's move, whether it be Siger of Brabant's critique of an unwarranted “fourth,” Giles of Rome's “defense” of a real distinction between two things (*res*), or Cardinal Cajetan's failure to elevate the existentiality of Aquinas's thought. Existential Thomism thereby seeks to supplant the essentialism of metaphysics, most especially Aristotle, with the existentialism of Christian philosophy, based on the incidental gift of *being*, to seek out *a new beginning* for metaphysics from out of that

¹⁵ In other words, even though something is not necessary *per se*, given the being of the first *per se necessary existent*, the being of all else is grounded in the necessary emanation from this source.

¹⁶ “Between the Avicennian extrinsicism and the Thomistic intrinsicism of existence, no conciliation is possible. To pass from the one to the other is not to achieve an evolution but a revolution.” Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Random House, 1956), 39. McInerney dissents from this opinion arguing that Boethius's distinction between *esse* and *id quod est* reflects the distinction between existence and essence. See Ralph McInerney, *Aquinas and Boethius* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990) and Chapter I below. That Thomas did not consider himself the sole innovator of this distinction can be witnessed through his constant referencing of other sources to support his discussion. In particular, when he raises such a distinction in *De Ente et Essentia*, he uses *Liber de Causis* as a corroborating source. Whether his exegeses of this and other texts were sound will be discussed below.

other essentialist beginning that dominates the history of metaphysics. They further maintain that those scholastics, however pious, who reject *esse* as a *really distinct principle* in creatures, are caught in the sway of essentialist metaphysics and cannot adequately account for the gift of being. Once again, such essentialism is not limited to Aristotelianism, but dominates Neoplatonism as well. As Gilson argues, the Neoplatonism of early Christian thinkers requires that they *believe* as Christians, but *think* as Platonists. Victorinus, for example, must follow the Plotinian lead in elevating the One beyond being in order that it account for *all being*, resulting in the failure to appreciate the fundamental truth not only *that God is*, but that *He is He Who Is*.¹⁷

Against the conceptual imperialism of both Neoplatonic and Peripatetic traditions of metaphysics, the “acid test” of existential metaphysics becomes the ability to think being qua actual existence as *incidental* to the nature of any being and as accounted for not by something beyond being, but by *being itself* (i.e., *He Who Is*, or *ipsum esse subsistens*).¹⁸ The importance of thinking *esse* as a gift of being, harkening back to Marion’s claim that *esse* is the incident *par excellence*, concerns its radical otherness to the substantial-essential constitution of any creature and its radical identity with God himself (*ipse*). The latter, what I will call God’s “*ipseity*,” requires that God’s nature as “He Who Is” remain a radically self-identical pure subsistence of being, incommunicable according to the

¹⁷ See, for example, Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 30-40.

¹⁸ Gilson uses this term in reference to such an issue. See *Ibid.*, 33. For one of the best and most succinct summations of such an attempt to herald the existential problematic as the basis of scholastic and contemporary Christian metaphysics, see: William E. Carlo, *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966). One particularly revealing passage states: “Once we have by patient historical work understood Thomas Aquinas and his relations to his contemporaries, the next step is a purification of temporal trappings. Now we must restate it to free it of the bias given it by the weight of its Greek vocabulary and philosophical principles. As we have already stated the doctrine of creation is the testing stone of a Christian metaphysics. To the extent to which it measures up to the exigencies of creation to that degree is a notion of being valid in metaphysics for the Christian thinker.” *Ibid.*, 18.

same *ratio* to any other being and thus participated by others only according to a separate *ratio essendi*.¹⁹ When this incommunicable perfection is participated by any other being, such a gift remains incidental to the participant's nature *for the very reason* that it remains identical to God. Thus, what Aquinas's metaphysics thinks, according to existential Thomism, is the essential groundlessness of this existential gift upon which all essential economies can be founded. In other words, each being of itself *lacks a root in being* and only through a free and gratuitous act does it enjoy that which radically exceeds its nature. Although *esse* radically exceeds the nature of any being other than God, once given, such *perfects* each thing's nature like light perfects the nature of air, which of itself remains unilluminated. Such a gift of being (*esse*) underlies the radical incidentality of created beings and their utter dependency on their creator.²⁰ Only through such an overcoming of existential forgetfulness, so the existential argument goes, does thought find a new ground for metaphysics, or perhaps better still, does it return metaphysics to its original beginning.²¹

¹⁹ "*Iipseity*" is a term used by Derrida to describe the condition of sovereignty and the sovereign as an *ipse* or "self" that constitutes a self-referentiality of power unopen to sharing. Such a hegemonic exercise of power, however, operates as a phantasm insofar as the very exercise of power requires iterability. Such iterability opens the *ipse* to an otherness, which ruptures its own *ipseity* and can be preserved only by even more violence in an attempt to eradicate the other in interest of "self"-preservation. Derrida, *Rouges: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). I will argue below, that Aquinas's concept of *esse tantum/ipsam esse subsistens* is not a pure and incommunicable *ratio essendi*, but a concept laundered from this side of finitude with *univocal*, not analogical, ties to creation. See below Chapter VI Section 1.

²⁰ Although I will agree with a certain understanding of contingency, using Scotus and others, I will critique existential metaphysics around this latter issue. I will argue that such leads to the problematic consequence of leaving a less than real and *diminished* status for created beings. Whether the existential Thomists would find such a consequence problematic, I will argue against such on grounds that creatures would never be real beings, but only less than real participants in *Ipsam Esse*.

²¹ Perhaps strange and reluctant bedfellows, both Gilson and Heidegger seek a new beginning for the question of metaphysics. As Heidegger states: "And insofar as be-ing is experienced as the ground of beings, the question of the having come to pass [*Wesen*—translation modified] of be-ing, when asked in this way, is the *grounding-question*. Going from the guiding-question to the grounding-question, there is never an immediate, equi-directional and continual process that once again applies the guiding-question (to be-ing); rather there is only a leap, i.e., the necessity of an *other* beginning." *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enownment)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1999),

This critique of the conceptual imperialism parallels what Marion following Heidegger, calls “onto-theology” and the “onto-theological constitution of metaphysics.” With onto-theology, a preeminent being (*ens*) should ground entities and being (*esse*), “exercising a foundation on all other beings—indeed upon being and its own foundation [...]”²² The preeminent being serves as cause of everything because it first serves as cause of itself (*causa sui*): the ground grounds itself. God as *causa sui*, Marion argues, follows the assumption that God as preeminent entity should be subject to the same metaphysical rules as every other entity: existence requires a cause. Thus, God as preeminent in existence also requires a cause, which turns out to be himself. In a grounded totality, exceptions cannot be made, not even for the first. Once God becomes part of the causal order (as ground and grounded), all other principles of metaphysics, such as the principle of order and of sufficient reason, also apply to God, according to Marion. This preeminent being, to incorporate Gilsonian terminology, sets the standard for the essential economy as that by which all other beings are measured. Thus, we find—if not altogether an isomorphism—at least a deep kinship between Gilson’s critique of conceptual imperialism and Marion’s critique of onto-theology. In both thinkers, the hegemonic accounting of beings and of being itself is accomplished by the enshrinement of a preeminent being as the foundation of a totalized system, which does not leave a remainder. All beings, as Marion states, are subject to the same ontological grounds: “Just one condition rules all of them, however: that they should ground entities

53. Perhaps not so much a *new* beginning as a restoration of the true yet forgotten beginning for the question of being. True Gilsonian “*esse*” and Heideggerian “*Sein*” (or *Seyn*) are separated by more than their respective tongues. Where they converge, however, is around the search for a *new beginning* for being.

²² Marion, “Thomas Aquinas and Onto-Theo-Logy,” in *Mysticism: Presence and Aporia*. ed. Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 42.

and being in the name of preeminent entity, thus that they could be inscribed precisely without exception or remainder within the onto-theo-logical frame of the ontological difference, which is itself thought in a metaphysical manner, starting with and for the exclusive benefit of the entity.”²³

In terms of this onto-theological constitution of metaphysics, its forgetfulness, or “alleged forgetfulness,” of *esse* has transformed metaphysics into a science of beings, crowned by a “most being” (*maxime ens*) that secures the ontological field as the first and ground for all the rest. Occupying such a superlative status, this first is merely “first among equals” (*primum inter pares*); but unlike Caesar Augustus, who as *princeps* accepted the diminished title while wielding absolute and imperious power, the first being of ontology—or onto-theology—is bound by the strictures of metaphysics: it remains within the essential economy. It may be *first* and *most*, but only as a member of a class to which it belongs. God is first amongst numerical beings, and moving beings, and sensitive beings, and rational beings—to name but a select number of regions—but mathematics, physics, biology, and psychology *forget* the question of being as such. Due to the forgetfulness of *esse*, metaphysics has fallen into the diminished status in which one finds it in the twentieth-century and against which the “existentialists” of that century merely react by affirming the absolute priority of existence over essence (i.e., a *temporal* being-in-the-world excluding any reference to the eternal), but at the expense of any recourse to a science of being, albeit a science grounded in the groundless incidentality of actual existence. The science of being has become little more than an analytic tool for the positive sciences, unable to speculate beyond the limits of possible experience or logical

²³ Ibid., 43. According to Marion, at least in this text, even though not in the earlier *God without Being*, Aquinas’s notion of *esse* does not offer an onto-theo-logy. For Heidegger’s account of onto-theo-logy, see *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

analysis. Once metaphysics has been put under such receivership, to speak of being at all requires a close proximity with “regions of beings,” lest metaphysics stray too far from its secure ground. Being as beings must always be present at hand for the philosophical and scientific, not to mention technical, disciplines.²⁴

Despite these parallels, the two critical engagements differ in a significant respect: namely, around what I will call the “existential *actuality*” of the first. Whereas, existential Thomism seeks to ground all being in the pure actuality of *Qui Est*, or a first that is “only being,” Marion and presumably Heidegger read this move of holding onto existential actuality as still caught up in the sway of onto-theology. As Marion states in one particularly clear point of contact with existential Thomism, referring to Gilson in particular, they do not go far enough because they still identify God with *esse*. He states:

But it is not enough to go beyond entity for God to avoid going into onto-theo-logy because any familiarity with being ascribes him to this metaphysical constitution. Onto-theo-logy deals with being as well as entities, insofar as metaphysical being remains always oriented toward and questioned for the sake of entity. However, how could God amount to ‘to be’ without assuming the figure of an entity whatsoever?²⁵

A first that is only “to be” or *esse tantum* still resembles those beings that it grounds.

Such a resemblance, as Marion is keen to target, tends toward an analogical union of

²⁴ Although undertaking such a critical engagement with the history of being from out of a different project, another twentieth-century thinker, Martin Heidegger, has diagnosed the condition of being in terms similar to those of the existential Thomists. To naively lump Heidegger into the category of “false existentialism”—as a proto-Sartrean—misses a much deeper affinity between his *Seinesfrage* and the project of existential Thomists. Heidegger, like Gilson, sees the need for a “new beginning” for metaphysics, a beginning that has been forgotten amidst essentialism’s dominance within the history of metaphysics. Again like Gilson, Heidegger sees such forgetfulness as responsible for a certain destitution in Western humanity wherein the grounding questions have been replaced by “positivistic” or “technocratic” questions that require and demand a presence of being as beings. Thus, such a technocratic destitution presupposes a metaphysics of presence—what Gilson calls “essentialism” or “conceptual imperialism”—that reduces being to beings. Such a reduction fully grounds beings within a metaphysical economy wherein everything including being itself (*ipsum esse*) has an account; and in this forgetfulness, the originary phenomenon of withdrawal and concealment upon which presencing is made possible is obliterated. Albeit with differing details, Heidegger along with his existential brethren see a need for return to something more originary, to some saving power for both metaphysics and humanity.

²⁵ Marion, “Thomas Aquinas and Onto-Theo-Logy,” 72 fn. 55.

beings with God, which although claiming to protect divine transcendence around an analogically pure and incommunicable *ratio essendi*, nevertheless moves in the direction of univocal conflation. Analogy risks bridging the gap separating the first in its transcendence from everything else. Thus, Marion views the existential project as doomed for onto-theology so long as *Ipsum Esse Subsistens* and *esse commune* share a real analogical bond.

Despite these distinctions between the critiques of conceptual imperialism and onto-theology, their deep family resemblance will allow us to draw upon Marion's invaluable insights in the critique of conceptual imperialism that follows. As we will come to see, Aquinas's existential metaphysics operates between the Scylla of reducing the first being to the mere order of beings, thereby making God a mundane *primum inter pares*, and the Charybdis of allowing the first to transcend the order of being altogether, thereby evacuating the first from all actuality. Either one or the other fails to appreciate the way in which *esse* comes to be communicated to all beings as their perfection *par excellence* and yet in itself remains an incommunicably primary and pure act, the *energia* of all essential *energia*.

Despite these attempts of existential metaphysics to overcome conceptual imperialism and to navigate either extreme, I will argue that such a project risks instituting an imperialism of its own around the identification of *esse* as the nature of God. In order to protect the purity and *ipseity* of *ipsum esse subsistens*, existential metaphysics must remove all traces of finitude and otherness from this pure and incommunicable act of being. Otherwise, its self-identity would be disrupted by reference to something outside itself. However, the process by which such finite traces are removed requires a type of

concept laundering. This means that we begin with content borrowed from finite beings because, for Aquinas, all knowledge for us derives from sensation. Such content then must be purified, however, so as to apply properly to God alone and exclude any univocal reference to creatures despite such mundane origins. Thus, the purity of that which is *esse tantum* is secured but only at the price of obscuring its conceptual origins. In the end, “*esse*” comes to function as a proper name, of *Qui Est*, and thereby becomes applicable to creatures only in a secondary or derived sense. “*Esse*” no longer signifies something’s ownmost perfection, but instead its borrowed refraction of another’s perfection. This is why, as I will argue, in attempting to surmount the imperialism of essentialism, existential Thomism institutes its own *imperium* around the *ipseity* of *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*.

In what follows, I will show how Aquinas develops this existential problematic from out of Aristotelian metaphysics, which combines and yet revolutionizes the threads picked up from Boethius and Avicenna, neither of whom had made *esse* an extra-essential principle in the sense Aquinas does. Chapter One begins by exploring the emergence of an existential problematic in Aquinas’s early text *De Ente et Essentia*. This text provides a clear entry point into the existential problematic insofar as Aquinas introduces the real otherness between *esse* and essence against an otherwise Aristotelian metaphysical inquiry into being and essence. In addition, the introduction of a contemporary respondent and critic of Aquinas’s real distinction (i.e., Siger of Brabant) shows the necessary steps Aquinas must take to secure *esse* as a perfection outside of and irreducible to something’s formal determinations and thereby to overcome the essential sway of the Aristotelian concepts deployed by Aquinas. Chapter Two furthers this

investigation by looking at arguments for the real distinction outside of *De Ente*, including both Aquinas's "exposition" of Boethius's *De Hebdomadibus* and his argument from act and potency, in addition to the role played by such a distinction in both the *Summas*. We will see how Aquinas's innovation of introducing real otherness between *esse* and essence is used to solve the immediate problem of how everything is really diverse from God and divine simplicity (i.e., how everything other than God is in some way composite), but more broadly, comes to unite a "constellation" of distinct metaphysical issues including analogy, participation, a metaphysics of creation, and providence.

Chapter Three treats the demonstrative link between beings and God such that on the basis of created being, human thought can be elevated to something that is most being and only being. Additionally, given this demonstrative link between beings and God, we will ask in what sense *esse* belongs *both* to beings and to God, the answer to which introduces Aquinas's analogical theory of being. But, as will be seen, such an answer raises a deeper problem: If God is a purely subsisting act of being, incommunicable to anything else, then in what sense can *esse* be meaningfully applied to creatures? This leads to a larger exploration of Aquinas's existential problematic and the meaning of *esse* when applied to creatures in terms of the metaphysics of creation. Namely, *what* is given through the gratuitous act of creation and sustained through the abiding act of conservation? Furthermore, how can Aquinas avoid the troubling conclusion that God is the formal *esse* of all things if he must also insist that *esse* cannot be really distributed to creatures?

Chapters Four and Five take up Aquinas's metaphysics of creation, respectively treating beings as related to their essential and existential grounds in the divine intellect and the divine will. These Chapters will ask: In giving *esse*, to what is it given? What is given?; and In what way is it given? Chapter Four will address the former question of the "to what" *esse* is given, thereby seeking to establish the recipient of such act. Our concern will be both the status of essences in the divine intellect prior to creation and the possible orders of the universe contrived by God prior to the enactment of any single "world." Chapter Five will explain Aquinas's understanding of the "existential perfection" given in the creative act and attempt to more broadly understand the status of *esse* as the "perfection of all essential perfections." Both Chapters in concert will show the manner in which being is given according to Aquinas, such that it is fundamentally distinct from the mediated manner of an Avicennian overflow, but instead results from a divine decree based on God's foreknowledge of a variety of distinct essential possibilities and compossible orders: God is the immediate and total cause of the being (*esse*) of everything that is.

Both of these Chapters, however, do not so much dissolve the earlier concern of what *esse* means in relation to creatures, but instead reissue the question at a deeper metaphysical level: Does "*esse*" pick out or designate some intrinsic existential perfection in creatures apart from their extrinsic causal relation to God? By beginning with an account of the status of creatures as *possible* in the divine intellect prior to creation, we see how Aquinas attempts to counter Avicennian necessitation by separating the conditions for something's essential possibility in the divine intellect from its existential actuality in the divine will. This leads to the question of what more the act of

creation adds to something's essential possibility. Can Aquinas successfully counter the claim that due to the incommunicable *ipseity* of divine being, the being participated by creatures *is* in some real way the being of God? By asking such question, we can begin to determine the meaning of “*esse*” when applied to creatures. This would mean that creatures enjoy no *esse* of their own apart from the infusion of such from the radiance of their causal source. In the end, if all “*esse*” entails is a creature's fact of having-been-caused, then it does not signify anything beyond something's essential state. Thus, I argue that the continued insistence on the part of existential Thomism that “*esse*” signifies some existential perfection actually deprives creatures of real being, making them little more than *reflections of being*, much like—borrowing Aquinas's favorite metaphor—illumination does not properly belong to air, but air merely receives and reflects the borrowed light of another.

Finally, Chapter Six draws together the findings of the previous Chapters and argues that an account of creation can be given in which “*esse*” need not signify anything beyond the created thing itself and further the identification of *esse* with essence does not necessarily entail conceptual imperialism. First, using Duns Scotus's argument for the univocity of being, I argue that Aquinas's analogical metaphysics is guilty of a type of “concept laundering” such that it borrows all its conceptual content from the side of creatures, but attempts to remove—or launder—any impure traces of finitude, in order to retain a pure and proper name applicable exclusively to God. The problem, however, as shown by Scotus, is that such borrowed content cannot be purified, or intensified, because once all finite traces are removed either a univocal concept remains or nothing at all. And it seems that for Aquinas only the latter can be the case since *ipseity* requires that

nothing is shared between creatures and God, and *being*—as the most intensive, not extensive of all concepts— should be applied according to a different *ratio* in each case. We seem left only with content provided through revelation, such as indicated by Gilson in turning to the Metaphysics of Exodus 3:14, but not any philosophic grounds upon which to arrive at an intensive and proper notion of “*esse*” exclusive only to God.²⁶

Second, I treat the role of judgment in Aquinas’s thought and the claim of existential Thomists that judgment *thinks* the extra-conceptual act of being covered over by the static images of conceptual thought. By looking at the few places in which Aquinas thematizes this second operation of the intellect, I argue that judgment need only think something’s essential fact of being, not an extra-essential act of existence. Furthermore, and thirdly, I argue that such a fact of being is part of the essential content of any thing, although unknown to us, as part of the divine intellect’s *provision* of what should and should not come to be (*fiendum et non fiendum*) in order to realize God’s intended order for the universe. Once again following Scotus, I argue that the insistence by existential Thomists upon an originary decisive moment of creation *incidental* with respect to the

²⁶ Without the positive content of *esse ipsum subsistens*, which moves our conception of being from the most abstract and empty to the most concrete, Gilson’s concern perpetually seems to be that the extra-essential actuality brought by *esse* gets lost in the shuffle of parsing out something’s essential determinations. One could simply remain on Augustinian or Neoplatonic grounds and assert that “*esse*” is not understood through essences (i.e., *intellectus essentiae* argument) because “*esse*” signifies nothing other than essence and only God is most truly essence (i.e., being). Everything other than God is not truly essence because it is mutable, even angels who are composed of form and “spiritual matter.” Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1960) 60-63. Furthermore, Gilson states, “...all the arguments one can use to establish the distinction between being and essence in Thomas Aquinas’ doctrine presuppose the prior recognition of the ‘act of being’ (*esse*).” *Ibid.*, 130. In answering how one achieves this prior recognition, which even most philosophers have not accomplished, Gilson notes an impasse around this real distinction as such does not give rise to a philosophical demonstration. He goes on to state: “This impasse is an invitation to us to give up the philosophical way—from creatures to God—and try the theological way—from God to creatures. Thomas Aquinas may well have first conceived the notion of an act of being (*esse*) in connection with God and then, starting from God, made use of it in his analysis of the metaphysical structure of composite substances. Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, 131. See also Gilson, *Christian Philosophy*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Philosophy, 1993), Chapter 6. The theological way that Gilson recommends in this passage means that a philosophical path, either from knowledge of creatures or from demonstrative knowledge of God, cannot be reached—a concession untroubling to Gilson’s Metaphysics of *Exodus*.

being and non-being of all things is a moment quickly bypassed in Aquinas's metaphysical thought. Instead, God *knows* what he will do and what order he has chosen to enact, and through such a *providential scientia*, the radical indeterminacy and *incidentalness* of the original gift of being comes to be neutralized by the onset of the "normal" operations of the universe. Such a teleological, but also providential, normalization of each being (i.e., as part of a predetermined order) requires that the gift of being given to it instead function like a loan or a fief to a "repaid" through the service of each to its proper end. Each thing renders a "return" on the existential investment.

By withholding a distinct contribution for *esse* in this act of creation, existential Thomists do not find a new restoration for the destiny of being, but instead merely mystify the essential economy from which they attempt to escape, while overlooking the more dominant essential tendencies in Aquinas's thought. Based on this inquiry centered around the real otherness between *esse* and essence and its metaphysical constellations, I argue that such an attempt to overcome conceptual imperialism on the part of Aquinas, and more so on the part of existential Thomism, which would make existence into an act of being irreducible to the categories of thought and knowledge, fails to identify an ontological perfection in creatures really distinct from the intension and extension of the concepts "substance" or "thing." It instead introduces a signifier that, as a name proper to God, comes to deprive creatures of the very perfection it was introduced to signify (i.e., actual existence) and to enshrine such deprivation as the ultimate actuality of created beings. In the end, the project of existential metaphysics merely reverses the "imperialism of the concept" without actually overcoming such imperialism.

Chapter I. Problematizing the Question: Thomas Aquinas and the Real Distinction of *Esse* and Essence in Created Beings

This chapter will treat how *esse* in its real otherness to essence, quiddity, or form arises as a distinct “problem” for Aquinas. To understand the problematization of *esse* as a distinct area of metaphysical inquiry, we must show how Aquinas introduces such a distinction and develops *esse* as a distinct metaphysical perfection irreducible to the essential constitution of a substance. The task of this entire work, but of this and the subsequent chapter in particular, is to seek the ground and meaning for Aquinas’s claim, resonated throughout his entire corpus, that *esse* is the actuality of all acts and the perfection of all perfections.¹

As a point of entry into this inquiry, we will begin by addressing how the distinction arises within the context of *De Ente et Essentia*, one of Aquinas’s earliest and insightful

¹ “... quod hoc quod dico esse est inter omnia perfectissimum: quod ex hoc patet quia actus est semper perfectio 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* [m.e.]. Nec intelligendum est, quod ei quod dico esse, aliquid addatur quod sit eo formalius, ipsum determinans, sicut actus potentiam: esse enim quod huiusmodi est, est aliud secundum essentiam ab eo cui additur determinandum. Nihil autem potest addi ad esse quod sit extraneum ab ipso, cum ab eo nihil sit extraneum nisi non-ens, quod non potest esse nec forma nec materia. Unde non sic determinatur esse per aliud sicut potentia per actum, sed magis sicut actus per potentiam. Nam et in definitione formarum ponuntur propriae materiae loco differentiae, sicut cum dicitur quod anima est actus corporis physici organici. Et per hunc modum, hoc esse ab illo esse distinguitur, in quantum est talis vel talis naturae. Et per hoc dicit Dionysius [cap. V de divin. Nomin.], quod licet viventia sint nobiliora quam existentia, tamen esse est nobilius quam vivere: viventia enim non tantum habent vitam, sed cum vita simul habent et esse.” S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones disputatae, t. 2: Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*. Ed. P. M. Pession (8^a ed.: Marietti, Taurini-Romae, 1949) q. 7, a. 2, ad 9. Hereafter: “*De pot.*” Also: “[...] dicendum quod ipsum esse est perfectissimum omnium: comparatur enim ad omnia ut actus. Nihil enim habet actualitatem, nisi in quantum est: unde ipsum esse est actualitas omnium rerum, et etiam ipsarum formarum. Unde non comparatur ad alia sicut recipiens ad receptum: sed magis sicut receptum ad recipiens. Cum enim dico esse hominis, vel equi, vel cuiuscumque alterius, ipsum esse consideratur ut formale et receptum, non autem ut illud cui competit esse.” Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P. M. edita, t. 4-5: Pars prima Summae theologiae* (Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, Romae, 1888-1889) I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3. Hereafter: “*ST*,” followed by number of the part (e.g., I), question (e.g., q. 4), article (e.g., a. 1), and its status as either objection (e.g., obj. 1), sed contra (i.e., s.c.), response (i.e., resp.) or response to the objections (e.g., ad 1).

considerations of the distinction.² *De Ente*, which treats the metaphysical topics of “being” (*ens*) and “essence” (*essentia*), provides a fairly standard Aristotelian backdrop against which the Aquinas’s “real distinction” takes place. In tracing the Aristotelian inspired themes of *De Ente* (Section 1), we can witness the emergence of *esse* as a distinct problem around Aquinas’s “*intellectus essentiae* argument” and begin to chart the work such a distinction accomplishes not only within this text, but also in other contexts in which it appears (Section 2).³ In order to evaluate Aquinas’s argument for such a distinction, it will be beneficial to reflect upon the essentialist preoccupations his metaphysics and this argument must overcome in order to necessitate such a distinction. Thus, due to Aristotle’s own unawareness of the distinction, Siger of Brabant—a contemporary interpreter of Aquinas’s distinction and defender of a more orthodox Aristotelianism—can serve to illustrate the “Aristotelian *sed contra*” that must be overcome (Section 3). What the argument must show, I will argue, is not merely that “*esse* is not included in our understanding (*intellectus*) of certain things” (i.e., the first stage of the *intellectus essentiae* argument), but that the “non-inclusion of *esse*” constitutes a real lack on the part of being. Such a lack can only be revealed by understanding being (*esse*) to be a perfection incommensurable with any other created

² *De Ente et Essentia*, Vol. 43, *Sancti Thomae De Aquino Opera Omnia Iussu Leonis XIII P.M. Edita*.

³ This is the name given in the secondary literature to such an argument. See, for example, John F. Wippel “Aquinas’s Route to the Real Distinction: A Note on ‘De Ente Et Essentia,’” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 43 (April 1979): 279-295.; Joseph Owens, “Quiddity and Real Distinction in St. Thomas Aquinas,” *Mediaeval Studies*. XXVII (1965): 5; Walter Patt. “Aquinas’s Real Distinction and Some Interpretations,” *The New Scholasticism*. LXII (Winter 1988): 1-29; Leo Sweeney. “Existence/Essence in Thomas Aquinas’s Early Writings,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* XXXVII (1963): 97-131. Sweeney catalogues and analyzes the various contexts in which the argument occurs, and also notes the same argument treated as “*ratio creaturae*” in *De Veritate*. One possible advantage to using the word “ratio” as opposed to “intellectus” is to emphasize the non-subjective (in the modern sense) character of such a comprehension. Cf. MacDonald, however, denies that *De Ente* presents an *intellectus essentiae* argument: “If my remarks about the underlying logical structure of Aquinas’s argument are right, then the IE Argument is not to be found in *De ente* 4.” MacDonald, “The *Esse/Essentia* Argument in Aquinas’s *De Ente et Essentia*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* XXII (April 1984): 162.

perfection and also possessed according to its true and pure *ratio* by a single being, which is *esse tantum* and *ipsum esse subsistens* (Section 4). Finally, due to the omnipresence of the phrase “real distinction” in reference to such *real otherness*, I will address how such a phrase must be used and the textual basis for such (Section 5). The preliminary conclusions drawn from *De Ente* will establish a basis for tracing the “real distinction” in other contexts throughout Aquinas’s *corpus* and more broadly establish a set of issues with which, I will argue, such a distinction should be constellated.

Section 1: *Ens* and *Essentia* in *De Ente et Essentia*

Early in his career, Aquinas composed his seminal *De Ente et Essentia*,⁴ in which he sets forth his thoughts on the issue of *esse* and its relation to essence. Although the discussion of *esse* occupies a limited role in this short text, nevertheless, it establishes a principle quite foreign to the Aristotelian tenor of Aquinas’s metaphysics: that the act of being, or *esse*, stands as incommensurable with the order of created essences. That is, the former cannot be derived or reduced to the latter, neither directly nor through an emanated or derived necessity (e.g., Avicenna).⁵ Such a commitment to the super-essential convergence of *esse* with essence (in created beings) will persist in Aquinas’s thought and will be treated similarly in more sustained expositions. Even if the text does not supply adequate answers for all of the problems it raises, *De Ente et Essentia* as read by itself, however, provides a sense of the overall spirit of Aquinas’s argument. Thus, it offers a point of entry into the existential problematic as developed throughout Aquinas’s *corpus*.

⁴ Gilson dates the text around 1256, but notes conjectural dating to as early as 1252. See *Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 411.

⁵ See below Chapter IV Section 1.

In *De Ente et Essentia*, the discussion of *esse* arises in Chapter IV, only upon the heels of the earlier discussion of being and essence (*de ente et essentia*, that is). The discussion of the prologue and the previous three chapters entertain a relatively familiar Aristotelian discussion of metaphysics. The short prologue reveals, based on the authority of Avicenna, that the intellect first conceives *ens* and *essentia*, and thus to avoid further errors along the way (of intellection), what is signified by these two terms must be clarified here at the beginning. Generally speaking, knowledge (*cognitio*) of simple things should be derived from knowledge of complex ones, as should knowledge of the prior from the posterior since such is easier for beginners. For the matter at hand, Aquinas notes, this entails proceeding from *ens* to *essentia*. In relation to one another, essence is prior to and more simple than being, but to arrive at knowledge of essence, one must begin with what is more easily apprehensible, namely being (*ens*).⁶

⁶ Despite the brevity of Aquinas's discussion, a great deal is presupposed by this ordering of being and essence, as many commentators have drawn out. See, for example, Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A Translation and Interpretation*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965) 22-31; Joseph Owens, "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being," 1-40. Most notably, that in keeping with Thomas's empiricism, even that which is first and most immediately known (i.e., objects of sensation) implies a vague conception of being (*ens*). Even though we later come to know the simples which compose the category of 'being'—for example, essences and non-essences—and that some (i.e., essences) better incorporate the true sense of being, such a refined knowledge of being requires an origin in the immediacy of sensation from which knowledge can proceed. Bobick, in particular, equates the ease with which we grasp being (*ens*) with an implied immediacy of sensing "something there." Even without any further knowledge, the perception of "something" (e.g., a human, whiteness, heat, etc.) implies at the very least (my terms not Bobick's) "some being, whatever it is." Such an immediate sensation has not yet grasped the essential quality of *what* is being experienced, and yet the vagueness of "being" broadly covers both essential and non-essential, substantial and accidental, beings alike. Because both the essential and the non-essential, and the substantial and accidental, and so on fall under 'being,' the latter is *composed* of such *simpler* things. Furthermore, essence is *prior to* being because if being is composed, the elements that make up the composite are presupposed (and thus prior to) the composite itself. To illustrate these issues, Bobick gives the example of a child touching a hot stove. Despite the absence of any metaphysical reflection in the cried utterance "hot," nevertheless, such a sensitive encounter with something there implies being. Such a concept, albeit vague, accompanies all levels of cognition, beginning with the most basic and immediate sensations and continuing through the acts of intellection (simple apprehension, composition and division, reasoning). This goes back to Thomas's original point that we must begin with the more easily assessable (i.e., being) and proceed to that which is simple.

Chapter I of *De Ente* takes up the clarification of ‘*ens*,’ and Aquinas follows Aristotle’s division of being into being as divided into the ten categories and being as signifying the truth of a proposition. Aquinas goes on to add that the difference between these two senses is that the first sense posits something in reality (*ponat illud in re*) whereas the second sense need not do so. Any affirmative proposition, even if it affirms a privation or negation (e.g., she *is blind*), is about a being in the second sense (e.g., her *blindness*). Such an example does not qualify for being in the first sense, however, because nothing is posited *in re*.⁷ Affirming her “being blind” (i.e., she *is blind*) does not name some being *in re* (i.e., her “blindness”) as does, for example, the “blueness” of her eyes.⁸

Based on this distinction, Aquinas argues, following Averroes in his *Metaphysics*, that the “*nomen essentiae*” is taken not from being in the second sense, but instead from being in the first sense. Given the former’s not positing *in re*, *essentia* must take its meaning from *real being*, if it is to name something more than mental activity alone.

‘*Essentia*’ designates a commonality in the natures of multiple individuals through which

⁷ “unde primo modo cecitas et huiusmodi non sunt entia” *De Ente*, Cap. I. ll. 12-13. Throughout the next two sections, I will cite only the chapter and line numbers from *De Ente*.

⁸ The importance of judgment in relation to being (both *ens* and *esse*) will only emerge throughout the following chapters. “Being blind” from the predication “she *is blind*” does not predicate categorical being because blindness does not fall under any of the categories. Thus, in reference to the discussion above, such is *being per accidens*, and herein one sees the connection between being in the mind, being as the truth of a proposition, and being per accidens. In a discussion on the relation of this second sense of being (i.e., *ens per accidens*) to Aquinas’s notion of *entia rationis*, Klima states: “We can also illustrate the dependence of blindness on the activity of the mind, as opposed to the independence of a real being from the same, by saying that if there were no minds at all forming the concept of blindness, then there would be no blindness either, even if there were eyes lacking sight. By opposition, however, even if there were no minds forming the concept of whiteness, still, there would be whiteness in reality, provided there would be white things” Gyula Klima, “The Changing Role of Entia Rationis in Mediaeval Semantics and Ontology.” *Synthese* 96:1 (1993): 30. Bobick in his commentary calls this “true being” or “propositional being” as opposed to “real being” or “positive being.” As the former does not *posit* anything *in re*, its being is related to the proposition forming activity of the mind. See also Bobick, *Aquinas on Being and Essence*, 33-38.

they are “collected” in genera and species.⁹ Aquinas goes on to say that some thing’s (*res*) definition, or that through which it is constituted in a genera and species, points to *what* that thing is: thus, for example, the definition “rational animal” expresses *what* it is (or was) to be Socrates. The intelligibility of this thing here, namely Socrates, is grounded in indicating “*quid est res.*” Because the essence “human,” in the case of Socrates, answers this question of *whatness* (*quidditas*), Aquinas can move to identify ‘*essentia*’ and ‘*quidditas*’ as synonymous, along with listing ‘*forma*’ and ‘*natura*’ as further synonyms.¹⁰

In traditional Aristotelian fashion, Aquinas has acknowledged the role of *essentia* as that which makes something intelligible and also that which orders something to its proper operations (*quod habet ordinem ad propriam operationem rei*). The essence “human” of Socrates orders this individual to the proper operations of being human (i.e., thinking, laughing, etc.). *Whatness* gathers an otherwise disparate multiplicity of beings within varying degrees of essential order, the exact orders that make such beings intelligible to our understandings. The same essential principles thus connect the order of our understanding to the order of *rerum natura*. Having begun this short chapter with a vague and manifold sense of being, being as essence comes to have increasing primacy throughout the analysis. A further move will be made to order the varied senses of ‘*ens*,’ said primarily of ‘*essentia*,’ around a principal meaning as “substance.”

⁹ “Et quia, ut dictum est, ens hoc modo dictum diuiditur per decem genera, oportet ut essentia significet aliquid commune omnibus naturis per quas diuersa entia in diuersis generibus et speciebus collocantur, sicut humanitas est essentia hominis, et sic de aliis” (Cap. I, ll. 20-26).

¹⁰ “Et quia illud per quod res constituitur in proprio genere uel specie est hoc quod significatur per diffinitionem indicantem quid est res, inde est quod nomen essente a philosophis in nomen quidditatis mutatur; et hoc est etiam quod Philosophus frequenter nominat quod quid erat esse, id est hoc per quod aliquid habet esse quid” (Cap I, ll. 27-34).

If ‘*essentia*’ derives from ‘*ens*’ that posits something *in re*, then the primary sense of such “real and positive”¹¹ being is as substance: accidents depend upon substances for their being, whereas substances are independent of accidents. Furthermore, complex substances, which later will be defined as *hylomorphic* composites, take their name from simple substances, which as pure form have essences without the commixture of matter, further identified by Aquinas as “the truer and nobler sense of essence.”¹² Much like accidents could *not be* without substances, so complex substances could *not be* without simple ones, or at least, the first simple substance God.¹³ Thus, even though being (*ens*) is said in many ways, and the mind has some grasp of this concept even in its most immediate and basic activities (i.e., sensation), nevertheless, being is said *more absolutely and primarily* of substances, and only derivatively of accidents.

At the end of Chapter I, Aquinas introduces his (here unnamed) “analogical predication of being”: in predicating ‘being’ of substance and accidents, such a term is not predicated in the same way in each case.¹⁴ Predicating ‘being’ of accidents *takes its meaning* from predicating ‘being’ of substances. Furthermore, predicating ‘being’ of composite substances *takes its meaning* from predicating ‘being’ of simple substances,

¹¹ Something in reality as opposed to merely in the mind (*in intellectu*), and as a positive addition, not merely as a negation, that is, not merely according to the compositional operations of the intellect but primarily according to being as divided by the categories.

¹² “Sed quia ens absolute et primo dicitur de substantiis, et per posterius et quasi secundum quid de accidentibus, inde est quod etiam essentia proprie et uere est in substantiis, sed in accidentibus est quodammodo et secundum quid. Substantiarum uero quedam sunt simplices et quedam composite, et in utrisque est essentia; sed in simplicibus ueriori et nobiliori modo, secundum quod etiam esse nobilium habent: sunt enim causa eorum que composite sunt, ad minus substantia prima simplex que Deus est” (Cap. I, ll. 54-63).

¹³ Unlike Aristotle, Avicenna, or Averroes, Aquinas does not think that other simple substances other than God are necessary for the being of composite substances. He may mean to suggest the yet-to-be introduced argument for the non-simplicity of all substances save God; thus “simple substance” would name only a single substance.

¹⁴ For a more extended discussion of Aquinas’s treatment of analogy, see below Chapter III.

most especially of God.¹⁵ Thus, because certain meanings derive their meaning from more primary ones, the former can only say ‘being’ in an analogical sense to the latter.¹⁶ Even though understanding should take the meaning of ‘being’ and ‘essence’ from those things (i.e., simple substances), and that thing in particular (i.e., God), of which the terms are most properly predicated, the essences of composite substances are more immediately available to our understanding, and thus are easier to grasp. So just as a more refined understanding of ‘being’ (i.e., as substance and essence) arose out of an easier and more immediate one, so too a more refined understanding of being as simple substance will depart from the more immediate understanding of the being of complex substances.

Beginning with the nature of complex substances, the following two chapters of the treatise cover a standard Aristotelian fare: form and matter as the principles of composition in composite substances; essence as neither form nor matter alone, but as the *hylomorphic* composite; form as the act (and actualizing principle) of matter; matter as the principle of individuation of form; the relationship between essence and the logical intentions of genus, species, and differentia, and so on. As most of these issues do not radically depart from the teachings of Aristotle, they can be bypassed here. Two issues, however, should be noted before moving on to the discussion of *esse* in Chapter IV.

These include the difference between “designate” and “non-designate matter” as well as the distinction between abstraction with precision and abstraction without precision, as

¹⁵ Wippel, following Fabro, refers to a distinction of analogy on the predicamental level and analogy on the transcendental level. The former concerns the analogical application of being to substances and other accidents. The latter treats the analogical application between higher and lower substances. See Cornelio Fabro, “Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation.” *The Review of Metaphysics*, 27 (1974): 449-491. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 73-74.

¹⁶ For a more developed treatment of this doctrine, see, for example, S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Liber de veritate catholicae Fidei contra errors infidelium seu Summa contra Gentiles*, t. 2-3, ed. P. Marc, C. Pera, P. Caramello (Marietti, Taurini-Romae, 1961) I. 32-34. Hereafter: “SCG.”

each of these issues will occupy an important role for the distinction between essence and *esse*.

Matter serves as the principle of individuation according to Aquinas.¹⁷ Socrates and Plato both have the same form *human*, but are not one and the same human. The reason why they are distinct humans is because they do not share the same matter: the same form thus informs different matters. And yet, Aquinas had previously stated that essence signifies the form-matter composition, and not just the form alone.¹⁸ Does this not entail, however, that the essence (and thereby the definition) would be of the individual because it contains matter?¹⁹ And that which contains matter—only the particular individual, and not the universal—would be defined.²⁰ Such an outcome would run afoul of *scientia* as defined by Aristotle and understood by his scholastic followers.

¹⁷ See also SCG I.65. Although Aquinas seems to assume that he is following Aristotle in this regard, some dispute whether matter serves as the principle of individuation for Aristotle. See, for example, A.C. Lloyd, “Aristotle’s Principle of Individuation,” *Mind*, 79 (Oct., 1970): 519-529. Lloyd argues that matter alone is not enough to sustain individuation, but requires individuals to have specifically different forms as well.

¹⁸ Essence cannot signify matter alone because the essence is intelligible (*cognoscibilis*) and ordered into species and genera. Matter, however, is not a principle of cognition (*principium cognitionis*) and is not that which something is determined to species and genera. (Cap. II ll. 4-10). Socrates’s matter does not determine him to the species human or the genus animal because the very same matter *post mortem* no longer composes a human animal even though the matter itself has not changed. The more likely candidate would be form alone, which Aquinas also rejects. The reason is that if essence is that which is signified through the definition of the thing, the definition of a natural substance must contain form as well as matter. Otherwise, Aquinas argues, there would be no difference between definitions of natural things (composed of matter and form) and mathematical things (form alone). Matter is not merely added to the essence or an external being (*ens extra essentiam*) but makes up the constitution of the essence itself. (Cap. II ll.10-24). This issue of “being outside the essence” will play a vital role in the discussion of *esse* in chapter 4, in particular surrounding Aquinas’ *intellectus essentiae* argument.

¹⁹ An additional point should be noted concerning the use of “*esse*” as that being given by form. He states: “...essentia autem est secundum quam res *esse dicitur* [m.e.]: unde oportet ut essentia qua res denominatur ens non tantum sit forma, neque tantum materia, sed utrumque, quamvis *huiusmodi esse suo modo sola forma sit causa* [m.e.]” (Cap. II ll. 53-57). A thing is said to be (*esse*) according to its essence. Likewise, for such being (*esse*), form alone is the proper cause. It is unclear how to reconcile such an account of *esse* with that given in Chapter IV.

²⁰ “Sed quia individuationis principium materia est, ex hoc forte uideretur sequi quod essentia, que materiam in se complectitur simul et formam, sit tantum particularis et non uniuersalis: ex quod sequeretur quod uniuersalia diffinitionem non haberent, si essentia est id quod per diffinitionem significatur” (Cap. II ll. 67-73).

Aquinas's solution is to introduce "designate" versus "non-designate" matter (*materia signata et non signata*). A definition includes only the latter type of matter, and thereby must be distinguished from the former, which is the principle of individuation. He states: "Et ideo sciendum est quod materia non quolibet modo accepta est individuationis principium, sed solum materia signata; et dico materiam signatam que sub determinatis dimensionibus consideratur."²¹ Designate matter considers the determinate dimensions of matter: not just "flesh and bones" but *these* flesh and bones, with this weight, this dimension, in this area of space, and so on. All matter has spatial dimensions and location, and thereby makes Socrates *Socrates* and not Plato. In expressing the definition of Socrates, however, the specific dimensions that separate Socrates' matter from Plato's becomes irrelevant. Having flesh and bones makes it possible that he is human, but having *these* flesh and bones is not necessary for his being human, only for his being Socrates. Thus, all matter *in re* is designate, even though in forming definitions the mind abstracts from such determinate dimensions and considers only non-designate matter. The process of abstraction and its relation to the individuals *in re* from which it abstracts introduces the second issue: abstraction with precision and abstraction without precision (or imprecise abstraction), a matter of much importance in discussing how the intellect understands *esse* in relation to essence.²²

²¹ Cap II ll. 73-77.

²² For the importance of the different types of abstraction in reference to the question of *esse*, see below Section 2. Owens attempts to revitalize the Thomistic distinction between abstraction with/without precision in order to show why the *intellectus essentiae* argument does not demonstrate a real distinction: "From this doctrine of the knowledge of species and individuals through designation, St Thomas develops a teaching that has been strangely neglected or forgotten in later Scholasticism, including Neoscholasticism. It is the doctrine of abstraction with precision and without precision. From the time of Suarez the notions of abstraction and of precision have been regarded as the same. It is difficult today to realize how vital is the notion of abstraction without precision for understanding the Thomistic doctrine of essence and being." Owens, "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being," 29.

The discussion of abstraction arises around the ways in which the essence can be abstracted from the individual, which also includes an accompanying discussion of the way genus abstracts from the *differentiae* of species. This discussion treats the way in which genus can be predicated of species and species of the individual through abstraction without precision. Aquinas argues that the designation in each case (i.e., specific difference or signate matter) remains latent *in* the essence, and thus predication is made possible. Such designations are “indeterminate” with respect to the essence: the mind abstracts the genus “animal,” but without fully excluding the specific difference “rational.” Or in the case of abstracting the specific essence of “human,” the designate matter of Socrates remains latent without being altogether excluded. This is referred to as “abstraction without precision.”

Unlike “abstraction with precision,” which seeks as contained and as explicit an abstraction (or concept) as possible, abstracting without precision allows for an indeterminacy of content. The example Aquinas uses is the difference between the abstractions “human” and “humanity.” The former is imprecise because it signifies the entire essence of a human but leaves certain determinations implicit. As the whole essence of a human, however, it can be predicated of the individual: this human (e.g., Socrates) is human. The latter is precise in that it abstracts only a part without leaving anything implicit or undetermined in the concept. In the case of “humanity,” Aquinas calls this an integral part.²³ “Humanity” is something integral to the constitution of any

²³ He also uses the example of “body” and the different ways it can be abstracted: body as the genus of animal and body as the part of an animal. The former requires abstraction without precision and the latter abstraction with precision. No animal *is* its body. Rather its body is integral to it, albeit only as a part. Every animal is “body,” however, in the sense that “body” is understood as “three dimensional thing,” in which case it is a genus of animal. See Cap. III II. 105-150.

human, but no human is humanity. Thus, such a precise abstraction cannot be predicated of the individual.

Distinguishing these two types of abstraction concerns the possibility of an abstraction that carries both determinate and indeterminate content.²⁴ Imprecise abstraction of an essence enables predication because the whole contained in the individual is *implicitly* contained in the essence as indeterminate content. Such abstraction leaves the whole in tact, but only explicates a certain dimension of it. Thus, although not constituting different realities, the nature or essence can be considered in two ways: *absolutely* or *secundum esse*.²⁵ In regard to the former, Aquinas states: “Ergo patet quod natura hominis absolute considerata abstrahit a quolibet esse, ita tamen quod non fiat precisio alicuius eorum. Et hec natura sic considerata est que predicatur de indiuiduis omnibus.”²⁶ Although abstracting from any *esse*, such an act does not exclude *esse* altogether. *Esse* remains latent along with universality or plurality. The latter, on the other hand, considers the essence according to its *esse*, either as multiplied in singulars and or as unified and universalized in the soul. The essence has *esse* in either way, but can be considered in absolution from both.

²⁴ The issue of the status of essences must be noted at this point, but set aside until the following chapter, in which it can be treated at length. Here I will mention only the following: Aquinas argues that the *ratio* of genus or species applies more properly to the essence taken as a whole, not as a part (e.g., human, not humanity; animal, not animality). This he maintains against the Platonists, who by separating the essence from the individual, bar predication of it to a multiplicity. Essence considered in the absolute sense lacks its own *esse* even though such remains latent. For a comparison between Aquinas’s understanding of the common nature in comparison to Duns Scotus and Avicenna, see Joseph Owens, “Common Nature: A Point of Comparison Between Thomistic and Scotistic Metaphysics,” *Mediaeval Studies* XIX (1957): 1-14.

²⁵ “Human” as abstracted without precision from Socrates is not a separate part or reality of Socrates. It is instead a way of considering Socrates’ essence absolutely. According to Owens, for Scotus the common nature constitutes a separate and formally distinct reality, which is composed with *haecceity* as an individuating mode. *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁶ Cap. III ll. 68-73.

Aquinas seems to draw a parallel between the implicit containment of *esse* and the implicit containment of individuality in the imprecise abstraction of essences.²⁷ The essence “human,” for example, abstracts from the determinate features of this or that individual’s matter in addition to abstracting from any existential considerations as *existing* in a multiplicity of real humans or as *existing* as a unified notion (*ratio*) in the soul. Thus, when presented with the *intellectus essentiae* argument in Chapter IV, one must ask whether the essence understood without *esse* is an essence abstracted without precision. This would entail the indeterminate containment of *esse*, and thereby foster only a *rational distinction* between essence and *esse*, but not necessarily a real distinction. This question will reemerge below after addressing the issue of *esse*.

Section 2: “*Intellectus Essentiae*” and the Real Distinction in *De Ente* IV

Following along the easier path, Chapter III’s discussion of composite substances prepares the way for Chapter IV’s treatment of simple substances (i.e., the soul, intelligences, and the first cause). The latter covers familiar ground in Aristotelian metaphysics, even with the Christianized understanding of intelligences as “angels.” And yet, Chapter IV presents a new type of question. This new type of question digs deeper

²⁷ Masiello argues that this section is necessarily presupposed by the *intellectus essentiae* argument and makes it possible. See Ralph J. Masiello, “A Note on Essence and Existence,” *The New Scholasticism* XLV (1971): 491-494. Sweeney casts doubt upon the validity of this comparison. The relationship essence: individual is one of act: potency because signate matter *receives* specific form, form actualizes the potency of matter. The relationship essence: *esse* is the reverse (i.e., potency: act) for the reasons outlined in Chapter 4. Leo Sweeney, “Existence/Essence in Thomas Aquinas’s Early Writings,” 107. Also see Walter Patt, “Aquinas’s Real Distinction and Some Interpretations,” 1-29. At stake (to be discussed further below, see Section 5) is what type of distinction is entailed by “not knowing” one of the members of the couplet. Abstraction without precision translates the “not knowing” the individual determinations not as complete ignorance, but the leaving indeterminate (although not excluded) individual determinations. Thus, I can know the essence “human” without knowing (yet not being completely ignorant of) every individual human’s individuating features. But essences are only *rationally distinct* from individuals and thus abstraction without precision does not necessarily reflect *real distinctions*. The *intellectus essentiae* argument, however, requires more of a distinction and thus must show that *esse* is not merely “unknown yet implicated” in such an understanding of essences, but that *esse* is unknown because it is really distinct.

than had the previous ones by problematizing the existence (*esse*) of things, or how to account for the fact that anything is at all. For Aristotelian metaphysics, such a fact had been the starting point from which *scientia* could begin: things appear before us and subsequently we may ask “what are they being?,” with an emphasis on the “*what*.” The starting point itself, however, did not foster its own question of “*why* there are things at all.” Because essential considerations cannot answer this question, as Aquinas shows in Chapter IV, such constitutes an existential problem.

The discussion of *esse* arises around and in opposition to the Augustinian-inspired position of universal hylomorphism, even though here Aquinas mentions only Avicenna’s *Fons Vitae* by name. Taking off from the preceding chapter’s consideration of how essences are in composite substances, he now addresses the same question in terms of simple substances. Aquinas states:

Nunc restat uidere per quem modum sit essentia in substantiis separatis, scilicet in anima, intelligentia et causa prima. Quamuis autem simplicitatem cause prime omnes concedant, tamen compositionem forme et materie quidam nituntur inducere in intelligentias et in animam [...]²⁸

Aquinas immediately recognizes that even though now speaking of “simple substances,” he must be careful to avoid thinking of all such substances as equally simple. The assumption here is that the first cause is itself absolutely simple and unmarked by any degree of potentiality, whereas intelligences and separated souls cannot enjoy such absolute simplicity. In composite substances, the presence of potentiality is explained by matter, which remains inseparable from their essences. With intelligences and souls, however, matter by definition seems to be precluded. The position of universal hylomorphism, however, rectifies this problem by introducing a “spiritual matter” into

²⁸ Cap. IV ll.1-6.

intelligences and souls in order to provide the compositionality necessary to distinguish such created beings from divine simplicity.²⁹ This would allow the first cause to be unique in its absolute simplicity and separate it from everything else, which is composed of form and some kind of matter.

Against universal hylomorphism, Aquinas maintains that *like* the first cause, souls and the intelligences are not composed of matter and form. They are immaterial. He rejects the claims of universal hylomorphism by pointing to “the excellence of understanding” found in intelligent substances, which implies an intelligibility of forms apart from any conditions of materiality.³⁰ The intelligibility of forms, Aquinas argues, requires an *eduction* from matter of the form to be received in an intellectual substance. Intelligibility, Aquinas insists, requires a complete absence of matter. He argues that to maintain this other type of matter, unlike corporeal matter, would not impede intelligibility would mean that matter’s unintelligibility comes from its corporeal form. This implies that of all types of matter, only that with a corporeal form is unintelligible; matter with a incorporeal form remains intelligible. But even a corporeal form, Aquinas states, like any form abstracted from matter, is intelligible. Matter thus cannot be called unintelligible on account of its corporeal form, but must be unintelligible on account of that which is other than its formal element.³¹ Thus, “corporeal form” cannot be invoked

²⁹ For a discussion of Aquinas’s understanding of *hylomorphism* in reference to *Liber de causis*, see Richard C. Taylor, “St. Thomas and the *Liber de causis* on the Hylomorphic Composition of Separate Substances,” *Mediaeval Studies* XLI (1979): 506-513.

³⁰ An implied premise is that intellectual substances understand apart from all conditions of materiality.

³¹ “Cuius demonstratio potissima est ex uirtute intelligendi que in eis est. Videmus enim formas non esse intelligibiles in actu nisi secundum quod separantur a materia et a conditionibus eius, nec efficiuntur intelligibiles in actu nisi per uirtutem substantie intelligentis, secundum quod recipiuntur in ea et secundum quod aguntur per eam. Vnde oportet quod in qualibet substantia intelligente sit omnino immunitas a materia, ita quod neque habeat materiam partem sui, neque etiam sit sicut forma impressa in materia ut est de formis materialibus. Nec potest aliquis dicere quod intelligibilitatem non impediatur materia quelibet, sed materia corporalis tantum. Si enim hoc esset ratione materie corporalis tantum, cum materia non dicatur

as what makes matter unintelligible and diverse from other types of matter. If there were other types of matter, they too would be unintelligible (i.e., *qua matter*, not *qua* “corporeal” or *qua* “spiritual”) because only through an *educed* form—whether corporeal or incorporeal—does it take on intelligibility.

The burden of the victor following the defeat of universal hylomorphism is rendering souls and intelligences *unlike* the first cause. That is, how to avoid absolute simplicity in intelligences and souls such that the first cause alone is entirely simple.³² The appeal of the vanquished position had been to uphold the uniqueness of divine simplicity by locating a material element in *all* creatures thereby limiting them through the potency of matter. Aquinas, thus, must provide some way of distinguishing even the most noble creatures (i.e., souls and intelligences)—which are also immaterial—from God. This requires showing why even the most noble of entities other than the first cause are nevertheless marked by some degree of inherent limitation.

At this point, Aquinas introduces a new principle of composition in order to maintain the non-simplicity of immaterial substances. This principle is the act of being, or existence (*esse*), that enters into composition with what something is (i.e., its quiddity). Thus, by maintaining a real composition between *being* and the form in all entities other than the first cause, Aquinas can uphold the non-simplicity of material and immaterial substances alike. On this issue, he states:

corporalis nisi secundum quod stat sub forma corporali, tunc oporteret quod hoc haberet materia, scilicet impedire intelligibilitatem, a forma corporali; et hoc non potest esse, quia ipsa etiam forma corporalis actu intelligibilis est sicut et alie forme, secundum quod a materia abstrahitur.” Cap. IV ll. 11-33.

³² Even the distinction between the soul, for example, and its powers is a distinction between an essence and its essential properties. Thus, such properties follow from, or are a natural consequence of, the soul. See *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a.11, resp. At *ST I*, q. 54, a. 1, resp., Aquinas explains that an angel’s substance (and he extends this argument to any creature) cannot be its action (as the actuality of a power) *because* an angel has an admixture of potency insofar as God alone is pure act. Thus, Aquinas grounds the composition between substance and action on the composition between essence and existence.

Vnde in anima uel in intelligentia nullo modo est compositio ex materia et forma, ut hoc modo accipiatur essentia in eis sicut in substantiis corporalibus. Sed est ibi compositio forme et esse; unde in commento none propositionis libri De causis dicitur quod intelligentia est habens formam et esse: et accipitur ibi forma pro ipsa quidditate uel natura simplici.³³

And here we find what is arguably one of Aquinas's greatest innovations in metaphysics, and also one of the most controversial: although there is no composition of form and matter in simple substances, there is composition of form and *esse*.³⁴ The "having of *esse*" requires a non-identity between *what* something is and its act of being, which it *has* but *is* not.

Accepting such a principle of composition, however, is not intuitive. So far, the foundation for such a principle has been the need to posit some principle of non-simplicity for everything other than the first, and the insufficiency of universalizing hylomorphic composition for achieving this goal. But even this foundation requires further justification.³⁵ In terms of the simplicity of the first cause, Aquinas has only

³³ IV II. 33-40.

³⁴ Taylor argues that Aquinas's reading of the *Liber*, although correct in its refutation of hylomorphism, mistakes Aquinas's own *esse/essentia* composition for the *Liber's* composition between form and being because being serves as the potential substrate for formal determination; see Richard C. Taylor, "St. Thomas and the *Liber de causis* on the Hylomorphic Composition of Separate Substances," 506-513. In reference to *Liber de causis* and the *Plotiniana Arabica*, Taylor states: "[...] Aquinas can be said to have been influenced by these and other Arabic philosophical materials as well as philosophical and theological materials from the Latin tradition, but his critical synthesis of these notion into his own doctrine of Essence and Existence is a new and exciting philosophical development building upon but not identical with what preceded him in the history of philosophy." Richard C. Taylor, "Aquinas, the 'Plotinian Arabica', and the Metaphysics of Being and Actuality," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59.2 (April 1998): 238. As will be seen below, of central importance for Aquinas is the role of God as *esse tantum* and the sole cause of *esse* in things. Thus, being is not given through intermediaries, nor is *esse tantum* as mere reflection upon *esse commune*.

³⁵ In his *Scriptum Sententiarum*, Aquinas treats the issue of *esse* in a number of places. (For books 1 and 2 of Aquinas's Commentary on the *Sentences*, see *Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*, t.1-2 Ed. P. Mandonnet. P. Lethielleux, Parisiis, 1929). For example: One notable discussion of this issue arises around the issue of the accidentality of *esse* in God. He states: "...quod accidens dicitur hic quod non est de intellectu alicujus, sicut rationale dicitur animali accidere; et ita cuilibet quidditati creatae accidit esse, quia non est de intellectu ipsius quidditatis; potest enim intelligi humanitas, et tamen dubitari, utrum homo habeat esse" (*I Sent. d. 8 Expositio Primae Partis Textus*). The language of this passage, in which Aquinas refers to "*esse*" as an accident of a created quiddity, reflects that of Avicenna, who in his

claimed that “everyone concedes the simplicity of the first cause” (“omnes concedant simplicitatem causae primae”). Such a claim is noteworthy because *De Ente* has not already demonstrated the existence of such a simple first cause, nor has it argued that everything else, including simple substances, must be composed because of the uniqueness of the first cause as pure actuality. The manner in which Aquinas arrives at these conclusions and also grounds his principle of “existential” composition needs to be addressed at present. The argument Aquinas offers for the real distinction between essence and *esse* consists of three stages that will be worked out in what follows. How the states fit together, and at what stage the real distinction is established, will be discussed in Section 4 below.

In the spirit of Avicenna,³⁶ Aquinas argues that whatever is understood as not belonging to an essence *comes from outside it* and makes up a *composition* with that essence.³⁷ This is what commentators have called the *intellectus essentiae* argument.³⁸

Metaphysics treats of *esse* as an accident that happens to an essence. The use of “accidit” to describe this relationship of *esse* to essence does not seem to accord with Aquinas’s usual understanding of the matter.

³⁶ Sweeney cites both Alfarabi and Avicenna as providing forms of the *intellectus essentiae* argument. See Leo Sweeney, “Existence/Essence in Thomas Aquinas’s Early Writings,” 109.

³⁷ The understood essence is the absolute consideration discussed in Chapter 3 of *De Ente*. As Owens states: “The argument, then, proceeds from the nature absolutely considered, from the nature as it is the formal ground or *ratio* of its occurrence in individuals or in the mind.” Owens, “Quiddity and Real Distinction,” 7. But such an abstraction does not establish a real distinction, as Owens argues.

³⁸ Aquinas invokes a type of *intellectus essentiae* argument in many early texts: In *De Veritate* on the question of whether God’s existence is self-evident to the human mind, Aquinas offers another version of the *intellectus essentiae* argument. The issue arises in explaining how an account of God’s quiddity (*ratio quiditatis*) includes existence (*esse*). As such is *per se nota* only in itself, but not to us, thus God’s *esse* must be demonstrated. He prefaces this conclusion with a claim about creatures: “Hoc autem quod est esse, in nullius creaturae ratione includitur: cuiuslibet enim creaturae esse est aliud ab eius quiditate; unde non potest dici de aliqua creatura quod eam esse sit per se notum etiam secundum se. Sed in Deo...” (Sancti Thomae De Aquino, *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita, t. 22: Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* (Editori di San Tommaso, Roma, 1975-1970-1972-1976) 3 vol. 4 fascicula, q. 10, a. 12, resp. ll. 174-178). In *Scriptum Sententiarum*, in answer to the question whether there are many first principles, Aquinas presents another argument for the real distinction. Similar to the *De Ente* presentation, Aquinas begins with an understood distinctness between *esse* and essence in order to establish some being who has *esse per se*, and thus can explain the reception of *esse* in everything else (which is understood not to include *esse*). Aquinas introduces this argument in reference to the oneness of the first principle. He thus makes this argument for the existence of a first principle *simpliciter* invoking an *intellectus essentiae* type argument:

Esse is not included in an understanding of essences (save one). Therefore, *esse* is distinct from such essences.³⁹ Understanding an essence (e.g., human, triangle, phoenix) brings with it certain determinations without which the essence could not be understood: with triangle, for example, comes the determination “three sides equaling 180 degrees.” What does not accompany such understandings, according to Aquinas, is a determination to

“Invenitur enim in omnibus rebus natura entitatis, in quibusdam magis nobilis, et in quibusdam minus; ita tamen quod ipsarum rerum naturae non sunt hoc ipsum esse quod habent: alias esse esset de intellectu cujuslibet quidditatis, quod falsum est, cum quidditas cujuslibet rei possit intelligi etiam non intelligendo de ea an sit. Ergo oportet quod 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, nec potest esse nisi unum, cum natura entitatis sit unius rationis in omnibus secundum analogiam; unitas enim causati requirit unitatem in causa per se...” (*In II Sent.* d. I, q. 1, a. 1). This familiar language of something’s intelligibility apart from its actual existence (*an sit*) is echoed by the *De Ente* argument. The natures of entities (*natura entitatis*) are not the *esse* which they *have* because otherwise *esse* would derive from an understanding of their quiddities (*de intellectu cujuslibet quidditatis*). In the world, a variety of more or less noble natures are discovered in all things. And yet, *esse* does not accompany the quidditative understanding of “whatever” because its *an sit* is not entailed. One need only think of the intelligibility of the essence “phoenix.” Because the quiddity of such entities does not include their *an sit*, they must receive *esse* from another, necessitating the eventual arrival at a nature that has *esse per se* (“...oportet quod ab aliquo esse habeant, et oportet devenire ad aliquid cujus natura sit ipsum suum esse”). Without such a nature, the reception of *esse ab aliquo* would extend to infinity, and there would be no first that could ground the reception of *esse* in each posterior existent.

³⁹ “Huiusmodi ergo substantie, quamvis sint forme tantum sine materia, non tamen in eis est omnimoda simplicitas nec sunt actus purus, sed habent permixtionem potentie; et hoc sic patet. Quicquid enim non est de intellectu essentie uel quidditatis, hoc est adueniens extra et faciens compositionem cum essentia, quia nulla essentia sine hiis que sunt partes essentie intelligi potest. Omnis autem essentia uel quidditas potest intelligi sine hoc quod aliquid intelligatur de esse suo: possum enim intelligere quid est homo uel fenix et tamen ignorare an esse habeat in rerum natura; ergo patet quod esse est aliud ab essentia uel quidditate. Nisi forte sit aliqua res cuius quidditas sit ipsum suum esse, et hec res non potest esse nisi una et prima: quia impossibile est ut fiat plurificatio alicuius nisi per additionem alicuius differentie, sicut multiplicatur natura generis in species; uel per hoc quod forma recipitur in diuersis materiis, sicut multiplicatur natura speciei in diuersis indiuiduis; uel per hoc quod unum est absolutum et aliud in aliquo receptum, sicut si esset quidam calor separatus esset alius a calore non separato ex ipsa sua separatione. Si autem ponatur aliqua res que sit esse tantum ita ut ipsum esse sit subsistens, hoc esse non recipiet additionem differentie, quia iam non esset esse tantum sed esse et preter hoc forma aliqua; et multo minus reciperet additionem materie, quia iam esset esse non subsistens sed materiale. Vnde relinquitur quod talis res que sit suum esse non potest esse nisi una; unde oportet quod in qualibet alia re preter eam aliud sit esse suum et aliud quidditas uel natura seu forma sua; unde oportet quod in intelligentiis sit esse preter formam, et ideo dictum est quod intelligentia est forma et esse. Omne autem quod conuenit alicui uel est causatum ex principiis nature sue, sicut risibile in homine; uel aduenit ab aliquo principio extrinseco, sicut lumen in aere ex influenza solis. Non autem potest esse quod ipsum esse sit causatum ab ipsa forma uel quidditate rei, dico sicut a causa efficiente, quia sic aliqua res esset sui ipsius causa et aliqua res se ipsam in esse produceret: quod est impossibile. Ergo oportet quod omnis talis res cuius esse est aliud quam natura sua habeat esse ab alio. Et quia omne quod est per aliud reducitur ad id quod est per se sicut ad causam primam, oportet quod sit aliqua res que sit causa essendi omnibus rebus eo quod ipsa est esse tantum; alias iretur in infinitum in causis, cum omnis res que non est esse tantum habeat causam sui esse, ut dictum est. Patet ergo quod intelligentia est forma et esse, et quod esse habet a primo ente quod est esse tantum, et hoc est causa prima que Deus est.” (Cap. IV ll. 90-146).

being (*esse*). The essence of a phoenix, for example, can be understood and yet we know nothing of whether any phoenix is.⁴⁰ Nothing about the essence “phoenix,” or “human” for that matter, specifies that any phoenix or human *is* in the same way that the essence specifies that “human is risible” or “phoenix regenerable.” Here one finds the distinction between the principles that govern *what* something is (e.g., the essence of phoenix) and those that govern *that* it is (e.g., the actual existence of individual phoenixes). The latter, Aquinas maintains, come from *outside* the province governed by the essence: otherwise how could we understand the essence “phoenix” (not a contradiction) and all the determinations attached to it and yet there be no phoenixes?⁴¹

⁴⁰ Aquinas’s discussion in *De Ente* implies, but does not acknowledge, a series of deeper metaphysical questions: *What* is understood in understanding the essence “phoenix”? Is a positive reality understood or merely an *ens rationis*? Furthermore, what type of being can be granted to the essence of a non-existent entity (e.g., a phoenix)? Finally, on what grounds can “phoenix-ness” be considered a possibility that does not involve an inherent contraction (like “squared circle” or “chimera”)? These questions cannot be answered on the basis of *De Ente* and require a more sustained exposition of Thomas’s position on divine *rationes*, divine exemplars, and creaturely essences *visa-vis* universality, all of which ask after Thomas’s commitment to metaphysical *realism* in general. I will provide such an exposition in Chapter IV, but here only note the importance of this *intellectus essentiae* for existing and non-existing essences alike.

⁴¹ Ralph Masiello maintains that such a reading of Aquinas is based on a mistranslation of the term “ignorare” in the *intellectus essentiae* argument., and thus generates an apparent departure from Aristotle’s epistemic model. Ralph J. Masiello, “A Note on Essence and Existence,” 492. See also, Owens’s response: Owens “‘Ignorare’ and Existence,” *The New Scholasticism* XLVI (1972): 210-219. Instead of translating the term as “to be ignorant” or “to not know,” Masiello argues that it should be translated as “to ignore.” Otherwise, how could Aquinas “immediately conclude” that existence is obviously other than essence if “ignorant” of one of the terms of the distinction? The consequence of such a mistranslation, Masiello argues, is that scientific knowledge, “episteme” as outlined by the *Posterior Analytics*, would be undermined by Aquinas. On the traditional reading of *intellectus essentiae*, according to which *intellectus* operates independently of experience, he states: “But this is opposed to St. Thomas’ realistic position that the universals are inductively derived from the knowledge of individuals. Not to be able to relate the universal to the individual would render all scientific knowledge useless. Actually, St. Thomas’ argument that essence is other than existence is the culmination of a rather lengthy treatment in the previous chapter on the manner in which the essence as universal is understood in relation to individuals: the knowledge of the nature involves knowledge of individuals [...]” “A Note on Essence and Existence,” 492. According to Masiello, the mistake of treating essences in complete separation from actually existing individuals is twofold: first, it fosters the mistaken conclusion that the *intellectus essentiae* argument insufficiently establishes the real distinction between essence and *esse*; second, it dissolves contact with the actually existing individuals to which universal scientific knowledge must relate. The work of abstraction, however, as outlined by Aquinas in *De Ente* III and referred to by Masiello in this passage, does not sever its ties so radically from the experiential ground. Because the *intellectus*—as the extreme in both directions—sustains contact with the existing individuals of experience, there can be both knowledge of existence as distinct, and also knowledge of the particular as understood through the intelligible species. Based on this reasoning, Masiello concludes that existence for Aquinas thus must be self-evident through immediate

In a move praised by Gilson as “the Thomistic revolution in metaphysics,”⁴² Aquinas here begins to dislodge the act of being, which the essence phoenix lacks *in re*, from the determinative actuality brought by the essence. What this entails is that the determinate actuality of being this or that (e.g., being phoenix or human) governed by form must enter into composition with the act of being anything at all. Whether *intellectus essentiae* by itself establishes a “real” or a “conceptual” distinction remains to be seen below.⁴³

experience, as it had been for Aristotle. He claims “[i]n a word, our knowledge of the existence of any individual thing which comes under the purview of our immediate experience is self-evident.” *Ibid.*, 494. Masiello argues that this conclusion, made possible by the retranslation of “ignorare,” goes against both Gilson’s theological claim for the indemonstrability of *esse* as really distinct from essence (because *esse* in its immediacy is not open to the question of demonstrable or indemonstrable) and Maritain’s intellectual intuition of being: by relying on a conceptually inaccurate understanding of “ignorare,” both Gilson and Maritain have made the path to *esse* unnecessarily convoluted, when in fact it stands clearly before us through immediate experience. At stake in this matter is what type of distinction is entailed by “ignoring” one of the members of the couplet essence/esse: does a real distinction follow from this intellectual activity or is something else required to know the real distinction? What if, following Masiello, the taking of essence in *intellectus essentiae* “ignores” *esse*, but it is not “ignorant” of it? Thus, just as the individuating or universalizing modes of an essence can be ignored when considering the nature absolutely, so too its existence either in the mind or *in re* can be ignored. Even if Masiello is correct, which I do not dispute, a real distinction does not follow from “ignoring” existence, in the same manner as “ignoring” an essence’s universality in the mind or its individuality *in re* does not entail a real distinction. The so-called self-evidence of the existing individual, from which essential considerations can be taken (i.e., immediately grasped through *intellectus*), does not reveal existence to be “really distinct” from essence. Masiello is correct in pointing to the indemonstrability of the existence of the individual thing for Aristotle, but this by no means entails a real distinction. Even such a strong critic of the real distinction as Ockham also claims that we grasp the existing individual through intuitive cognition and we intuit this as an indemonstrable fact. And yet for Ockham—who seems to be thoroughly Aristotelian on this point—this does not entail that existence is something really distinct from the thing.

⁴² Gilson, *Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 365.

⁴³ I will run through all three stages of the argument before returning to address if and when Aquinas demonstrates a real distinction. The position of Joseph Owens accords with my own, except for our ultimate conclusions. According to Owens, the original *intellectus*, a simple operation of the mind, only grasps the essence; the compositional activity of judgment is required to discover being (*esse*). In tracing the creatures act of being back to that from which it was received, one discovers the giver of being’s nature to be identical to being itself (*ipsum esse*) and thus unable to enter into the nature of any other recipient. Thus, the received being must be really distinct from created natures. See, for example, Owens, “Being and Natures in Aquinas,” *The Modern Schoolman* LXI:3 (March 1984): 158. I will discuss the issue of judgment in relation to *esse*. See below Chapter VI Section 2. My argument will agree with Owens’s such that *intellectus essentiae* does not reveal a really distinct perfection of “being” (*esse*). For example: “...a real distinction between a thing and its being cannot be shown until after completion of the demonstration that God exists. Only then is one in a position to see that existence cannot coalesce in reality with any finite thing. It cannot enter in reality into the thing’s nature, nor be regarded as a part (*De Ente*, p. 376.97) of that nature, without entailing the Parmenidean consequences. It has to remain really other than the thing.” Owens, “Stages and Distinction in *De Ente*: A Rejoinder,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 45 (January 1981): 110. See also Owens, *Aquinas on Being and Thing* (Niagara Falls, NY: Niagara University Press, 1981), 9-10. He structures his argument around the hypothesis that if God as *ipsum esse*

At the end of this discussion, Aquinas adds a slight caveat to his claim: “therefore, it is obvious that *esse* is other than essence or quiddity. Unless perhaps there was some thing whose quiddity were itself its own *esse*, and this thing could not be unless one and first [...]” He here entertains the possibility of something whose essence and *esse* are identical. This initiates what has been called the “second phase” of the argument, following from the *intellectus essentiae* argument as the “first phase.”⁴⁴ This phase of the argument maintains that if an identity between essence and *esse* is possible, the conditions of its possibility restrict such an identity to a single being. This does not *prove* that such a being exists, but only that such an identity can be possible in *no more than one being*. The conditions of multiplication prohibit the multiplication of *esse*.

A thing whose essence is only existence (*esse tantum*) would be subsisting existence itself (*ipsum esse subsistens*), just as something whose essence were heat alone would be subsisting heat. If *esse* were to be multiplied, then it would have to be multiplied by the addition of some difference; or as received in diverse matters; or as something receives that which is separate in another.⁴⁵ The first way reflects how a genus is multiplied into species. The addition of *differentiae* multiplies the genus “animal” into the species “human, dog, lion, worm, etc.” *Esse* cannot be multiplied in this way because, with the

subsistens and *esse* as received in every other being (*entia*) were not really distinct, being, or being as God, would absorb all things and thereby undermine the distinction between God and created entities. This argument requires Stages 2 and 3 such that God that whose nature *is ipsum esse subsistens* has been determined. Whether Aquinas can avoid the outcome of collapsing created beings into God will be seen in Chapter III. Owens argues against such a conclusion, whereas I will show the trouble Aquinas encounters in avoiding it.

⁴⁴ See Wippel, “Aquinas’s Route,” 286-287; also, Patt, “Aquinas’s Real Distinction,” 17-18. For the “third phase,” see pp. 47-49 below.

⁴⁵ As will be argued below, Aquinas’s treatment of *esse* at this point blurs the distinction between *esse tantum* and *esse commune*. Whereas the former—as a distinct subsisting perfection—can only be participated, the latter could be contracted in a manner other than the three offered here. Scotus, for example, presents being as a univocal concept contracted through disjunctive modes. He thus avoids making being into a genus or species, but also resists Aquinas’s temptation to transform it into an intensified perfection. For this reason, the first being need not be *esse tantum*, but only *esse/ens infinitum*. See Chapter V and VI below.

addition of something else, it would no longer be *esse tantum*. Neither can *esse* be multiplied in the way matter added to form multiplies a species into individuals, because here again, with the addition of matter, it would no longer be *esse tantum*.

Although *ipsum esse subsistens* cannot be multiplied either through accidents or through matter, a third way of multiplication remains open.⁴⁶ This third way, however, retains the oneness of the subsisting thing while enabling it to be participated. Aquinas uses the example of separate heat in order to illustrate this type of multiplication. If there were separated heat—something whose essence were *heat alone*—then all non-separated heat would receive heat from outside itself, but *it* would not be heat alone. This would entail a distinction between that which receives heat and the received heat in everything other than *heat alone*. The case is the same for *esse*. Thus, even though participation multiplies the participants, the participated—in this case *ipsum esse subsistens*—remains one. The relationship between participated and participating *esse* is not along the lines of genus to species or species to individuals because participation does not divide or otherwise break up the participated *esse*, but leaves it intact. Thus, despite the participative sharing amongst a multiplicity, the distribution of the perfection (e.g., *esse* or heat) does not disrupt the absolute self-identity, or “*ipseity*,” of the subsisting form.⁴⁷ In order to address how such a perfection comes to be multiplied and yet retain its subsisting self-identity, Aquinas will introduce an “analogical theory of predication”

⁴⁶ Wipfel explains why Aquinas need not return to the third possibility: “The implication is that the third alternative really concedes his point. Then there would only be one separate and subsisting existence. In all others, existence would be received by something else. But this is to acknowledge that any such being would consist of existence and that which receives it.” Wipfel, “Aquinas’s Route,” 288-289. This reception of *esse* into another will play an important role in accounting for the diminished and participated (i.e., non-essential) *esse* of creatures. Aquinas’s account of creatures-participating-esse (and creator as participated) will be discussed in following chapter. See below Chapter II Section 1.

⁴⁷ For a definition of this term, see above fn. 19 of the Introduction.

whereby the former receive the perfection of the latter in a diminished and limited capacity.

Whether there is such a subsisting *esse* or a subsisting heat remains a matter for further demonstration. In the case of the former, a third phase of the argument must be undertaken for such a demonstration. In the case of the latter, no such demonstration is possible lest one unnecessarily posit Platonic forms. This means that the second stage of the argument operates in the realm of possibility without demonstrating the actuality of such subsisting things: for every essence, it is logically (and thereby ontologically) impossible for there to be more than one subsisting thing (i.e., who is identical to that essence alone) even if that thing itself does not exist. Many commentators on this text argue that the third phase of the argument, which actually demonstrates the existence of such a subsisting *esse*, adds nothing to securing the real distinction between *esse* and essence because the logical impossibility of multiplying such an identity already has been shown.⁴⁸ After reviewing the third phase of the argument, it will be necessary to determine at what point the real distinction is actually secured and how the three stages complement each other.

The third phase of the argument enlists efficient causation in order to demonstrate the existence of *ipsum esse subsistens*.⁴⁹ Aquinas begins by distinguishing principles intrinsic to something's nature (i.e., formal and material causes) and those extrinsic to its nature (i.e., final and efficient).⁵⁰ The intrinsic principles, such as risibility in humans, he argues,

⁴⁸ See fns. 56, 57, 121, and 123 below.

⁴⁹ On the question of whether this is a proof for the existence of God, see Owens, "Stages" 110-111; Dewan, "St. Thomas and the Existence of God: Owens vs. Gilson, and Beyond," in *God and Argument/Dieu et L'Argumentation Philosophique*. ed. by William Sweet (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1999): 115-141.

⁵⁰ See also *ST I* q. 3, a. 4, resp. and below Chapter III Section 1.

cause in accordance with something's nature: Socrates is risible because he is human. Such essential predicates and properties belong to something on account of its nature. Extrinsic principles, such as light in the air from the influence (*ex influentia*) of the sun, cause something pertaining to a nature, but outside the power of that nature itself. Illumination, which is not opposed to the nature of air but which exceeds the power of its essence, thus requires the influence of the sun as an extrinsic principle. Aquinas goes on to show why the cause of being (*causa essendi*) must originate in a principle extrinsic to all natures except that single nature whose essence is to be (*esse*).

Based on the disjunction of intrinsic and extrinsic principles, it becomes clear why existence (*esse*) must be an extrinsic principle. Something's form or quiddity cannot cause that thing's existence (*esse*). If something were the efficient cause of its own existence (*esse*), it would be *causa sui* and would produce itself in existence ("*aliqua res se ipsam in esse produceret*"). Something cannot produce itself in existence because such a production entails that it previously lacks *esse* (i.e., it does not exist). And if something lacks *esse*, then it would be impossible for it to produce *esse* for itself: something cannot give what it does not have. Because it is impossible for something to be *causa sui*, *esse* must be received from another that has *esse*. In tracing the reception of *esse* from another, understanding is led back to (*reducitur*) a first, which does not receive its being from another, lest a *reductio ad infinitum*. This first must be *esse tantum* because if it were not, its essence would be something other than *esse*, and thus require *esse* from an extrinsic principle. In other words, its essence would not imply *esse* because only that thing whose essence is *esse* alone implies *esse*, and for all other essences, *esse* can be

excluded. Aquinas names this *causa essendi* God. God thus is both the beginning and the efficient cause of all *esse* and Himself *ipsum esse subsistens*.

Section 3: *Esse* as Otherwise than Essence in *De Ente* IV—*Sed Contra*

In order to highlight the unique sense of existentiality introduced in *De Ente* IV, the unthought of essentialist metaphysics, it will be necessary to show that the occluded *esse* adds something more to the essence than just another predicative property corresponding to the conceptual domain, but is itself something exceeding and grounding the essential order. *Esse* does not merely determine an already entitative essence as a “plus one” to an already existing essential arsenal, but constitutes the very being of the essence itself. This also means showing against the essentialism of the Aristotelian tradition that in not emerging as an essential property, *esse* is not thereby a conceptual redundancy, signifying at most the extantness—or presence at hand—of the essence apart from its causes.

In order to respond to both scholastic and contemporary critics of such a real distinction,⁵¹ Aquinas will need to address the question of how to establish the real distinction between *esse* and essence in creatures and whether the first stage by itself of the *intellectus essentiae* argument (i.e., the *understanding* of essence apart from existence) reveals a real distinction or only a conceptual one.⁵² It seems that part of the

⁵¹ A “real” distinction differs from a “rational” distinction in that x is *really distinct* from y when even with the non-existence of y, x still be can posited. That is, could God destroy the one while preserving the other. A common example is a substance and a non-essential accident, such as Socrates and his musicality or snub-nosedness. In terms of his risibility, which follows from his being human, however, Socrates is only rationally distinct from such. One can only distinguish Socrates from his risibility in one’s mind because without risibility, Socrates would not be *what* he is (i.e., a human being). It will remain to be seen how Aquinas characterizes this real otherness between *esse* and essence in any created being. See below Section 5.

⁵² Some confusion may arise between “*intellectus essentiae*” as the first stage of the “*intellectus essentiae*” argument, the latter which includes all three stages. The question here concerns whether the first stage insofar as it inspects essences apart from existing things, reveals a real distinction between the two, which I

problem, however, is the anachronism of the very question insofar as Aquinas himself never concerns himself with “types of distinctions,” but instead uses various characterizations to highlight the otherness of *esse* to essence, characterizations treated below.⁵³ Nevertheless, in what follows it will be important to determine what each stage secures for the argument and also what resources each offers for introducing an existential problem whose very recognition must establish itself within an essential domain.⁵⁴

Throughout this section, I will use Siger of Brabant to provide a *sed contra* to an existential reading of *esse*. Siger provides an important refraction of Aquinas’s existentialism as he predates the multitude of readings and misreadings as are later

will argue it does not. Thus, the *intellectus essentiae* argument as a whole concludes to a real distinction although an *intellectus essentiae* does not.

⁵³ See Section 5 below. Carlo has also noted such a misplaced question of “distinctions.” He states: “The whole question of the ‘distinction’ between essence and existence is located within a metaphysics of unity and has to be reformulated in other terms to make sense within a metaphysics of existence.” *The Ultimate Reducibility*, 109. He argues that in addressing the question in terms of unity, thinkers such as Duns Scotus and Suarez made existence into a mode of essence. Instead, Carlo argues, essence must be conceived as an intrinsic principle of determination of *esse*. This helps to overcome the question of “distinction” whereby creation can be thought not as a “marriage, a joining of *esse* and essence, but a truth birth.” *Ibid.*, 111.

⁵⁴ Many existential Thomists argue that such a strong and spirited response to Aquinas’s “real distinction” results from a misreading on the part of his interpreters. Such a “bastardized” reading becomes enshrined in the work of Giles of Rome, whose views often come to be mistaken for Aquinas’s own. Peter Nash disagrees with this reading of Giles as a misguided Thomist. Nash instead emphasizes the Neoplatonic dimensions of Giles thinking, which are recalcitrant to Thomas’s thinking: “...a legend took firm hold that he [Giles] was an authentic disciple of St. Thomas. The myth, thanks mainly to the work of Father Edgar Hocedez, has been exploded. Giles’ doctrine reveals a dominant Neoplatonic strain that makes it impossible to describe his philosophy as Thomist.” Peter W. Nash, “Giles of Rome on Boethius’ ‘Diversum est esse et id quod est,’” *Mediaeval Studies* XII (1950): 57. Thus, Nash opposes the view that Giles misreads Thomas thereby presenting a bastardized version of existential metaphysics. Giles, instead, develops his position from fundamentally different grounds (i.e., Neoplatonism, esp. Proclus), which means that structurally his position is incompatible with Thomism. Nash goes so far as to argue the created *esse*, in being a *per se* diversity, is what brings diversity to natures. Thus, instead of conceiving of *esse* as the fullest actuality and perfection of created beings, Giles considers it as that which diversifies and makes [a nature] unlike divine unity and simplicity. In a subsequent article, Nash asks: “Why this difference from St. Thomas? I think it is because Giles never lost his logical approach to the problem of being dictated by his Boethian-Proclean metaphysics. Given the priority of essence and of its logical unity, the only way he could safeguard the coming-forth of the many from the One, and of the creaturely contingency of this many, was by such accidentality of the act of essence [i.e., *esse*].” Nash, “The Accidentality of Esse According to Giles of Rome,” *Gregorianum* 38 (1957): 114. *Esse*, according to Nash’s reading of Giles, explains not the perfection of the creature (as it does for Thomas) but the diversification of a created essence.

generations (e.g., Scotus or Suarez). Siger, as pointed out by Gilson, represents the first generation of thinkers who openly address the distinction between *esse* and essence as part of the Aristotelian repertoire. It has, we might say, become a “metaphysical problem” by this point, due in no small measure to Aquinas’s problematization of the question. As Gilson explains, Siger can help us to understand how certain philosophers thought they could think as philosophers (e.g., as Averroists) and believe as Christians, especially on the matter at hand: on the compossibility of existence with a metaphysics of being qua substance. Siger thus, for us and for Gilson, reflects an attempt to really identify *esse* with essence and yet one that must grapple with the (yet untainted) innovations of Aquinas’s existentialism.⁵⁵

The basic problem at hand is whether the occlusion of *esse* that occurs from an inspection of essences *by itself* reveals the otherness (i.e., real distinction) of the occluded perfection or whether an understanding of God as *ipsum esse subsistens* is necessary to ground our knowledge of such real otherness in them: that is, does an inspection of

⁵⁵ Due to the clarity with which Gilson presents this confrontation, I have quoted it in bulk. He states: “One of the most paradoxical episodes in the history of Western thought has been the rise, in the thirteenth century, of a philosophical school whose members imagined that they could think as Averroists while believing as Christians. If there is a crucial experiment on the compossibility of existence with being a metaphysics in which being is identified with substance, here is one, and there is good reason to hope that its study will throw some light on the truth nature of their relation. One of the most famous Averroists of the thirteenth century, Siger of Brabant, is exactly the man we need to help us with our problem... This, I think, should account for the remarkable decision made by Siger of Brabant when, having to raise questions about Book IV of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, he found himself confronted with the definition of this supreme science: a science whose object is being *qua* being. The problem was not for him to find something to say about it; in fact, he had only too much to choose from, but he made an unusual choice. The very first question asked by Siger on this occasion was: ‘Whether, in created things, being (*ens*) or to be (*esse*) belongs to the essence of creatures, or is something added to their essence.’ Obviously, we are now reaching a time when the problem of the distinction of essence and existence has already been openly raised and widely discussed. For Siger to have asked it in the very first place, the question must have already become, if not, as it now is, a perennial question, at least a question of the day. Between Siger and his own favorite master, Averroes, there stands Thomas Aquinas. For him, that is the trouble, but for us, that is what makes his case extremely interesting. If, as he naturally will do, Siger wants to identify essence and existence, it won’t be enough for him to play Averroes against Avicenna, whom Averroes had both known and already refuted; he will have to play Averroes against Thomas Aquinas, whom Averroes could not refute, because he could not foresee his coming.” *Being and Some Philosophers*, 61-62.

essences reveal *esse* as a necessary perfection lacking in such substances or only as a rationally distinct conceptual iteration of one and the same reality?⁵⁶ Thus, against the dominance of essentialism, which would reduce *that it is* to an abstraction of the claim *that it is a horse* or *that it is musical*, how does the *intellectus essentiae* argument indicate a really distinct act of being and “think existence” apart from conceptual domination?

A central problem in establishing the real otherness of *esse* to essence is to convince a would-be essentialist that the *esse* occluded by *intellectus* (i.e., the first stage of the argument) does more than bracket part of the thing’s (*res*) essential complexion, but instead withholds reference to something that could never enter its nature because itself pure and incommunicable.⁵⁷ Merely to ignore, or be ignorant of, the fact that the essence

⁵⁶ My own argument in this section runs counter to Lawrence Dewan’s. See Dewan, “Saint Thomas, Joseph Owens, and the Real Distinction Between Being and Essence,” *The Modern Schoolman* 41.3 (March 1984): 145-156; “Etienne Gilson and the Actus Essendi,” *Maritain Studies/Etudes Maritainiennes* 15 (1999): 70-96; and “St. Thomas and the Distinction between Form and *Esse* in Caused Things,” *Gregorianum* 80.2 (1999): 353-370. Dewan’s argument for the sufficiency of *intellectus essentiae* in grounding the real distinction, simply rendered, is based on the following premise: If a thing has an efficient cause, it must have an act of being (*actus essendi*) which is distinct from its essence (Dewan, “Etienne Gilson” 82-83). Knowledge of the real distinction derived from “caused things” (i.e., effects) does not, he argues, require knowledge of their *having-been-created*. Each *caused thing*, he argues, requires the influence of “a higher and nobler essence” in whose being (*esse*) the effect, as dependent, must share. Dewan argues that this hierarchical relationship tends to be covered over by univocal causation in which “like begets like,” but that all univocal causation is ultimately derived from equivocal causation. Thus, even though the one *informs* something else according to its form, that form ultimately must be caused by something unlike itself (lest *causa sui*). See Dewan, “Etienne Gilson,” 84 and “St. Thomas and the Distinction between Form and *Esse*,” 361-362. Following this hierarchy of causal natures, based around orders of dependence (i.e., the effect depends upon the cause, and thus is lower), this hierarchy terminates in an uncaused cause, which as uncaused is identical with its *esse*. He states “...I do not think that one comes to the metaphysical conception of God as the subsistent act of being *until* one sees that the hierarchy of efficient causes cannot go to infinity. I say this because it seems to me that the distinction between a thing and its act of being is seen as soon as one sees the contribution of the efficient cause as cause. There must be, in the effect, both a nature of its own and a participation in what is proper to the nature of the cause as cause. These cannot be identical. But that there is some one being whose nature is *esse* is seen in seeing that there is a *first* cause, first by nature.” Dewan, “Etienne Gilson,” 94. Emphasis in Original. I will say more about Dewan’s argument and debate with Joseph Owens below. In general, I will agree with Owens against Dewan that “the contribution of efficient cause as cause” is not enough to secure a real distinction.

⁵⁷ Although on different grounds than Dewan, Walter Patt also defends the sufficiency of the *intellectus essentiae* argument. See Patt “Aquinas’s Real Distinction and Some Interpretations,” 1-29. Each argues that *esse* as really distinct from essence can be known by understanding essences. Thus, reference to a real identity subsisting in *esse ipsum* is unnecessary. They differ on whether essences can be understood in themselves (Patt); or should be treated merely as effects of a cause (Dewan). Joseph Owens and Etienne Gilson, on the other hand, have been notable defenders of the latter position (*passim*). Owens argues that

human or phoenix is instantiated in *rerum natura* (*possum enim intelligere quid est homo uel fenix et tamen ignorare an esse habeat in rerum natura*)⁵⁸ does not entail a real distinction because, to invoke Siger of Brabant's essentialist response to Aquinas, the *an esse* of the *quid est* merely signifies the temporal extantness or facticity of the essence. Thus, to apply Siger's discussion to the case at hand, I can consider the essence of Caesar and yet ignore (or be ignorant, if I am a Roman citizen before learning about the Ides of March) whether he is (*an esse*). The occluded *esse*, however, is not really other than the essence because without it (i.e., once Caesar perishes) so too does his real essence.⁵⁹

To turn the tables on this essentialist position for a moment, what—if not *esse*—distinguishes an understandable essence and an actual thing? What else explains this fundamental distinction between an existing and a non-existing thing? The intuitive appeal of Aquinas's position is that it explains this difference through the contribution of *esse*: an actual thing has *esse*, whereas an essence by itself (i.e., conceived absolutely) lacks such existential import. The latter may be said to have *esse in intellectu*, but in such

without demonstrating God to be *ipsum esse subsistens*, "*esse*" lacks any positive content and thus cannot be shown to be necessarily really distinct from the essence of everything outside of God. Once God's nature has been shown to be *esse ipsum*, then *esse* cannot enter into the quiddity of created beings lest all distinction collapse into a single being (i.e., Pantheism). Against fellow defenders of the real distinction, he maintains that Gilson, while also maintaining the necessity of *esse ipsum subsistens* to ground the real distinction, however, remains skeptical on whether we grasp God to be *ipsum esse subsistens* through demonstration or otherwise (e.g., revelation). The position of John Wippel mediates these two extremes by pointing to the insufficiency of *intellectus essentiae* while maintaining the necessity of only the second stage of the argument instead of a full-fledged demonstration.

⁵⁸ "...possum enim intelligere quid est homo uel fenix et tamen ignorare an esse habeat in rerum natura; ergo patet quod esse est aliud ab essentia uel quidditate." *De Ente* IV.

⁵⁹ I will refer primarily to his *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam*, of which there are four main "reports" differing little in content, but often in presentation. Thus, I will refer primarily to the "Munich Report," but indicate which of the four reports is being cited or discussed. The Munich Report has been published in a critical edition along with the Vienna Report as: Siger De Brabant, *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam. Édition revue de la reportation de Munich. Text inédit de la reportation de Vienne*, (éd. W. Dunphy. Louvain-la-Neuve, Éditions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, coll. "Philosophes médiévaux, XXIV," 1981). For the Cambridge and Paris Reports, see Siger De Brabant, *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam. Text inédit de la reportation de Cambridge. Édition revue de la reportation de Paris*, (éd. A. Maurer. Louvain-la-Neuve, Éditions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, coll. "Philosophes médiévaux, XXV," 1983). Hereafter "MM," "MV," "MC," and "MP" respectively. The book number will be given in Roman numerals and the question number in Arabic (e.g., MM V. q. 5).

a case its being is parasitic on the being of something else (i.e., the intellect conceiving it). Existence (*esse*), thus, is what distinguishes things in reality from mere ideas in our minds and allows something on its own accord to stand out of nothingness.

Essentialists such as Siger, however, who reject a really distinct contribution by *esse*, can nevertheless explain this difference in standard Aristotelian terms without appealing to *esse*. What the essence “phoenix” lacks, they would argue, is substantial completion: even though the formal requirements of phoenix meet the criterion of non-contradiction, and thus can be understood, the necessary material component to realize the hylomorphic essence is unavailable. There are no phoenixes, not because the substance or essence lacks existence, but because the form lacks substance. Matter, according to the current cosmological order, is unreceptive to such a form and thus no phoenixes “exist.” Matter resists the incorporation of the essence “phoenix.” As Siger states concerning the currently non-existing man “Caesar,” what this human lacks is not existence, but substance and substantial duration.⁶⁰ When the substantial duration of an individual expires, or never takes place as in the case of the phoenix, what is removed is not *esse*, but the essential unity of matter and form necessary to determine this substance. The matter loses the form and takes on another—or resists its reception, as with phoenix—even though the understanding (*intellectus*) does not perish.⁶¹ A distinct contribution of “*esse*” is thus redundant in the explanation and can be eliminated.⁶²

⁶⁰ He argues that “Caesar” signifies a human only with qualification, that is, at a determinate time. When he does not “exist,” the term does not signify a man. What he lacks is substance, not existence.

⁶¹ “Et quia quando cessat entitas rei non cessat intellectus eius, ideo nec unus intellectus nec una significatio: ex quo enim significatio non refertur immediate ad rem (sic enim cessaret cessante esse rei), sed refertur ad rem prout refertur ad intellectum, et cessante esse non cessat intellectus, ideo nec significatio. Et ideo, quamvis in re non sit unum recipiens praedicationem essendi et non essendi, tamen in ratione unum utrumque recipit.” MM IV, q. 21.

⁶² How Siger explains the difference between immaterial intelligences and God will be treated in more detail below.

Thus, for Siger, “*An esse?*” seeks an answer according to a determinate measure of time as relating to an essence. In the case of Caesar, he is “no longer being a man” (*non est homo*), insofar as the hylomorphic union of Caesar’s essence has expired.⁶³ This does not prohibit us from considering the reality that was Caesar’s essence apart from his temporal determination, or the (never real) fictional essence of a phoenix, or the no longer real instantiation of stegosaurus, in order to understand Caesar to be a human, a phoenix to be a bird, or stegosaurus to be dinosaurs. But once we stop *ignoring* their *esse*, we realize that Caesar’s being human is not without qualification (*simpliciter*), but being only at a determinate time. What is brought to light in this realization concerns the *positing of* an essence, not the adding of an existential determination. That which receives the predication of being and not being (*praedicationem essendi et non essendi*) is not some real essence *in re*, because such an essence perishes with the individual. Thus, we posit the essence phoenix as an unreal, or fictional, essence—although not a logical impossibility—which is different than treating it as a real essence lacking *esse*.⁶⁴ That which receives the predication of being and not being (e.g., Caesar, a phoenix, or a stegosaurus) need only be something one *in ratione*.

In response to Aquinas’s treatment of *esse* as other than essence (*quod esse est aliud ab essentia uel quiditate*), as read by an Aristotelian of Siger’s ilk, the mere failure of

⁶³ “Et cum dicitur quod Caesar significat hominem, et tamen non est homo, dicendum quod Caesar non significat hominem simpliciter, sed temporis determinati: sic enim habuit substantiam et definitionem. Unde transmutabile est secundum substantiam et definitionem, quod secundum eam tempore mensuratur.” MM IV, q. 21.

⁶⁴ As Siger states in *Quaestio Utrum Haec Sit Vera: Homo Est Animal, Nullo Homine Existente*, “Socrates” is the name of an individual signifying human nature with an account (*sub ratione*) of determinacy and individuation. Thus, the nature as instantiated (e.g., in “Socrates” or “a phoenix”)—even if such instantiation no longer exists or never existed—is meaningful to the extent that when speech does more than predicate, but instead posits something *in re*, someone can meaningfully say “there is nothing in the world that is a phoenix.” Siger de Brabant, *Écrits de Logique, de Morale et de Physique*. ed. Bernardo Bazán (Louvain: Louvain Publications Universitaires, 1974), 58.

esse to appear in the inspection of essences should not treat “aliud” in any real sense. “*Esse*”—along with its convertible term “*ens*”—merely states the “fact” or “state” of being,⁶⁵ what Siger calls the temporal determination of the essence. Such a fact, far from being a distinct existential act, is the condition of an essence, which abstraction can ignore although not *really exclude*. When treating the question of “*esse* and *essentia*” in his *Metaphysics*, Siger asks whether the *esse in caused things* pertains to the essence of such (caused) things. Two initial points should be noted: first, in discussing *esse* in caused things (*in causatis*), Siger is already discussing what I have called “real essences” as distinct from logical possibilities. Thus, the latter lack not a really distinct *act of being*, but causes which could posit them in *re* and establish them real essences.

The second point concerns Siger’s presentation of Aquinas’s view. Although distinct from Avicenna—insofar as rejecting *esse* as an accident added to the essence—“Brother Thomas,” he argues, instead treats *esse* in caused things as something constituted through their essential principles (*in entibus causatis esse est additum essentiae...sed tamquam ens aliquid per essentiae principia constitutum*).⁶⁶ Siger responds, however, that that which pertains to a thing is either the thing itself (*res ipsa*), part of the essence of the thing (*par essentiae rei*), or an accident of the essence (*accidens essentiae*).⁶⁷ Clearly, an

⁶⁵ For the distinction between “act of being” and “fact/state of being,” see below Chapter V Section 5.

⁶⁶ MC Intro. q. 7. The editors note that Siger’s reference is to Aquinas’s *Commentary on the Metaphysics*. See S. Thomae Aquinatis *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio*, ed. M. R. Cathala, R.M. Spiazzi 2^a ed. (Taurini-Romae: Maietti, 1971) IV, lec. 2, n. 558. Hereafter “*Expositio Metaphysicorum Aristotelis*.”

⁶⁷ “Etsi conclusio vera sit, modum tamen ponendi non intelligo, quia esse quod pertinet ad rem, aut est pars essentiae rei, ut materia vel forma, aut res ipsa composita ex his, aut accidens. Sed si sit accidens, tunc erit additum essentiae rei: quod est contra dictam opinionem proximam. Sed dicere quod esse sit aliquid additum essentiae rei, ita quod non sit res ipsa, neque pars essentiae, ut materia vel forma, et dicere non sit accidens, est ponere quartam naturam in entibus. Item, dicitur sic quod esse est aliquid additum, nec est res ipsa, nec principium rei, sed est aliquid constitutum per principia essentiae; sed constitutum per principia essentiae est ipsa res; quare non erit additum, nisi tu dicas mihi quod sit constitutum effective sicut accidentia, et tunc erit accidens. Hoc enim dicimus accidens, quod advenit alicui quod habet formam vel quod advenit essentiae rei.” MM Intro. q. 7. MC Intro. q. 7.

extra-essential act of being, really other than the essence and yet not an accident, would posit some unwarranted fourth nature in beings.⁶⁸ This leads Siger to reject “*esse*” as something really other than the essential structure of the thing (*res*) and its formal determinations. Although not stated explicitly, Siger’s attempt at an essential reduction of *esse* invokes the essentialist principle *forma dat esse*. To be a real essence, as opposed to a mere conception *in mente*, means to posit being (*esse*) in such a way that those things (or that thing) instantiating the form *subsist*. *Esse*, thus, marks the actuality *following from* something’s form: the instantiation of the human form in this skin and these bones *gives human being* (*esse hominem*) to Caesar. Caesar’s own act of being arises not from a really distinct existential perfection, but from the hylomorphic union that determines him *to be* during this temporal duration. Although the mind can abstract the nature, such has real being only through the subsistence of individuals (or an individual in the case of separate substances).⁶⁹ Thus, if the essence has no reality apart from the subsistence of individuals, it remains unwarranted to speak of a really distinct act of existence added to the essence.

In order to show that there is not some fourth nature constituting the thing, a nature *really other* than that which is known by the understanding of the essence, Siger

⁶⁸ As Maurer states in reference to this argument: “We would not want a clearer proof that Siger lives in the philosophical world of Aristotle, where there is no room for a metaphysical principle that is not in the order of nature of essence. For Thomas, *esse* is not at all in that order. It is the actuality of form or essence, by which an essence exists and is called a being. With his existential understanding of *esse* he added a new dimension to metaphysics that was difficult for a mind like Siger’s to fathom, steeped as he was in the philosophy of Aristotle as interpreted by Averroes.” “*Esse and Essentia* in the *Metaphysics* of Siger of Brabant” in *Being and Knowing: Studies in Thomas Aquinas and Later Medieval Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990): 126-127.

⁶⁹ “Praeterea, ad essentiam hominis non pertinet aliquid individuorum, nec istae carnes, nec ista ossa, quia partes individuorum non sunt partes speciei; homo tamen non est sine istis carnibus et ossibus. Hoc enim fuit quod decepit PLATONEM: quia vidit quod natura humana erat aliquid ratione abstractum ab individuis, et ad cuius essentiam non pertinebat aliquid individuorum, nec materia propria eorum, creditit hominem posse subsistere sine individuis. Quod si hoc non est verum, videtur quod, si nullus homo particularium sit, quod <non> permanent essentia naturae humanae quae ponebatur manere” *Quaestio Utrum Haec Vera Est*, ll. 67-75.

concludes that the otherness between essence and *esse* concerns the distinct manners in which one and the same thing (*res*) is signified: either it can be statically signified as a “*res*” according to its sedimented essential habits or it can be dynamically signified as an “*ens*” according to the exercise of existential acts.⁷⁰ The latter traces the unfolding temporal dimensions of something, whereas the former attempts to atemporally ask in regard to such temporal unfolding “And what was it being?” Caesar’s being human transpires over the course of a lifetime, but with a single essential gaze we can reduce the multitude of his activities to the essential “habit” of “having been human.” Note, however, that even though Siger invokes a distinction between essential habits and existential acts, such an *act* is always the act of *an essence* signified during its temporal duration (i.e., its period of extantness), and not Aquinas’s deeper existential actuality. To unpack the degree of distinction involved in these really identical names (i.e., ‘ens’ and ‘res’), Siger considers three types of names, all convertible in a supposit.

The first types of names are synonyms. For example, ‘Marcus’ and ‘Tullius’ name the same man, Cicero. The names themselves do not communicate or signify any distinct aspect of their supposit, Cicero, and thus are distinct ways of *naming* (but not conceiving or signifying) one and the same man. ‘*Ens*’ and ‘*res*,’ however, do not differ merely in terms of arbitrarily imposed signifiers because they are not absolutely interchangeable, as synonyms must be.⁷¹ They instead capture some degree of difference surrounding one and the same thing.⁷²

⁷⁰ “Primo pono quod in causatis ipsum esse pertinet ad essentiam causatorum et non est aliquid additum essentiae causatorum, ita quod *res* et *ens* non significant duas intentiones. Ad hoc intelligendum quod tria sunt genera nominum quae convertuntur in suppositis, tamen diversimode.” MM Intro. q. 7.

⁷¹ This is because ‘*ens*’ names a mode of action and ‘*res*’ name a mode of habit. In *Metaphysics* Δ 20, Aristotle defines “*habitus*” (“*hexis*”) as an active having from which the action can follow. With such an active habit, the haver is disposed to a certain action immediately, unlike a passive disposition which must be developed. Thus, I have an active habit to speak German—even though I am currently not acting upon

The second type of names signifies diverse concepts (*intentiones*), insofar as one intention signifies an essence and the other something added to the essence, such as ‘human’ and ‘risible.’⁷³ They are convertible, however, Siger argues, because they extend equally to the supposit. Any given human being can be equally named ‘human’ or ‘risible,’ although the supposit is conceived according to distinct conceptions (*intentiones*). As applied to *esse*, such a distinction, however, would require one name to designate an essential addition (e.g., as the property ‘risible’ does in the case of the essence human).⁷⁴ Siger is not entirely explicit on why *ens* does not give rise to its own diverse “formal understanding” (*intellectus formales diversi*) or concept but instead only distinctly signifies the same concept.⁷⁵ His reason seems to reflect the ways in which something can be predicated essentially of its subject.⁷⁶ If the predication were merely accidental, a position that he already has rejected, then it would not fulfill the condition for this second type of names. Instead, it must be both *essential* and added. If *ens vel esse* were to function like such an added essential disposition, it would have to be essential to

such a disposition, whereas I have a passive habit to learn and subsequently speak Spanish. Thus, we see the close and rationally distinct relation between *actus* and *habitus*. A *res* is disposed to the act of being.

⁷² “Quaedam sunt nomina quae significant eandem essentiam et eodem modo, sicut nomina synonyma, ut Marcus, Tullius. Isto modo ens et res nec significant nec convertuntur, quia tunc unum non certificaret reliquum.” MM Intro q. 7.

⁷³ “Secundo, quando unum significat essentiam, aliud autem non significat essentiam, sed additum essentiae, convertuntur tamen in suppositis quia se extendunt ad aequalitatem suppositorum, ut homo et risibile, quorum intellectus formales diversi sunt.” MM Intro. q. 7.

⁷⁴ MM Intro. q. 7 46. This was the mistake of Avicenna, Siger argues following Averroes, insofar as he did not distinguish between names that signify diverse intentions and names that signify the same essence by different modes. He mistook a diversity in modes of signifying for a diversity between the essence and something added to it (i.e., *esse*). In addition, he mistook dispositions added to the essence of a thing (e.g., white and black) for dispositions pertaining to the essence (e.g., risible). He also failed to distinguish between essential dispositions and accidental ones. For an analysis of Siger’s relation to Avicenna and Averroes on this matter, see Maurer, “*Esse and Essentia*,” 131.

⁷⁵ See Maurer, “*Esse and Essentia*,” 130 fn. 46.

⁷⁶ His argument follows Aristotle’s *Topics*. See Aristotle, *Topica*. trans. E.S. Forster (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, Number 391, 2004), I.5.

the subject, like *risibile* is essential to the subject *human*.⁷⁷ “*Ens vel esse*” would signify “*res*” as a property, and thus it would signify its subject *per aliud* (i.e., not *per se*) and connotatively: *per aliud* because through something extrinsic to the essential nature and connotatively because only a part. The relation of the “extrinsic part” to its subject can be captured by following logical forms of predication: “Every thing (*res*) is able to be” or its equivalent, “Every thing (*res*) is possibly being (*ens*).”⁷⁸ Thus, the property signifies only a possibility of its subject and does not signify the entire essence.⁷⁹ But if *ens* were an existential property of *res*, through which it exists, then Siger asks what accounts for the existence of this property, a question extending *ad infinitum*.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ “Circumscriptis enim omnibus esse accidentibus hominis, ut esse album et nigrum, et sic de aliis non remanet aliquod esse reale determinatum hominis nisi hoc quod est esse hominem. Esse autem hominem de homine est praedicatum essenziale, quia hoc est per se primo modo: homo est homo. Igitur esse de homine est praedicatum essenziale. Hoc idem efficaciter probat ratio COMMENTATORIS superius.” MC Intro. q. 7 33. The argument by Averroes (*Metaphysics* V, com. 14), to which Siger refers, had been described above as follows: “Dicit enim quod dicendo <<homo est>> uno modo est problema de accidente, secundum quod li <<est>> praedicat esse diminutum in anima, quod idem est cum vero. Alio modo est problema de genere, secundum quod praedicat esse simpliciter extra animam. In problemate autem de genere praedicatum est essenziale subiecto, ut patet ex I^o Topicorum. Quare esse essenziale est homini, et eadem ratione aliis entibus causatis.” MC Intro. q. 7 31. In discussing the *ratio* of “caused thing,” which he argues is identical to *esse*, Siger may be guilty of collapsing the logical order of predication into the physical (and metaphysical) order of causation. See Ernst A. Moody, *The Logic of William of Ockham*, 105-106. Although Moody does not discuss Siger specifically, the Porphyrian conflation of the categories with the predicables, which he targets, seems to be at work in Siger’s discussion.

⁷⁸ Moody, in his discussion of the Porphyrian confusion of “categories” and “predicables,” follows Ockham in arguing the predication of a property as “every x is necessarily y-able” (where “y” represents the property) can be rendered in equivalent terms under the modality of possibility in predicating a logical accident determining of a subject. Thus, we can state “every x is possibly y-ing.” “Every human is risible” is equivalent to “Every human is possibly laughing” or “Every human is a potentiality of laughter.” See Ibid., 105. For the difference between “logical” and “physical” accidents, and Ockham’s generous interpretation of Porphyry’s equation of the two, see Ibid., 105-106.

⁷⁹ For a contemporary account of “existence as a property,” see Barry Miller, *The Fullness of Being: A New Paradigm for Existence* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame, 2002). His use of the term “existence,” as he admits, is synonymous with “actuality.” See Ibid. 82 fn. 1. He argues that instead of thinking of existence as “inherence in” (e.g., “Existence inheres in Caesar), we should say “bounded by” (e.g., “Caesar is bounded by existence”) as a more suitable metaphor (Ibid. 97).

⁸⁰ “Unde in IV^o, substantia cuiuslibet rei est aliquod ens non secundum accidens. Si esse dispositio addita, procedetur in infinitum, quod est inconveniens.” MM Intro. q. 7 46. “Necessario ergo erit dicere quod dicendo: <<homo est>>, praedicetur esse substantiale ut homo est homo; erit ergo concedere quod esse sit de essential rei, vel quod homo accidat homini.” MM III, q. 2 91.

Following Aristotle in *Metaphysics* Γ, Siger states that when we speak of something (e.g., a human) as opposed to that something is (i.e., an existing human), we do not introduce a new signification or any additional conceptual content; we reference a single signification (or “formal understanding”) differently.⁸¹ “A human,” “one human,” and “existing human,” Aristotle argues, are all expressions applicable to “a single human that comes to be and passes away.”⁸² Thus, by adding the term “existing,” we do not augment the conceptual utterance (i.e., a property) in the sense of an actualized possibility.⁸³ Siger argues that the repetition of terms, however, between “*res*” and “*ens*” is not superfluous (*inutiliter*).⁸⁴ Instead, the frequency of reiterating the same essential content by different names constitutes for the listener a difference in *rationes* surrounding the same essential content, without constituting an altogether new concept (*intentio*). Thus Siger appeals to the auditory response of a listener upon hearing the distinct terms “*ens*” and “*res*,” sensing a conceptual repetition amidst difference in emphasis. Such a differently emphasized concept, itself unified, provides us with Siger’s third type of names.

⁸¹ “Item, IV^o *Metaphysicae*: idem est homo et ens homo, et non significat aliquid diversum apud dictionem repetitam: <<homo>> et <<est homo>>.” MM Intro. q. 7 43.

⁸² *Metaphysics* IV.2.

⁸³ But what about cases of fictional things? Are “a phoenix” “one phoenix” and “existing phoenix” equivalent? Although discussing only *esse in caused thing* (*causatis*), Siger, it seems, would argue that to the extent that they are things (*res in mente*) to that extent they are existing (again *in mente*). Thus, the issue seems not to be what “existing” would add to *res*, but the extent to which either term can adequately signify a “*res rationis*” (e.g., a phoenix). Although we may speak of such expressions as having definitions, it would be a mistake to assume that any definable term expresses a real essence (e.g., “phoenix is a regenerable bird”). MM IV, qq. 20-21. Such *res rationis* seem to occupy a similar status as incidental being (i.e., *ens per accidens*) of which one can make inquiry, but whose “near non-being” offers little in the way of a real definition or subsequent demonstration. For Siger’s discussion of the definition of the accidental, see, for example: MV VII, q. 5. In both cases, the *si est* of either “her being a carpenter and a musician” or of “a phoenix”—although not nothing—lack being in the full sense. Both are cases of what Siger calls “diminished being in the soul” (*esse diminutum in anima*) as opposed to (“*esse simpliciter extra animam*”). And thus relating to such “beings,” insofar as all *scientia* is grounded on “*si est*,” subsequent questions of essence or demonstrations made on the basis of such *esse diminuta* seem without secure ground.

⁸⁴ “Ad aliud, cum dicitur: nugatio est <<res ens currit>>. COMMENTATOR solvit. Nam eadem essentia dicitur frequenter, nec tamen inutiliter. Aliquid enim vel ratio aliqua alia constituitur in audiente quando dicitur <<res ens>>, quam quando dicitur <<res per se>>. Non tamen sic cum dicitur <<Marcus Tullius>>.” MM Intro. q. 7.

The third type of names, and the one Siger favors, signifies the same essence with the same intention. And yet, the names are not merely synonymous for the following reason: “*unum [significat] per modum actus, aliud per modum habitus, sicut currere et cursus, et animatum et vivere.*”⁸⁵ The two modes of act and of habit in the case at hand correspond to *ens* and *res*.⁸⁶ Siger wants to argue that the infinitive “to run” and the perfect passive participle “that which has been run” say more than synonyms, but do not produce their own distinct concepts or conceptual content in the mind. Likewise, ‘*ens*’ and ‘*res*’ name nothing more than two such modes, or manners, of one and the same thing.

Insofar as *ens vel esse* signifies substance in the manner of act (*per modum actus*) really identical to the substance itself, such an act follows directly from its essence.⁸⁷ This is why, as Siger argues against Aquinas, caused things do not recede from the First in terms of composition (“*...entia recedunt a Primo forte non per compositionem*”). Instead, the hierarchy of beings is marked in terms of degrees of activity and passivity of their natures. The more formally *active* something is, the closer it is to the First. Each thing acts insofar as it is a being in act (*Agit enim unumquodque secundum quod ens in actu*), limited in such actuality only by its form. Although active/passive are correlative terms and refer to something’s interaction and exchange with others (i.e., to act upon and

⁸⁵ Tertium est genus nominum in quo quidem sunt quae ad aequalia se extendunt, significantia eandem essentiam, ita quod essentia quae primo apprehenditur eadem est, modo tamen diverso apud animam, unum per modum actus, aliud per modum habitus, sicut currere et cursus, et animatum et vivere.” MM Intro. 7.

⁸⁶ Maurer has argued that such a distinction in modes of signification was not unique to Siger but instead used by such contemporary logicians as Peter of Spain. “*Esse and Essentia*” 130.

⁸⁷ “Ad aliam rationem, quae fuit THOMAE, dicitur quod maior propositio famosa est, et habet forte suam probabilitatem, sed rationem a PHILOSOPHO ad eam non video. Dico ergo quod entia recedunt a Primo forte non per compositionem, sed per hoc quod accedunt ad naturam potentiae, quod patet ex actione eorum et etiam ipsius Primi. Agit enim unumquodque secundum quod ens in actu. Et ideo entia, secundum quod magis recedunt a Primo, minus habent naturam activam et magis naturam passivam. Primum enim solum naturam activam habet et non agitur ab alio.” MC Intro. q. 7.

be acted upon), such relationality does not require the introduction of “real composition” in the being itself between its essence and *esse*.

What distinguishes Sigerian onto-cosmology from its Thomistic counterpart stems from the deeper issue of subsistence: for Siger, each being subsists insofar as it is a substance. This does not mean that each substance is “pure act” unmixed with potency and unrelated to anything else.⁸⁸ Instead, subsistence comes along with being a substance, and yet being caused, whereas with Aquinas subsistence means being a pure and unmixed perfection. As we see with Aquinas’s examples of “subsisting heat” or “subsisting whiteness” from *De Ente*, if any thing were to subsist, it would have to be that (i.e., *only heat* or *only human*) and nothing else. But because they are received into matter and thereby divided, they lack the purity of subsistence. Thus, heat or humanity do not subsist, but are accidents or substantial forms of substances. The reason why subsistence must be reserved for only those pure cases, for Aquinas but not for Siger, is because once a perfection subsists (e.g., *esse*, heat, or human), all distribution of that perfection must occur through participation (i.e., the third of the three ways from *De Ente*), not through material or differential contraction. Thus, as participants *having* the perfection but not *being* the perfection (e.g., *having heat*, but not *being heat*), “composition” enters into the nature of the participant: there is the subject of participation and that which is participated, but they do not subsist.

For Siger, each substance is a case of subsisting being. This means that there is neither a concentration of this perfection in *only one* pure subsisting act nor a need for

⁸⁸ “Solum autem in Primo Principio esse dicitur pertinere ad essentiam, quia essentia Primi actus purus est; in causatis autem nulla essentia actus est quin ad naturam potentialem accedat.” MP Intro. q. 2.

beings to participate something outside and composed with their essence.⁸⁹ This is not to deny the passivity of all creatures nor their ultimate relation to the First. The universe is comprised of such a system of exchange (i.e., to act and be acted upon). However, Siger argues, all beings “participate” the mediated influence of the First through “imitation.” Such “participation by imitation,” however, does not introduce a separate existential perfection with which their essence is composed. It only means that each being other than the First is like the First in being in act through its essence, but is subject to the influence of other causes (i.e., making each a non-identical *imitation*).

Furthermore, he rejects the notion that beings (*entia*) participate in some common fund of being, *ens commune*, distinct from themselves. Because beings are beings through their own *rationes*, a separate fund of *ens commune* would be entirely superfluous.⁹⁰ Each *ratio* is a *ratio essendi*, and thus *ens vel esse* adds nothing to the

⁸⁹ “Ad aliud: non potest esse per se subsistens nisi unum tantum. Si negavero tibi illud, quomodo probares? Dico quod esse simpliciter actu non est nisi unius tantum, scilicet Dei. Esse tamen extendit se: accipiendo esse non pro actualissimo, sed secundum quod sumitur in aliis, potest esse in aliquo sine aliquo recipiente esse. Ad probationem: esse unum est, oportet ergo, si diversificetur, quod hoc sit per aliud, ut per illa in quae recipitur aut per differentias; non per differentias, cum non sit genus. Dico quod, si esse esset omnino univoce dictum, bene probares; sed esse ipsum multipliciter dicitur et plures habet rationes; non tunc potest multiplicari ex ratione essendi quae plures est, et non per aliquid cui additum est? Item, ratio essendi non potest esse ratio addita, quia omnis ratio est essendi ratio, ita quod ratio entis praedicatur de omnibus rationibus essendi univoce.” MM Intro. q. 8. On this matter, Maurer states: “Thomas’ proof of the oneness of *esse per se subsistens* is valid only if you grant him his notion of *esse*. Since the notion is unintelligible to Siger, so too is Thomas’ proof. Neither can Siger make any sense of Thomas’ distinction between a recipient of *esse* and the received *esse*, or the diversification of *esse* by a diversity of recipients. If being were a genus, Siger remarks, it could be diversified by the addition of differences, but Aristotle has shown that being cannot be a genus. So being cannot be diversified in this way but by the variety of its natures (*rationes*). It can be substance or quality or quantity or one of the other categories described by Aristotle. In any case, Siger concludes, nothing can be added to the nature of being, for every nature is a nature of being: *ratio essendi non potest esse ratio addita, quia omnis ratio est essendi ratio.*” “*Esse and Essentia*,” 128

⁹⁰ “Dico quod ens participari duobus modis est: vel ens commune, vel ens quod est Ipsum Ens particulare. Sed illud est duplex. Unum est Ens Ipsum, hoc est Ens PLATONIS separatum; tale non participatur quia non est aliquod tale ens. Alio modo Ens Primum per se, non sicut ens quod nunc dictum est, et hoc Ens contingit participari duobus modis: vel per participationem esse vel essentiae, vel per participationem imitationis. Unde aliquid potest participare Ens Primum non per essentiam, sed per imitationem. Sed potestne aliquid esse ens per participationem entis communis? Dico quod non, quia tunc oportet quod illud esset compositum ex natura participantis et participatae, quae inter se essent diversa. Unde omne quod est ens, est ens per suam rationem: homo est animal per participationem animalitatis, quia est aliquid in ipso quod differt a natura animalitatis; non tamen est ens per participationem entis, quia nihil est in ipso quod sit

thing either conceptually or really. Once all beings become subsisting acts of being, or “substances,” inscribed within a causal matrix in which they act and are acted upon, the uniqueness of being as something radically other than them in which they must participate for existential composition (and completion/perfection) becomes an unnecessary requirement.

In response to the issue motivating the *intellectus essentiae* argument of *De Ente*, Siger can respond: the separation of everything from the First transpires around everything—save the First—having some degree of passivity (i.e., being caused).⁹¹ Thus, the *De Ente* argument must somehow convince the essentialist that being subsists only in a unique and incommunicable instance: in all other cases, it is participated and thereby composed with the essences of the participants. What must be shown by Aquinas, and why an *intellectus essentiae* must appeal to God as the subsisting *ipseity* of being, is that *esse* is the very ground of essential perfection, the extra-essential actuality of all essential actuality. A mere inspection of essences occluding *esse* (i.e., the thing considered under the mode of act) does not by itself prompt the conclusion that *esse* is really other than the essence. This is why, as Joseph Owens argues against Lawrence Dewan, disputing the latter’s claim that a real distinction emerges before the completion of all three stages of the argument, people who deny the real distinction (e.g., Siger) do not need to make being subsist, or at least not in Aquinas’s sense of a subsisting pure perfection. Dewan presupposes, even before the completion of the argument, that *esse* retains an otherness to

differens ab ente vel a ratione entis, et sic patet ad illud.” MM III q. 21. On this marriage of modes of participation, Maurer states: “Siger here opens his metaphysics to the influence of Neoplatonism, but it must be admitted that it sits uneasily with his Aristotelianism, according to which every thing is a being by essence.” “*Esse and Essentia in the Metaphysics of Siger of Brabant*,” 129.

⁹¹ MC Intro. q. 7; MM Intro. q. 3 48; MP Intro. q. 2.

all concrete things insofar as being itself (*ipsum esse*) is pure.⁹² Thus, if it were made identical to any thing, they too would have to subsist as “pure acts of being.”⁹³

Dewan, in arguing for the sufficiency of the first stage, presents the matter thusly:

We have to know that *esse* is some really common feature, rather than merely an abstract way of speaking about the concrete. Anyone who denies the distinction of *esse* from the subsisting thing will say there are as many instances of *esse*-subsisting as there are things: though ‘*esse*’ does not signify them as subsisting. If *esse* is something common in things,

⁹² “The general problem is: what if we take something which *we* experience as *common to many* and attempt to posit it as existing in its purity: will it still be envisageable as a multiplicity of individuals?” “Saint Thomas, Joseph Owens, and the Real Distinction,” 154.

⁹³ An interesting debate ensues between Dewan and Owens over this point and the success of the argument in demonstrating the real distinction. Dewan maintains the sufficiency of *intellectus essentiae* (i.e., the first stage) in grounding the real distinction. His argument, simply rendered, is based on the following premise: If a thing has an efficient cause, it must have an act of being (*actus essendi*) which is distinct from its essence (Dewan, “Etienne Gilson,” 82-83). Each *caused thing*, he argues, requires the influence of “a higher and nobler essence” in whose being (*esse*) the effect, as dependent, must share. The crux of Dewan’s arguments is that every caused entity reveals a lack of “per se unity” in that it must be ordered to form by a higher cause (i.e., “higher” because independent of the effect). And because the effect required the cause to order it to form, it shares, albeit it to a lesser degree, in the being of its cause. As “sharing/participating in the being of another,” the effect is *other than* its being. *Esse*, even though distinct, really constitutes part of the nature. *Esse* is “already found” to some degree in material things, and although distinct from them, it is more than just a mere name, but instead an intrinsic perfection. Dewan, “Etienne Gilson,” 72. Otherwise, according to Dewan’s account of *esse*, how could the nature as effect come to be? The argument for the “real distinction” can commence by observing as effects sensible things, which undergo generation and corruption. Dewan seems to agree with Masiello that the *an sit* of a sensible effect reveals a real distinctness with its quiddity. As “effect,” the immediacy of something’s existence requires the causal influence of another, which provides existence to the effect. From the basic fact of something’s being an effect, Dewan argues, its *esse* can be known as really distinct. To emphasize that “*esse*” refers to a real commonality in which every effect as effect must participate is crucial to the Dewan’s argument because if one subsequently were to deny the real distinction, then *esse* would have to be identical with and really indistinguishable from each thing. This would mean, Dewan concludes, that there are as many *esse subsistens* as there are things because in each *esse* is both real and indistinguishable. In each subsisting thing, from which *esse* is indistinguishable, there would be *esse subsistens*. Dewan, “Saint Thomas, Joseph Owens, and the Real Distinction,” 154-156. A number of problematic assumptions surround Dewan’s position, assumptions which come to light through Owens’ argument for the insufficiency of *intellectus essentiae* and his attempt to strengthen Aquinas’s argument for the real distinction. Against Dewan, Owens insists: “People who deny the [real] distinction [between *esse* and essence] need not make being subsist. But after the conclusion has been reached that being is a nature in God, the consequence emerges that it could not be a part of any other nature without absorption of that nature into itself. It has to remain really other than what it actuates. If it did not stay really distinct, then there would be indeed as many instances of subsistent existence as there are things—exactly one.” Owens, “Being and Natures in Aquinas,” 167. Owen correctly counters Dewan’s argument by stating that the position of those who reject the real distinction also reject such a thing as *esse subsistens*. Although he mentions only Aristotle and Suarez by name, one also might include Siger of Brabant, Godfrey of Fontaines, and William of Ockham. Those who altogether reject the real distinction need not make being subsist because being merely repeats, albeit with a slight conceptual variance, what already has been understood through thing (*res*) or entity (*ens*). Although Owens himself disagrees with this position, he uses it against Dewan to show that *intellectus essentiae* requires the prior demonstration for God alone as *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*.

then if it is isolated in itself it will be one only... ‘*Esse*’ must be the name of something in the nature of things which, in its own nature, is simple and common. If it is simply a name for the concrete thing, then it is “pure” in every concrete thing, and is as many as they are.⁹⁴

Siger, as we have shown, has no problem admitting that *esse* subsists with each thing: there are as many cases of subsisting *esse* as there are things (*res*) because “to subsist in being” means to be a substance. And yet, Dewan suggests that if *esse* is common in things and more than just an abstract signification of a concrete thing (*res*), as isolated in itself *esse* will be one. He makes this claim by presenting the consequence, which he deems as absurd, that each subsisting instance of *esse* also would have to be “pure.”

We must note, however, this aforementioned association of subsistence with purity, as such a move requires an implicit premise: subsistence cannot mean, or at least primarily mean, “individual substance” (as it does for Siger) but instead must entail a pure act of perfection. As I will argue in what follows, Aquinas does not invoke such a claim as a “hidden premise” in an argument for the real otherness between *esse* and essence. Instead, through his attempt in *De Ente* to solve the question at hand—i.e., How are separate substances in their essential simplicity diverse from God and yet God serves as cause of being for all things?—God’s causal firstness as *esse tantum* emerges as the result of the completed argument from which it follows that everything else remains *really other* to its *esse*. Such “real otherness,” as will be seen, signifies an abiding existential impotence on the part of all essences (i.e., they remain in potency to being even when they actually are and never appropriate *esse* as a real attribute belonging to their essences) rooted in the subsisting purity of God’s existential act.

⁹⁴ Dewan, “Saint Thomas, Joseph Owens, and the Real Distinction,” 155.

Section 4: *Esse* as Otherwise than Essence in *De Ente IV*—An Existential Response

Even if not fully realized in *De Ente*, Aquinas's undertaking to seek a source for God's diversity from the order of things launches what will be a continued endeavor throughout his metaphysics: insofar as God's purity of act (i.e., *being esse tantum*) removes the first cause from the order of things through radical individuation—or “ipseity” as self-sameness through incommunicable purity—at the same time, as *an act* of being, the first is not without actuality (i.e., beyond being). Whenever, as in *De Ente IV*, confronted with the question of both God's uniqueness (i.e., as distinct from even the most noble of creatures) and also his role as total causal source (i.e., as source of all being), Aquinas thus negotiates two sources of compromise: on the one hand, an Aristotelian essentialism that would rid the first of real otherness and transcendence from the world insofar as it would be merely the “first (individual) among many equal (substances)” (*primum inter pares*); and on the other, a Neoplatonism that would essentially distinguish the first in its transcendental *Oneness* beyond being from the Forms of intelligibility (i.e., *nous* as the ground of intelligibility) leading to two distinct hypostases.⁹⁵

The argument of *De Ente IV* operates against the backdrop of the *Liber de causis*, which provides Aquinas with insight regarding a form/*esse* composition in simple

⁹⁵ As Gerson observes in terms of the Plotinian separation of the cause of existence from the cause of being: “In endowing things with existence, the One is unlimited. It does not run out of power of goodness. There is nothing that could exist that does not. Yet *what* could exist is not the One's business. That bird and bees can and do exist, that griffins could exist, but do not, and that square circles cannot exist, are owing to facts about οὐσία. Its causal power is a pure stream, flowing out over whatever it is that can receive it according to its own nature.” Lloyd P. Gerson, “Plotinus's Metaphysics: Emanation or Creation?,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 46.3 (March 1993): 573.

substances (*habens formam et esse*).⁹⁶ Insofar as such pure forms are caused *to be* by another, their forms are receptive of an act from their cause. Thus, receptivity marks the nature of all beings except the first which, Aquinas states, is “first and pure act” (*actus primus et purus*).⁹⁷ The importance of identifying a (hypothetical) first cause as *actus primus et purus*, even before engaging in the *intellectus essentiae* argument, is to secure its purity of act (i.e., being only something and receptive of nothing else) as the condition for individual subsistence.⁹⁸ As we see from his much later commentary on Proposition 9 of the *Liber*, the proposition cited in *De Ente* IV, the first’s status as *only being* and receptive of nothing from outside its pure actuality does not make it common.⁹⁹ One might think, Aquinas argues, that that which is unreceived must be common insofar as individuation requires reception in another. This would mean that the first has *yliatim* (i.e., a receptive subject) in order to receive and individuate its being, which otherwise would remain a common share.¹⁰⁰ Against such, Aquinas argues that the first is in fact individuated, otherwise as common it would have no activity, but individuated *by its own*

⁹⁶ *De Ente* IV ll. 36-45. Taylor argues that Aquinas’s perception of “existential composition” in the *Liber* is not entirely in keeping with the argument of the text. See Richard C. Taylor, “St. Thomas and the *Liber de causis*,” 506-513

⁹⁷ *De Ente* IV l. 54.

⁹⁸ The link between firstness and subsistence will be traced below in regard to “the fourth way.” See below Chapter III Section 1.

⁹⁹ “Deinde cum dicit: Quod si dixerit aliquis etc., excludit quamdam obiectionem. Posset enim aliquis dicere quod, si causa prima sit esse tantum, videtur quod sit esse commune quod de omnibus praedicatur et quod non sit aliquid individualiter ens ab aliis distinctum; id enim quod est commune non individuatur nisi per hoc quod in aliquo recipitur. Causa autem prima est aliquid individuale distinctum ab omnibus aliis, alioquin non haberet operationem aliquam; universalium enim non est neque agere neque pati. Ergo videtur quod necesse sit dicere causam primam habere *yliatim*, id est aliquid recipiens esse. Sed ad hoc respondet quod ipsa infinitas divina esse, in quantum scilicet non est terminatum per aliquod recipiens, habet in causa prima vicem *yliatim* quod est in aliis rebus. Et hoc ideo quia, sicut in aliis rebus fit individuatione rei communis receptae per id quod est recipiens, ita divina bonitas et esse individuatur ex ipsa sui puritate per hoc scilicet quod ipsa non est recepta in aliquo; et ex hoc quod est sic individuata sui puritate, habet quod possit influere bonitates super intelligentiam et alias res.” *Sancti Thomae de Aquino super Librum De Causis Expositio*. Textum a H.-D. Saffrey (Friburgi Helvetiorum: Societe Philosophique, 1954) IX. Hereafter “*Super lib. De cau.*”

¹⁰⁰ On Aquinas’s misreading of the term “*yliatim*,” see Richard C. Taylor, “St. Thomas and the *Liber de causis*,” 506-513.

purity. Such individuated purity entails that the first subsists as a pure act, and thus receives nothing outside itself, but as individuated and not common retains its incommunicable self-identity. Thus, as *actus primus et purus*, the first communicates to everything else without communicating itself, and they in turn, must receive an incommunicable perfection.¹⁰¹

Regarding the first source of compromise, and the one philosophically immediate to the context of *De Ente*, how can the first communicate to all beings without them partaking of his actual being (i.e., God as the formal *esse* of creatures)? In other words, this concerns the aforementioned third mode of distribution (i.e., participation), which does not require either the addition of difference (i.e., specification) or matter (i.e., individuation). Thus, to think God's subsistence as an individual substance, even *primum inter pares*, instead of subsistence individuated through purity, requires a certain principle of individuation. Anything that comes to be individuated by another principle both requires something other than itself to account for its "being other" (i.e., individual), but also requires it to share in a certain community from which it must be individuated. Thus, as Aquinas later argues in the *Summa Theologiae*, God can be called "substance" only if substance comes to mean self-subsistent existence ("*Substantia vero convenit Deo, secundum quod significat existere per se*").¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ The communication of a participated perfection by an unparticipated cause of such a perfection is discussed by Proclus in Proposition 23 of his *Elements of Theology*. He explains how the unparticipated monad generates that which is capable of being participated and yet itself transcends the participants. It gives them something without giving itself. That which is present and common has a prior unity apart from them: to be common and participated as identical for all, such perfection must be prior to all as unparticipated. Whether Aquinas can invoke such an account of participation remains to be seen. See Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*. trans. E.R. Dobbs. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 26-29.

¹⁰² "Ad quartum dicendum quod Deus potest dici rationalis naturae, secundum quod ratio non importat discursum, sed communiter intellectualem naturam. Individuum autem Deo competere non potest quantum ad hoc quod individuationis principium est materia: sed solum secundum quod importat incommunicabilitatem. Substantia vero convenit Deo, secundum quod significat existere per se. Quidam

Thus, to call God an individual substance is misleading on both accounts:

individuation requires a process of differentiating from a common share, a process that must reach a stopping point in the individual in order that some subject receives everything else and yet the subject itself be received in nothing; the individual terminates the chain of communication (i.e., of genus, species, accidents, etc.), but itself is nothing apart from their determination.¹⁰³ Instead, God's nature is incommunicable existence (*est divinae naturae incommunicabilis existentia*) individuated through its purity. And likewise, to think God's pure subsistence as *substantial* or *essential* would be to risk assigning distinct essential components to what is really a self-identical purity of *personal* distinctions, which brings us to the second compromise.

The other (i.e., Neoplatonic) source of compromise concerns the evacuation of divine purity from actuality in order to protect divine oneness and simplicity from contact with the order of things that it must ground. This would be to mistake a pure *ipseity* with distinct divine *personae*, considered as *hypostases*, for distinct essential substances outside the first.¹⁰⁴ As Aquinas argues in the *Summa Theologiae* against such a

tamen dicunt quod definitio superius a Boetio data, non est definitio personae secundum quod personas in Deo dicimus. Propter quod Ricardus de sancto Victore, corrigere volens hanc definitionem, dixit quod persona, secundum quod de Deo dicitur, est divinae naturae incommunicabilis existentia." *ST I*, q. 29, a. 3, ad 4.

¹⁰³ "Quod autem aliquid non sit natum esse in multis hoc potest contingere dupliciter. Uno modo per hoc quod est determinatum ad aliquid unum in quo est, sicut albedo per rationem suae speciei nata est esse in multis, sed haec albedo quae est recepta in hoc subiecto, non potest esse nisi in hoc. Iste autem modus non potest procedere in infinitum, quia non est procedere in causis formalibus et materialibus in infinitum, ut probatur in II metaphysicae; unde oportet devenire ad aliquid quod non est natum recipi in aliquo et ex hoc habet individuationem, sicut materia prima in rebus corporalibus quae est principium singularitatis. Unde oportet quod omne illud quod non est natum esse in aliquo, ex hoc ipso sit individuum; et hic est secundus modus quo aliquid non est natum esse in multis, quia scilicet non est natum esse in aliquo, sicut, si albedo esset separata sine subiecto existens, esset per hunc modum individua. Et hoc modo est individuatione in substantiis separatis quae sunt formae habentes esse, et in ipsa causa prima quae est ipsum esse subsistens." *Super lib. De cau. IX.*

¹⁰⁴ "Ad tertium dicendum quod nomen hypostasis non competit Deo quantum ad id a quo est impositum nomen, cum non substet accidentibus: competit autem ei quantum ad id, quod est impositum ad significandum rem subsistentem. Hieronymus autem dicit sub hoc nomine venenum latere, quia antequam significatio huius nominis esset plene nota apud Latinos, haeretici per hoc nomen simplices decipiebant, ut

“poisonous heresy,” the separation of subsistence from “being an individual substance” pays theological dividends for a Trinitarian apologist. This is because the “three-in-one” of Christian theology need not ally itself with the essentially distinct *hypostases* of Neoplatonic emanation with which it is so often aligned. The “Son” in his *personal* distinction from the “Father,” although resembling certain structural aspects of “*nous*” and the “One,” remains essentially identical with him. There is a certain expediency, Aquinas argues, even if not based in a literal reading of Scripture, to make these hermeneutical innovations concerning the term “*persona*” in the fight against heresy.¹⁰⁵ God communicates himself without distributing himself as *actus primus et purus* into separate essences. In a philosophical argument for creation, as will be treated below, Aquinas thus can argue that *God* (i.e., as an essentially identical *ipse*, although *personally* distinct) is “the cause and exemplar of essences through his nature and the cause and exemplar of *esse* through his *esse*.”¹⁰⁶ Although derived from distinct *principles*—or in a theological context *persona*—the unity of creation resides within a single subsisting *ipse*.

In emphasizing the first both as *pure* and as *act*, Aquinas avoids the extremes of making mundane what is pure or evacuating from being what is most act. This means, as he states continuing in his commentary on Proposition 9, the first can causally *influence* everything else without needing to be a real member of their community (*unum inter*

confiterentur plures essentias, sicut confitentur plures hypostases; propter hoc quod nomen substantiae, cui respondet in Graeco nomen hypostasis, communiter accipitur apud nos pro essentia.” *ST I*, q. 29, a. 3, ad 3.¹⁰⁵ “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod, licet nomen personae in Scriptura veteris vel novi Testamenti non inveniatur dictum de Deo, tamen id quod nomen significat, multipliciter in sacra Scriptura invenitur assertum de Deo; scilicet quod est maxime per se ens, et perfectissime intelligens. Si autem oporteret de Deo dici solum illa, secundum vocem, quae sacra Scriptura de Deo tradit, sequeretur quod nunquam in alia lingua posset aliquis loqui de Deo, nisi in illa in qua primo tradita est Scriptura veteris vel novi Testamenti. Ad inveniendum autem nova nomina, antiquam fidem de Deo significantia, coegit necessitas disputandi cum haereticis. Nec haec novitas vitanda est, cum non sit profana, utpote a Scripturarum sensu non discordans: docet autem apostolus profanas vocum novitates vitare, I ad Tim. ult.” *ST I*, q. 29, a. 3, ad 1.

¹⁰⁶ Although discussed throughout this work, these represent the subject matter of Chapters IV and V, and their unity is discussed in Chapter VI.

pares).¹⁰⁷ Thus, when read in the light of Aquinas’s commentary on this Proposition, a uniquely existential strategy can be gleaned from the complete argument of *De Ente* by which (contra Aristotelian essentialism) causal *sharing* does not require the giver to be among the given nor, however, (contra Neoplatonism) does such separation require a purity of complete annihilative transcendence. This unweakened resolve by which the first stands as *arche* to everything else and is able to influence them without becoming *primum inter pares* occurs through the mechanism of participation. “Everything that is participated must be derived from that which *subsists purely* [m.e.] through its essence” (*oportet autem quod omne participatum derivetur ab eo quod pure subsistit per essentiam suam*).¹⁰⁸ Aquinas, in borrowing such a Platonic and Neoplatonic mode of causality, uses participation to retain the purity of the first act, while nevertheless enabling it to *influence* everything else. As Aquinas later explains in his Commentary, the pure self-identity of the first does not weaken through its influence and rule over others, but instead retains its pure concentration of actuality.¹⁰⁹

Aquinas first introduces the *intellectus essentiae* argument in returning after a brief discussion of composites to inquire about the essences of simple substances, which he

¹⁰⁷ See above fn. 103.

¹⁰⁸ “Similiter etiam prosequitur quantum ad esse, ostendens quod causa prima habet altiori modo esse quam omnia alia. Nam intelligentia habet yliatim, id est aliquid materiale vel ad modum materiae se habens; dicitur enim yliatim ab yle, quod est materia. Et quomodo hoc sit, exponit subdens: Quoniam est esse et forma. Quidditas enim et substantia ipsius intelligentiae est quaedam forma subsistens immaterialis, sed quia ipsa non est suum esse, sed est subsistens in esse participato, comparatur ipsa forma subsistens ad esse participatum sicut potentia ad actum aut materia ad formam. Et similiter etiam anima est habens yliatim, non solum ipsam formam subsistentem sed etiam ipsum corpus cuius est forma. Similiter etiam natura est habens yliatim, quia corpus naturale est vere compositum ex materia et forma. Causa autem prima nullo modo habet yliatim, quia non habet esse participatum, sed ipsa est esse purum et per consequens bonitas pura quia unumquodque in quantum est ens est bonum; oportet autem quod omne participatum derivetur ab eo quod pure subsistit per essentiam suam; unde relinquitur quod essentia intelligentiae et omnium entium sit a bonitate pura causae primae. Sic igitur patet ratio quare supra dixit quod causa prima non est intelligentia neque anima neque natura, quia eius scientia excedit scientiam intelligentiae et animae, et eius virtus excedit omnem virtutem, et eius esse omne esse.” *Super lib. De cau. IX.*

¹⁰⁹ *Super lib. De cau. XX.*

reminds us are immaterial forms and yet not pure acts (*actus purus*) because they are composed.¹¹⁰ He argues that whatever is not from the *intellectus essentiae* arrives from outside (*adveniens extra*) because an essence cannot be known without its parts. But that which *advenit extra* through external causes, although not part of the essence and its essential content, does not provide anything more *essentially*, but operates *efficiently*. But Aquinas cannot yet conclude to real composition, because, as we have seen with Siger, to understand an essence without its efficient causes does not entail that once those causes have been added, any *adveniens extra* comes to be composed with the thing and its essence.¹¹¹ A mere inspection of essences, thus, cannot counter those who would

¹¹⁰ *De Ente* IV ll. 90-93.

¹¹¹ Again, Owens, taking up the position of the essentialist, argues: "...the *intellectus essentiae* argument if alleged to conclude immediately to a real distinction would be taking for granted that existence has a real positive content of its own over and above the content of the quiddity. But this is something very difficult to prove. Spontaneously, when the question is faced for the first time, a thing and its existing may appear to be really the same. The expression 'existing' would seem to add merely a reference to the duration between beginning and end, but imply no real content besides the thing itself. For a number of modern thinkers, in fact, existence has been an empty concept, a blank, a surd." Owens, "Aquinas' Distinction at *De Ente Et Essentia* 4.119-123" *Mediaeval Studies* XLVIII (1986): 280. "*Esse*" as duration of time is exactly the manner in which Siger understands this concept. As Owens points out, it thus can be written off as an empty and abstract concept, which even when "added" to the essence, does not supply any additional quidditative content. A real lack of positive content can be seen only once *esse* has been demonstrated to be a real nature (i.e., *ipsum esse subsistens*) in which composite things must participate. Such a "need to participate" requires further proof, which Owens and Gilson have argued can be supplied only by tracing essences in terms of efficient causes, not merely an inspection of quidditative content. Owens puts forth the following: "In giving a metaphysical account of a thing, one cannot think of the essence as something already constituted by its form and matter and then having the act of being added to it. Rather, from a metaphysical viewpoint, one has to start with the act of being that the primary efficient cause gives by participation, and consider that in being participated it has to be limited and thereby gives rise to the essence that determines it." See Owens, "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being," 38. See also Gilson: "[...] the actual object of a concept always contains more than its abstract definition. What is contains over and above its formal definition is its act of existing, and, because such acts transcend both essence and representation, they can be reached only by means of judgment. The proper function of judgment is to say existence, this is why judgment is a type of cognition distinct from, and superior to pure and simple abstract conceptualization." *Being and Some Philosophers*, 202. Likewise, Owens points out the innovation on the part of Aquinas: "Finally, in the immediate background of Aquinas, there was William of Auvergne's clearly stated distinction, and his vigorous assertion of the superiority of existence in respect of anything in the thing's nature. But the genetic leap to judgment as a distinct synthesizing cognition that apprehends an existential synthesizing in the thing appears for the first time in Aquinas. It ushers in a profoundly new metaphysical starting point." Owens, *An Interpretation of Existence*, 30. Such a depth must be shown to counter those who reject the real distinction altogether. Gilson points to such a burden of proof as follows: "[...] but if an actually existing being has been produced by its cause, why should one attribute to it an 'existence' distinct from the fact that it exists? This is the very point that Thomas is anxious to

eliminate “*esse*” as a linguistic or conceptual redundancy, the position held by Aristotle, Siger of Brabant, Godfrey of Fontaines, William of Ockham, or Francisco Suarez, just to name a few.¹¹² To refute the essentialist challenge and reveal *esse* as more than a “surd,”¹¹³ a voiceless consonant in the syntax of “thing,” Aquinas’s argument must show not only that *esse* adds a perfection irreducible to the essential determinations brought by the thing itself, but also that such a perfection when received cannot be a real part of the nature itself.¹¹⁴ Only once “*esse*” has been supplied with content through a demonstration for the existence of God as *ipsum esse subsistens* can the subsequent move be made to show *esse* as a perfection necessary to the constitution of every entity, not as part of its

make us understand; but how can he make us see it if we don’t? One cannot abstract from reality a notion whose object one fails to perceive. What has divided the Thomist school from the other great schools of theology, ever since the thirteenth century, is a general reluctance to conceive the act of being (*esse*) as a distinct object of understanding. To tell the whole truth, even the so-called ‘Thomists’ have been and still are divided on this point. No such disagreement would take place if the presence, in things themselves, of an act in virtue of which they can be called ‘beings’ were a conclusion susceptible of demonstration. This impasse is an invitation to us to give up the philosophical way—from creatures to God—and to try the theological way—from God to creatures.” *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, 131.

¹¹² Taking up the position of the would-be defender of the real identity, Sweeney states the matter succinctly: “The second reason why Thomas’ fourth approach [i.e., *intellectus essentiae* argument] is not convincing by itself has, I would suggest, been clearly seen by all Suarezians. Let us grant, they would say, that essence can be understood without anything being known of its existence. Again, let us grant that essence-as-known is different than essence-as-existing. But in what does that difference consist? In its relationship to God as efficient cause: an essence-as-existing God has actualized by willing it to be. It does not arise from a component actually present within the existent. It is merely the effect of God’s efficiency; it is the extrinsic state of an essence as efficiently posited by God in the actual universe. Whether the essentialist’s interpretation of essence-as-existing is true, is open to question. But the cogency of their attack on Thomas’s text seems beyond question, unless it is complemented by the important realization that *esse* is an intrinsic and perfective factor within existents.” Leo Sweeney, *A Metaphysics of Authentic Existentialism* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1965), 71-72. Thus, *intellectus essentiae* by itself does not show *esse* as a perfection in the thing, which can be known by inspecting the thing. Against the argument of Dewan, even though God efficiently causes the thing to be in the actual world, the thing as effect does not *participate its esse*.

¹¹³ This is Owens’s term referenced above. See Owens, “Aquinas’ Distinction,” 280 and fn. 111 above. What this means is that Gilson also notes this dynamism in “Chapter VI: Knowledge and Existence” of *Being and Some Philosophers*.

¹¹⁴ In terms of the former requirement, Salas states: “The existence (*esse*) that actualizes a creature’s essence, bringing about the substantial being of the thing, is not only really distinct from or other than essence, but *esse* is related to essence as act to potency. In being other than and irreducible to essence, *esse* completely transcends the essential order as an act beyond form through which even forms themselves—either substantial or accidental—are actualized and brought into being.” Victor Salas, “The Judgmental Character of Thomas Aquinas’s Analogy of Being,” *The Modern Schoolman*, LXXXV (January 2008): 118.

quidditative content, but as the most fundamental act of its being (*actus essendi*).¹¹⁵ The complete demonstration is necessary for two reasons: first, *esse* must be shown to be an *act* of being distinct from the essence itself and the latter's *state* of existence or non-existence; second, such an act must be pure and thereby fundamentally incommunicable to everything else. Thus, the *intellectus essentiae* argument requires both the second and third stages in order to secure a real distinction between *esse* and essence considered absolutely.

Before attempting to frame an existential response to the essentialist challenge concerning the *real otherness* between *esse* and essence, the issue of intellectual apprehension must be noted. In keeping with the guiding thread of our inquiry, namely the essential imperialism of the concept in its forgetfulness of *esse*, it should come as no surprise that to think something according to its dynamic act of being, the static categories of the concept and conceptualization will not suffice. Thus, many existential Thomists, although not without controversy, have stressed “judgment” as the means by which Aquinas's existential metaphysics *thinks* existence beyond the essential confines of the concept.¹¹⁶ Thus, in looking for the *conceptual* content of *esse* corresponding to some essential or accidental part in the substance, Siger necessarily comes up short and must reduce “*esse*” to a really identical iteration of “*res*.”

Thus, following from static conceptualization—what Aquinas calls “understanding of indivisibles”—judgment, as the second operation of the intellect, appears through the

¹¹⁵ Owens—to whom my argument is greatly indebted, although ultimately it departs from his conclusions—makes this argument continually throughout his writings and is in agreement with the argument I put forth in this section. He argues that the conceptual distinction “[...] is the distinction observable in the failure of existence to appear in the conceptualization of the thing. The existences accordingly has to come from something other than the thing, and ultimately from subsistent existence” Owens, “Ignorare’ and Existence,” 216.

¹¹⁶ I will return to explore this issue of judgment in more depth below. See Chapter VI Part 2.

synthesis that unfolds from unpacking a simple concept, moving from an essential grasp to a propositional composition. Such a dynamic activity reveals the existential ground of the proposition covered over by the static and detemporalized image of a mere concept.¹¹⁷ Understanding gives rise to judgment, which sets in motion an “unfolding” of the conceptual grasp, reaching out beyond the frame of the simple concept to reestablish, albeit at a higher level of cognition, its connectivity to actuality from which it was intellectually abstracted.¹¹⁸ *Esse* as reflected in judgment is not another predicate, but the very ground of predication itself. Although not itself indicative of the real distinction between essence and *esse*—which is inferred after concluding that *esse* properly belongs to *ipsum esse subsistens*—such a dynamism reaches actuality and finds a voice for *esse* outside the essential syntax. *Esse* as a verbal act, as opposed to a static state, can be revealed only in the dynamic activity of judgment, but not through the adjectival vocabulary of things.

Although Siger distinguished *ens vel esse* from *res* in terms of the former’s being understood in the “manner of act,” such an act merely expresses the power (i.e., the doings and undergoings) of an essence: the activity of a runner is *to run*, just as the activity of a thing is *to be*. This is what distinguishes Aquinas’s existential metaphysics from its essentialist counterparts: when faced with the “something extra” that judgment introduces beyond the categorial determinations of substance and accident, Aquinas is not

¹¹⁷ Owens cites Bergson’s treatment of a concept as a frozen photograph deprived of the dynamism of temporality, captured by the “moving picture” of judgment. See *Aquinas on Being and Thing*, 7. See also Salas, “The Judgmental Character of Thomas Aquinas’s Analogy of Being,” 117-141. Cf. L.M. Régis, *Epistemology*. trans. Imelda Choquette Byrne. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959).

¹¹⁸ Owens stresses the existentiality of this synthesis: “Furthermore, in Aquinas, what the judgment grasps is always existential in character, even when a predicate other than existence is asserted. In every case an assertion expresses an existential synthesis [...] For Aquinas everything originally known through conceptualization finds its actuality in the object that is attained through judgment, that is, in existence. While any substantial or accidental nature is grasped through conceptualization, the actuality of the nature is in every case existential, and is known through judgment.” *An Interpretation of Existence*, 32.

so quick to reduce the *adveniens extra* to a mere repetition of essential content.¹¹⁹

Instead, beginning with the complete argument from *De Ente*, Aquinas allows *esse* to remain outside the essential domain of the first activity of the intellect. Judgment thinks *esse* not as a “fourth nature” but as the “incidental” (i.e., *per accidens*) ground of something’s essence. Incidental in the sense of “being a carpenter and a musician,” *esse* stands as the perfection of all perfections and the act of all actuality. For Aquinas, unlike for Siger, the question of *an esse* occluded by *intellectus* can only fully be appreciated once referred back to its existential ground in divine being.

Even though the second operation of the intellect, or “judgment,” moves thought beyond the *whatness* grasped by *intellectus*, the move to a real distinction is not yet complete. What judgment uncovers is that there is *something more* underlying the concept than that captured in the essential determination alone: *actual existence* in the case of this or that human, *intellectual existence* in the case of phoenixes. Although opponents of the real distinction may agree with Aquinas that all forms (even simple substances) must have an efficient cause other than themselves, lest they be *causa sui*, and that this chain terminates in some *first efficient cause*, they need not agree that the extra-essential actuality contributed by *esse* is composed with all natures until it has been shown that *esse* incommunicably belongs to the first as *actus purus (essendi)*.¹²⁰ In other words, they need not agree until *esse* has been instituted as a perfection.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ “Ad secundum dicendum quod compositio enuntiabilis significat aliquod esse rei: et sic Deus per suum esse, quod est eius essentia, est similitudo omnium eorum quae per enuntiabilia significantur.” *ST I*, q. 14, a. 14, ad 2.

¹²⁰ See also Owens, “Stages and Distinction in ‘De Ente,’” 118-120.

¹²¹ Again, Owens makes a similar claim in his debate with Wippel. See Owens, “Being and Natures in Aquinas,” 167. *Esse*, as Owens argues, remains the most impoverished of concepts and not a content-rich subsistence. In order to move from an impoverished notion of being to a rich a content filled one, the existence of God as *esse ipsum subsistens* must be demonstrated. Only once *esse* has been shown to be a nature (i.e., God’s nature), then the impossibility of its being part of another nature (lest Parmenides)

What Aquinas must show *contra Siger* is that the mysterious “fourth nature” has been confused because it is not a nature at all, or at least not a finite nature. Aquinas begins such a response with his oft-cited metaphor of light’s reception in otherwise unilluminated air, which is meant to show that *esse* cannot be a principle intrinsic to form (i.e., a risible to human) lest the essence be the cause of itself (*causa sui*). But, merely to argue that something comes to a nature from an extrinsic principle does not convince such an opponent, who would retort in the spirit of essentialism that this means only that “the essence is efficiently caused,” not that *esse* signifies a really distinct perfection of such an essence.¹²² What is involved in the metaphor of “light received in air” is more than merely an issue of the causal status of essences. Remember, Siger had no problem granting that essences are caused by an efficient cause other than themselves. Instead, what he refused to grant was that once received, *esse* must be composed with and really other than the recipient. This is because a substance can both be caused and subsist.

For Aquinas, however, the reception of *esse* in any nature other than the first requires a real otherness *not only* because they are efficiently caused and this causal chain terminates in a first, *but also* because Aquinas’s requirements of “being first” (contra

becomes apparent. Until that point, *esse* can be treated in the manner of a genus, which through *differentiae* can enter into composition with other natures. Joseph Owens, “Being and Natures in Aquinas,” 165-167. Further: “Outside the mind what the creature is is not existence. Yet that does not immediately imply that there is a real distinction between a creature and its real existence. Nor does this immediately follow from the demonstration that ‘it is not possible for there to be more than one entity in which essence and *esse* are identical’, as Wippel seems to maintain. Until existence has been shown to have a positive content of its own over and above the quidditative content of the finite thing, a conceptual distinction suffices as it did with Aristotle and Suarez to explain the fact that in the extramental world every finite thing’s nature is something other than its own existing, yet in a way that would leave the two really identical” Owens, “Aquinas’ Distinction,” 283.

¹²² See Francisco Suarez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae* I-II (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965), XXXI. Hereafter “DM.” Fabro expresses this difference as such: “But since the essence of a creature has also its own participated act of being (*actus essendi*), its actualization is not merely a relation of extrinsic dependence; rather it is based on the act of *esse* in which it participates and which it preserves within itself and is the proper terminus of divine causality.” Fabro, “Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy,” 482.

both essentialism and Neoplatonism) requires purity of act (*actus primus et purus*). And following from *esse*'s pure subsistence, as that which can ground the entire chain of efficient causes, when received by anything else, they must *participate esse* as other than their nature. For this reason, even the second stage of the *De Ente* argument, which operates in the register of the possible, lacks the ontological force to necessitate a real distinction. Recall that, at this stage, Aquinas had not yet shown there to be an actual *ipsum esse subsistens*, but merely considered the possibility of something (*aliqua res*) whose quiddity could be its own existence (*ipsum suum esse*). This possible identification of something with *ipsum esse* without an actual demonstration for the *subsistence* of such a nature remains insufficient to show that such (i.e., *esse*) cannot be divided and thus must remain one (*esse tantum*).¹²³ If we take Aquinas's stock example of "if something were only heat, it would be subsisting heat"—and thus could not be multiplied into individuals by the addition of matter or into species by the addition of *differentiae*—we can see why.¹²⁴ Just as there is *no subsisting heat, animality, or humanity*, but a multiplicity of hot things, animals, and humans, nothing prevents the addition of *differentiae* to the genus (e.g., animal) or matter to the species (e.g., human or heat) in order to multiply the genus and species.¹²⁵ Siger had no problem granting that *esse*

¹²³ John Wippel agrees with the claim for the insufficiency of the first stage, but argues that only the second stage, and not the actual demonstration of the third stage, is required to establish the real distinction. The second stage had argued that even the possible identity of essence and *esse* is restricted to a single being. Like with the possible, yet non-existing, subsisting heat, subsisting *esse* can be realized in no more than one being because it cannot be divided. Whether such a singular being exists is a matter for further demonstration. The further demonstration, however, does not diminish the exclusion of multiplicity from a possible *esse ipsum subsistens*. Wippel, "Aquinas's Route to the Real Distinction," 279-295. Also: *The Metaphysics Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 137-150.

¹²⁴ See also Owens, "Stages and Distinction in 'De Ente,'" 108-109.

¹²⁵ Such additions are problematic *if and only if* any of these genera or species was itself *subsisting*, that is if it were some indivisible plenitude over and above the individuals "partaking" of such. The language of "participation" in this case is only logical, not ontological, participation. In his *Expositio*, Aquinas speaks of three forms of participation. The first, which does not seem to involve metaphysical participation, is when a species participates in a genus or an individual in a species. This is a form of participation because

subsists with each *res* and thus is not composed with the thing, but really identical to the thing itself (*res ipsa*). Once one equates subsistence with purity, being *only* heat or human, that is, once the requirement for subsistence is to be something *completely*, “that and nothing else,” then subsistence becomes a matter of *per-fection*. Only because of the *actual* subsistence of such a pure act does it follow that, due to the incommunicability of the first’s nature, being must be received as other in everything after the first.¹²⁶

the former in each case does not possess the *ratio* according to its total commonality and in the same way, but grasps only “a part.” The second is when a subject participates in an accident or matter participates in form. The third type is when an effect participates its cause, especially when the patient is not equal to the power of its cause. The example he gives is when air participates the light of the sun. He states: “Est autem participare quasi partem capere. Et ideo quando aliquid particulariter recipit id quod ad alterum pertinet, uniuersaliter, dicitur participare illud, sicut homo dicitur participare animal quia non habet rationem animalis secundum totam communitatem; et eadem ratione Sortes participat hominem. Similiter etiam subiectum participat accidens et materia formam, quia forma substantialis uel accidentalis, que de sui ratione communis est, determinatur ad hoc uel ad illud subiectum. Et similiter etiam effectus dicitur participare suam causam, et precipue quando non adequat uirtutem sue cause, puta si dicamus quod aer participat lucem solis quia non recipit eam in claritate qua est in sole.” *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia*, Tomus L; *Expositio libri Boetii De ebdomadibus*, ed. L.-J. Bataillon, C.A. Grassi, pp. 267-282. (Rome: Commissio Leonina, Paris: Editions du cerf, 1992) L.2, ll. 70-85. Hereafter: “*Exp. de Hebd.*” But in such cases, no such subsistence is found according to Aquinas. Likewise, until *esse* has been demonstrated to be the really subsisting and indivisible nature of God (i.e., Stage 3), *esse* remains the most common, indeterminate, and empty category, which says nothing more than “*res*” and does not appear as a really distinct perfection of each thing. Just as a possible *subsisting heat* has no force to preclude the multiplication of the species heat into hot things, or a possible *subsisting animality* the multiplication of the genus animal into species of animals, so too a possible *ipsum esse subsistens* has no force to preclude the identification of *esse* with individual beings (*entia*). Even though the transcendental “*ens*” qua transcendental cannot be divided through matter or *differentiae*, and thus cannot be a genus or species, calling anything “*ens*” remains the most abstract, indeterminate, and common way of *identifying* that thing, not of indicating a distinct perfection. In any thing, “*ens*” is not really distinguishable from “*res*,” but as transcendentals, they are convertible. “*Ens*” needs not be divided because everything is “*ens*.” Such is the fate of *esse* unless infused with an existential dimension.

¹²⁶ “Animality” adds nothing over and above individual animals, as though a real cause of dogs, cats, lions, and Socrates *having animality*. So too, unless Aquinas demonstrates subsisting being to actually exist, a possible subsisting being would not introduce the need for a real otherness between a thing and *its being* because “*its being*” signifies nothing more than the thing itself. If there is a subsisting x, any multiplication of x requires the multiple instantiations to *participate* in x (i.e., have x) but not be x. X thus remains other than the nature of the participant. This is not the case for a genus or species—or even a transcendental—such as, for example, the genus “animal”: dogs, cats, lions, and Socrates are animals. Because “animality” is not actually subsisting, to say they *participate* animality is a rationally distinct (but not really distinct) variation of the statement that “they are animals.” The “animality” indicated by the former is not really distinct from their “being animals” of the latter. If there were a subsisting heat, then heat in everything else (e.g., the heat of fire; the heat of my coffee; the heat of the sun; etc.) would be really distinct from the participating subjects, lest the *oneness of subsisting heat* be made divisible. It would also be a real cause of all hot things *having heat*. The need of participation and composition between *esse* and essence follows from the fact that there is a subsisting *being itself*. Once, as demonstrated by the third stage, “being”

The revolutionary moment in Aquinas's thought, inchoately present in *De Ente*, is not only to equate subsistence with perfection, which had already been done by Plato: only the Forms truly exist/subsist because, unlike particulars, Forms *themselves by themselves* are unmixed with otherness, a position he later needed to rethink in the *Parmenides*. Instead, Aquinas's unique achievement is to remove the condition of perfectibility from the essential realm altogether. As he elsewhere states, even if there were Platonic Forms, they too would need to participate *esse*.¹²⁷ Thus, despite their *essential purity*, even separate substances (i.e., the subject of *De Ente* IV) do not subsist by themselves because they are existentially *impure*; their lack of subsistence, however, is not because they are caused, but because they depend on a perfection that—in itself pure—cannot be communicated to them. By making *esse* a pure perfection in the Platonic and Neoplatonic sense, Aquinas accomplishes two things: first, he links something's "being caused" with its participation of *esse*. Thus, every essence that does not include *esse*, but has an efficient cause of its being, thereby stands in potency to an existential act, which it *receives* and which remains other than it. Note the emphasis is placed not merely on being caused, but having a cause of some perfection that cannot be fully received. Second, like Neoplatonism, Aquinas demonstrates the necessity of "all being" to participate in the superabundance of a first, but unlike Neoplatonism, he maintains this "pure cause of all being" to be, not "beyond being" or "without being," but as *most being*, a superlative—as will be seen in Chapter III below—that establishes an analogical referent for all other diminished modes of being.

belongs to an actually existing nature, in whose indivisible perfection all else must participate but cannot share, the real distinction follows.

¹²⁷ *Exp. de Hebd.* II. 230-240.

The treatment of *esse* as exceeding the actuality brought by essence opens up a new metaphysical dimension for Aquinas. Even the essence of most noble separate substance (i.e., the highest archangel)—complete with the entirety of its perfections and formal determinations—nevertheless stands *in potency* to its act of being (*actus essendi*) which it must receive from outside itself and which remains really other than it. The actuality contributed by even the most perfect form—standing in need of no matter—completely determines something *to be this*, not does not determined it *to be*. Here we see the work of *intellectus essentiae*, but not in isolation from the second and third stages of the argument. As Aquinas concludes, bringing the three stages of the *De Ente* argument together:

Omne autem quod recipit aliquid ab alio est in potentia respectu illius, et hoc quod receptum est in eo est actus eius; ergo oportet quod ipsa quiditas uel forma que est intelligentia sit in potentia respectu esse quod a Deo recepit, et illud esse receptum est per modum actus.¹²⁸

With this move to ascribe a deeper level actuality to *esse*, Aquinas has reconfigured the notion of a first cause in such a way that the first remains pure in its causal distribution, but as an act is not itself beyond being. By “real otherness” Aquinas means that the potency of any nature, no matter how perfect, *remains* non-identical to its being: i.e., even once “actualized,” or brought into being by its cause, the actualized perfection is never really received into the recipient.

This is what distinguishes Aquinas’s use of the metaphor “light as received in air” from a seemingly parallel example “heat as received in water”: both are cases in which a received perfection (light/heat) is “accidental to” its subject (air/water). The difference,

¹²⁸ *De Ente* Cap. IV. ll. 147-152. This resembles the argument from act and potency discussed below. See below Chapter II Section 2.

however, is that in the former case (i.e., illuminated air, existing beings) that which is received, the quasi-accident, remains other. Even though water returns to its natural condition, for a time it retains heat without the influence of its cause because it enjoys the same *ratio* as its cause.¹²⁹ It only defects from complete substantial transformation (e.g., fire only *causes* the accident of heat in water, but does not *generate* a new fiery supposit) because of the weakness of its matter. Light, however, altogether lacks a “root in air,” and cannot sustain illumination without it the continual influx of its source, but receives it according to a different *ratio*. Thus unlike others who also embrace God’s giving being through creation, Aquinas has more radically separated the actuality of being (*actus essendi*) from the essential determinations of any being (*ens*). Even the most fully actualized form stands in need of existential actuality, and because such existential actuality is *actus primus et purus*, there must be a real distinction between such a nature and the being it receives, but *is* not.¹³⁰

The importance of a “pure act of being” containing all perfections and able to distribute such perfections cannot be understated: the first causes all being without causing its own being. To foreshadow a metaphor from *Summa Contra Gentiles*, like a king who gives governance to his entire realm, the first cause can totalize without either being made part of the totality that it causes in its entirety or removing itself entirely from the realm.¹³¹ Its purity remains intact, when even more radically it distributes such perfections to itself (i.e., the Trinity). Thus, through the second and third stages of the *De*

¹²⁹ *ST I*, q. 104, a. 1, resp. I will return to this issue in reference to divine conservation below. See Chapter V. The issue here concerns “analogical” vs. “univocal” causation, to which I will return below. See Chapter III.

¹³⁰ On this issue, see also James F. Anderson, *Cause of Being: The Philosophy of Creation in St. Thomas*. (St. Louis, Mo.: B. Herder Book Co., 1952), 1-30.

¹³¹ See Chapter II Section 3.

Ente argument, Aquinas existentially reinscribes the Neoplatonic signature of participation around the extra-essential influx of *esse*, which actualizes even the highest formal perfections. God as universal cause does not give merely a particular act (e.g., this or that form) to everything that follows, but he gives actuality as such.¹³²

¹³² Dewan seems to reject the existential reading of *esse* in favor of an argument that focuses on the relation of a form to its efficient cause(s). “*Esse*” refers to something’s higher sustaining causes without which it would not continue to exist. Thus, although nothing besides God subsists in its own right, “*esse*” does not mark a distinct existential perfection in addition to anything’s form. The issue for Dewan seems to be that the univocal series of efficient causes must be essentially ordered to some (higher) equivocal cause, otherwise the series would run to infinity. In the effect, Dewan explains, there is the ordering principle of form, a nature of the effect’s own. The form or nature of the effect is the principle of its being, but only as presupposing the contribution of the higher thing as efficient cause. Without the cause as cause, there would be no ordering influence. That which is ordered (i.e., the effect) receives a share of the being from its principle of ordering, but ultimately remains lower than it and must participate it. Hence, the non-identity between that which must participate and that which is participated. Dewan’s argument requires that the effect continually participate (i.e., be caused by) its cause, as opposed to *esse* being something given to the effect along with its nature. For the effect *to be*, its cause must remain in act. The following passage best captures his overall argument: “The form of the caused thing is an *inferior* form. Since it is a form, it is a principle of being (*esse*); but only as presupposing the contribution of a *higher* thing, the efficient cause. In the case of our letters making a word, it is the presence of order (the FORM) which makes of the letters a being, a word: thus, we can say that with the coming of the order there comes also an act of being (*esse*); being accompanies form. However, order is present in the letter only ‘under the influence’ of the man who holds up the letters. The man (having a higher, more active form) is a being *more fully established in being* than are the words made out of wooden letters. The words have being only by receiving a share (“participating in”) the wealth of being of the man. This is why we must distinguish between the *form* of the lower thing and the *esse* of the lower thing. The *esse*, i.e. the being actually, of the caused (or lower) thing pertains to the caused thing’s participation in the perfection *proper to the nature of the higher thing*, the nature of the *efficient cause as such*. The form of the lower thing, on the other hand, pertains to the *nature proper to the lower thing*. The two natures being different, so also the *esse* and the form of the caused thing must be different from each other, the *esse* being the *actuality* even of the form.” Dewan, “St. Thomas and the Distinction between Form and *Esse*,” 366. If *esse* can be translated as “the having been ordered of a form,” which indicates its having been caused, then everything besides the first cause must be *other than* its *esse*. The actual being of any effect requires participation in the perfection of its cause, but this participated perfection remains other than it. “It is only when the thing is seen as caused, and thus as dependent on a *higher and more noble essence*, that one must conceive of a distinction, within the caused thing, between its essence and its act of being. The act of being is a perfection, pertaining to the being as a being, which surpasses the causal power of the essence of the caused thing.” Dewan, “Etienne Gilson,” 84. Lower modes must participate in the actuality of being of higher modes, which are other than them, until we reach *esse subsistens*. Two issues are noteworthy in Dewan’s account: first, that the composition of *esse* and form diminishes as one ascends the hierarchy of causes; second, that *esse* participated by each effect is something really distinct, and not merely another way of naming the same reality (i.e., a conceptual distinction). The second issue relates directly to the matter of concern: whether the real distinction between *esse* and essence presupposes an entity in which there is an identity between the two: *esse ipsum subsistens*. On the first issue, to the causal hierarchy of natures there corresponds a hierarchy of acts of being. Higher natures are more able to exercise being, and therefore are less distinct from their *esse* than lower natures. Such diminished distinction converges in a point of identity with the first cause. Dewan clearly states: “...one might say that form becomes closer to, i.e., more like, *esse* as one mounts the metaphysical hierarchy, and coincides with it ‘at infinity’, i.e. at God.” Dewan, “St. Thomas and the Distinction between Form and *Esse*,” 364. Higher natures are more active because more effects depend upon them, and they

Section 5: A Real *Distinction*? Terminological Clarification

To return to the earlier question, what would it mean to say *esse* and essence are *really distinct* in created beings? According to the handbook definition of this distinction, it would require God to be able to create—and/or subsequently destroy—something’s *esse* and not its essence, and vice versa. Such is the charge *ad absurdum* that later opponents of the real distinction will lodge against the real distinction between *esse* and essence: what would a being be without being, or being apart from any being?¹³³ The otherness of which Aquinas often speaks between *esse* and essence—but of which he seldom, if ever, explicitly considers in terms of types of distinction—cannot be between *res et res*. What would it mean to create something’s *esse* without the thing itself, or likewise to create (i.e., really create, not just conceive) something without its *esse*? Likewise, *esse* cannot be an accident of a thing, because insofar as accidents *happen to* the subjects of which they are accidents, *esse* would have to be added to a non-existing thing (i.e., to nothing). If *esse* is called upon to explain the difference between “existing and non-existing things,” which do not *include* such a specification through themselves, then we also ask of this addition: what accounts for *its* existence or non-existence?¹³⁴

Unlike later thinkers who identify their arguments along the spectrum of distinctions, ranging from real to rational and many varieties in between, Aquinas does not seem

themselves (as effects) depend upon fewer causes (i.e., they can cause more, both univocally and equivocally). The more the form can order (i.e., the more active and less passive the form) the more being it has. Grades of composition of form and *esse* follow according to the rubric: inasmuch as an entity has above it a higher cause, to that degree it is composed.

¹³³ See, for example, Ockham: “Si essent duae res, non esset contradictio, quin Deus conservaret entitatem rei in rerum natura sine existentia, vel e converso existentiam sine entitate, quorum utrumque est impossibile.” *Opera Philosophica I: Summa logicae*, ed. Philotheus Boehner, et al. (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 1974), III, II, c. xxvii. If Aquinas is committed to some form of a “real distinction” between *esse* and essence, he most certainly does not mean this as outlined by Ockham.

¹³⁴ The argument that if existence were an accident added to an essence, then another existence would have to be added to it (i.e., the accident) is a commonly stated argument against the treatment of *esse* as an accident. “Si esse est dispositio addita, procedetur in infinitum, quod est inconveniens.” Siger of Brabant, *MM Intro.* q. 7. He derives this argument from Averroes’s response to Avicenna. See *Metaphysics* IV.2.

committed to a single term. He says of *esse* that it is “other than,”¹³⁵ “composed with,”¹³⁶ “outside (*praeter*)”¹³⁷ “really differs from,”¹³⁸ and “happens to”¹³⁹ essence.¹⁴⁰

“Distingere” occurs at least once in his corpus, although in no way is highlighted as a technical term.¹⁴¹ His fluid terminology, however, seems to reflect the state of the problematic, and where he stands in the range of positions on this issue cannot be clearly located because such a *range* only fully emerges through and in response to his work. One almost could argue that Scotus’s “formal distinction,” which is a distinction in a single entity between two formalities each with its own account (*ratio*) and which Scotus often applies in cases of real composition that do not warrant a full-fledged real distinction, best describes what Aquinas has in mind.¹⁴² Although *esse* is not a formality, but an extra-formal actuality, nevertheless, such a distinction captures the real otherness in any created being between *esse* and essence without requiring the consequence (i.e., of the real distinction) that one could persist while the other were destroyed. A further advantage would be that *esse* does not merely modify essences (i.e., as is the case with

¹³⁵ *In I Sent.* d. 24, q. 1. art. 1 resp.: “Aliquid enim est quod, quamvis sit indivisum in actu, est tamen divisibile potentia, vel divisione quantitatis, vel divisione essentiali, vel secundum utrumque[...] divisione essentiali, sicut in compositis ex forma et materia, vel ex esse et quod est.”

¹³⁶ *SCG* II.56.

¹³⁷ *In II Sent.* d. 3 q. 1. a. 1. resp.

¹³⁸ *Exp. de Hebd.*

¹³⁹ *In I Sent.* d. 8, *expositio primae partis textus*.

¹⁴⁰ Wippel, for example, states: “[Aquinas] speaks more frequently about the composition of essence and *esse* than about their real distinction. Nonetheless, at times he does refer to them as being really distinct, presumably because he realizes that if they are to enter into real composition with one another, they must to that degree be distinct from one another.” “Metaphysics,” *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kreutzmann and Elenore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 99. On the same matter concerning the “early texts” of Aquinas (c. 1254-c. 1260), Sweeney states: “Those texts disclose that Thomas has at least six ways of expressing the otherness between *esse*/essence: *distinguere*, *accidere*, *differre*, *est aliud*, *non est* and *compenere*. The last four are used most frequently, with almost equal frequency and, seemingly, with little or no change in meaning.” Sweeney, “*Existence/Essence*,” 104-105.

¹⁴¹ *De veritate*, q. 1, a. 1, ad s.c. 3. “...diversum est esse, et quod est, *distinguitur* [m.e.] actus essendi ab eo cui ille actus convenit.”

¹⁴² “In eodem igitur quod est unum numero, est aliqua entitas, quam consequitur minor unitas quam sit unitas numeralis, et est realis; et illud cuius et talis, unitas, formaliter est ‘de se unum’ unitate numerali. Concedo igitur quod unitas realis non est alicuius existentis in duobus individuis, sed in uno.” *Ordinatio* II d. 3, Pars I q. 6, 172. Scotus applies such a distinction, for example, to a thing’s quidditas and haecceitas.

Scotus's modal distinction), but makes its own "existential" contribution, which cannot be reduced any essential account, but requires its own extra-essential (i.e., non-definitional) account. Because calling Aquinas's distinction a "formal distinction" is both speculative and anachronistic, and because the formal distinction is a type of real distinction, I will avoid this appellation, but instead continue to use the term "real distinction" bearing in mind the qualifications addressed here.

Instead, we must focus on the real otherness between the essential determinations specifying what any given thing is and its non-identical existential act. This is what was first considered by the understanding of essences (i.e., the first stage of the *intellectus essentiae* argument) which occluded an understanding of their *an esse* ("*possum enim intelligere quid est homo uel fenix et tamen ignorare an esse habeat in rerum natura*"). As will come to be seen in what follows, the incommensurability of these orders and the otherness between a being and its act of being can be traced back to the distinct ways by which any given thing relates to God as exemplar. As Aquinas states:

Similiter etiam in ipso Deo est considerare naturam ipsius, et esse ejus; et sicut natura sua est causa et exemplar omnis naturae, ita etiam esse suum est causa et exemplar omnis esse. Unde sicut cognoscendo essentiam suam, cognoscit omnem rem; ita cognoscendo esse suum, cognoscit esse cujuslibet rei [...]¹⁴³

Thus, although not two distinct things (*res*), as issued from two distinct causal grounds (i.e., *causa et exemplar omnis naturae* and *causa et exemplar omnis esse*), a real otherness, which Aquinas does not define as this or that type of distinction, must pertain in created beings between *esse* and essence.¹⁴⁴ The distinction between *esse* and essence

¹⁴³ *In I Sent.* d. 38, q. 1, art. 3, resp.

¹⁴⁴ A distinction between two things (*res*) should more properly, but perhaps anachronistically, be called a "numerical distinction." Giles of Rome will defend such a distinction between *res et res*. For Giles, *esse* is something really distinct from essences or natures. What is so radical about this response is not merely that it posits a real distinctness between *esse* and essences. Even more is the fact that Giles treats *esse* as itself

is not a mere product of the intellect—as is the case of understanding an essence apart from individual instantiations of that essence, and would be the case for *esse* and essence if relying on *intellectus essentiae* alone, as I have argued¹⁴⁵—but a distinction pertaining even in the absence of any mind to conceive of it. The deeper meaning of the “otherness between an essence and its *esse*” thus concerns the fact that even when brought into being by its cause, such a bringing into being is not merely the actualization of a potency, because of the continued non-identity between something and its being. Thus, more than anything else “real otherness” signifies that a being never truly receives *esse* because of its purity as *esse tantum*, a purity which grounds its reception in everything else.

something (i.e., a *res*). In Theorem XVI, he claims: “Nam ipsa humanitas, cum sit tota essentia hominis et tota quidditas eius, dicta est forma totius, quia dicit totum per modum formae. Esse autem quod causatur a forma totius ut in decima nonna propositione patebit, est *res differens* [m.e.] ab ipsa forma.” (XVI, L.14-18). In this passage, Giles has outlined the key elements of his real distinction: the total form (i.e., whole essence of matter and form as opposed to the partial substantial form) causes a *different thing* (i.e., *esse* as “*res differens*”) than the form itself. To fully explain his formulation of this distinction, he has directed his reader to Theorem XIX in which he takes on contrary opinions in order to argue that *esse* and essence are different things. The title of this Theorem is: “Omne esse quod fluit in compositis a forma totius vel quod in simplicibus causatur a quidditate non esset coniunctio essentialium partium, nec respectus ad agens, nec determinatio materiae, vel subiecti, sed est actualitas quaedam realiter differens et superaddita quidditati ex quo esse et essentia componitur quodlibet citra primum.” Two issues should be noted in discussing this Theorem as they reflect Giles’ overall position on *esse*: why *esse* must be really distinct from essence, and what Giles means by calling *esse* a distinct *thing* (*res*). “Verum quia in propositione quinta et etiam in duodecima multis rationibus probabatur et etiam hic ostendetur quod *esse et essentia sunt duae res* [m.e.], ita quod esse nihil est aliud quam quaedam actualitas realiter superaddita essentiae ex quo esse et essentia *realiter componitur* [m.e.] omne creatum...” (XIX). Murray in his introduction to his translation of *Theoremata* states: “Giles of Rome had been the pupil of St. Thomas, most probably between the years 1269-1273, he had been considered for some years, the interpreter of St. Thomas, but he has undoubtedly created the monster which has frightened Duns Scotus and Francis Suarez and has motivated their reaction to the real distinction. He has in fact prepared the way for the Scotistic and Suarezian conception of the real distinction. With such a conception of the real distinction we can certainly pardon these great metaphysicians, Duns Scotus and Francis Suarez” (21-22).

¹⁴⁵ Sweeney maintains that the “essence:individual::essence:esse” pairing is based on a misguided analogy: the former is a relation between act and potency, the latter between potency and act. This means that even though the former gives rise to a mere conceptual distinction, the latter must give rise to a real distinction because to understand essence as not including existence is not merely an indeterminacy in conception (as is the case with the former). He does acknowledge that the *intellectus essentiae* argument needs to be supplemented, but not necessarily by a prior demonstration for the existence of God. See Leo Sweeney, “Existence/Essence in Thomas Aquinas’s Early Writings,” 107, 129-130. Owens, however, argues that even if in one case the essence is *participated* by individual, and in the other *participates* existence, this does not necessitate a real distinction in the case of the latter. He states: “If there is a reason why existence when received into a subject has to remain really distinct from the subject, the reason will lie in the existence itself, and not in anything learned from the simple inspection of a sensible thing’s essence.” Owens, “Quiddity and Real Distinction,” 12.

Conclusion

As has been argued, the full argument of *De Ente* IV is necessary in order to show a “real otherness” between things (i.e., other than God) and their being. Only with the final stage of the argument does the necessity for really distinguishing *esse* from essence in things (*res*) become apparent.¹⁴⁶ Stage 3’s demonstration of *esse* as a real nature enables the subsequent move to show that the reception of such into any other essence is a *real positive content*, which nevertheless remains *really distinct* from the nature into which it is received for the very reason that *esse* can be identical only to a single nature (i.e., *ipsum esse subsistens*). Thus, in everything else, it must be received as really distinct from the nature, otherwise *ipsum esse* also would be part of such natures (and thus God/*esse* would be a real part of such things).¹⁴⁷

So what is this “reception of *esse*?” As Aquinas outlined in Stage 3 of the *De Ente* argument, a move must be made from the order of essential inspection (i.e., *intellectus essentiae*) to the order of efficient causality.¹⁴⁸ A ground must be sought not for the *whatness* of any given thing, but for its being anything whatsoever, the actuality of all

¹⁴⁶ In Chapter V, I will argue that Aquinas leaves his argument open to a deeper problem, namely that the “really distinct” *esse* received by creatures turns out to be nothing more than their participation in divine *esse*. As such, the original impetus for the real distinction (i.e., to distinguish God from creatures) collapses.

¹⁴⁷ The real distinctness is *necessitated* by the consequences that would follow if *esse* (now shown to be a subsisting nature) became part of any created natures. Owens states: “The reason is that the being so established [*Ipsum Esse Subsistens*] cannot, when participated, be really identical with any quidditative characteristics. Where it is participated as an act, it has to remain really other than the quiddity it makes be.” Owens, “Quiddity and Real Distinction,” 17. The otherness established through understanding God’s nature as *ipsum esse subsistens* surrounds the subsequent impossibility of *esse* as something entering the essential or quidditative continuation of any other entity. If *esse* is God’s nature alone, then if *esse* were to be part of other entities’s natures—that is, if *esse* were not *really distinct* from their quiddity—then they would be indistinguishable. Either everything would be God (i.e., pantheism) or everything would be being (i.e., Parmenideanism), each an equally pernicious outcome. Thus, the establishment of the real distinction requires a *prior* demonstration for the existence of God.

¹⁴⁸ “Non autem potest esse quod ipsum esse sit causatum ab ipsa forma uel quidditate rei, dico sicut a causa efficiente, quia sic aliqua res esset sui ipsius causa et aliqua res se ipsam in esse produceret: quod est impossibile. Ergo oportet quod omnis talis res cuius esse est aliud quam natura sua habeat esse ab alio.” (*De Ente*, Cap IV II. 131-137).

actuality, exceeding essential perfection alone. Ultimately, we arrive at the ground of all being, a being whose essence is *to be*. Aquinas argues that something's quiddity cannot produce its own existence (*esse*), otherwise it would be the efficient cause of itself (*causa sui*). Something would have to give to itself what it previously had lacked (i.e., *esse*).

Against an essentialist challenge, Aquinas's argument in *De Ente* begins to dislodge the actuality brought by *esse* from formal actuality. This he does by grounding the being of beings in *ipsum esse subsistens* and showing that their composition with *esse* makes possible any essential determination, instead of thinking being as nothing more than the appearance of the essence *in re* through the union of form and matter. In showing God to be *ipsum esse subsistens*, an understanding of all other beings (*intellectus essentiae*) subsequently can reveal the non-implication or absence of *esse* as a genuine lack—a lack that can only be supplemented through God's efficient causality (i.e., participation in *ipsum esse subsistens*).¹⁴⁹

Because *intellectus essentiae*, which by itself only establishes a rational distinction, cannot placate those who would altogether reject the real distinction, *ipsum esse subsistens* must be shown to be a real nature in order to ground the real distinction. As Owens has argued: "If [*esse*] is really distinct in point of fact, the reason will have to be sought in what is peculiar to existence itself, not in the accidental connection established

¹⁴⁹ Creation, as will become clear, enables Aquinas to radicalize the actuality brought by God's inaugural act of effectivity and underlying all "standard" efficient causality. It seems that Heidegger in the *Beiträge* misreads Scholastic metaphysics—and especially Aquinas—on this point. He states: "Abandonment of being is strongest at that place where it is most decidedly hidden. That happens where beings have—and had to—become most ordinary and familiar. That happened first in *Christianity* and its dogma, which explains all beings in their origin as *ens creatum*, where the creator is the most certain and all beings are the effect of this most extant cause. But cause-effect relationship is the most ordinary, most crude, most immediate, what is employed by all human calculation and lostness to being in order to explain something, i.e., to push it into the clarity of the ordinary and familiar." Heidegger, *Contributions*, 77. Instead of *familiarizing* and making *ordinary* the createdness of beings (*entia/seiendes*), Aquinas attempts to dislodge from ordinary efficient causality the deeper *givenness of being* at the center of creation and at the core of all *ens creatum*. Whether he avoids the Heideggerian charge of onto-theo-logy is a matter of some dispute. Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, "Thomas Aquinas and Onto-Theo-Logy."

through inspection of the thing's quidditative content."¹⁵⁰ The *reason* must be sought from the side of *esse*, not from the side of *quidditas*. This is because a transition must be made outside the order of quidditative content and formal causality altogether. The focus instead becomes the exercise of efficient causality, which accounts for the being of such quiddities, but which itself cannot be a quidditive determination. *Esse* cannot be considered just another essential determination because it itself as a nature (i.e., *ipsum esse subsistens*) cannot be divided or multiplied as can other natures (e.g., human, whiteness, etc.) and thereby cannot be just another essential determination, but is that which (in the order of *efficiency*, not *formality*) causes any such nature *to be*. *Esse*, thus, becomes a perfection required by all natures in order to *enact* their essential actuality (i.e., *esse* is the act of all formal actuality) and without which—due to their lack of subsistence—they would not be. This means that *actus primus et purus* serves as the cause of all being and yet as the causal ground of being *in its totality*, it need not be beyond being. As most perfect act, its purity does not require it to not-be in order that it be able to give (i.e., cause) all being by reason of “analogical causation” as will be explored below.¹⁵¹ Before turning to this issue of an “analogic of being,” we must trace Aquinas's other arguments for the real otherness between *esse* and essence insofar as they help to frame his enshrinement of *esse* as a “really other” existential perfection of all essential perfections.

¹⁵⁰ Owens, “Quiddity and Real Distinction,” 12.

¹⁵¹ See below Chapter III.

Chapter II. *Esse Beyond De Ente*

As was argued above, the discussion of *esse* and its real otherness from essence in *De Ente et Essentia* presents an inchoate version of a metaphysical argument that resonates throughout the entirety of Aquinas's corpus: *esse* is the act of all actuality and the perfection of all perfections.¹ Such a claim provides a focal point for the entirety of Aquinas's existential metaphysics in its overcoming of conceptual imperialism. Before turning to the constellation of issues surrounding the real otherness between *esse* and essence (e.g., analogy, participation, the divine ideas, creation *ex nihilo*), a broader survey of other types of argument offered by Aquinas for his "real distinction" will help to unpack the full meaning of this claim and also to round out our understanding of how such a distinction emerges.

This chapter will consider two other types of argument that Aquinas presents for the real distinction—the argument from participation and the argument from act and potency—in addition to looking at the treatment of the real distinction in the two *Summas*.² Although his arguments for this distinction vary in terms of context, and he never treats the question as such (i.e., "What type of difference pertains between *esse* and essence in creatures?") but always addresses the issue in terms of some other problem,

¹ Sweeney divides the texts of Aquinas into early (ca. 1254-1260), middle (ca. 1260-1267) and late (ca. 1267 sq.) and catalogues, classifies, and analyzes *esse* in the early group. See Sweeney, "Existence/Essence in Thomas Aquinas's Early Writings," 99.

² One argument I do not raise is the so-called "genus argument." See Sweeney "Existence/Essence in Thomas Aquinas's Early Writings," 109-112 and Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* 157-161. The gist of the argument, as summarized by Wippel, is "[...] if something belongs to a genus, essence and *esse* (act of being) differ in that thing." Ibid. 159. Otherwise, something would not differ from other members of the genus insofar as they share quidditative content. The problem, to which I will return below, is that this argument invokes *esse* as "that by which things differ." Insofar as I think such a treatment of *esse* is problematic, not only in itself, but also for Aquinas's own project, I will pass over such an argument in this Chapter in order to return to the issue of *esse* as individuating below. See below Chapter V.

the fundamental insights of the *De Ente* argument persist throughout his *corpus*.³ In what follows, I will show the broader range of Aquinas's existential insights.

Section 1: The Argument from Participation

Aquinas's explication of Boethius's *De Hebdomadibus* argument has been a central source for the latter's own purported commitment to the real distinction.⁴ Interpreters of the real distinction, who argue for knowledge of real distinction in creatures *prior* to knowledge of real identity (or "purity") in God, often appeal to this account in his *Expositio* contemporaneous with *De Ente*.⁵ Even though this account does not offer an *intellectus essentiae* argument, but instead "an argument from participation," keeping in mind the essentialist challenge, the question posed to this text must be whether an inspection of created beings reveals *esse* as a really distinct perfection in creatures without reference to a *subsisting esse*.⁶

On the nature of the reasoning invoked in the argument at hand, Wippel succinctly states the argument thusly: "The heart of this reasoning, in these texts and in others, is

³ Sweeney argues: "His endeavors to establish the real distinction are not completely successful in his early writings. He does succeed, though, in subsequent treatises. Setting aside reflection upon the concept of essence as an approach to the real distinction, he turns instead to *actual existents themselves*. There he concentrates upon the fact that they do actually exist and upon what that fact does to those existents: it contributes all their perfections to them. The result is that *esse*, the component to which that fact leads and of which it is the evidence, is clearly seen to be a perfection and act within the existent and really other than what the existent is." *A Metaphysics of Authentic Existentialism*, 72.

⁴ See fn. 10 below.

⁵ Patt states: "Neither the difference between an entity and *esse* itself, nor the real distinction between *esse* and essence is, of course, an otherness between two things ("res and res"). In this passage of his commentary on the *De hebdomadibus*, Thomas does not treat of the difference between *esse subsistens* (which itself is an entity) and the entities which participate in *esse*. Rather the difference between an entity and *esse* itself is the difference between a thing and a perfection, and the real distinction between *esse* and essence indicates an otherness within one and the same entity" "Aquinas's Real Distinction," 25-26.

Sweeney and Wippel refer to this as a "participation argument" or "argument based on participation."

Sweeney, "*Existence/Essence*," 120-126 and Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 161-170. Wippel also argues that such an argument need not presuppose that God exists. Sweeney argues that the "participation argument" in general...even though in this particular case...With the latter, nevertheless...

⁶ Cf. Patt, *Aquinas's Real Distinction*, 24-29. He here lays out the contribution of the *Expositio* for *De Ente* IV.

this: if something participates in a perfection, existence (*esse*) in the case at hand, it must be distinct from and enter into composition with the perfection in which it participates.”⁷ Around such an argument from participation, I will argue that knowledge of *esse* as a really distinct perfection in things (i.e., a perfection in which they must participate) requires first establishing the subsistence of *ipsum esse*. Thus, *ipsum esse* serves in a grounding function beyond just that of the conceptual order (*intentiones*), because, as signified by Wippel’s use of “perfection,” it brings a completion of act to any nature in terms of an *actus essendi*. In attempting to test the strength of Aquinas’s argument, we must keep in mind the Sigerian challenge: a thing is not composed with its being (*esse*) because its “participation” in its cause (i.e., participation by imitation) does not add any additional perfection to the thing outside its nature, but it does not really (but only logically) participate in *esse commune*. Thus, what sense does it make to speak of “real composition” or “real difference” between the thing and its *esse*?

This is exactly the issue confronted for Aquinas and for us in understanding the first of seven rules in Boethius’s *De Hebdomadibus*.⁸ Here he introduces a distinction that will orient the subsequent rules and the remainder of the treatise: “Being and that which is are diverse” (“*Diversum est esse et id quod est*”).⁹ The meaning of such terms, as well as the “diversity” between them, has not been without interpretive controversy. Setting aside hermeneutical concerns regarding Boethius’s own intentions, the pertinent issue

⁷ Wippel, “Metaphysics,” 106.

⁸ I will follow King and others (e.g., Schutz and Synan) with the organization of the rules into 7. See Peter King, *Treatise On the Hebdomads: How substances are good in that they are, although they are not substantial goods*, trans. Peter King (N.p: n.p., 2004). Also Janet L. Schultz and Edward A. Synan, introduction, *An Exposition of the “On the Hebdomads” of Boethius*, by Thomas Aquinas (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001). All citations will be from Boethius, *The Theological Tractates. The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. H.F. Stewart, et al. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1973). OSI and OSIII respectively refer to *De Trinitate* and *De Hebdomadibus*.

⁹ OSIII 1. 28.

surrounds Aquinas's use of the argument from participation to secure a real difference between *esse* and *id quod est*.¹⁰ In a transitional argument late in his exposition of the

¹⁰ There has been a wealth of secondary literature attempting to settle the precise meaning of the terms "*esse*" and "*id quod est*" in the *Opuscula Sacra* (especially *De Trinitate* and *De Hebdomadibus*). My own interpretation generally follows what Schultz and Synan call the "traditional interpretation," a group of interpretations that read the distinction in terms of essence/form and concrete *informed* particular substance. See Schultz and Synan, xxxix; and: LaZella, "Creation, *Esse*, and *Id Quod Est* in Boethius's *Opuscula Sacra*," *Carmina Philosophiae* 16 (2007)-17 (2008). This view is also held by John Marenbon, *Boethius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 76-95, who reads it as a distinction between immanent form and concrete whole. Gilson also offers such a reading of the distinction in terms of substance (*id quod est*) and the principle of such substance (*esse*), which does not admit the further distinction between essence and existence. See Gilson, *Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 105. Peter W. Nash, in discussing medieval readings of Boethius, calls this interpretation of "the philosophers." Such a position reads *esse* as substantial form, *esse aliquid* as accidental form, and *quod est* as subsistent individual. See Nash, "Giles of Rome," 59-63. This has also been dubbed the "Aristotelian" reading in the sense that I would make Boethius a consistent Aristotelian. The Aristotelian reading maintains a reading of "*id quod est*" as the concrete primary substance and "*esse*" as its embodied essence, neither separable from the concrete particular nor reducible to it. For a general overview of contemporary "Aristotelian" readings, see Ralph McInerny, *Boethius and Aquinas*; Chapter 6, in particular, provides important discussions of Duhem, Roland-Gosselin, Brosch, Obertello, and Maioli, who hold this view. Nash-Marshall offers a similar survey of interpretations, which she generally groups into four: two groups divided around their reading of "*esse*" as essence or existence further subdivided. The former is subdivided around the issue of whether or not essences are the *cause* of things' existences. The latter group is divided around the issue of "consubstantiality" of contingent things with God. See Siobhan Nash-Marshall, *Participation and the Good: A Study in Boethian Metaphysics* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000), 230-246. The "Aristotelian" readings distinguishes itself from both Thomas's reading and the Neoplatonic reading. Both McInerny and Nash-Marshall attribute the latter reading to Pierre Hadot. One can find this threefold distinction both with medieval and contemporary interpretations of Boethius: Nash ("Giles of Rome on Boethius" 58-70.) following Jean Paulus, discusses the threefold interpretation of Boethius in the Middle Ages: the interpretation of the philosophers; the interpretation of the theologians; and the Avicennian interpretation of St. Thomas and Giles. The interpretation of the theologians reads *esse* as divine *Esse*, *esse aliquid* as substantial form, and *quod est*, as the subsistent created being. For a contemporary version of this breakdown, c.f. McInerny, *Boethius and Aquinas*, 161-198. For a similar breakdown, see Nash-Marshall, *Participation and the Good*, 230-246. Medieval and contemporary interpretations of Boethian *esse* and *id quod est* fall into three general groupings (I am following McInerny's grouping, Nash-Marshall divides into two groups of four): Thomas's, which we must refrain from calling "Thomistic" as most Thomists (e.g., Roland-Gosselin, Gilson, etc.) regard it as a favorable imparting, not an accurate interpretation, by the Angelic Doctor (McInerny is the exception to this rule); the Aristotelian, also called the "traditional interpretation" because a majority of scholars now hold some form of this view; and the Neoplatonic readings, which, as we shall see, makes up a roughly unified group of medieval and contemporary interpretations. Concerning his unique position, McInerny identifies the issue of Thomists's rejection of Thomas's reading of Boethius as follows: "Because Thomists came to insist on the originality and the centrality of *esse* in the thought of Thomas, though they gave different accounts of that claim, as Fabro noted, there was a disposition to oppose Thomas's thought to that of his predecessors—and indeed to most of his followers. Such Thomists were susceptible to and relatively untroubled by the claim of Duhem that there exists a chasm between what Boethius meant and what Thomas took him to mean" (249). Schultz and Synan refer to this as the "Traditional Interpretation," which encompasses a number of different interpretations, including the authors' own position. What they all have in common is that they disagree with Thomas's reading of "*esse*" as "existence" and "*id quod est*" as "essence" and that they agree on a more Aristotelian rendering of the terms. For a (now dated) list of various thinkers attachments to these readings, see James Collins. "Progress and Problems in the Reassessment of Boethius." *The Modern Schoolman* 23.1 (November 1945), 1-23. Although the terms "*esse*" and "*id quod est*" seem to be used

rules, he explains what he regards as the grounds for moving from conceptual difference to real difference:

Est ergo primo considerandum quod sicut esse et quod est *differunt secundum intentiones*, ita in compositis *differunt realiter* [m.e.]. Quod quidem manifestum est ex premissis. Dictum est enim supra quod ipsum esse neque participat aliquid ut eius ratio constituatur ex multis, neque habet aliquid extrinsecum admixtum ut sit in eo compositio accidentalis; et ideo ipsum esse non est compositum; res ergo composita non est suum esse; et ideo dicit quod in *omni composito aliud est esse ens et aliud ipsum compositum quod est participando ipsum esse*.¹¹

Aquinas has set forth the following argument: If *ipsum esse* can be shown to be absolutely simple and non-composed, then anything that presents itself as composite cannot be *ipsum esse*. *Ipsum esse* neither participates in anything, nor receives something extrinsic to it, therefore it is not composed; composite things are not their own *esse*; therefore, in such composite things, the thing itself and its *esse* really differ such that the thing itself *is* by *participating ipsum esse*.

The success of the argument lies in establishing the simplicity of *ipsum esse* such that it is not a composite. This means that it neither participates anything nor has anything added to it. The underlying question surrounding this argument is: must Aquinas presuppose that the *ipsum esse* repugnant to all composition *subsists*, or can he show *esse*

equivocally throughout *De Hebdomadibus* and *De Trinitate*, and more so in the entirety of the Boethian corpus, the Aristotelian tenor of the terms can be shown as most plausible of all the competing interpretations. In putting forth such a position, Brosch in one of the few, however, who argue Boethius uses the terms consistently in various contexts. Brosch's extreme position can be seen. Here he categorically rejects a reading of "*esse*" as "*Dasein*": "Mir scheint, kein einziger Anhaltspunkt ist dafür aus dem Text selbst noch aus dem Zusammenhang zu gewinnen" Hermann Josef Brosch, *Der Seinsbegriff bei Boethius: Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Sosein und Dasein* (Innsbruck: Felizian Rauch, 1931), 27. Aquinas's interprets the distinction as a predecessor of his own distinction between *esse* and essence. The foremost contemporary defense of this view is McNerny's *Boethius and Aquinas*, in which he reviews and rejects multiple versions of the Aristotelian interpretation along with the Neoplatonic reading of Hadot. In his epilogue, McNerny unequivocally voices his support of this view against its detractors: "The thesis of this book is that Boethius taught what Thomas said he taught and the Thomistic commentaries on Boethius are without question the best commentaries ever written on the tractates." McNerny, *Boethius and Aquinas*, 249.

¹¹ *Exp. De Hebd* II. II. 204-215.

to be a really distinct perfection in composite things prior to knowledge of the subsistence of *ipsum esse* (i.e., God)? To understand how he arrives at this conclusion, it will be beneficial to review those arguments from which the premises derive their support.

Aquinas maintains the simplicity of *ipsum esse* by appeal to the “rules” offered by Boethius at the beginning of *De Hebdomadibus*. Boethius presents such rules as common conceptions of the mind (*communis animi conceptio*) which the learned, at the very least, approve upon hearing. Aquinas refers to such rules as *per se nota* foundational principles from which the subsequent demonstration can commence. In expositing the famous first rule “*diuersum est esse et id quod est,*” Aquinas states:

Sicut autem dictum est, ille propositiones sunt maxime note que utuntur terminis quos omnes intelligunt; ea autem que in intellectu omnium cadunt sunt maxime communia, que sunt ens, unum et bonum; et ideo primo ponit hic Boetius quasdam conceptiones pertinentes ad ens, secundo quasdam pertinentes ad unum ex quo sumitur ratio simplicis et compositi, ibi: *Omni composito* etc.; tercio ponit quasdam conceptiones pertinentes ad bonum [...]¹²

The Boetian rule under discussion had treated “*esse*” in its distinction from *that which is*, which Aquinas takes up as pertaining to “*ens*,” the first of three “transcendentals” (i.e., “*ens, unum, et bonum*”) as the most common understandings.¹³ Convertible with each

¹² *Exp. De Hebd.* II. II. 9-18.

¹³ In their translation of the text, Schultz and Synan take note of this of this move: “Note that although Boethius uses *esse*, Aquinas uses *ens* here.” Schultz and Synan, introduction, 60, n.4. For Boethius, according to my (but not Aquinas’s) interpretation of “*esse*” in *De Hebdomadibus*, such an interpretation of “*esse*” under the rubric of the transcendental “*ens*” would not be problematic. For Aquinas’s own existential project, however, the matter becomes more complicated because the Thomistic *actus essendi* operates on a different register than the transcendental *ens*. This confusion at hand echoes the problem raised above with the *intellectus essentiae* argument: what necessitates that “*esse*” must signify some non-essential *actus essendi*, instead of merely repeating “*ens*” or “*res*”? If “*esse*” remains indistinguishable from the transcendental “*ens*,” as the gloss on the first rule seems to suggest, then something and its “*esse/ens*” would only ever be *rationaly* distinct. What would it even mean to understand some essence and yet *really* exclude a more common and empty conception of it as “a being” (*ens*)? Even a phoenix as understood essentially can be called an “*ens rationis*.” Therefore, more must be said about why a *real* distinction occurs. Aquinas seems to think that the *conceptual* distinction established by the rule can be translated as a *real* distinction in reference to composite beings: “*Est ergo primo considerandum quod sicut esse et quod est differunt secundum intentiones, ita in compositis differunt realiter.*” Thus, to establish the

other, these transcendental concepts stand outside the categories such that any categorical predication presupposes an understanding of the most common concepts of being, one, and good. Thus, Boethius's axioms or common conceptions of the mind pertain to such transcendental concepts, each dealt with in turn throughout the Rules. Although Boethius uses the transcendentals to solve the questions "how substances can be good without being substantially good," and Aquinas seeks a faithful exposition of such an argument, our focus here must be limited to Aquinas's discussions of "*ens*" and "*esse*."

As the exposition continues, concerning "*ens*" Aquinas states:

Circa *ens* [m.e.] autem consideratur *ipsum esse* [m.e.] quasi quiddam commune et indeterminatum, quod quidem dupliciter determinatur, uno modo ex parte subiecti quod *esse habet* [m.e.], alio modo ex parte predicati utpote cum dicimus de homine uel de quacumque alia re, non quidem quod sit simpliciter, set quod sit aliquid puta album uel nigrum.¹⁴

In one way (*ex parte subiecti*), being is said of a subject *having being*. In the other (*ex parte predicati*), being is not said simply, but in regard to being something: we do not say simply that "Socrates is," but that "Socrates *is white*." *Ipsum esse* relates to *ens* as a common and indeterminate consideration, determinable in either of these two ways (i.e., having being or being something). As Aquinas will make clear, this "*esse habet*" on the part of the subject is that by which any being (*ens*) *is*, and yet—as will be seen when Aquinas later applies these considerations to composite things (*res*)—must remain really distinct from all composite things.

The characterization of *ipsum esse* as "common and indeterminate" here concerns the abstract manner in which beings (*entia*) can be signified. Beginning with "*esse*" as an

real distinction, *esse* must be shown to mean more than just the transcendental "ens," but instead a participated perfection in all composite beings.

¹⁴ *Exp. De Hebd.* II. II.19-26.

abstract signification of beings, Aquinas is clear to point out, however, that the distinction under consideration concerns only conceptions at this point, and not yet realities. He states:

[...] diuersitas non est hic referenda ad res de quibus adhuc non loquitur, set ad ipsas rationes seu intentiones. Aliud autem significamus per hoc quod dicimus esse et aliud per id quod dicimus id quod est, sicut et aliud significamus cum dicimus currere et aliud per hoc quod dicitur currens. Nam currere et esse significatur in abstracto sicut et albedo; set quod est, id est ens et currens, significatur in concreto uelud album.¹⁵

The rational distinction at hand concerns the distinct manners by which “*ens*” and “*esse*” signify. Just as “one running” (*currens*) and “to run” (*currere*) signify rationally distinct manners of considering one and the same *thing*, so too with the case of “one being” (*ens*) and “to be” (*esse*). At this point, Aquinas merely has stated a position that accords with a rational distinction, outlined above with Siger of Brabant.¹⁶ Something can be signified either in abstraction, as in the case of “to run,” or in concretion, as in the case of “one running,” and yet two distinct realities are not being signified, but instead a single reality as distinctly (i.e., more or less abstractly) *conceived*.

The character of Aquinas’s subsequent argument will slowly execute the transition from a rational distinction to a real distinction such that these distinct considerations can be applied to things. In the following passage, we witness Aquinas’s first move toward a real distinction. He states: “et ideo sicut possumus dicere de eo quod currit siue de currente quod currat in quantum subicitur cursui et participat ipsum, ita possumus dicere quod ens siue id quod est sit in quantum participat actum essendi.”¹⁷ We must take note of the issue of participation discussed in this passage as it anticipates the issue of real

¹⁵ *Exp. De Hebd.* II. II. 37-45.

¹⁶ See above Chapter I Section 3.

¹⁷ *Exp. De Hebd.* II. II.54-59

composition introduced later in the argument. “*To x*” (in the infinitive) is not the subject of *x-ing* (here the participle). One might *speak* of “the one running” (*currens*) as distinct from her activity “to run” (*currere*). This distinction follows because “to run” is not the subject of “running” (*currendi*), just as “to be” (*esse*) is not the subject of “being” (*essendi*). Thus, just as we do not say “*to run runs*,” but “the *runner runs*,” so too it is incorrect to say “*being is*,” but instead “that which is,” as the subject of being, “is.”

Despite the obviousness of Aquinas’s point, both in Latin and in English, we must note the conclusion he draws from this; namely, the one running (*currens*) runs “inasmuch as she is the subject of running *and participates in it*.” What he is trying to determine with this discussion is whether “*ipsum esse*” can participate in anything, from which he concludes that only *id quod est* can participate, but not *ipsum esse*. Remember *to run* does not *run*. But what does it mean to be the subject of something (in the gerundive) such that one participates in it (in the infinitive)? Aquinas defines participation quite literally as “to grasp a part” (*partem capere*) of something and goes on to discuss three distinct forms of participation in which the participant must “grasp a part” or “take part in” the participated.

In terms of his three ways of participation, the first is when a species participates in a genus or an individual in a species. This is a form of participation because the former in each case does not possess the *ratio* according to its total commonality and in the same way, but grasps only “a part.” The second is when a subject participates in an accident or matter participates in form. Either an essential or accidental form, “common according to its ratio” (*de sui ratione communis est*), is determined to a particular subject and thus the subject participates the form. Such determinate qualification of a subject (i.e., *esse*

aliquid) from its participation in an essential or accidental form, as Aquinas later will explain, presupposes that the subject (i.e., *without qualification*) participate *ipsum esse*. The third type of participation, and the one most relevant to our discussion, is when an effect participates its cause, especially when the patient is not equal to the power of its cause. The example he gives is when air participates the light of the sun. He states: “[...] effectus dicitur participare suam causam, et precipue quando non adequat uirtutem sue cause, puta si dicamus quod aer participat lucem solis quia non recipit eam in claritate qua est in sole.”¹⁸ The air is *inadequate to the power (virtutem)* of its cause and thus must *participate* light, but is unable to receive it “with the clarity” (*in claritate*) as it is in the sun. It grasps a part of light, but fails to receive it completely. As explained above, air is not merely a deficient medium for the reception of light—as water is for heat—but instead, the perfection itself (i.e., light) enjoys a “clarity”—a physical description that resonates metaphysically as “purity”—that is fundamentally incommunicable to any subject.

For the exposition at hand, Aquinas has introduced participation in order to show that *ipsum esse* does not participate anything, and subsequently he will argue that nothing can be added or admixed with the *ratio* of *ipsum esse*. Before turning to the issue of *ipsum esse*'s lack of admixture, we must note the following: in this passage, Aquinas has interpreted Boethius's “*forma essendi*” in terms of his own existentialized “*actus*

¹⁸ “Est autem participare quasi partem capere. Et ideo quando aliquid particulariter recipit id quod ad alterum pertinet, uniuersaliter, dicitur participare illud, sicut homo dicitur participare animal quia non habet rationem animalis secundum totam communitatem; et eadem ratione Sortes participat hominem. Similiter etiam subiectum participat accidens et materia formam, quia forma substancialis uel accidentalis, que de sui ratione communis est, determinatur ad hoc uel ad illud subiectum. Et similiter etiam effectus dicitur participare suam causam, et precipue quando non adequat uirtutem sue cause, puta si dicamus quod aer participat lucem solis quia non recipit eam in claritate qua est in sole.” *Exp. De Hebd.* II. ll. 70-85.

essendi.”¹⁹ Thus, “*id quod est*” participates in an *act*—not a *form*—of being (*actus essendi*) so that it *is*, a matter to resurface below.²⁰ Given both considerations, we must ask how Aquinas makes the final move to leverage a real distinction through application of such conceptual consideration to things (*res*).

In discussing the lack of admixture to *ipsum esse*, Aquinas begins by explaining how, according to abstract signification, that which is signified abstractly (e.g., humanity, whiteness, to run) contains nothing outside its essence.²¹ Such an abstract signification of a human, for example, contains only an account of human (*ratio hominis*) with nothing else admixed to it. When signified concretely, however, such (e.g., a human) is capable of partaking of extra-essential additions. A human, something white, or a runner can possess determinations other than humanity, whiteness, or to run. There can be, for example, “a pale, human, runner.” The consequences for *esse* and *id quod est* are obvious: being itself (*ipsum esse*) cannot partake of any determinations outside itself, whereas the concretized *id quod est* (i.e., that which is, or a being) can receive further determinations. A being is always something more than the fact that it *is*. Its *to be* (*esse*), however, can receive nothing extraneous to itself.

The pertinent issue at this point, once again, is that only *intentiones* are under consideration.²² The *ratio hominis*, *ratio currendi*, *ratio albendi*, and most importantly *ratio essendi* as the abstract signification of individual humans, white things, runners, and beings (*entia*) do not—qua *ratio*—foreclose the possibility of multiplicity. When

¹⁹ This issue has been noted, for example by Schultz and Synan, n.5, 60.

²⁰ Although Aquinas often relates *actus* directly to *forma*, here the *actus* in which *id quod est* must participate so that it *is* exceeds the formal determinations alone.

²¹ “Humanity” might be better rendered “to be human” and “whiteness” “to be white.”

²² The relation between *intentiones* and *rationes* seems almost interchangeable in this text. See *Exp. De Hebd.* II. 1. 39, where Aquinas speaks of “*rationes seu intentiones*.”

considered by themselves, they are naked of any further determination, but this does not afford them any *real* separation from their actual partakers (e.g., beings, humans, white things, and runners), as if there were a *currere tantum* apart from *currentia*. To state the matter in Siger's terms, our concept of any individual runner *really includes* "to run" not because of some separate fund of "*currere tantum*" in which each must participate, but because *each* concept of a runner iterates the same conceptual content as "to run," albeit with a difference in emphasis. Even more, Siger states, every *ratio* is a *ratio essendi*.

Thus, "*ipsum esse*," at this point in the argument, need only be conceptually other than composite thing (*res composita*) because the *ratio* of each composite expresses a *ratio essendi*. Thus, the unity such a concept (i.e., "*ipsum esse*") enjoys *in mente*, due to its lack of admixture, fails to exclude multiplicity *in re*: nothing alien can divide the concept and disrupt its unity because it extends to everything. This is not because some nature other than *esse* must divide it.²³ Instead, it remains "undivided" only because it fails to exclude anything and thus is presupposed by every *ratio*. The Sigerian thorn in the side of the argument is that an analysis of any thing (*res*) in terms of its conceptual content (*ratio*) already includes a *ratio essendi*; therefore to drive a wedge between one region of being (e.g., composite things) and another (e.g., *ipsum esse*) fails to really

²³ Cf. "If *esse* (the act of being) is to be multiplied, this can only be owing to diversity on the part of that which participates in it. Therefore, because different natures or entities participate in it, it is realized in different fashion in each of them. Not only does this requires real diversity between one participating nature and entity and another; it also requires real diversity within every such being between something which receives and diversifies *esse* (the act of being) and the received and diversified act of being itself. One may ask why. This follows because *esse* as such is not self-dividing or self-diversifying. As Thomas has explained in a number of other contexts, *esse* insofar as it is *esse* is not divided. It can only be divided by something that is different from itself, that is, by a nature or essence which receives and diversifies it. If the *esse* (act of being) of this human being is different from the *esse* (act of being) of that human being or that stone, that is because in each of them the nature or essence which receives and diversifies *esse* is distinct from the *esse* which it receives and diversifies." *The Metaphysics Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 167. Wippel's claim that "*esse* is not self-dividing" mistakes an abstract *ratio essendi*, applicable to everything, for a perfection. According to Siger, *esse* is not "received" in anything because it already accompanies everything.

distinguish the two. Being says too much because it says everything; but because it says everything without determination, it says nothing at all.

Aquinas builds his argument for real difference around an implicit dichotomy, mentioned earlier in reference to the *intellectus essentiae* argument, that “either composite things are not their own being (*suum esse*) or all beings are *ipsum esse*.”²⁴ The reason why one must reject the claim “all beings are *ipsum esse*,” Aquinas assumes, is because *ipsum esse* can participate nothing nor have anything extrinsic mixed with it.²⁵ And composites are, at the very least, mixtures of spatially differentiated parts. The problem, however, is that Siger would agree that *ipsum esse* neither participates anything (what could *being* participate beyond itself?) nor has anything admixed to it (what could be admixed to *being itself* that is ‘not-being’?). But for Siger, “being a composite,” although this entails being caused by another, does not necessitate that the composite thing (*res compositum*) is non-identical to its being. Instead, he argues, everything that is a being is a being through its own account (*ens per suam rationem*).²⁶ There is nothing in it that differs from being or from an account of being (*differens ab ente vel a ratione entis*), which thus would be the subject of participation in *ipsum esse*: the *ratio* of such a subject (e.g., *res compositum*) is a *ratio essendi*. One may speak along the orders of logical participation, but this would remain insufficient grounds for concluding that that

²⁴ For an unpacking of this dichotomy, see, for example, Dewan, “Saint Thomas, Joseph Owens, and the Real Distinction Between Being and Essence.” See also, Owen’s response: “Being and Natures in Aquinas,” 167.

²⁵ “*ipsum esse neque participat aliquid ut eius ratio constituatur ex multis, neque habet aliquid extrinsecum admixtum ut sit in eo compositio accidentalis; et ideo ipsum esse non est compositum; res ergo composita non est suum esse...*” *Exp. De Hebd.* II ll. 208-213.

²⁶ “Sed potestne aliquid esse ens per participationem entis communis? Dico quod non, quia tunc oportet quod illud esset compositum ex natura participantis et partipate, quae inter se essent diversa. Unde omne quod est ens, est ens per suam rationem: homo est animal per participationem animalitatis, quia est aliquid in ipso quod differt a natura animalitatis; non tamen est ens per participationem entis, quia nihil est in ipso quod sit differens ab ente vel a ratione entis, et sic patet ad illud.” *MM III q. 21.*

which is (*id quod est*) is not its own *esse*. For Siger, participation in being by the subject does not really differ from its subsequent participation in other perfections (e.g., humanity or whiteness) because there is nothing in it that *differs from being*. To be something (*aliquid*) (i.e., to participate essential and accidental qualifications) and to be simply (i.e., to participate *ipso esse*) are not distinct.

For Aquinas, however, participation in *ipsum esse* takes a certain priority over subsequent participation.²⁷ By participating in *being itself*, the subject of participation is a subject without qualification (*simpliciter subiectum*), which subsequently can partake of qualification through further participation (e.g., as a human or something white).²⁸ Obviously, Aquinas does not think of this as a temporal process by which the subject without qualification *first* participates *ipsum esse*, and *then* participates everything else. Nor, however, does he treat such modes of participation as merely *logical* forms of participation. The subject without qualification *really differs* from its being (*esse suum*) insofar as it *is* only by participating *ipsum esse*. But in order to reach his conclusion, namely that insofar as *esse* and *id quod est* really differ in composites (*different realiter*), the composite *is* by participating *ipsum esse* (*est participando ipsum esse*),²⁹ Aquinas must seek a determinate negation for “*ipsum esse*.” In other words, with nothing “*differens ab ente*,” everything says being unless the being of which Aquinas speaks, and which Sigerian essentialism would argue is *repeated* by every concept, is somehow other than that conceived by mere conceptual analysis. Thus, the being (*ipsum esse*) that

²⁷ *Exp. De Hebd.* II II 186-195.

²⁸ “Dicit quod ad hoc quod aliquid sit simpliciter subiectum participat ipsum esse, set ad hoc quod sit aliquid, oportet quod participet aliquo alio, sicut homo ad hoc quod sit albus participat non solum esse substancialie set etiam albedinem.” *Exp. De Hebd.* II. II. 180-185.

²⁹ “...et ideo dicit quod in *omni composito aliud est esse ens et aliud ipsum compositum quod est participando ipsum esse.*” *Exp. De Hebd.* II. II. 213-215.

remains other to the natures of composite things (*res composita*) does not appear other from a conceptual inspection of the *rationes* of composites for the very reason that such is not a static essential or accidental qualification, but an “*actus essendi*” reached through judgment.³⁰ A conceptual analysis of terms alone (i.e., “*ipsum esse*” means “*esse* pure and simple,” whereas “composite” means “non-simple,” therefore the two are different) does not suffice, but instead requires an appeal to an extra-conceptual *actus*. Here is where the interpolation of “*actus essendi*” plays in Aquinas’s favor.

For Boethius, a discussion of “*forma essendi*” arises following his initial distinction between *esse* and *id quod est*, in order to provide clarification on why such a distinction must be posited. He states: “*ipsum enim esse nondum est, at vero quod est accepta essendi forma est atque consistit.*”³¹ It comes to be only through that which takes it on (*id quod est*) as its form of being (*forma essendi*). This means that, as *forma essendi*, *esse* is taken on so that something is and exists. The subsequent rule helps to clarify the matter, while also illuminating the role of *esse* as *forma essendi*: “*Quod est participare aliquo potest, sed ipsum esse nullo modo aliquo participat. Fit enim participatio cum aliquid*

³⁰ For a discussion of the role of judgment in moving outside the conceptual order, see Owens, “Being and Nature in Aquinas,” 166. Wippel’s second argument presupposes that *esse* is an act (i.e., more than conceptual content): “The second reason is more directly suggested by our text and will be developed in the following section of this chapter. It follows from Thomas’s oft-repeated claim that act, especially the act of being (*esse*), is not self-limiting. But if *esse* is participated in by a subject or participant, it is present in that subject only in partial or limited fashion. This follows from the very nature of participation, as Thomas understands it. If one is to account for the limitation of that which is not self-limiting, one must postulate within such a participant an intrinsic principle which receives and limits *esse* (the act of being), and a really distinct act of being which is received and limited. Hence for both of these reasons, appeal to a merely logical or conceptual distinction between essence and act of being will not be sufficient to account for the fact that given beings actually and really do participate in *esse*.” Ibid. Wippel assumes, however, that “given beings *actually and really* participate *esse*,” as opposed to merely being identical to such *esse*. The assumption is that “the act of being (*esse*) is not self-limiting.” But to designate *esse* as an act is already to provide it with an ontological status outside the register of conceptual content. For Siger, nothing needs to “limit” *esse* because there is nothing to limit such ubiquitous conceptual content.

³¹ OSIII II.28-30.

iam est; est autem aliquid, cum esse susceperit.”³² Here we see the parallel language between Rule 1 and 2, where both “*forma essendi*” and “*esse*” are used to characterize that which makes something be once it (i.e., *esse*) is “taken on.” *Esse* is not itself something, and thereby cannot participate, but is that by which something is and can participate. Something is when it has received *esse*, that is, when it has taken on *forma essendi*.

Aquinas’s “*actus essendi*,” which interprets Boethius’s “*forma essendi*,” may not be entirely metaphysically neutral as it at first seems, especially if Aquinas is attempting to relocate a deeper metaphysical actuality (i.e., *esse*) outside the formal determinations of the essence. The *forma essendi*, like the *forma currendi*, signifies the rational structure shared by all *entia*, or all *currentia*, without considering their particularizing differences *in concreto*. It concerns a difference of signifying (i.e., abstractly or concretely). Discussions of the *formal* structure of being or of running can be metaphysically neutralized in a way that discussions of an *actus essendi* cannot because it is not an essential or accidental qualification, but the ground of such qualifications: “the act of all actuality and the perfection of all perfections.” With this move to *actus*, Aquinas has gone beyond the mere formal abstractions of signification, where *esse* stands as the most abstract, indeterminate, and empty category. Instead, an *esse* that implies not only *forma essendi* but also *actus essendi* brings with it a deeper actuality underlying a subject’s (i.e., a subject without qualification) subsequent essential and accidental qualification. “Human” or “whiteness” or any other participated quality presupposes a subject without qualification and its act of being.

³² OSIII II.31-34.

Although Aquinas seems to ground such a priority of the subject without qualification “as understood” (*ut intelligatur*) in the order of understanding, he reasons that what is understood is that *when the subject is* (i.e., through participation in *ipso esse*) only then does something remain (*restat*) to be anything (*aliquid*) else (e.g., human or pale).³³ In sum, under consideration is not merely subject terms with or without qualification, but instead a more dynamic attempt to think the order between the fundamental act of participation (i.e., *actus essendi*) by which a subject is at all (*simpliciter*) and its grounding of further *formal* qualification (i.e., essential and accidental participation). Thus to think *when the subject is* is to reach the very constitution of the subject term in its synthesis with an existential act, an act underlying all further *formal* qualification. The result of Aquinas’s reading of Boethius’s “*forma essendi*” as “*actus essendi*”³⁴ is that, contra Sigerian essentialism, not every *ratio* is a *ratio essendi* because “of being” primarily expresses *an act* by which something is, remaining distinct from both the subject it constitutes and the further formal qualifications it makes possible. It is in this disengagement of *esse* as act from the formal determinations of the thing and their corresponding *conceptual* content wherein, according to Fabro, “...lies the nerve of Thomistic metaphysics in its antithesis to the *Vergessenheit des Seins* of scholastic and immanentistic philosophy.”³⁵

³³ “Est autem hec differentia quod primo oportet ut intelligatur aliquid esse simpliciter, et postea quod sit aliquid, et hoc patet ex praemissis. Nam aliquid est simpliciter per hoc quod participat ipso esse; set quando iam est, scilicet per participationem ipsius esse, restat ut participet quocumque alio, ad hoc scilicet quod sit aliquid.” *Exp. De Hebd.* II ll. 188-195.

³⁴ Thomas’s “actus essendi,” when participated by “id quod est,” accounts for the existential actuality of the being, namely the fact that it is. He states: “[...] et ideo sicut possumus dicere de eo quod currit siue de currente quod currat in quantum subicitur cursui et participat ipsum, ita possumus dicere quod ens siue id quod est sit in quantum participat actum essendi” Aquinas, *Exp. De Hebd.* II. ll. 54-59. See also, *De Ente* IV, ll. 159-166.

³⁵ Fabro, “The Transcendentality of ‘Ens-Esse’ and the Ground of Metaphysics,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 6.3 (September 1966): 411.

Following this discussion of the “subject without qualification” and its participation in *ipsum esse*, Aquinas marks what he perceives to a shift in Boethius’s argument from mere conceptions (*intentiones*) to actual things. In interpreting the penultimate rule,³⁶ in which Boethius discusses how the foregoing applies to everything simple and everything composite,³⁷ Aquinas notes how Boethius has applied his conceptual (*secundum intentiones*) to things (*ad res*). Aquinas states:

Deinde cum dicit: *Omni composito* etc., ponit conceptiones de composito et simplicibus, que pertinent ad rationem unius, et est considerandum quod ea que supra dicta sunt de diuersitate ipsius esse et eius quod est, est secundum ipsas intentiones. Hic ostendit quomodo applicetur ad res; et primo ostendit hoc in compositis, secundo in simplicibus [...]³⁸

This application of the conceptual considerations to *things (res)*, which Aquinas heralds in this passage, begins the transitional argument cited above, in which he argues for *real difference* between *esse* and *quod est* in composite things. Remember the argument states: *ipsum esse* is not composite; therefore, composite things cannot be their own *esse*, and thus must be really distinct from such. A cursory observation of the world reveals any number of composite substances, which *qua composite* are not simple, thus must be other than *esse*. Not being its own being, the composite thing *has being* by participating *ipsum esse*.

Such a passage begins the transition to a real distinction, but requires a final discussion of simple and composite substances. This discussion both will identify *ipsum esse* as a subsisting nature, and based on *esse*’s subsistence, that is once *esse* is concentrated in a single referent, the discussion will also show that everything, even

³⁶ Depending on the numbering of the rules, this is either Rule 6, or Rules 7 and 8.

³⁷ Boethius himself does not mark such a transition in the rules, such that only now *res* are under consideration.

³⁸ *Exp. De Hebd.* II II. 196-203.

simple substances (e.g., Platonic immaterial forms), are really different than their *actus essendi*. Even though Aquinas begins with a discussion of real composites, and then moves to a discussion of simples and finally *ipse Deus* as subsisting *esse*, only upon a complete exposition of the Boetian Rules (i.e., one that considers both composite and simple realities) can real difference emerge between composites (and everything besides God for that matter) and their *esse* or *actus essendi*.³⁹

The use of counterfactual hypotheticals (i.e., immaterial Platonic forms such as Heat or Humanity) in the final stage of the argument seems to serve two purposes: first, their hypothetical status, which provides a unified intelligible content (i.e., *ratio*) for a multiplicity of “logical” participants, reveals that their non-subsistence (i.e., they are always instantiated) prohibits any real otherness between the subject and the participated perfection. If there were a subsisting “to run,” a subsisting heat, or a subsisting humanity, then they would be really distinct from runners, hot objects, and humans and themselves really indivisible. But in the absence of their pure subsistence, e.g., that there is nothing that is *only running* (*currere tantum*), nothing prohibits its division through the addition of *differentiae* or accidents. In the case of *ipsum esse*, Siger would agree with Aquinas that it neither participates anything nor receives anything extrinsic to it; nothing can divide *ipsum esse*. But this is because each *ratio* is a *ratio essendi*. In terms of a composite substance like Caesar, that he is a being (*ens*) signifies nothing really distinct from him. Thus, in order to show how the “having *esse*” on the part of all beings contributes a really distinct actuality *by which* Caesar *is*, the move to subsisting *ipsum esse* must be made. Otherwise, nothing necessitates that being (*esse*) cannot be a really

³⁹ Note: this is not a demonstration for the existence of God, either by Aquinas or by Boethius. The rules are supposed to be *per se nota*, and used to solve the question at hand (i.e., *quomodo substantiae...*).

identical part of Caesar, as is his animality or humanity, both of which also could not be a real part of him were they subsisting as Platonic immaterial forms. *That by which* Caesar is human or animal can be really identical with Caesar himself in the absence of subsisting humanity or animality. “Humanity” and “animality” repeat what has already been said with “Caesar,” albeit with a greater degree of abstraction. They help to unpack Caesar’s nature, but apart from Caesar they do not signify a really distinct *that by which* in which he must participate. Likewise, without the subsistence of *esse*, the opponents of the real distinction could point to the common and indeterminate nature of *esse* as a *really identical* iteration of each concretized *ens*. *Esse* would be no more a really distinct perfection of each subsisting *ens* than *currere* would be of each *currens*, or humanity of each human.

The second purpose served by this reference to simples is to show even if they did exist, their subsistence would be *incomplete* because they would need to participate their *actus essendi*. And although Aquinas does not do so in this context, one may extrapolate such to *really existing* separate substances (i.e., the soul and intelligences). Thus, such “higher forms” are not truly simple because even though hypothetical Platonic Forms would serve as the basis for the formal participation of participating subjects, such Forms themselves would still need to participate in a higher *actus*. They could not subsist on their own (*per se*) because they would need to participate their *esse*. The reason for such a needed participation, however, is that *esse* belongs only that which is truly its own *actus essendi*, namely *ipsum esse subsistens*. Thus, through its subsistence as “being itself,” *ipsum esse subsistens* demands an otherness between itself and all participants. Aquinas states:

Id autem solum erit vere simplex quod non participat esse, non quidem inherens set subsistens. Hoc autem non potest esse nisi unum, quia, si ipsum esse nichil aliud habet admixtum preter id quod est esse, ut dictum est, impossibile est id quod est ipsum esse multiplicari per aliquid diversificans, et, quia nichil aliud preter se habet adiunctum, consequens est quod nullius accidentis sit susceptivum. Hoc autem simplex, unum et sublime est ipse Deus.⁴⁰

It is true that only *after* discussing the real distinction does Aquinas name *ipsum esse* “God.” And yet, the actual subsistence of being as a real and indivisible nature stands as a necessary precondition to leverage the *need* for beings to participate in a perfection really distinct from themselves. Without such an appeal to *ipsum esse subsistens*, the argument fails to reveal to the defender of the *rational distinction* that *esse* is a really distinct act by which each being is, the “*actus essendi*” that cannot be accounted for by a mere formal analysis of any being in terms of essential and accidental qualities.

Thus, unlike participation in essential or accidental qualities, which serve as formal acts received by a subject, participation in *ipsum esse* is the prior enactment of such secondary, or “formal,” participation—it is the act, or *enacting*, of such actualities. To understand the more fundamental role of the *actus essendi*—and the reasons that it cannot be a mere *forma essendi* for Aquinas—take a familiar example: a subject (e.g., this mug of coffee on my desk) has received both an essential quality “water plus the differentia of coffee” and also certain accidental qualities such as heat. The subject through a process of generation (i.e., the addition of water to ground coffee beans) *has become* identical to

⁴⁰ *Exp. De Hebd.* II. II. 249-258. True simplicity belongs only to that which does not participate *esse*, but is itself subsisting *esse*. The issue at hand, however, is on what grounds Aquinas posits *esse* as subsisting: does a real distinction in things demonstrate a *subsisting esse*, or does a subsisting *esse* demonstrate a real distinction in things? This passage does not demonstrate the existence of God, but merely identifies that which has been presupposed to be *ipsum esse subsistens* with God. Such a presupposition needs to show that there is such a nature, which as entirely simple, cannot enter into created natures as a mere quidditative determination. Otherwise, it remains like subsisting heat, whiteness, or animality, which if they were really to exist, they could not be divided through differentiae and accidents and would be entirely one. See also *ST I*, q. 44, a. 1.

its essence in a manner that it *cannot* (i.e., *qua water*) to its accidental quality of heat. Heat requires violent induction so long as the patient essentially remains water. And yet this non-identity between water and heat results from a material deficiency on the part of the water and not the failure of the cause (e.g., the flame on the stove) to perfectly *educere* its effect. That very same flame, when confronted with a different patient such as paper, could communicate the quality of heat according to an equal formal *ratio* as itself. Thus, the otherness between water and heat is not a *fundamental otherness*, but what we might call a *material otherness*. With *ipsum esse*, a fundamental otherness necessarily results due to the nature of *esse itself*, and not a mere failure on the part of the recipients: *esse* is not merely a formal (i.e., essential or accidental) quality that can be actualized in a subject, but, as a complete discussion of the Rules show, is by nature a pure and incommunicable act that, once distributed, remains fundamentally other than any receiving subject. The non-identity between *id quod est* and *ipsum esse* stems from an understanding of the latter as an existential act, but only once such an act has been fully explicated, its status as unreceivable ground emerges.

Much like the *intellectus essentiae* argument, which must draw on the third stage to deploy the full force of the argument, the argument here also must appeal to the subsistence of *ipsum esse* to thus indicate *both* the lack of such an act of being in every other being *and* also the reception of such perfection as *really distinct* from the thing itself. Patt, however, has argued that the second and third stages of the argument from *De Ente* are unnecessary in establishing the real distinction. In comparing the *intellectus essentiae* argument to Aquinas's account from *De hebdomadibus*, he states both arguments sufficiently demonstrate the distinction without *esse subsistens*. Patt argues:

Neither the difference between an entity and *esse* itself, nor the real distinction between *esse* and essence is, of course, an otherness between two things (“*res* and *res*”). In this passage of his commentary on the *De hebdomadibus* [II. ll. 204-215], Thomas does not treat of the difference between *esse subsistens* (which itself is an entity) and the entities which participate in *esse*. Rather the difference between an entity and *esse* itself is the difference between a thing and a perfection, and the real distinction between *esse* and essence indicates an otherness within one and the same entity.⁴¹

Patt is right that the otherness between *esse* and essence is not between “two things” (*res et res*), but between a thing and a perfection. Existence is a perfection because it is that by which something is made actual, which even forms require in order to be.⁴² But the *reason why* such an otherness *must* hold between a thing and its existential perfection is not because of some weakness on the part of *res composita* (i.e., as water cannot become fire, no matter how powerful the cause), but because of the pure subsistence of that which

⁴¹ Patt, “Aquinas’s Real Distinction and Some Interpretations,” 25-26. The passage to which Patt refers argues that *esse* cannot be composed because it neither participates in anything nor can receive an extraneous admixture (e.g., a differentia). *Esse*’s simplicity thereby entails that anything composed cannot be *esse* and must be really distinct from *esse*. In reference to *De Ente*, this argument reveals that the understood essences of composite things must be really non-identical to *esse* in its simplicity. Without invoking *esse ipsum subsistens* from the second and third stage of the *De Ente* argument, understanding the essence of a composed entity suffices to show the difference between its essence and *esse*, the latter which cannot be part of its essence because *esse* itself is simple yet contributes some real perfection to the essence. Inspecting the essences of composed entities, however, indicates that the perfection of being (*esse*) does not follow from such essences themselves. The perfection of *esse* does not follow *quidditatively* from something because its essence can be understood independent of understanding whether it exists or not. Patt argues: “[t]his difference consists in that the knowledge of a thing’s essence is not dependent upon what is the case. A thing’s essence can be signified by a definition even if the thing does not exist.” (“Aquinas’s Real Distinction and Some Interpretations,” 27). Thus, Patt would disagree with Masiello’s insistence upon the need to relate quidditative content to existing particulars. The independence of understanding quiddities seems to allow one to be “ignorant of” existing particulars, as the case of actual phoenixes suggests. Concerning the *intellectus essentiae* argument, Patt concludes: “the purpose of the argument, in my opinion, is to establish a fundamental difference between the order of quidditative knowledge and the existential order.” (Ibid.). The emphasis in this passage must be placed upon the claim for a *fundamental* difference between the two orders. Otherwise, Patt has merely aligned *intellectus essentiae* with the *Posterior Analytics*, which does not establish a real distinction between essential and existential orders. Patt asks: What besides *esse* as perfection can explain the “fundamental difference” between the quidditative order, of which the essence phoenix as intelligible is a part, and the existential order, in which there are no phoenixes? Does not this difference by itself and apart from knowledge of subsisting *esse* reveal the distinct orders? Such an argument, however, is forgetful of *De Ente* III: that the nature can be considered *absolutely* or *secundum esse*. Thus, when considering absolutely even the nature of “phoenix,” it is only being *considered* apart from its *esse in intellectu*. If one must withhold reference to *esse subsistens* and still focus on *esse* as a perfection in the thing, as Patt suggests, then nothing necessitates that the thing as non-identical to its *esse* lacks any positive content.

⁴² See, for example, *ST* I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3.

is received. Insofar as the First is pure being (*esse tantum*) and incommunicable, nothing else can have a “root in being.” By establishing *ipsum esse* as a subsisting nature, which brings with it the singularity and uniqueness of such subsistence (i.e., through purity of act), the argument can show that the *esse* complementing the transcendental *ens* at the beginning of the exposition, signifying a subject having *esse*, is more than the most indeterminate way of identifying each thing.

Patt, however, seems to suggest that this *really distinct* existential perfection precedes reference to *esse subsistens*, and occupies a role similar to what Aquinas discusses under the heading of “*ipsum esse commune*.”⁴³ The problem with understanding the really distinct perfection of being in creatures through such an existential fund (i.e., distinct from either creatures or God) is that even if Aquinas went so far as to treat it as the “first creature”—as does the *Liber de causis*—such *ipsum esse commune* lacks subsistence. Thus, by itself (i.e., without further reference to *ipsum esse subsistens*), due to its own lack of existential subsistence, it no more explains the *actus essendi* of things as really distinct than do their generative causes. Even if given thing X had *ipsum esse commune* as the (intermediary) cause of its being, nothing on the part of either the recipient or the cause prohibits that a univocal sharing transpire between the two. They may be unequal (e.g., as the heat in water remains unequal to the heat of fire), but such *existential inequality* is not measured by the same yardstick as the *existential otherness* (of real

⁴³ Before introducing *Deus ipse*, he invokes such term in reference to such hypothetical forms. “[P]uta secundum opinionem Platonis, ponamus formam immaterialem subsistere que sit ydea et ratio hominum materialium, et aliam formam que sit ydea et ratio equorum, manifestum erit quod ipsa forma immaterialis subsistens, cum sit quiddam determinatum ad speciem, *non est ipsum esse commune*, [m.e.] sed participat illud. Et nichil differt quantum ad hoc si ponamus illas formas immateriales altioris gradus quam sint rationes horum sensibilium ut Aristoteles uoluit; unaqueque enim illarum, in quantum distinguitur ab alia, quedam specialis forma est participans ipsum esse, et sic nulla earum erit uere simplex.” *Exp. De Hebd.* II. II. 236-249.

difference) that persists between a pure subsisting act of being and even the most perfect of its participating subjects.

Only by making *ipsum esse*, or the *actus essendi*, as something in which composite things must participate, lest they remain in potency to act, can Aquinas execute the transition real difference. The nature of such “potency to be,” however, remains insatiable insofar as even when something is, it *really differs* from its act of being. Once thought synthesizes a subject with its “being,” and “being” has taken on the dynamism of an act (i.e., *actus essendi*) as opposed to a mere repetition and reiteration of the conceptual content of the thing, concerning such an act, the question becomes: does the thing have such an act *by itself* or through another? Thus whereas before the dichotomy stated “*either* composite things are not their own being (*suum esse*) *or* all beings are *ipsum esse*,” now the issue becomes “either a composite being has its *act of being* (*actus essendi*) from itself or from another.” To interpret Boethius’s *forma essendi* as an *actus essendi*, an act *by which* something is, Aquinas’s has introduced a ground of actuality beyond formal actuality. And insofar as this enactment is from another, it is by participating *ipsum esse*. But what it means “to have an act of being from another” is not simply equivalent to “to have heat from fire” because *ipsum esse*, once identified as proper to a single nature, cannot be received by any other subject except as really other than it.⁴⁴ Thus, real difference emerges as the result of a determinate negation by which the concentration of *esse* in a single nature requires a “real otherness” for all remaining referents.

⁴⁴ It may seem that if heat were a pure subsisting act, it too would enjoy such an incommunicable subsistence and otherness to all subjects of heat, but—and herein we find the distinctly *existential* moment in Aquinas’s argument, which will be explored more thoroughly in the following chapter—even if such essential forms did not need to participate in higher forms (e.g., whiteness in color), they still would need to participate in *esse*. See Chapter III below.

All of this is not to say that the exposition begs the question, but instead that the identification of God with that *ipsum esse* in which *esse* and *id quod est* are identical stands as a necessary condition to ground the real distinction in everything else.

Aquinas's expositive argument began with an abstract and indeterminate conception of being, which extends equally to everything that is. Such a conception, however, fails to indicate much more than a semantic variance between concrete and abstract conceptions. Mere logical abstractions such as "humanity" include nothing alien to the intelligible structure of human (*ratio hominis*), even though the multiplicity of real concrete humans include more than their "to be human."⁴⁵ This means that logically we can form an abstract concept of humanity without the addition of anything else, even though there is no "really distinct" humanity or human form in which all humans *really* participate. The case with being (*esse*), however, is different. Given the actual subsistence of being itself (*ipsum esse subsistens*), being (both as a concept and as a reality) can include nothing alien to itself and thus must really exclude multiplication or addition. Only once this proper concept of being has been reached (i.e., through an identification of the proper referent of "*ipsum esse*") can Aquinas "reapply" the concept to everything else in a secondary or derivative sense as "participants." The real distinctness of each being's being (*esse*) thus only fully emerges when illuminated by their need to participate being in order to be. They must participate a cause because it and it alone can be being (as opposed to everything else that *has* being), but because unable to equal the power (*virtus*) of their cause, that in which they participate (i.e., *esse*) and which belongs to God alone remains really other to them. This allows the proper *ratio* to remain undivided and unmultiplied amidst its diffusion to a multiplicity of effects. By excluding all beings save

⁴⁵ *Exp. De Hebd.* II II. 114-146.

one from the true sense of being, *ipsum esse* thus remains an uncontaminated *ipseity* of being, or “being itself” without anything alien.

Section 2: An Argument from Act and Potency

With both *intellectus essentiae* and the argument from participation, Aquinas needed to show *esse* to be something more than just another name or conceptual iteration, albeit more abstract and indeterminate, for the thing itself. In both arguments, he attempts to indicate a deeper-level actuality at the core of all beings, and actuality necessary for them *to be*. As I have argued, such an actuality becomes manifest only when presented in reference to that subsistence which is *being itself*. Aquinas presents yet another type of argument for the real distinction, the review of which will further highlight the existential actuality underpinning his argument for the real distinction. An act/potency argument, as it has been dubbed by some commentators, argues for a real distinction on the basis of created quiddities standing only in potency with respect to their *esse*.⁴⁶ *Esse* is that by which such a nature is, but must be participated as a really distinct perfection from that nature.

In his Commentary on the *Sentences*, around the question of “whether the soul is simple” (“*utrum anima sit simplex*”) Aquinas makes one such act/potency argument. This question furthers the investigation of the previous article concerning whether some creature was simple,⁴⁷ both questions responding to the problem of distinguishing the

⁴⁶ Concerning such a manner of argumentation (i.e., act/potency), Sweeney states: “None of them underwrites the practice of some contemporary Thomistic textbooks of beginning with act/potency to establish the real distinction between *esse*/essence (for example, “Act and potency are really distinct; but *esse*/essence are act/potency; therefore...).” Sweeney, “Existence/Essence,” 127.

⁴⁷ See *In I Sent.* d.8, q.5, a.1, resp. Here, he asks “*utrum aliqua creatura sit simplex*.” The introduction of the real distinction arises in response to the problem of how everything other than God is in some sense composite. Here, the language of “creature” has already been established within a context of creation, and

simplicity of any creature from divine simplicity. After rejecting the composition of matter and form in the soul, Aquinas takes up the solution of unnamed others (“*alii dicunt*”) who maintain a composition between “*quo est*” and “*quod est*,” which thus explains both the composition of immaterial entities and the dual composition of material entities.⁴⁸

The argument for the real distinction between *quo est* and *quod est*, that is *esse* and quiddity, runs as follows: some immaterial quiddity would either be its own *esse* or not.⁴⁹ If it were, then it will be the very essence of God, which is *suum esse*. If not, then it is necessary to have *esse* acquired from another (*ab alio*) and not *per se*. Everything that does not have something from itself (*a se*) is possible with respect to that something. Both material and immaterial created quiddities have *esse* from another (*ab alio*) and thus are possible with respect to their *esse*. However, with respect to that by which they have *esse*, there is no potentiality (“*...in quo nulla cadit potentia*”). In such quiddities that have

thus in correlation to the uncreated creator. He states: “Cum enim in solo Deo esse suum sit sua quidditas, oportet quod in qualibet creatura, vel in corporali vel in spirituali, inveniatur quidditas vel natural sua, et esse suum, quod est sibi acquisitum a Deo, cujus essentia est suum esse; et ita componitur ex esse, vel quo est, et quod est.”

⁴⁸ See also *ST I* q. 75 a. 5, resp. This article concludes: “Relinquitur ergo quod anima intellectiva, et omnis intellectualis substantia cognoscens formas absolute, caret compositione formae et materiae [m.e.]” In response to Objection 4 (that which does not have matter, but is form alone, is pure and infinite act; this is only God; therefore, the soul has matter), Aquinas introduces the composition of “forma et esse participato” and goes on to define *esse* as “that by which (*quo*) something is.”

⁴⁹ “Cum autem de ratione quidditatis, vel essentiae, non sit quod sit composita vel compositum; consequens poterit inveniri et intelligi aliqua quidditas simplex, non consequens compositionem formae et materiae. Si autem inveniamus aliquam quidditatem quae non sit composita ex materia et forma, illa quidditas aut est esse suum, aut non. Si illa quidditas sit esse suum, sic erit essentia ipsius Dei, quae est suum esse, et erit omnino simplex. Si vero non sit ipsum esse, oportet quod habeat esse acquisitum ab alio, sicut est omnis quidditas creata. Et quia haec quidditas posita est non subsistere in materia, non acquireretur sibi esse in altero, sicut quidditatibus compositis, immo acquireretur sibi esse in se; et ita ipsa quidditas erit hoc <<quod est>>, et ipsum esse suum erit <<quod est>>. Et quia omne quod non habet aliquid a se, est possibile respectu illius; hujusmodi quidditas cum habeat esse ab alio, erit possibilis respectu illius esse, et respectu ejus a quo esse habet, in quo nulla cadit potentia; et ita in tali quidditate invenietur potentia et actus, secundum quod ipsa quidditas est possibilis, et esse suum est actus ejus. Et hoc modo intelligo in angelis compositionem potentiae et actus, et de <<quod est>> et <<quod est>>, et similiter in anima. Unde angelus vel anima potest dici quidditas vel natura vel forma simplex, inquantum eorum quidditas non componitur ex diversis; sed tamen advenit ibi compositio horum duorum, scilicet quidditatis et esse.” *In I Sent.* d.8, q.5, a. 2, resp.

their *esse* from another (*ab alio*), there is found a composition between actuality and potentiality. Such a composition of quidditative potentiality and existential actuality upholds the immateriality of both the soul and angels while at the same time maintaining their compositeness (i.e., of quiddity and *esse*). They can be called “simple quiddities” insofar as they are not composed from diverse parts, even though a “composition arrives there” (“*advenit ibi compositio...*”). This seems to mean that the *esse* which arrives there (i.e., to the potency of the essence) and with which the essence is composed is not some *thing* or predicamental accident, either of which would make the quiddity “non-simple,” but instead an extra-essential *actus essendi*.

The language of quidditative *possibility* (or *potentiality*) and existential *actuality* around which Aquinas bases the argument from act/potency stems from God’s identity *ipsum esse subsistens* from which all other essential perfections must be differentiated (“*Cum enim in solo Deo esse suum sit sua quidditas, oportet quod in qualibet creatura...*”). When this perfection is received in anything outside of God, it remains really distinct because *ipsum esse subsistens* remains indivisible. In regard to this argument, we must further explore the nature of this composition between essential potency and existential actuality and the otherness that remains between the two even upon the latter’s reception by the former.

As Aquinas explains in *De spiritualibus creaturis*, God as first being (*primum ens*), who is infinite act and the plenitude of being (*essendi plenitudinem*), does not contract into some nature of genus or species.⁵⁰ This is the same issue of “*esse tantum*” discussed

⁵⁰ See *De Spiritualibus Creaturis* a. 1, resp. ll. 313-330. “A primo autem actu perfecto simpliciter, qui habet in se omnem plenitudinem perfectionis, causatur esse actu in omnibus, set tamen secundum quendam ordinem: nullus enim actus causatus habet omnem perfectionis plenitudinem, set respectu primi actus omnis actus causatus est imperfectus; quanto tamen aliquis actus est perfectior, tanto est Deo propinquior.

above with both *De Ente* and the *Expositio*. Recall that this “non-contraction” of *esse* shelters being itself (*ipsum esse*) from entering into the nature of any single being (*ens*). Given the first being’s uncontracted plenitude of being, embracing within itself all other perfections of being, *esse* cannot be received into any other nature lest the nature *finitize* *esse*’s plenitude and restrict it to a single nature (“...*unde oportet quod ipsum esse eius non sit esse quasi inditum alicui nature que non sit suum esse, quia sic finiretur ad illam naturam*”). Although neither received nor limited by any nature, by which it could either be specified or individuated, nevertheless this does not entail that such a plenitude of perfection is common. Instead, as discussed above, the first is individuated through its purity of act.

Because the first cannot be contracted, and thereby *shared* with everything else, and yet as a first absolutely perfect *act* containing within itself a *fullness* of all perfections (“*habet omnem perfectionis plenitudinem*”) it must cause actual existence in everything else (“...*causatur esse actu in omnibus*”) in some way that neither comprises its *purity* nor diminishes its causal *actuality*. Everything after the first being (*post primum ens*), not being *ipsum esse*, must participate *esse* as really distinct from its nature. Such participation (i.e., of an effect in its cause) allows *esse* “to contract” in a way that does not allow it to be shared, which means *esse* as the highest perfection of any created being remains other: “*cum non sit suum esse, habet esse in aliquo receptum, per quod ipsum esse contrahitur* [m.e.]”. Without an actual division of *esse*, whereby its parts can be received into the nature itself, *esse* remains really other. Thus, Aquinas concludes: “*et sic*

Inter omnes autem creaturas Deo maxime appropinquant spirituales substantie, ut patet per Dionisium IV cap. Celestis ierarchie: unde maxime accedunt ad perfectionem primi actus, cum comparentur ad inferiores creaturas sicut perfectum ad imperfectum et sicut actus ad potentiam. Nullo ergo modo hoc ratio ordinis rerum habet, quod substantie spirituales ad esse suum requirant materiam primam, que est incompletissimum inter ominia entia, set sunt longe supra totam materiam et omnia materialia eleuate.”

in quolibet creato aliud est natura rei que participat esse et aliud ipsum esse participatum.”⁵¹ That which participates (i.e., *natura rei*) is only possible with respect to that act which it participates (i.e., *esse*). Thus, even the most noble and perfect (i.e., complete) essences of spiritual creatures stand in potency with respect to the existential actuality which they fundamentally lack because such a perfection is proper only to God (i.e., *plenitudinem essendi*) and cannot be partitioned or divided amongst other natures.

To indicate this *lack* lurking at the core of every being—a lack measured only against the abyss of nothingness or *rootlessness*—Aquinas’s argument can only but appeal to *ipsum esse subsistens*. Such an appeal serves to illuminate *esse* to be not an abstract and indeterminate signification (i.e., the most extensive of all signifiers), but instead a necessary fund of actuality without which every other essential determination remains impotent. The addition of being (*esse*) does not pile on just another perfection amongst

⁵¹ In the following passage, Aquinas brings the act/potency distinction to bear on the real distinction between *esse* and essence. He states: “Si tamen quecumque duo se habent ad inuicem ut potentia et actus nominentur materia et forma, nichil obstat dicere, ut non fiat uis in uerbis, quod in substantiis spiritualibus est materia et forma: oportet enim in substantia spirituali creata esse duo, quorum unum comparatur ad alterum ut potentia ad actum. Quod sic patet. Manifestum est enim quod primum ens, quod Deus est, est actus infinitus utpote habens in se totam essendi plenitudinem, non contractam ad aliquam naturam generis uel speciei; unde oportet quod ipsum esse eius non sit esse quasi inditum alicui nature que non sit suum esse, quia sic finiretur ad illam naturam: unde dicimus quod Deus est ipsum suum esse. Hoc autem non potest dici de aliquo alio: sicut enim impossibile est intelligere quod sint plures albedines separate—set si esset albedo separate ab omni subiecto et recipiente, esset una tantum—, ita impossibile est quod sit ipsum esse subsistens nisi unum tantum. Omne igitur quod est post primum ens, cum non sit suum esse, habet esse in aliquo receptum, *per quod ipsum esse contrahitur* [m.e.]: et sic in quolibet creato aliud est natura rei que participat esse et aliud ipsum esse participatum. Et cum quelibet res participet per assimilationem primum actum in quantum habet esse, necesse est quod esse participatum in unoquoque comparetur ad naturam participantem ipsum sicut actus ad potentiam. In natura igitur rerum corporearum materia non per se participat ipsum esse, set per formam: forma enim adueniens materie facit ipsam esse actu sicut anima corpori. Vnde in rebus compositis est considerare duplicem actum et duplicem potentiam: nam primo quidem materia est ut potentia respectu forme, et forma est actus eius; et iterum natura constituta ex materia et forma est ut potentia respectu ipsius esse in quantum est susceptiua eius. Remoto igitur fundamento materie, si remaneat aliqua forma determinate nature per se subsistens—non in materia—, adhuc comparabitur ad suum esse ut potentia ad actum: non dico autem ‘ut potentia separabilis ab actu’, set quam semper suus actus comitetur. Et hoc modo natura spiritualis substantie, non est composita ex materia et forma, est ut potentia respectu sui esse; et sic in substantia spirituali est compositio potentie et actus, et per consequens forme et materie, si tamen omnis potentia nominetur materia et omnis actus nominetur forma. Set tamen hoc non est proprie dictum secundum communem usum nominum.” *De spiritualibus creaturis*. a. 1, resp. 357.

perfections, but donates a perfection of a different order altogether. As a “plenitude of perfection,” to borrow O’Rourke’s apt characterization,⁵² or an “intensification” to borrow Fabro’s,⁵³ *esse* thus indicates a fundamental *lack* at the core of every being (*ens*) such that participation in something outside itself can supplement the lack. But because the finite essences from which we begin cannot account for the very ground of their being, thus requiring an extrinsic cause, they themselves cannot make intelligible the lack of being at their core.⁵⁴ Such a multiplicity of finite beings can only be understood to possess the perfection of being when gathered as imperfect similitudes of subsisting being itself. The unified *ratio essendi*, belonging properly to God and attributable to created beings by a different *ratio*, explains their *having being* through participation and yet not sharing in God’s incommunicable being. Only by knowing the source of being in *ipsum esse subsistens*, and not merely by inspecting finite essences, does the real contribution of *esse* become apparent.

Without the endowment of being (*esse*), every being (*ens*) despite its essential rank and perfection stands in equal measure against the threshold of nothingness, each essence

⁵² “In his unique and original vision of being, Aquinas brings together the Aristotelian primacy of actuality—carrying this doctrine to a profound level not glimpsed by Aristotle—and the Platonist principle of perfect plenitude. For St. Thomas, *esse* is the actualising and emergent plenitude of perfection to which all entitative determinations stand as potency towards act, as participant to perfect and pre-eminent fullness.” Fran O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 174.

⁵³ See, for example Fabro, “The Transcendentality of ‘Ens-Esse.’”

⁵⁴ In the following passage, O’Rourke expresses a similar sentiment to the argument that I have been making; namely, that created being cannot render an account of its itself, and thus points back to subsisting being itself. He states: “The Platonist motif, however, illustrates the fundamental principle that what is caused as an effect participates in its cause and that its perfection is preserved in it virtually according to a superior mode. A perfection which is received into a subject does not accrue or belong essentially to it of its own power. The key to Plato’s affirmation of transcendent perfection is the recognition of the limited nature of the objects within our experience. A limited or incomplete measure of any perfection is unable to explain itself, to render reason for its existence. It is intelligible only through the indwelling presence of that fullness upon which, of its nature as finite, it places limitation. A perfection embodied within an individual is measured to the capacity of that being. But such a limited measure is ultimately meaningful only in the light of a plenitude which, free from all restrictions, is sufficient to itself and which is the source of its limited participations.” O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 156.

equally determines (or equally fails to determine) such a being to be. This is the meaning of “possibility” that Aquinas sets against the extra-essential order of existential actuality; this *incidental* actuality, which as will be seen, arrives only through the gratuitous act of creation and the sustaining act of conservation insofar as *actus primus et purus* can in no way be supplemented by any derivation of being.⁵⁵ With the arguments for existential otherness in the two *Summas*, we will begin to see even more clearly the metaphysical constellations of “the real distinction.”

Section 3: Real Otherness in the *Summas*

In both the *Summas*, perhaps the most mature expressions of the Aquinas’s views, Aquinas demonstrates the existence and nature of God before attempting to establish a real distinction between essence and *esse* in beings other than *ipsum esse subsistens*. Despite the profound differences between the two *Summas*, they follow a similar track in presenting an argument for the real distinction. With both *Summas*, previously having demonstrated the existence of God and shown him to be *ipsum esse subsistens*, Aquinas can proceed to argue that in everything else apart from God, its *esse* is other than it, and thus must be participated. This issue of participation will serve as the mechanism of existential distribution whereby the *primus et purus actus essendi* can distribute the perfection of being without in any way rendering itself *communicable* and thereby exposing its subsistence as an *ipseity*. As will be seen in the following chapters, not only does this issue of “communication of a perfection according to a different *ratio*” serve as the basis of Aquinas’s theory of analogy—which provides a compromise between the aforementioned “making mundane” of God’s being through a univocal sharing and the

⁵⁵ See below Chapter III.

“transcendental release” whereby nothing connects the order of creation to its unknowable cause beyond being thereby nullifying any sustainable attempt at demonstration—but also, participation serves as the backbone of Aquinas’s metaphysics of creation.

In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas asks whether it is necessary that everything that is be from God.⁵⁶ He answers that anything discovered in something by way of participation must causally correspond to an essential concentration of such a discovered “*quodlibet*.” Having shown both *that God is* and that God is essentially his *esse*, both arguments to which we shall return below, Aquinas now is in a position to state that anything else must not be being (*non sint suum esse*), but participates such. It should be observed that the argument here for the unnamed real distinction requires *ipsum esse subsistens* as a unique nature that cannot be divided up and shared amongst other natures. Thus, the nature of anything other than this subsisting *esse* must participate such *esse* as an act really distinct from and non-constitutive of its nature. The purification of *esse* in a concentrated plenitude repels any communication of *esse* to another, lest some mode of communication be found which would divide *esse* and disrupt the *ipseity* of *ipsum esse per se subsistens*.

When the discussion turns to intelligences in Question 50, and in what way their natures can be limited without matter, Aquinas need only refer to the necessity of their participation in subsisting being. Through the subsistence of their form, they are

⁵⁶“Respondeo dicendum quod necesse est dicere omne quod quocumque modo est, a Deo esse. Si enim aliquid invenitur in aliquo per participationem, necesse est quod causetur in ipso ab eo cui essentialiter convenit; sicut ferrum fit ignitum ab igne. Ostensum est autem supra, cum de divina simplicitate ageretur, quod Deus est ipsum esse per se subsistens. Et iterum ostensum est quod esse subsistens non potest esse nisi unum: sicut si albedo esset subsistens, non posset esse nisi una, cum albedines multiplicentur secundum recipientia. Relinquitur ergo quod omnia alia a Deo non sint suum esse, sed participant esse. Necesse est igitur omnia quae diversificantur secundum diversam participationem essendi, ut sint perfectius vel minus perfecte, causari ab uno primo ente, quod perfectissime est.” *ST I*, q. 44, a. 1, resp.

unlimited in their own *ratio*; but *secundum esse*, even the noblest angelic nature exhibits an otherness, which thus finitizes it and distinguishes it from the pure actuality of *ipsum esse*. The essences of created substances can reach the height of perfection and be infinite according to their form, nevertheless lacking the single perfection of *being*. Aquinas states: “*Substantiae autem immateriales creatae sunt finitae secundum suum esse, sed infinitae secundum quod eorum formae non sunt receptae in alio.*”⁵⁷ It remains to be seen what status essences lacking *esse* hold in Aquinas’s ontological scheme, a topic addressed below.⁵⁸ But like with the argument from act and potency, here Aquinas clearly has instituted a real separation between something’s essential determinations and whether or not it *actually is*. But the question of “whether or not an essence *actually is*” is not merely one more formal determination added on to the essence, but its very act of being that must arrive to the nature (*ad naturam aliquam cui advenit*) from outside it. To avoid any complication in the future, we must not think of either the nature or its *actus essendi* in temporal terms “one before the other.” Instead, what Aquinas’s language suggests (e.g., “*advenit*”) is that something’s *actus essendi* arrives to the essence from a separate “ground;” both the essence and the *actus essendi* come together (i.e., as a “*compositio*”), not as an essence with a part, but through a more fundamental synthesis of grounds.

⁵⁷ “Ad quartum dicendum quod omnis creatura est finita simpliciter, inquantum esse eius non est absolutum subsistens, sed limitatur ad naturam aliquam cui advenit. Sed nihil prohibet aliquam creaturam esse secundum quid infinitam. Creaturae autem materiales habent infinitatem ex parte materiae, sed finitatem ex parte formae, quae limitatur per materiam in qua recipitur. Substantiae autem immateriales creatae sunt finitae secundum suum esse, sed infinitae secundum quod eorum formae non sunt receptae in alio. Sicut si diceremus albedinem separatam existentem esse infinitam quantum ad rationem albedinis, quia non contrahitur ad aliquod subiectum; esse tamen eius esset finitum, quia determinatur ad aliquam naturam specialem.” *ST I*, q. 50, a. 2, ad 4.

⁵⁸ See below Chapter IV.

The import of separating these two grounds (i.e., the essential and the existential), even though finding unity in a single causal source, is that it allows Aquinas to immobilize any existential necessity for essences, and thereby to counter any appeal to Avicennian “derived” necessity; but also, it allows Aquinas to make each thing’s participation in being direct and immediate.⁵⁹ Thus, instead of receiving being through a series of intermediaries (i.e., separate substances responsible for mediating the causal chain), each existing thing participates directly in its existential ground, whereas it has received its essential determination from another equiprimordial ground with both grounds united in the self-same *first act*. Such a move allows Aquinas to render all essential perfection existentially *impotent*, and yet enable the divine intellect (and subsequently the human intellect) to confront a range of essential possibilities apart from their existential enactment. God thus confronts individual essential possibilities, in addition to their various compossibilities, in order to decide *on a separate basis* which of the various orders and essences (or none at all) will come to be.

Further in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas’s argument culminates around the existential contribution and how *esse* thereby serves as the perfection of all perfection and the act of all acts. It is here in asking the same question addressed above with *Summa Theologiae* (i.e., whether God is the cause of all being) that he reflects upon the role of a grounding principle in that which it grounds. *Ipsum esse subsistens*’s principative role in giving being, he argues, is like that of a king giving governance to all particular

⁵⁹ In comparing Aquinas’s understanding of God as *ipsum esse subsistens* in reference to the Plotinian One beyond being, Taylor states the matter as follows: “This participation of being is brought about by Divine activity which is direct and without mediation in the giving of being. For Aquinas it is the *esse* as participated which gives actual existence to the nature which receives it in such a way that this limiting form quidditatively and formally determines what it receives, with these two forming the entitative composition that *is* the existing being or creature.” Richard C. Taylor. “Aquinas, the ‘Plotinian Arabica’,” 221-222.

governors in his realm. The king transcends their particular governance—and thus we might say does not share the same *ratio* of governance—and, as a plenitude of governance, is the cause of all governance. Such a plenitude of governance by which the king universally accounts for all particular governing in his realm, nevertheless does not nullify the king himself from being a governor. Instead, we might say, he is the *actus primus et purus* of governance in his kingdom.

Likewise, as we shall see, the giving of *esse* as the perfective act of all other perfections does not require an existential evacuation whereby the giver of being is itself “beyond being.” Although removed from the realm opened up by his causality, and not made into a mundane *primum inter pares*, God’s existential influence retains enough traces of similitude to transcendently ground the mundane order of particular beings, and yet sharing a common name with such an order (i.e., “*esse*”), nevertheless exceeds such according to his *ratio*. God’s eminent possession of *esse*, even when considered with the most noble of creatures, enjoys a separation and purity, thereby requiring all particular beings to be really other than their being.

In *Contra Gentiles* II.52, Aquinas raises the now familiar question of how immaterial substances are composed without being composed of form and matter.⁶⁰ The discussion here reflects the others treatments of the real distinction with the aforementioned difference that the former raises the problem already having shown God to exist (I.13); to be simple (I.18); and to be *ipsum esse subsistens* (I.22). Given this demonstration regarding God, the problem naturally emerges of how everything else is in some way

⁶⁰ Sweeney: “When he came to write the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and other late treatises, then, Aquinas was not only aware that the act of existence is really distinct from essence (this awareness he seems to have had from the first moment he took up his pen), but he also realized that the way in which to establish their real distinction is to turn to the actual universe [as opposed to an inspection of essences].” Sweeney, *A Metaphysics of Authentic Existentialism*, 73.

composed. Without composition, immaterial created beings (*entia*) would adequate divine simplicity and there would be no account for the radical diversity between the two orders. In II.52, Aquinas thus states:

Non est autem opinandum quod, quamvis substantiae intellectuales non sint corporeae, nec ex materia et forma compositae, nec in materia existentes sicut formae materiales, quod propter hoc divinae simplicitati adaequentur. Invenitur enim in eis aliqua compositio ex eo quod non est idem in eis *esse* et *quod est*.⁶¹

On account of some composition, even the most noble of creatures (i.e., intellectual substances) are *inadequate* to divine simplicity. This minimal composition of all creatures whether material or immaterial stems from that which is not the same in them, namely *esse* and *whatness*.

In the very next sentence Aquinas states: “Si enim *esse est subsistens* [m.e.], nihil praeter ipsum esse adiungitur.” In a manner similar to the arguments reviewed above, Aquinas begins with a broad and indeterminate conception of being, and attempts to purify (or intensify) it so as to include only God and exclude creatures. Such distillation of the concept of being (*ratio essendi*) follows from the actual and exclusive subsistence of being, which thereby requires all other beings to participate being according to a separate account.⁶² The apodosis “if *esse* is subsisting” does not operate merely in the register of the possible, along the lines of the second stage of the *De Ente* argument, where Aquinas merely speculates on the force that such possibility has in excluding multiplicity.⁶³ Instead, the argument draws on the established fact (*quia*) of such a nature,

⁶¹ SCG II.52.

⁶² In the following chapter, I will show how Aquinas maintains such an account must be analogical to the true or proper *ratio essendi*, which belongs to God alone as “*ipsum esse subsistens*.”

⁶³ Wippel disagrees with this assessment: “Even though Aquinas can and does assume in this argument that God exists (he has already offered philosophical argumentation for this in SCG I.13), the assumption is not required for the argument to be valid. The argument rests on the impossibility of there being more than on

which as actual must exclude multiplicity lest it not remain *esse tantum*. Thus, everything else receiving *esse* must receive it as really distinct from its own nature. We witness here once again the use of *ipsum esse subsistens* both to illuminate the need for everything else to *have being*, but also to distinguish those beings having being (*entia habentia esse*) from being itself (*ipsum esse*), which alone retains the true sense of being. Thus, to restate the conclusion from above, even immaterial entities lack *esse per se* and remain existentially imperfect in terms of their being.

As *principium et causa essendi*, Aquinas has allocated a role for God that is not merely *primum inter pares* (“first amongst equals”) but the very cause of being, and therefore of causality itself.⁶⁴ To return to the passage referenced above, he states:

[...] sicut supra particulares causas generationis huius vel illius est sol universalis causa generationis; et rex est universalis causa regiminis in regno, supra praepositos regni et etiam urbium singularium. Omnibus autem commune est *esse*. Oportet igitur quod supra omnes causas sit aliqua causa cuius sit dare esse. Prima autem causa Deus est, ut supra ostensum est. Oportet igitur omnia quae sunt a Deo esse.⁶⁵

Just as the king stands as universal cause of government in his whole realm, whose *imperium* transcends but makes possible particular governors in his kingdom, so too God stands as the universal cause of being, whose giving of being (*dare esse*) transcends but makes possible all particular causes and beings (*entia*). God’s firstness transcends the very order to which it gives rise.⁶⁶ The cause above all causes (*supra omnes causas*)

self-subsisting *esse*. If many other beings do exist, in all of them, with this single possible exception, essence and *esse* must differ.” “Metaphysics,” 104.

⁶⁴ If God is being itself and the cause of being, does this not make God *causa sui*? As will be seen below, Aquinas addresses this problem through analogical causation. The being caused by God is of a different order than his own being. See below Chapter III.

⁶⁵ SCG II.15.

⁶⁶ And yet, as I will argue in the next chapter, Aquinas doubles back on this radical transcendence by making beings (*entia*) nothing more than participants in divine *esse*. Thus, each being (*ens*) becomes nothing more than a mere repetition of this *first*. Creation turns out to be a serialization of God’s *esse*, and

causally grounds the rest. It will be important to keep in mind that although above “all causes” (i.e., the totality of causes), Aquinas does not state that God’s *dans esse* is extra-causal or “non-causal.” Instead, it bears some relationship to the totality of causes without itself being reduced to their order. Thus, it can be both *causal* (i.e., not without causality), otherwise it would be ineffectual; and yet, it is not merely one cause amongst many (*unum inter pares*) otherwise, as “a cause” it would need to ground itself. As will be seen, “the non-reciprocal relationship” between the universal ground of all causes *dans esse* and those particular causes and beings that it grounds requires a “bond of analogy” in order to protect the purity of the first cause and yet sustain traces of it (i.e., as cause) in its effects such that one can demonstratively move from the grounded to its ground.

Conclusion: The Two Grounds of Beings

Demonstrating the essence of God as such uniquely “subsisting being” enables the inference that because all else *lacks* the subsistence of being (*esse*), being must be given from another. This lack is metaphysically relevant in pointing to *the fact that there are creatures*, which must have been given their being from another.⁶⁷ This explains why, Aquinas takes note of the fact that there are entities other than God, unlike Aristotelian essentialism, which can pass off the *an sit* of such sensible things as a given.⁶⁸ For

not a radical diversification of the first from all that follows, a diversification *for which esse* was introduced in the first place!

⁶⁷ This fact cannot be demonstrated from within the order of essences, and thus is not knowledge (*scientia*) as such. The initial act of *intellectus essentiae*, upon which *scientia* is derived, only reveals that the essence of every created being does not imply *esse*. Such a “non-implication,” however, only becomes a metaphysically significant existential problem in lieu of the fact that without the efficient endowment of *esse* through which creatures participate, God alone would exist.

⁶⁸ Even for Augustine, as Gilson notes, “the fact that there are creatures” needs to be parsed out in existential terms. For Augustine, this fact of being (*esse*) reflects only the essential degree of being for

Aquinas, “whether there are entities” becomes more than the mere starting point from which *intellectus/nous* can ask “and *what* was it to be such a thing” and *scientia/episteme* can proceed with its demonstrations. Instead his questioning probes a deeper, extra-essential, *incidental* fact of “whether there are entities *at all*.” Rendering an account of why there are entities requires a different type of explanation.⁶⁹ As will be discussed below,⁷⁰ only efficient causality can explain the fact that there are beings, but not efficient causality in a sense reducible to essence (e.g., *omne agens agit sibi simile*).⁷¹ Unlike with Avicenna’s derived or emanated necessity, the causal act of *giving being*, for Aquinas, can appeal only to the *givenness* of being, which cannot be reduced to an essence, and thus remains extra-*intelligible* and unscientific. The fact of being (*esse*), just as the fact of someone’s *being* a carpenter *and* a musician, exceeds the range of essential/categorical accountability and must be treated as an existential problem.

The revolutionary move by Aquinas toward a real distinction between *esse* and essence, as traced over the course of the last two chapters, has been to radically and fundamentally separate the conditions for the possibility of any given thing from the conditions for its actuality. As most clearly expressed in the passage from the

creatures. God as supreme essence is immutable; for all beings contains greater or lesser degrees of (essential) being, and thus of mutability. See Gilson, *Christian Philosophy*, 60-63.

⁶⁹ Both Owens and Gilson make this point clear throughout their writings. It is not enough to begin with the fact that there are things about which the mind can form conceptions and subsequently make demonstrations. This is the procedure outlined by the *Posterior Analytics*. What instead must be recognized—this happens only through the activity of judgment, according to Owens—is that all the substantial and accidental features of something is grounded in the more fundamental fact that it *exists*. This is the insight to which Aristotle did not return. See, for example, Owens, *An Interpretation of Existence*. In particular, “Chapter II: Grasp of Existence.” See also Gilson: “The proper function of judgment is to say existence, and this is why judgment is a type of cognition distinct from, and superior to, pure and simple abstract conceptualization” Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* 202.

⁷⁰ See below Chapter V.

⁷¹ Such a distinction corresponds to what Gilson calls the distinction between “state of existence” versus the “act of being.” The latter goes beyond the mere actual existence of the essence. The *si est* of Aristotelian metaphysics and epistemology, Gilson might say, asks if it is a rose, not if it *exists*.

Commentary on the Sentences discussed above,⁷² the real otherness between something and its being (i.e., its *actus essendi*) does not correspond to a distinction between two things (*res*) comprising a single unity, nor does it consist of something (i.e., an essence) and the addition of an accident. Instead, such real otherness reflects the fundamental incommensurability between something (i.e., as determined by its formal qualities) and its *act of being*, each of which emerge from separate grounds. Thus, even when a nature comes to be, it retains the same existential impotence as it had before its emergence. This means that no nature, no matter how essentially perfect, can find existential ground within the essential order. Once translated into a metaphysics of creation, such a separation between essence and *esse* preserves the novelty of coming *to be*, sheltering its radical inceptuality against its reinscription into an essential order, and requiring a continual influx of *esse* through conservation.

At this point, we can conclude about *esse* as the “perfection of all perfections” and the “act of all actuality” that its *arrival to* anything stands outside that thing’s essence and even when participated by the thing, *esse* retains an otherness. This means that something’s *actus essendi* cannot, at least not primarily, be transcribed as one more fact about the essence or a part of something’s essential content. Instead, *esse* arrives from a separate ground and thus enters into to a composition with the thing through a non-reductive synthesis. In order to think such a synthesis underlying every mundane thing, however, one must first treat “*esse*” as something fundamentally other than a more abstract and indeterminate repetition of every other concept. Thus, unlike with the ubiquitous and confused meaning of *ens vel esse* in the hands of such thinkers as Duns Scotus, who admittedly maintains *ens vel esse* to be the most extensive and common of

⁷² See *In I Sent.* d. 38, q. 1, art. 3, sol. and above Chapter I, Section 5.

all concepts and opposed only to nothingness, *esse* as perfection requires positive content. Such a forgetful confusion, which Fabro following Heidegger deems the “*Vergessenheit des Seins*,” has led to the treatment of “*esse*” as the most extensive and thereby the most meaningless conceptual iteration.⁷³ With such an extension (i.e., to everything indiscriminately and without determinate negation) “*esse*” as Hegel teaches in the *Science of Logic*, becomes indistinguishable from nothingness: “Being (*Sein*), the indeterminate immediate, is in fact *nothing*, and neither more nor less than *nothing*.”⁷⁴

Although Scotus will argue such confused extensity is a necessary requirement for the concept of being, such that will allow for us to know something as a being and yet be uncertain of its finitude or infinitude, a matter to which we will return below, its lack of determinate negation prohibits it from being a perfection.⁷⁵ For Aquinas, however, *esse* emerges as a perfection needed by all beings once it has been enshrined with “real positive content,” which occurs through establishing it as a “permanent referent,”⁷⁶ removing any impurities that would infringe upon its being “that and nothing else,” and making it incommunicable insofar as any univocal distribution would require the addition of something else.⁷⁷ Such a move operates by locating a *self-identity of being*, or “*ipseity*,” as something that is *actus primus et purus* of “only being.” Thus, we might say, Aquinas’s move beyond Neoplatonism is to think the “subsistence through purity of act”

⁷³ Fabro, “The Transcendentality of ‘Ens-Esse’ and the Ground of Metaphysics” 411. Martin Heidegger, *passim*.

⁷⁴ Hegel, *Science of Logic*. trans A.V. Miller (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1969), 82

⁷⁵ See below Chapter VI Section 1.

⁷⁶ As Gilson states concerning *esse*: “Its wealth consists, first, of all the judgments of existence it virtually comprises and connotes, but much more of its permanent reference to the infinitely rich reality of the pure act of existing.” Ibid. 44.

⁷⁷ See also *ST I*, q. 3, a. 4, ad 3. Here Aquinas argues that *esse commune* by itself is most common, not most perfect. Thus, the *esse* that is the really distinct perfection of each thing must include reference to *ipsum esse subsistens* (otherwise the concept of *esse* would be the empty *esse commune*). Only once Aquinas has identified *esse* with God can he show the necessity of such as a really distinct perfection.

clause in terms that do not require the cause of all being to itself be “without being.”⁷⁸ Its purity does not require it to not-be in order that it be able to give (i.e., cause) all being.⁷⁹ Instead, what Aquinas’s existential metaphysics negotiates (against essentialism) is that all beings *need being* because such a perfection contains the very source of their perfections (i.e., *esse* is the act of all formal actuality); and yet (against Neoplatonism) the purity of the source can sustain a referent (i.e., the type knowable through demonstration) through its effective diffusion. By sustaining a reference to a “pure act of being,” there emerges a perfection required by all natures (i.e., *esse*), yet necessarily and really other to such natures given the determinate negation that results in identifying such a pure perfection.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ This argument becomes clear in Aquinas’s response to the disputed question of whether there can be anything not created by God; he states: “Tertia ratio est, quia illud quod est per alterum, reducitur sicut in causam ad illud quod est per se. Unde si esset unus calor per se existens, oporteret ipsum esse causam omnium calidorum, quae per modum participationis calorem habent. Est autem ponere aliquod ens quod est ipsum suum esse: quod ex hoc probatur, quia oportet esse aliquod primum ens quod sit actus purus, in quo nulla sit compositio. Unde oportet quod ab uno illo ente omnia alia sint, quaecumque non sunt suum esse, sed habent esse per modum participationis. Haec est ratio Avicennae. Sic ergo ratione demonstratur et fide tenetur quod omnia sint a Deo creata.” *De Pot.*, q. 3, a. 5, resp. In later works he will come to define this giving of *esse* more explicitly in terms of creation *ex nihilo*. See *De Pot.* q. 3, a. 1, resp and Chapter V below. To this question of whether God *creates* every being, he responds that every thing that in any way *is* is from God. If some perfection is found in something through participation, it is necessary that it was caused by that thing to which the perfection is found essentially. Through this link between perfection and participative causality, which Aquinas highlights through the example of heat in iron (i.e., participative) and heat in fire (i.e., essential). At this point, Aquinas deploys many of the same issues surrounding the fourth way: everything other than God is not its own *esse*, but participates in *esse*; creatures participate in *esse* more and less perfectly; God as the first being, who is *most perfect*, causes being in everything else. See *ST I*, q. 44, a. 1. resp. and Chapter V below. See also *In I Sent.* d. 38, q. 1, art. 3, sol.

⁷⁹ Gilson states this matter quite clearly as follows: “In a metaphysics of being, such as a Christian metaphysics, for instance, each and every lower grade of reality owes its being to the fact that the first principle *is*. In a metaphysics of the One, however, it is a general rule that the lower grades of reality are only because their first principle itself is not. In order to give something, a cause is bound to be above it, for if the superior already had that which it causes, it could not *cause* it, it would *be* it.” *Being and Some Philosophers*, 23.

⁸⁰ Gilson has been one of the most vociferous defenders of the novelty of this move on the part of Aquinas. In addition, he has shown the ways in which other Christian philosophers failed to think being as *esse*, even while embracing creation *ex nihilo*. The Gilsonian, and more broadly existentialist, “actus essendi” measures being solely against “nothingness” and categorically precludes “degrees of being.” Every creature is equally set against nothingness: existence no more *belongs* to the essence of the highest archangel than it does to a pebble of sand. In both cases, existence is *donated* to the entity, and by rejecting “degrees of being,” Gilson stresses the “givenness” of such (*esse*). The Gilsonian position sees such a tempered ascent from nothingness, as one finds with Dewan’s reading of Aquinas, as the byproduct of Neoplatonic and

Given what has been said about a cause of being that *gives being* (*dare esse*) without either being the recipient of that which it gives nor transcending that which it gives in such a way that we are left with but a negation (i.e., the cause of being is “not-being”), in what follows a number of issues require more sustained development: first, we must view how Aquinas uses effects as traces of some first, whose essence is *to be*. Having established God alone as such subsisting being and pure simplicity thereby necessitating an element of composition in everything else, a second question comes to the fore: namely, how does the transcendent source of all *esse* share in that which is given, if the former by its nature remains incommunicable? This will prompt a discussion of Aquinas’s understanding of analogical causation, which cuts between a mundane reduction of a cause to the order of its effects (i.e., univocity) and an abandonment of the cause altogether as something exceeding the established order altogether and thereby *beyond* any discernable contact with its effects (i.e., equivocity). This will be followed by

Augustinian metaphysics, which treat *esse* as the outcome measurable in degrees of an entity’s essential determination. According to Gilson, such a reduction of *actus essendi* to an essential outcome fundamentally misreads the existential move of Aquinas’s real distinction. Gilson like Owens, casts doubt upon *intellectus essentiae* as sufficient for grounding the real distinction, even though questioning the “demonstrability” of God as *ipsum esse subsistens*. Without the positive content of *ipsum esse subsistens*, which moves our conception of being from the most abstract and empty to the most concrete, the non-implication of “esse” in our understanding of essences (*intellectus essentiae*) does not point to a lack. Gilson’s concern perpetually seems to be that the extra-essential actuality brought by *esse* gets lost in the shuffle of parsing out something’s essential determinations. One could simply remain on Augustinian or Neoplatonic grounds and assert that “esse” is not understood through essences (i.e., *intellectus essentiae* argument) because “esse” signifies nothing other than essence and only God is most truly essence (i.e., being). Everything other than God is not truly essence because it is mutable, even angels who are composed of form and “spiritual matter.” Gilson, *Christian Philosophy*, 60-63. Furthermore, Gilson states, “...all the arguments one can use to establish the distinction between being and essence in Thomas Aquinas’ doctrine presuppose the prior recognition of the ‘act of being’ (*esse*).” In answering how one achieves this prior recognition, which even most philosophers have not accomplished, Gilson notes an impasse around this real distinction as such does not give rise to a philosophical demonstration. He goes on to state: “This impasse is an invitation to us to give up the philosophical way—from creatures to God—and try the theological way—from God to creatures. Thomas Aquinas may well have first conceived the notion of an act of being (*esse*) in connection with God and then, starting from God, made use of it in his analysis of the metaphysical structure of composite substances. Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, 131. See also, from the same year: Gilson, *Christian Philosophy*, Chapter 6. *Christian Philosophy* 56. The theological way that Gilson recommends in this passage means that a philosophical path, either from knowledge of creatures or from demonstrative knowledge of God, cannot be reached—a concession untroubling to Gilson’s Metaphysics of *Exodus*.

larger discussion of how Aquinas introduces “creation *ex nihilo*” as the causal ground of giving being.

In what follows, our task will be to constellate the various points that comprise Aquinas’s existential metaphysics: such include his theory of analogical causation and predication; his notion of participation as the mechanism of causal distribution; and finally his (two-pronged) argument for the separation between the divine preconception of essential possibilities (and what this entails) from their existential enactment and sustainability through creation and conservation (and what these *add* to such possibilities). In separating something’s essential determination from whether or not it *actually is*, we must remember contra-Sigerian essentialism that the latter cannot adequately be represented in terms of conceptual content and thereby as something (i.e., a fourth nature) to be *included* or *occluded* as an essential determination. Although Aquinas already had grasped such otherness in *intellectus essentiae* argument of *De Ente* IV, the full weight of this distinction could only be unleashed—and fully secured—when set in reference to the “plenitude of perfection” that is the *actus primus et purus essendi per se subsistens*, and even more, through the aforementioned “constellation” of points surrounding the existential problematic. As the next three chapters will argue, such a perfection is inextricably linked to the non-reciprocal bond of reference that allows creatures to attest to the perfection of their creator without in any way supplementing its plenitude, a plenitude distributed to creatures through participation and because fundamentally incommensurable with any essence—no matter how *perfectly* it is *per se*—only created and sustained through the continual influx of existential otherness.

Chapter III. The Non-Reciprocal Communion: Analogy as the Bond of Being Between *Ipsum Esse Subsistens* and *Esse Commune*

The previous two chapters argued that the real distinction between essence and *esse* in material and immaterial substances cannot fully emerge from an inspection of their order alone. Such a distinction requires reference to *ipsum esse subsistens* in order both to reveal the perfective actuality brought by *esse*, irreducible to essence, and also to mandate such actuality remain other to any being other than God. This chapter will show that God as *ipsum esse subsistens* and *maxime ens* serves as the primary and principal *significatum* or analogue of *esse* and through the identity of being with God himself, the otherness of being to everything else emerges. With God's radical self-identity (i.e., *ipseity*)¹ preventing any distribution of his being to creatures, how can there be a bond of being uniting all beings and grounding them in a single referential principle? How can *esse commune* be said *to be* in any meaningful sense if *ipsum esse subsistens* shares none of its own being? And finally, how can creatures attest to their cause in demonstrations for the existence of God if cause and effect share nothing in common? These will be the problems confronted by analogy.

The problem at hand can be unpacked in terms of a two-sided threat surrounding the need for creatures to participate *esse*.² Either, on the one hand, God becomes just one

¹ In the previous chapters, I had discussed how God as *subsisting existence itself* (*ipsum esse subsistens*) cannot be divided or shared in any way. Thus, unlike a genus or species, his self-identity of being, or "*ipseity*," cannot be communicated to many nor reducible to a higher commonality. Such an identity is radical because God's nature is not merely *different* from creatures (i.e., according to a common unity), but *diverse*. As I shall argue in this chapter, analogy is meant to keep that diversity in play while allowing creatures to *be like* God to such an extent that demonstrations for the existence of God can be made beginning with creatures. And despite this *likeness* of creatures to God, God is in no way like creatures.

² This is *similar* to the one addressed above, but adds another degree of complexity. For the statement of the earlier two extremes, see above, for example Chapter I Section 4. The primary difference is that instead of God being "first among many beings," now his being (*esse*) is actually shared by such beings. Thus, it is

more member—albeit *primus*—in the “growing empire of the univocal and intelligible concept of *ens*”³ due to his sharing *being* (*esse*) with all other beings (*entia*). Causal firstness does nothing to protect “purity of act” if a univocal community results between beings (i.e., the first and everything else); this is because somehow they must *reciprocally* communicate—a reciprocity in terms of a shared *third*, non-identical to either and thereby able to be composed with both. If, however, *actus primus et purus* were to communicate through a non-identical third (e.g., a genus of being, or even only a transcendental concept), it would receive its *portion* or *share* of such non-identical content as a recipient, an impure subject receptive of something other than itself.

On the other hand, however, and this brings us to the second threat, distancing the first act from the rest threatens to *withdraw* God’s transcendence of being to the point where the being locatable only on this side of creation (i.e., *esse commune*) no longer signifies the same thing as *ipsum esse subsistens* and any attestation on the part of recipient to the giver’s *perfective plenitude* falls silent.⁴ The *esse* of *entia creata* no longer reflects or attests to the existential perfection of *ipsum esse subsistens*, and “*esse*” holds together the two, not through a shared account, but by an empty word. The extreme diversity of this solution, which as Marion argues “saves God’s distance” and prevents

the difference between a mere *univocity* of being and pantheism. The way in which the threat of univocity “borders” that of pantheism will be made apparent throughout this chapter.

³ Marion states: “The analogy of being—about which it makes sense to emphasize once again that Thomas Aquinas scarcely uses the term *analogia entis*—has no other function than to dig the chasm that separates the two understandings of *esse* (and not to bridge it). It is even more necessary to underline that, coming from Dun Scotus unto Suarez by means of Cajetan, the inflation of this doctrine has had no other aim than to submit it to the growing empire of the univocal and intelligible concept of *ens*” Jean-Luc Marion, “Thomas Aquinas and Onto-theo-logy,” 48-49.

⁴ The latter is the solution of Jean-Luc Marion. In *God Without Being*, he states: “[Aquinas] does not chain God to Being because divine *esse* immeasurably surpasses (and hardly maintains an *analogia* with) the *ens commune* of creatures, which are characterized by the real distinction between *esse* and their essence, whereas God and He alone, absolutely merges essence with *esse*: God is expressed as *esse*, but this *esse* is expressed only of God, not of the beings of metaphysics. In *this* sense, Being does not erect an idol before God, but saves his distance.” Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), xxiii.

idolatry, may be the only way out of the bind of onto-theology.⁵ According to such a solution, however, *ipsum esse subsistens* gives to beings the same perfection possessed by itself *only* in the most extremely equivocal sense, incurring the cost of existential evacuation: “*esse*” becomes meaningless as a shared term because the primary *significatum*—“*esse*’s” transcendental signifier—stands outside the realm of possible meaning.⁶

In addition to these two “threats,” we must identify a *third*, which is more of a hybrid of the two than its own species; such a “monster,” however, is most dangerous of all because it incorporates elements of the others and can be reached by too far a transgression on either path. This is the “threat” of monism, either in the guise of pantheism or Parmenideanism, which results from a failure to negotiate the distance between the first and all else that follows because it *collapses* everything into divine being (or divine being into everything). It fails to order multiplicity around a common principle and referent in such a way that the one orders the many into a unity while remaining distinct from such an order. This failure to remain distinct occurs by making itself either so *immanent* to the unity that it becomes the unity itself (and thereby one) or so radically transcendent that the unity itself becomes nothing: all is one because either the many are identical to the one or they are nothing at all.

⁵ To recap the discussion from above, onto-theo-logy, as defined by Marion following Heidegger, is the systematic grounding by a metaphysics of all beings and their being. For Heidegger’s account of onto-theo-logy, see “The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics” from *Identity and Difference* (1957) and p. 14 fn. 21 above. Although Marion seems more willing to loosen the ties that bind God to creation in order to escape onto-theo-logy and preserve divine transcendence, I will argue that Aquinas’s demonstration for the existence of God (the *fourth way*, in particular) and his theory of analogy do not attempt such a radical evacuation of the existential field.

⁶ See *In I Sent.* d. 8, q. 1, a. 1. Here Aquinas demonstrates how “*esse*” is properly said of God, who is “*qui est*” and that such is the maximally proper name amongst all the divine names.

Either monistic extreme signifies a failure to think a unified existential field grounded in an *actus primus et purus* irreducible to the field itself. The problem for Aquinas's existential metaphysics will be to find *enough* commonality amidst a multiplicity of applications for "*esse*" to justify a common name. Such metaphysics becomes most vulnerable, I will argue, when it must parse the meaning of "*esse*" in its secondary application and avoid saying God is being itself and creatures *are* only by extrinsic denomination. This would mean "*existence*" is not an intrinsic property of creatures, but their relation to something else (i.e., God) as medicine is not intrinsically healthy, but healthy in reference to the health it produces in a body. Defining created *esse* as relation to God, however, does not seem to sufficiently emphasize what separates an actual being from a mere possibility, as both a human and a phoenix can be characterized by a relation to God.⁷ Although such relations are different, the extrinsicism of both fails capture what "*esse*" was meant to introduce: the ultimate actuality of any being, which as fundamentally extra-conceptual, can be withheld in essential contemplation. The problem with an "extrinsic attribution" of "being" is that it minimizes the existential difference between a mere conceptual possibility and something actually *in re*: both *in intellectu* and *in re* become extrinsic modes of relation accidentally attached to an essence, but not some act or power of the being itself.

Aquinas's attempted way out of this bind derives from his theory of *analogy*, which institutes *ipsum esse subsistens* as the existential ground of every being and all being (*ens* and *esse commune*) without making such an eminent principle part of or subject to the existential community. Thus, everything that is derives its being from the principle of being (*principium essendi*) and reflects the plenitude and the perfection of its power, even

⁷ See below, Chapter V Sections 3-5.

though the eminence of the transcendental signifier can never be reflected in any—or every—single mode of finite being. Nevertheless, as will be discussed below, only through the coronation of the existential field with its primary and perfect analogue (i.e., *ipsum esse subsistens*) can there be any significant connection between *esse commune* and its ground in divine *esse*. Analogy, for Aquinas, functions as an indispensable principle of unity that maintains difference and distinction between beings according to the mode of *dissimilarity*. His solution to the above-stated problem rests on analogy’s unification of everything that “is” insofar as it is a *similitude* of the first, but as similitude, does not share in an essential community with the first.⁸

Although revisiting familiar themes from the previous chapters, this chapter will pursue such under the guise of the connections or bonds which *demonstratively*, *causally*, and *predicatively* link the unrepeatable and incommunicable *ipsum esse subsistens* to that which repeats *esse* and to which *esse* is communicated. Thus, by discussing the issues of demonstration, participation, and analogy in this chapter, we will be in a position to explore *creative* dimensions of the “real otherness” between *esse* and essence in the following chapters. Section 1 will address the *fourth way* of the *Summa Theologiae* and

⁸ See *SCG* I.29, *STI*, q. 4, a. 3, and *De Pot.* q. 7, a. 7, ad 2. In such cases, he uses the example of the sun. I will take up Aquinas’s extended discussion of analogy throughout this work and explain the various possibilities and the different ways he explains this relationship. Although analogy encompasses a broader range than likeness and similitude, I will explain below how Aquinas’s primary means of explaining the analogy between creatures and God is as a “non-reciprocal” similitude wherein they are likened to his *esse*, but he in no way is like or similar to them. God has being perfectly, whereas the creature “has what belongs to God,” and thereby is said to be “like” God. Aquinas explains that this is a “non-univocal likeness” because one form is not shared between two agents, but the form belongs to the one essentially and the others through participation. Turning to a stock example, he invokes the sun and sublunary heat: the sun has heat essentially, whereas sublunary bodies participate heat, and thereby fall short of the primary *significatum* of heat. Like the sun, *ipsum esse subsistens*, as the primary and principal *significatum* of being, provides the *ratio essendi* which all beings approximate and against which they are measured, and yet ultimately falls short because whenever being is said of any being other than God, it is not according to the same *ratio*. Aquinas thereby does not flatten the field of being, but maintains its *continuous verticality* crowned by the universal cause of being *ipsum esse subsistens*, which alone is being (*esse tantum*) thus necessitating a *similitude* (i.e., participatory having, but not being) for everything else.

connect this demonstration to Aquinas's argument in *De Ente* IV. Section 2 will show how Aquinas moves from the “*maxime ens*” (i.e., God) reached by the *fourth way* to the remotional characterization of God as an identity of *esse* and essence. Sections 3-4 will bring together the previous two sections around Aquinas's use of analogy to explain God's communication of being to beings without entering into an existential community with such beings. Section 3 will focus on the issue of eminent causation, which Aquinas invokes to explain how God is a non-univocal, but not entirely equivocal, cause of the being of creatures. Section 4 will consider the analogical predication of being, which ensues from this non-univocal and non-equivocal distribution of being.⁹ As these two sections show, analogy works both to preserve the incommunicability of God's being to creatures (i.e., *ipsum esse* to *esse commune*) and to enable creatures to reflect God in such a way that demonstration of an effect from its cause remains possible. The subsequent chapters will determine whether analogy as cast within the constellation of creation *ex nihilo* can sustain a meaning for *esse* attributable to created beings that does not *collapse* their actuality into their causal ground.

Section 1: *Maxime Ens* and *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*

Aquinas introduces the so-called “Five Ways” of *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3 in response to the question of whether God's necessary existence is self-evident (*per se nota*).¹⁰ Distinguishing between what is self-evident in itself versus self-evident to us,

⁹ I agree with Montagnes that Aquinas's doctrine of analogy encompasses both predication and causality and that it cannot be isolated solely to the former as a logical or linguistic doctrine. “Being” is said of creatures analogically because their being does not share the same *ratio* as their cause, but bears a similitude or trace (i.e., of proportion) to the cause. See Bernard Montagnes, *The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being according to Thomas Aquinas*. trans. E.M. Macierowski (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2004).

¹⁰ See also *SCG* I.10.

Aquinas maintains, counter to the Anselmian proof, that to us in this life, we cannot know the divine quiddity and thus cannot self-evidently know God *to be* (*Deum esse*). Without knowledge of God's essence, it seems that we cannot make demonstrations concerning God following the Aristotelian model of demonstration: In a proper demonstration, essence serves as the middle term of the premises. For example: All *animals* are mortal; Humans are *animals*; Therefore, humans are mortal. "Animal" is the middle term in this demonstration and, as the essence of humans, is that on account of which some property (e.g., mortality) can be demonstratively attributed to them. In the case of God, however, the divine essence cannot serve as the middle term, which seems to prohibit demonstrations for the existence of God or any of the divine attributes. Thus, if reason fails to secure knowledge of God, faith and revelation remain our only access to him in this life.

Aquinas confronts this seeming roadblock by appealing to Aristotle's distinction from the *Posterior Analytics* between demonstration *quia* and demonstration *propter quid*. Whereas demonstrations *propter quid* account for a property belonging to something based on *what it is*, demonstrations *quia* show *that* something is so based on its effects. As Aquinas argues in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, an effect takes the place of quiddity in demonstrations *quia*.¹¹ This means that given our inability to know God's essence in this life, nevertheless, based on observable effects, we can make demonstrations *that* he is the cause of such effects. The five ways, briefly stated, are demonstrations *quia*. Each begins with some observable fact, and reasons from this fact to its cause. Thus, from motion,

¹¹ "In rationibus autem quibus demonstratur Deum esse, non oportet assumi pro medio divinam essentiam sive quidditatem, ut secunda ratio proponebat: sed loco quidditatis accipitur pro medio effectus, sicut accidit in demonstrationibus quia; et ex huiusmodi effectu sumitur ratio huius nominis Deus. Nam omnia divina nomina imponuntur vel ex remotione effectuum divinorum ab ipso, vel ex aliqua habitudine Dei ad suos effectus." *SCG* I.12.

efficient causality, possibility, perfection, and government, Aquinas concludes that God is the cause of such effects. The *five ways* show *that God is* based on observable effects without attempting to utilize *what he is*.¹²

The fourth way must be discussed in detail because it, in particular, most explicitly appeals to being in demonstrating the existence of God. Whereas the other ways appeal to being *qua* some determinate manner of being (i.e., *qua* moving, caused, possible, or purposiveness), the fourth way treats being in relation to the other transcendental perfections. Like all of the ways, it begins from some observable effect, and from this effect concludes to its cause. In this case, from the degrees of perfection observable in things, we can conclude to some *most perfect* measure by which their varying degrees are judged. Aquinas states:

¹² The other four ways argue the following: The first way begins with the fact of motion and reasons to the first cause of motion, an unmoved mover. The observable effect of motion substitutes for a quiddity. Thus, given the fact that everything is moved by another, we can reason to an unmoved source of motion. Likewise, with the following four ways. The second way begins from the world of sensible things and the order of efficient causes observable therein: the cause of an effect must be *prior to* that effect. Nothing can be prior to itself, and thus an effect cannot be cause of itself. The cause as prior is that without which there would be no effect, a relation of priority which cannot run to infinity lest there be no causal sequence at all. Thus, there must be a first efficient cause. The third way begins from the possibility either to be or not to be of things that are generated and corrupted. They cannot always exist since, given their previous generation (i.e., coming into being), they are capable of not-being and at some time were not. Such things *have being*, but only from a cause and only after *not-being*. This is what it means to be *possible* in regard to existence: *per se* they do not determine themselves *to be*, but only *able to be*. Thus, if everything were capable of such non-being (i.e., only *possible* with regard to existence), then everything at some point would not have been. Everything would *have being after non-being* and only through a cause. The equal need of everything for a *cause to be* would equally eliminate anything from being the cause of anything else, as it too required a cause in order to be a cause. But given the fact *there is something*, there must be something necessary in regard to its being, otherwise nothing would have been or could ever come to be. Aquinas further argues that this necessary thing has necessity from itself or from another cause. If the latter, then that cause of necessity also would be a necessary being and have its necessity either from itself or another. Once again, this chain cannot run into infinity, lest there be no first to *give* necessity to anything else. Thus, there must be a first necessary being that has its necessity *per se*. This, Aquinas maintains, we call God. Before turning to this characterization, a word must be said about the fifth way. The fifth way argues from the purposive action in both natural bodies and rational agents to a governor of such action. The continual striving to achieve some end by natural bodies, which lack rational deliberation, indicates *design*, and thus cannot be by blind chance alone. Given the design of such action, an intelligent designer must be posited to account for such design. From the observed effect of ordered action in the world, we can conclude the existence of a governor of such order. This governor is God.

Quarta via sumitur ex gradibus qui in rebus inveniuntur. Invenitur enim in rebus aliquid magis et minus bonum, et verum, et nobile: et sic de aliis huiusmodi. Sed magis et minus dicuntur de diversis secundum quod appropinquant diversimode ad aliquid quod maxime est, sicut magis calidum est, quod magis appropinquat maxime calido. Est igitur aliquid quod est verissimum, et optimum, et nobilissimum, et per consequens maxime ens: nam quae sunt maxime vera, sunt maxime entia, ut dicitur II Metaphys. Quod autem dicitur maxime tale in aliquo genere, est causa omnium quae sunt illius generis: sicut ignis, qui est maxime calidus, est causa omnium calidorum, ut in eodem libro dicitur. Ergo est aliquid quod omnibus entibus est causa esse, et bonitatis, et cuiuslibet perfectionis: et hoc dicimus Deum.¹³

According to this argument, various grades are discovered in things. Something can be *more or less* good, true, noble, etc. than another. Calling something “more or less,” however, indicates their approximation to a maximum. Aquinas provides the example of something being hotter than another insofar as it approximates maximal heat.

Furthermore, the maximal in any such genus is the cause of everything in that genus.¹⁴

The perfection of the genus *heat* is realized in the species *fire*, and the species *fire* as the maximum of heat, is the cause of everything hot (i.e., all other species of hot objects).¹⁵

¹³ ST I. q. 2, a. 3, resp. For a similar presentation of this argument, see SCG I.13.

¹⁴ What does Aquinas mean by “cause of” in this context? For a discussion of this issue, see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 473–475. The example Aquinas provides is limited in answering this question as it relates only to an accidental kind (e.g., heat) and one that obviously admits of degrees. E.g., white, as the most perfect color, measures all other colors. Does this mean that *white* is the efficient cause of all other colors? See SCG I.62. Also, cf. Boethius’s argument for the identity of God as the *princeps omnium* with the perfect good and true happiness. See *Consolations* III.10. Here Boethius begins from the intuitively obvious point that we can judge *more and less* in terms of happiness, which indicates (the not-so intuitively obvious) conclusion that there must be a *most happiness* by which we can judge comparative grades. This real standard is the perfect instantiation of the *ratio*, namely the maximum of the kind.

¹⁵ Maximally x equals a perfect or “complete” x. Remember, in the argument from act and potency, Aquinas had stated the possibility of an essential perfection for creatures while maintaining their existential imperfection, and thus potency. Over the course of this chapter, I will show how Aquinas utilizes God’s existential perfection and firstness in any order to explain him as the cause of “whatever (essential) perfection” in creatures. Thus, even though subsisting fire (i.e., absolutely maximal heat) would be hotter than the sun (i.e., relatively maximal heat), through eminent causation, God takes over the role as “first cause of heat” even without *actually* containing heat.

Thus, Aquinas begins the argument for God from the observation of grades of things being *more or less* true, good, and noble.¹⁶ Focusing on the first of these, he musters support for this observation in part from Aristotle’s claim that not everything is equally true/mistaken, but can be more or less true/mistaken.¹⁷ For example, he argues, “four is five” is *less mistaken* than “four is a thousand” and therefore *more true* than the latter.¹⁸ In order to account for its being *more true*, there must be something to which it approximates to a greater degree than something *less true*. Otherwise, such an account of truth would be ungrounded and everything would be equally true.¹⁹ The measure of *true*, which is *most true* (*verissimum*), institutes the ground upon which all other truths can be derived, just as fire establishes the ground upon which all other things can be said to be *hot*. Because being and truth follow one another, as *true* speaks to what *is* and *false* to what *is not*,²⁰ such that those things that are *most true* are *most beings*,²¹ there must be something that is most being (*maxime ens*). Furthermore, Aquinas argues,²² just as the

¹⁶ In *Metaphysics* II.1, Aristotle states: “To explain a thing it is necessary to know which among a number of things that have some trait in common give that trait to others. So fire, being hottest, is the reason why other things are hot. So, too, what is most true is the reason why other things are derivatively true. Hence, the principles of eternal things are necessarily most true; for they are true always and not merely sometimes; and there is nothing which explains their being what they are, for it is they that explain the being of other things. Consequently, status in being governs status in truth” (993b.25-31).

¹⁷ Even though the choice of example would suggest otherwise, Wippel holds that Aquinas has in mind ontological truth, not logical truth (i.e., the truth of a proposition). Thus something has *more or less truth* according to its degree of intelligibility: the elements are less formed and less intelligible than “the organized” structure of an animal, and thus is *less true*. See Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 471.

¹⁸ In the *Contra Gentiles* presentation of this argument, Aquinas emphasizes this statement of Aristotle such that of two false things, one can be *less false*—and therefore *more true*—than the other. See *SCG*.I.13.

¹⁹ See *Metaphysics* IV.4 (1008b.32-1009a.6).

²⁰ See *Metaphysics* IV.7 (1011b.26-30).

²¹ “[...] nam quae sunt maxime vera, sunt maxime entia, ut dicitur II Metaphys.” Here Aristotle argues that eternal principles are truer than others. By extension, Aquinas states that there must be that which is *most true* (*verissimum*) and this is God.

²² On this furtherance of the argument, Gilson notes: “The *Contra Gentiles* concludes the proof with an affirmation of the existence of a *maxime ens*, which is at once identified with God. The *Summa Theologiae* demonstrates further that what is *maxime ens* is also the universal cause of being and, consequently, can be nothing but God. Why this addition to the demonstration?” *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas*

maximal in any genus is the cause of everything in that kind (i.e., the cause of being under the *ratio* of that kind), so too there must be a cause of being (*esse*) in all beings (*entibus*). This cause, Aquinas concludes, we call God.

Through the language of *causality*, Aquinas has moved from a mere discussion of the transcendental concepts (i.e., *ens*, *verum*, *bonum*, etc.) to the register of actuality, *rerum natura*. “*Maxime ens*” is more than just a conceivable measure (i.e., if I recognize more or less, I can *imagine* a maximal), but causally operative in relation to all beings.²³ That is, God as the maximal being (*maxime ens*) causes *to be* for all beings (“*Ergo est aliquid quod omnibus entibus est causa esse...hoc dicimus Deum*”). The importance of introducing causality, I would argue, is that it highlights that not only must there be a conceivable measure of the maximal in any kind (i.e., a perfect *x*), but, as *cause*, there must be such a thing *in re* and this thing must be *first*.²⁴ Otherwise, in keeping with his mode of demonstration *quia*, nothing would explain the actual effect of *more and less* *x*-ness, the middle term of this demonstration.²⁵

Aquinas, 72. The addition, he argues, stems from the fact that “*maxime ens*” may signify only “a very high degree of being” and thus a relative (not an absolute) sense of “maximal.”

²³ See below fn. 35.

²⁴ Causality seems to free the argument from getting trapped in the conceptual sphere alone. I.e., that the *maxime x* is merely the maximally conceivable, but not the maximal *in re*. Take the example of maximal blackness. A definition of maximal blackness can be posited (i.e., reflecting 0% of light) against which this or that black object can be measured as *more or less* black. Such a definition of *perfect blackness* can serve as a measure for everything black, and yet nothing *in re* is maximally black. The problem with the argument nevertheless remains: whether Aquinas’s empirical example supports the claims that there must be a maximal in *any* genus and this maximal is the *cause* of everything in that genus. Little argues that the *fourth way* operates along lines of exemplary causality alone, without introducing (or smuggling in) efficient causality. See Arthur Little, *The Platonic Heritage of Thomism* (Dublin: Golden Eagle Books Limited Standard House, 1949), Chapter VI.

²⁵ “Thomas Aquinas’ Fourth Way of proving the existence of God, with the analogy it introduces, demonstrates the degrees of being which demand a *maxime ens* as compared to those things which are *magis et minus entia*. Even if the causality exerted by this *maxime ens* is the efficient causality which is proper to being, there is yet a real continuity of being moving from the lesser to the greater and eventually to the *maxime ens*. The descending hierarchy of perfection culminating in a universe which contains the deficient and the evil within it, may be impossible of explanation but we would like to suggest that the laws of metaphysical causality whereby no effect can equal its cause makes it impossible for God in His Goodness to communicate Himself totally. But this decreasing series of perfections approaches the

The crucial link in the argument of the *fourth way* is thus between *being imperfect* with respect to x and *having* x from another.²⁶ In those cases where something does not take on the complete *ratio* of a perfection—whether it be an accidental perfection such as heat or a transcendental perfection such as goodness, unity, or truth—but remains an imperfect instantiation, then it must have received this perfection from another in order to explain its imperfect having of this perfection. This means that the degrees of imperfection (i.e., “more or less”) approximating a maximum indicate a causal account whereby they have such a perfection, an account that must terminate in a first cause having the perfection from itself (i.e., essentially). Thus, at stake in the *fourth way* is not only recognition of degrees, but accounting for how such things come to have a degree of perfection if not from itself. It is this latter move that allows the argument to conclude that not only a maximal being can be conceived, but that God actually exists.

To explain this link in more detail, Aquinas’s example may be helpful. Any recognizable *imperfect* instantiation of a perfection, such as “heat,” requires an immediate cause no less perfect than itself with respect to the given perfection. The first cause must be “most” (i.e., no less than its effects) otherwise it could not cause the degree of perfection in its effects, and it must have the perfection through itself (*per se*),

indefiniteness of material goods to the diminishing point between the infinite and the indefinite” Carlo, *The Ultimate Reducibility*, 99. Carlo does not seem to differentiate univocal from eminent causation.

²⁶ Wipfel notes the controversial introduction of such a link to make sense of the fourth way: “In doing this [utilizing an argument based on participation], however, I must acknowledge that we have reinterpreted the fourth way seriously, and even in its substance. It will no longer be based solely on exemplar causality in its first stage, as its text indicates that it was originally intended to be. It will now be equivalent to the argument offered in the *Lectura* on St. John’s Gospel. But unless some such reinterpretation or substitution is introduced, it seems unlikely that the argument’s first stage can be regarded as successful in its attempt to prove that a maximum actually exists” 478. In regard to our further inquiry, what must be noted concerning the *fourth way* is the bond forged by Aquinas between the formal completeness of something (i.e., *more or less perfection* with regard to some form) and its causal status (i.e., *having* that perfection from a cause). Following from this, the more complete something is with regard to a perfection, the fewer intermediaries stand between it and the most perfect in its kind. In addition, as will be discussed below, the closer in proximity it is to the most perfect in its kind, or that which has the perfection from itself (i.e., essentially) and not from another, the more powerful it is.

otherwise it too would require a cause, running the causal chain indefinitely backwards. Thus, the heat in my cup of coffee requires a cause of equal or greater heat by which it has heat. The immediate cause of such *hot coffee* may be of the same species as itself, for example boiling water can impart heat to tepid water, or it may be of another species, as the fire that boils the water and previous fire that ignites the wood. Even the heat of fire (e.g., of a burning log) requires a cause of its heat: *heat* does not belong to the substance by its nature, even though its matter is receptive to the accidental form, even to the point of undergoing substantial change (i.e., wood is flammable and changes to ash). As none of these bodies are hot by themselves, and although receptive to heat in various degrees depending upon their matter, each must have as its original cause the maximal heat of something that is hot by its nature (i.e., fire).²⁷ Without such a first cause of heat, degrees of heat (i.e., the middle term of the demonstration) would lack an explanatory principle whereby they could be explained as observable effects.

It should be noted that although “participation” can be introduced at this point of the argument, it seems that participation *follows* an argument for God’s essential identity with his *esse* and thus can only shed light on the fourth way *post de facto*. This accords with what has been argued above concerning the real otherness between *esse* and essence, namely, it is only after the subsisting act of being has been reached that the communication of *esse* to anything other than God becomes precluded except through participation. As Owens has argued regarding *De Ente*, the need for beings to participate

²⁷ Aquinas’s analogy between accidental perfections such as heat and transcendental perfections such as goodness, truth, and most of all being must be called into question around the use of “maximum” in each case. With regard to the former, the maximum (i.e., the sun) is not an absolute maximum, but a relative maximum. The heat of the sun does not exhaust the perfection of heat. We could imagine, as Aquinas often does, a “subsisting heat,” which, as heat alone, would be even hotter than the sun. In regard to the latter perfection, there is such an absolute maximum.

esse remains hypothetical until the argument has reached a subsisting nature whose nature is to be because until that point *esse* could be causally “shared” in other ways.²⁸ The same goes for the argument of the *fourth way*: only once “most being” has been shown to be being *essentially* and also identical with *ipsum esse* does it become necessary for all else “to have being” through participation.²⁹ A scale of eminence grounded in “the most” does not by itself require the lesser degrees to participate: hot coffee is *really hot*; that is, it shares in the same *ratio* of heat as fire, even though due to its material substrate (i.e., qua water), it will return to its natural state of coolness. With this precautionary note in place, we can presuppose the lens of participation to further unpack the argument.

As we have seen, by participation Aquinas means to take a part of something, instead of grasping it in its entirety and according to its complete *ratio*.³⁰ In terms of the *fourth way*, an effect participates in its cause when it is unable to receive the full measure of its

²⁸ Joseph Owens, “The Causal Proposition—Principle or Conclusion?” *The Modern Schoolman* XXXII (March 1955): 269.

²⁹ Aquinas does, however, introduce this link in the following question after identifying God with his *esse*. For his third argument for the identity between essence and *esse* in God, he states: “Tertio, quia sicut illud quod habet ignem et non est ignis, est ignitum per participationem, ita illud quod habet esse et non est esse, est ens per participationem. Deus autem est sua essentia, ut ostensum est. Si igitur non sit suum esse, erit ens per participationem, et non per essentiam. Non ergo erit primum ens: quod absurdum est dicere. Est igitur Deus suum esse, et non solum sua essentia.” *ST I* q. 3, a. 4. resp. For the full citation of this article, see fn 51 below.

³⁰ See above Chapter II Section 1. For a larger study of Platonism in Aquinas, see Little, *The Platonic Heritage of Thomism*. On the Platonic principles at work in this argument, see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* 475-476. See also Rudi A. Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*. In his *Expositio de ebdomadibus*, Aquinas speaks of three forms of participation. See above: Chapter II Section 1. The first, which does not seem to involve metaphysical participation, is when a species participates in a genus or an individual in a species. This is a form of participation because the former in each case does not possess the *ratio* according to its total commonality and in the same way, but grasps only “a part.” The second is when a subject participates in an accident or matter participates in form. The third type is when an effect participates its cause, especially when the patient is not equal to the power of its cause. The example he gives is when air participates the light of the sun. He states: “Est autem participare quasi partem capere. Et ideo quando aliquid particulariter recipit id quod ad alterum pertinet, uniuersaliter, dicitur participare illud, sicut homo dicitur participare animal quia non habet rationem animalis secundum totam communitatem; et eadem ratione Sortes participat hominem. Similiter etiam subiectum participat accidens et materia formam, quia forma substancialis uel accidentalis, que de sui ratione communis est, determinatur ad hoc uel ad illud subiectum. Et similiter etiam effectus dicitur participare suam causam, et precipue quando non adequat uirtutem sue cause, puta si dicamus quod aer participat lucem solis quia non recipit eam in claritate qua est in sole.” *Expositio* L.2, ll. 70-85.

power. Thus, those things that are more or less *take part* in a cause that is *most*: just as illuminated air *participates* in the power of the sun (i.e., as cause of light), so too beings—none of which are “maximally being”—must *participate* in their cause, the first cause of being. What participation offers to the demonstration of the *fourth way* is an explanatory model whereby a first cause possesses a perfection completely and according to itself and yet is able to share such with its effects in a diminished manner.³¹ And in communicating this perfection to its effects according to various degrees (i.e., more or less), such multiplication does not disrupt or lessen the original unity of the perfection. Nor does communication of the perfection to the effect supplement the original *ratio* of the perfection. The perfection’s dissemination retains unity in the cause, the referential measure for everything having that perfection. Participation thus subsequently ties together for the *fourth way* an argument of “more or less referencing a most” with an

³¹ See *ST I*, q. 44, a. 1, resp. The question asks whether *omne ens* is created by God. Aquinas responds: “Respondeo dicendum quod necesse est dicere omne quod quocumque modo est, a Deo esse. Si enim aliquid invenitur in aliquo per participationem, necesse est quod causetur in ipso ab eo cui essentialiter convenit; sicut ferrum fit ignitum ab igne. Ostensum est autem supra, cum de divina simplicitate ageretur, quod Deus est ipsum esse per se subsistens. Et iterum ostensum est quod esse subsistens non potest esse nisi unum: sicut si albedo esset subsistens, non posset esse nisi una, cum albedines multiplicentur secundum recipientia. Relinquitur ergo quod omnia alia a Deo non sint suum esse, sed participant esse. Necesse est igitur omnia quae diversificantur secundum diversam participationem essendi, *ut sint perfectius vel minus perfecte* [m.e.], causari ab uno primo ente, quod perfectissime est. Unde et Plato dixit quod necesse est ante omnem multitudinem ponere unitatem. Et Arisoteles dicit, in II *Meta.*, quod id quod est maxime ens et maxime verum, est causa omnis entis et omnis veri, sicut id quod maxime calidum est, est causa omnis caliditatis.” Note that he again refers to *Metaphysics II*. Also, *ST I*, q. 50, a. 2, ad 4.: “Ad quartum dicendum quod omnis creatura est finita simpliciter, in quantum esse eius non est absolutum subsistens, sed limitatur ad naturam aliquam cui advenit. Sed nihil prohibet aliquam creaturam esse secundum quid infinitam. Creaturae autem materiales habent infinitatem ex parte materiae, sed finitatem ex parte formae, quae limitatur per materiam in qua recipitur. Substantiae autem immateriales creatae sunt finitae secundum suum esse, sed infinitae secundum quod eorum formae non sunt receptae in alio. Sicut si diceremus albedinem separatam existentem esse infinitam quantum ad rationem albedinis, quia non contrahitur ad aliquod subiectum; esse tamen eius esset finitum, quia determinatur ad aliquam naturam specialem.”

argument for the causal relationship between these various degrees based on a first cause that has the perfection from itself.³²

Even before introducing participation, the *fourth way* can assume that for perfections admitting of degrees, there must be something that *has* the perfection most perfectly in order to explain the *less perfect* having in all other members.³³ As it contains the most complete instantiation of the *ratio*, the perfection of any kind gives such perfection to all other members, which *have* it imperfectly.³⁴ This link between degrees of perfection and causal dependency raises the question of how well Aquinas's empirical example supports his demonstration: if the cause of all heat is the hottest actual thing (i.e., fire), and yet

³² On whether "participation" is introduced to supply the missing argumentation for an actually subsisting maximum, Wippel states: "One way of supplying the missing justification is to appeal to Thomas's metaphysics of participation and to regard the fourth way as an argument based on participation [...] Everything which is (such) by participation is reduced to something which is such of its essence as to something first and supreme. (Thus all things which participate in fire are reduced to fire which is such of its essence.) But since all things which exist participate in *esse* and are beings through participation, there must be something at the summit of all things which is *esse* of its essence in that its essence is its *esse*. This is God, the most sufficient and noblest and most perfect cause of all *esse*, from whom all things which exist participate in *esse*. This is an interesting approach and it rests on a principle frequently employed by Thomas in other contexts. That which participates in something must be traced back to something which is that perfection of its essence." *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 475-476. He goes on to argue that if something participates *x* (more than in a merely logical sense), then there must be an *efficient cause* of that which it participates.

³³ Gilson states: "Now, for a thing to be more perfect simply is *to be* in a higher degree than a less perfect one. And since to be in act is the same as to be perfect and to be, the more a thing is, the more in act and the more perfect it is. On the other hand, it is of the nature of that which is act that it should act, and it can act only upon other beings less perfect than itself, that is, upon being in potency with respect to the very perfection which, because it itself has it, it can impart to them. The central point of this doctrine is that, in virtue of the very nature of being, the very inequality created by God in beings *demand*s that the more perfect ones should act upon less perfect ones. Both physics and ethics hinge upon this literally 'cardinal' truth, for indeed just as, in the world of nature, causality is for the higher beings a sort of duty, so also, in human affairs, inferiors are bound to obey their superiors because it is of the very nature of higher beings to act upon lower ones. This social and political relationship of authority and of obedience therefore is rooted in the law of nature and, since nature is the creatures of God, it is primarily rooted in the divine law [...]" *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, 194-195.

³⁴ The more imperfect something is, the more it depends upon its cause to have that perfection. A burning log retains heat more perfectly than does a cup of hot coffee. "Quanto alicuius actionis principium est perfectius, tanto actionem suam potest in plura extendere et magis remota: ignis enim, si sit debilis, solum propinqua calefacit; si autem sit fortis, etiam remota. Actus autem purus, qui Deus est, perfectior est quam actus potentiae permixtus, sicut in nobis est. Actus autem actionis principium est. Cum igitur per actum qui in nobis est possumus non solum in actiones in nobis manentes, sicut sunt intelligere et velle, sed etiam in actiones quae in exteriora tendunt, per quas aliqua facta producimus; multo magis Deus potest, per hoc quod actu est, non solum intelligere et velle, sed etiam producere effectum. Et sic potest aliis esse causa essendi." *SCG II.6*.

there remains an exemplar of the greatest possible heat (i.e., the hypothetical subsisting heat), does this not cause problems for necessarily identifying the exemplar with the efficient cause? In other words, could not the maximally perfect possible being serve as the exemplar of all degrees of being, and yet the most perfect *actual* being—albeit less perfect than the most perfect yet non-existent possible being—serve as the cause of all being?³⁵

Whatever may be the case physically with heat, whiteness, etc.—that is, whether a subsisting heat would be *hotter than* that which is actually *maximally hot* (i.e., fire)—being must subsist in the maximally perfect measure because a most being that is possible cannot exceed the most being that is actual. Aquinas is not, however, passing from the conceptual register of possibility to the existential register of actuality, attempting to deduce a fact about actual existence from a mere concept. Instead, he starts with actual degrees of more or less being and shows how their actual measure and cause (i.e., most being) cannot be surpassed, even by something conceivably “more.” “Most being” is instead an absolute, and not merely a relative, measure because something conceivably more and yet non-existent is a self-refutation: the very content of being itself measures existential actuality. Unlike the content of formal essences, whose conceptual content can be increased beyond the actual maximum to an absolute maximum (e.g., an absolute blackness is conceptually greater than any existing blackness), the content of being is

³⁵ On this argument, Kenny asks: “Is the maximum (of heat, or of goodness) supposed to be something ideal (the hottest possible thing, the best possible thing) or something actual (the hottest actual thing, the best actual thing)? If the former, then it seems plausible to identify the best possible thing with God; but the degrees of goodness in no way seem to show the actual existence of any best possible thing, any more than degrees of size show that there existence a largest possible thing. If the latter, then the existence of things of varying degrees of goodness will show that there exists a *de facto* best thing (at least in the sense of a thing than which there is no better): but why should this be God rather than, say a good man?” Anthony Kenny. *The Five Ways: St. Thomas Aquinas’ Proofs of God’s Existence*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1969), 81.

actuality itself. The cause of all being cannot be conceptually exceeded by an exemplar (i.e., the greatest possible being) because existential exemplarity measures actuality. To increase its content in terms of non-existent possibility would be to diminish its existential actuality. Thus, the most being (i.e., highest actual and highest possible degree of being) serves as both the exemplar and as the cause of other beings, themselves more or less.³⁶

This seems to be the great insight of the third stage of the *De Ente* argument in regard to *esse*: any subsisting essential perfection, were it to exist, would be one and separate from all non-subsisting instantiations of that perfection (e.g., separate *versus* received heat).³⁷ So too with being. However, as stage three shows, we must posit a first subsisting *causa essendi*, but not a first subsisting *causa caloris*, because maximal heat unlike maximal being can be marked by some degree of potency with respect to a higher order (i.e., it remains *existentially* imperfect and secondary).³⁸ There need not be an *absolutely* perfect heat *in re* for there to be recognizable degrees of heat because even if there were subsisting forms for each essential perfection, nevertheless, they too would be relatively perfect and in potency to the extra-essential actuality which eminently contains them and by which they exist. This is because as most perfect in its kind (e.g., heat, human, etc.), but as a relative perfection nevertheless, it can *have* this essential perfection from a more *eminent cause*.³⁹ Thus what connects the early *De Ente* with the mature *fourth way*, and distinguishes both arguments from an Anselmian conceptual analysis, is the grounding of

³⁶ This interpretation of the argument seems to vaguely resemble Gilson's. See Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, 70-74.

³⁷ See *De Ente* IV and above Chapter I Section 4.

³⁸ Firstness is necessary in the order of being, but not in the order of other perfections because existential actuality can serve as the eminent cause of all other perfections.

³⁹ "Substantiae autem immateriales creatae sunt finitae secundum suum esse, sed infinitae secundum quod eorum formae non sunt receptae in alio." *ST I*, q. 50, a. 2

essences and essential content (i.e., the concept's *imperium*) upon an existential firstness. The first is a *plenitude of being* because it causes and contains all perfections *eminently*, and instantiated degrees of heat, for example, can emerge *immediately* from it as a cause without the mediation of a subsisting heat. The exemplar of heat and the efficient cause of heat may diverge because, whereas the latter measures the actual cause of all heat, the former measures a conceptual content abstracted or ignoring of reference to actuality (i.e., an *intellectus essentiae*), which would be impossible for being insofar as its content is actuality.⁴⁰

Esse is unique as a perfection (i.e., the perfection of all perfections) because of the causal actuality it provides to all other perfections and formal acts. Unlike other *formal* perfections (e.g., heat or animality), which need not subsist and can be instantiated, the highest in being, however, must be *only being* (*esse tantum*) and subsisting because it cannot *have being* from any higher cause. This is because *esse* is not a perfection of essential order, but an existential perfection. The highest actual being (i.e., that than which nothing is *more being*) cannot receive this *existential* perfection from a more eminent cause because such a cause *would not exist*.⁴¹ Thus, unlike an eminent cause that is not something but virtually contains such a perfection (e.g., the sun as the cause of all life or heat), nothing can not exist and yet virtually contain existence.⁴² Thus, the highest in being (*maxime ens*), which is most perfect and the cause of all beings, also must be subsisting being itself (*ipsum esse subsistens*) otherwise it would need to receive its being

⁴⁰ In the language of Edmund Husserl, we might say that an eidetic variation of heat (e.g., how hot) can occlude reference to actuality in a way that being cannot. Being's eidetic variation is already bound up with actuality.

⁴¹ If it did exist, then it would be a univocal cause and it, not God, would be the highest in being. This is also why Aquinas needs causality for his argument as otherwise he replicates a type of ontological argument: the *highest in being* equals only the highest conceivable measure and not the most actual cause.

⁴² That is, unless of course, Aquinas would divorce God from being altogether (i.e., God *without being*) as discussed above.

(i.e., *have being*) from something that is non-being.⁴³ Aquinas, as we have seen, continually rejects any move whereby the first would transcend or exceed being in such a way that it would be evacuated of actuality. Instead, the first is a concentration of actuality because, as the cause above all causes, its province is to *give to be* wherein all particular causes can operate and beings can emerge (“...*supra omnes causas sit aliqua causa cuius sit dare esse*”).⁴⁴ As the eminent ground of being, God can cause *whatever* (*quodlibet*) perfection (e.g., human, plant, angel, mineral, heat, etc.). But, this is because as first principle God contains such perfection eminently. As Gilson aptly points out, this is what distinguishes Neoplatonic doctrine of the One beyond being from an existential metaphysics: for the former, if the One had that which it caused (e.g., being) then it would not *cause* such but *be* such and thus could not be *its* cause.⁴⁵ For existentialism, the first cause *gives* what it most has because this is what it *is*. Thus, as the *fourth way* concludes, a *most* being is the cause to all beings of their being.⁴⁶ It is not itself without being or beyond being, but a first and pure act of *being* (*primus et purus actus essendi*).

Insofar as the *fourth way* argues that the “maximum” (i.e., most perfect and most actual) in any kind is the cause of everything in that kind (*maxime tale in aliquo genere, est causa omnium quae sunt illius generis*), the “most being” (*maxime ens*) is the

⁴³ If this other were not a non-being, then it would be *more being* than the first and the first would neither be *maxime ens* nor first.

⁴⁴ See, for example, in *SCG* II where Aquinas states the following: “Omnibus autem commune est *esse*. Oportet igitur quod supra omnes causas sit aliqua causa cuius sit dare esse. Prima autem causa Deus est, ut supra ostensum est. Oportet igitur omnia quae sunt a Deo esse” *SCG* II.15. This *esse commune*, given by the cause above all causes—as a king’s universal cause of government makes possible particular governors in his realm—is that by which more or less imperfect instantiations of the *ratio* are made possible. In this context we clearly know “dare esse” to pertain to efficient causality—as *creation* is under discussion. See also Chapter II Section 3 above.

⁴⁵ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 20-22. Gilson goes on to state, in language reminiscent of disqualification of thinking as an Averroist and believing as a Christian (e.g., Siger of Brabant), that one cannot think at one and the same time as a Neoplatonist and a Christian. *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁶ “Ergo est aliquid quod omnibus entibus est causa esse, et bonitatis, et cuiuslibet perfectionis, et hoc dicimus Deum.” *ST* I, q. 2, a. 3, resp.

universal cause of all beings. But, and perhaps more importantly as will be seen below, such a universal mode of causing all beings (*causa entium*) is more fundamentally a causing of *being itself* (i.e., *ipsum esse commune*).⁴⁷ Such a totalized causing (i.e., of *everything* in its kind) can only occur because of the non-univocal eminence between *most* and every other degree of being.

Given what has been shown above in terms of the link between *perfection* and causality—namely, that God as most perfect being (*maxime ens*) is the cause of all *esse* in beings—it will be necessary for Aquinas to argue for an identity of *esse* and essence in God. Otherwise, if such an identity were lacking, God would need to *have esse* from another, and thus God—previously defined as *maxime ens*—would become the causal recipient of something prior to himself.⁴⁸ This something prior either would be another being, and it, not God, would be *maxime ens*. Or it would be a non-being, and thus non-being would be the cause of being and the highest of all actualities. Neither alternative can provide a sufficient account of how all beings have being.

Once this move has been secured to the first as a pure act of only and incommunicable being, the utter rootlessness of being in everything else—and thereby the real otherness by which *esse* arrives to their essences *adveniens extra*—becomes apparent. The move to participation can be made, but only after Aquinas has leveraged God's firstness to subsequently secure his identity with *esse* and remove any composition

⁴⁷ See below Section 3. Analogical causation is what allows something to be the total cause of *x* and yet not cause of itself. Also, we see the importance of this move when later in the *Summa*, Aquinas argues that God is the cause of prime matter: “Hoc igitur quod est causa rerum in quantum sunt entia, oportet esse causam rerum, non solum secundum quod sunt talia per formas accidentales, nec secundum quod sunt haec per formas substantiales, sed etiam secundum omne illud quod pertinet ad esse illorum quocumque modo. Et sic oportet ponere etiam materiam primam creatam ab universali causa entium.” *ST I*, q. 44, a. 2, resp.

⁴⁸ As argued above, any being whose essence does not include existence (i.e., for which there is a real composition between *esse* and *essentia*) must have existence from another. See above, Chapter I Section 3.

(in Argument 1 of Question 3 following the *five ways*).⁴⁹ Furthermore, he can use God's firstness in the order of efficient causes to show that he is most perfect.⁵⁰ Something is perfect, Aquinas argues, in proportion to its *actuality*. As first (as has been established by the *five ways*), nothing is more actual than God and thus, through the actuality/perfection conversion, God is most perfect. Later and on this basis, Aquinas can argue that all things must *participate* in this first most perfect being because of its self-subsistence, which in its absolute simplicity and identity cannot be multiplied except through participation.⁵¹ Aquinas's later return to participation in being relies on having shown God's identity to his *esse*, an identity that can be demonstrated once God's *firstness* has been established.

Therefore, we need to trace how utilizing the bond between perfection and causality of the *fourth way*, Aquinas shows the *maxime ens* to be *ipsum esse subsistens* in which there is an identity of *esse* and essence; that such subsisting being, as cause of being, remains proper to God and is not shared with creatures; but that there must be an *analogical communion* between subsisting being and "common being" (*esse commune*). *Maxime ens* as the perfection and cause of all being and *whatever* perfection is not altogether without or beyond being, but possesses being from itself (*per se*) and has its being in a manner unlike (i.e., *analogous to*) the derivative manner of creatures. Thus, when it causes being for all beings, it *eminently contains* the being which it gives, but it does not give its own being. Such *common being* (*esse commune*), however, resembles the being proper to God and thus can render an account of its creator (e.g., the *fourth way*) who, once again, is not beyond being but is in no way is supplemented by these derivative modes of being.

⁴⁹ See below Section 2.

⁵⁰ See *ST I*, q. 4, a. 1.

⁵¹ See, for example *ST I*, q. 44, a. 1, resp.

Section 2: The Identity of *Esse* and Essence in *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*

Following the *five ways*, in which Aquinas proves the existence of God, he acknowledges that we are unable to know what God is (*scire non possumus non quid sit*) and thus must proceed by way of *remotion*, or “removing” from God what He is not.⁵² The hope is that by removing any impurities from our concepts, we can retain a pure—albeit imperfect—concept applicable to God. Thus, after having shown God not to be a body, not composed of matter and form, and not composed of nature or *quiddity* and subject, with the fourth remotion, Aquinas asks whether God can be composed from essence and *esse*. Here he will argue that no reason for composition between *esse* and essence in God can be found in God, and thereby they cannot be really distinguished.⁵³ God is *essentially being*. This identity of *esse* and essence will serve as the fundamental point of difference between God and creatures, the latter not only instantiate it *imperfectly*, as has been shown above, but also who must receive their *esse* through participation in another.

Aquinas begins this article with the opinion that would deny an identity of *esse* and essence in God on the grounds that if they were the same, then divine *esse* would have nothing added to it.⁵⁴ *Esse* without addition, the opinion maintains, is *esse commune*, that common being predicated of everything. Thus, the absurdity of maintaining that God is *esse commune*, and thereby predicable of everything, necessitates denying that God’s *esse* and his essence are the same. The attempt to address this question and to identify

⁵² See also *SCG* I.14.

⁵³ See also *De Pot.* q. 7, a. 2, resp. and *SCG* I.22.

⁵⁴ “Videtur quod in Deo non sit idem essentia et esse. Si enim hoc sit, tunc ad esse divinum nihil additur. Sed esse cui nulla fit additio, est esse commune quod de omnibus praedicatur: sequitur ergo quod Deus sit ens commune praedicabile de omnibus. Hoc autem est falsum, secundum illud Sap. XIV, *incommunicabile nomen lignis et lapidibus imposuerunt*. Ergo esse Dei non est eius essentia.” *ST* I. q. 3, a. 4. arg. 1.

esse and essence in God and yet distinguish him from *esse commune*, will form a central point in Aquinas's analogical metaphysics of being: although *esse commune* resembles *ipsum esse*, the two do not equally share in a common third, a genus to their species, or even a transcendental to their mode. All assimilation and approximation occurs on the side of created being and in no way supplements the already perfect *ratio* of *ipsum esse subsistens*, to which nothing can be added.

To this position, Aquinas responds that not only is God his own essence, but also his own *esse*. This he shows in three ways.⁵⁵ First, he argues, if God were not his own *esse*,

⁵⁵ “Respondeo dicendum quod Deus non solum est sua essentia, ut ostensum est, sed etiam suum esse. Quod quidem multipliciter ostendi potest. Primo quidem, quia quidquid est in aliquo quod est praeter essentiam eius, 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 eius essentia, necesse est quod esse illius rei vel sit causatum ab aliquo exteriori, vel a principiis essentialibus eiusdem rei. Impossibile est autem quod esse sit causatum tantum ex principiis essentialibus rei, quia nulla res sufficit quod sit sibi causa essendi, si habeat esse causatum. Oportet ergo quod illud cuius esse est aliud ab essentia sua, habeat esse causatum ab alio. Hoc autem non potest dici de Deo, quia Deum dicimus esse primam causam efficientem. Impossibile est ergo quod in Deo sit aliud esse, et aliud eius essentia. Secundo, quia esse est actualitas omnis formae vel naturae: non enim bonitas vel humanitas significatur in actu, nisi prout significamus eam esse. Oportet igitur quod ipsum esse comparetur ad essentiam quae est aliud ab ipso, sicut actus ad potentiam. Cum igitur in Deo nihil sit potentiale, ut ostensum est supra, sequitur quod non sit aliud in eo essentia quam suum esse. Sua igitur essentia est suum esse. Tertio, quia sicut illud quod habet ignem et non est ignis, est ignitum per participationem, ita illud quod habet esse et non est esse, est ens per participationem. Deus autem est sua essentia, ut ostensum est. Si igitur non sit suum esse, erit ens per participationem, et non per essentiam. Non ergo erit primum ens: quod absurdum est dicere. Est igitur Deus suum esse, et non solum sua essentia.” *ST I* q. 3, a. 4, resp. In *De Potentia*, he offers another argument: “Respondeo. Dicendum quod in Deo non est aliud esse et sua substantia. Ad cuius evidentiam considerandum est quod, cum aliquae causae effectus diversos producentes communicant in uno effectu, praeter diversos effectus, oportet quod illud commune producant ex virtute alicuius superioris causae cuius illud est proprius effectus. Et hoc ideo quia, cum proprius effectus producat ab aliqua causa secundum suam propriam naturam vel formam, diversae causae habentes diversas naturas et formas oportet quod habeant proprios effectus diversos. Unde si in aliquo uno effectu conveniunt, ille non est proprius alicuius earum, sed alicuius superioris, in cuius virtute agunt; sicut patet quod diversa complexionata conveniunt in calefaciendo, ut piper, et zinziber, et similia, quamvis unumquodque eorum habeat suum proprium effectum diversum ab effectu alterius. Unde effectum communem oportet reducere in priorem causam cuius sit proprius, scilicet in ignem. Similiter in motibus caelestibus, sphaerae planetarum singulae habent proprios motus, et cum hoc habent unum communem, quem oportet esse proprium alicuius sphaerae superioris omnes revolventis secundum motum diurnum. Omnes autem causae creatae communicant in uno effectu qui est esse, licet singulae proprios effectus habeant, in quibus distinguuntur. Calor enim facit calidum esse, et aedificator facit domum esse. Conveniunt ergo in hoc quod causant esse, sed differunt in hoc quod ignis causat ignem, et aedificator causat domum. Oportet ergo esse aliquam causam superiorem omnibus cuius virtute omnia causent esse, et eius esse sit proprius effectus. Et haec causa est Deus. Proprius autem effectus cuiuslibet causae procedit ab ipsa secundum similitudinem suae naturae. Oportet

esse would be outside God's essence (*praeter essentiam eius*) and would be caused either by principles of his essence (e.g., as risible in humans) or by something exterior (e.g., as heat in water by fire).⁵⁶ Unlike essential principles that cause some essential property to follow the essence (e.g., a power), *esse* cannot be caused by an essence that is other to its *esse*. On this matter, Aquinas states: "Impossibile est autem quod esse sit causatum tantum ex principiis essentialibus rei, quia nulla res sufficit quod sit sibi causa essendi, si habeat esse causatum. Oportet ergo quod illud cuius esse est aliud ab essentia sua, habeat esse causatum ab alio."⁵⁷ Aquinas argues that nothing can be the *sufficient cause* of being for itself (*causa essendi sibi*), if it must have its *esse* through causes. But why, for example, can the essence *human* be the sufficient cause of risibility for itself but not *essendi*? To state the matter in parallel terms, why can something (i.e., its essence) be the sufficient cause of its own risibility if its risibility is caused? In what way does *esse* differ from risibility, or any other property for that matter?

At this point, Aquinas has brought to light the fundamental difference between *esse* and any other addition. In a manner similar to Siger's argument addressed above, and yet maintaining a radically different interpretation of *esse*, Aquinas rejects any treatment of *esse* as a property of the first cause.⁵⁸ If something's *esse* is caused, even by its own essence, this means that without that cause there is *no thing*; there *is* no essence and accompanying essential principles which could bestow being onto the non-existent thing.

A *sufficient causa essendi* thereby would have to be *cause of itself* (*causa sui*) and not

ergo quod hoc quod est esse, sit substantia vel natura Dei. Et propter hoc dicitur in Lib. de causis, quod intelligentia non dat esse nisi in quantum est divina, et quod primus effectus est esse, et non est ante ipsum creatum aliquid." *De Pot.* q. 7, a. 2, resp. Aquinas's use of *Liber de Causis* here, which argues that *esse* is the first emanation, will invite trouble for Aquinas's own attempt to account for *esse commune*. See Chapter II Section 1 above; and Chapter 5 Section 3 below.

⁵⁶ See also *De Ente et Essentia* IV and Chapter I Section 2 above.

⁵⁷ *ST I* q. 3, a. 4, resp.

⁵⁸ See above Chapter I Section 3.

just of one of its properties. Given an existing thing, however, its essential principles can serve as the sufficient cause of a property because there is in fact an essence, which brings with it certain determinations. As Porphyry states concerning the difference between species and property: “[...] species has its reality prior to property, while property follows after species. First man must exist in order to be risible.”⁵⁹ Man must also exist in order to be man. And by *not-existing* such a being through its essence cannot supply *to itself* either properties or *esse*. Were such an essence to *actually exist*, then the accompanying properties would follow. The insufficiency is not on the side of the essence in its essential determination: the essence brings with it the full array of essential properties. The insufficiency, instead, results on a different register altogether. The *insufficiency* of a possible, that is non-existing, being (*ens*) to give being (*esse*) to itself is not merely that it lacks some property or accident; it lacks *being* altogether.⁶⁰ According to the very basic rule of any causal economy, something cannot *give* what it does not *have*. A possible essence *has* all of its essential determinations. What it *lacks*, and thus cannot give, is *esse*. This is the significance of the link in the *fourth way*, discussed

⁵⁹ *Isagoge* §110.

⁶⁰ Owens also expresses a similar claim in reference to the *intellectus essentiae* argument, and why it fails to grasp a real distinction through the first stage alone. He states: “If essence in the real world is regarded as something finished in itself instead of as an object abstracted non-precisively and thereby left open for completion by its metaphysically prior existence, it can hardly help but be looked upon as rounded off in the distinct contours of a fully constituted recipient of existences (cf. above, n.29). It will be regarded as possessing some kind of essential being of its own, like an Avicennian common nature, and as *having its essential predicates in independence of any efficient causality* [m.e.]...Correspondingly, without keen and continued awareness that existing is first grasped through judgment and only later conceptualized as an actuality, it can hardly escape being viewed in the manner of a quality or other incomplex object. It will then tend to be looked upon as something having of itself the finitude of an object originally known through conceptualization and marked off as in itself a distinct unit” Owens, “Aquinas’ Distinction,” 284. This issue of *esse* as “rounding off” (i.e., completing) an essence is the common charge leveled by existential Thomists against the essentialism of Aristotle, which would reduce *esse* to some moment in the order of essential completion. *Esse*, instead, as Owens argues here, and Gilson also argues (*passim*), cannot be treated as such a moment in essential unfolding. The essential predicates of any being (*ens*) cannot be separated from the existential order of creation whereby “it” receives the entirety of its being (*esse*) and “is” anything at all.

above, between perfection and causality: anything imperfect with regard to x, cannot cause such a perfection in itself, but must *have* it from another (i.e., a cause).

Esse as the actuality of every form points ahead to Aquinas's second argument against a composition of *esse* and essence in God, as well as reminding us of his arguments against universal hylomorphism, which employs such existential actuality to explain composition (and thus imperfection) in immaterial substances. Before turning to his second argument, a word must be said, however, about why God's *esse* cannot be caused by an external efficient cause. Having already shown God to be *first efficient cause*, the introduction of another cause for divine *esse* would undermine the *firstness* of God. Thus, Aquinas has shown that God's *esse* must be identical to his essence because the composition of two non-identical things (e.g., form and matter) requires *a cause*. Composition indicates the *having been caused* of the composite, as something outside the composition itself must account for its unity. There must be an account of otherness if such is to be introduced into God. Without a reason, composition cannot be introduced.⁶¹

For his second argument against composition between *esse* and essence in God, Aquinas invokes the sense of actuality as brought by *esse* and irreducible to formal actuality alone. He argues that *esse* is the actuality of every form or nature. Any essence which is *other than esse*—even subsisting forms were there to be such—thus, must be compared to *esse* as potency to act. Humanity or goodness, for example, are only said to be in act in so far as they exist (“*non enim bonitas vel humanitas significatur in actu, nisi*

⁶¹ Aquinas discusses how composition requires a cause: “Tertio, quia omne compositum causam habet, quae enim secundum se diversa sunt, non conveniunt in aliquod unum nisi per aliquam causam adunantem ipsa. Deus autem non habet causam, ut supra ostensum est, cum sit prima causa efficiens.” *ST I*, q. 3. a. 7. resp.

prout significamus eam esse”). Thus, if God’s essence were to admit an otherness with his *esse*, then the divine essence would stand in potency to his act of being.

Aquinas has already shown, however, that there can be no potency in God, lest his *firstness* be undermined.⁶² If he were in potency in any way, then something else would be more actual and thus prior to God (i.e., first). For hypothetical subsisting perfections, such as goodness, heat, or humanity, their being in potency could be explained as their essential perfection and existential imperfection: they are perfect in regard to being *this* but still lack the perfection of being anything at all and thus require a cause. For God as *most being and first cause*, however—unlike a mere subsisting essential perfection which is most being *as this* and first cause *in such an order*—there can be nothing more actual otherwise he would not be the *first being and cause* of all being. Therefore, there can be no otherness between his essence and his *esse*.

The significance of being *first in being* once again comes to the fore: no order of being (e.g., heat, humanity, goodness, etc.) is more actual than and prior to being itself, and thus a distinction between *esse* and essence in God would require the *cause of all being in beings* to have being from another to which God would stand in potency. This other either would need to eminently contain being, and thus be beyond being, a non-being altogether unknowable (even by analogical predication), or would need to have being more perfectly than God, and be *more being* than the *most being*, a contradiction of terms.⁶³

⁶² See *ST I*, q. 3, a. 1, resp. In his second argument of the response to the question of whether God is a body, Aquinas argues that the first being (*primum ens*) must be in act and no way in potency. Anything in potency requires something prior, and as *first*, nothing can be prior to God. His use of the “God as first being” conclusion derives from the *five ways* of the previous question.

⁶³ Below, I take up the possibility of such a non-being (i.e., God without or beyond being) and whether remotion leaves any reason for calling this cause of all being itself “subsisting being.” See below Chapter VI Section 1.

For his third argument, Aquinas appeals to the difference between *having something* through participation and *being something* through itself. Having heat is not being heat, but instead participating in heat. This is why *hot coffee* imperfectly instantiates the *ratio* of heat. So too with *esse*; something which only *has being*, but is not itself being, is only a being by participation (“...*ita illud quod habet esse et non est esse, est ens per participationem*”). If God, who has been shown to be his own essence, is not also his own *esse*, then he is a being (*ens*) through participation and not essentially. Therefore, he could not be the first being, from which all other being derives because he too would need to participate being in something more principal than himself (“*Non ergo erit primum ens, quod absurdum est dicere*”). Given the link discussed above between *causality* and perfection—having a perfection *from another* and having it *imperfectly*—if God were to have *esse* from something more principal, then he would have being *imperfectly* and would not be *maxime ens* and the cause of all *esse* (as demonstrated in the *fourth way*). Thus, we once again witness the importance of the link between degrees of perfection (i.e., the formal completeness of something) and causation (i.e., tracing a sequence of causes which *give* the perfection until we reach a first cause that has the perfection from itself).⁶⁴

⁶⁴ I agree with Owen’s assessment that Aquinas uses God as *first* efficient cause and subsistent being to introduce participation. In moving to a discussion of the article under consideration, he states: “In point of fact, the article cited from the *Summa Theologiae* [I, q. 44, a. 1] seems to presuppose that the doctrine of participated being is ultimately based upon efficient causality. True, it reasons that God alone is essentially being, and so all other things participate being from God and are therefore caused by God. But for the proof that God is subsistent being, it refers back to a previous article which shows that if God is not His own being He would be being by participation and so would not be the primary being. The first way in which the argument is expressed in that article proceeds from the doctrine that God is the *first* efficient cause and so cannot be other than His being. The reasoning is that anything which is outside the essence of a thing must be caused either by the principles of the essence or by something extrinsic; and ‘to be’ cannot be caused by the principles of the essence. Therefore the being (*esse*) of anything for which to be is other than its essence must be caused by another.” Owens, “The Causal Proposition—Principle or Conclusion?,” 264-265.

With Aquinas's response to the objections for the identity of *esse* and essence in God, we reach an important stage in the argument. This will be noteworthy in what follows because only *ipsum esse* as God's "proper" (i.e., non-communicable) essence institutes the primary *ratio essendi*, from which *esse commune* can derive its analogical similitude and approximation to the first. Due to God's identity with his being, if creatures *took part* in the same *esse* as God, they would partake of God; thus to avoid this "heretical" conclusion, a radical rupture between divine and created being is necessary.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, common being (*esse commune*) can establish its imperfect claim to be only through a non-reciprocal reference to a first.⁶⁶ This analogical architectonic, wherein all being imperfectly assimilates itself to and resembles its perfect model, *ipsum esse subsistens*, will be traced below.⁶⁷

To uphold this non-univocity of being, Aquinas must respond to the argument that if *esse* and essence were identical in God, then God would be *esse commune* and thereby predicable of everything. He begins by distinguishing the different ways in which *esse commune* and divine *esse*, or *ipsum esse subsistens*, are *esse without addition*.⁶⁸ Divine

⁶⁵ On this matter, see, for example, *SCG* I.29. The former states the following: "Secundum tamen hanc similitudinem convenientius dicitur Deo creatura similis quam e converso. Simile enim alicui dicitur quod eius possidet qualitatem vel formam. Quia igitur id quod in Deo perfecte est, in rebus aliis per quandam deficientem participationem invenitur, illud secundum quod similitudo attenditur, Dei quidem simpliciter est, non autem creaturae. Et sic creatura habet quod Dei est: unde et Deo recte similis dicitur. Non autem sic potest dici Deum habere quod creaturae est. Unde nec convenienter dicitur Deum creaturae similem esse: sicut nec hominem dicimus suae imagini esse similem, cui tamen sua imago recte similis enuntiatur."

⁶⁶ What this phrase intends is that created being *refers* (and must refer) to uncreated being in order to be intelligible according to the *ratio* of being (and also to exist), but that uncreated being need not reciprocally refer to created being.

⁶⁷ See Section 3 below.

⁶⁸ "Ad primum ergo dicendum quod aliquid cui non fit additio potest intelligi dupliciter. Uno modo, ut de ratione eius 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 animalis communis ut habeat rationem; sed nec de ratione eius est ut careat ratione. Primo igitur modo, esse sine additione, est esse divinum, secundo modo, esse sine additione, est esse commune" *ST* I q.3, a. 4, ad. 1. An important step in dissociating God as *ipsum esse subsistens* from *esse commune* will be in showing God not to be the *formal esse* of creatures. See Section 3 below and Chapter V Section 3.

esse precludes (*non fiat*) any addition, whereas *esse commune* does not have addition, but neither does it *lack* such. Such a distinction, he argues, can be illustrated by the following example: the genus animal does not have the addition rational, but it does not preclude such—otherwise there could be no rational animals. Animal would repel any such division. The same goes for *esse commune*. It does not have any addition, but neither does it preclude such otherwise there could not be a multiplicity of beings. On the other hand, much like the essence *irrational animal* precludes *rationality* from itself, as such an addition could not come to it without disrupting its very core—*divine esse* bars any addition by its very nature. This is because, as Aquinas shows throughout this question, nothing—not matter, accidents, *esse*, or anything else—can possibly be added to it. Thus, God as identical to his *esse* cannot have anything added to him, thus retaining the absolute purity of his incommunicable nature, his *ipseity*. As will be seen below, this entails that he cannot enter into a univocal community of being with any other being.

Together these arguments for the identity of *esse* and essence in God have unpacked what was entailed by the *maxime ens* of the *fourth way*. As maximum, any non-identity between essence and *esse* in God would require a cause to account for his *having* (but not *per se* being) his *esse*, a cause which would either eminently contain being as a non-being or have being and thus be more being than the most being. From the problems surrounding each alternative, Aquinas mobilizes the conclusion of the *fourth way* to show that a non-identity cannot be accounted for, and thus there must be an identity. As we shall see, this identity coupled with the real otherness in creatures, as discussed in the previous chapters, converge around the unifying principle of an analogy of being. Being as analogical removes God from common being (*esse commune*) and retains the purity of

the proper concept without evacuating *esse commune*'s reference to its cause and ground of perfection. Thus, through the principle of resemblance—the specific type of analogy at work in Aquinas's argument—finitized by their essential modes of expressing being, creatures assimilate themselves to the perfection of being without ever attaining its perfect expression.

Having shown God not to be composed of essence and *esse*, and thus to be an identity of *esse* and essence, Aquinas goes on to further refute a composition of genus and *differentiae*, subject and accidents, or, for that matter, any composition whatsoever, thereby concluding God to be absolutely simple. The final, and perhaps culminating, consideration addresses the question of whether God is composed with other things. In both *Summas*, Aquinas takes up this question against those who would risk too closely identifying God with creation. An extended discussion of this issue must be reserved for below, when the larger question participation in *esse* emerges.⁶⁹ For now, it can be noted that Aquinas needs to maintain God's *esse* as proper to God alone, and not as common to all creation. However, a deeper problem surrounds his philosophical vision: how to preserve God's *esse* as proper to God alone and yet not radically sever *divine esse* from *esse commune* such that the latter would be rendered demonstratively silent in attesting to its cause, the former. Thus, how can Aquinas's existential metaphysics think the multiplicity of *entia* as united in their *esse commune* as ordered in reference to the pure actuality of *ipsum esse subsistens*?

As the previous chapters have argued, *esse commune* must be more than just the most abstract way of signifying a thing (i.e., the most extensive of all concepts), but instead must capture the existential actuality of something's *to be* or *actus essendi*, which

⁶⁹ See below Chapter 5.

remains really other than the thing itself. Thus, *esse commune* must in some sense be infused with the plenitude of existential perfection that is proper to only God, and yet such perfection cannot be the *same* in creatures as in God. Aquinas must navigate the Scylla of not too closely identifying God with creatures—lest *divine esse* become one with *created esse*, or both subsumable to a common third—and the Charybdis of not evacuating creation of all ties to the existential perfection that sustains it—lest the real otherness between *esse* and essence in created being become a meaningless position and any attempt to demonstrate the existence of God beyond being, at least being in the sense predicable of creatures, futile. Thus, a delicate balance must be struck for the non-reciprocal reference of *esse commune* to *esse divinum*. This will require Aquinas to show that *esse divinum* is not most common, but instead most perfect and most eminent, but nevertheless there can be a *real similitude* or trace—and not just a nominal tie—between God and creatures. Such a real similitude wherein God alone is the full *ratio essendi* and every other being has being according to an imperfect *ratio*, and thus merely resembles *ipsum esse subsistens*, is sustained by Aquinas’s theory of analogy.

In the following Question, Aquinas takes up the aforementioned issue, namely that God’s being is not the most common, and thereby imperfect, but instead proper and most perfect.⁷⁰ As discussed above, Aquinas had addressed this problem of identifying the divine essence with *esse* in that it would become most common (*esse commune*) and

⁷⁰ “Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut Philosophus narrat in XII Metaphys., quidam antiqui philosophi, scilicet Pythagorici et Speusippus, non attribuerunt optimum et perfectissimum primo principio. Cuius ratio est, quia philosophi antiqui consideraverunt principium materiale tantum: primum autem principium materiale imperfectissimum est. Cum enim materia, inquantum huiusmodi, sit in potentia, oportet quod primum principium materiale sit maxime in potentia; et ita maxime imperfectum. Deus autem ponitur primum principium, non materiale, sed in genere causae efficientis: et hoc oportet esse perfectissimum. Sicut enim materia, inquantum huiusmodi, est in potentia; ita agens, inquantum huiusmodi, est in actu. Unde primum principium activum oportet maxime esse in actu, et per consequens maxime esse perfectum. Secundum hoc enim dicitur aliquid esse perfectum, secundum quod est actu, nam perfectum dicitur, cui nihil deest secundum modum suae perfectionis.” *ST I*, q. 4, a. 1, resp.

thereby predicable of everything.⁷¹ At this point, he raises a similiar objection to the identification of *perfectissimum* with *esse*, as the latter seems to indicate *communissimum*. He states: “Praeterea, ostensum est supra quod essentia Dei est ipsum esse. Sed ipsum esse videtur esse imperfectissimum, cum sit communissimum, et recipiens omnium additiones. Ergo Deus est imperfectus.” The problem is how to distinguish *ipsum esse subsistens*, as the highest perfection in any class of being, from *esse commune*, which is most common and receives all additions (as additions cannot be added to that which is not). Otherwise, if God is identified with *esse*, this would make God *imperfect*.

To this charge, Aquinas responds with what has been for us a familiar refrain:

[...] dicendum quod ipsum esse est perfectissimum omnium: comparatur enim ad omnia ut actus. Nihil enim habet actualitatem, nisi in quantum est, unde ipsum esse est actualitas omnium rerum, et etiam ipsarum formarum. Unde non comparatur ad alia sicut recipiens ad receptum: sed magis sicut receptum ad recipiens. Cum enim dico esse hominis, vel equi, vel cuiuscumque alterius, ipsum esse consideratur ut formale et receptum: non autem ut illud cui competit esse.⁷²

Aquinas here has argued that *esse* must be understood as the actuality of all actuality. More than signifying a concept *in intellectu* divested of all concretization, a concept that is *most common* to anything and merely repeats *that it is something*, *esse* instead captures the most *perfect actuality* of any thing, a perfection which completes even their forms—the Aristotelian ground of actuality. *Esse* is that very actuality that enables there to be any further actuality (“*nihil enim habet actualitatem, nisi in quantum est...*”), that without which there would be no actuality whatsoever. As the ground of actuality as such, *esse* is

⁷¹ *ST I* q. 3, a. 4 ad. 1.

⁷² *ST I*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3. In Chapter V below, I unpack how even though God is the actuality of all beings, nevertheless, he is not their formal *esse*. Aquinas attempts to explain this in terms of “analogical causation” such that God is *causally* the *esse* of all things—and thus the ground of their actuality—but is not *formally* the *esse* of all things. See below, Chapter V Section 3.

said to be most perfect because it opens the conditions by which there can be anything at all. Herein, we witness the emergence of *esse* as a concept, or quasi-concept, that elevates thought from the mere vacuousness of *esse commune*, which merely repeats what has been said in the concepts of determinate being (e.g., being as substance, being as quantity, being as motion, etc.), to the level of existential perfection.

To this point, we have seen how *esse* stands as the ground of all essential perfections insofar as being something perfectly (i.e., in this particular mode of being) does not entail being perfectly overall (i.e., being universally), whereas being as such eminently contains being in this or that way. The link between causality and perfection forged in the *fourth way* moreover serves to make the most perfect being the cause of all being. The cause of all being must be essentially identical to its being, lest it receive being from another, which is either a being (and thus more being than it) or a non-being (and thus being derives from non-being).⁷³ To avoid such a regress, *esse subsistens* must stand as the crowning perfection of all actuality. We now must show how such a perfection of being can be the cause of being in everything else and they can attest to their cause without joining into an essential community with their cause.

Section 3: Eminent Causation

As is common to much of Aquinas's writings, here in the *Summa*, the issue of a cause of all being prompts a discussion of non-univocal causality. Remember that the *fourth way* had concluded with the statement a *maxime ens* is the cause of *all being* and of *whatever* perfection. But it seems that certain formal perfections (e.g., *heat, color, animality*) would be altogether repugnant to God, who without body, cannot partake of

⁷³ This begs the question of why God must have being (or be being) at all, as opposed to be beyond being.

such, even in their most perfect form. What might it even mean to call God the most perfect heat, or the most perfect animal, or the most perfect color? Such perfections, when predicated of God, seem altogether absurd and yet God has been shown to be a first absolutely perfect act having a plenitude of perfections, in other words, as a *plenitude*, he has the power to cause all perfections of being immediately and without plenipotentiaries of subsisting forms (e.g., the form of heat or whiteness itself) or other intermediary causes.⁷⁴

Thus, as the cause of all being (*totius esse*), Aquinas concludes that all created perfections are included in the perfection of being (“*quod Deus est ipsum esse per se subsistens, ex quo oportet quod totam perfectionem essendi in se contineat*”).⁷⁵ This means that *ipsum esse subsistens* as the total perfection of being need not *actually be* every perfection it contains, such that God would *be* perfectly hot, white, human, and so on. Instead, as cause of such perfections, God *virtually contains* them in a more eminent manner than they actually exist. The forms *human* or *heat* exist more eminently as virtually contained in God than as substantial or accidental forms of material bodies, just as, for example, sugar is not itself sweet, but contains sweetness such that it is able to cause sweetness when it interacts with the tongue. Thus, all formal perfections find ground in the perfection of *esse* and *esse* (i.e., *actus essendi primus et purus*) as the “plenitude” of such perfections grounds them immediately.

The first step in answering the question of how God contains certain perfections thus can be answered in terms of his power: although God himself does not possess such perfections *actually*, he can fund them *virtually*. As most perfect and first cause of

⁷⁴ See, for example *De Spir. Creat.* a. 1, resp.

⁷⁵ *ST I*, q. 4, a. 2, resp.

everything in its kind, such a cause has the total power (*totus virtus*) of that kind. Whiteness, as the most perfect species of color, contains the entire power of being colorful. Thus, God as the most perfect being is the cause of whatever perfection of being. Aquinas clarifies this connection between *perfection* and *power* (*virtus*), and subsequently shows how with *esse* it extends not only to the power of a certain kind, but the power of everything that is. He states:

Secundo vero, ex hoc quod supra ostensum est, quod Deus est ipsum esse per se subsistens, ex quo oportet quod totam perfectionem essendi in se contineat. Manifestum est enim quod, si aliquod calidum non habeat totam perfectionem calidi, hoc ideo est, quid calor non participatur secundum perfectam rationem, sed si calor esset per se subsistens, non posset ei aliquid deesse de virtute caloris. Unde, cum Deus sit ipsum esse subsistens, nihil de perfectione essendi potest ei deesse. Omnium autem perfectiones pertinent ad perfectionem essendi, secundum hoc enim aliqua perfecta sunt, quod aliquo modo esse habent. Unde sequitur quod nullius rei perfectio Deo desit.⁷⁶

Thus, God as *ipsum esse subsistens* is not absent from any of the perfections of being (*nihil de perfectione essendi potest ei deesse*). Instead, all perfections must reach (*pertinent*) existential perfection in some way (*aliquo modo*).

⁷⁶ The surrounding passage reads: “Respondeo dicendum quod in Deo sunt perfectiones omnium rerum. Unde et dicitur universaliter perfectus: quia non deest ei aliqua nobilitas quae inveniatur in aliquo genere, ut dicit Commentator in V Metaphys. Et hoc quidem ex duobus considerari potest. Primo quidem, per hoc quod quidquid perfectionis est in effectu, oportet inveniri in causa effectiva: vel secundum eandem rationem, si sit agens univocum, ut homo generat hominem; *vel eminentiori modo, si sit, agens aequivocum, sicut in sole est similitudo eorum quae generantur per virtutem solis* [m.e.] Manifestum est enim quod effectus praeexistit virtute in causa agente, praeexistere autem in virtute causae agentis, non est praeexistere imperfectiori modo, *sed perfectiori* [m.e.]; licet praeexistere in potentia causae materialis, sit praeexistere imperfectiori modo: eo quod materia, in quantum huiusmodi, est imperfecta; agens vero, in quantum huiusmodi, est perfectum. Cum ergo Deus sit prima causa effectiva rerum, oportet omnium rerum perfectiones praeexistere in Deo secundum eminentiorem modum. Et hanc rationem tangit Dionysius, cap. V de Div. Nom., dicens de Deo quod *non hoc quidem est, hoc autem non est, sed omnia est, ut omnium causa*. [...] Et hanc etiam rationem tangit Dionysius, cap. V de Div. Nom., dicens quod *Deus non quodammodo est existens, sed simpliciter et incircumscripse totum in seipso uniformiter esse praeaccipit*, et postea subdit quod *ipse est esse subsistentibus*.” *ST I*, q. 4, a. 2, resp. Aquinas’s reading of “God is the *esse* for subsisting things” as not implying that *ipsum esse subsistens* serves as the formal *esse* of anything else is treated in *SCG I.26* and Chapter V below.

Again, we see this logic play out in the commentary *On The Divine Names* of Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas states:

Omnia autem alia, sicut superius dictum est, habent esse receptum et participatum et ideo non habent esse secundum totam virtutem essendi, sed solus Deus, qui *ipsum esse subsistens* [m.e.], secundum totam virtutem essendi, esse habet; et hoc est quod dicit, quod Deus potest esse causa essendi omnibus, quia Ipse non est existens quodam modo, idest secundum aliquem modum finitum et limitatum, sed Ipse universaliter et infinite accepit in seipso totum esse et praecepit, quia in Eo praeexistit sicut in causa et ab Eo ad alia derivatur.⁷⁷

These passages together reveal the relation between *perfection* (i.e., completeness), *power* (*virtus*), and *causality*: God, who is *ipsum esse subsistens*, has *esse* according to the total “power of being.” God lacks nothing of the power of being (*virtus essendi*) because through his subsistence as being itself (*ipsum esse*)—limited to no single mode of being and *not having* being from another—he contains the total perfection of being. From his *causality*, operating according to the full (i.e., perfect) *ratio* of being, which prescind from no power, the being (*esse*) of everything derives.⁷⁸ Because divine *esse* is neither receive nor limited by any nature, but instead subsists a *pure esse*, he contains a complete *virtus essendi* by which he is able to be the cause of being in all other things (*potest esse causa essendi omnibus*). The range of being exceeds the entirety of essential perfections, which express finite modes of being, but being itself, as eminently containing the whole power of being, funds their limited expressions.

To merely call God “the fund of being,” however, seems to relinquish our understanding and naming of God to the form “God is the cause of...,” the sort of

⁷⁷ S. Thomae Aquinatis, *In librum Beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*. ed. C Pera, P. Caramello, C. Mazzantini (Marietti: Taurini-Romae, 1950) cap. 5, 1.1. 629. Hereafter: “*In div. nom.*”

⁷⁸ So too subsisting heat as perfect heat would have the total “power of heating” and thus cause every other kind of “hot thing.”

negative theologizing of which Aquinas accuses Maimonides.⁷⁹ According to such naming, the divine names reference God’s causal power without indicating anything of the divine substance. Thus, Aquinas’s first step will be to negotiate the issue of “non-univocal” causality. If God stands as the equivocal cause of all beings, containing yet surpassing all their perfections, do we not risk complete separation in our attempt to *save the distance*?⁸⁰ In what sense can *esse creatum* be said to exemplify *divine esse*, and *maxime* “*ens*” be the cause of all “*entibus*” without equivocation, that is using merely an empty set of names (i.e., *esse* and *ens*) to stand in common between God and creatures?⁸¹

In regard to these questions, Aquinas must address the likeness or similitude that non-reciprocally links God and creatures (“*creatura possit esse similis Deo*”).⁸² *Remotion*,

⁷⁹ Dobbs-Weinstein’s warning at this point should be noted concerning any over-simplified comparison between Maimonides and Aquinas on equivocation and analogy. After outlining several points of difference between their respective theories of naming, she notes: “Whereas Maimonides’ major concern is to eradicate any trace of belief in divine corporeality, a belief that, for him, renders impossible ‘a portion in the world to come’ and of which the prohibition is manifest in radical Jewish iconoclasm, for Aquinas the very fact of the incarnation, the Roman permission of iconography, and the Mass do not necessitate such austerity. Aquinas’ concern, then, is not primarily to deny the efficacy of all language in relation to God, but rather to determine what language would escape the boundaries of logical predication and how, without thereby undermining the significance of logic and of language.” See Dobbs-Weinstein, *Maimonides and St. Thomas on the Limits of Reason* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 187. Further on, she states: “...his use of the term *remotion* for negation, properly speaking, removes God from the order of *esse commune* in order to signify *esse tantum*, which exceeds being. This is why in the orders of cognition and of language *remotion* succeeds common negation and precedes the modes of excellence, whereas in the order of being the perfection clearly precedes rather than succeeds the predication.” *Ibid.*, 195-196.

⁸⁰ There is some ambiguity on whether in eminently containing such perfections God would be an equivocal or an analogical cause. Aquinas addresses this issue as follows: “Causa igitur universalis totius speciei non est agens univocum. Causa autem universalis est prior particulari. Hoc autem agens universale, licet non sit univocum, *non tamen est omnino aequivocum* [m.e.], quia sic non faceret sibi simile; sed potest dici agens analogicum, sicut in praedicationibus omnia univoca reducuntur ad unum primum, non univocum, sed analogicum, quod est ens.” *ST I*, q. 13, a. 5, ad 1. In what follows, I will show how he argues for this role of God as “analogical agent.”

⁸¹ “Goodness” says nothing more about God than “locomotion” as he is equally the cause of both. According to such a “negative theology,” created *esse* no more reflects and imitates divine *esse* than does (created) locomotion because in either case there is absolutely no similitude of form between cause and effect. See also *De Pot.* q. 7, a. 7. Aquinas considers one such argument against the univocal predication of names in common between God and creatures: “Sed contra. Est quod philosophus dicit, quod aeterno et temporali nihil est commune nisi nomen. Sed Deus est aeternus, et creaturae temporales. Ergo Deo et creaturis nihil potest esse commune nisi nomen; et sic praedicantur aequivoce pure nomina de Deo et creaturis.” *De Pot.* q. 7, a. 7, s.c. 1.

⁸² On the non-reciprocity, see *ST I*, q. 4, a. 3. For the citation and analysis of this article, see fn. 115 below.

while requiring a certain removal or withdrawal from the limited phenomena of creation, is not altogether negation or denial. Instead, there is an elevation of that which *withdraws* (*remotus*), but one which leaves behind a trace.⁸³ Thus between univocity's collapse of terms into an identical *ratio* and equivocality's evacuation of the meaningful bonds holding them together, Aquinas locates analogy as a point of negotiation. This link cannot unify being as a common *ratio* because, as has been shown, *esse* cannot be a genus divided by the differentiae "*causatum*" and "*uncausatum*."⁸⁴ The being of God is proper and incommunicable; it withdraws (*removet*) from common affirmation. The consequence seems to be that between *esse causatum* and *esse uncausatum*, the shared term "*esse*" provides common ground *nominally*. And yet, without a real common measure to hold together divine and created *esse*, a measure that at the same time does not compromise God's unique and proper *esse*, any argument that proceeds from caused being to uncaused being would risk the fallacy of equivocation, and thus be unable to sustain such a demonstrative link between an effect and its causal ground (e.g., *the five ways*).

It is here that we are reintroduced to Aquinas's *analogical theory of predication*, whose seeds were sown as early as *De Ente et Essentia*.⁸⁵ Because God contains every perfection in a way surpassing that of creatures, there cannot be a univocal predication in regard to them. This is clear. Nor, however, can a mere name stand in common (i.e., equivocal predication) lest Aquinas sever the tie that binds an effect to its cause. As he repeatedly argues when regarding this question, it is not by mere chance that certain

⁸³ See fn. 79 above.

⁸⁴ Such a formulation on my part is somewhat misleading, as we shall see below with Duns Scotus. "Being" (*ens*) is not a genus divided by differentiae, but a transcendental concept which can be conceived *confusedly* without its intensive *modifications* (i.e., finite and infinite). Because such a "modal distinction" is thoroughly Scotistic, I will leave this issue aside until below. See Chapter VI Section 1.

⁸⁵ See also *SCG* I.32-34 and *De Pot.* q. 7 a. 7 resp.

names happen to obtain between God and creatures.⁸⁶ The commonality of name instead indicates a real causal relation of likeness between the two even though the relation persists not between two members of the same species or genus, but between an eminent cause and its effects. In the community of being, God stands as both transcendental signifier and causal ground by which all others beings can be said “to be” *analogously* to that being which is itself being (*ipsum esse*) and which institutes the common ground of being for everything that is. In what follows, I will discuss Aquinas’s arguments against both univocity and equivocity in favor of an analogy of being through which he will forge the mediating link of his existential metaphysics between univocity’s reduction of God to a mundane *primum inter pares* and equivocity’s evacuation of the first from the field of causality and signification altogether.

The problem with a univocity of being between God and creatures is the following: If the universal cause of *esse* must cause being for all beings (*causa esse omnibus entibus*), as argued in the *fourth way*, it itself as subsisting being cannot be part of that being which it causes. It cannot be part of any class that would have it as a member *and* as its cause. Otherwise, it would have to be cause of itself. Thus, the *esse commune* which it causes and its own proper and incommunicable nature whatever it may be do not fall under a common genus or species, and thereby must differ in their respective accounts (*rationes*).⁸⁷ However, on this same note, if a similarity is to be retained between the two senses of being and one is not reduced to the category of non-being, they cannot be

⁸⁶ See, for example: “Nam in his quae sunt a casu aequivoca, nullus ordo aut respectus attenditur unius ad alterum, sed omnino per accidens est quod unum nomen diversis rebus attribuitur: non enim nomen impositum uni significat ipsum habere ordinem ad aliud. Sic autem non est de nominibus quae de Deo dicuntur et creaturis. Consideratur enim in huiusmodi nominum communitate ordo causae et causati, ut ex dictis patet. Non igitur secundum puram aequivocationem aliquid de Deo et rebus aliis praedicatur.” *SCG* I.33.

⁸⁷ In *SCG* I.32, Aquinas argues that univocal predication of many requires genus, species, accident, difference, or property, none of which can apply to God.

altogether dissimilar.⁸⁸ Otherwise, the effect of *more and less* being could not stand in as the middle term of the *fourth way*, because nothing except the empty communion of word would be syllogized. Based on such equivocation, Aquinas might as well conclude that “God is most rock” (*maximus petrus*) because nothing of his nature is retained after negating all creaturely content from the terms being syllogized.

An *analogical* theory of being, Aquinas’s response to this problem, thus cuts between either pure univocity or pure equivocity.⁸⁹ Because the effect is inadequate to the power of the cause, it receives the similitude of its agent according to a different *ratio*, and thus deficiently. The cause cannot be multiplied in its effects according to the same power by

⁸⁸ *SCG* I.33 argues that equivocation bars likeness between the equivocal things themselves. The only unity is a nominal unity that does include any ontological import.

⁸⁹ “Respondeo dicendum quod impossibile est aliquid praedicari de Deo et creaturis univoce. *Quia omnis effectus non adaequans virtutem causae agentis, recipit similitudinem agentis non secundum eandem rationem, sed deficienter* [m.e.]: ita ut quod divisim et multipliciter est in effectibus, in causa est simpliciter et eodem modo; sicut sol secundum unam virtutem, multiformes et varias formas in istis inferioribus producit. Eodem modo, ut supra dictum est, omnes rerum perfectiones, quae sunt in rebus creatis divisim et multipliciter, in Deo praeexistunt unite. Sic igitur, cum aliquod nomen ad perfectionem pertinens de creatura dicitur, significat illam perfectionem ut distinctam secundum rationem definitionis ab aliis: puta cum hoc nomen sapiens de homine dicitur, significamus aliquam perfectionem distinctam ab essentia hominis, et a potentia et ab esse ipsius, et ab omnibus huiusmodi. Sed cum hoc nomen de Deo dicimus, non intendimus significare aliquid distinctum ab essentia vel potentia vel esse ipsius. Et sic, cum hoc nomen sapiens de homine dicitur, quodammodo circumscribit et comprehendit rem significatam, non autem cum dicitur de Deo, sed relinquit rem significatam ut incomprehensam, et excedentem nominis significationem. Unde patet quod non secundum eandem rationem hoc nomen sapiens de Deo et de homine dicitur. Et eadem ratio est de aliis. Unde nullum nomen univoce de Deo et creaturis praedicatur. Sed nec etiam pure aequivoce, ut aliqui dixerunt. Quia secundum hoc, ex creaturis nihil posset cognosci de Deo, nec demonstrari; sed semper incideret fallacia aequivocationis. Et hoc est tam contra philosophos, qui multa demonstrative de Deo probant, quam etiam contra apostolum dicentem, Rom. I, *invisibilia Dei per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta, conspiciuntur*. Dicendum est igitur quod huiusmodi nomina dicuntur de Deo et creaturis secundum analogiam, idest proportionem. Quod quidem dupliciter contingit in nominibus, vel quia multa habent proportionem ad unum, sicut sanum dicitur de medicina et urina, in quantum utrumque habet ordinem et proportionem ad sanitatem animalis, cuius hoc quidem signum est, illud vero causa; vel ex eo quod unum habet proportionem ad alterum, sicut sanum dicitur de medicina et animali, in quantum medicina est causa sanitatis quae est in animali. Et hoc modo aliqua dicuntur de Deo et creaturis analogice, et non aequivoce pure, neque univoce. Non enim possumus nominare Deum nisi ex creaturis, ut supra dictum est. Et sic, quidquid dicitur de Deo et creaturis, dicitur secundum quod est aliquis ordo creaturae ad Deum, ut ad principium et causam, in qua praeexistunt excellenter omnes rerum perfectiones. Et iste modus communitatis medius est inter puram aequivocationem et simplicem univocationem. Neque enim in his quae analogice dicuntur, est una ratio, sicut est in univocis; nec totaliter diversa, sicut in aequivocis; sed nomen quod sic multipliciter dicitur, significat diversas proportionem ad aliquid unum; sicut sanum, de urina dictum, significat signum sanitatis animalis, de medicina vero dictum, significat causam eiusdem sanitatis.” *ST* I. q. 13, a. 5, resp.

which it exists in itself uniformly, but becomes diffuse and manifold. For example, the sun's unified power (*unam virtutem*) has a "brilliance" or "clarity" (*in claritate*)—to invoke the phrase from the *De Hebdomadibus* Exposition—that cannot be communicated to the effects. Likewise, the first cannot communicate its purity of being to many without such a pure act becoming *otherwise than it is* according to itself, and thereby communicated according to another *ratio*. This means, Aquinas clarifies, a univocal tie cannot be sustained between a first cause and its effects. On the other hand, pure equivocity confronts its own pitfalls insofar as it threatens the demonstrative link between the first and all else that follows. Equivocity removes the first from the order which it grounds in such a matter that nothing is left to bear the name of that which binds a diverse multiplicity to a single referent. Instead, the unity of such multiplicity must be established *in proportion* to their shared reference (i.e., both conceptually and causally) to a single unifying ground; a ground, however, that stands analogically separated by its eminence.⁹⁰

Despite the insistence of some such as Marion that *analogy* merely digs a chasm between *rationes* of *esse* without bridging the two, thereby avoiding the inflation of analogical doctrine in the service of the growing empire of univocity, analogy instead provides the very backbone of Aquinas's existential metaphysics through its ability to

⁹⁰ I will say more on the difference between "analogy of attribution (proportion)" and "analogy of proportionality" below. For the present, we might note Fabro's representation of their difference: "In contrast to static analogy of proportionality, there is the dynamic *analogy of intrinsic attribution*. While the former expresses in its own way a relation of similarity, the latter expresses mainly a relation of foundation and dependence of beings on *esse*. The analogy of proportionality emphasizes, as it were, the Aristotelian aspect of the immanence of *esse* in beings; the analogy of attribution, on the other hand, stresses the Platonic aspect of radical dependence of participant beings on the pure perfection that is separate from them." Fabro, "Intensive Hermeneutics," 483. He goes on to state: "Thus analogy of attribution accomplishes the ultimate 'resolution' of metaphysical discourse by relating the many to the One, the diverse to the Identical, and the composed to the Simple. It is at the same time the answer to the problem of the Parmenidean One within the creationist theory." Ibid., 483-484.

sustain an abiding reference.⁹¹ A multiplicity's analogical proportion to one thus finds a unifying ground that does not absorb all diversity into itself, but as a common referent *outside* the order it unifies it preserves such distinct proportions.⁹² Common names can be transferred analogically between God and creatures insofar as he is the cause and principle of such perfections, yet contains them in a higher fashion (“...*aliquis ordo creaturae ad Deum, ut ad principium et causam, in qua praeexistunt excellenter omnes rerum perfectiones*”).

Such a *higher preexistence* of perfections entails that the cause and principle can cause an entire species without either being part of the species itself (i.e., which it causes in its totality) or *itself* having anything in common with that which it causes. On such *analogical causation* as the cause of everything in its kind (i.e., of being), Aquinas states:

[...] licet in praedicationibus oporteat aequivoca ad univoca reduci, tamen in actionibus agens non univocum ex necessitate praecedit agens univocum. Agens enim non univocum est causa universalis totius speciei, ut sol est causa generationis omnium hominum. Agens vero univocum non est causa agens universalis totius speciei (alioquin esset causa sui ipsius, cum sub specie contineatur): sed est causa particularis respectu huius individui, quod in participatione speciei constituit. Causa igitur universalis totius speciei non est agens univocum. Causa autem universalis est prior particulari. –Hoc autem agens universale, licet non sit univocum, non tamen est omnino aequivocum, quia sic non faceret sibi simile; sed potest dici agens analogicum: sicut in praedicationibus

⁹¹ See Jean-Luc Marion, “Thomas Aquinas and Onto-theo-logy,” 48-49 and above fn. 3.

⁹² “If difference and diversity are real, as we have seen Saint Thomas insist that they be, then what is common in the analogy of being can only be the order that binds them together. ‘Being’ is not an abstraction but a concrete order in creation. Analogy thus brings out the idea that reality in creation is not just a flat, lowest common denominator of widely diverse things in the concrete, but rather a diversity of things interrelated in their original and originating integrity, the first perfection of the world, and in their interaction as they move toward their second and final perfect. This analogy of being in its diversity calls for a similar analogy in the order of efficient causes that produce this order of the universe through motion and change.” Oliva Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas: A Teleological Cosmology* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 172.

omnia univoca reducuntur ad unum primum, non univocum, sed analogicum, quod est ens.⁹³

As the universal *cause* of its kind, the agent cannot itself be part of that which it causes, lest it be *causa sui*. For example, the universal cause of human generation cannot be human otherwise it would have to cause its own humanity and give to itself what it does not have, or have what it does not give. As the particular cause of human generation, one human can be the univocal cause of another, but ultimately this causal line terminates in a non-univocal cause, which stands as the universal cause of the entire species. Likewise, if the cause of being in all beings were a univocal cause, then the universal cause of *being* would need to be the cause of *its own being*, because “being” would be the same in both cases. Although the cause of being cannot be a univocal cause, Aquinas argues that nevertheless, some bond must hold between the universal cause and that which it causes. Otherwise, there could be no *likeness* (*faceret sibi simile*) between the perfect *causa essendi* and its *more or less* imperfect effects of being, and therefore no demonstration.⁹⁴

A word of clarification should be offered regarding univocal causality as it relates to the argument from the *fourth way* that the most perfect in its kind is *cause of everything* in its kind. For example, the most perfect in the kind of heat (i.e., fire) can be the *univocal* cause of everything hot, that is of all hot individuals. But it could not be the cause of heat as such, otherwise it would be *causa sui*: as something hot, and as the cause of heat, it would be the cause of itself. Aquinas lays out this distinction clearly in *De Potentia*:

⁹³ *ST I*. q. 13, a. 5, ad 1.

⁹⁴ See, for example: “Aequivocatio nominis processum argumentationis impedit. Si igitur nihil diceretur de Deo et creaturis nisi pure aequivoce, nulla argumentatio fieri posset procedendo de creaturis ad Deum. Cuius contrarium patet ex omnibus loquentibus de divinis.” *SCG I*.33. Also, *De Pot.* q. 7, a. 7, resp.

[...] quod agens aequivocum oportet esse prius quam agens univocum, quia agens univocum non habet causalitatem super totam speciem, alias esset causa sui ipsius, sed solum super aliquod individuum speciei; agens autem aequivocum habet causalitatem super totam speciem; unde oportet primum agens esse aequivocum.⁹⁵

What he here calls “equivocal cause,” but elsewhere refines to mean “eminent cause” such that it sustains some likeness to its effects, must be of a different order than the *perfection* itself (i.e., as opposed to merely the individuals embodying the perfection) which it universally causes. Fire can cause the individuals of the genus heat, but even a most perfect original fire must have an account of its being hot other than itself. Thus, as hot it cannot itself be the cause of heat as such. It must derive from something of a higher order, which is not hot, but which eminently contains heat, and thus can cause the total species (*super totam speciem*) of fire, along with the total genus of heat (e.g. the sun).⁹⁶

Furthermore, this is why the “most being” of the *fourth way*, even though not stated in the argument itself, cannot be the superlative of being on a scale of contiguous points. The being given by it to all beings, which is the very scale of being itself, is not of the same order as itself; otherwise in constituting the order, it would constitute itself. By opting for a “non-univocal” cause of being, a cause that does not constitute its own being (*ipsum esse*) in grounding the being of everything else (*esse commune*), Aquinas holds open an escape route from onto-theology: “most being” is not merely a pinnacle on a scale of entitiveness, but an excess grounding the economy of entity altogether.

But at the risk of idolatry (*pace* Marion), we must uncover the nature of that analogical bond that non-reciprocally links *entia creata* in their *esse commune* to *ipsum esse subsistens*, a bond that must allow the dissemination of being in creation in no way

⁹⁵ *De Pot.* q. 7, a. 7, ad. 7.

⁹⁶ This means that at some point this accidental order of causes needs to be grounded in an essential order, otherwise it would run to infinity and the entire sequence could never be generated.

to compromise the self-identity (i.e., *ipseity*) of the creative source. In short, Aquinas must remove God from *esse commune* in order to preserve the integrity of *ipsum esse subsistens* (and thus the “proper” application of the *ratio essendi*) as “only being” without any trace of the otherness of creation and yet retain enough of a similitude to move from the being of creatures to their cause.⁹⁷ Beings bear a trace of that which is most being because insofar as each agent acts according to its being in act, the nature of action is to produce its like.⁹⁸ Thus, no matter how removed from the first and imperfect, all beings attest to its activity. There must be some non-reciprocal bond that sustains the unequal distribution of this shared perfection (i.e., *esse*) throughout the entirety of creation. Without such, the universal cause of being would not produce effects *similar* to itself. Thus, the bond must be analogical.⁹⁹ But what does Aquinas mean by “analogy”?¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷As referenced above: “[...] non tamen est omnino aequivocum, quia sic non faceret sibi simile [...]” *ST I q. 13, a. 5, ad 1.*

⁹⁸See, for example, *SCG I.29*. “Within the Commentary on the *Sentences* and *De Veritate*, formal or exemplar causality—in which the relationship between cause and effect is one of *imitation*—operates with a particular dominance in Thomas’s thought. In an effect’s sharing in its cause’s form—a sharing which never attains the same degree of formal similitude as the cause itself—the effect imitates its cause. As Montagnes points out though, beginning with the *Summa contra gentiles* and carried throughout the rest of the later works, for example, the *De potentia Dei* and *Summa theologiae*, Thomas approaches the issue of analogy in terms of *efficient* causality; for now in the later works the relationship between a cause and its effect is rendered, more often than not, in terms of the communication of *act* [...] In those early texts, God’s *causal* activity is understood in terms of a *formal* communication of His own being to creation. Beginning with the *Summa contra gentiles*, however, there is a marked movement away from the formalist-exemplarist direction of the early works—which, again, is not to say that there is radical reorienting with respect to Aquinas’s understanding the nature of being—toward a more existential perspective.” Salas, “The Judgmental Character,” 131. I will focus on the later texts (i.e., the two *Summas* and *De Potentia*), while drawing out both the existential and the imitative aspects of analogy.

⁹⁹Wippel clearly explicates this link between a metaphysics of participation and analogical causality: “...it will not be amiss here for us to note that he draws a close connection between his theory of analogy and his metaphysics of participation. This we have already mentioned in passing. And while this connection is much more evident at the transcendental level in conjunction with Thomas’s account of analogical predication of divine names, to some extent it enters into his theory of analogy even at the predicamental level. Thus analogy by reference to a first implies a priority and posteriority on the part of the primary analogate and the secondary analogate(s). This also means that a secondary analogate such as an accident may be regarded as sharing in or participating in being from its primary analogate, its substantial subject. Hence even at this level it is the ontological situation, the fact that an accident depends for its being on its substantial subject, that justifies analogical predication of the name being both of it and its substantial subject.” *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 86.

Section 4: Analogical Predication

Much has been written about Aquinas's doctrine of analogy, perhaps more than any other area of his metaphysics. Without fully immersing ourselves in this historical debate, let it be noted that many commentators have sought to excavate Aquinas's own thoughts on the matter from beneath the topsoil of Cajetanian exegesis. The great commentator's influence has been particularly important in emphasizing the primacy of "analogy of proportionality," which many have since argued plays only a secondary role in the thinking of Aquinas, over "analogy of attribution (proportion)."¹⁰¹ According to an

¹⁰⁰ A word of clarification is in order concerning the link between "similitude" and "analogy." "Analogy," for Aquinas, contains a larger extension than "similitude" "likeness" or "resemblance," the latter which constitute a subtype of analogy. Thus, in what follows, it will be necessary to show that Aquinas uses not only analogy, but an analogy of similitude to describe the relation between God and creatures: this similitude is non-reciprocal insofar as the *esse* of creatures is likened to *ipsum esse subsistens*, but it is in no way *like them*.

¹⁰¹ I will use "attribution" and "proportion" synonymously and distinguish them from "proportionality." Commentators disagree over the division employed by Aquinas regarding analogy. In a chapter entitled "Where Cajetan Went Wrong," McNerny argues that Cajetan's threefold division of analogy (i.e., of inequality; of attribution; and of proportionality) not only is based on a misreading of Thomas, but ultimately denies an analogical nature for the first or second division (i.e., inequality and attribution), leaving only his ill-defined analogy of "proper" proportionality. See McNerny, *Aquinas and Analogy* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 3-29. Lyttkens states: "[...] we find that St. Thomas only uses the analogy of proportionality as a logical aid in stating of God certain properties taken from creation, viz. in *De Ver.* 2.11. The analogy of proportionality must accordingly be said not to play that central parts in St. Thomas, which is ascribed to him in Thomistic quarters" Hampus Lyttkens, *The Analogy Between God and the World: An Investigation of its Background and Interpretation of its Use by Thomas of Aquino* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri AB, 1952), 475. Further, Klubertanz explains: "For a period of some months around the year 1256, St. Thomas either held or considered holding proper proportionality as *the* intrinsic analogy explaining the ontological similarity between God and creatures. This position he had not held previously and would never develop again in subsequent writings. Proper proportionality is therefore a Thomistic analogy in the sense that it as a doctrine taught by St. Thomas for a brief period early in his career" George P. Klubertanz, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy: A Textual Analysis and Systematic Synthesis* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1960), 94. Marion, referring to the etymology of analogy as "proportion," offers a stance on the debate concerning Aquinas's exact position on analogy. He states: "Thomas Aquinas ensures this [i.e., the being of creatures will not be taken for the *esse* of God], further, through two characteristics given to analogy. (a) First, it is a matter of *proportio* and not of *proportionalitas*: 'analogiam idest proportionem [sic].' Whereas *proportionalitas* translates and thus recalls a proportion of four terms, which entails a defined, commensurable, and intelligible relation between them, *proportio*, by contrast, has no further ambition than to refer several terms to a focal point without the necessity of any common measure between them." "Thomas Aquinas and Onto-Theo-Logy," 49-50. For yet another defense of this position, see also Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 550-555. On proportionality in *De Veritate*, Wippel surmises: "His overriding concern throughout much of this discussion seems to be to protect divine transcendence. His theory of analogical proportionality is not equally successful, however, in protecting him against the kind of

analogy of proportionality, a is analogous to b insofar as a is to c as b is to d, a four term analogy that can be formalized as follows: a:c :: b:d (e.g., fawn:deer::kid:goat). A does not relate directly to b, but their relationship is mediated by an analogy between their distinct relationships to something else, and the relationship of each to something else then brings them into communion. Aquinas provides the example of the “sight” of vision being analogous to the “sight” of intellect.¹⁰² The two sights are related analogously insofar as each operates in a similar fashion with respect to the functioning of vision or the intellect: there is an analogy between the relation of each act (i.e., intellectual and corporeal vision) to its respective faculty (i.e., the intellect or the eyes). Thus in terms of *esse*, the relation of creatures to *their being* is analogous to the relation of God to *his being*.¹⁰³ This type of analogical relationship has the advantage that no direct analogy links divine to created *esse* such that *esse* would be common to both. The “*esse*” of each is not analogous; only their respective relations. Thus, we ascend from an understanding

agnosticism on our part which he associates with a theory of purely equivocal predication of the divine names.” Ibid., 554. See also Montagnes, *The Doctrine of Analogy*. Cf. Anderson, *The Bond of Being: An Essay on Analogy and Existence* (St. Louis, Mo.: B. Herder Book Co. 1949). Here he argues that Thomas opts for “analogy of proper proportionality” for the very reason that it avoids the covert univocity of “analogy of proportion/attribution.” Only this type of analogy, he maintains, allows created beings to have *esse* in any meaningful sense, which is indicated by the adjective “proper.” Otherwise, their *esse* is referred to something outside them (i.e., subsisting being) either by *extrinsic* or *intrinsic attribution*. Both modes of attribution, he argues, are reducible to univocity and thus fail to sustain the real difference between God and creatures. He argues: “For, while attribution is in the order of extrinsic relation, metaphor is in the order of operation; and operation is certainly ‘closer’ to being than relation. Nevertheless metaphor is an improper mode of analogy precisely because it has to do with a concept that is univocal in itself, since it is realized formally and properly in only one of the terms of the proportionality. In analogy of proper proportionality, on the other hand, the common concept is intrinsically analogical because it is realized formally and properly in each and every one of the terms of the proportionality” *The Bond of Being*, 229-230. For our purposes at present, a division between analogy of proportion/attribution and analogy of proportionality will suffice.

¹⁰² “Quandoque vero dicitur aliquid analogice secundo modo convenientiae; sicut nomen visus dicitur de visu corporali et intellectu, eo quod sicut visus est in oculo, ita intellectus in mente.” *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 11, resp.

¹⁰³ Salas has stressed the way in which such an analogy accounts for the judgmental basis of analogy insofar as an analogy holds between the *dynamic* relation of both beings to their respective *actus essendi*. See Salas, “The Judgmental Character,” 125-130. He goes on to claim, however, that analogy of attribution is also realized in judgmental terms, and thus is no less existential. Ibid., 130.

of the relation between creatures and their being to a knowledge of God and his being. A further advantage is that it awards creatures their own *intrinsic* or “proper” perfections (e.g., being), which can be known apart from and prior to the other dyad of the analogy (i.e., a:c apart from b:d).¹⁰⁴

Given the wide range of skepticism concerning Aquinas’s adherence to the analogy of proportionality, I will bypass a comparative review of the textual basis for the different types of analogy and instead focus on what seems to be the pressing philosophical issue concerning its use. The problem with an analogy of proportionality is that it requires prior knowledge of both proportions (e.g., “God to God’s *esse*” and “a creature to a creature’s *esse*”) from which the comparison can be derived. But as we have argued, only through reference to the *primum analogatum essendi* (i.e., *ipsum esse subsistens*) does the true role of *esse* for creatures manifest. Reinvoking the argument from above that a real distinction between *esse* and essence in creatures requires knowledge of their identity in *ipsum esse subsistens*, below I will argue that neither *esse commune* nor a creature’s own *actus essendi* satisfies the demands of such knowledge when withholding reference to (a creature’s) participation in *ipsum esse subsistens*.

The noteworthy issue here concerns the inability to draw an analogy of proper proportionality from creatures, whose *esse* as a really distinct perfection only fully emerges when held in reference to their efficient creative cause. As argued above, an understanding of “a” (e.g., the essence of phoenix or human) which does not include “c”

¹⁰⁴ Anderson states: “The metaphysical necessity of this analogy [proper proportionality] may be brought home to us by the reflection that, apart from it, even the univocal predication of a common term of several actually distinct things would be impossible. For were there no analogy of beings in being, there would not be several things distinct in the act of being, but only on Thing, One Essence; and we should be back with old Parmenides. Univocal predication itself clearly presupposes simple diversity of act of existing of diverse existents. This act, which is the root and flower of every perfection, since it proceeds from Him alone who is Pure Act, St. Thomas calls *esse*—‘to be.’” *The Bond of Being*, 284.

(e.g., their existence) does not provide adequate grounds for uncovering the perfective contribution of c—what I have been calling “extra-formal existential actuality”—before referencing the efficient cause of such perfection, a cause that has the perfection of itself and not from another. Thus, the being of creatures is indelibly linked to the being of God: we only discover the true meaning of being when we reflect on the insufficiency of beings to ground their own being, which leads back to subsisting being. Likewise, our knowledge *that God is* arises from such reflection on the ground of beings, and not from an independent intuition into the nature of God, which we then can compare to the nature of beings and derive an analogy of proper proportionality.¹⁰⁵

In addition, as pointed out by Suarez, proportionality itself does not preclude univocity.¹⁰⁶ Proportionality by itself (e.g., a human is related to its senses *as* a horse is related to its) does not entail an *analogy of* proportionality. Thus, merely to relate the distinct proportions of being does not necessitate that they be analogical. Instead, what makes a being’s *esse* unlike that of God’s requires a deeper understanding of the *primum analogatum* of *esse* itself (i.e., as a pure subsisting act) and the way in which it comes to be received in caused beings through participation. Such an understanding cannot transpire from an inquiry concerning caused things themselves, but must make some appeal to the nature of *esse* as such. Suarez explains that only by referencing the absolute status of one member (i.e., *primum analogatum*) does the derivative nature of the others become apparent. Thus, only by a remotional understanding of the radical identity between God and his *esse* do we come to witness the analogical manner in which

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Klubertanz, 109. Klubertanz argues that analogy of proper proportionality either requires previous knowledge of both analogates, which can subsequently be compared; or agnosticism about one of the analogates involved because the knowledge remains figurative.

¹⁰⁶ *DM* 28.3.10-11.

everything else must participate being.¹⁰⁷ From the insufficient and imperfect likeness of creatures to God, a non-reciprocal reference is made to God based on *proportion*, not *proportionality*.¹⁰⁸ The likeness of creatures to God is direct (i.e., *proportion*) and, as will be presently unpacked, Aquinas’s prominent mode of understanding the distinction.

As Aquinas often explains in his discussions of analogy of attribution (i.e., or “proportion”), two things are said to be *analogous* in one of two ways: either as they both relate to a common third (i.e., many to one), or as one of them relates to the other and receives the *ratio* from the first (i.e., one to another).¹⁰⁹ An example of the first kind of analogous predication is predicating ‘*ens*’ of both quality and quantity in reference to substance, as accidents are said “to be” only in relation to substance; or, another example, as medicine and urine are both called “healthy” in relation to the end of health in the body.¹¹⁰ This type of predication of two things to a third cannot be what holds for

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Anderson, *The Bond of Being*, 105-107. Despite Anderson’s persistence that Suarez misreads proportionality, and treats only analogy of improper proportionality (i.e., metaphor) and not *proper* proportionality, nevertheless in order to draw out the *analogical* character of the relationship, there must be a primary analogate, which all others reference but which itself does not include inferior. Although Anderson denies such a primary analogate, as will be seen, Aquinas always speaks in terms of many referencing the one in such a way that the one itself does not include reference to the many.

¹⁰⁸ An analogy of proportionality could not *attest to* the nature of God—we would need to already have knowledge of the relation of God to God’s *esse* and could not utilize the similitude of creatures to God for the basis of a demonstration.) Even though there is an attestation on the part of creature, which makes demonstration possible, their very being inherently refers to subsisting being itself. Thus, there can be a demonstration of the existence of God beginning with creatures (e.g., the *De Ente* presentation or the *fourth way* of the *Summas*) even though the real distinction between *esse* and essence in creatures only fully emerges after God’s nature as *ipsum esse subsistens* has been secured. The “not-included *esse*” of the first stage comes to be specified as (*esse*) “efficiently caused by another” and must be really distinct because it belongs only to a single being. Given the incommunicably self-identical subsistence of *esse*, all else must defect from this perfection in some way. Only once we realize the *limitation* of these beings and their essences (i.e., they require an efficient cause) does the *composition* of their essence and *esse* manifest based on what their efficient cause necessarily turns out to be (i.e., subsisting being).

¹⁰⁹ “[...] quod Creator et creatura reducuntur in unum, non communitate univocationis sed analogiae. Talis autem communitas potest esse duplex. Aut ex eo quod aliqua participant aliquid unum secundum prius et posterius, sicut potentia et actus rationem entis, et similiter substantia et accidens; aut ex eo quod unum esse et rationem ab altero recipit; et talis est analogia creaturae ad Creatorem: creatura enim non habet esse nisi secundum quod a primo ente descendit, nec nominatur ens nisi in quantum ens primum imitatur; et similiter est de sapientia et de omnibus aliis quae de creatura dicuntur.” *In I Sent.* Prolog., q. 1, a. 2, ad. 2.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, *SCG* I. 34 and *De Pot.* q. 7, a. 7, resp. The latter states: “Respondeo. Dicendum quod impossibile est aliquid univoce praedicari de Deo et creatura; quod ex hoc patet: Nam omnis effectus

creatures and God, although it can be what holds between creatures themselves in reference to God. Otherwise this bond of analogy would be *prior* to both God and creatures and this common third would constitute the *ratio* of both finite *and* infinite being. Thus, the analogy between God and creatures must be of the latter sort, insofar as creatures reference God, but God in no way references them. This means that only one side constitutes the *ratio* under which a multiplicity is linked, but the multiplicity in no way co-constitutes the *ratio*. The proper *ratio* remains purified of any traces of that which it grounds.

agentis univoci adaequat virtutem agentis. Nulla autem creatura, cum sit finita, potest adaequare virtutem primi agentis, cum sit infinita. Unde impossibile est quod similitudo Dei univoce in creatura recipiatur. Item patet quod, etsi una sit ratio formae existentis in agente et in effectu, diversus tamen modus existendi impedit univocam praedicationem; licet enim eadem sit ratio domus quae sit in materia et domus quae est in mente artificis,- quia unum est ratio alterius,- non tamen domus univoce de utraque praedicatur, propter hoc quod species domus in materia habet esse materiale, in mente vero artificis immateriale. Dato ergo per impossibile quod eiusdem rationis sit bonitas in Deo et creatura, non tamen bonum univoce de Deo praedicaretur; cum quod in Deo est immaterialiter et simpliciter, in creatura sit materialiter et multipliciter. Et praeterea ens non dicitur univoce de substantia et accidente, propter hoc quod substantia est ens tamquam per se habens esse, accidens vero tamquam cuius esse est inesse. Ex quo patet quod diversa habitudo ad esse impedit univocam praedicationem entis. Deus autem alio modo se habet ad esse quam aliqua alia creatura; nam ipse est suum esse, quod nulli alii creaturae competit. Unde nullo modo univoce de Deo creatura dicitur; et per consequens nec aliquid aliorum praedicabilium inter quae est ipsum primum ens. Existente enim diversitate in primo, oportet in aliis diversitatem inveniri; unde de substantia et accidente nihil univoce praedicatur. Quidam autem aliter dixerunt, quod de Deo et creatura nihil praedicatur analogice, sed aequivoce pure. Et huius opinionis est Rabbi Moyses, ut ex suis dictis patet. Ista autem opinio non potest esse vera: quia in pure aequivocis, quae philosophus nominat a casu aequivoca, non dicitur aliquid de uno per respectum ad alterum. Omnia autem quae dicuntur de Deo et creaturis, dicuntur de Deo secundum aliquem respectum ad creaturas, vel e contrario, sicut patet per omnes opiniones positas de expositione divinorum nominum. Unde impossibile est quod sit pura aequivocatio. Item, cum omnis cognitio nostra de Deo ex creaturis sumatur, si non erit convenientia nisi in nomine tantum, nihil de Deo sciremus nisi nomina tantum vana, quibus res non subesset. Sequeretur etiam quod omnes demonstrationes a philosophis datae de Deo, essent sophisticatae; verbi gratia, si dicatur, quod omne quod est in potentia, reducitur ad actum per ens actu,- et ex hoc concluderetur quod Deus esset ens actu, cum per ipsum omnia in esse educantur,- erit fallacia aequivocationis; et sic de omnibus aliis. Et praeterea oportet causatum esse aequaliter simile causae; unde oportet de causato et causa nihil pure aequivoce praedicari, sicut sanum de medicina et animali. Et ideo aliter dicendum est, quod de Deo et creatura nihil praedicetur univoce; non tamen ea quae communiter praedicantur, pure aequivoce praedicantur, sed analogice. Huius autem praedicationis duplex est modus. Unus quo aliquid praedicatur de duobus per respectum ad aliquod tertium, sicut ens de qualitate et quantitate per respectum ad substantiam. Alius modus est quo aliquid praedicatur de duobus per respectum unius ad alterum, sicut ens de substantia et quantitate. In primo autem modo praedicationis oportet esse aliquid prius duobus, ad quod ambo respectum habent, sicut substantia ad quantitatem et qualitatem; in secundo autem non, sed necesse est unum esse prius altero. Et ideo cum Deo nihil sit prius, sed ipse sit prior creatura, competit in divina praedicatione secundus modus analogiae, et non primus." *De Pot.* q. 7, a. 7, resp.

In both the case of “the *being* of accidents” or the “*health* of medicine or exercise,” there is an “extrinsic attribution” of the term, which is defined by the intrinsic or proper attribution of such in the primary analogate (i.e., the being of substance; the health of bodies). These examples are illuminating insofar as they show how the unified *ratio* can be applied to a multiplicity and yet retain its proper and complete attribution according to the primary analogate. The original definition remains unsupplemented by its communication to many.¹¹¹ The examples may be misleading, however, in that created beings would have being only by extrinsic denomination and thus their *being* would be nothing more than their relation to God (i.e., as efficient cause). At this point, the difference between a human and a phoenix would be negligible. A phoenix also can be said “to be” by extrinsic denomination, that is, it *has being* in relation to its status in the intellect. Although the relation that defines a real being would be different than the relation whereby an intellect gives being to an idea, in both cases, nevertheless, “being” would be nothing more than a mere relation to God.¹¹²

¹¹¹ In an early text, Aquinas gives a clear statement of analogy in reference to univocity and equivocity as the three modes of predicating a concept (*ratio*) of many. He states: “[...] intelligentiam sciendum est quod tripliciter aliquid praedicatur de pluribus: uniuoce, aequiuoce et analogice. Vniuoce praedicatur quod praedicatur secundum idem nomen et secundum rationem eandem, id est definitionem, sicut animal praedicatur de homine et de asino: utrumque enim dicitur animal, et utrumque est substantia animata sensibilis, quod est diffinitio animalis. Equiuoce praedicatur, quod praedicatur de aliquibus secundum idem nomen, et secundum diuersam rationem, sicut canis dicitur de latrabili et de caelesti, que conveniunt solum in nomine, et non in diffinitione siue significatione; id enim quod significatur per nomen, est diffinitio, sicut dicitur in IV Metaphisice. Analogice dicitur praedicari quod praedicatur de pluribus quorum rationes diuersae sunt sed attribuuntur uni alicui eidem, sicut sanum dicitur de corpore animalis et de urina et de potione, sed non ex toto idem significat in omnibus.” *Opera Omnia Iussu Leonis XIII P.M. Edita, t. 43: De principiis naturae ad fratrem Sylvestrum*. (Roma: Editori di San Tommaso, 1976), VI. Hereafter: “*De principiis naturae*.” See also: “Tamen sciendum, quod paternitas non est ejusdem rationis secundum univocationem in Deo et in creaturis, quamvis sit eadem ratio secundum analogiam, quae quidem aliquid habet de identitate rationis, et aliquid de diversitate.” *In I Sent.* d. 21 q. 1 a. 1 qc. 2 resp.

¹¹² See Chapter VI below. Also: “The diminished, parasitic *esse* of creatures consists in their being somehow related to God; but, likewise, the diminished, parasitic *esse* of a fictive being, say a goatstag, consists in its being somehow related to creatures (to a goat and a stag, or to the mind the imagines it). What is remarkable about God, though, is that he can give *real esse* to the objects he creates, where a human mind only *fictive esse* to the objects it imagines.” Menn, “Metaphysics: God and Being,” in *The*

Such an account would fail to explain the tangible difference between a being *in re* (i.e., its real being) and a being *in intellectu*. “*Esse*,” however, is meant to explain what more this “*in re*” signifies. Because, however, God “*faceret sibi simile*,” the being of creatures attests to their *causa essendi* in a more causally robust manner than a mere being of reason, such as a phoenix, which has a *causa essendi* in only a limited sense: i.e., prior to creation, it has no being of its own apart from the divine intellect and, following creation, it makes gains only *in intellectu* through the number of intellects which can conceive it.¹¹³ It will be necessary to see how around the issue of assimilative participation Aquinas seeks a more proper attribution of *esse* to beings *in re* without allowing their being to co-constitute the *ratio essendi*. The problem will be to show how beings can be like God in their existential actuality; that is, that “*esse*” actually explains a thing’s own act of being as more than extrinsic dependence upon a cause (i.e., being through external relation) and yet due to the essential nature of God’s being, which all other beings must participate, even when received, *esse* remains fundamentally other than the nature of any other being.¹¹⁴

Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy, ed. A.S. McGrae (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 163.

¹¹³ I will say more about this below. See Chapters IV and V below.

¹¹⁴ In the following passage, Aquinas states the problem in terms of goodness and attempts to explain how being and good can be said of creatures more than in terms of extrinsic denomination. He states: “*Sed contra est quod omnia sunt bona in quantum sunt. Sed non dicuntur omnia entia per esse divinum, sed per esse proprium* [m.e.]. Ergo non omnia sunt bona bonitate divina, sed bonitate propria.” *ST I*, q. 6, a. 4, s.c. In what follows, Aquinas explains how from its participation in the first being, which itself is *essentially* good and being, everything else can be called good and a being. What belongs to each thing *formally* is a similitude or trace of divine goodness. Thus, on account of such an inhering similitude, each creature both possesses its own goodness, but also reflects its cause, which alone is essentially good. On this matter, Aquinas states: “*A primo igitur per suam essentiam ente et bono, unumquodque potest dici bonum et ens, in quantum participat ipsum per modum cuiusdam assimilationis, licet remote et deficiente, ut ex superioribus patet.* [m.e.] Sic ergo unumquodque dicitur bonum bonitate divina, sicut primo principio exemplari, effectivo et finali totius bonitatis. *Nihilominus tamen unumquodque dicitur bonum similitudine divinae bonitatis sibi inhaerente, quae est formaliter sua bonitas denominans ipsum* [m.e.]. Et sic est bonitas una omnium; et etiam multae bonitates.” *ST I*, q. 6, a. 4, resp.

In discussing the perfection of God, Aquinas asks whether other things can be like God.¹¹⁵ He maintains that God communicates his form to them, not according to generic or specific formality, but analogy, more specifically, according to *likeness* and *similitude*. They in turn are *assimilated* to him as imperfect similitudes insofar as they are beings and he the first and universal principle of the totality of being (*Et hoc modo illa quae sunt a Deo, assimilantur ei in quantum sunt entia, ut primo et universali principio totius esse*). In differentiating the procession of creatures from God from the procession of the divine persons, Aquinas helps to clarify the nature of analogy at work. The divine essence itself (*ipsa*) is not communicated to creatures emanating from God, but remains uncommunicated. A similitude of this essence, which is not the *essence itself*, however, is spread through creation, thus preserving the *ipseity* of the divine essence while at the

¹¹⁵ In the following passage, Aquinas discusses the ways in which likeness (*similitudo*) is based on communication of a form. The first way communicates the same form according to the same *ratio*, and according to the same mode. He provides the example of two equal whitenesses. The second manner concerns the communication of the same form according to the same *ratio*, but in different modes. He gives the example of greater and lesser whitenesses. The third way, which is between non-univocal agents, concerns the communication of the same form, but not according to the same *ratio*. God's communication of his same form to creatures cannot be a specific or generic similitude, as God is outside all genera. Thus, creatures are similitudes of God's form according to analogy. He states: "Respondeo dicendum quod, cum similitudo attendatur secundum convenientiam vel communicationem in forma, multiplex est similitudo, secundum multos modos communicandi in forma. Quaedam enim dicuntur similia, quae communicant in eadem forma secundum eandem rationem, et secundum eundem modum: et haec non solum dicuntur similia, sed aequalia in sua similitudine; sicut duo aequaliter alba, dicuntur similia in albedine. Et haec est perfectissima similitudo. Alio modo dicuntur similia, quae communicant in forma secundum eandem rationem, et non secundum eundem modum, sed secundum magis et minus; ut minus album dicitur simile magis albo. Et haec est similitudo imperfecta. Tertio modo dicuntur aliqua similia, quae communicant in eadem forma, sed non secundum eandem rationem; ut patet in agentibus non univocis. Cum enim omne agens agat sibi simile in quantum est agens, agit autem unumquodque secundum suam formam, necesse est quod in effectu sit similitudo formae agentis. Si ergo agens sit contentum in eadem specie cum suo effectu, erit similitudo inter faciens et factum in forma, secundum eandem rationem speciei; sicut homo generat hominem. Si autem agens non sit contentum in eadem specie, erit similitudo, sed non secundum eandem rationem speciei, sicut ea quae generantur ex virtute solis, accedunt quidem ad aliquam similitudinem solis, non tamen ut recipiant formam solis secundum similitudinem speciei, sed secundum similitudinem generis. Si igitur sit aliquod agens, quod non in genere contineatur, effectus eius adhuc magis accedent remote ad similitudinem formae agentis: non tamen ita quod participant similitudinem formae agentis secundum eandem rationem speciei aut generis, sed secundum aliqualem analogiam, sicut ipsum esse est commune omnibus. Et hoc modo illa quae sunt a Deo, assimilantur ei in quantum sunt entia, ut primo et universali principio totius esse." *ST I*, q. 4, a. 3, resp.

same time providing a unified ground for the diffused multiplicity. In his Commentary on the *Divine Names*, he states:

Nam in processione divinarum Personarum ipsa eadem divina Essentia communicatur Personae procedenti et sic sunt plures Personae habentes divinam Essentiam, sed in processione creaturarum, ipsa divina essentia non communicatur creaturis procedentibus, sed remanet incommunicata seu imparticipata; sed similitudo eius, per ea quae dat creaturis, in creaturis propagatur et multiplicatur et sic quodammodo Divinitas per sui similitudinem non per essentiam, in creaturas procedit et in eis quodammodo multiplicatur, ut sic ipsa creaturarum processio possit dici divina discretio, si respectus ad divinam similitudinem habeatur, non autem si respiciatur divina Essentia.¹¹⁶

Creatures do not join in an essential (i.e., generic or specific) community with God, but as imperfect similitudes of divine *esse*, in whom *esse* and essence are really distinct, they remain analogically linked to him. God's essence remains uncommunicated and unparticipated.¹¹⁷ Instead, God generates a similitude of himself to be participated, thereby not multiplying himself or giving himself over to the participants. We are not yet in a position to fully understand the mechanisms by which being is given (*dare esse*), all of which will be treated below in relation to essential possibility in terms of divine ideas and the act of giving *esse* through creation.

This issue of how God hands-down and diffuses being to creatures, while still remaining himself unparticipated, will be important in determining whether “created beings” *are* by their own *actus essendi*, or whether “*esse*” as the having being of such beings only can be attributed to them as they relate to their cause. At this point, all that can be affirmed is that relation to a first and universal principle of all being, however, provides creatures with the *adveniens extra* as something other than and uncontained by

¹¹⁶ *In div. nom.*, cap. 2 lect. 3. 158.

¹¹⁷ This language of the “unparticipated” perfection generating something of itself that is participated seems to derive from the Neo-Platonism of Proclus. See *Elements of Theology*, Prop. XXIII.

their essential determinations. Although only God is a being *essentially*, whereas everything else is a being through *participation*, a difference that would prohibit creatures from agreeing with God in form, analogy provides the bond between a cause transcending all genera and its effects that bear his likeness as participants in being. This does not, however, mean that God is *like* creatures.¹¹⁸ His transcendence cannot be perfected through an analogical communication of his form, but instead remains untouched by creaturely assimilation.¹¹⁹

Again, in his *Sentences Commentary*, we see how Aquinas specifically thinks through the analogical relation between God and creatures in terms of similitude. On the question of whether God is the formal *esse* of creatures, he states: “Unde est tertius modus causae agentis analogice. Unde patet quod divinum esse producit esse creaturae in similitudine sui imperfecta: et ideo esse divinum dicitur esse omnium rerum, a quo omne esse creatum effective et exemplariter manat.”¹²⁰ God as efficient *and* exemplary cause (i.e., most being) produces an imperfect similitude of himself, which is the *esse creaturae*. Divine *esse* is said to be the *esse* of all things because it is that by which all created *esse* efficiently and exemplarily diffuses (*manat*). Thus, as created being is diffused from God,

¹¹⁸ And further on the non-reciprocity, he states: “Ad quartum dicendum quod, licet aliquo modo concedatur quod creatura sit similis Deo, nullo tamen modo concedendum est quod Deus sit similis creaturae: quia, ut dicit Dionysius cap. IX de Div. Nom., in his quae unius ordinis sunt, recipitur mutua similitudo, non autem in causa et causato: dicimus enim quod imago sit similis homini, et non e converso. Et similiter dici potest aliquo modo quod creatura sit similis Deo: non tamen quod Deus sit similis creaturae.” *ST I* q. 4, a. 3, ad 4. See also *SCG I.29*.

¹¹⁹ In response to the objection that there could be no similitude since *esse* and essence are not identical in creatures, but are so in God, Aquinas states: “Ad tertium dicendum quod non dicitur esse similitudo creaturae ad Deum propter communicantiam in forma secundum eandem rationem generis et speciei: sed secundum analogiam tantum; prout scilicet Deus est ens per essentiam, et alia per participationem.” *ST I*, q. 4, a. 3, ad 3. Here again we see the connection between analogy and participation.

¹²⁰ *In I.Sent.* d. 8, q.1. a 2, resp. This question addresses whether God is the *esse* of all things, which Aquinas obviously rejects. I will discuss this latter passage in more detail below in reference to his arguments against God being the formal *esse* of all things. See Chapter V Section 3 below. See also, for example, *SCG I.29* and *De Pot.* q. 7, a. 7, ad. 2. In both cases, Aquinas distinguishes between possession according to essence and possession according to diminished participation. The *likeness* of creatures to God stems from their possession of what belongs to God.

the effect imperfectly exemplifies its exemplar to whose perfection the former can attest.¹²¹ God thus cannot be made univocal with any creature because of his purity of act by which he subsists. His being cannot be diffused according to itself (i.e., its own *ratio*), as nothing could be added to such pure subsistence by which it could be rendered communicable. And yet his purity of act, by which *esse* diffuses to all beings, leaves a trace, although of a different *ratio*, such that an account can be rendered. Although analogy cuts between the extremes of univocal collapse and equivocal evacuation, it seems to invite a deeper problem. How to avoid the conclusion that the analogical having of *esse* by creatures, which results from the spreading of divine *esse*, does not make God the formal *esse* of all things.¹²²

To make God the formal *esse* of all things, a conclusion which Aquinas constantly resists, would be to deprive creatures of their own proper being (i.e., their own intrinsic *actus essendi*). This is the danger of too closely assimilating participants into that which they participate, leaving no room between the causal expanse of *esse* and those things to which it expands. It is clear that each thing has *esse* insofar as it participates the first and pure act (*primum et purum actum*) through *assimilation*, as Aquinas often states: “[...] quaelibet res participet per assimilationem primum actum in quantum habet esse.”¹²³ But

¹²¹ Cf. Jean-Luc Marion: “The foundation for entities and for their being (*esse commune*) in God depends without doubt on causality, but it has nothing that is reciprocal, so that being certainly does not ground (conceptually) God, whose *actus essendi* escapes all concepts, to the strict extent that an act determines being in Him [...] This is confirmed in the fact that, free from any causality or ground (not even His proper essence, directly identified with his act of being, God denies from Himself the metaphysical figure of self-foundation, for which the *causa sui* designates the paradigm.” Marion, “Thomas Aquinas and Onto-theology,” 65.

¹²² See below Chapter V, Section 2.

¹²³ *De spir. creaturis*, a. 1 resp. Also, *In I Sent.* d. 8, q.1. a 2, resp. I will discuss this latter passage in more detail below. See Chapter V Section 3 below. Elsewhere, on the question of whether the *esse* of an angel is an accident of it, Aquinas states: “Sciendum ergo quod unumquodque quod est in potentia et in actu, fit actu per hoc quod participat actum superiorem, *per hoc autem aliquid maxime fit actu, quod participat per similitudinem primum et purum actum; primus autem actus est esse subsistens per se; unde completionem unumquodque recipit per hoc quod participat esse. Unde esse est complementum omnis forme, quia per hoc*

does such assimilation (*per assimilationem*) risk collapsing created beings into their creative ground and thereby undermining *esse* as an existential perfection properly attributable to them? Thus, what does “*esse*” mean in reference to creatures besides their relation to another, an existential actuality proper to another? Does the diffusion of the unparticipated *ipsum esse subsistens* to its participants really give them anything of their own or, to borrow Sweeney’s language, is this merely a “deployment” of *esse* on a lower level, as created effects remaining in and identical with their cause?¹²⁴

If this perfection of all perfections and act of all actuality comes to mean only “relation to a causal ground,” “*esse*” as the mark of the real, or that which irreducibly distinguishes “that which is” from its mere conception, is guilty of existential evacuation: not an evacuation of God from being this time, but of being from creatures. Being becomes too closely related to *ipsum esse per se subsistens* to serve as an act properly belonging to anything else. Although both resisting any real and univocal sharing between God and creatures, which would make created beings beings according to the proper *ratio essendi* and not just imperfect *similitudes* of being, and at the same time retaining a unifying bond grounded in assimilation to a primary and pure ground of actuality, analogy must defend itself on another front: namely, one where the existing individual, whose *actual existence* “*esse*” is meant to explain, becomes little more than a

completur quod habet esse, et habet esse cum est actu; et sic nulla forma est nisi per esse [m.e.]. Et sic dico quod esse substancialia rei non est accidens, sed actualitas cuiuslibet forme existentis, siue sine materia siue cum materia. Et quia esse est complementum omnium, inde est quod proprius effectus Dei est esse, et nulla causa dat esse nisi in quantum participat operationem diuinam. Et sic proprie loquendo, non est accidens. Et quod Hylarius dicit, dico quod accidens dicitur large omne quod non est pars essentiae, et sic est esse in rebus creatis, quia in solo Deo esse est eius essentia.” Thomae De Aquino *Opera omnia jussu Leonis XIII P.M. edita*, t. 25/2: *Quaestiones de quolibet. Quodlibet I, II, III, VI, IV, V, XII* (Commissio Leonina-Éditions du Cerf, Roma-Paris, 1996) XII, q. 4, a. 1, arg. Hereafter “*Quodlibet*.”

¹²⁴ He raises this question in reference to Proclus’ theory of emanation, but the same problem holds for Aquinas. See Sweeney, “Participation and the Structure of Being in Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*,” *The Structure of Being: A Neoplatonic Approach*. ed. R. Baine Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982): 154.

divine refraction of being. As opposed to restoring actual existence to its primary role in the thinking of being, metaphysics would thus become theology insofar as their objects coincide. Aquinas's *thinking the real* (i.e., as beyond merely conceiving the formally intelligible as stated by existential Thomism) would be concentrated only to the fullness of *esse* as *actus essendi primus et purus* against which the communal field of being (i.e., *esse commune*) becomes a pale and spectral refraction of being, hardly more worthy of the name of "being" than mere intellectual fictions (e.g., phoenixes) that *are* but only in relation to their causal ground (i.e., the intellect's act of understanding).

If we are to locate a more fundamental actuality imparted by *actus essendi primus et purus* to its effects and to show how such existential actuality, although radically other than such beings in their essential natures, differs from the actuality imparted by the intellect to its objects (even if fictional), we must determine how the "*dare esse*" of the former does not mean that beings *inhere in* divine *esse* but exist on their own and yet not through themselves (*per se*).¹²⁵ How analogy explains the proper attribution of being to creatures without making God the formal *esse* of creatures and thereby undermining their *real existence* nor making them self-sufficient and able to subsist apart from God's influence introduces a further inquiry; it will require us to assess what *esse* adds *adveniens extra* to a creature's essential possibility prior to creation and what Aquinas means specifically by "participation in being": what participates (i.e., a precreated subject or essence) and what is participated (i.e., *esse commune*, *actus essendi suum*, *ipsum esse commune*, all three)?¹²⁶ In short, a final answer to this question requires an understanding of Aquinas's doctrine of *creation ex nihilo*.

¹²⁵ See also Stephen Menn, "Metaphysics: God and Being," 163.

¹²⁶ These will compose the respective topics of the following two chapters.

Conclusion

As we have seen, analogy forges a common bond of being (i.e., a non-reciprocal likeness to a primary referent) without collapsing the hierarchical diversity between the unequal members. Beings that are *more or less* true, good, and noble partake of the *ratio essendi* from God, whose essence is to be and to whom they imperfectly *liken* themselves. As a plenitude of existential perfection, *ipsum esse subsistens* cannot be supplemented by anything outside of itself otherwise it would depend upon something extrinsic to itself. As the self-contained *ratio essendi*, containing the entire *virtus essendi*, divine *esse* both makes possible the bond of being by which creatures are able to be beings through the spread of being and yet transcends such a communal field of being (*esse commune*) in such a way that the latter derivation can only be linked to the former, its cause, through analogy.

And yet the perfect *ipseity* of subsisting *esse* bars a true communication of being to beings—as such is proper only to God—and thus creatures must imitate being (i.e., be like being by participating being itself), but not be being. With an analogic of being, which both retains God’s transcendent *ipseity* while also preserving the link between the two orders of being, Aquinas attempts to remove any trace of creation and finitude from the proper *ratio essendi* while preserving traces in creation of divine perfection sufficient to ground demonstration and remotion. Thus, even though all concepts attributed to God originate in our sensory experience of creatures and retain this primary mode of signification, certain concepts (e.g., being or good) belong properly to God and thus must be stripped of any impurities (i.e., through remotion). The purified concept can be reapplied to the field of created being, but only according to a secondary, or “analogical,”

sense (*ratio*) as a derivation of the true sense of being (*ratio essendi*). Thus, the derivative *ratio* is excluded from constituting in any way its proper archetype, lest its purity be tainted by supplements, although the proper *ratio* originates for us from within the derivative and provides us with “traces” by which it can be reached.

With analogy, Aquinas mobilizes the principle of similitude in order to unite a multiplicity of diverse beings around a common principle to which they refer and under which they form a unified field. Beings thus are measured through their likeness to and imitation of their referent (*ipsum esse subsistens*), a measure (i.e., resemblance) that inherently implies at least some degree of dissimilarity and thus distance from God. Analogy thus brings univocity’s community of being together with equivocity’s distance between created and uncreated being, without the former’s flattening of the community into equal members or the latter’s radical distance and diversity between created and uncreated being. With analogy, there is communication between *esse commune* and *ipsum esse subsistens* insofar as the very being of the former inherently references and attests to the perfection of the latter to whose perfection and plenitude it imperfectly testifies. With divine *esse* as its primary referent (*primum analogatum*), created *esse* shares in a non-reciprocal communion of being, such that the giver of communion in no way partakes of that which is given.

We find Aquinas holding together the two orders by a fragile thread: neither can the names *shared* by God and creatures reduce both to a common third (i.e., univocity) nor can difference in meaning (i.e., equivocity) open too great a chasm. Only through *analogical predication* grounded in analogical causation can the eminence of divine perfection fortify against collapse into univocity, while maintaining a link to the very

order of being of which it serves as the first principle and as the unifying ground.¹²⁷ God as the universal principle of all being, thus, subsists as the crown of “perfective elevation”—to borrow Pickstock’s language¹²⁸—wherein the concept of *esse* proper to him does not empty being of all content, but completes an analogical field of likenesses. Created beings, however, do not co-constitute or enhance the meaning of *esse* in any way.¹²⁹ They do not share in determining the meaning, or filling out the perfection, of being. This is why, as has been argued in this chapter and the previous ones, the true meaning of the real distinction only comes into focus when “*esse*” is properly referred to its primary analogue (i.e., *ipsum esse subsistens*). Because creatures need being to be, but *are not* such being through themselves; and because God is the plenitude of such existential perfection through himself (*per se*) without any supplement on the part of creation; around the always inadequate and unreciprocal likening of them to him, a space of participation is opened. And they, in turn, render an account of their creator, for example, the *fourth way*.¹³⁰

Whatever can be said of *esse commune* prior to a reflection upon *ipsum esse subsistens* and its “*dans esse*”—and I do not doubt that something can be said, even by those who deny the real distinction—there remains an inadequate foundation for the real distinction in created being before establishing that being whose being is *proper* to it

¹²⁷ SCG I.36.

¹²⁸ Catherine Pickstock, “Duns Scotus: His Historical and Contemporary Significance,” *Modern Theology* 21:4 (October 2005): 546, 550.

¹²⁹ The example Aquinas often uses to display this type of analogy (often called “analogy of attribution”) is the predication of “health” of an animal, a diet, and urine. Predicating such of an animal is the primary mode of predication, from which the others derive. Without this primary mode, they would not *be healthy*. In addition, the true meaning of health is fully constituted by an animal and thus lacks nothing without these secondary modes (analogues) of signification.

¹³⁰ “The participating analogue cannot exhibit a full rational account of its cause (cannot furnish us with a syllogistic proof of its cause) but only a partial one, by way of its concreteness as an effect, its very factuality which declares its cause by exhibiting more clearly its own concrete character. And yet this fact, in pointing towards its more excellent cause, embodies a kind of reason.” Pickstock, “Duns Scotus,” 554-555.

alone. Only by arguing for *esse* as the most perfect of all actualities—that to which even the most perfect forms remain in potency—can Aquinas maintain that *esse* says something more than *ens* when referring to created beings. What it says, and why the third stage of the *De Ente* argument and an appeal to causality in the *fourth way* are necessary, is that no matter how perfect an essential perfection may be, it stands in need of a deeper existential actuality. Otherwise, both arguments remain trapped in the conceptual realm, unable to translate claims to a *maximal* perfection of a kind into *rerum natura*. Causality forces every measure of a perfection to be accountable by some cause *in re* because this cause contains the perfection more eminently.

Despite certain successes in mediating the aforementioned pitfalls of univocity and equivocity, analogy confronts the deeper problem of what *esse* means when applied to creatures. As we have seen, such a theory risks existential deprivation insofar as that which was introduced to explain a created being's extra-conceptual, extra-formal, actuality (i.e., the *actus essendi*) comes to imply an extrinsic relation of creatures to the plenitude of another. The need to secure the borders of a pure act, even one that cannot be fully known to us such as "*esse*," may leave creatures more ontologically impoverished than they had been under essentialism's conceptual imperialism. Under the essentialist regime of Aristotelian *ousiology* (i.e., being *qua* substance), finite beings, or "creatures" if you will, were considered imperfect to that degree that their formal actuality required another to causally enable it *to be* (i.e., a substance). In the case of some creatures, this meant only a cause of movement (i.e., in the case of intelligences) whereas in other less perfect beings (i.e., sublunary beings) more causal influences, including matter, needed to align. For Thomistic existentialism, however, even caused substances of the highest

pedigree lack the purity of act (i.e., *esse*) and so cannot subsist, but remain specters basking in the borrowed radiance of another. If this interpretation is right, which I am not yet convinced it need be, then “*esse*” would be the most imperious of all perfections, even if not a concept.

I am not yet convinced because the meaning of *esse* in relation to creatures seems indelibly tied to an account of *creation ex nihilo*, that is, the mechanism of distribution by which the cause of all being for beings “*dat esse*.” By undertaking a more extensive examination of such a matter, the meaning of *esse* in relation to creatures (i.e., as more than an extrinsic attribution of their relation to a cause) can be filled out. Thus, we must unpack *that which is given* in the giving of being, the “*adveniens extra*” that meets the essence of each existing thing without merging with such. By understanding the causality of *dans esse* in the light of *creation ex nihilo*, what “*esse*” says even more than the relation of something to a cause is the existential happening by which the first cause provides a dispensation to be. Because essential possibility, whose ultimate ground will be discussed in the following chapter, is not and never becomes identical with its existential actuality, the event of creation remains incidental (*per accidens*) to any and every essential order. The (existential) fact that the first cause chose to dispense this order as opposed to another or not to create at all, signifies a divine preconception and understanding of possibilities, whose status qua intelligible possibilities and compossibilities contain no internal necessity to *actually be*, unlike Avicennian *emanation*. What must be noted, however, around Aquinas’s use of the term “plenitude” is that even though he often, perhaps most often, uses it in Neoplatonic contexts, such

does not function as what some might call a “principle of plenitude.”¹³¹ A principle of plenitude requires there to be a deterministic realization of the possibilities implied by a concept or idea, thus eradicating any true sense of contingency. We shall witness this below with Avicenna’s definition of necessity as “vehemence of being” (*vehementia essendi*), whereby given the existence of the first necessary existent, all else follows with a certain “derived vehemence.” Thus, Avicennian emanation bridges any gap between something’s possibility and its actual existence.¹³²

With Aquinas, however, the subsequent chapters will show how he parses “plenitude” in primarily existential terms such that God’s plenitude of being enables him to immediately cause anything that is possible (i.e., any conceivable essence), and as an intelligent being to understand the full range of his power in terms of such possibilities and compossibilities. The wisdom and practical intelligence of God provide him insight into the ordered unity of the universe as a whole, if he decides there is to be a universe. And yet the *decision to create* remains fundamentally incidental (*per accidens*) with respect to such essential determinations; no essence exercises any more *vehemence of being* than any other. The fact of being remains *incidental* with respect to the intelligible structure of the universe as a whole insofar as it *happens to* essences completely outside the plenitude of essential possibility.

For Gilson, the Christian Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas problematizes this incidentality of actual existence, which philosophy has ignored or at least minimized in its concern with an abstract interpretation of objective reality. Whenever such actual existence did enter the domain of philosophy, it came under the guise of concrete

¹³¹ See Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960). Cf. Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe*, 128-140.

¹³² See below Chapter IV Section 1.

facticity, philosophically unintelligible and thus secondary to essential considerations. Although the traditions of essentialist metaphysics have recognized a certain *what more* in regard to the concrete facticity of actual existence, a what more requiring some explanatory force outside the essential domain itself, such actuality could be relegated to the realm of concrete happenings with no real intelligibility or *scientia*, therefore handled within chronographs of actual events (e.g., histories or cosmogonies). As Gilson states:

This is why, in Plato's philosophy, the gods are always there to account for existential events. Ideas alone cannot account for any existence, because they themselves are, but do not exist, whereas the gods, whatever they may be, do at least exist. In the *Timaeus*, not an Idea, but a god, makes the world, and, though Ideas account for the intelligibility of what the god makes, they themselves do not make it. It takes something that *is* to cause an existential happening.¹³³

With Aquinas's existential metaphysics, however, there is a certain reversal of the usual essential priority: that is, Aquinas recognizes the philosophical importance of such an existential happening, but not merely as a matter of additional (theological) facticity. Instead, for Aquinas, the existential actuality of "giving being" (*dans esse*) serves as a fundamentally irreducible "fact" or "existential happening" without which the entire essential domain lacks not only a vehemence of being, but also real essential actuality.¹³⁴

Thus, in what follows, we must address what *esse* adds (*adveniens extra*) to something's mere essential possibility and whether such an account of this "giving being" (*dare esse*) as understood through creation *ex nihilo* can provide an adequate foundation of the existential actuality of *real creatures* apart from the abundance of divine *esse* as its

¹³³ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 51.

¹³⁴ "Being itself is enacted, therefore, at least for the created and the finite, according to the figure of the incident. An extraordinary conclusion! First, because the incident, which had on principle been pushed to the margins of the ontic domain by degrading all its essential dignity, rediscovers its license to be, though without *ousia*. [...] Being should henceforth be thought according to the determinations of the incident, far from the incident being ontically devalued into a marginal accident. The exception becomes the rule—no one understood this better than Thomas Aquinas." Marion, *Being Given*, 156.

causal fund: in other words, does “*esse*” designate a real perfection in creatures apart from their essence or does it merely designate their participative relation to their cause of being (i.e., *ipsum esse subsistens*)? Before turning to the incident of creation, however, a preliminary issue must be treated: *to what* does God give *esse*? In other words, what is the status of an essential core of possibility preexisting creation to which *esse* can be given and which determine the possible creation of a human as opposed to the impossibility of a squared circle? These two issues, taken up in the following chapters, will address both essential possibility and existential actuality in Aquinas’s account of creation *ex nihilo* in attempt to understand what “*esse*” means when applied to a created being.

Chapter IV. The Essential Ground of the Universe: The Divine Intellect and the Ordered Totality of the Universe

The previous chapter outlined the manner in which God who is *maxime ens* (i.e., as concluded by the fourth way) subsists as a self-identity of being whose nature is incommunicable to creatures according to the same *ratio essendi*. As participants of *esse*, such that they lack being through their essences, creatures resemble divine *esse* in an analogical manner and yet insofar as they receive their being from another, they are unlike the self-subsistence of being that is their cause. Based upon such analogical union of beings, a union sealed by their common referent in *ipsum esse subsistens*, we must ask both how such distinct manners of being (*modus essendi*), forming the diverse manifold that is the world, come to be distinguished, but also how such diversity could reflect and imitate the perfect *ipseity* that is *ipsum esse subsistens*. This will allow us to answer the question of how “*esse*” can meaningfully apply to creatures and reference their extra-essential actuality, even though belonging properly to God.

The nature of our investigation in what follows will be how God serves both as the cause of all beings insofar as they *are* (i.e., have *esse*, and in this they agree), but also insofar as they exhibit distinct manners of being (i.e., no creature is being as such, but only being this or that). Aquinas clearly illustrates this dual grounding of beings both in terms of formal exemplarity and efficiency: “*Similiter etiam in ipso Deo est considerare naturam ipsius, et esse ejus; et sicut natura sua est causa et exemplar omnis naturae, ita etiam esse suum est causa et exemplar omnis esse.*”¹ As the formal exemplar and cause of everything’s nature, and also as the exemplar and cause of their being, God serves both as the principle of their unity and also of their multiplicity. The common participation of

¹ *In I Sent.* d. 38, q. 1, art. 3, sol.

creatures in being unites them as beings. However, as participants according to a distinct mode of being, they differ from one another and ultimately from God (i.e., being itself without modification or limitation).

In order to fully understand the nature of such existential participation, we must begin by asking: *what* participates *esse*? Or, to phrase it differently: in creation, *to what* is *esse* given? Such a question requires understanding the possibility of creatures prior to creation, and how such possibility relates to their essences. Thus, after taking up in Section One Avicenna's account of emanation against which Aquinas's argument is largely directed, Section Two deals with the role of divine *rationes*, which after creation serve as *exemplars* of created essences.² The question of what status creatures have before creation means asking if there is anything like an *essential being* (*esse essentiae*) according to Aquinas, and if not, how he deals with the conditions of *essential possibility*, as well as the pre-created possibility of individual beings.³ Following from this inquiry, Section Three asks how such a multiplicity of creatable beings in their essential diversity could reflect the perfect simplicity of their cause. How could that which is manifold and diverse serve as a trace of its creator, which is simple and one, and form any sort of ordered unity analogically reflecting the perfect *ipseity* of its divine cause?

² In *ST I*, q. 15, a. 3, resp., Aquinas distinguishes between "*rationes*" and "*exemplares*."

³ On the relation between divine ideas of essential possibilities in relation to individuals, see *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 8, ad 2. "Ad secundum dicendum, quod si loquamur de idea proprie secundum quod est rei eo modo quo est in esse producibilis, sic una idea respondet singulari, speciei et generi, individuatis in ipso singulari, eo quod Socrates, homo et animal non distinguuntur secundum esse; si autem accipiamus ideam communiter pro similitudine vel ratione, sic cum diversa sit consideratio Socratis ut Socrates est et ut homo est, et ut est animal, respondebunt ei secundum hoc plures ideae vel similitudines." In this article, Aquinas argues against Plato that divine ideas of singulars are necessary to uphold an account of providence. He states: "[E]t eadem ratione Plato non ponebat ideas generum, quia intentio naturae non terminatur ad productionem formae generis, sed solum formae speciei. Nos autem ponimus Deum causam esse singularis et quantum ad formam et quantum ad materiam, ponimus etiam quod per divinam providentiam definiuntur omnia singularia, et ideo oportet nos etiam singularium ponere ideas." *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 8, resp. We will return to this issue below. See Chapter VI Section 3.

Such an inquiry will be followed in the next chapter by an attempt to further understand what Aquinas means by “participation in being,” and whether creatures actually participate in the incommunicable divine *esse subsistens* itself or in some other fund of *esse* (e.g., *esse commune*). In discussing the reception of *esse* through creation, a central question will be what *perfection* is added to the already “existing” (here the trouble arises) possibility of such a creatable being: remember, *esse*, for Aquinas, is the “act of all acts and the perfection of all perfections.” Thus, to understand this real distinction in creatures, we must return to the beginning: their *having been created*. Such participation can be understood through the lens of the divine act of creation, or that act inaugurating existential participation beyond something’s mere status in the divine intellect. Over the course of the next two chapters, we will trace these interwoven threads concerning God’s grounding of created being both in its essential multiplicity and also in its existential unity by attempting to unpack the status of any created being in relation to its essential determinations (i.e., as *ratio* before creation, and *archetype* after creation) on the one hand, and the “what more” creation adds by existential actualization on the other.

Section 1: Emanation and Derived Necessity

Our discussion of Aquinas and his problematization of *esse* began with his claim in *De Ente* that we can understand the essence of something without understanding whether or not it exists (i.e., the *intellectus essentiae* argument). He provides the example of human or phoenix, the former exemplified *in re*, the latter only *in intellectu*, both of which can be understood according to essential determinations without accounting for whether or not such essential kinds are actually instantiated. Now it is time to return to

this lingering issue and ask: what is the status of essences for Aquinas, both before *creation* and subsequent to it?⁴ How does he understand *essential possibility* apart from *existential actuality*; that is, how can the essence “phoenix” or “unicorn” or any other member of the mythic bestiary not be a contradiction—and thus is not a mere nonsensical utterance such as “squared circle”—and yet there be no such actual thing in re?⁵ In short, *what* receives the *actus essendi* given in creation?

We have made much mention of Aquinas’s real distinction between *esse* and essence in creatures. And yet, in order to uphold the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, Aquinas will have to do more than merely separate and distinguish *esse* and essence. Like Aquinas, Avicenna seems poised to make the existential turn insofar as he begins by separating the conditions of something’s possibility from its actual existence. And yet, as Aquinas recognizes, the latter’s doctrine of emanation leads to an inflation of necessity, thus undermining the radical incidentality of all creation. Unlike Aquinas, Avicenna grounds the existential remainder, or that something’s essence does not necessarily imply the fact that *it is*, in a derived or emanated necessity: in other words, even though something is not necessary *per se*, given the being of the first *per se necessary existent*, the being of all else is grounded in the necessary emanation from this source. Thus, each actual effect

⁴ For a detailed examination of the subject, and a spectrum of readings, see Ross’s article on the subject and counter-response to Maurer’s and Dewan’s responses: James Ross, “Aquinas’s Exemplarism, Aquinas’s Voluntarism,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (Spring 1990): 171-198 and “Response to Maurer and Dewan,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 45 (Spring 1991): 235-243. Also: Armand Maurer, “James Ross on the Divine Ideas: A Reply,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 45 (Spring 1991): 213-220. Dewan, “St. Thomas, James Ross, and Exemplarism: A Reply,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 45 (Spring 1991): 221-234. In addition, see Timothy B. Noone, “Aquinas on Divine Ideas: Scotus’s Evaluation,” *Franciscan Studies* 56 (1998): 307-324.

⁵ The case of “chimera” is difficult to assess because sometimes it is used as a synonym (or proper name of) logical impossibility almost in the same manner as “squared circle.” As the case of the latter suggests, mere names are being thrown together that devolve to the point of nonsense. Thus, the use of the name “chimera” often is not meant to signify an imaginable creatures, such as in the case of *Aeneid* VI, but the improper and impossible combination of simple concepts, which as combined leads to a nonsensical, although nameable, utterance.

becomes necessary, albeit *ab alio*. It is important to look more closely at Avicenna's argument as it forms the backdrop of Aquinas's existential response.

According to Avicenna in the *Metaphysics*, there is only one *per se* necessary existent, such that existence follows by necessity from its essence.⁶ For everything else, *when considered in itself* (i.e., *per se*), existence does not follow by necessity. Everything that is not the one necessary being, if it is to be (*esse*), must receive its existence from another (i.e., from its cause). This caveat (i.e., when considered in itself), however, contains important implications for Avicenna's understanding of the contingency of secondary beings in relation to the first *per se* necessary being. He argues that insofar as something other than the first *is* or *exists*, it has a necessity through its cause. Thus, in relation to itself (*per se*) it is possible, but in relation to its cause (*ab alio*) it is necessary. Necessity, Avicenna states, has a "vehemence of being" (*vehementia essendi*). Furthermore, although everything that is derives its necessity from the *per se* necessity of the first, such a derivation is not immediate, but mediated by a series of successive causes: necessity *emanates* from causes to their effects. Both of these issues, namely the necessity of all actual effects and their mediated relationship to the first, must be further discussed.

In taking up Avicenna's discussion of necessary and possible existence, we must not lose sight of the fact that such designations refer to the necessity or possibility of something *through itself*.⁷ *Per se* necessary existence, according to Avicenna, is

⁶ *Avicennae Metaphysica* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1948). See Treatise I, Chapters VI-VIII.

⁷ Such designations (i.e., necessary and possible) divide being in the intellect. Avicenna states: "Dicemus igitur quod ea quae cadunt sub esse possunt in intellectu divide in duo. Quorum unum est quod cum consideratum fuerit per se eius esse non est necessarium; et palam est etiam quod eius esse non est impossibile, alioquin non cadet sub esse, et hoc est in termino possibilitatis. Alterum et quodcum consideratum fuerit per se eius esse erit necesse" (I.VII.25).

necessary through itself because it does not require a cause in order to be.⁸ Such an existent—and in Chapter 8, Avicenna shows how this must be a singular designation (i.e., God)—suffices for the determination of existence. If there were not such a *per se* necessary existent, everything else would remain possible with respect to its being. Nothing could suffice to determine such essential possibility *to be*. Thus, such a *per se* necessary existent must be, and there can only be one such existent, lest absurdities follow if we grant more than one such existent.⁹

The *quiddity* of every other being, although non-repugnant through itself (i.e., possible), lacks this necessary determination to existence, but retains through itself the possibility of receiving existence through another.¹⁰ This entails that in lacking existence through itself, such a possible *quiddity* must have existence *come to it* from some source outside its essence. That which comes to something externally (*accedit*) without being implicated through its essence is an accident.¹¹ Something *possible through itself*, however, takes on a second-tier necessity when viewed through and in relation to its cause. If the effect were not necessitated by its cause with respect to existence, this would mean, Avicenna argues, that it would remain *possible* in terms of specification to existence or non-existence. A further cause would be required to determine this existential modification of its essence. But in terms of this third cause, we must ask whether it necessitates its effect: if so, then the effect exists necessarily; whereas if not, then the effect remains possible with respect to existence and non-existence, and yet a

⁸ “Dicemus igitur quod necesse esse per se non habet causam, et quod possibile esse per se habet causam...” (I.VII.25).

⁹ I.6.

¹⁰ “Quidquid autem possibile est consideratum in se, eius esse et eius non esse utrumque est per causam” (I.VII.26).

¹¹ As Morewedge points out, this traditional reading of Avicenna greatly reduces the complexity of his thought. See Parvis Morewedge, “Philosophical Analysis and Ibn Sina’s ‘Essence-Existence’ Distinction,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 92, No. 3 (July-September 1972): 425-435.

further cause is required to determine it to be, and so on *ad infinitum*. Thus, everything outside the first exists through a cause, but so long as it exists, it exists necessarily *ab alio*, or through its causes.

Actual existence becomes synonymous with necessity for Avicenna, opposed only to *per se* essential possibility. As we will come to see, Aquinas opposes his radically incidental existential actuality to this giving of *necessity* to “contingent” beings and failing to mind the gap between the necessity of the First Cause and the *derived existence* of all else that follows. The problem as Aquinas sees it is: If the first cause is necessary through itself, does not all that follows (i.e., caused by the first) take on some degree of derived necessity in Avicenna’s scheme? And if partaking of a derived necessity, would not contingent beings lose their radical contingency? Such chain of necessity was established for Avicenna because all “contingent” beings could be grounded in the necessity of the first cause, or God. Although Avicenna begins by establishing the distinction between the one necessary being and beings merely possible through themselves, this second-tier (or “emanated”) necessity seems to bridge the gap between God and creatures.¹² The same principles of necessity that governed God’s being also governed created being, albeit in a weakened or diminished state of vehemence. Avicenna, thus, puts forth a thoroughly essentialist metaphysics, as any recourse to extra-essential *esse* can be grounded in the necessary existence of the first, which gives rise to a *necessary* procession of all the rest.

¹² Cf. Gilson: “[...] the same Christian theologians [of the thirteenth-century] could not fail to realize the fact that the God of Avicenna, although ontologically separated from merely possible beings by his own necessity, still remained tied up with them in a necessary way. From the very fact that the Necessary Being is, the Avicennian universe of finite beings necessarily follows [...]” *Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), 216.

Aquinas's existential problematic in a large part responds to such inflation of necessity, which Aquinas diagnoses as stemming from Avicenna's commitment to *emanation*. From the plenitude of the first's being, it "overflows itself" giving rise to the first effect. In Avicenna's scheme, such an effect is an intelligence, which thinks both the first and also itself as possible (*per se*) and as a necessary effect of the first (*ab alio*), thus *emanating* the next set of effects: a subsequent intelligence, a celestial sphere, and its soul.¹³ Such a chain of emanation proceeds until reaching the sublunary world over which the tenth and final of the separate intellects presides as the cause of being for all generation and the giver of forms for all intellection. Two points must be noted in preparation for Aquinas's understanding of this model of emanation: first, there is no "gap" between the first, *per se* necessary existent and its effect, but instead it causes necessarily and not by will; second, the chain of emanation is mediated, which means that the first acts upon the second immediately, but upon each subsequent effect only through intermediaries. Such a scheme can explain how the first gives rise to everything that is without holding that a single cause is capable of a multitude of diverse effects and thereby violating the principle *ex uno unum*.

In terms of the first point, the one *per se* necessary existent does not retain the possibility of stopping the flow from the source. Once the first is granted, all else follows.

¹³ In *SCG* II.42, Aquinas rejects the position of Avicenna, which argues that in knowing himself, God produces a first intelligence, which in knowing God produces a second intelligence, and by knowing itself as act produces the soul of the first sphere and in potentiality produces the substance of the first sphere, a process that extends to the final intelligence (e.g., the agent intellect). God thus acts only indirectly and through his intellect which generates the second being without his free legislation. Thus, we must begin with God's "relation" to creation before the act of creation. I must provide a word of caution here about the use of this temporal phrase. What is at stake is not a time before and after creation, but a logical relation between God's power to know something without actually bringing it into being. Aquinas will want to hold open the possibility that God could create something from eternity (thus leaving no time before which), but such a thing nevertheless even though eternal would radically depend upon God's free and unecessitated bestowal of being. Thus, time is not the issue, but the terms of the relation between creator and created.

This means that the accidental existence of “contingent” things is only accidental through their own essences, but grounded in the necessity of the one necessary being, thereby undermining the radical distinction between the two. The first exercises a foundation of causal necessity upon all of its effects in the same way that it exercises its own necessity.¹⁴ They share in the necessity of the first, removed only by degrees or positions in the causal chain. Such a communion of being based on an overflow of necessity introduces problems for a strict understanding of creation *ex nihilo*.

Furthermore, and to the second point, Aquinas’s First must act immediately upon all effects as their total “cause of being” (*causa essendi*). As will be seen, Aquinas accomplishes such immediacy through arguing contra Avicenna that God knows all possible effects as *rationes* in the divine intellect prior to creating them, and any effect that does come to be follows not from a necessitated emergence from the divine intellect, but freely in accordance with divine wisdom, based on a decision to issue this order *in re*. To avoid such an outcome, the First must be understood not merely as a source that gives

¹⁴This is what Marion following Heidegger, call “onto-theology.” A preeminent being (*ens*) should ground entities and being (*esse*), “exercising a foundation on all other beings—indeed upon being and its own foundation [...]” Marion, “Thomas Aquinas and Onto-Theo-Logy,” 42. The preeminent being serves as cause of everything because it first serves as cause of itself (*causa sui*): the ground grounds itself. God as *causa sui*, Marion argues, follows the assumption that God as preeminent entity should be subject to the same metaphysical rules as every other entity: existence requires a cause. Thus, God as preeminent in existence also requires a cause, which turns out to be himself. In a grounded totality, exceptions cannot be made, not even for the first. Once God becomes part of the causal order (as ground and grounded), all other principles of metaphysics, such as the principle of order and of sufficient reason, also apply to God, according to Marion. This preeminent being, to incorporate Gilsonian terminology, sets the standard for the essential economy as that by which all other beings are measured. Thus, we find—if not altogether an isomorphism—at least a deep kinship between Gilson’s critique of conceptual imperialism and Marion’s critique of onto-theo-logy. In both thinkers, the hegemonic accounting of beings and of being itself is accomplished by the enshrinement of a preeminent being as the foundation of a totalized system, which does not leave a remainder. “Just one condition rules all of them, however: that they should ground entities and being in the name of preeminent entity, thus that they could be inscribed precisely without exception or remainder within the onto-theo-logical frame of the ontological difference, which is itself thought in a metaphysical manner, starting with and for the exclusive benefit of the entity” Marion 43. According to Marion, at least in “Thomas Aquinas and Onto-theo-logy,” even though not in the earlier *God without Being*, Aquinas’s notion of *esse* does not offer an onto-theo-logy. For Heidegger’s account of onto-theo-logy, see *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

rise to the rest; instead It must be understood as a benefactor capable of issuing immediately all that follows, but equally capable of withholding such an issuance. Any creative expression by the first thereby is not the result of a necessary overflow of itself, but what we can only call a “gratuitous” act of generosity (*actus liberalitatis*).¹⁵ This will mark the battleground between an essentialism that reduces *esse* to a derived (or deduced) essential predicate and an existentialism that desperately seeks to disavow its ties to such a conceptual schema. Avicenna started with this distinction, but reduced the *esse* received in creatures to a second-order necessity once the existence of the first necessary being had been established. Aquinas will need to show how the prior intelligibility of creatures in the divine intellect remains non-identical to the manner in which creatures actually come to be (i.e., *ex nihilo*).¹⁶ Thus, Aquinas must argue that in

¹⁵ “Amplius. Sicut supra ostensum est, finis ultimus propter quem Deus vult omnia, nullo modo dependet ab his quae sunt ad finem, nec quantum ad esse nec quantum ad perfectionem aliquam. Unde non vult alicui suam bonitatem communicare ad hoc ut sibi exinde aliquid accrescat, sed quia ipsum communicare est sibi conveniens sicut fonti bonitatis. Dare autem non propter aliquod commodum ex datione expectatum, sed propter ipsam bonitatem et convenientiam dationis, est actus liberalitatis, ut patet per philosophum, in IV Ethicorum. Deus igitur est maxime liberalis: et, ut Avicenna dicit, ipse solus liberalis proprie dici potest; nam omne aliud agens praeter ipsum ex sua actione aliquod bonum acquirit, quod est finis intentus. Hanc autem eius liberalitatem Scriptura ostendit, dicens in Psalmo: *aperiente te manum tuam, omnia implebuntur bonitate*; et Iac. 1-5: *qui dat omnibus affluenter et non impropere*.” SCG I.93. The passage Aquinas references from Avicenna (i.e., *Metaphysics* Book VI Chapter 5 231-234) discusses “liberality” as an act of giving for which there is no recompense for the giver. It may seem surprising that Aquinas references Avicenna to make his point. But for Avicenna, however, unlike Aquinas, although the giving of a benefit does not supplement the giver, there need be a *cause* if it is given.

¹⁶ The status of such a nature will be questioned in what follows along with the manner in which God brought everything into being, that is, immediately and freely, or through intermediaries (i.e., intelligent agents, formal exemplars, primordial matter as passive potency) and necessarily. I will focus only on the issue of exemplars, although Aquinas takes up and rejects both the need for God to create through intermediaries (i.e., a second intellect, that gives rise to the next, and so on) and also through matter. See, for example, SCG II.42 and 43 (respectively) and also *De Aeternitate Mundi*. In SCG II.42, Aquinas rejects the position of Avicenna, which argues that in knowing himself, God produces a first intelligence, which in knowing God produces a second intelligence, and by knowing itself as act produces the soul of the first sphere and in potentiality produces the substance of the first sphere, a process that extends to the final intelligence (e.g., the agent intellect). God thus acts only indirectly and through his intellect which generates the second being without his free legislation. Thus, we must begin with God’s “relation” to creation before the act of creation. I must provide a word of caution here about the use of this temporal phrase. What is at stake is not a time before and after creation, but a logical relation between God’s power to know something without actually bringing it into being. Aquinas will want to hold open the possibility that God could create something from eternity (thus leaving no time before which), but such a thing

creating as an intelligent agent, God does not act by natural necessity, but preordains those beings to which he will give being, even though this *giving of being* is not co-extensive with or determined by the preconception. Such precreated intellection provides a slate of possibles and compossibles, but does not suffice to bring them about *in re*. For Aquinas, the challenge thus is to ordain a role for possibility prior to creation without allowing such possibility to “make gains” (Gilson) in terms of its actuality of existence. In other words, Aquinas must separate the ground of essential possibility from the ground of existential actuality.

Section 2: The Status of Creatures Prior to Creation

What determines something’s *possibility* before it was created and what status do such possibles have in relation to God prior to creation?¹⁷ The question of possibility and impossibility first surfaced above in reference to the *intellectus essentiae* argument: what makes the essence of phoenix possible, as opposed to an outright impossibility such as “squared circle,” even though there are no more phoenixes than squared circles? In *De Aeternitate Mundi*, Aquinas argues that if something cannot be made, it is said to be impossible for one of the following reasons: either there is an absence of passive potency to receive such a form or there is a contradiction between the ideas determining the nature of the thing.¹⁸ Before creation, the former condition applies to everything. Other

nevertheless even though eternal would radically depend upon God’s free and unecessitated bestowal of being. Thus, time is not the issue, but the terms of the relation between creator and created.

¹⁷ The latter part of this question asks whether such “possibles” are distinct from the ideas of the divine intellect or reducible to them.

¹⁸ “Si autem dicatur hoc esse impossibile, uel hoc dicetur quia Deus non potuit facere aliquid quod semper fuerit; aut quia non potuit fieri, etsi Deus posset facere. In prima autem parte omnes consentiunt, in hoc scilicet quod Deus potuit facere aliquid quod semper fuerit, considerando potentiam ipsius infinitam; restat igitur uidere, utrum sit possibile aliquid fieri quod semper fuerit. Si autem dicatur quod hoc non potest fieri, hoc non potest intelligi nisi duobus modis, uel duas causas ueritatis habere: uel propter remotionem

than God, nothing preexists creation, which could serve as a co-cause in the making of creatures. There is no primordial matter to which God merely adds form, as a sculptor giving shape to clay, a position with obvious heretical implications. God is the cause of *all being*, even that of prime matter.¹⁹ After creation, however, various species are made possible in regard to the passive potency of matter, the “stuff” from which forms can be *educed* or imposed and which subtends substantial change.²⁰ The difference between human and phoenix after creation stems from the former’s possible and the latter’s impossible educibility from matter: according to the established order of the universe, matter does not stand in potency to the form of phoenix. It lacks the disposition to receive such form, even if there were an agent with the power (*virtus*) to educe it. Matter can compose the sinew, bones, and blood that comprise a human, but it cannot subtend the “mythical” species of phoenix according to its current ordained power. The latter, however, is not an absolute impossibility, and this is what distinguishes it from an outright contradiction and makes possible an understanding of its essence (*intellectus*

potentiae passive, uel propter repugnantiam intellectuum. Primo modo posset dici antequam angelus sit factus ‘Non potest angelus fieri’, quia non praexistit ad eius esse aliqua potentia passiuua, cum non sit factus ex materia preiacente; tamen Deus poterat facere angelum, poterat etiam facere ut angelus fieret, quia fecit, et factus est. Sic ergo intelligendo, simpliciter concedendum est secundum fidem, quod non potest creatum semper esse, quia hoc ponere esset ponere potentiam passiuam semper fuisse, quod hereticum est. Tamen ex hoc non sequitur quod Deus non possit facere ut fiat aliquid semper ens. Secundo modo dicitur propter repugnantiam intellectuum aliquid non posse fieri, sicut quod non potest fieri ut affirmatio et negatio sint simul uera, quamvis Deus hoc possit facere, ut quidam dicunt, quidam uero dicunt quod nec Deus hoc posset facere, quia hoc nichil est: tamen manifestum est quod non potest facere ut hoc fiat, quia positio qua ponitur esse, destruit se ipsam. Si tamen ponatur quod Deus huiusmodi potest facere ut fiant, positio non est heretica, quamuis, ut credo, sit falsa, sicut quod preteritum non fuerit includit in se contradictionem; unde Augustinus in libro Contra Faustum: <<Quisquis ita dicit: Si omnipotens est Deus, faciat ut ea quae facta sunt, facta non fuerint, non uidet hoc se dicere ‘Si omnipotens est Deus, faciat ut ea quae vera sunt, eo ipso quo vera sunt, falsa sint.’>> Et tamen quidam magni pie dixerunt Deum posse facere de preterito quod non fuerit preteritum; nec fuit reputatum hereticum.” *Opera Omnia Iussu Leonis XIII P.M. Edita, t. 43: De aeternitate mundi.* (Roma: Editori di San Tommaso, 1976), 17-61. Hereafter: “*De Aeternitate Mundi.*”

¹⁹ See, for example, *ST I*, q. 44, a. 2, resp. and Chapter III Section 2 above.

²⁰ The difference between “eduction” and “imposition” concerns the distinction between natural and artificial creation. Although Aquinas will say that with the former, matter has some active role in allowing for a form to be educed, such activity is nevertheless reducible to its formal determinations.

essentiae eius). Even though the current condition of matter is unreceptive to the essence phoenix, such an essence as understood does not form an outright contradiction.

In *De Potentia*, Aquinas offers a more extended account of the possibility of essences apart from actually existing instantiations. In addition to the *essentia in intellectu*²¹ and *essences* in potency to matter, he here introduces also the power of an agent. He states:

Nam *humanitas vel igneitas potest considerari ut in potentia materiae existens, vel ut in virtute agentis, aut etiam ut in intellectu* [m.e.]: 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.²²

Humanity or fire can be considered as existing in the potency of matter, or in the power of an agent, or even in the intellect. But, Aquinas explains, that which has *esse* is effected as existing in act. It has the actuality of all acts and the perfection of all perfections.

Despite this pre-created lack of *esse*, something still can be regarded as either possible or impossible in terms of the second and third conditions listed above, but not yet the first, as there is no preexisting, co-eternal matter. That is, God can conceive the essence human

²¹ Here one may object that the *intellectus essentiae* argument considered essences apart from the intellect, in the same manner as such were being considered apart from being. Despite his discussion of the absolute consideration of essence in *De Ente* III, Aquinas seems to reject a status for essences equal to their subsistence *in re* or *in intellectu*. This, however, will be the matter to be discussed in what follows. For a more detailed discussion of the issue, and a comparison of Aquinas, Avicenna, and Scotus on this question, see Owens, “Common Nature: A Point of Comparison,” 1-14.

²² Aquinas’s explanation of the *possibility* of non-existents. Namely, before creation, they are in the power of the agent and in the divine intellect, although not yet inherent in matter. “[...] quod hoc quod dico esse est inter omnia perfectissimum: quod ex hoc patet quia actus est semper perfectio 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: esse enim quod huiusmodi est, est aliud secundum essentiam ab eo cui additur determinandum. Nihil autem potest addi ad esse quod sit extraneum ab ipso, cum ab eo nihil sit extraneum nisi non-ens, quod non potest esse nec materia. Unde non sic determinatur esse per aliud sicut potentia per actum, sed magis sicut actus per potentiam. Nam et in definitione formarum ponuntur propriae materiae loco differentiae, sicut cum dicitur quod anima est actus corporis physici organici. Et per hunc modum, hoc esse ab illo esse distinguitur, in quantum est talis vel talis naturae. Et per hoc dicit Dionysius [cap. V *de divin. Nomin.*], quod licet viventia sint nobiliora quam existentia, tamen esse est nobilius quam vivere: viventia enim non tantum habent vitam, sed cum vita simul habent et esse.” *De Pot.* q. 7, a. 2, ad 9.

or fire or even phoenix and he has the power (*virtus*) to create such beings, even though all three lack the actual *esse* necessary to stand outside their cause. Such non-beings are possible in relation to the non-contradiction of their terms and to the power of an agent.

Again in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas lays out an extended account of this matter:

Possibile autem fuit ens creatum esse, antequam esset, per potentiam agentis, per quam et esse incoepit. Vel propter habitudinem terminorum, in quibus nulla repugnantia invenitur: quod quidem possibile secundum nullam potentiam dicitur, ut patet per philosophum, in V Metaph. Hoc enim praedicatum quod est esse, non repugnat huic subiecto quod est mundus vel homo, sicut commensurable repugnat diametro: et sic sequitur quod non sit impossibile esse, et per consequens quod sit possibile esse antequam esset, etiam nulla potentia existente.²³

In this passage, Aquinas follows Aristotle in distinguishing between *possibility* in an absolute sense and a more limited sense of *potency* (*potentia*): something can be said to be *in potency* to the power of an agent or the passive receptivity of matter; whereas, its *possibility* stems from the relatability and non-repugnance of terms. The predicate “*esse*” is not repugnant to the subject “world” or “human” or even, we might add, “phoenix,” whereas certain terms such as “commensurable diameter” or “squared circle” fight against each other, and thus are impossible.²⁴ Even with no potency existing (i.e., passive potency), that which is not impossible is possible to be (*possibile esse*) even before it comes to be.²⁵

²³ SCG II. 37.

²⁴ Ross seeks to intervene at this point and maintain that such non-repugnance entail merely “vacant possibility” and not a realm of *possibles* or even a multiplicity of divine ideas. E.g., “antilichts repel chronons” (not impossible *per se*). Ross wants to dissociate such vacant possibilities from the more robust *esse essentiae* of Henry of Ghent. He argues that with Wippel, Gilson, and Maurer, possibility in Aquinas becomes too closely associated with such essential being as an object separate from divine ideas, an association stemming from underemphasizing what he calls “Aquinas’s Voluntarism.” See James Ross, “Aquinas’s Exemplarism; Aquinas’s Voluntarism,” 171-198.

²⁵ From the context of this discussion, we can see that Aquinas is concerned with a preexisting passive potency, but does not yet consider an active potency or power. He states: “Ex hoc etiam patet quod non

Although Aquinas seems in such passages to uphold the absolute possibility or impossibility of such essences, elsewhere he grounds eternal truth in the divine mind. He states: “[...] dicendum quod ratio circuli, et duo et tria esse quinque, habent aeternitatem in mente divina”.²⁶ At this point, we might ask about the status of such “possibility” in relation to the divine mind, which alone, before creation, is able to *understand* such. In addition, we might add the question of how divine omnipotence along with the non-contradiction of certain terms “co-determines” what *can be* created. That is, does the divine intellect in conjunction with the divine will determine such possibility, or does such *possibility* determine the *potency* of God’s omnipotence? Or to put it in other terms, does possibility (i.e., either in relation to the divine intellect or independent of it) dictate the conditions of what divine power can create or does divine omnipotence determine the nature of possibility?

In order to address this question, we must clarify what Aquinas means by divine ideas and how they stand in relation to possibility in an absolute sense.²⁷ “Ideas,” Aquinas states, translates the Latin “*forma*,” which exist apart from the things themselves of which they are the forms. If the world was not made by chance, but designed by an

oportet aliquam potentiam passivam praecedere esse totius entis creati, ut tertia ratio concludebat. Hoc enim est necessarium in illis quae per motum essendi principium sumunt: eo quod motus est actus existentis in potentia. Possibile autem fuit ens creatum esse, antequam esset, per potentiam agentis, per quam et esse incoepit. Vel propter habitudinem terminorum, in quibus nulla repugnantia invenitur: quod quidem possibile secundum nullam potentiam dicitur, ut patet per philosophum, in V Metaph. Hoc enim praedicatum quod est esse, non repugnat huic subiecto quod est mundus vel homo, sicut commensurabile repugnat diametro: et sic sequitur quod non sit impossibile esse, et per consequens quod sit possibile esse antequam esset, etiam nulla potentia existente. In his autem quae per motum fiunt, oportet prius fuisse possibile per aliquam passivam potentiam: in quibus philosophus, in VII Metaphys., hac utitur ratione.”
SCG II. 37.

²⁶ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 7, ad 1.

²⁷ On this question, see Ross, “Aquinas’s Exemplarism; Aquinas’s Voluntarism,” especially pp. 173-176. He argues against attributing any real status to possibles prior to creation and also against multiplying the one divine idea. As mentioned above, possibles prior to creation represent mere vacant possibilities, not blueprints of creation. This also avoids introducing any relation between God and a realm of possibility (i.e., a referent) outside of the one divine idea.

intelligent agent, then a form, or forms, must exist in the intellect of the maker by which the ultimate product comes to be made.²⁸ Everything not generated by chance, Aquinas maintains, must be ordered according to a form as the end of its generation. Such a form is that to which its generation is ordered and in which it terminates. Thus, by realizing its form, something becomes what it is meant to be as established by its nature. The world that eventually may or may not come to be will have a basis of intelligibility in an ideational preconception in the divine intellect.

Aquinas further clarifies what it means for an agent to act on account of a form: in one sense, an agent acts by its nature, and thereby (i.e., insofar as its nature is determined by its form), it acts on account of its form; in another way, however, an agent that acts intelligibly acts on account of form, although not necessarily in a univocal sense. In both types of generation, if they are to avoid the influence of mere chance, the form must serve as the end of generation, that idea toward which the thing strives (“*In omnibus enim quae non a casu generantur, necesse est formam esse finem generationis cuiuscumque*”). The first way consists of natural generation in which one thing generates another like itself (e.g., human begets human, and fire fire). Because such natural generation requires the agent to act only on account of *its form*, and thereby communicate a univocal likeness to its effect, it will be important, as Aquinas indicates, to show that God does not act

²⁸ “Respondeo dicendum quod necesse est ponere in mente divina ideas. Idea enim graece, latine forma dicitur: unde per ideas intelliguntur formae aliarum rerum, praeter ipsas res existentes. Forma autem alicuius rei praeter ipsam existens, ad duo esse potest: vel ut sit exemplar eius cuius dicitur forma; vel ut sit principium cognitionis ipsius, secundum quod formae cognoscibilia dicuntur esse in cognoscente. Et quantum ad utrumque est necesse ponere ideas. Quod sic patet. In omnibus enim quae non a casu generantur, necesse est formam esse finem generationis cuiuscumque. Agens autem non ageret propter formam, nisi in quantum similitudo formae est in ipso. Quod quidem contingit dupliciter. In quibusdam enim agentibus praexistit forma rei fiendae secundum esse naturale, sicut in his quae agunt per naturam; sicut homo generat hominem, et ignis ignem. In quibusdam vero secundum esse intelligibile, ut in his quae agunt per intellectum; sicut similitudo domus praexistit in mente aedificatoris. Et haec potest dici idea domus, quia artifex intendit domum assimilare formae quam mente concepit. Quia igitur mundus non est casu factus, sed est factus a Deo per intellectum agente, ut infra patebit, necesse est quod in mente divina sit forma, ad similitudinem cuius mundus est factus. Et in hoc consistit ratio ideae.” *ST I*, q. 15, a. 1, resp.

naturally, but instead acts in the second way, according to intelligible being. With Avicenna in mind, Aquinas will argue that God acts through intellect on account of forms. Because God can intellectually grasp a multitude of possible effects according to their intellected form, he can thereby serve as the total and immediate cause of all diversity, instead of requiring the agency of secondary causes to introduce such diversity.²⁹ God intends each thing according to its form, which orders a multitude of things toward preordained ends as understood by God.

If God were merely acting according to his nature, then the universe would necessarily follow from God without his prior intellection, but also without his deliberation. God acts on account of form, but form that he knows and is able to propose to himself in rational deliberation, not form that determines his nature and requires him to act. For the entirety of nature to have an end of action on account of its form, the diverse forms that make up nature must have an ideational ground in the divine intellect, just as to use Aquinas's example, an arrow flies toward a target as to its natural end, but such direction reduces to the foresight of an archer.³⁰ What such a ground of intelligence

²⁹ See, for example, *SCG* II.42.

³⁰ See "The Fifth Way" of *ST I*. q. 2, a. 3, resp. Aquinas uses the idea of design for the God's free act of creation (as opposed to necessity) based upon the universe being ordered to an end. "... Quarum prima est, quod oportet dicere universum aliquem finem habere: alias omnia in universo casu acciderent; nisi forte diceretur, quod primae creaturae non sunt propter finem, sed ex naturali necessitate; posteriores vero creaturae sunt propter finem; sicut et Democritus ponebat caelestia corpora esse a casu facta, inferiora vero a causis determinatis, quod improbatur in II Phys., per hoc quod ea quae sunt nobiliora, non possunt esse minus ordinata quam indigniora. Necesse est igitur dicere, quod in productione creaturarum a Deo sit aliquis finis intentus. Invenitur autem agere propter finem et voluntas et natura, sed aliter et aliter. Natura enim, cum non cognoscat nec finem nec rationem finis, nec habitudinem eius, quod est ad finem in finem, non potest sibi praestituere finem, nec se in finem movere aut ordinare vel dirigere; quod quidem competit agenti per voluntatem, cuius est intelligere et finem et omnia praedicta. Unde agens per voluntatem sic agit propter finem, quod praestituit sibi finem, et seipsum quodammodo in finem movet, suas actiones in ipsum ordinando. Natura vero tendit in finem sicut mota et directa ab alio intelligente et volente, sicut patet in sagitta, quae tendit in signum determinatum propter directionem sagittantis; et per hunc modum a Philosophis dicitur, quod opus naturae est opus intelligentiae. Semper autem quod est per aliud, est posterius eo quod est per se. Unde oportet quod primum ordinans in finem, hoc faciat per voluntatem; et ita Deus per voluntatem creaturas in esse produxit, non per naturam. Nec est instantia de Filio, quod naturaliter procedit a Patre, cuius generatio creationem praecedat: quia Filius non procedit ut ad finem ordinatus, sed ut

provides and what Aquinas finds lacking in emanationist theories is an immediate and essential reduction of the diversity of nature to a single unifying ground in the divine intellect, namely the good of the universe as a whole. Such a ground is *immediate* because every being depends directly upon God for its being (*esse*) and not upon other emanated intermediaries who themselves give rise to the next in the series.³¹

Furthermore, it is *essential* because the order of the universe proceeds according to a preordained design and does not just “happen” outside the intention of the first.

For Aquinas the procession of beings from the first happens on account of an *intellectual* action ordered toward an end (“*Processus autem entium a primo ente est per actionem ordinatam ad finem*”).³² If intermediaries assist in the execution of the divine plan and help to realize such preordained ends, this is not because they provide a diversification not-included by the plenitude of the first. Instead, Aquinas argues just as the art of war, of horsemanship, and of bridle-making (*frenifactoris*) are on account of the higher end of political affairs (*propter finem civilis*), so too secondary causes are directed toward the end of the first cause, the *ultimus finis* in caused things. This is not, according to Aquinas, the case in an emanated universe where diverse things may strive towards a common good, but such striving has not been arranged by the first cause as integral to the realization of an intended and preordained good. This is because in

omnium finis.” *De Pot.* q. 3, a. 15, resp. Thus, the work of nature, which contains many natural agents acting toward an end, is ultimately a work of intelligence on the part of the first agent.

³¹ In *SCG* II.42, Aquinas rejects the argument that intermediary agents could account for diversity in the world.

³² “In omnibus causis agentibus ordinatis, ubi agitur propter finem, oportet quod fines causarum secundarum sint propter finem causae primae: sicut finis militaris et equestris et frenifactoris est propter finem civilis. Processus autem entium a primo ente est per actionem ordinatam ad finem: cum sit per intellectum, ut ostensum est; intellectus autem omnis propter finem agit. Si igitur in productione rerum sunt aliquae causae secundae, oportet quod fines earum et actiones sint propter finem causae primae, qui est ultimus finis in rebus causatis. Hoc autem est distinctio et ordo partium universi, qui est quasi ultima forma. Non igitur est distinctio in rebus et ordo propter actiones secundarum causarum: sed magis actiones secundarum causarum sunt propter ordinem et distinctionem in rebus constituendam.” *SCG* II.42.

thinking only itself, the first of emanation neither intends nor provides for the universe as a whole except through that which “overflows” from itself.³³

If God did not know the forms of all things, diversity would escape the intention of his agency. It may result, but outside the order of his intelligence (i.e., by chance). In addition, acting not only from his nature, but also by his will, God directs nature as a whole toward an end in a manner similar the archer dispensing the arrow (“*Natura vero tendit in finem sicut mota et directa ab alio intelligente et volente, sicut patet in sagitta, quae tendit in signum determinatum propter directionem sagittantis...*”).³⁴ The diverse parts of nature, Aquinas argues, agree in their “account of existence” (*ratione existendi*) much like multiple and diverse building materials agree and are gathered together around the unifying order of a house.³⁵ The various parts of a house contribute to the order as arranged by an architect and directed to an end (i.e., residence).

Aquinas frequently draws such analogies between nature and unified orders such as armies, households, organic bodies, etc. in order to highlight the intelligibility of all parts as *integral* to the whole. Only because nature is the work of intelligence, and not produced by natural necessity, can it be essentially directed toward an end and the

³³ “It must, hence, be known that providence consists in the First’s knowing in Himself [the mode] of existence of the order of the good in His being, in Himself, a cause of goodness and perfection in terms of what is possible, and in His being satisfied [with the order of the good] in the manner that has been mentioned. He would thus intellectually apprehend the order of the good in the highest possible manner, whereby what He intellectually apprehends in the highest possible way as an order and a good would overflow from Him in the manner, within the realm of possibility, that is most complete in being conducive to order. This, then, is the meaning of providence.” Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, trans. and intro. Michael E. Marmura (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), Book IX, Chapter 6, 339.

³⁴ *De Pot.* q. 3, a. 15, resp.

³⁵ “[...] ponit ea quae pertinent ad mansionem unius rei in alia. Unde sciendum est quod, cum ex aliquibus aliquid constitui oportet, primo quidem requiritur quod partes convenient: sicut multi lapides conveniunt ad invicem ex quibus constituitur domus et similiter omnes partes universi conveniunt in ratione existendi; et hoc ideo dicit, quia non solum ex pulchro sunt mansiones rerum in seipsis, sed etiam communionones omnium in omnibus secundum proprietatem uniuscuiusque; non enim uno modo omnia sunt in omnibus, sed superiora quidem in inferioribus participatione, inferiora vero in superioribus excellenter et tamen omnia cum omnibus aliquid commune habent.” *In De Div Nom.*, Chapter 4. Lec. 6. 364. For an analysis of these different analogies, see Blanchette, *The Order of the Universe*, 12-19.

diversity of creatures be the intended result of a single *principium*.³⁶ The *arche* from which all beings emerge also determines the *telos* towards which all beings strive. Thus, the universe constitutes “an integral whole” existing as ordered to the whole.³⁷ The diversity of the universe is rendered intelligible in reference to the unity of both its origin and its end.

The importance for Aquinas of such a first *principium* is not only that it has the power to causally give rise to being as their *arche*, but also *archically* dispenses such beings toward their final end. Beings as emanated from other beings would be teleologically *anarchic* with respect to the first insofar as they lacked a preordained order and connection to each other, but instead occurred as the result of blind necessity, a sort of cosmic overflow. The universe would be reduced to a first only indirectly insofar as each successive emanation follows from the previous, but the series as a whole is not intellectually *designed* by the first. If nature were the result of the first agent acting by natural necessity, each subsequent being would still have a form, but such form would not be an end of its generation as intended by the first agent. The work of nature (*opus naturae*) would not be a work of intelligence (*opus intelligentiae*), which would mean that the diversity between beings on account of their forms would not be inscribed in terms of a natural end. This is why, Aquinas argues, God acts intelligibly and has a pre-existing idea of everything that can come to be. Like the architect who intends to build a house according to the form in her mind, God creates the universe according to a design with each thing corresponding to a likeness preconceived by its agent.³⁸ As the reflection of these preconceived ideas, the universe, once created, *resembles* that after which it was

³⁶ Aquinas argues that this allows God to give to things their *principium durationis*. SCG II.38.

³⁷ See Blanchette, *The Order of the Universe*.

³⁸ See ST I, q. 15, a. 1, resp. and fn 19 above.

modeled and anything can be judged in accordance with how closely it approximates its ideated form. Things have an essential ground in divine preconception, even though, as we will come to see, their existential ground exceeds mere conceivability.

Given what has been said about such divine ideas, as the forms on account of which God acts as an intelligent agent, we must add the following: God does not understand things according to an idea existing apart from himself, as the Platonist might think.³⁹ Otherwise, there would be something other than God and uncreated by him. Given such an identity between God and the divine ideas, two questions arise at this point. First, whether God understands things through one or through many divine ideas? And second, in referring to the “things understood,” what is the referent of this understanding both before creation, but also after creation for uncreated possibilities, such as phoenixes? These preliminary questions will help in formulating an answer to the earlier question of the relationship between divine power and absolute possibility.

The obvious problem with positing multiple ideas in the divine essence would be the multiplication of divine simplicity. Something absolutely simple would include a multiplicity of acts of understanding which would constitute a breach between God and his multiple acts of knowing. Aquinas argues, however, that it is necessary to posit many divine ideas on account of the order of the universe as a whole. To make this argument, he refers to the ultimate end of every effect, which follows from the intention of the principal agent and not from an accidental succession of multiple agents. God’s ideas must be multiple, otherwise any subsequent manifold of actual beings would not be sufficiently ordered according to God as their *arche*. Their unity would exceed the order preordained by the divine intellect. Such an accidental, or *anarchic*, unity would lack a

³⁹ *ST I*, q. 15, a. 1, ad 1.

true sense of order, which Aquinas defines as a multiplicity unified around a guiding intention as determined by a principle. He illustrates this definition with the example of the order of an army as the proper intention of a general.⁴⁰ The various parts of the army are ordered according to the intention of the general, who serves as the guiding principle of this ordered totality. Each individual part of the army is ranked according to its distance from the principle and finds its proper place within the order in relation to an end. Such an ordered relation to an end means that we can discern an intelligibility to what otherwise might appear as a disparate multiplicity insofar as an intelligent agent directs them all to some ultimate good.⁴¹ All effects preexist in the mind of the creator

⁴⁰*ST I* q. 15, a. 2, resp. and also *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 2, resp. The former states: “Respondeo dicendum quod necesse est ponere plures ideas. Ad cuius evidentiam, considerandum est quod in quolibet effectu illud quod est ultimus finis, proprie est intentum a principali agente; sicut ordo exercitus a duce. Illud autem quod est optimum in rebus existens, est bonum ordinis universi, ut patet per philosophum in XII Metaphys. Ordo igitur universi est proprie a Deo intentus, et non per accidens proveniens secundum successionem agentium: prout quidam dixerunt quod Deus creavit primum creatum tantum, quod creatum creavit secundum creatum, et sic inde quousque producta est tanta rerum multitudo: secundum quam opinionem, Deus non haberet nisi ideam primi creati. Sed si ipse ordo universi est per se creatus ab eo, et intentus ab ipso, necesse est quod habeat ideam ordinis universi. Ratio autem alicuius totius haberi non potest, nisi habeantur propriae rationes eorum ex quibus totum constituitur, sicut aedificator speciem domus concipere non posset, nisi apud ipsum esset propria ratio cuiuslibet partium eius. Sic igitur oportet quod in mente divina sint propriae rationes omnium rerum. Unde dicit Augustinus, in libro Octoginta trium Quaest., quod *singula propriis rationibus a Deo creata sunt*. Unde sequitur quod in mente divina sint plures ideae. Hoc autem quomodo divinae simplicitati non repugnet, facile est videre, si quis consideret ideam operati esse in mente operantis sicut quod intelligitur; non autem sicut species qua intelligitur, quae est forma faciens intellectum in actu. Forma enim domus in mente aedificatoris est aliquid ab eo intellectum, ad cuius similitudinem domum in materia format. Non est autem contra simplicitatem divini intellectus quod multa intelligat: sed contra simplicitatem eius esset, si per plures species eius intellectus formaretur. Unde plures ideae sunt in mente divina ut intellectae ab ipso. Quod hoc modo potest videri. Ipse enim essentiam suam perfecte cognoscit: unde cognoscit eam secundum omnem modum quo cognoscibilis est. Potest autem cognosci non solum secundum quod in se est, sed secundum quod est participabilis secundum aliquem modum similitudinis a creaturis. Unaquaeque autem creatura habet propriam speciem, secundum quod aliquo modo participat divinae essentiae similitudinem. Sic igitur in quantum Deus cognoscit suam essentiam ut sic imitabilem a tali creatura, cognoscit eam ut propriam rationem et ideam huius creaturae. Et similiter de aliis. Et sic patet quod Deus intelligit plures rationes proprias plurium rerum; quae sunt plures ideae.”

⁴¹ According to Blanchette, the analogy of the army is introduced in order to capture the connection between the good of the order of parts and a separated good: in terms of an army, this corresponds to the good of the army itself and the good of the general who stands over the army. This analogy allows Aquinas to show that the good of the universe is both of an intrinsic good amongst parts and a separate good. This leads to yet another analogy of a household and the various grades of order (i.e., 1. the sons; 2. the servants; 3. domestic animals) that exist apart from the principle of order (i.e., the head of house or *paterfamilias*). The importance of the household analogy, Blanchette argues, is that it adds the notion of “affinity” as an

and are directed according to the intended good of his design. This account of order toward an end, Aquinas argues, is *providence*, a matter to be explored below.⁴²

In terms of the universe, the highest good existing in things (*optimum in rebus existens*) is the good of an ordered universe, and the order of the universe is the proper intention of God. It is worth pausing to observe Aquinas's tactic here insofar as it indirectly responds to theories of emanation. Against such theories—in which a series of successive agents follow (literally: *fall out of*) the previous one, and God only has *an idea* of the immediately subsequent agent—Aquinas counters that the order of the universe and each creature in it is *intended* immediately by God. According to an emanation account, Aquinas reports, God only creates the first creature, and the latter in turn creates the second, and so on down the line until a multiplicity is produced. Thus, the “order” of the universe does not follow from divine intention because God is responsible only for the first creature and not for the totality of the universe. Accordingly, God requires only a single idea sufficient to produce the first creature and nothing more.

Aquinas's response, although not directly refuting such a theory, but instead arguing for a multiplicity of divine ideas, states that since the order of the universe is created by God immediately (i.e., not through a series of mediaries) and is intended by him, then he must have an idea of this order as a totality and of its individual parts, and not just of his

ordering principle. Affinity functions as a *natural* principle of order between various ranks: i.e., one based upon natural differences, and not merely difference of assignment, which Blanchette argues, “is contingent upon the choice of the head” and not a matter of natural resemblance to the first itself. Thus, one might say, a sergeant and a private-first class do not differ by nature, but by their rank as recognized by the general, whereas a son and a servant differ by bloodline. Thus, the father could not direct a servant (and even less a domestic animal) to fulfill the function of one of his sons insofar as they lack the father's inheritance (i.e., bloodline). See Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe*, 15-19.

⁴² See Chapter VI Section 3 below. Also: “Hoc igitur bonum ordinis in rebus creatis existens, a Deo creatum est. Cum autem Deus sit causa rerum per suum intellectum, et sic cuiuslibet sui effectus oportet rationem in ipso praeexistere, ut ex superioribus patet; necesse est quod ratio ordinis rerum in finem in mente divina praeexistat. Ratio autem ordinandorum in finem, proprie providentia est.” *ST I*. q. 22, a. 1, resp.

first effect. A proper account of any totality must account for those parts from which it is constituted: a general's account of the order of his army must account for all the distinct units (e.g., infantry, cavalry, weaponry, etc.), just as a *paterfamilias* must account for his children, his servants, and his livestock in accounting for his family. Otherwise, the principal agent—whether it be God, a general, or a *paterfamilias*—could not establish that order in accordance with its proper end. Since God created a universe with multiple beings, which can be gleaned *post facto*, such a multitude of beings must be grounded in the ideational multiplicity of the divine intellect, otherwise they would be *anarchic* with respect to the first insofar as their actual being would exceed their divine preconception and they would be unordered in accordance with the proper intention of the agent.

The more Aquinas insists on the multiplicity of divine ideas, the more he seems to threaten divine simplicity. Aquinas, however, argues that God understands many things but not through a multiplicity of images informing his intellect. Such a manifold of images would require a multiplicity of forms actualizing God's intellect. Ideas are not species *by which* God understands, but *that which* is directly understood.⁴³ As Aquinas further explains in *De Veritate*, a form can be in the intellect in two ways.⁴⁴ In one way, it

⁴³ “[...] ideam operati esse in mente operantis sicut quod intelligitur; non autem sicut species qua intelligitur, quae est forma faciens intellectum in actu [...]” See *ST I* q. 15, a. 2, resp.

⁴⁴ “Forma enim in intellectu dupliciter esse potest. Uno modo ita quod sit principium actus intelligendi, sicut forma, quae est intelligentis in quantum est intelligens, et haec est similitudo intellecti in ipso; alio modo ita quod sit terminus actus intelligendi, sicut artifex intelligendo excogitat formam domus, et cum illa forma sit excogitata per actum intelligendi et quasi per actum effecta, non potest esse principium actus intelligendi ut sit primum quo intelligatur sed magis se habet ut intellectum quo intelligens aliquid operatur; nihilominus tamen est forma praedicta secundum quo intelligitur quia per formam excogitatam artifex intelligit quid operandum sit; sicut etiam in intellectu speculativo videmus quod species qua intellectus informat ut intelligat actu est primum quo intelligitur, ex hoc autem quod est effectus in actu per talem formam operari iam potest formando quidditates rerum et componendo et dividendo, unde ipsa quidditas formata in intellectu vel etiam compositio et divisio est quoddam operatum ipsius, per quod tamen intellectus venit in cognitionem rei exterioris et sic est quasi secundum quo intelligitur. Si autem intellectus artificis aliquod artificiatum produceret ad similitudinem sui ipsius, tunc quidem ipse intellectus artificis esset idea, non quidem ut est intellectus sed in quantum intellectum. In his autem quae ad imitationem alterius producuntur, quandoque quidem id quod alterum imitatur perfecte imitatur ipsum, et tunc

is the principle of the act of understanding, or that which leads the intellect from potency to act. The form serves as a likeness of the thing in the intellect, enabling it to understand the thing from which the form has been abstracted. In another way, the form is the culmination of the act of understanding, as is the case when an architect contrives (*excogitat*) the form of a house. Since in the case of the latter the form is contrived through the act of understanding, as an effect of the intellectual act, it cannot be the principle of understanding. The form is not that *by which* the intellect understands something, as is the case for our intellect knowing something through its intelligible species, but instead that which is produced through the activity of thinking. Cognition in such a case is practical and productive. The former way of a form's being in the intellect does not suffice to explain the divine ideas. Otherwise, the divine intellect would be called to act by something other than itself. Instead, Aquinas turns to the latter productive model of cognition to explain how the divine intellect operates as first artificer, or cosmic architect of all distinct manners of being (*modi essendi*).

Aquinas begins by explaining that if the intellect of an artisan produced something similar to itself, then her intellect itself would be an idea, not insofar as it is understanding (i.e., an intellect) something distinct from itself, but insofar as understood.

As opposed to producing an idea of some other object (e.g., a house or a motorcycle), the

intellectus operativus praeconciens formam operati habet ut ideam ipsam formam rei imitatae prout est illius rei imitatae; quandoque vero quod est ad imitationem alterius non perfecte imitatur illud, et tunc intellectus operativus non acciperet formam rei imitatae absolute ut ideam vel exemplar rei operandae sed cum proportione determinata secundum quam exemplatum a principali exemplari deficeret vel imitaretur. Dico ergo quod Deus per intellectum omnia operans omnia ad similitudinem essentiae suae producit, unde essentia sua est idea rerum; non quidem ut est essentia, sed ut est intellecta. Res autem creatae non perfecte imitantur divinam essentiam; unde essentia non accipitur absolute ab intellectu divino ut idea rerum, sed cum proportione creaturae fiendae ad ipsam divinam essentiam, secundum quod deficit ab ea vel imitatur ipsam; diversae autem res diversimode ipsam imitantur et unaquaeque secundum proprium modum suum cum unicuique sit esse distinctum ab altera; et ideo ipsa divina essentia, cointellectis diversis proportionibus rerum ad eam, est idea uniuscuiusque rei: unde cum sint diversae rerum proportionibus, necesse est plures esse ideas, et est quidem una omnium ex parte essentiae sed pluralitas invenitur ex parte diversarum proportionum creaturarum ad ipsam." *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 2, resp.

artisan instead would produce its very likeness through the act of thinking. As Aquinas further explains, this is the way of divine ideation. For God, such a production of his essence as understood establishes an idea for all creatures. Such an idea, however, is not the divine essence absolutely understood, but instead as the proportion each thing might have to the divine essence as its exemplar. Thus, God knows various things according to the degrees in which they might imitate his essence, and as imitations always with some degree of deficiency. In knowing his essence perfectly, God also knows the various manners in which his essence can be participated by creatures. Such an imitability on the part of the divine essence accounts for the multiplicity of divine ideas. There is but a single idea of God's essence for all things, but many ideas follow according to the diverse proportions by which things are able to imitate the divine essence. Aquinas states: "Unde, cum sint diversae rerum proportiones, necesse est plures esse ideas; et est quidem una omnium ex parte essentiae; sed pluralitas invenitur ex parte diversarum proportionum creaturarum ad ipsam."⁴⁵ God does not serve indifferently as the exemplar of all things, in which case he would know everything indifferently.⁴⁶ Instead, he must understand distinct things as various manners in which the divine essence can be imperfectly imitated.⁴⁷ In doing so, Aquinas thus has retained the simplicity of God's essence while allowing it to serve as an ideational principle or *arche* of multiplicity, that by which everything falls short of divine perfection although according to diverse manners of being.

⁴⁵ See *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 2, resp. and fn 44 above.

⁴⁶ See also, *SCG* I.54.

⁴⁷ In *De Pot.* q. 3, a. 16, ad. 12, Aquinas argues that if the exemplified were a perfect copy of its exemplar, there could be but one copy of it, multiplied only accidentally through matter. The only perfect imitation of the exemplar is the Son, who is an image of the Father. All other exemplification falls short.

To the degree each creature participates in the divine essence and can come to imitate such a perfection, to that degree it has its species. Through its species, each being assimilates itself to the divine essence. As the specific parts constituting the totality of the universe, species—and the individuals subsumed therein—find their highest good in the ordered universe. Through determinate forms, everything is placed within its species and reduced to divine wisdom ordering the unified multiplicity of the universe as their first principle. As Aquinas argues in the beginning of *Summa Contra Gentiles*, wise are those who order things rightly and govern them well.⁴⁸ This rule of government and order for all things best disposes each thing when it is fittingly ordered to its end. A ship is best disposed when the technician produces it with regard to the end of navigation, or medicine when the chemist concocts the formula with regard for the health of the body. Thus, everything in the universe finds order according its specific end, and such ends are specified in terms of the general architectonic of the universe as a whole.⁴⁹ A multiplicity comes to be unified in accordance with the intention of its proper governor. The role of the divine intellect for Aquinas is not only as *arche* from whence all things derive or emanate, but also as that to which all things are dispensed and ordered as a *telos* or end.

In intending an order for the universe according to the multiplicity of his ideas, God serves as the exemplary cause of everything wherein each creature receives its determinate form.⁵⁰ Such determinate forms link creatures to a species and also

⁴⁸ *SCG* I.1.

⁴⁹ In this chapter of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas defines “architectonic” as the arts that rule other arts insofar as they establish the other’s end.

⁵⁰ “[...] dicendum quod Deus est prima causa exemplaris omnium rerum. Ad cuius evidentiam, considerandum est quod ad productionem alicuius rei ideo necessarium est exemplar, ut effectus determinatam formam consequatur: artifex enim producit determinatam formam in materia, propter exemplar ad quod inspicit, sive illud sit exemplar ad quod extra intuetur, sive sit exemplar interius mente conceptum. Manifestum est autem quod ea quae naturaliter fiunt, determinatas formas consequuntur. Haec autem formarum determinatio oportet quod reducat, sicut in primum principium, in divinam sapientiam,

distinguish them from members of other species. The *rationes* of all things, which Aquinas notes had earlier been called *ideas*, are the principles by which divine wisdom grounds all things, providing them with the order of a fully contrived (*excogitavit*) universe. This suggests that the subcontracting of creation through intermediary agents (e.g., Avicenna's account of emanation), whose subsequent actions stand outside the purview of the first (*primum principium*), would leave creatures anarchic in a very real sense because although necessarily following from the first, such an order is not intended by the first as dispensed toward an end.

Even though Avicenna treats emanation according to a model of necessity (i.e., the existence of a cause sufficiently determines the production of its effect), not leaving much to contingency or chance, for Aquinas, there is no preconception of such an order as a totality. Thus, such a multiplicity is not grounded in the order of a single principle nor are such effects adequately foreseen in their multiplicity. The vehemence of necessity implicates God in the natural order without a breach between cause and effect.⁵¹ For Aquinas, instead, divine wisdom can think through an order for the universe without thereby committing God to its actual production. As he argues in *De Veritate*, much like an artist who has practical knowledge of what she might create, but merely “thinks through” (*excogitat*) without intending such a work, likewise, in merely contriving an

quae ordinem universi excogitavit, qui in rerum distinctione consistit. Et ideo oportet dicere quod in divina sapientia sunt *rationes omnium rerum* [m.e.], quas supra diximus *ideas* [m.e.], id est *formas exemplares in mente divina existentes* [m.e.]. Quae quidem licet multiplicentur secundum respectum ad res, tamen non sunt realiter aliud a divina essentia, prout eius similitudo a diversis participari potest diversimode. Sic igitur ipse Deus est primum exemplar omnium. –Possunt etiam in rebus creatis quaedam aliorum exemplaria dici, secundum quod quaedam sunt ad similitudinem aliorum, vel secundum eandem speciem, vel secundum analogiam alicuius imitationis.” *ST I*, q. 44, a. 3, resp.

⁵¹ This is the issue that seems to concern Gilson: “...the same Christian theologians [of the thirteenth-century] could not fail to realize the fact that the God of Avicenna, although ontologically separated from merely possible beings by his own necessity, still remained tied up with them in a necessary way. From the very fact that the Necessary Being is, the Avicennian universe of finite beings necessarily follows...” *Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 216.

order for the universe, God does not yet actually produce such an order.⁵² When the divine *rationes* do come to serve as the principles of actual production and pertain to practical cognition, they are called *exemplares*.⁵³

Coming full circle from the *intellectus essentiae* argument of *De Ente*, at this point we begin to witness the importance of this separation insofar as in thinking through the imitability of his essence, God provides an exemplar for all creatures without actually bringing them into being, which allows Aquinas to keep separate the conditions for something's being intelligible, for example through a divine *intellectus essentiae*, from its being actual. Only through an endowment of being does something actually come to be. This is why our *intellectus essentiae* can grasp the intelligibility of any creature—even those non-existent creatures such as phoenixes—but cannot conceptually reproduce for itself the “what more” of actual being. We run up against such actuality when we encounter any being, and yet in attempting to render an account and conceptually unpack the content of our intellectual grasp, we seem always to come up short. The reason for *esse*'s fundamental incommensurability with conceptual thought is rooted in the distinct manners by which God causes something's nature and by which he causes its being.

As the exemplary cause of everything, God makes creatures in his likeness. God knows different things according to the modes by which they accept something of the

⁵² *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 3, resp.

⁵³ “Respondeo dicendum quod, cum ideae a Platone ponerentur principia cognitionis rerum et generationis ipsarum, ad utrumque se habet idea, prout in mente divina ponitur. Et secundum quod est principium factionis rerum, exemplar dici potest, et ad practicam cognitionem pertinet. Secundum autem quod principium cognoscitivum est, proprie dicitur ratio; et potest etiam ad scientiam speculativam pertinere. Secundum ergo quod exemplar est, secundum hoc se habet ad omnia quae a Deo fiunt secundum aliquod tempus. Secundum vero quod principium cognoscitivum est, se habet ad omnia quae cognoscuntur a Deo, etiam si nullo tempore fiant; et ad omnia quae a Deo cognoscuntur secundum propriam rationem, et secundum quod cognoscuntur ab ipso per modum speculationis.” *ST I*, q. 15, a. 3, resp. In his *sed contra* to a later question, he states: “Sed contra est quod exemplar est idem quod idea. Sed ideae, secundum quod Augustinus libro Octoginta trium Quaest. dicit, *sunt formae principales, quae divina intelligentia continentur*. Ergo exemplaria rerum non sunt extra Deum.” *ST I*, q. 44, a. 3 s. c.

divine essence.⁵⁴ Such acceptance is itself a perfection, made imperfect only to the extent that it falls short (necessarily so, we might add) of true being. God understands the essence of each thing as a way (*modus*) of imitating his own essence. Although everything deficiently imitates the divine essence, *life*, for example, imitates God in a lesser noble manner than *knowledge*, whereby God knows the proper form of plant. This multiplicity of divine imitation accounts for a multiplicity in things and their varying degrees of *nobility*. It is important to note that Aquinas extends divine knowledge even to singulars, of which there is a proper account in the divine intellect (*propria ratio singulorum*). This move will help secure a robust account of divine providence, in which not only are particulars dispensed toward an end *qua species*, but also the divine intellect offers provision for individuals as well.

Although exemplarity is a condition *sine qua non*, by itself it provides an insufficient causal ground of being. If the divine intellect were the sufficient cause of the being of creatures, then every creature would be a necessary being (*ens*). Their being (*esse*) would be but an extension of their essential intelligibility as understood by God, an identity

⁵⁴ "Divina autem essentia in se nobilitates omnium entium comprehendit, non quidem per modum compositionis, sed per modum perfectionis, ut supra ostensum est. Forma autem omnis, tam propria quam communis, secundum id quod aliquid ponit, est perfectio quaedam: non autem imperfectionem includit nisi secundum quod deficit a vero esse. Intellectus igitur divinus id quod est proprium unicuique in essentia sua comprehendere potest, intelligendo in quo eius essentiam imitetur, et in quo ab eius perfectione deficit unumquodque: utpote, intelligendo essentiam suam ut imitabilem per modum vitae et non cognitionis, accipit propriam formam plantae; si vero ut imitabilem per modum cognitionis et non intellectus, propriam formam animalis; et sic de aliis. Sic igitur patet quod essentia divina, in quantum est absolute perfecta, potest accipi ut propria ratio singulorum. Unde per eam Deus propriam cognitionem de omnibus habere potest. Quia vero propria ratio unius distinguitur a propria ratione alterius; distinctio autem est pluralitatis principium: oportet in intellectu divino distinctionem quandam et pluralitatem rationum intellectarum considerare, secundum quod id quod est in intellectu divino est propria ratio diversorum. Unde, cum hoc sit secundum quod Deus intelligit proprium respectum assimilationis quam habet unaquaeque creatura ad ipsum, relinquitur quod rationes rerum in intellectu divino non sint plures vel distinctae nisi secundum quod Deus cognoscit res pluribus et diversis modis esse assimilabiles sibi. Et secundum hoc Augustinus dicit quod Deus alia ratione facit hominem et alia equum; et rationes rerum pluraliter in mente divina esse dicit. In quo etiam aliquantulum salvatur Platonis opinio ponentis ideas, secundum quas formarentur omnia quae in rebus materialibus existunt." *SCG I.54*.

between *esse* and essence reserved only for God. The perfection posited by every essence, as understood by the divine intellect as a reflection of itself, is perfection borrowed from God and thereby does not help the essence to make gains against nothingness: all essences are equal in their existential impotence with none inching closer to the starting line of being. When they do come to be, they posit more and less perfect modes of being according to (what is presumably) their own *actus essendi*. But until created, essences lack a reality of their own apart from their being in the divine mind.

For this reason, divine ideas can be multiple and yet not complicate divine simplicity (i.e., because God understands only himself). But also, this means that real creatures require a radically distinct principle of being (*principium essendi*) if they are to emerge from out of the borrowed reality of essences. Granted, their essential preconceptions will determine their distinct manners of being (*modi essendi*) once they emerge in their being (*esse*), but first they must take a stand outside of divine *ipseity*, that is, they must *be*.⁵⁵ To prepare for a more extended discussion in what follows of participation in *esse*, we must discuss further what accounts for the difference between mere divine ideas and those ideas that are brought into being and *why* God chooses to bring about a diverse multiplicity.

⁵⁵This is why even though creatures are made in the divine image, they do not share a form with God. “Praeterea, similia sunt quae communicant in forma. Sed creatura potest Deo similari; quod patet Genes. I, 26: *Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram*. Ergo creaturae ad Deum est aliqua communicatio in forma. De omnibus autem communicantibus in forma potest aliquid univoce praedicari. Ergo de Deo et creatura potest aliquid praedicari univoce.” *De Pot.* q. 7, a. 7. arg. 2. Aquinas responds to the aforementioned argument for univocal predication as follows: “[...] dicendum, quod similitudo creaturae ad Deum deficit a similitudine univocorum in duobus. Primo, quia non est per participationem unius formae, sicut duo calida secundum participationem unius caloris; hoc enim quod de Deo et creaturis dicitur, praedicatur de Deo per essentiam, de creatura vero per participationem; ut sic talis similitudo creaturae ad Deum intelligatur, qualis est calidi ad calorem, non qualis calidi ad calidius. Secundo, quia ipsa forma in creatura participata deficit a ratione eius quod Deus est, sicut calor ignis deficit a ratione virtutis solaris, per quam calorem generat.” *De Pot.* q. 7, a. 7, ad 2. Also, *SCG*. I. 29. What is interesting to note about this passage is that it spells out the consequence of the fourth way (discussed above) that creatures do not merely participate a relatively *maxime ens*, but an absolutely *maxime ens*.

In regard to the first question, let us begin by noting that the separation of exemplary causality from efficient causality stands as a central move in Aquinas's argument for the radical givenness of being. This means that even though something is conceivable by the divine intellect, such a being is not necessarily issued *in re* following from its mere conception. The God of Aquinas can "stop the flow" of being insofar as all creatures are principiated by both divine exemplary causality and also by divine efficient causality. From these distinct lines of influence, irreducible to one another, creatures emerge as created, not emanated. For Aquinas and his existential readers, the distinctive mark of creation, which sets his account apart not only from emanation (e.g., Plotinus or Avicenna), but also from other creationist accounts (e.g., Duns Scotus or Suarez) is the *givenness* of being (*dare esse*), which both immediately grounds the actual existence of every being and also remains really other than its essential constitution. From the multiplicity of divine ideas, God can choose which to actually create, those to which he will endow the gift of being. This brings us to the questions of uncreated possibilities, or unlegislated ideas.

As repeatedly stated, the essence of phoenix is intelligible, that is, it is not a contradiction or mere non-sense, and yet there are no individual phoenixes. And given the inferiority of our intellect in comparison with the divine intellect, it seems that God even more can understand every possibility without there being such an instantiation of any given one. As has been shown, God's having an idea does not necessitate that this, or any, idea is realized *in re*. But because its ideational status "pre-exists" its existential manifestation,⁵⁶ in God there is an idea of that which is not, was not, and never will be:

⁵⁶ "Pre-exists" here is not meant to necessarily signify temporality, but instead that existence requires a "*principium durationis*," distinct from such ideational preconception. As will be explained below, such a

Dicendum, quod idea proprie dicta respicit practicam cognitionem non solum in actu sed in habitu, unde, cum Deus de his quae facere potest quamvis nunquam sint facta nec futura habeat cognitionem virtualiter practicam, relinquitur quod idea possit esse eius quod nec est nec fuit nec erit: non tamen eodem modo sicut est eorum quae sunt vel erunt vel fuerunt, quia ad ea quae sunt vel erunt vel fuerunt producenda determinatur ex proposito divinae voluntatis, non autem ad ea quae nec sunt nec erunt nec fuerunt, et sic huiusmodi habent quodammodo indeterminatas ideas.⁵⁷

As Aquinas states here in *De Veritate*, God's cognition of those things which are not, were not, and will never come to be, is more than merely speculative cognition, but "virtually practical cognition." As *practical*, this means that such ideas are legislable by the divine will and thought through as possibilities, but as *virtual*, they remain within the power of God, but never will be actualized.⁵⁸ The unlegislated ideas remain indeterminate, unlike actual ideas legislated by the *divine will (ex proposito divinae voluntatis)*. Ideas of both things that have determinate being (i.e., they are, were, or will be) and things that lack such being (i.e., are not, were not, or will not be) belong primarily to practical cognition, or the divine intellect as oriented towards what will come to be.⁵⁹ Although Aquinas allots a role to the divine will in such production, the exact

"principle of duration" implies a radical break or rupture (thus "*principium*" in the sense of beginning) although not necessarily in time.

⁵⁷ *De Veritate* q. 3, art. 6, resp.

⁵⁸ For this distinction, see *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 3, resp. Practical cognition considers something insofar as it is operable, unlike speculative cognition, which considers the absolute truth of something. The latter can also consider something (e.g., a house) according to its genus or differentia, that is in an inoperable manner. For a more extended discussion of the difference between speculative and practical, as well as actual and virtual, cognition, see Dewan, "St. Thomas, James Ross, and Exemplarism," 226-229. Against Ross's ideational minimalism, Dewan maintains that God not only has multiple ideas of what he does make and what he can make (i.e., actual and virtual practical cognition), but that he has knowledge of such things in modes by which they are not operable (i.e., speculative cognition). The latter category, the operables conceived inoperably, should be properly called *rationes* and not *ideas*. See also *ST I*. q. 15, a. 3, resp. and ad 2 and *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 3, resp.

⁵⁹ To the argument that nothing has an idea unless it has determinate being (*esse*), Aquinas states: "Ad primum igitur dicendum, quod quamvis quod nec est, nec fuit, nec erit, non habeat esse determinatum in se, est tamen determinate in Dei cognitione." *De Veritate* q.3, art. 6, ad. 1. Ross's voluntaristic reading of Aquinas states: "Aquinas modulates the general answers acceptable to Augustinians to fit his Aristotelian metaphysics. For instance, the divine '*rationes*' are a virtual plurality of ideas denominated from finite natures, contained 'in an excelling manner,' 'as the imperfect is within the perfect' (*ST I*, 14, 6c). The

nature of their interrelation (i.e., practical cognition and will) remains to be seen after the event of creation itself has been treated.⁶⁰

Although Aquinas's account may be misread as foreshadowing the position of Henry of Ghent, an important distinction separates the two: for Henry, such ideas have being of their own, what he calls "*esse essentiae*," apart from either their intentional being in the divine mind or their existential being (*esse existentiae*). For Aquinas, on the other hand, such indeterminate ideas do not have *esse* in themselves, but derive their *esse* from divine cognition.⁶¹ Left to itself, the creature's essence would be nothing. It does not subsist in

proper *ratio* of each thing is *contained* in God according to the diverse ways in which different creatures participate in and imitate God (*ST I*, 14, 6 ad 3). These, however, are 'incomplete ideas,' not the ideas of one making such things (*De potential Dei* 1.5 ad 11; *De veritate* 3, 6)." Ross, "Aquinas's Exemplarism, Aquinas's Voluntarism," 178. He argues that Wippel's manner of questioning the "status of possibles" transforms vacant possibility into a realm of extensional reference. Ross argues that instead prior to creation, there is only one eternal truth, linked to the unity of the divine idea. He seeks to reduce possibility to the divine will (hence his voluntarism) and eliminate any referential extension for possibility apart from created things themselves.

⁶⁰ See Chapter VI Section 1 below.

⁶¹ For a comparison of Aquinas and Henry on this question, see John F. Wippel, "The Reality of Nonexisting Possibles According to Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, and Godfrey of Fontaines," *Review of Metaphysics* 33 (June 1981): 729-758. Henry of Ghent's argument can best be understood as a response to Giles of Rome's reading of Aquinas's real composition between *esse* and essence as a real distinction between two things (*res*). The problem with treating *esse* as a really distinct *res*, to paraphrase Henry's argument against the unnamed Giles, would be the following: if *esse* were some thing (*res*) outside the essence of the creature, such a thing obviously would not be God (otherwise every creature would be composed with God). Thus, *esse* (as a *res*) must be a created thing. But any created thing does not have *esse* from itself, but through participation and acquisition. If something always has participated *esse* from that thing in which it participates, then we must ask does that thing have *esse* through itself or through another? If the latter, the process goes on ad infinitum. If the former, then that thing must be uncreated as created things must participate their *esse*. *Quodlibet* I, q. 9, 51. Ultimately, *esse* as a distinct thing becomes an unnecessary posit, because it cannot by itself account for creaturely existence, but instead leads back to God. Henry will eliminate such a reified principle and simply define *esse* as a relation to God himself. *Esse* is not something really distinct from essence, but merely an *intentionally distinct* manner in which created beings relate to God. In the following passage, Henry puts forward a clear expression of what he means by *esse* and essence being *intentionally distinct* (*Quodlibet* I, q. 9, 56). He offers a number of examples to illustrate his intentional distinction (i.e., running, lighting, living). Take for example living. The participle "living" (*vivens*), the noun "life" (*vita*), and the infinitive "to live" (*vivere*) all signify the same thing. And yet, to state "life" is "to live" would be a mistake. In one and the same thing, a certain less than real distinctness is signified by all three terms. That is, we understand the same thing under distinct concepts. To gain a better grasp on this distinction as it relates to "*ens, essentia, et esse*," it might help to compare Henry to Siger, who also used such examples to make his case. Both thinkers would agree that "*essentia*" and "*esse*" do not signify two really distinct things. Henry wants to maintain, however, that we understand one and the same thing under distinct concepts (*intentiones*): either as conceived in the Divine Intellect or as actualized by the Divine Will. As discussed above in Chapter I, Siger rejects such an intentional

limbo, midway between being and nothingness, prior to its actualization. It does not have “incomplete being” to which *esse* merely adds the final touch.⁶² To the argument that the divine ideas afford too much pre-created being to essences, and verge on placing essences

distinction on the grounds that a single thing was not conceived under two distinct concepts through ‘*essentia*’ and ‘*esse*.’ At stake in Henry’s intentional distinction is the eternal *conceivability* of natures apart from their actual existence, which had not troubled Siger because of his position on the eternity of the world. With this issue, we find Henry’s famous discussion of *esse essentiae* (i.e., essential being) and *esse existentiae* (i.e., existential being). (*Quodlibet* 1, q. 9). Creatures enjoy *esse essentiae* insofar as they are formal exemplars in the Divine Intellect. Thus, such essential being grounds eternal truth even without actual creatures: essential being safeguards true possibility in the Divine Intellect separating it as a genuine object of scientific knowledge apart from mere cognitive fancy (i.e., chimeras). Such a theory goes along with Henry’s theory of illumination and distinction of the Truth of beings from what is true. On this matter, Wippel states: “Reflecting an interest already manifested by certain members of the Arts Faculty at Paris in the 1260’s, Henry is much concerned with accounting for the possibility of there being some kind of knowledge, even scientific knowledge, of nonexistent possible entities. Going hand in hand with this concern is his effort to show that a creaturely essence is in some way indifferent to its actual existence and nonexistence” Wippel, “The Reality of Nonexisting Possibles,” 740-741. Giles of Rome had offered a similar account concerning how form gives a positive nature as distinct from actual existence. Where Giles and Henry differ, concerns the question of what is given in giving *esse*. Giles had maintained that the given *esse* is a *differens res in re* from the essence. Henry, having attacked this view, holds that the given *esse*—and here I mean *esse existentiae*—is not a thing, but a relation to the Divine Will as an effect. Whereas essential being designates the status of being an exemplar in the Divine Intellect (i.e., the eternal conceivability of precreated possibility), existential being designates the actualization of such possibility through a free act of the Divine Will. In each case, one and the same nature is under consideration, but in each case it is conceived under different concepts (i.e., as merely possible or as actual). Godfrey of Fontaines argues that even though Henry attempts to *free up* creation through intentionally distinguishing essential and existential being, such a move ultimately restricts Divine Freedom much more than Henry would like. Creation, under Henry’s model, allows God to freely actualize the possibilities exemplified in the Divine Intellect, but such possibilities themselves are governed by formal necessity and not free choice. This is why Henry had intentionally distinguished essential from existential being: it allowed him to uphold eternal truth alongside the free act of creation. Even if God had not (freely) decided to create roses, “a rose is a flower” still would be true. By hedging his bets, however, Henry does not fully escape the essentialist bind (characteristic of such an Augustinian Platonism) that relapse his view into an eternalized model of the universe. Wippel provides an excellent discussion of how Divine Freedom comes under threat in Henry’s view such that the Divine Intellect governs essential possibility, which *as possible* is not freely chosen, but only its actualization is a matter of volition. Wippel goes on to discuss Godfrey’s reaction to such a view and how it takes up this issue of limiting creation to the actualization of essences. See both Wippel “The Reality of Nonexisting Possibles” and *The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines: A Study in Late Thirteenth-Century Philosophy* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1981).

⁶² On this question, Carlo states: “‘Between *esse* and *esse intentionale* there is no alternative except the never-never land of Platonic Ideas and Avicennian essences [...] The doctrine of the Possibles is so critical because it can serve as a fulcrum to shift a metaphysics in an existential or essential direction and even to degrees of existentiality or essentiality.’” Carlo, *The Ultimate Reducibility*, 91-92. In comparing Aquinas’s account of God as an exemplary cause to the question of necessary truth as addressed by Modern Philosophy (e.g., Descartes, Leibniz, Gassendi, etc.), Menn states: “By this account [Aquinas’s] God would produce the *esse cognitum* of rosehood, or the eternal truths about roses, not by any act of his will, but by his knowledge of his own essence through *scientia naturalis*. Sixty years after Descartes’ death, Leibniz is still commending this solution as the way to grant Descartes’ point that the necessary truths of things are not independent of God, while avoiding the anarchic consequences of a creation of the eternal truths: contingent truths depend on God’s will, but ‘necessary truths depend only on his intellect, and are its internal object.’” Stephen P. Menn *Descartes and Augustine*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998), 348.

prior to the act of creation and thus making them uncreated,⁶³ Aquinas maintains that *both essence and esse are created*.⁶⁴ In *De Potentia*, he states: “[...] 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.”⁶⁵ Before the essence is instantiated in creatures, its only being is in the intellect of the creator not yet reaching a status *extra intellectum*. Essences are created in the sense that without the intellect of the creator (*intellectus creantis*), they would have no *esse* whatsoever. This means that essences do not occupy the role of Platonic Ideas subsisting in themselves and determining the possibility of things in separation from their actual instantiation of them, but that their *esse cognitum* in the divine mind accounts for their being.⁶⁶

⁶³ “Praeterea, omnia quae a Deo sunt facta dicuntur esse Dei creaturae. Creatio autem terminatur ad esse: prima enim rerum creaturarum est esse, ut habetur in Lib. de causis. Cum ergo quidditas rei sit praeter esse ipsius, videtur quod quidditas rei non sit a Deo.” *De Pot.* q. 3, a. 5, arg. 2.

⁶⁴ Against those who might maintain the eternity of the world, Aquinas argues that ‘*ex nihilo*’ need not imply a temporal move from nothingness to being (even though from *Genesis* such is to be believed) but a relation of dependence. God could have created from eternity, and creatures nevertheless depend upon this gift of being such that were it withheld, they would be made nothing. Aquinas states: “[E]sse autem non habet creatura nisi ab alio, sibi autem relicta in se considerata nichil est: unde prius naturaliter est sibi nichilum quam esse. Nec oportet quod propter hoc sit simul nichil et ens, quia duratione non praecedit; non enim ponitur, si creatura semper fuit, ut in aliquo tempore nichil sit; sed ponitur quod natura eius talis esset quod esset nichil, si sibi relinqueretur: ut si dicamus aerem semper illuminatum fuisse a sole, oportebit dicere quod aer factus est lucidus a sole. Et quia omne quod fit ex incontinenti fit, id est ex eo quod non contingit simul esse cum eo quod dicitur fieri; oportebit dicere quod sit factus lucidus ex non lucido, vel ex tenebroso, non ita quod umquam fuerit non lucidus vel tenebrosus, sed quia esset talis, si eum sibi sol relinqueret. Et hoc expressius patet in stellis et orbibus quae semper illuminantur a sole.” *De Aeternitate Mundi*.

⁶⁵ *De Pot.* q. 3, a. 5, ad 2.

⁶⁶ Menn holds that Aquinas dodges a more serious set of difficulties faced by his theory, namely: “Since God’s essence is simple, there is precisely one thing that God knows prior to creation: his *scientia naturalis* cannot give him knowledge of a plurality of intelligible contents (such as the many truths of geometry), and he cannot produce a plurality of essences in *esse cognitum* prior to his willing and creating. Since Thomas shares Descartes’ commitment to God’s simplicity, he cannot avoid Descartes’ conclusion. Thomas tries to solve the problem by saying that God knows himself in one way as the paradigm of roses, in another way as the paradigm of lions, and so on. But since the divine ideas are not a real multiplicity, but are all really identical with the divine essence, and distinguished only by reason comparing the divine essence with the different creatures that can imitate it, God cannot recognize a plurality of truths by looking at himself, unless he also looks at creatures for comparison: so Thomas has no explanation of how God can know a plurality of things by *scientia naturalis*. The only honest way to explain a plurality of content in God’s

To answer our earlier question of whether divine power determines possibility or possibility determines divine power, the answer seems to be both. If we consider possibility as the *imitability* of divine essence, then God's very nature determines the conditions of possibility. Arguing against a reading of Aquinas as a strict voluntarist, Wippel states: "God can effect certain things only because they are possible in themselves. They are possible in themselves only because the divine essence is as it is in itself."⁶⁷ Thus, possibility requires divine imitability without which nothing would be possible, but God does not choose his own nature, but he necessarily is such. Thus, even though Aquinas speaks of something's being "possible in an absolute sense" according to the relation of its terms and power being said in reference to possibility (*potentia dicatur ad possibilia*),⁶⁸ such terminological relatibility requires God's essence as the thesaurus

knowledge, prior to any act of will, is to posit some real complexity in God himself: not merely a complexity in God's intellect, but a complexity in God's essence, giving rise to the complexity in the intellect. Leibniz, unlike Thomas or Descartes, is willing to pay this price (God has an infinite number of perfections, and by distinctly contemplating each of these, and their possible combinations, he knows all possible creatures); but for Descartes this is no better, either religiously or scientifically, than subjecting God to Styx and the Fates. We would merely be saying that Styx and the Fates belong to the structure of God's essence." Menn, *Descartes and Augustine*, 349.

⁶⁷ Wippel, "The Reality of Nonexisting Possibles," 738. Thus, Aquinas does not posit the robust essences of Henry of Ghent, because if God did not exist, there would be no divine essence to determine possibility. Thus, without the divine essence, and God's knowledge of his imitability, there would be no possibility. But because God does not choose his essence, and thus imitability is dictated by what is necessarily the divine essence, Wippel also counters the voluntarism of Ross. Thus, on the question of "nonexisting possibles," he locates Aquinas between the extremes of essentialism (e.g., Henry of Ghent) and voluntarism.

⁶⁸ Aquinas argues that God is omnipotent insofar as he can do all things that are absolutely possible (i.e., whose terms do not involve contradiction). "Socrates sits" is possible, whereas "a donkey is human" is impossible because of the compatibility or incompatibility of their terms. Such compatibility or incompatibility depends upon some referent (i.e., the divine essence) by which such terms become meaningful, and thereby take on possible syntactical relations with other terms. See: "Respondeo dicendum quod communiter confitentur omnes Deum esse omnipotentem. Sed rationem omnipotentiae assignare videtur difficile. Dubium enim potest esse quid comprehendatur sub ista distributione, cum dicitur omnia posse Deum. Sed si quis recte consideret, cum potentia dicatur ad possibilia, cum Deus omnia posse dicitur, nihil rectius intelligitur quam quod possit omnia possibilia, et ob hoc omnipotens dicitur. Possibile autem dicitur dupliciter, secundum philosophum, in V Metaphys. Uno modo, per respectum ad aliquam potentiam, sicut quod subditur humanae potentiae, dicitur esse possibile homini. Non autem potest dici quod Deus dicatur omnipotens, quia potest omnia quae sunt possibilia naturae creatae: quia divina potentia in plura extenditur. Si autem dicatur quod Deus sit omnipotens, quia potest omnia quae sunt possibilia suae potentiae, erit circulatio in manifestatione omnipotentia: hoc enim non erit aliud quam dicere quod Deus est

of their meaning.⁶⁹ “Circle,” or “human,” or “phoenix” derive meaning because their constitutive terms reflect possible imitations of the divine essence, they become meaningful in reference to the divine essence as their transcendental referent.

Just as monetary currency has no value apart from an economic system of exchange—ideally reducible to some gold standard that grounds the entire economy—likewise, all possibility reduces to the terminological exchange of definitional parts grounded in the gold standard of divine imitability: without God, the definition “squared circle” would be no more a contradiction than “rational animal” because none of the terms have any meaning or signification in themselves. Thus, the semantics of terms and the syntax of their combinations, whose exchange gives rise to the logic of contradiction and non-contradiction, become meaningful only in terms of an ultimate *significatum*, or *analogatum*, whose independence from the system of meaning that is the

omnipotens, quia potest omnia quae potest. Relinquitur igitur quod Deus dicatur omnipotens, quia potest omnia possibilis absolute, quod est alter modus dicendi possibile. Dicitur autem aliquid possibile vel impossibile absolute, ex habitudine terminorum: possibile quidem, quia praedicatum non repugnat subiecto, ut Socratem sedere; impossibile vero absolute, quia praedicatum repugnat subiecto, ut hominem esse asinum. Est autem considerandum quod, cum unumquodque agens agat sibi simile, unicuique potentiae activae correspondet possibile ut obiectum proprium, secundum rationem illius actus in quo fundatur potentia activa, sicut potentia calefactiva refertur, ut ad proprium obiectum, ad esse calefactibile. Esse autem divinum, super quod ratio divinae potentiae fundatur, est esse infinitum, non limitatum ad aliquod genus entis, sed praehabens in se totius esse perfectionem. Unde quidquid potest habere rationem entis, continetur sub possibilibus absolutis, respectu quorum Deus dicitur omnipotens. Nihil autem opponitur rationi entis, nisi non ens. Hoc igitur repugnat rationi possibilis absoluti, quod subditur divinae omnipotentiae, quod implicat in se esse et non esse simul. Hoc enim omnipotentiae non subditur, non propter defectum divinae potentiae; sed quia non potest habere rationem factibilis neque possibilis. Quaecumque igitur contradictionem non implicat, sub illis possibilibus continentur, respectu quorum dicitur Deus omnipotens. Ea vero quae contradictionem implicat, sub divina omnipotentia non continentur: quia non possunt habere possibilium rationem. Unde convenientius dicitur quod non possunt fieri, quam quod Deus non potest ea facere. Neque hoc est contra verbum Angeli dicentis, *non erit impossibile apud Deum omne verbum*. Id enim quod contradictionem implicat, verbum esse non potest, quia nullus intellectus potest illud concipere.” *ST I*, q. 25, a. 3, resp. In *De Pot.* q. 5, art. 3, resp., he argues, however, that something is said to be impossible to God in two ways: It is impossible in itself, insofar as it involves a contradiction; or because, the opposite is necessary. He subdivides the latter into cases of natural agents determined to a certain effect (e.g., heat to fire) and cases of determination to a certain end (e.g., man to happiness). Once again, such terms (i.e., heat, fire, man happiness) derive their meaning from a transcendental referent, namely God.

⁶⁹ Carlo uses this term throughout *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics*.

world exemplifies the diverse and manifold imitations of itself whereby they become meaningful expressions of their exemplary ground. This means that although divine power does not arbitrarily choose the fabric of possible reality, such is modeled after the divine essence as the ground of imitability itself. Thus, absolute possibility depends on divine being as its transcendental source of meaning, the “gold standard” of intelligibility, without relapsing into volunary election on the part of divine omnipotence.⁷⁰ How such a diverse multiplicity of possible imitations could signify God’s perfect *ipseity* of being remains to be seen.

Section 3: Creation as Ordered Multiplicity

To this point, we have seen how Aquinas accounts for a possible multiplicity of beings through the divine ideas, which means that the divine intellect accounts for diversity and, as will be seen in what follows, this allows him to rule out other candidates such as matter, the concordance of multiple agents, or any other accidental means as the source of such diversity.⁷¹ The ideas are the modes of imitation by which creatures can imitate and thereby ultimately fall short of (i.e., be *unlike*) the divine essence insofar as they are other than God himself. We also have seen that God knows such *imitability* through a practical cognition distinct from his actual legislation of those creatures. This distinction, however, does not mean that God *knows*, and then *acts* in a temporal sense,

⁷⁰ Aquinas also argues that certain things (e.g., uninformed matter) cannot be created. See *De Pot.* q. 4, a. 1, s.c. 3: “Praeterea, Deus plus potest operari quam natura. Sed natura facit de ente in potentia ens actu. Ergo Deus potest facere de ente simpliciter ens in potentia; et ita potuit facere materiam sine forma existentem.” And: Ad tertium dicendum, quod si Deus faceret ens in potentia tantum, minus faceret quam natura, quae facit ens in actu. Actionis enim perfectio magis attenditur secundum terminum ad quem, quam secundum terminum a quo; et tamen hoc ipsum quod dicitur, contradictionem implicat, ut scilicet aliquid fiat quod sit in potentia tantum: quia quod factum est, oporteret esse cum est, ut probatur in VI Phys. Quod autem est tantum in potentia, non simpliciter est.” *De Pot.* q. 4, a. 1, ad s.c. 3

⁷¹ See *SCG* II.39-45.

but that God as an intelligent agent can determine what ideas he will act upon (i.e., create) or he can choose not to create at all. His knowing by itself does not necessarily give rise to, or “emanate,” a distinct being outside divine cognition, but only contrives the scope of possibilities capable of receiving being. Such contriving, or thinking through, the order of universe makes beings *archic* or *principated* such that they are accounted for in the wisdom of a first agent as directed toward an end. At this point, the focus will begin to shift toward the divine will and what is actually created by God, attempting to penetrate insofar as possible God’s reason for choosing this particular order of creation over others and over outright nothingness. Why would God choose to create a multiplicity consisting of such diverse beings, which due to its manifold diversity seems to *least resemble* the perfect *ipseity* of God himself?

We must begin with the question of why creation consists of a diverse multiplicity of beings instead of a single being. Instead of a multiplicity that includes material creatures, would not a single intelligence most resemble God, thus enabling the whole of creation (i.e., consisting of a single creature) to be the best possible imitation of its exemplar? What reason can be found for such diversity? Possible diversity, as outlined above, can be accounted for by the distinct manners of imitating the divine essence and preconceived by the divine intellect. But why would God choose to institute such diversity?

In the tradition of emanation, Avicenna had argued that multiplicity results from a series of agents, beginning with the first, each giving rise to a single effect out of necessity. Each subsequent effect is a little more unlike the first, until the prime matter of the sublunary world is reached and distinct species of beings emerge therein given the superlunary influence of the tenth and final intelligence (i.e., the giver of forms, or the

agent intellect). Nothing in this line of causal succession “chooses” one effect over another, but each agent simply acts according to its nature. Diversity arises as a matter of necessity (i.e., from gap between thought thinking and thought thought), not foreseen by any single agent, but issued by all in conjunction.

Aquinas’s immediate concern with such a position is at least twofold: first, God neither foresees nor chooses the full range of his effects, which limits the practical wisdom of this first agent as a providential governor of an ordered multiplicity; second, agents other than God “create” (i.e., give being to) their effects, even though they themselves have been created. In such a universe, God’s sovereign influence extends only to the first effect, leaving each subsequent effect as a plenipotentiary or instrument in the diffusion of being. Thus, God does not hold a monopoly on creation. Aquinas’s response to such a position will be not only that God executes a full range of effects (i.e., he creates, conserves, and governs everything that is), but also that the existing order as composed of a diverse multiplicity is not at all accidental, but the immediate product of divine wisdom. Divine goodness as guided by divine wisdom is the cause of multiplicity and diversity in creation: no single creature alone could reflect God, so God chose to institute a diverse multiplicity that as a whole most reflects divine perfection.

Because all creatures bear at least a minimal degree of composition (i.e., a real distinction between *esse* and essence) no effect could attain perfect self-identity (i.e., *ipseity*). Thus, the single effect that most reflects God’s perfect nature, more than any single creature standing alone, is the totality of diverse creatures ordered to a common end. Diversity means that not only are there many beings other than God, but these multiple beings consist of different orders and fulfill different functions in terms of the

organization of the universe as a whole. Thus, difference is more than numerical. A well-ordered multiplicity instead requires specific or qualitative distinction between its parts. An ordered totality that does not collapse the distinction between its parts, but integrates them in their diversity to the greater whole, attains a self-identity next in perfection only to pure *ipseity*. Thus, a universe in which the greatest diversity of beings find their self-identity through ordered unity (i.e., hierarchy) surpasses the production of a single imperfect (i.e., composed) effect.

If we are to imagine Aquinas's oft-invoked analogy of an army, the need for diversity can be seen: if all an army's soldiers were of the same rank and distinction, such a homogeneous multiplicity could not be well-ordered because it would lack qualitative distinction between its parts. It would be totalizable, but unlike an army with distinct ranks, each performing a different function, and all ordered by well-defined chains of command grounded in a single *principium* (i.e., the general), such a homogeneous totality could not realize its true end on the battlefield, unless accidentally. Its actions would be vague and ill-defined, with each part performing the same function as every other part. A wisely-ordered army, however, contains distinct units, each with a separate function, but all serving the commands of its general as ordered to the end of victory. So too a house that is habitable or a body that is livable must consist of distinct parts (i.e., not just roofs or not just eyes), which altogether contribute to the greater good of the whole.⁷²

⁷² "Ex ipso enim ordine universi potuisset eius ratio apparere, quod ab uno principio, nulla meritorum differentia praecedente, oportuit diversos gradus creaturarum institui, ad hoc quod universum esset complementum (repraesentante universo per multiplices et varios modos creaturarum quod in divina bonitate simpliciter et indistincte praeexistit) sicut et ipsa perfectio domus et humani corporis diversitatem partium requirit. Neutrum autem eorum esset completum si omnes partes unius conditionis existerent; sicut si omnes partes humani corporis essent oculus, aliarum enim partium deessent officia. Et similiter si omnes partes domus essent tectum, domus complementum et finem suum non consequeretur, ut scilicet ab imbribus et caumatibus defendere posset. Sic igitur dicendum est, quod ab uno primo multitudo et diversitas creaturarum processit, non propter materiae necessitatem, nec propter potentiae limitationem, nec

Applying this organic model to the universe, Aquinas states that the distinction of things follows from the intention of the first agent, who through his wisdom (*ex divina sapientia*) causes there to be multiple and diverse forms in order to best represent his own incommunicable goodness:

Unde dicendum est quod distinctio rerum et multitudo est ex intentione primi agentis, quod est Deus. Produxit enim res in esse propter suam bonitatem communicandam creaturis, et per eas repraesentandam. Et quia per unam creaturam sufficienter repraesentari non potest, produxit multas creaturas et diversas, ut quod deest uni ad repraesentandam divinam bonitatem, suppleatur ex alia, nam bonitas quae in Deo est simpliciter et uniformiter, in creaturis est multipliciter et divisim. Unde perfectius participat divinam bonitatem, et repraesentat eam, totum universum, quam alia quaecumque creatura. –Et quia ex divina sapientia est causa distinctionis rerum, ideo Moyses dicit res esse distinctas verbo Dei, quod est conceptio sapientiae. Et hoc est quod dicitur Gen. I, *dixit Deus, fiat lux. Et divisit lucem a tenebris.*⁷³

To communicate his goodness and represent himself in creation, God intentionally ordained there to be multiplicity and distinction between things. Although God’s choice to institute such an order could have been otherwise, since he chose the best possible order, multiple and diverse creatures are necessary to reflect divine goodness. Divine goodness is simple and uniform, whereas goodness in creatures is manifold and divided. Thus, one creature alone could not sufficiently represent divine goodness because any individual creature is in some way limited and thereby an inadequate representation of divine perfection. The universe *represents* through ordered manifoldness what preexisted

propter bonitatem, nec propter bonitatis obligationem; sed ex ordine sapientiae, ut in diversitate creaturarum perfectio consisteret universi.” *De Pot.* q. 3, a. 16, resp.

⁷³ *ST I.* q. 47, a. 1, resp. Also *SCG II.*45 (see his arguments leading up to this conclusion in Chapters 39-44). And *De Pot.* q. 3, a. 16, resp.: “Quod enim Deus tale universum constituere voluerit, non est necessarium neque debitum, neque ex fine neque ex potentia efficientis, neque materiae, ut ostensum est. Sed supposito quod tale universum producere voluerit, necessarium fuit quod tales et tales creaturas produxerit, ex quibus talis forma universi consurgeret. Et cum ipsa universi perfectio et multitudinem et diversitatem rerum requirat, quia in una earum inveniri non potest propter recessum a complemento bonitatis primae; necesse fuit ex suppositione formae intentae quod Deus multas creaturas et diversas produceret; quasdam simplices, quasdam compositas; et quasdam corruptibiles, et quasdam incorruptibiles.”

simply and indistinctly in divine goodness. Aquinas states: "...repraesentante universo per multiplices et varios modos creaturarum quod in divina bonitate simpliciter et indistincte praeexistit."⁷⁴ Thus, the differential expression that is the universe is grounded in a unified end, an end to which its order testifies and such that would not be possible if not the result of an intellectual agent.

As we have seen above, any effect of God cannot attain to the same nature as its cause, but *analogically* resembles such, and thus no single species or being could perfectly resemble God in his simplicity.⁷⁵ All species (i.e., as defined by their determinate mode of imitating the divine essence) are lacking and deficient in reference to their cause. Only through the order of the universe as a whole, each deficiency is supplemented by others of different kinds that make up for what it lacks; therein each species finds its highest good.⁷⁶ Otherwise, many beings of the same kind could not supplement what the others of their kind lack as the lack is essential to each species: E.g., rationality is essentially lacking in all non-human species of animals, otherwise they would be human.

With lack as constitutive of the very being of creatures, the universe comprises an existential community ordered around supplementing each other's deficiency; taken as a whole, this ordered multiplicity is the least deficient resemblance of the existential

⁷⁴ See *De Pot.* q. 3, a. 16, resp.

⁷⁵ For a discussion of analogical likeness, see Chapter 3 above. Also, *SCG* II.45: "Cum enim omne agens intendat suam similitudinem in effectum inducere secundum quod effectus capere potest, tanto hoc agit perfectius quanto agens perfectius est: patet enim quod quanto aliquid est calidius, tanto facit magis calidum; et quanto est aliquis melior artifex, formam artis perfectius inducit in materiam. Deus autem est perfectissimum agens. Suam igitur similitudinem in rebus creatis ad Deum pertinebat inducere perfectissime, quantum naturae creatae convenit. Sed perfectam Dei similitudinem non possunt consequi res creatae secundum unam solam speciem creaturae: quia, cum causa excedat effectum, quod est in causa simpliciter et unite, in effectu invenitur composite et multipliciter, nisi effectus pertingat ad speciem causae; quod in proposito dici non potest, non enim creatura potest esse Deo aequalis. Oportuit igitur esse multipliciter et varietatem in rebus creatis, ad hoc quod inveniretur in eis Dei similitudo perfecta secundum modum suum."

⁷⁶ *ST* I q. 47, a. 1, resp.

perfection, which grounds the community. The best, albeit still imperfect, representation of divine goodness requires the totality of the ordered universe with the greatest possible diversity in order to reflect the incommunicable nature and self-identity of its creator. Once again, it is important to emphasize that divine wisdom is the sole cause of the distinction of things, and such distinction does not arise by chance, matter, secondary agents, or any other principle. The ordered multiplicity that is the universe thus attests to the intelligence of its cause insofar as such cause chose the greatest possible diversity of kinds and ordered them to a common good.

Although matter is a principle of multiplication and individuation for Aquinas, true diversification requires a cause at least as perfect as the totality of its effects. Matter provides potentiality to manifoldness, but lacks the internal perfection (i.e., actuality) to ground essential diversification.⁷⁷ Diversity contributes more to the common good than does multiplicity alone. At this point, it is worth reviewing the case Aquinas makes for the superiority of diverse species to multiple individuals. Aquinas argues that a diversity of species is better than a mere multiplicity of individuals insofar as a diversity of species adds more to the goodness of the universe than does a multiplicity of individuals all of the same species. Individuals of the same species cannot supplement what members of their own species lack because they are essentially the same and differ only as individuals (i.e., numerically). One plant does not supplement the lack of another plant; such lack is constitutive of the species itself. The perfection of the universe requires other species to add what it lacks (i.e., sensitivity and rationality). Thus, only on the level of species

⁷⁷ See SCG II.40. Actually, matter is not even solely responsible for individuation, but *determinate* matter (i.e., matter having received the form of quantity).

supplementing other species does the universe form an ordered totality. For this reason, the good of the species surpasses the good of the individual.

On this matter, Aquinas states:

Bonitas speciei excedit bonitatem individui, sicut formale id quod est materiale. Magis igitur addit ad bonitatem universi multitudo specierum quam multitudo individuorum in una specie. Est igitur ad perfectionem universi pertinens non solum quod multa sint individua, sed quod sint etiam diversae rerum species; et per consequens diversi gradus in rebus.⁷⁸

A universe with many humans would be less perfect than a universe with angels, humans, and irrational animals, as the graded range of the latter better reflects the perfection of divine being which is its cause. The mere repetition of a single species amongst a multiplicity of individuals—like a singer who knows but one tune—requires a less perfect cause than does causing specifically diverse effects. Fire repeats fire given a multiplicity of flammable patients, whose multiplicity requires only distinct material substrata; whereas a human—a more noble cause than fire—can generate offspring or produce a house or wage war, and thus is capable of specifically diverse effects.

Here we see the priority afforded to form over matter insofar as matter only multiplies but does not perfect. Matter, as the principle of individuation, accounts for multiplicity according to Aquinas, and thus plays a necessary role in the order of the universe. And although numerically many individuals are necessary for the realization of any hylomorphic species (i.e., unlike angelic species that contain only a single member), ultimately the contribution of such a multiplicity must be rendered in terms of its service to the species. Individuation does not perfect so much as it multiplies according to

⁷⁸ SCG II.45.

Aquinas.⁷⁹ Thus, as seen with the argument at hand, the individual occupies somewhat of a subordinate role in relation to its species as individuals are not the basic currency of this economy. Instead, only as particulars (i.e., particularized instantiations of a universal) can individuals emerge within an exchange that takes place at the level of species. Individuals find their highest calling through form, which places them within a species and through which they participate in their highest good.

Matter, and the hylomorphic beings that it subtends, enter the existential ranks only on account of form. Although Aquinas argues that matter and form are one in being (*esse*), there is a pronounced prioritization of form to matter: form provides matter with intelligibility and order without which the latter would verge on the brink of nothingness. The being of matter might better be called a type of “quasi-being,” which requires the actual determination of form to participate in existential actuality: matter as such must be something in order to receive actual being. Furthermore, the more noble the form informing the matter, the more it surpasses the matter and exceeds the conditions set by the latter, the more it conquers (*vincit*) the matter and unites the composite as a particular member of its species.⁸⁰ Because Aquinas upholds a unicity of form position, each

⁷⁹ As noted by Gilson, whereas for Aquinas *esse* is the highest perfection of every being, for Scotus individuation plays this role. “In the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas, it is existence; in that of Duns Scotus, it is ‘thisness’ (*hecceitas*) that is *ultima actualitas formae*.” *Being and Some Philosophers*, 94.

⁸⁰ “Hoc autem modo mirabilis rerum connexio considerari potest. Semper enim invenitur infimum supremi generis contingere supremum inferioris generis: sicut quaedam infima in genere animalium parum excedunt vitam plantarum, sicut ostrea, quae sunt immobilia, et solum tactum habent, et terrae in modum plantarum adstringuntur; unde et beatus Dionysius dicit, in VII cap. de Div. Nom., quod divina sapientia coniungit fines superiorum principiis inferiorum. Est igitur accipere aliquid supremum in genere corporum, scilicet corpus humanum aequaliter complexionatum, quod attingit ad infimum superioris generis, scilicet ad animam humanam, quae tenet ultimum gradum in genere intellectualium substantiarum, ut ex modo intelligendi percipi potest. Et inde est quod anima intellectualis dicitur esse quasi quidam horizon et confinium corporeorum et incorporeorum, in quantum est substantia incorporea, corporis tamen forma. Non autem minus est aliquid unum ex substantia intellectuali et materia corporali quam ex forma ignis et eius materia, sed forte magis: quia quanto forma magis vincit materiam, ex ea et materia efficitur magis unum. Quamvis autem sit unum esse formae et materiae, non tamen oportet quod materia semper adaequet esse formae. Immo, quanto forma est nobilior, tanto in suo esse superexcedit materiam. Quod patet inspicienti

substantial form immediately unites the matter without the mediation of lesser forms.⁸¹

Thus, the noblest form informing matter (i.e., the incorporeal human soul) must win the greatest victory over the underlying matter, more than an elementary form such as fire or earth. But through this victory of form over matter, material individuals are ordered to the good of the universe and particularized as members of a species.

Between distinct species, wherein numerically distinct individuals find their exchange as specifically distinct particulars, there is contiguity, with the lowest of a higher genus touching (*atingit*) the highest of the lower genus. Oysters, Aquinas observes, are more like plants than they are like higher grades of animals, even though they share a genus with the latter. Following Dionysius, Aquinas argues that such contiguity means that not only are all species ordered to a common good, but also that the beginnings (*principiis*) of lower species are ordered to the ends of higher species. Thus, lower orders are embedded in higher ones, as the former serve and are subordinate to the latter, while the latter guide and utilize the former. As seen from such “a marvelous order,” diversity and inequality of creatures arises not as a matter of chance, nor as a matter of necessity, but as a matter of design. Some beings are of a higher nature than others and such inequality amongst beings, all measured against the transcendent reference of being, completes the perfection of the universe.⁸² A single manner of being by itself could not reflect the perfection of its

operationes formarum, ex quarum consideratione earum naturas cognoscimus: unumquodque enim operatur secundum quod est. Unde forma cuius operatio superexcedit conditionem materiae, et ipsa secundum dignitatem sui esse superexcedit materiam.” *SCG* II.68.

⁸¹ His “Unicity of Form” position means that there is a single substantial form for each being. Thus, humans do not have multiple uniting forms (i.e., a form of the body, a vegetative form, a sensitive form, a rational form, as held by a “Plurality of Form” theory), but a single form that *contains* the other functions (i.e., sensation, generation, reproduction, etc.) that one might ascribe to a separate form.

⁸² Aquinas provides a helpful and pithy summary of the conclusions of his arguments on this matter: “Est igitur diversitas et inaequalitas in rebus creatis non a casu; non ex materiae diversitate; non propter interventum aliquarum causarum, vel meritorum; sed ex propria Dei intentione perfectionem creaturae dare volentis qualem possibile erat eam habere.” *SCG* II.45.

creator. Thus, the incompleteness of each manner of being fits together to form a more perfect totality. Unable to be being itself (*ipsum esse*), but always limited to being in some such a manner, each being belongs to a certain species, which characterizes its manner of being, and each species is hierarchized in relation to others: some manners of being more closely resemble that of being itself, but only taken together as an ordered whole do they most closely resemble their source.

Like in a “family” where the individual parts exist (i.e., are legally recognized) only through the good of the whole toward which they are dispensed by the *paterfamilias*, the good of the total universe takes priority over its individual parts, making each *part* ordered to the whole better than any *single* member as an isolated unit.⁸³ Each singular being, more valuable as *such* than as *this*, is subordinated to the universal form of the good that governs this diverse multiplicity.⁸⁴ Around their service to the good of the universe, beings are rendered intelligible in terms of this order. Each being finds its place in the universe according to its end through which it serves the good of the whole. By placing all beings within a unified order, Aquinas inscribes inequality as a necessary feature both to distinguish and to totalize unequal ranks of being. The realization of the highest good requires an order uniting an unequal multiplicity wherein creatures of superior and inferior ranks form hierarchized legions tending to the good of the universe with each particular member (called forth from its singularity) located in its proper station. Difference is made intelligible as inequality and inequality is accountable in terms of the good of the universe itself.

⁸³ See also Blanchette, *The Order of the Universe*, 16-19.

⁸⁴ “Operi a summe bono artifice facto non debuit deesse summa perfectio. Sed bonum ordinis diversorum est melius quolibet illorum ordinatorum per se sumpto: est enim formale respectu singularium, sicut perfectio totius respectu partium. Non debuit ergo bonum ordinis operi Dei deesse. Hoc autem bonum esse non posset, si diversitas et inaequalitas creaturarum non fuisset.” *SCG* II.45.

As each distinct individual becomes part of a natural kind, their singularity becomes reducible to higher level essentiality wherein they are ordered to an end and made intelligible. As the principle of individuation and itself teetering on the verge of nothingness (i.e., as mere being in potency), designate matter comes to serve as a reservoir for formal actuality.⁸⁵ Matter is form in waiting and the individual a *particular* instantiation of an essence accountable in terms of its rank within the order of the universe as a whole. Thus, as we shall continue to see in what follows, Aquinas does not leave the order of creation unaccounted for, but renders a reason for each being in terms of its natural end.⁸⁶ Every creature is rendered intelligible and tends toward the good on account of its nature. Each individual in its singularity is made intelligible as a particular instantiation of an essential kind, a kind whose members the intention of the creator mobilizes in a coordinated effort with all other kinds toward the good of the universe.

In order to make this case for the order and the intelligibility of the universe as a whole, albeit not for the original givenness of *esse* itself as will be addressed below, Aquinas's existential metaphysics must appeal to a familiar move from its essentialist counterpart; namely, it must overcome any resistance offered on the part of matter. If matter serves as the principle of limitation to all formal enterprise, then order extends only so far as matter enables formal actualization. If matter resists form, however, then the form lacks the power to impose order upon and to render intelligible its effect, which *qua effect* cannot exceed its cause in perfection. Matter must subtend the action as a fund of potency, but cannot serve as a real causal contributor to the operation itself. Otherwise,

⁸⁵ On the question of whether God knows singulars, see *De Veritate* q. 2, a. 5, resp. *SCG* I.65. *ST I*, q. 14, a. 11. Aquinas argues that God can have knowledge of designate matter (the principle of individuation), which as being in potency is also a similitude of the divine essence (*ipsum esse subsistens*). God as the principle of being (*principium essendi*) must have knowledge of that which he causes.

⁸⁶ See Chapter VI Section 3 below.

matter would counteract the production of form and thereby disrupt the order of the universe.

Aquinas reins in such excess causality, or overdetermination, by making the motion of matter begin with the prior actuality of form.⁸⁷ When an effect follows the “disposition” of matter and the intention of the agent, in such “normal” cases, matter does not exercise its own power in the causal process. It is pliable to form without providing counter-determinations of its own. The effect does not exceed its cause in perfection, and is able to be accounted for (i.e., ordered and made intelligible) through its cause. We might say that there is a balanced economy between cause and effect insofar as the cause (or causes) completely *funds* the effect without the effect requiring anything more. This means that the form educed from or imposed onto matter cannot exceed the sum total of formal perfection offered by its causal contributor or contributors. Otherwise, some effect would occur without a complete causal explanation, thus without a reason why.

Such an explanatory gap can only occur between the first cause and the first effect, namely God and the gift of being that is creation: in giving being (*esse*), God both exceeds and grounds the formal economy altogether.⁸⁸ Such power to act outside the determinations of a formal nature—as both purpose and essence are created by such a power itself—belongs only to divine power, which is beyond essential determination, whereas all creatures must act similiar to themselves (i.e., to their essence).⁸⁹ This is

⁸⁷ See fn. 80 above.

⁸⁸ As I will argue below, Aquinas covers over the groundlessness of the gift of being in terms of “seeking return” (i.e., in terms of teleological and providential intelligibility) upon this gift. See Chapter VI Part 3.

⁸⁹ As Lee has argued in terms of violent causation: “The order of the universe must be the order produced by some intellect. If it is the case that the order of the universe is the order of the powers of things, then the powers of all things, *even those that act violently* [m.e.], is now opened up to the gaze of reason through the order of the universe itself. In this way, the universe of power or force is reduced to the universe of the intellect.” “Mana and Logos: Violence and Order in Thomas Aquinas,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 22:2 (2001): 44.

especially true of matter, which occupies the lowest point on the hierarchy of being and without form verges on the brink of pure nothingness.⁹⁰ Matter cannot exact the same formal excess as God without altogether fracturing the order of the universe as a whole. As a cause, matter is a cause from which (*ex eo*) something comes to be, as determined by the actuality of form, but not itself responsible for the determinations that it receives. Thus, matter and materiality must be neutralized by form.

In the normal course of nature, form conquers matter, and matter receives the formal determinations enacted upon it. Aquinas does address in passing, however, cases where matter resists form. Thus, in those abnormal cases where matter resists, we must ask with what power. In such cases, there results “monstrosities and other failures of nature” (*monstra et alia peccata naturae*), recalcitrant to the order and aim of the universe as a whole.⁹¹ This means that matter contributes something more, something exceeding, the perfecting and actualizing power of form alone. Aquinas, however, can reconcile such explanatory overdetermination on the part of matter by casting such material resistance in terms of form and thereby remain consistent with his making intelligible the manifold diversity of the universe (i.e., making the universe a work of divine intelligence). Prime matter does not harbor some extra-formal potency distinct from its passive potency for

⁹⁰ See “Sciendum est tamen quod, cum Avicbron sic argumentatur, est aliquid quod est movens non motum, scilicet primus factor rerum, ergo, ex opposito, est aliquid quod est motum et patiens tantum, quod concedendum est. *Sed hoc est materia prima, quae est potentia pura, sicut Deus est actus purus. Corpus autem componitur ex potentia et actu, et ideo est agens et patiens* [m.e.]” *ST I*, q. 115, a 1. ad 2. Here Aquinas states that the universe is ranged hierarchically from pure act (God) to pure potency (matter).

⁹¹ “Ea quae sunt ex intentione agentis, non sunt propter materiam sicut propter primam causam. Causa enim agens prior est in causando quam materia: quia materia non fit actu causa nisi secundum quod est mota ab agente. Unde, si aliquis effectus consequitur dispositionem materiae et intentionem agentis, non est ex materia sicut ex causa prima. Et propter hoc videmus quod ea quae reducuntur in materiam sicut in causam primam, sunt praeter intentionem agentis: sicut monstra et alia peccata naturae. Forma autem est ex intentione agentis. Quod ex hoc patet: agens enim agit sibi simile secundum formam; et si aliquando hoc deficiat, hoc est a casu propter materiam. Formae igitur non consequuntur dispositionem materiae sicut primam causam: sed magis e converso materiae sic disponuntur ut sint tales formae. Distinctio autem rerum secundum speciem est per formas. Distinctio igitur rerum non est propter materiae diversitatem sicut propter primam causam.” *SCG II.40*.

receiving elementary forms, some occult power impenetrable to form. Instead, when things go wrong and monsters result—or even for that matter when things go right, but change takes time to complete or certain patients must undergo a series of transformations before receiving a more perfect form (e.g., water becoming wine)—the reason must be sought not in terms of matter but in terms of form. As we will see, such a shift from matter to form allows Aquinas’s to close the explanatory gap that would result from an active power on the part of matter.

The impetus for granting matter some active power is that if matter were merely a passive recipient of formal determination, it would seem that anything could become anything else and change would be an effortless and immediate. But as Aristotle correctly notes “You can’t make a saw out of wool,” even though the human artisan is more perfect than the material patient (i.e., the wool). Likewise, water must undergo a lengthy process of fermentation before taking on the more complex character of wine. Except in cases of miraculous or supernatural action (e.g., when Jesus instantaneously changes water into wine or God’s infusion of grace), all matter must be properly disposed to receive the form introduced by the agent. A natural agent cannot immediately enact just any form in matter because of some “disproportion between the power (*virtus*) of the agent and that in the matter which resists.”⁹² But what does Aquinas mean by such “disproportion” and by “that” in matter which resists?

⁹² “Respondeo dicendum quod tota iustificatio impii originaliter consistit in gratiae infusione, per eam enim et liberum arbitrium movetur, et culpa remittitur. Gratiae autem infusio fit in instanti absque successione. Cuius ratio est quia quod aliqua forma non subito imprimatur subiecto, contingit ex hoc quod subiectum non est dispositum, et agens indiget tempore ad hoc quod subiectum disponat. Et ideo videmus quod statim cum materia est disposita per alterationem praecedentem, forma substantialis acquiritur materiae, et eadem ratione, quia diaphanum est secundum se dispositum ad lumen recipiendum, subito illuminatur a corpore lucido in actu. Dictum est autem supra quod Deus ad hoc quod gratiam infundat animae, non requirit aliquam dispositionem nisi quam ipse facit. Facit autem huiusmodi dispositionem sufficientem ad susceptionem gratiae, quandoque quidem subito, quandoque autem paulatim et successive, ut supra dictum

We can formulate an answer by following further Aquinas's line of reasoning. In terms of this argument, he goes on to state that the infinite power of God, unlike the finite power of natural agents, can in fact dispose matter to any form instantaneously and without preparation. Furthermore, the stronger the power of the natural agent, the more quickly the matter becomes disposed. Because superable, the power of material resistance responsible for disproportion between an acting agent and its passive patient can be ascribed to some other form inhering in the matter, but not some power of the matter itself: all resistance simply requires a stronger power.⁹³ Such an illusion of material resistance can be dispelled by looking at matter in its more basic state (i.e., prime matter and elementary forms). Elementary bodies are active only to the extent that they have form and thereby participate some similitude of divine being. Prime matter, however, is in no way active, and thus does not by itself contain the power by which to be disposed and indisposed to form. This is why God, whose effects have no existential debt to matter (“...*quod effectus eius habeat debitum essendi ex materia*”), can introduce any form into matter, whereas natural agents must compete with some pre-existing form, which *qua* form, not *qua* matter, is responsible for “material resistance.”⁹⁴ Form is the source of intelligibility for resistance.

est. *Quod enim agens naturale non subito possit disponere materiam, contingit ex hoc quod est aliqua disproportion eius quod in materia resistit, ad virtutem agentis, et propter hoc videmus quod quanto virtus agentis fuerit fortior, tanto materia citius disponitur. Cum igitur virtus divina sit infinita, potest quamcumque materiam creatam subito disponere ad formam, et multo magis liberum arbitrium hominis, cuius motus potest esse instantaneus secundum naturam* [m.e.]. Sic igitur iustificatio impii fit a Deo in instanti.” *Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P.M. edita, t. 6-7: Prima secundae Summa theologiae* (Ex Typographia Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, Romae, 1895-1897-1899) q. 113, a. 7, resp. Hereafter “*ST I-II*.”

⁹³ “Ad quartum dicendum quod corpus non est id quod maxime distat a Deo, participat enim aliquid de similitudine divini esse, secundum formam quam habet. Sed id quod maxime distat a Deo, est materia prima; quae nullo modo est agens, cum sit in potentia tantum.” *ST I*, q. 115, a. 1, ad. 4.

⁹⁴ “Non potest autem dici in Deo, quod effectus eius habeat debitum essendi ex materia. Nam cum ipse sit totius esse auctor, nihil quolibet modo esse habens praesupponitur eius actioni, ut sic ex dispositione materiae necesse sit dicere talem vel talem eius esse effectum.” *De Pot.* q. 3, a. 16, resp.

Aquinas thus can supply a natural (i.e., formal) explanation for such resistance without appealing to some occult power on the part of prime matter, which would altogether stand outside intelligibility. In the face of recalcitrance, he simply can maintain that one form has a more powerful hold over the matter and does not give way to the new form: the *form* of wool prevents the *form* of saw's victory, but not because of some power on the part of matter itself. Thus, the active principle on the part of matter—to bear and to resist—can be understood in terms of form and thereby rendered intelligible. Granting some degree of resistance in all generation (i.e., natural causation) and production (i.e., artificial causation)—otherwise such change would be instantaneous—even the occasional cases of outright resistance (e.g., when nature produces a monstrosity) do not become altogether unintelligible, but can be explained in terms of one substantial or accidental form withstanding the introduction of another when it *should* give way. Such individual cases do not render explanation invalid. What may seem recalcitrant on the level of individuals becomes recoverable on the level of the species (i.e., the population). Aquinas's view is not troubled by deviation from the norm in terms of “monsters and other failures of nature” because despite such fortuitous material resistance, a resistance of one material form to another, matter ultimately owes its existence to God. Matter's causal contribution to any effect is merely to multiply, and not to diversify, and even its power to multiply is on account of some intelligible *form* (i.e., quantity).

To explain “a monster,” or something without a recognizable essence and essential powers thereby falling outside the scope of intelligible classification, does not require a distinct economy of subaltern material causes. Instead, the acting agent has simply

exerted insufficient power to educe or impose a new form from or onto the matter, the result of which is something in-between two forms, an indeterminate mixture of features from both. Such “a monster,” although a failure of nature because in-between essences, does not require some supernatural explanation or cause, especially one involving matter. As Aquinas explains in the case of a mule, which is not a “monster” in the proper sense because it has its own species but a freak of sorts because due to sterility is incapable of natural regeneration, the matter resists the form in a certain way.⁹⁵ The male is incapable of bringing the material offered by the female to the perfection of its own species, because the female herself is of a different species. Thus, the male leads (*perduxit*) the matter to something close to his own species. But in a case such as this and even in the case of more outright material resistance where a monster would result, that which resists imposition is some other form (e.g., the substantial form of female’s “egg” resisting imposition of the male’s sperm). And as Aquinas argues in *De Potentia*, monsters may result contrary to a particular nature, although they cannot be contrary to universal nature, but are recoverable within the scope of the order of the universe as a whole.⁹⁶

By making matter completely subordinate to form, and able *to be* only on account of its determination by form, insofar as matter does not fall outside the scope of divine providence, but it too has a divine idea, Aquinas preserves the order of the universe as the work of an intelligible cause and a reflection of divine goodness.⁹⁷ Such an ideational

⁹⁵ “Ad quartum dicendum quod mulus habet speciem mediam inter asinum et equum, unde non est in duabus speciebus sed in una tantum, quae est effecta per commixtionem seminum, in quantum virtus activa maris non potuit perducere materiam feminae ad terminos propriae speciei perfectae propter materiae extraneitatem sed perduxit ad aliquid propinquum suae speciei; et ideo eadem ratione assignatur idea mulo et equo.” *De Veritate* q. 3, a. 8, ad 4.

⁹⁶ *De Pot.* q. 6, a. 2, ad 8.

⁹⁷ Aquinas argues that in the broad sense of the term “idea” God has an idea of matter. In the narrow sense of the term, matter only has an idea through its form, that is, as part of the composite. See, for example, *De Veritate* q. 3, a. 5, resp.; *ST I*, q. 15, a. 3, ad 3; and Chapter VI Section 3 below.

containment of matter holds together the totalized order of the universe as a whole, and moreover when individuals and future contingents seem to happen by chance and outside the intended order of nature, such an excess of causal operation falls within the scope of divine providence.⁹⁸ All of nature, including the incidental, is the work of divine *scientia*—theoretical, practical, and productive.

Conclusion

Nature, as we have seen, is a work of intelligence. This means that God does not create by natural necessity, but chooses an order based on his preconceived *rationes*. Although everything in nature acts toward an end, Aquinas clearly distinguishes those agents that naturally act toward an end and those that voluntarily act toward an end. Thus, despite everything in nature being accountable in terms of some such end, it is important that Aquinas shows such teleological directedness of the universe ultimately to reside not in natural necessity, but in intelligence. To restate the earlier example, an arrow flies toward a target, as to its natural end, but such direction reduces to the foresight of an archer.⁹⁹ In *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas argues if all of nature were produced by natural necessity, nature would not have an end.¹⁰⁰ Beings as emanated from other beings would be teleologically (and providentially) *anarchic* insofar as they lacked a

⁹⁸ See *De Veritate* q. 5, a. 8, ad 2 and *SCG* I. 65, 67 and III 92.

⁹⁹ Aquinas argues for the God's free act of creation (as opposed to necessity) based upon the universe being ordered to an end. See *De Pot.* q. 3, a. 15, resp. Thus, the work of nature, which contains many natural agents acting toward an end, is ultimately a work of intelligence on the part of the first agent.

¹⁰⁰ "Potest autem efficacius procedi ad hoc ostendendum ex fine divinae voluntatis, ut supra tactum est. Finis enim divinae voluntatis in rerum productione est eius bonitas inquantum per causata manifestatur. Potissime autem manifestatur divina virtus et bonitas per hoc quod res aliae praeter ipsum non semper fuerunt. Ex hoc enim ostenditur manifeste quod res aliae praeter ipsum ab ipso esse habent, quia non semper fuerunt. Ostenditur etiam quod non agit per necessitatem naturae; et quod virtus sua est infinita in agendo. Hoc igitur convenientissimum fuit divinae bonitati, ut rebus creatis principium durationis daret." *SCG* II.38.

preordained order and connection to each other, but instead occurred as the result of blind necessity (i.e., a sort of cosmic overflow). But what's more, for nature to be the result of intelligence, it must also be radically unintelligible and unnatural. Otherwise, if the mere intelligibility of created beings in the divine intellect were a sufficient cause of their being (*esse*), then they would have being as a result of such intellection. God would act according to his nature as intelligence, the result of which would be that he acted by necessity. To allow God to act as the cause of everything's nature in such a way that natures have an end and reflect the intelligence (not necessity) of their cause, the ground of God's action when he in fact gives a beginning of being (*principium essendi*) to nature must be distinct from the ground of their intelligibility. The former, as we shall see, is the *principium essendi* that is creation. Having reviewed Aquinas's economy of essential causes and natural purposiveness, as established by the divine *rationes* and ordered to an end by God as first and sole *principium*, we are now in a position to reflect upon what it means for God's being to serve as the cause and exemplar of all being (“[...] *etiam esse suum est causa et exemplar omnis esse*”).¹⁰¹

God as a “*principium essendi*” or “*causa et exemplar omnis esse*” means not only and not primarily that the universe has a beginning in time. Instead, it means that God's contrivance of any and all possible orders of nature can occur for the very reason that no amount of contrivance suffices as a *principium essendi*, because such a *principium* is extra-essential. In other words, God's *intellectus essentialium* prior to creation does not impart any being (*esse*) to such essences because such virtually practical cognition alone lacks the causal force necessary to compel God to act. This is because creatures other than God owe their being to him as their *principium essendi*, and yet his nature accrues

¹⁰¹ See above the Introduction to this chapter, and also *In I Sent.* d. 38, q. 1, art. 3, sol.

nothing in return from such an endowment. If his acts were determined by his nature, something in him would demand or necessitate that he act in order to fulfill his nature, and in this sense, nature would lack an end. It would be the result of necessity, and not the result of intelligence. Instead, God is able to give nature an end because he himself acts as *principium essendi* completely without end. God's power is infinite, not only because he can create an infinite variety of effects, but because God gives to created things being as such (*esse simpliciter*).

Having explored how God's nature can be the cause and exemplar of every nature, it remains to be seen how God's incommunicable *esse* can serve as the cause and exemplar of all created *esse*. This will require treating the question of how creatures can have/participate *esse* without having/participating God's own *esse* and what it means to attribute "esse" to creatures. Given the infinite power of the divine will, God must know *what* is possible if he is to legislate a diverse multiplicity that most realizes the good of the universe, as opposed to other possibilities that would be a less perfect realization (e.g., a universe without intellectual creatures).¹⁰² And yet, underlying this divine intellection of various possibilities stands the free act by which God gives being (*dare esse*) to all beings, a distinction of causal grounds that accounts for our ability to understand essences as other than their actual existence. In what follows, we must further determine what the accrual *adveniens extra* of *esse* to beings entails both through the originary free act of creation *ex nihilo* and the sustaining act of conservation. This will help to determine the nature of "esse" when predicated of creatures and whether it retains meaning apart from their extrinsic relation to their cause.

¹⁰² For Aquinas's argument on the necessity of intellectual creatures for the perfection of the universe, see *SCG* II. 46.

Chapter V. The Existential Ground of the Universe: Creation and the Giving of Being

Picking up from the previous chapter's treatment of the archetypal ground of creatures in the divine intellect, we are now in a position to address God's own being as the cause and exemplar of all being: If the universe is an ordered totality of diverse and multiple beings, together presenting the most perfect possible imitation of divine perfection, and everything in the universe is made intelligible within its kind and aiming toward the good of the universe as a whole, we must ask after that inaugural act wherein God furnishes not merely this or that mode of being (i.e., essence), but being as such (*esse simpliciter*). As we have seen, although *being itself* (*ipsum esse*) belongs to God alone and cannot be communicated to creatures under the same *ratio* as possessed by God in his simplicity and radical self-identity (*ipseity*), the being (*esse*) of creatures both stands as a necessary precondition for all further essential determination and yet cannot be reduced to such essentiality. Thus, once created, creatures are ordered to the good of the universe in terms of their form as aiming at a natural end, but this belies the deeper question of what is given in creation. In what follows, drawing on all of the resources from Aquinas's metaphysics discussed to this point, we must attempt to more thoroughly understand this "perfection of all perfections" and "actuality of all essential acts"¹ that is *esse*, or that which is given in the inaugural act of creation and sustained through the subsequent act of conservation.

The problematic of this chapter arises from a recognition on the part of Aquinas that although God gives being to creatures, God cannot be the formal *esse* of things.² If God

¹ *De Pot.* q. 7, a. 2, ad 9

² *SCG* I.26. See also *In I Sent.* d. 8, q. 1. a. 2. Here Aquinas shows how the divine *esse* can be called "*esse omnium rerum*" without making creatures a part of God. God instead, he argues, is the efficient cause of

were their formal *esse*, God would be a part of creation, and no longer radically diverse. This follows from the discussion above, which addressed the analogical attribution of “*esse*” to creatures and whether the attribution can be more than an extrinsic attribution.³ The question thus emerges, that once God has been identified as *ipsum esse subsistens*—and thus cannot enter into any other nature, but must remain really *distinct*—how can *ens creatum* “have being” in any meaningful sense? Does not all being (*esse*) remain proper to God and utterly incommunicable to creation?

The task at hand requires that we render an account of what constitutes the difference between an idea in the divine mind and something that actually *is*. Facing this gap between understandable essences and real beings, a parallel, albeit metaphysically more originary (i.e., in itself, although not to us), question arises as the one confronted in the *intellectus essentiae* argument of *De Ente*: namely, what *more* do real beings have than mere understandables? When this question is recast in terms of *divine* understanding and the reality that God creates, we face the metaphysically more robust task of indicating and isolating the irreducible contribution of *esse*. By posing this question in terms of the divine act of creation, we will be in a better position to evaluate Aquinas’s real distinction between *esse* and essence and to ask: does *esse* signify the extra-essential actuality of all

their *esse*. He then moves to identify God as “superesse” following along with Pseudo-Dionysus. I will address the feasibility of this solution throughout the chapter.

³ See above Chapter III, especially Section 3. If, as has been argued, being must be given to creatures who lack such through themselves because only God has being *as* his essence, then all being must be given by that being who has being *per se*, *ipsum esse subsistens*. To call something other than God “a being” (*ens*) comprises an analogical predication, derivative in reference to the true sense of being. Such derivativeness stems from the need for all creatures to be given their being from another, in which *esse* and essence are identical. This gift or endowment of being, as will be seen, arises through the act of creation. If being is analogical for Aquinas, created beings who are given being resemble God, who is *ipsum esse subsistens*, in so far as they have being, but differ from him insofar as their *having* (i.e., participating) being entails a limited expression of being. Essence serves as the principle of dissimilar multiplicity and *esse* as the principle of assimilation, thus achieving a unity in a diversity, both distancing creatures from God and yet allowing them to resemble their creator as a participative similitude.

essential actualities thinkable outside the conceptual determinations of the thing or can it be reduced to such essential determinations of the thing, a *rationally* distinct repetition of a series of already conceived determinations?

Addressing this question will require us to track down and investigate exactly what Aquinas means by the claims addressed above that creatures must participate their *esse*. As has been noted, such *esse* cannot be the same as divine *esse* and the link between the two must be one of non-reciprocal proportion, that is, analogy. I have left open the question, however, of what exactly is this participated *esse*: Is it *ipsum esse subsistens*; *esse commune*; each creature's own *actus essendi*; or some combination of all three? And furthermore, what does *esse* add to the essential determinations of the creature such that an account based on its essential principles alone fails to grasp its full actuality? To take up this question, I will begin in Section 1 by discussing Aquinas's characterization of creation as the inception of being and a relation of dependence. Section 2 will address how God's monopoly on creation results due to the perfective nature of *esse* itself. This is followed by a discussion in Section 3 of Aquinas's argument that God is not the *formal esse* of creatures. In Section 4, bringing together lingering threads, I address the aforementioned "ambiguity of created *esse*" or what being is participated by creatures (i.e., *ipsum esse subsistens*, *esse commune*, *actus essendi suum*). Finally Section 5 will attempt to use Aquinas's metaphor of illumination to determine whether *esse* retains any existential meaning proper to creatures apart from their conservational cause. This will result in the final question of whether *esse* withstands essential reduction or becomes merely an unwarranted assertion mystifying the essential economy from which it attempts to escape.

Section 1: Creation as Participation in *Esse*

Creation marks the distinction between a merely possible imitation of the divine essence and an actual creature. As Aquinas notes in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, the number and distance of stars could have been otherwise, and although incommensurable with the current order, “more stars” (i.e., more actual imitations of the divine essence) is not impossible *per se*.⁴ Or, we might add, God could have made phoenixes and other such fictive creatures whose essences do not include a contradiction of terms. Thus, how do we account for this seemingly radical difference between those things that emerge from the divine intellect and those possibilities left unmade? As shown by Aquinas, conceivability by itself cannot provide such an explanation insofar as no created essence posits more existential reality than any other created essence. The essence “seraphim” has no more power “to be” *qua essence* than does “worm” or even “phoenix.” Following from our discussion of exemplarity in the divine intellect above, we can say that the emergence of certain essences *in re* requires not only conceptual intelligibility, but also the effective production by the divine will. A crucial question that will be answered in what follows is whether such beings enjoy their own act of being, and thus whether *esse* can denominate them intrinsically, or whether God’s *ipseity* bars any true sharing of being even in a derivative and limited sense. To address this question, we must turn now to what Aquinas means by “creation” as the act of giving being (*dare esse*).

In *ST I*, q. 44, a. 1, Aquinas asks whether *omne ens* is created by God. The use here of “created” should be noted as a more contracted and restricted form of “caused,” the latter which Aquinas had introduced in regard to the *fourth way*. Although “cause of being” seems to include creation, Aquinas will need to rule out emanation as the causal process

⁴ *SCG* II.23.

of giving being. As discussed above with Avicenna, the one necessary being *causes being* in everything else, albeit indirectly and through a causal overflow.⁵ Thus, Aquinas will need to show that *ipsum esse subsistens* as the cause of being gives being through the free act of creation, and not through the mandatory outcome of its nature. Such a “free act,” as discussed above, is necessary for creation to be a work of intelligence, not natural necessity.

To this question of whether God *creates* every being, Aquinas responds that every thing that in any way *is* is from God.⁶ He states:

Respondeo dicendum quod necesse est dicere omne quod quocumque modo est, a Deo esse. Si enim aliquid invenitur in aliquo per participationem, necesse est quod causetur in ipso ab eo cui essentialiter convenit; sicut ferrum fit ignitum ab igne. Ostensum est autem supra, cum de divina simplicitate ageretur, quod Deus est ipsum esse per se subsistens. Et iterum ostensum est quod esse subsistens non potest esse nisi unum: sicut si albedo esset subsistens, non posset esse nisi una, cum albedines multiplicentur secundum recipientia. Relinquitur ergo quod omnia alia a Deo non sint suum esse, sed participant esse. Necesse est igitur omnia quae diversificantur secundum diversam participationem essendi, ut sint perfectius vel minus perfecte, causari ab uno primo ente, quod perfectissime est.⁷

If some perfection is found in something through participation, it is necessary that it was caused by that thing to which the perfection belongs essentially. I emphasized above this link between perfection and participative causality, which Aquinas highlights through the example of heat in iron by which iron is ignited (i.e., participative) and heat in fire (i.e., essential): any participated perfection must be resolved to a cause that has that perfection

⁵ See Chapter IV Section 1 above.

⁶ Aquinas also asks “Is God able to create?” “Et inde est quod in Lib. de causis, dicitur, quod esse eius est per creationem, vivere vero, et caetera huiusmodi, per informationem. Causalitates enim entis absolute reducuntur in primam causam universalem; causalitas vero aliorum quae ad esse superadduntur; vel quibus esse specificatur, pertinet ad causas secundas, quae agunt per informationem, quasi supposito effectu causae universalis: et inde etiam est quod nulla res dat esse, nisi in quantum est in ea participatio divinae virtutis. Propter quod etiam dicitur in lib. de causis, quod anima nobilis habet operationem divinam in quantum dat esse.” *De Pot.* q. 3 a. 1, resp.

⁷ *ST I*, q. 44, a. 1, resp.

essentially.⁸ God as the first principle of being, or *ipsum esse per se subsistens*, serves as that by which *esse* is caused in everything else and through which they participate *esse*. But in the causal act of distributing a perfection, the first does not *give itself*, even though contra the Neoplatonic tradition, neither is it *without* the given perfection.⁹

At this point, Aquinas deploys many of the same issues surrounding the fourth way: everything other than God is not its own *esse*, but participates in *esse*; creatures participate in *esse* more and less perfectly; God as the first being, who is *most perfect*, causes being in everything else. Whereas before (i.e., in the fourth way) he sought to demonstrate the existence of God from these points, now they are meant to reveal a deeper truth about creatures: namely, having demonstrated the self-subsistence and oneness of God, the being (*esse*) of everything else must be other than it and participated. *Because* there is something that is being itself (*ipsum esse*), the conditions of its self-identity require that the being of everything else to be participated. Creatures are united with each other and radically distinguished from God insofar as they must participate their being in order to be. In such participation, however, they are diversified on account of their diverse participation of being (“...*omnia quae diversificantur secundum diversam participationem essendi*”). Thus, Aquinas locates the principle of unity in the common bond of creaturely participation (i.e., “*participant esse*”), a commonality diversified by the fact that they must participate being according to some *modus essendi*, that is, according to their essence.

⁸ As discussed with the *De Ente* argument from above, only the reference to an actually existing separate X necessitates the real distinction between a participated X and the sole instance of essential X. See Chapter I. Also, on this matter, Owens states: “The third [example], that of heat from its subject, would be real in real things since heat is a predicamental accident. But for the moment the text is concerned only with the distinction between separate heat and participated heat, and not with the distinction between participated heat and its subject.” “Stages and Distinction in ‘De Ente,’” 118.

⁹ For a comparison between Aquinas’s and Plotinus’s first principles, see Taylor, “Aquinas, the *Plotiniana Arabica*, and the Metaphysics of Being and Actuality,” 220-222.

Due to the imperfect having of being on the part of creatures, such a perfection must be given to them from a cause, a cause to which the perfection essentially belongs (*essentialiter convenit*). Participation, Aquinas argues, means that creatures have been caused by God.¹⁰ As most perfect cause of being and highest actuality, God does not lack any power (*virtus*) for communicating his being, but virtually contains every perfection.¹¹ Like the king whose power transcends the particular powers of the governors in his realm, and makes their governance possible, or the sun that makes possible all sublunary illumination, God as the universal cause of being makes possible the particular being of all other beings.¹² God communicates being to beings by way of likeness (*per modum similitudinis*) without communicating himself. Because God is *ipsum esse subsistens*, and cannot be such unless one and indivisible (i.e., an *ipseity*), everything else that *is* must receive *esse* through participation and as really other than its own nature.

The example of ignited iron (*ferrum fit ignitum ab igne*) used above to explain existential participation captures how something non-essentially hot (e.g., ignited iron) must have as its cause something essentially such (i.e., fire). The example, however, does not exhaust the full scope of participation insofar as ignited iron or even hot water

¹⁰ Aquinas spells out this relation between participation and causality in more detail in what follows. In response to the claim that it is not necessary for every being to be created by God, Aquinas responds: “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod, licet habitudo ad causam non intret definitionem entis quod est causatum, tamen sequitur ad ea qua sunt de eius ratione: *quia ex hoc quod aliquid per participationem est ens, sequitur quod sit causatum ab alio* [m.e.]. Unde huiusmodi ens non potest esse, quin sit causatum; sicut nec homo, quin sit risibile. Sed quia esse causatum non est de ratione entis simpliciter, propter hoc invenitur aliquid ens non causatum.” *ST I*, q. 44, a. 1, ad 1.

¹¹ On this giving of being to creatures, and their imperfect resemblance of God’s being, Aquinas states “Ostensum est in primo libro quod Deus vult suum esse aliis communicare per modum similitudinis. De perfectione autem voluntatis est quod sit actionis et motus principium: ut patet in III de anima. Cum igitur divina voluntas sit perfecta, non deerit ei virtus communicandi esse suum alicui per modum similitudinis. Et sic erit ei causa essendi. Adhuc. Quanto alicuius actionis principium est perfectius, tanto actionem suam potest in plura extendere et magis remota: ignis enim, si sit debilis, solum propinqua calefacit; si autem sit fortis, etiam remota. Actus autem purus, qui Deus est, perfectior est quam actus potentiae permixtus, sicut in nobis est.” *SCG II*. 6. The reference to the “first book” is *SCG I*.75. Aquinas further argues that the more perfect anything is, the further its power extends.

¹² For this analogy, see *SCG II*.15.

temporarily retains heat in the absence of its cause. Thus while the participant remains heated, it *takes part* in the perfection, and the perfection imperfectly inheres in the subject even once the cause has withdrawn. We might say the property, in this case “heat,” belongs to the subject for a time. Such a model taken by itself tends to be misleading when translated to participation in being insofar as it suggests that created beings need only participate their own *actus essendi* given to them as a real property not needing to be sustained by the continued presence of the cause. The difficulty of this image will be clarified as we further explore Aquinas’s account of creation and conservation.

To begin explicating what is entailed by “having been created,” we must understand the sense in which this causal relationship between creator and creation requires participation of the effect in its cause.¹³ As discussed above, in his *De Hebdomadibus* exposition, Aquinas introduces three types of participation: a species/individual’s participation in a genus/species; a subject/matter’s participation in an accident/form; and an effect’s participation in a cause.¹⁴ With the third, which will be pertinent for our discussion, the effect *partakes of* its cause, but the integrity of the cause itself is not compromised or diminished by this sharing. To illustrate this point, Aquinas turns to his stock example that the illuminated air must participate in its solar cause because it cannot receive its full power, even though the imperfect distribution of this perfection does not

¹³ The two thinkers most responsible for understanding the importance of “participation” in the metaphysics of Aquinas are Fabro and Geiger. *Opt. cit.*

¹⁴ See Chapter II Section 1 above. “Est autem participare quasi partem capere. Et ideo quando aliquid particulariter recipit id quod ad alterum pertinet, uniuersaliter, dicitur participare illud, sicut homo dicitur participare animal quia non habet rationem animalis secundum totam communitatem; et eadem ratione Sortes participat hominem. Similiter etiam subiectum participat accidens et materia formam, quia forma substancialis uel accidentalis, que de sui ratione communis est, determinatur ad hoc uel ad illud subiectum. Et similiter etiam effectus dicitur participare suam causam, et precipue quando non adequat uirtutem sue cause, puta si dicamus quod aer participat lucem solis quia non recipit eam in claritate qua est in sole.” *Expositio* L.2, ll. 70-85.

diminish the sun's power in any way.¹⁵ The oneness of the principle remains intact amidst its dissemination to many. The many in turn liken themselves to their principle through participation.¹⁶ Participation serves as the operative model by which to explain the communication of *esse* to creatures, with a particular emphasis upon the example of the sun illuminating air, which of itself lacks illumination but receives light through the power of the sun. Although creation is a relation of participation, participation by itself does not mark the existentiality at work in Aquinas's conception of creation.¹⁷ What more is needed to stave off a return to essentialism is an emphasis upon the *givenness* of such an act, both inaugurated through creation and sustained through conservation.

For Aquinas, God is the universal cause of all being, which means that his power extends to everything that is, even matter. It is not impossible, Aquinas emphasizes, that

¹⁵ See *De Ente* IV and the *fourth way*.

¹⁶ Fabro in his work on participation in Aquinas has called this an "intensive" plenitude of being. Thus, the more proper and pure our notion of being (*notio entis*) becomes, the more *intense* the perfection. The greatest intensity of being belongs to *ipsum esse subsistens*. This goes against the emptying abstraction of being, wherein the more abstract our notion of being becomes the more *extensive* (i.e., covering a broader range) and emptier. Fabro notes that this is the tendency of thinking being in modern ontology, the best witness being Hegel's *Science of Logic* where being (as empty, abstract, and extensive) passes over into nothingness. *Opt. Cit.*

¹⁷ Merely maintaining that source of *esse* comes from outside the essence and must be participated by the essence does not guarantee an escape from essentialism. This is why creation as the *giving* of being is vital to an understanding of *esse* in Thomistic metaphysics. A cursory glance at Avicenna's treatment of *esse*, which promisingly began by distinguishing possibility from actuality—the latter condition marked by *esse* over against mere non-repugnant conceivability—revealed a relapse into essentialism, as the *to be* of all beings necessarily derives from, or better yet "overflows," the abundance of the first necessary existent. Such a generous overflow, however, radiates and yet does not *give*. Aquinas's existential break with essentialist hegemony, I would argue, is by thinking creation in terms of the *giving* of being, thus preserving the novelty of coming *to be* and sheltering its radical inceptuality against reinscription into an essential order. To think true givenness, Aquinas mobilizes *esse* as the true meaning of creation *ex nihilo*: being becomes a gift incommensurable with any essential order. Creation marks the *giving* of being, which lacks any determinate ground to anticipate its arrival (i.e., the event of its givenness). This means that creation cannot proceed by natural necessity; otherwise given the existence of God, *all* his possible effects would necessarily result. Instead, God as *omnipotent* is capable of a variety of diverse effects, not all of which come to be. Such diversity reflects the power of God, who through his action, and not variation in patients or a series of intermediaries that assist the creative effort, is capable of a various effects. This distinguishes God from natural agents, which produce only one type of effect and cannot give rise to a diversity. Given the range of possibilities that could be created, however, God has chosen to institute a certain order containing a diverse multiplicity of beings, which in their integrated entirety fulfill the intended end of the universe; for this reason, nature can be deemed a work of intelligence. See, for example, *De Pot.* q. 3, a. 15, resp. Also SCG II.23.

nothing pre-exist the creative act and yet be brought into being through such an act.¹⁸ If there were some preexisting “stuff,” the uncaused matter posited by the ancients, then the first principle would not be a universal agent productive of the totality of being. Instead, its action would be proportioned to some pre-existing material ground, and both would be governed by a higher causal law, lest their order of proportion be a matter of chance. God is the total cause of being for the very reason that nothing assists God in creation nor stands as a measure of proportion for his action. In cases of natural causation, an agent acts in proportion to its patient without exceeding the limits of its receptivity. We have seen cases of causal incommensurability in which the power of the agent *exceeds* the receptivity of the patient (e.g., the generation of a mule). With creation, however, there can be no balanced economy of *natural proportion* because nature itself arises from such an act, and thus divine power must exceed the totality of all balance if it is to give rise to such an economy of particular causes. Thus, without some proportion by which to measure the activity of the first principle, it remains incommensurable with the totality of being because as the ground of everything that is, nothing can serve to measure its action. This is why, as Richard A. Lee has argued, creation is a type of violent causation, even if Aquinas seeks legitimacy for the violence of this excessive inaugural act through the subsequent institution of an intelligible order.¹⁹

Creation results from the free act of the divine will in concert with (but not compelled by) divine intelligence whereby certain *rationes* contained in the divine intellect are issued *in re*. To speak of an “*in re*” prior to creation, however, is misleading as it suggests that there were some preexisting space or void which comes to be filled with creatures.

¹⁸ SCG II.16.

¹⁹ See Lee, *The Force of Reason and The Logic of Force* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

Instead, creation itself opens such a space of being. As has been stressed above, God acts by the decision of his will and not by the compulsion of his intellect. What this ultimately entails is that nothingness endures as a real possibility for beings who receive their *esse* as a gift whose arrival cannot be anticipated. And yet, such a coming-to-be is marked by the gratuitousness that has left others (equal in their essential possibility) undone. As we witness in Aquinas's account of creation, such a letting come to be of certain possibilities, while leaving others undone, constitutes the mark of creation. The definition of creation which he gives is the creature's being ordered to God as its principle *from which (a quo)* it has *esse* and on which it depends for its being anything whatsoever.²⁰ Creation is the act through which God draws forth creatures from out of the dark canvass of nothingness.

Creation, Aquinas argues in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, is a kind of relation.²¹ But, keeping in mind the discussion above concerning analogy, one must be careful to stress

²⁰ "Respondeo. Dicendum quod quidam dixerunt creationem aliquid esse in rerum natura medium inter creatorem et creaturam. Et quia medium neutrum extremorum est, ideo sequebatur quod creatio neque esset creator neque creatura. Sed hoc a magistris erroneum est iudicatum, cum omnis res quocumque modo existens non habeat esse nisi a Deo, et sic est creatura. Et ideo alii dixerunt, quod ipsa creatio non ponit aliquid realiter ex parte creaturae. Sed hoc etiam videtur inconueniens. Nam in omnibus quae secundum respectum ad invicem referuntur, quorum unum ab altero dependet, et non e converso, in eo quod ab altero dependet, relatio realiter invenitur, in altero vero secundum rationem tantum; sicut patet in scientia et scibili, ut dicit philosophus. Creatura autem secundum nomen refertur ad creatorem. Dependet autem creatura a creatore, et non e converso. Unde oportet quod relatio qua creatura ad creatorem refertur, sit realis; sed in Deo est relatio secundum rationem tantum. [...] Creatio autem, sicut dictum est, non potest accipi ut moveri, quod est ante terminum motus, sed accipitur ut in facto esse; unde in ipsa creatione non importatur aliquis accessus ad esse, nec transmutatio a creante, sed solummodo *inceptio essendi, et relatio ad creatorem a quo esse habet; et sic creatio nihil est aliud realiter quam relatio quaedam ad Deum cum novitate essendi.*" *De Pot.*, q. 3, a. 3, resp. See also *ST I*, q. 45, a.3. "Respondeo dicendum quod creatio ponit *aliquid in creato secundum relationem tantum.* Quia quod creatur, non fit per motum vel per mutationem. Quod enim fit per motum vel mutationem, fit ex aliquo praeexistenti: quod quidem contingit in productionibus particularibus aliquorum entium; *non autem potest hoc contingere in productione totius esse a causa universali omnium entium, quae est Deus* [m.e.]. Unde Deus, creando, producit res sine motu. Subtracto autem motu ab actione et passione, nihil remanet nisi relatio, ut dictum est. *Unde relinquitur quod creatio in creatura non sit nisi relatio quaedam ad creatorem, ut ad principium sui esse* [m.e.]; sicut in passione quae est cum motu, importatur relatio ad principium motus."

²¹ Also "Non enim est creatio mutatio, *sed ipsa dependentia esse creati ad principium a quo statuitur. Et sic est de genere relationis.* Unde nihil prohibet eam in creato esse sicut in subiecto. [...] Apparet autem, si

the unidirectional nature of such relationality: creation is the real relation of creatures to God, but not of God to creatures. Otherwise, God as a self-identity of being would welcome real otherness, which would fracture his *ipseity*. Insofar as relation is one of the categories of accident, such a category cannot be a real relation happening to God. Thus, a real relation holds on the side of the creature to its creator, whereas only a logical relation links God back to creatures. But for creatures, creation is thus something real (*in rerum natura*) whereby creatures emerge into being. And unlike mere change, which presupposes a subject undergoing such a process, whether it be a substance's change in place (i.e., locomotion) or even the more radical production of a new substance (i.e., generation and corruption), creation, instead, marks an even more radical development: the inception of being (*inceptio essendi*) from out of nothingness. Creation initiates a relation of real dependency whereby created being in its dependency upon its principle is established (*ipsa dependentia esse creati ad principium a quo statuitur*). Creation is thus the grounding of beings in their relation of dependency to God.

The grounding act of creation, in which God opens a space wherein creatures can emerge in being (*essendi*), is fundamentally characterized by a “newness” or “novelty” of being (*cum novitate essendi*). Aquinas's use of this term (i.e., *novitate*) is not meant to express temporal change, as in a “time before” and a “time of” being. The inception of being denotes not primarily and not merely that *at one time* there was nothing, *now* there is something. Such “creation in time,” as revealed by the book of *Genesis*, although a

creatio relatio quaedam est, quod res quaedam est: et neque increata est; neque alia relatione creata. Cum enim effectus creatus realiter dependeat a creante, oportet huiusmodi relationem esse rem quandam. Omnis autem res a Deo in esse producitur. Est igitur in esse a Deo producta. Non tamen alia creatione creata, quam ipsa creatura prima quae per eam creata dicitur. Quia accidentia et formae, sicut per se non sunt, ita nec per se creantur, cum creatio sit productio entis: sed, sicut in alio sunt, ita aliis creatis creantur. Praeterea. Relatio non refertur per aliam relationem, quia sic esset abire in infinitum: sed per seipsam refertur, quia essentialiter relatio est. Non igitur alia creatione opus est, qua ipsa creatio creetur, et sic in infinitum procedatur.” *SCG* II.18.

truth of the faith, cannot be philosophically demonstrated.²² Nor is this Aquinas’s primary philosophical concern. Instead, such “newness” or “inception” indicates the radical gratuitousness or givenness at the ground of being such that everything that is fundamentally depends upon a gift that not only is radically other to it and to its essential constitution but also that opens the very space in which beings can stand out or “*ex-ist*” in their being (*esse*). An account for the universe as a whole cannot be taken from any single being within the universe nor from the formal totality of all beings, but instead such an account must be derived from the unnecessitated divine will alone (*ratio sumatur ex simplici voluntate producentis*).²³ Creation is *incidental* in the sense that it happens—and continues to happen through conservation—outside any created nature, arriving *adveniens extra* to everything that is and never merging with it as part of its essential constitution. *Esse* remains fundamentally other to each being, never becoming “its own property,” not even for a time.

²² See, for example: Si enim intelligatur quod aliquid preter Deum potuit semper fuisse, quasi possit esse aliquid tamen ab eo non factum, error abominabilis est non solum in fide, sed etiam apud philosophos, qui confitentur et probant omne quod est quocumque modo, esse non posse nisi sit causatum ab eo qui maxime et verissime esse habet. Si autem intelligatur aliquid semper fuisse, et tamen causatum fuisse a Deo secundum totum id quod in eo est, videndum est utrum hoc possit stare.” It can be demonstrated that the world is not eternal and that God gives being to everything that is from out of nothingness, but it cannot be demonstrated that God created the world in time. *De Aeternitate Mundi* II. 6-16.

²³ “Nec hoc potest aliqua physica demonstratione efficaciter impugnari. Ad cuius evidentiam sciendum est, quod sicut in quaestione alia est habitum, in operatione Dei non potest accipi aliquod debitum ex parte causae materialis, neque potentiae activae agentis, nec ex parte finis ultimi, sed solum ex parte formae quae est finis operationis, ex cuius praesuppositione requiritur quod talia existant qualia competunt illi formae. Et ideo aliter dicendum est de productione unius particularis creaturae, et aliter de exitu totius universi a Deo. Cum enim loquimur de productione alicuius singularis creaturae, potest assignari ratio quare talis sit, ex aliqua alia creatura, vel saltem ex ordine universi, ad quem quaelibet creatura ordinatur, sicut pars ad formam totius. Cum autem de toto universo loquimur educendo in esse, non possumus ulterius aliquod creatum invenire ex quo possit sumi ratio quare sit tale vel tale; unde, cum nec etiam ex parte divinae potentiae quae est infinita, nec divinae bonitatis, quae rebus non indiget, ratio determinatae dispositionis universi sumi possit, oportet quod eius ratio sumatur ex simplici voluntate producentis ut si quaeratur, quare quantitas caeli sit tanta et non maior, non potest huius ratio reddi nisi ex voluntate producentis.” *De Pot.* q. 3, a. 17, resp. The “reason” (*ratio*) must be found in the mere will of the creator.

Coupled with his earlier argument that what is given in creation (i.e., *esse*) grounds all further essential actuality of any being,²⁴ we see how Aquinas radicalizes this actuality brought by God's inaugural act of gratuity: *esse* has become the really distinct ground of any being in its being without which it would fundamentally lack the power to be. Thus, "*esse*" is not merely another name for the sum total of emanated beings or for the essential completion of any given being, but is itself—when analogically applied to "*esse creatum*"—the very ground upon which such an essential vocabulary is inscribed. Although *esse* does not appear as one such being (*ens*) governed and made intelligible by essential determinations, nor can it without undermining its fundamental nature, this does not mean that it is thereby redundant.²⁵

Creation, we might say, is the opening or the "exitus" of a world—of *the* world—wherein an ordered multiplicity of beings come to have being through a real relation of dependence, or participation, in another distinct from themselves. *The* world is an ordered totality of beings united around their shared participation in *esse*, albeit a sharing marked by degrees of inequality based upon a diversity of essences united in their common dispensation toward the fulfillment of the good of the universe. The *esse* common to all beings (i.e., *esse commune*) in which they must participate so that they participate in *ipsum esse subsistens*—a relation to be outlined in more detail below—is not itself *some thing* distinct from any of them, but that which in its indifference to all determination

²⁴ "[...] dicendum quod ipsum esse est perfectissimum omnium, comparatur enim ad omnia ut actus. Nihil enim habet actualitatem, nisi in quantum est, unde ipsum esse est actualitas omnium rerum, et etiam ipsarum formarum. Unde non comparatur ad alia sicut recipiens ad receptum, sed magis sicut receptum ad recipiens. Cum enim dico esse hominis, vel equi, vel cuiuscumque alterius, ipsum esse consideratur ut formale et receptum, non autem ut illud cui competit esse." *ST I*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3.

²⁵ Its irreducibility appears as the actualization whereby an essential lexicography finds expression. Creation *ex-presses* (and conservation sustains the expression of) the divine ideas through the irreducible act of *esse*, which is not merely something added to such ideas (i.e., thought's supplement of expression) but is the very fundament of their inscription and actualization.

gives rise to all real differences between beings and, more importantly, between God and the world. Thus, the world as the totality of such distinct beings, and containing the full range of conceptual intelligibility based on the unity of essences and ends, does not simply add up to or equal *esse* as the space of such emergence. For this reason, *esse* more than anything else, is what is given by the act of creation. As will become clear in Aquinas's argument for God's monopoly on creation, *esse commune* is the most universal effect and can be issued only from an omnipotent cause not because it stands as the highest genus encompassing every other species, but because the omnipresent actuality that is *esse* opens the entirety of regions in which essential actuality can be distinguished from essential potentiality.²⁶ *Esse*, as that which is given in the act of creation and sustained through the abiding act of conservation, cannot be reduced to a mere repetition of every other formal perfection in sum, albeit conceived more abstractly.

Although Existential Thomism acknowledges that “forma dat esse”—a phrase Aquinas repeatedly invokes²⁷—nevertheless they argue that beneath or behind such a *formal* determination of being, there must underlie an existential *enactment* of such an essence non-identical to the being given by form.²⁸ Gilson plays out this principle in terms of Aquinas's metaphor of illumination: the being given by form is comparable to the diaphaneity of the air, which receives the light of another, but requires the constant

²⁶ See *ST I*, q. 45, a. 5, resp. and fn. 31 below. Between being and nothingness there stands an infinite distance. Without this first and continual endowment of being, there would be absolute nothingness. As Aquinas clearly expresses the matter in *De Potentia*: “creation is really nothing other than a relation to God with a newness of being” (“*et sic creatio nihil est aliud realiter quam relatio quaedam ad Deum cum novitate essendi.*”) *De Pot.* q. 3, a. 3, resp. This newness of being inaugurates the very relationality whereby creatures participate in the divine plenitude of being without it in anyway being diminished (through sharing) or supplemented (through expressing) through this act. Perhaps the best way to express the nature of creation, although not in Aquinas's own words, would be it *gives* without any possibility of return.

²⁷ See, for example, *In II Sent.* d. 9, q. 1, a. 4, resp; *De Prin. Nat.* c. 1; *De Ente* III; *SCG* II.68; and *ST I*, q. 76, a. 4, resp.

²⁸ Below, I will return to this existential rendering and argue that to uphold an existential act distinct from form drowns out the creature itself behind the radiance of another's causal activity. See Section 5 below.

influx of that light to sustain its illumination.²⁹ And it is here that Gilson tells us that by dissociating form and act such that *esse* could be an act of the form without being a formal act, Aquinas does nothing less than bring about a revolution in metaphysics.³⁰ The *forma* of each created thing thus fails to sustain it in being, but only determines it as *such* once sustained through the power of another. Instead, *esse* represents a distinct ground of perfection altogether and this is why no creature *gives being (dat esse)* properly speaking, even when causing a variety of formal changes, including the most *formally* radical of all, substantial generation and corruption.

Section 2: God's Existential Monopoly

If we characterize creation as God's inaugural act of giving *esse*, we must ask about those beings that follow later in time: to what do they owe their *esse*? Once the order of creation has been instituted, does God entrust creatures somehow to administrate being or must he continually preside over and concur in their causal operations? From the foregoing discussion of Aquinas's account of creation and thinking on *esse*, it is no surprise that in addressing this question, he answers that God alone can create. If being (*esse*) is the extra-essential actuality of all essential actuality, which is really other than any created nature, such an act obviously would exceed the causal activity of any created agent, even the most perfect: how could any creature give that which it most fundamentally lacks, even as a plenipotentiary endowed with the power of being? It is not Aquinas's restriction of creation to God that makes his argument uniquely existential, but, as will be seen, the reasons he gives for such a restriction.

²⁹ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 173-175.

³⁰ *Being and Some Philosophers*, 174.

To make the case for a divine monopoly of giving being, Aquinas argues that a more universal effect must be reduced to more universal and prior cause.³¹ And because the most universal effect is *esse*, it must have as its cause the most universal cause. This cause is *ipsum esse subsistens*, which is the cause of all being. Although certain creatures may exceed others essentially, this does not mean, however, that they are *more universal* in terms of giving *esse*. This is why, as will be seen below, no other being, not intelligence nor soul, gives being (*dat esse*) no matter how noble its nature. An angel does not cooperate in giving being to an ant; the former may exceed the latter in term of essential determination and exert causal influence over it essentially; however, there is nothing proper to its nature by which it gives being (*esse*). Thus, contrary to the emanationist theory of Avicenna, it cannot act as a secondary cause in the conferral of

³¹ In *ST I*, q. 45, a. 5, resp.: “Respondeo dicendum quod satis apparet in primo aspectu, secundum praemissa, quod creare non potest esse propria actio nisi solius Dei. Oportet enim universaliores effectus in universaliores et priores causas reducere. Inter omnes autem effectus, universalissimum est ipsum esse. Unde oportet quod sit proprius effectus primae et universalissimae causae, quae est Deus. Unde etiam dicitur libro de causis, quod neque intelligentia vel anima nobilis dat esse, nisi in quantum operatur operatione divina. Producere autem esse absolute, non in quantum est hoc vel tale, pertinet ad rationem creationis. Unde manifestum est quod creatio est propria actio ipsius Dei. Contingit autem quod aliquid participet actionem propriam alicuius alterius, non virtute propria, sed instrumentaliter, in quantum agit in virtute alterius; sicut aer per virtutem ignis habet calefacere et ignire. Et secundum hoc, aliqui opinati sunt quod, licet creatio sit propria actio universalis causae, tamen aliqua inferiorum causarum in quantum agit in virtute primae causae, potest creare. Et sic posuit Avicenna quod prima substantia separata, creata a Deo, creat aliam post se, et substantiam orbis, et animam eius; et quod substantia orbis creat materiam inferiorum corporum. Et secundum hunc etiam modum Magister dicit, in V dist. IV Sent., quod Deus potest creaturae communicare potentiam creandi, ut creet per ministerium, non propria auctoritate. Sed hoc esse non potest. Quia causa secunda instrumentalis non participat actionem causae superioris, nisi in quantum per aliquid sibi proprium dispositive operatur ad effectum principalis agentis. Si igitur nihil ibi ageret secundum illud quod est sibi proprium, frustra adhiberetur ad agendum, nec oporteret esse determinata instrumenta determinatarum actionum. Sic enim videmus quod securis, scindendo lignum, quod habet ex proprietate suae formae, producit scamni formam, quae est effectus proprius principalis agentis. Illud autem quod est proprius effectus Dei creantis, est illud quod praesupponitur omnibus aliis, scilicet esse absolute. Unde non potest aliquid operari dispositive et instrumentaliter ad hunc effectum, cum creatio non sit ex aliquo praesupposito, quod possit disponi per actionem instrumentalis agentis. Sic igitur impossibile est quod alicui creaturae conveniat creare, neque virtute propria, neque instrumentaliter sive per ministerium. Et hoc praecipue inconueniens est dici de aliquo corpore, quod creet, cum nullum corpus agat nisi tangendo vel movendo; et sic requirit in sua actione aliquid praeeexistens, quod possit tangi et moveri; quod est contra rationem creationis.”

being.³² Instead, what the givenness of being (*datum esse*) conveys is that although something can be a substance, it can never truly subsist. All subsistence requires *esse*, and once received, that is, once an essence has been posited “outside its causes,”³³ *esse* still lacks a root in being. To be is the most universal of all acts because even self-subsisting forms, were there such, would stand in potency to such existential actuality.

But what does Aquinas mean here by “more and less universal”? There seem to be at least two distinct understandings of how an effect can be more or less universal: the opinion of Scotus or Suarez, in which the universality of an effect corresponds with its indeterminacy and imperfection with *esse* as the most indeterminate and imperfect of all effects; and the opinion of Aquinas, in which *esse* in being most universal is also most perfect. The difference between the answers to this question will reveal why unlike Scotus and Suarez, who also argue that creatures cannot create, Aquinas’s argument is uniquely existential.

Suarez follows Scotus in holding that the claim “a more universal effect must be traced back to a more universal cause” entails that there is a *ratio objectiva* applicable to the widest multiplicity of objects and the universal cause of such a widespread *ratio* contains such effects within itself eminently.³⁴ The highest *perfection* of such effects, however, is not their indeterminate *ratio objectiva* in which they agree, but instead the individual completeness of each and every effect. Thus, their most universal *ratio essendi* is also their most imperfect *ratio*. This is why the giving of being (*esse*) is not what is

³² See above Chapter IV Section 1. As stated in the fn. 33 above: “Quia causa secunda instrumentalis non participat actionem causae superioris, nisi in quantum per aliquid sibi proprium dispositive operatur ad effectum principalis agentis. Si igitur nihil ibi ageret secundum illud quod est sibi proprium, frustra adhiberetur ad agendum, nec oporteret esse determinata instrumenta determinatarum actionum.” For a discussion of this matter, see Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe*, 164.

³³ Cf. the Suarezian treatment of “*esse*” in its distinction from essence in *DM* 31.

³⁴ *DM* 20.2.

noteworthy about creation, because every efficient cause gives being. Instead, as will be seen, for Scotus and Suarez the production of a complete effect without a preexisting subject (i.e., matter) serves to monopolize the act of creation.

For Aquinas, on the other hand, to say that God as most universal cause creates the most universal effect (i.e., *esse*) is *not* merely to say that God creates the totality of beings. The latter would mean only that God's power extends to everything that is—which it does—but not also that God creates every being (*ens*) in its being (*esse*). This would be to leave unthematized the existential dimension of the creative act as that in which *esse* as the most universal *and the most perfective* effect endows. The stakes can be made apparent by further developing Suarez's answer to the question at hand (i.e., whether God can endow creatures with a creative power).

According to Suarez, a creative power is not infinite and incommunicable to creatures on account of being a “surplus of educative power,” or a power that reaches and actualizes even the most remote passive potencies; instead, creative power occupies a different order than any educative power because it calls forth its effect in the absence of any potency (i.e., *ex nihilo*).³⁵ Creative power is incommensurable with any finite power insofar as the former requires no real preexisting potency upon which to act, but requiring only objective potency (i.e., non-contradiction), acts upon nothing. Suarez emphasizes the independence of the creative act from *any* (i.e., *ex nihilo*) economy of real potencies.

Aquinas's argument at *ST* I. q. 45, a. 5 accords with this assessment, but tends to diverge around parsing the question of *esse*'s contribution to the universality of the created effect. Aquinas penetrates the universal *depth* of *esse*, instead of stopping short at the mere “fact of being” of the essence. Whereas, for Suarez, the incommensurability of

³⁵ *DM* 20.2.

creation with all other “types” of efficient causation does not stem from its introduction of the existential actuality of *esse*, as this is included in the production *ex nihilo* of an actual essence. The emphasis for Suarez instead shifts to the creative act’s complete independence from any preexisting subject of potency: God creates an *actual essence* (i.e., an essentially determined individual) from no real potency. Creation creates real essential beings. What makes of this model of creation a “conceptual imperialism,” according to Gilson, is that grasping to explain the difference between a potential and an actual essence, and on the verge of thinking *esse*, Suarez attributes the difference to the latter’s created actuality. And in explaining what such created actuality means, Suarez fails to address such actuality by its proper name, “*esse*”; that is, he reduces *esse* to the actuality of essence without comprehending that such “actuality *of*” already entails an otherness to essence, an otherness that is existence. To account for such otherness, Suarez mistakes “of” for an essential property, as something belonging to the essential domain, which allows him to conceptualize and render essentially determinate such created actuality. And thus by asking “*what is it?*” when confronted by such existential actuality, itself thinkable only outside the conceptual domain, Suarez’s account of creation thus relapses into essentialism.³⁶

Against such a backdrop, we begin to see how *esse* as the most universal effect *of* all created beings serves as the “most universal perfection” according to Aquinas, a perfection whose depth cannot be made intelligible by thinking any being nor even the totality of beings. Although he agrees with Suarez that creation is the proper act of God alone, and cannot be administered to creatures, Aquinas’s definition of creation as “producing being absolutely, not as this or that (*non in quantum est hoc vel tale*)” reflects

³⁶ *Being and Some Philosophers*, 102-105.

a different concern and emphasis than that of Suarez; namely, an uncovering of the existentiality at work in the universal effect of *esse*.

Even once certain beings (i.e., creatures) have been given *esse*, creation as the giving of *esse* still requires a cause able to endow this highest perfection: i.e., conservation. And because such *esse* does not belong to creatures as part of their essential constitution, but retains an otherness to them even when they exist, creatures cannot create *because* they cannot give *esse*. This is the significance of Aquinas's real distinction: any creature as determined by its essential determinations never becomes identical to its being (*esse*) in such a way that it could causally endow another with *esse*. *Esse* retains a fundamental otherness to its essential constitution even when such a being does in fact exist. And the "fact of its being" does not fully reflect the existential perfection by which such a being in its essential constitution emerges from nothingness. There is a monopoly on creation because there is a monopoly on giving being insofar as *esse* never becomes a real property of creatures even when they exist (i.e., the real distinction).³⁷

Although other scholastics may agree with the claim that creatures cannot create, this is not necessarily because they acknowledge that "to create" means to "give *esse*." Suarez, for example, defines "efficient causality" generally as the "communication of *esse*," insofar as the cause makes the effect "to be."³⁸ Creation is a unique moment of such causality because it makes something be from nothing, whereas all other communication of *esse* (i.e., efficient causation) makes a *this* be a *that*. And here is where we witness the divergent understandings of "*esse*" in Suarez and Aquinas: *to be (esse)*,

³⁷ Compare, for example, the difference between hot water and illuminated air. Heat belongs to hot water as an accidental quality and such can cause heat (even in a limited degree) in other patients. Light, however, belongs to the continued endowment of the source, never taking up root in the patient. Thus, the quality remains *incidental* to the patient.

³⁸ *DM* 17.1.

for Suarez, is merely the “fact or state of being” of some essence, the temporal duration of its extantness, the life-cycle of its effective actuality before it passes over into another essential fact. For Aquinas, however, *to be* marks the very extra-essential act of standing out of nothingness, a relation of real dependence derived from the *primus et purus actus essendi*, or that alone which subsists. This was why, as discussed at length above, the real distinction could emerge only after *esse* was identified as the proper nature of a subsisting being, *ipsum esse subsistens*. Prior to this conclusion, an opponent of the real distinction could accept the various steps of the argument, yet merely assert that the occluded *esse* signifies nothing more than whether a given essence factually *is* or *is not*. And because *esse* is never identical to any creature, no creature can create (i.e., *give esse*) even on behalf of God.

In discussing whether the power to create can be communicated to creatures, Aquinas’s argument thus targets those thinkers (e.g., Avicenna) who might maintain a coordinating causal act on the part of creatures (most especially, the intelligences) or those (e.g., Peter Lombard) who would hold that although not through their own authorship, but through a ministration, creatures are communicated the power of creation (“*ut creet per ministerium, non propria auctoritate*”). Against such views, Aquinas argues that such instrumental causality (i.e., when something participates the power of another and acts as a plenipotentiary) does not occur in creation. Creatures are not instruments used by God to create.

The reason, Aquinas maintains, is that even though operating through a superior agent, any instrument must effect something *by something proper to it*. Otherwise, the instrument would be superfluous. Aquinas gives the example of a saw used to cut wood.

Given the property of its form (i.e., sharp metal teeth), the saw enables the sawyer to produce a bench. Such a proper effect of the principal agent (i.e., the human who saws) cannot be completed without the instrument. The sawyer alone lacks the power to saw without a certain property belonging to an instrument. But because *esse* cannot be appropriated by any created nature, a created being cannot serve as an instrument of creation. What this means for creation, Aquinas concludes, is that God's proper effect (i.e., absolute being), which is presupposed by all other effects, presupposes nothing else insofar as it is most universal. Thus an instrumental agent cannot be invoked otherwise something proper to the essence of creatures would be required for God to give being (i.e., create). Creatures, thus, altogether lack the power to create either through themselves or instrumentally.

To the claim that the power (*virtus*) of the maker is measured by the thing made, and because creatures are finite, only a finite power is required to create them, Aquinas responds that we must consider not only the substance of the thing made, but also the mode in which it is made.³⁹ A greater heat heats not only more, but more quickly. What this means for creation, Aquinas claims, is that even though the creation of a finite effect does not require an infinite power, to create that effect *ex nihilo* (i.e., in its being) requires an infinite power. As Aquinas has argued previously, creatures lack such infinite power and thus are unable to create. To overcome the threshold from nothingness into being,

³⁹ “Ad tertium dicendum quod virtus facientis non solum consideratur ex substantia facti, sed etiam ex modo faciendi, maior enim calor non solum magis, sed etiam citius calefacit. Quamvis igitur creare aliquem effectum finitum non demonstret potentiam infinitam, tamen creare ipsum ex nihilo demonstrat potentiam infinitam. Quod ex praedictis patet. Si enim tanto maior virtus requiritur in agente, quanto potentia est magis remota ab actu, oportet quod virtus agentis ex nulla praesupposita potentia, quale agens est creans, sit infinita, quia nulla proportio est nullius potentiae ad aliquam potentiam, quam praesupponit virtus agentis naturalis, sicut et non entis ad ens. Et quia nulla creatura habet simpliciter potentiam infinitam, sicut neque esse infinitum, ut supra probatum est, relinquatur quod nulla creatura possit creare.” *ST I*, q. 45, a. 5, ad 3.

even the most miniscule finite effect presupposes an infinite power. Aquinas thus would agree with Suarez that the mode of the making (*modus faciendi*) must be taken into account just as much as the substance of the thing made (*substantia facti*). However, whereas Suarez emphasizes a creature's inability to actualize *ex nihilo* an essence due to its inability to confer essential actuality to nothingness (i.e., an absence of essential potentiality), Aquinas would stress that the very actuality needed is something altogether non-essential to any being, not because it is accidental (*pace* Avicenna), but because it is supra-essential.⁴⁰ To overcome the gap between being and nothingness, infinite power is necessary for the very reason that it is extra-essential: the currency of essential power, no matter how great, finds exchange and measure only in proportion to preexisting potency, and no matter how large its surplus, it cannot overcome nothingness "because nothingness exceeds the scale of essential potency" (...*quia nulla proportio est nullius potentiae ad aliquam potentiam*) and cannot be measured in an economy that already presupposes being's (*esse's*) overcoming of nothingness.

In summation, we can say that the emergence of beings from out of nothingness through the creative act brings about a participation in God whereby creatures *liken* or *assimilate* themselves to the first and perfect act of being. Such assimilation is made possible by God's exemplarity (that is, as exemplary cause), but made actual by his legislation of certain similitudes *in re* (through the efficient cause of the divine will). Creation is made to be *like God*, and yet remains *unlike him* insofar as any creature must participate its most fundamental act of being. The *actus essendi* is the act of assimilation and marks a radical otherness on the part of creatures to their participated *esse*. God, as

⁴⁰ *DM* 31.3. Suarez states the actuality of an actual essence, as distinct from a potential essence, stems not from the addition of *esse* (or *esse existentiae*), but from its being an essence. A potential essence is not an essence (but only something *potential*), and thus lacks *essential actuality*.

the *total plenitude of being*, actuates the being of everything else through the creative act whereby creatures come to participate being and partake of this existential plenitude. Creatures participate in *ipsum esse subsistens* and thus assimilate themselves to the first act through participation. God is obviously the efficient cause of being for all creatures, but in what sense do they too have being? That is, through their assimilative participation in God whose being is un-shareable, does God *himself (ipse)* come to constitute *their* being? Or do they realize and exercise their own act and power of being outside of God's conservation and concurrence? If we are to crack the code of Aquinas's existential metaphysics, we must determine whether *esse* provides more than an "extrinsic denomination" of the being of creatures or whether "*esse*" when applied to *entia creata* refers only to their relation to *ipsum esse subsistens* designating nothing intrinsic to them.⁴¹

Section 3: God as the Formal *Esse* of Creatures?

In *SCG* I.26, Aquinas introduces an important polemic against those unnamed individuals who maintain "the heresy"⁴² that God is the formal *esse* of all things.⁴³ Such a heretical claim at first might seem to be consistent with what follows from Aquinas's argument that only God has *esse* from himself, that is, God's essence is *esse*. If things

⁴¹ For a discussion of this problem, see Introduction to Chapter II above.

⁴² According to Gilson, such a view was condemned in 1210. Gilson identifies the targets of contemporary followers of the teachings of the ninth-century Neoplatonic philosopher John Scotus Erigena (e.g., Amaury of Bene and the "Amauricians"). Amaury taught God to be all things. Etienne Gilson, *Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 240-241. In *ST* I. q. 3. a. 8. resp. Aquinas states: "Alii autem dixerunt Deum esse principium formale omnium rerum. Et haec dicitur fuisse opinio Almarianorum." The "Almariani" of *ST* seem to be one and the same as the "Amauricians" discussed by Gilson and unnamed in *SCG*.

⁴³ Although the basic sense of both accounts is the same, the *Contra Gentiles* version treats God as the *formal esse of things*, whereas *Summa Theologiae* treats God as the *formal principle of things*. Due to its more explicit concern with the question of *esse*, and its more sustained argument against "misinterpretations" of existential participation, the *Contra Gentiles* account will serve as the primary focus in what follows. See also *In I Sent.* d. 8, q. 1, a. 2, sol.

other than God lack *esse* from themselves, then they must receive it from somewhere else. This means that creatures must participate in the divine *to be* (i.e., *ipsum esse subsistens*), if they are to have *being* at all, which they cannot receive from their essences. But if creatures participate the divine *esse* for their own *esse*, and if God's proper being somehow constitutes created beings' own *actus essendi*, does this not make God their formal *esse*, which is what the heresy claims?

The obvious problem with such a view, for Aquinas, is that it leads to pantheism: if all beings partake of God's being, then all things would be identical with God in some way. For creatures *to be*, they would have *to be God*. Although God is the *efficient cause* of *esse* in all beings (i.e., through creation, conservation, and concurrence), Aquinas must refute any suggestion that God's *esse* forms a part of the *esse* of created beings. Otherwise God himself (*ipse*) would be made communicable and divisible as a part of creation, thus compromising his radical self-identity.

Aquinas rejects the Amaurician view on the grounds that if God were the formal *esse* of all things, God and creatures could not differ in *esse*, but would have to differ some other way.⁴⁴ They would agree in being because their being would be formally derived from divine being, as each instantiation of a form derives from the form itself. Thus, if they are to differ at all, they must differ according to added difference or through the accrual of *esse* to diverse natures. Neither alternative can explain the diversity of beings, however, because the former would require *esse* to be a genus to which additions could

⁴⁴ "Res ad invicem non distinguuntur secundum quod habent esse: quia in hoc omnia conveniunt. Si ergo res differunt ad invicem, oportet quod vel ipsum esse specificetur per aliquas differentias additas, ita quod rebus diversis sit diversum esse secundum speciem: vel quod res differant per hoc quod ipsum esse diversis naturis secundum speciem convenit. Sed primum horum est impossibile: quia enti non potest fieri aliqua additio secundum modum quo differentia additur generi, ut dictum est. Relinquitur ergo quod res propter hoc differant quod habent diversas naturas, quibus acquiritur esse diversimode. Esse autem divinum non advenit alii naturae, sed est ipsa natura, ut ostensum est. Si igitur esse divinum esset formale esse omnium, oporteret omnia simpliciter esse unum." *SCG* I.26.

be made and the latter would divide divine *esse* from the separate nature to which it accrues. Aquinas already has rejected both possibilities.⁴⁵

The former explanation, which would treat “being” as a genus, would require some difference to be added to being, whereby distinct species would be constituted. One might think created/uncreated, finite/infinite, potential/actual, and so forth could serve in such a differential capacity, thereby give rise to two distinct species of being (i.e., finite being and infinite being). Against such a treatment of being as a genus, Aquinas issues the longstanding Parmenidean consequence of dividing being: any difference would have to be included in the genus—and thus unable to divide it. Otherwise it would be outside the genus, but something not included in the genus of being would be nothing.⁴⁶ Either

⁴⁵ SCG I.25 and 22, respectively.

⁴⁶ Cf. Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I d. 3, p. 1, qq. 1, 2, and 3. Here we find Scotus’s argument for the univocity of being and “finite/infinite” as distinct modes of a single univocal transcendental concept. Thus, everything that is has the modification of being either finite or infinite. Such modifications, he argues, are not attributes or accidents, but as intrinsic modes marking grades of perfection: just as a certain intensity of whiteness is not said to constitute a really distinct addition to whiteness in itself (i.e., because all real instances of whiteness have *some* intensity of whiteness) as would “visible,” so too finite and infinite are modally distinct (i.e., less-than-real) intensities of being. Thus, they need not be differences external to being and thereby nothing, as posed by Parmenides. What is important to note is that “being” is not a genus for Scotus and yet between its distinct modifications it remains a single concept (*ratio*). This is of central importance in demonstrations for the existence of God against treating being as analogical (e.g., Aquinas) or equivocal (e.g., Henry of Ghent), which Scotus maintains cannot demonstratively move between the two concepts without fallaciously importing an extraneous concept. I will return to this issue below. See Chapter VI Section 1. In an excellent discussion of Scotus’s larger role in the transition from scholasticism to modern and post-modern philosophy, Catherine Pickstock assesses the changes that result with such a concept of being. Instead of thinking of the abstraction to being as an elevation of the mind (the ascent from the finite to the infinite), such abstraction *empties* but no longer *elevates*. Being is no longer the most exalted concept, but the most common. Above, I discussed Joseph Owens’s claim that scholasticism inherited two concepts of being (i.e., being as most common and being as most perfect), neither of which they could accept wholesale. Pickstock argues that Scotus puts forth the empty commonality of being at the expense of a certain transcendent richness of being that can only be imitated by finite creatures. Such emptiness means that being can even be thought without God: even though every being is either finite or infinite, we can know something as a being without knowing whether it is finite or infinite. The ability to think a being independent of its causes and all other realities, “tends to encourage,” Pickstock argues, both epistemological and political atomism. Such atomism is at odds with a “space of participation.” See: Catherine Pickstock, “Duns Scotus,” 545-553; Also see the final paragraph of Section VII, p.64 below. On a similar note, the treatment of God and creatures both as *beings* has led some such as J-L Marion to charge Scotus’s thought as *onto-theo-logy*: being for Scotus can be thought in terms of entity; even God becomes merely an *infinite* entity, but not something radically transcendent, or to put in Marion’s term “God without being.” See Jean-Luc Marion, “Thomas Aquinas and Onto-Theo-Logy,” 47-48.

possibility leaves being indivisible thereby consuming all distinctions—and most especially between God and creatures—within the genus of being.

The other possibility for treating God as the formal *esse* of beings would be to explain their diversity of being (*esse*) through an accrual (*acquiritur*) of divine being to their diverse natures. Thus, they would agree in their being—for in this they do not disagree, Aquinas states—but differ in their distinct natures. Thus, being (*esse*) would differ between this and that being insofar it accrues to (at the very least) distinct individuals if not members of distinct species. The problem with this approach, however, is that divine *esse* cannot accrue to any nature because—as shown in both *SCG* I.22 and *ST* I q.3, a.4.—God’s *esse* cannot be other than his nature. “Accrual” signifies a non-identity between *esse* and essence that has already been procluded. Such a non-identity would rupture the *ipseity* of divine being, an *ipseity* necessary to ground the causal lineage of being.⁴⁷ Thus, the *esse* that is divided through its accrual to diverse participants—as discussed in reference to *De Ente*—cannot be *ipsum esse subsistens*.

In the subsequent argument against the same position, Aquinas utilizes God’s status as a first (i.e., *per se*) *necessary* cause to disprove the heresy.⁴⁸ A principle must be prior to that which it *principiates* because the *principiated* is not without its principle.⁴⁹ He argues that being in certain things has something as its principle (*principium essendi*),

⁴⁷ We should take note of the conclusion Aquinas draws, however, because he argues merely the conditional “if God were formal *esse*, everything would be absolutely one,” *not that* such is altogether impossible. Even though such a conclusion that everything is God runs contrary to the faith, such an argument does not prove the conclusion to be impossible.

⁴⁸ “Amplius. Principium naturaliter prius est eo cuius est principium. Esse autem in quibusdam rebus habet aliquid quasi principium: forma enim dicitur esse principium essendi; et similiter agens, quod facit aliqua esse actu. Si igitur esse divinum sit esse uniuscuiusque rei, sequetur quod Deus, qui est suum esse, habeat aliquam causam; et sic non sit necesse-esse per se. Cuius contrarium supra ostensum est.” *SCG* I.26. For his argument for God as a first *necessary* being, see: “the third way” of *ST* I, q. 2, a. 3, resp. And *SCG* I.15.

⁴⁹ King notes that Scotus coins this neologism “*principiare*.” Peter King, “Scotus on Metaphysics” in *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, ed. Thomas Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 46. A principle stands in relation to a cause as genus to species. In this passage, Aquinas does not seem to clearly distinguish between the two.

which Aquinas enumerates as both form and agent: the former that makes them be what they are and the latter that makes them be in act. With such “certain things,” Aquinas refers to his earlier discussion of contingent beings (i.e., those subject to generation and corruption), whose nature equally relates to the contraries “being and not-being.” Here he had argued that due to such contingency of being and to avoid infinite regress, the being of hylomorphic beings must accrue from a cause having necessary being, which he subsequently shows can either be through another (i.e., as in the case of immaterial beings) or through itself (i.e., God as first necessary cause).⁵⁰ In terms of his argument against the Amaurician heresy, if God were the formal *esse* of such things, then for things that require a principle to be in act, God as their *esse* would also require a separate principle, which would make God caused. Instead, as Aquinas has argued, God is *unprincipiated*, or “anarchic,” insofar as he grounds the entire economy of all principles. If divine *esse* were collapsed into *esse commune*, such that God were the formal *esse* of each thing, God himself would have a principle and no longer be *per se* necessary. He would be subject to (i.e., *principiated* by) something else—even if he were his own principle as “*causa sui*”—and thereby without such a principle, he would not be.⁵¹ To ground and to principiate the community of beings, the grounding principle must “except” itself from the order which it founds.⁵² We witness the role of such transcendent exceptionality in Aquinas’s “exegesis” of Dionysius’s *Celestial Hierarchy*.

⁵⁰ SCG I.15. Concerning Aquinas’s understanding of necessity as pertaining to necessary beings *ab alio*, see Section 5 below.

⁵¹ Aquinas has already rejected such a conclusion in *the third way* of *ST* and *SCG* I.15. This means that if the formal *esse* of anything (e.g., this human) were God, then because this human has a principle that is prior to it in nature (e.g., humanity) whereby it can be in act as this human, then the principle of humanity also causes God (as the *esse* of this human).

⁵² On this matter, Marion states: “For Descartes, it will henceforth be the divine essence that will play the role of cause for the divine existence, at the risk, at least implicit, of only existing at the price of the transcendence of its irreducible *esse*. But the stake also amounts to the dispute with (or the confirmation of)

Seeking next to identify of the source of this Amaurician error, which has often found ground in authoritative texts such as *Celestial Hierarchy*, Aquinas offers a defense of Dionysius's misleading claim that "the super-essential divinity is the *esse* of everything." Aquinas maintains that if God were the formal *esse* of things, he would be within them (*inter*) and not above them (*super*) as self-subsisting being.⁵³ God's *ipseity* of being would be communicable to creatures, and thereby God would not be subsisting being itself untouched by anything other than itself. As constituting a part of all beings, everything would be God. Such contiguity, let alone communication, between God and creatures would rupture both the purity of divine being as well as expose the universally grounded order of *esse commune* to self-referentiality. In terms of the latter, Dionysius's cosmic hierarchy would become a flattened field in which the principle of being is merely *primum inter pares*, and not a pure actuality radically exceeding and yet grounding all subsequent actuality.⁵⁴ Thus creatures, Aquinas pleads on the author's behalf, do not

the prior decision made by Thomas Aquinas to except God from the *esse commune* and hence from *metaphysica*, since it is a matter of submitting or not to causality understood as the common feature of *esse commune*." "Thomas Aquinas and Onto-theo-logy," 58.

⁵³ "Primum est quarundam auctoritatum intellectus perversus. Invenitur enim a Dionysio dictum, IV cap. Cael. Hier.: *esse omnium est superessentialis divinitas*. Ex quo intelligere voluerunt ipsum esse formale omnium rerum Deum esse, non considerantes hunc intellectum ipsis verbis consonum esse non posse. Nam si divinitas est omnium esse formale, non erit super omnia, sed inter omnia, immo aliquid omnium. Cum ergo divinitatem super omnia dixit, ostendit secundum suam naturam ab omnibus distinctum et super omnia collocatum. Ex hoc vero quod dixit quod divinitas est esse omnium, ostendit quod a Deo in omnibus quaedam divini esse similitudo reperitur. Hunc etiam eorum perversum intellectum alibi apertius excludens, dixit in II cap. de Div. Nom., quod ipsius Dei neque tactus neque aliqua commixtio est ad res alias, sicut est puncti ad lineam vel figurae sigilli ad ceram." SCG I.26. The failure of reason to grasp God as proper *esse* without addition. This latter clarification will set up ST I q. 4 a. 1 and SCG I.27, in which Aquinas argues God is not the form of any being (i.e., nothing but God is God). This failure of reason, Aquinas points out, concerns the misapplication of creaturely specifications (i.e., specific differences) and individuations (i.e., matter and accidents) to God. The fallacious reasoning assumed that because what is common of creatures remains common without the addition of accidents, God, who is without accidents, must also be common. Such common being, however, cannot subsist apart from thought, unlike God whose very *esse* is marked by the fullness of act that excludes the addition of accidents. This very fullness of act, Aquinas argues, is God's *proper* being, which is not common.

⁵⁴ "When Aristotle says, quoting the *Iliad*, 'The rule of many is not good; let there be one ruler,' he is here designating a *primum inter pares*, not a transcendently more complete actual instance of *ούσία*. Thus it seems not at all unfair or incorrect to state that Aristotle seems not to have given serious consideration to

share in a part of God; instead when Dionysius states that divinity is the being of everything (“*divinitas est esse omnium*”) he means that a similitude of divine *esse* is found in all things deriving from God. This entails that God must be outside the order of being, although analogical traces of the creator can be found within creation. God himself remains uncommunicated and unparticipated, although he gives a similitude of himself to be participated by creatures.⁵⁵ Everything that is, is *through* divine being, but *is not* it. This difference (i.e., *through* it, but *not it*) enables God to be the efficient cause of *esse* in creatures without being their formal *esse*.

Although implicit in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas draws out this distinction (i.e., *through* it, but *not it*) more explicitly in terms of analogical causation in his *Sentences* commentary, once again on the question of “whether God is the *esse* of all things.”⁵⁶ This may not seem like an obvious move at first and requires us to unpack the exact nature of the problem (i.e., God being the *esse* of all things). A preliminary issue to note is that even if God acted univocally this would not *necessarily* entail that he also would be the formal *esse* of his effects. In the case of univocal efficient causation, such as when a human begets a human, even though both are of the same species, the begetting and the

being outside of or beyond what Aquinas would call *ens commune* or *esse commune*... Aristotle never saw fit to affirm the reality of a transcendent efficient cause of being, a cause of *esse commune* outside *esse commune*, which cause is itself *ipsum esse per se subsistence* as we find in the thought of Aquinas.” Taylor, “Aquinas, the ‘Plotinian Arabica,’” 219.

⁵⁵ See *In div. nom.*, cap. 2 lect. 3. 158 and above p. 195.

⁵⁶ “Respondeo, sicut dicit Bernardus, *Serm. IV super Cant.*, Deus est esse omnium non essentielle, sed causale. Quod sic patet. Invenimus enim tres modos causae agentis. Scilicet causam aequivoce agentem, et hoc est quando effectus non convenit cum causa nec nomine nec ratione: sicut sol facit calorem qui non est calidus. Item causam univoce agentem, quando effectus convenit in nomine et ratione cum causa, sicut homo generat hominem et calor facit calorem. Neutro istorum modorum Deus agit. Non univoce, quia nihil univoce convenit cum ipso. Non aequivoce, cum effectus et causa aliquo modo conveniant in nomine et ratione secundum prius et posterius; sicut Deus sua sapientia facit nos sapientes, ita tamen quod sapientia nostra semper deficit a ratione sapientiae suae, sicut accidens a ratione entis, secundum quod est in substantia. Unde est tertius modus causae agentis analogice. Unde patet quod divinum esse producit esse creaturae in similitudine sui imperfecta: et ideo esse divinum dicitur esse omnium rerum, a quo omne esse creatum effective et exemplariter manat.” *In I Sent.* d. 8, q.1. a 2, resp.

begotten human are really and numerically distinct. So too in causing being: if God acted as a univocal cause, this would mean that both creatures and creator would share a common, univocal *ratio essendi*, but would not be enough to conclude that God's effects would be really and numerically identical with him. This would pose a problem, but not *the* problem that God would be the formal *esse* of all things. *Esse* would in fact precede God as a genus.⁵⁷ He would remain really distinct from creatures, thus avoiding pantheism, but he would share a principle with them through their common genus, thus compromising his firstness, *per se* necessity, and simplicity.

In attempting to free God from the communal order of being, so that he remains that through which the order comes to be but not a real part of the order itself, Aquinas confronts the earlier problem of navigating between radical transcendence and immanence: it seems that the first either must be beyond being altogether in order to cause "all being" and thus not be essentially being; or the first must be a part of being and thereby either *causa sui* or cause only of beings, but not their being. If God acted as an equivocal *arche*, as Aquinas discusses in the *Sentences* commentary, he would not be the perfect causal actuality (i.e., essentially and only being) in which all else must participate, but instead something beyond being, "an *arche* without *energeia*" to use Lloyd Gerson's expression.⁵⁸ On the other hand, if the first being is merely *primum inter pares*, or "first among equals," then such an *arche* cannot account for the totality of the order *in which* it is first. As principiated by the order itself (i.e., of being), God (i.e., being + something else) still could cause all other beings, but not in their being (*esse*). This is not a problem if, as is the case with Aristotle, the *first* is called upon to provide a causal account of

⁵⁷ See, for example, SCG I.25.

⁵⁸ Gerson, "Plotinus's Metaphysics: Emanation or Creation?" 569. See also Taylor, "Aquinas, the 'Plotinian Arabica,'" 234-238.

everything subsequent to it, but not account for being as such. For Aquinas, however, the first cause as first *creative* cause must provide being to all beings. And yet, if the first itself were a *part* of such a community of being, there would be no subsistence of being, nothing would be being essentially. Being would only be an essential *part* of God's essence, but being itself (*ipsum esse*) would not subsist because nothing (i.e., not even God) would be only being. Without such subsistence of being, there would be nothing for other beings in which to participate for their being.⁵⁹

Aquinas's appeal to analogy in the *Sentences* commentary thus operates on two fronts: first, it counters the univocity of being whereby creatures and God would share in a common *ratio essendi*. Second, it maintains that God is the *esse* of all things *causally*, but not *essentially*, and furthermore as cause of all things, he acts as an analogical cause. What an analogy of being shows is that God cannot be the *esse* of creatures because they are deficient in their being and cannot share in the same *ratio essendi* as God's incommunicable *ipseity* of being insofar as such is *pure* by its own nature.⁶⁰ By arguing that God cannot act univocally such that he would communicate and disrupt his own purity of being, Aquinas thereby shows that the finite and inferior measure of being received by creatures must be other than God. God cannot be the formal *esse* of creatures because their *esse* defects from his most perfect being, thereby distancing the perfect and

⁵⁹ On this matter, Owens states: "To exercise efficient causality, being has to subsist in its primary instance. The real subsistence of being is in fact shown by tracing to its source the being found in observable things and participated by them through efficient causality. If being did not subsist, there could not be efficient causality and so no participation of being." "Diversity and Community of Being" in *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: Collected Papers of Joseph Owens, C.Ss.R.*, ed. John R. Catan (Albany: State University of New York, 1980): 106.

⁶⁰ "Praeterea, nihil habet esse, nisi in quantum participat divinum esse, quia ipsum est primum ens, quare causa est omnis entis. Sed omne quod est participatum in aliquo, est in eo per modum participantis: quia nihil potest recipere ultra mensuram suam. Cum igitur modus cujuslibet rei creatae sit finitus, quaelibet res creata recipit esse finitum et inferius divino esse quod est perfectissimum. Ergo constat quod esse creaturae, quo est formaliter, non est divinum esse." *In I Sent.* d. 8, q.1. a 2, s.c. 2.

pure *ipsum esse* from its various participants.⁶¹ Thus, reference to the pure actuality of being must be made in order to show the otherness of all derived modes of being. By arguing against a univocity of being, which would make being equally divisible between God and creatures, Aquinas also counters the charge of pantheism.

As we have seen above with Aquinas's arguments for analogy, there is nevertheless, some manner of non-reciprocal agreement, and that is between "prior and posterior" wherein the prior remains altogether untouched by the addition of the posterior. And they, in turn, proceed (*manant*) from him as their exemplary and efficient cause. God produces the *esse* of creatures, and thereby can be said to be the *esse* of all things, but he cannot be the formal *esse* of creatures as they are an imperfect similitude of himself and his *ipseity*.⁶² Creatures are through God, but he completely transcends creation and remains untouched in his perfect self-same identity. But, if we altogether remove God from the community of beings, insofar as they cannot *formally* share in his being, what formal principle explains their being?

⁶¹ Salas states: "Within the Commentary on the *Sentences* and *De veritate*, formal or exemplar causality—in which the relationship between cause and effect is one of *imitation*—operates with a particular dominance in Thomas's thought. In an effect's sharing in its cause's form—a sharing which never attains the same degree of formal similitude as the cause itself—the effect imitates its cause. As Montagnes points out though, beginning with the *Summa contra gentiles* and carried throughout the rest of the later works, for example, the *De potential Dei* and *Summa theologiae*, Thomas approaches the issue of analogy in terms of *efficient* causality; for now in the later works the relationship between a cause and its effect is rendered, more often than not, in terms of the communication of *act*." Further: "Beginning with the *Summa contra gentiles*, however, there is a marked movement away from the formalist-exemplarist direction of the early works—which, again, is not to say that there is radical reorienting with respect to Aquinas's understanding of the nature of being—towards a more existential perspective." Salas, "The Judgmental Character," 131. Throughout his work, Fabro has attempted to bring together around the notion of participation this Platonic-exemplary element of Aquinas's thought with his Aristotelian-actuality element. Against Geiger, he maintains that "participation by similitude" and "participation by composition," the former more clearly reflected in the above passage, do not mark distinct modes of participation in Thomas's thought, but a "Thomistic synthesis... which is the assimilation and mutual subordination of the couplets of act-potency and *participatum-participans* in the emergence of the new concept of *esse*" "Intensive Hermeneutics," 469.

⁶² And he argues further that God can be called "superesse" because he is not *essentially* the being in creatures. See *In I Sent.* d. 8, q.1. a 2. ad 1.

As we have discussed, Aquinas introduces *esse* to explain the existence of everything that is and to serve as the most fundamental ground of their actuality, which does not follow from their essential determinations alone.⁶³ But what exactly is this principle of being? Is it some fund of being common to all creatures (*esse commune*) or an act of being belonging to each creature (*actus essendi suum*) and intrinsically attributable to it? Either solution has the advantage that the formal *esse* of creatures, or that which explains the fact that they are, is not God, thus avoiding the aforementioned heresy of pantheism.

The problem, however, concerns the status of this principle (either *esse commune* or a creature's own act of being) and *its* existence.⁶⁴ That is, even if we posit *esse commune* as a fund of existence accounting for the being of all beings (i.e., as the formal *esse* in which all beings participate and thereby are said to be), does such a fund subsist on its own or must it too participate in something other than itself (i.e., *ipsum esse subsistens*)? Unless *it* exists through itself (*ipsum esse*), an untenable position, it must have an account of its formal being, which merely displaces the original problem one step further down the explanatory line. The same is true of an *actus essendi* proper to each creature: does its own proper act of being exist through itself or another? And if through another, then what explains the *actus essendi*? Thus, we face the problem of being by extrinsic denomination raised above.⁶⁵

According to such extrinsic denomination, what explains the being of creatures is their participation in *ipsum esse subsistens*, just as, for example, "health" extrinsically denominates medicine or exercise insofar as each reflects the health of an animal (i.e., its

⁶³ Such was the early recognition of *De Ente* and was further developed in other contexts of his corpus.

⁶⁴ Stephen Menn states the problem thusly: "Whenever X is a contingent being, X exists through the existence of X, which is something other than X. But the existence of X also exists. Does it exist through a further existence and so *ad infinitum* [...]?" See Menn, "Metaphysics: God and Being," 160.

⁶⁵ See Chapter III Section 3 above and Conclusion.

intrinsic denomination). Thus, what is most actual to any being is something extrinsic to it, and *its* most fundamental perfection is God. Such an account evacuates the explanatory power of *esse* as it indicates nothing about the thing and its existence, but instead refers to an extrinsic perfection. “*Esse*” thereby would no longer signify any intrinsic perfection of a being that distinguishes it from something lacking existence. On the other hand, and in agreement with essentialists such as Siger, Scotus, or Suarez, Aquinas could maintain that “*esse*” signifies nothing more than the causal status (i.e., fact of being) of an essence, namely “that is has been caused,” but such a move would be to deprive existentialism of any ground.⁶⁶

By looking further at the relation of *esse commune* and *actus essendi* to *ipsum esse subsistens*, and what explanatory power the former hold apart from the latter, we can find an answer to what Aquinas means by “participation in *esse*,” central to his account of creation. I will argue that without reference to the former, the latter relapses into essentialism whereby “*esse*” signifies nothing more than the thing itself without capturing a distinct extra-essential perfection. However, when reference is made to *ipsum esse subsistens*, the meaning of *esse* for creatures becomes eclipsed to the point of altogether undermining the original impetus for the existential turn. Thus, Aquinas faces this double bind of either relapsing into essentialism or depriving creatures of existential actuality.

⁶⁶ Fabro states: “But since the essence of a creature has also its own participated act of being (*actus essendi*), its actualization is not merely a relation of extrinsic dependence; rather, it is based on the act of *esse* in which it participates and which it preserves within itself and is the proper terminus of divine causality” “Intensive Hermeneutics,” 482. See also: “Nonetheless, Thomas hotly denies that the *esse* of creatures is God. God is not *esse*-in-general (*esse commune*): he is ‘just *esse*,’ but not all *esse* is God. Both God and *esse*-in-general are ‘*esse* without addition,’ but differently (q. 3, a. 4, ad 1) [...]” Menn, “Metaphysics: God and Being,” 161.

Section 4: The Ambiguities of Participation in *Esse*

As has been seen, *esse commune* is the fullness of created being indifferent to any manner of being (*modus essendi*) in such a way that does not preclude such determinations as does *ipsum esse subsistens*.⁶⁷ And yet, *esse commune* is nothing apart from its distinct members who participate being. In his argument dissociating *ipsum esse subsistens* from *esse commune*, Aquinas states that since all commonality exists only in the intellect and is derived from particular things, the multiple individuals of which it is predicated, then *esse* as the most common of all would only subsist *in intellectu* but not *in re*.⁶⁸ Thus, if God who is his *esse* were *esse commune*, then he too would exist only in the intellect. Aquinas has already argued against such a conclusion, which would limit God's *esse* to the intellect.⁶⁹ Aquinas here employs a moderate realism in order to argue that as common, *esse commune* has no subsistence of its own apart from its conception *in intellectu*, thus adding nothing in reality (*in rerum natura*) over and above the *entia* themselves. Beings (*entia*) logically participate in *esse commune*, but as something existing only in the intellect, *esse commune* does not contribute any extra perfection in addition to what the beings themselves already contain.

More than showing God to be something outside the intellect and not *esse commune*, this argument reveals the emptiness of *esse commune* as a principle by itself. Without *ipsum esse subsistens* as the efficient cause of its fund, and without those being to which

⁶⁷ See *ST I* q. 3, a. 4, ad 1.

⁶⁸ "Adhuc. Quod est commune multis, non est aliquid praeter multa nisi sola ratione: sicut animal non est aliud praeter Socratem et Platonem et alia animalia nisi intellectu, qui apprehendit formam animalis expoliata ab omnibus individuantibus et specificantibus; homo enim est quod vere est animal; alias sequeretur quod in Socrate et Platone essent plura animalia, scilicet ipsum animal commune, et homo communis, et ipse Plato. Multo igitur minus et ipsum esse commune est aliquid praeter omnes res existentes nisi in intellectu solum. Si igitur Deus sit esse commune, Deus non erit aliqua res nisi quae sit in intellectu tantum. Ostensum autem est supra Deum esse aliquid non solum in intellectu, sed in rerum natura. Non est igitur Deus ipsum esse commune omnium." *SCG I.26*.

⁶⁹ See *SCG I.11*.

it is common, as itself nothing outside existing things (*praeter omnes res existentes*), *esse commune* does not provide a separate principle by which to account for the being of beings.⁷⁰ Admittedly, one finds Neoplatonic vestiges in Aquinas's treatment of *esse commune*, as the first emanation following the One and itself a reality (*hypostasis*) apart from the multiplicity deriving from it. But despite such vestiges, *esse commune* does not subsist for Aquinas apart from its inherence in individual beings. The being's participation in *esse commune* is only on the order of logical participation (e.g., Socrates in humanity), not adding existential perfection over and above essential determinations.

This seems to suggest that between *esse commune* and individual created beings, there can only be a "less-than-real" distinction insofar as the former does not exclude the latter determinations, but remains indifferent to them. *Esse commune* does not subsist on its own apart from various *modi essendi* (i.e., essential determinations), although in itself specifying no single mode in particular. Such specification comes from the divine intellect as the ground of exemplarity, having preordained the best possible order. The divine will, however, funds such an order with *esse commune*, with "*commune*" signifying the grounding of beings through creation and conservation, which allows for them to remain in presence, a dynamic act apprehensible only through judgment. Unlike with *ipsum esse subsistens*, which cannot be divided and can only be participated, if the

⁷⁰ Some may argue that *for us*, an understanding of a creature's participation in *esse commune* precedes an understanding of its participation in *ipsum esse subsistens*—even though *per se* the former depends on the latter. That is, an understanding of participation in *esse commune* is first in the order of discovery. Although this may be the case, without reference to a creature's *having been created*, a reference to the existential plenitude of the giver of *esse*, "participation in *esse*" implies only logical participation, as a runner "participates" in to run. The understanding could not grasp what perfection had been added over-and-above the already conceived essential perfections and array of possible accidents of a given substance. This move beyond essence, as argued above, can only be glimpsed by accounting for a creature not in terms of its essential determinations, but in terms of the order of efficient causes *by which* it has come to be, an account that ultimately terminates in a self-subsistence of being (*ipsum esse subsistens*). See Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 117, 130-131; and "Metaphysics," 98. See also Chapter I Sections 3-4, and Chapter II Section 1 above.

esse participated by creatures and signifying their actual existence means *esse commune*, then it seems that creatures need not really participate such *esse* at all. As we saw above with Siger of Brabant, at most one can speak of a logical participation in *esse commune* until *esse* has been shown to be a deeper existential perfection identifiable with *ipsum esse subsistens*, instead of the most extensive and abstract of all concepts.⁷¹

If *esse commune* cannot be an independent source of causal actuality apart from the individual *esse* of each being, we must ask whether each being's own intrinsic act of being instead serves as its formal *esse*. That would mean that each thing *is* through its own *actus essendi*. Even though such an act requires a cause outside itself, namely *ipsum esse subsistens*, for each being such an act accounts for that thing's *own being*. And when Aquinas speaks of "participation in *esse*," at least in part he means that a being participates in an act really distinct from its own essence, but an act with which it is composed and is proper to it.

One of the strongest claims for this reading can be found in the following passage where Aquinas seems to provide each thing with *its own* act of being. He states:

[...] quia nihil ponitur in genere secundum esse suum, sed ratione quidditatis suae; quod ex hoc patet, quia esse uniuscuiusque est ei proprium, et distinctum ab esse cuiuslibet alterius rei; sed ratio substantiae potest esse communis: propter hoc etiam philosophus dicit, quod ens non est genus.⁷²

The "*esse*" of which Aquinas here speaks is not the *esse commune* discussed above, and most certainly not the *esse subsistens* of God, but an act proper to each thing (*esse uniuscuiusque est ei proprium*) and distinct from the *esse* of others. This seems to suggest that each thing is distinguished from others according to its *esse*. Each thing has *its own*

⁷¹ See Chapter I Section 3 above.

⁷² *De Pot.* q. 7, a. 3. resp. The question asks whether God is contained in a genus. As Aquinas argues further, because God is "being itself" he cannot be in a genus.

act of being and, in relation to this act, there is a *proportionality* to God: i.e., this being is to its *actus essendi* as God is to God's *actus essendi*. Creatures do not directly imitate God—and thus analogy of similitude is not the primary mode of explaining creatures' relation to God—but instead there is proportionality between their relation to their being, and God's relation to God's being. Thus, we could conclude that such an intrinsic act of being serves as the formal *esse* of each thing, thereby avoiding the aforementioned threat of identifying such formal *esse* with God.

This would mean that each thing enjoys its own act of being separate and distinct from every other thing, and more importantly distinct from God's subsisting being. With the generation of each new substance, an accompanying act of being would follow. Likewise, with its corruption, its act of being would expire. Thus, in addition to the essential determinations that make possible each new substance, an existence proper to it must accompany its subsistence so that it can pass the threshold of nothingness. Such an act proper to each being thereby explains the formal being of everything that is. Each thing participates its own created *esse* by which it formally is able to be.⁷³ The stress on

⁷³ As with the passage from *De Potentia*, each being's intrinsic *actus essendi* formally accounts for its being. In *In I Sent.* d. 29, q. 5, art. 2, resp., Aquinas again raises this issue of each thing having its own *esse* by which it formally is and which is diverse from the *esse* of other things. The explanatory "by which" of each thing's being is predicated upon the one divine *esse* "by which" everything is. He states: "Respondeo dicendum, quod, sicut dictum est, ratio veritatis in duobus consistit: in esse rei, et in apprehensione virtutis cognoscitivae proportionata ad esse rei. Utrumque autem horum quamvis, ut dictum est, reducatur in Deum sicut in causam efficientem et exemplarem; nihilominus tamen quaelibet res participat suum esse creatum, quo formaliter est [m.e.], et unusquisque intellectus participat lumen per quod recte de re iudicat, quod quidem est exemplatum a lumine increato. Habet etiam intellectus suam operationem in se, ex qua completur ratio veritatis. Unde dico, quod sicut est unum esse divinum quo omnia sunt, sicut a principio effectivo exemplari, nihilominus tamen in rebus diversis est diversum esse, quo formaliter res est; ita etiam est una veritas, scilicet divina, qua omnia vera sunt, sicut principio effectivo exemplari; nihilominus sunt plures veritates in rebus creatis, quibus dicuntur verae formaliter." Thus, just as the light of each created intellect, by which it correctly judges concerning a thing (*de re*), is exemplified by the uncreated light, so too the created *esse* of each thing is exemplified by the one divine *esse* which is their cause. This means that each thing has its own act of being apart from the being of God. See also *SCG* II.53. "In quocumque enim inveniuntur aliqua duo quorum unum est complementum alterius, proportio unius eorum ad alterum est sicut proportio potentiae ad actum: nihil enim completur nisi per proprium actum [m.e.]. In substantia autem intellectuali creata inveniuntur duo: scilicet substantia ipsa; et esse eius, quod non est ipsa substantia,

“formally” places emphasis on each being having its own proper act of being by which it is, despite God standing as the ultimate source of all being (i.e., the efficient creative cause). Otherwise, it would depend formally on God’s incommunicable being and thereby either be God or not be at all.

The question remains that if each thing has its own *esse*, by which it formally is, diverse from the *esse* of other things, what explanatory power does “*esse*” hold as that which makes actual an actually existing thing? If something’s “act of being” is meant to provide a formal account of something’s being anything at all, answering the question of what enables this individual *to be*, then we must ask what accounts for it? Thus, even if “act of being” were used to explain something’s “power of being” (*virtus essendi*), and served as the power by which something persists in act, a further issue needs to be addressed: does the power of being reside within creatures themselves and arise through their effective exchange with one another (i.e., generation and corruption) or must they appeal—even in their limited acts of being—to their unlimited source of creation and conservation? That is, can Aquinas uphold each thing’s *actus essendi* as a perfection proper to it as distinct from both its essence and its external efficient cause if such an act must arise outside the course of its natural causes through divine concurrence and be sustained by an *influx of* divine conservation?

The problem, it seems, is that something’s own intrinsic act of being cannot be called upon to account for its existential subsistence. Only God existentially subsists and everything else must have their subsistence enacted by God through creation and

ut ostensum est. Ipsum autem esse est complementum substantiae existentis: unumquodque enim actu est per hoc quod esse habet. Relinquitur igitur quod in qualibet praedictarum substantiarum sit compositio actus et potentiae.” Here he speaks of a substance’s *own proper* act of being, which completes the substance and with which it is composed.

conservation. Thus, to say “a creature exists through its intrinsic *actus essendi*” attributes some perfection to the constitution of the thing itself, which really belongs to it through an extrinsic relation of dependence to another (i.e., *ipsum esse subsistens*). However, if by something’s “intrinsic act of being” Aquinas means only those acts something exercises *of itself*, then this need not mean anything beyond *my exercise* of the form human as distinct from *your exercise* of the form human, the two forms being enacted distinctly by two individuals although sharing in a common specific *ratio*. Such a reading would be consistent with the claim that *forma dat esse* insofar as my being results from my form and is distinct from your being resulting from your form. This reading also can be squared with the above-cited passage, in which Aquinas discusses that nothing is placed in a genus through its *esse*. What is missing from such an account is a distinct role for an intrinsic *actus essendi* as existentially distinct from each thing’s formal constitution.

The problem with maintaining the existentialist reading, which continues to reserve such an existentially irreducible act, as we will come to see more clearly, is that *esse* fails to pinpoint a distinct existential perfection in things beyond something’s formal constitution on the one hand and God’s conserving influence on the other. If each existing creature is like a marionette possessing its own formal constitution but ultimately tied to its actuating power through existential strings (i.e., the *esse* given in creation and preserved in conservation), to demarcate *its own* act of being somewhere between the formal structure of its essential makeup and the extrinsic power *by which* it is in act seems nebulous. Reference to a creature’s intrinsic act of being becomes superfluous insofar as it always misses its mark: either it targets the creature’s essential constitution

and thus says nothing of its actual existence or it appeals to the existential act which preserves the listless shade, not its own *actus essendi* but the *actus primus et purus* as participated. Thus, each thing lacks its own act and power of subsisting existentially, but extrinsically depends upon the sustaining act of another.

Without God's abiding presence as part of the creation and conservation of every newly generated thing as a co-efficient cause, nature itself would retreat into the nothingness from which it emerges.⁷⁴ *In that same moment* as God withdraws his presence, the being ceases to be. What this entails is that *esse* when applied to creatures signifies not an intrinsic power of being in beings, but an external influx of being, which allows and continues to allow creatures to "participate being." "Nec aliter res in esse conservat, nisi in quantum eis continue influit esse."⁷⁵ Whatever *esse commune* and *actus essendi suum* may suggest in reference to a creature, "the primary import" of a creature's being always references the source of existential influx and the primary referent of being, *ipsum esse subsistens*. This seems to follow from Aquinas's definition of creation discussed above as a passive *relation* of dependence added to a creature, not an intrinsic act of its own.⁷⁶ But as Fabro has argued, for example, while it is true that God operates immediately in every agent as its "grounding Act," nevertheless Aquinas reserves a role

⁷⁴ On the question of conservation, see *De Pot.* q. 5, a. 1, resp. "Respondeo. Dicendum quod absque omni dubio concedendum est, quod res conservantur in esse a Deo, et quod in momento in nihilum redigerentur, cum a Deo desererentur. [...] Unde sequitur quod divina operatione cessante, omnes res eodem momento in nihilum deciderent, sicut auctoritatibus est probatum in argumentis sed contra." The authority cited by Aquinas in the *sed contra* is Augustine (*Genesis ad lit.*) who argues that if the ruling power of God were withdrawn, the form of creatures would cease to be and all nature would collapse. See also John Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on Creatures as Causes of Esse," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 40 (June 2000): 197-213.

⁷⁵ *ST I*, q. 104, a. 3, resp.

⁷⁶ See p. 278 above. Also: "[...] in eo quod ab altero dependet, relatio realiter invenitur, in altero vero secundum rationem tantum [...] unde in ipsa creatione non importatur aliquis accessus ad esse, nec transmutatio a creatante, sed solummodo *inceptio essendi, et relatio ad creatorem a quo esse habet; et sic creatio nihil est aliud realiter quam relatio quaedam ad Deum cum novitate essendi.*" *De Pot.* q. 3, a. 3, resp.

for the having-been-created and remaining-unannihilated creature as “an actuated act to the full extent of its metaphysical import.”⁷⁷ Such an extent of metaphysical import is exactly what remains in question and must be addressed presently.

By returning to Aquinas’s metaphor of illumination as used to explain such existential *inflowing* or communication of the incommunicable act, perhaps existential metaphysics finds the clue for salvaging an adequate role for *esse* as distinct from either something’s formal constitution or its relation to an external efficient cause. Accordingly, the *adveniens extra* of *esse* captures a presencing or advent of being as happening between, and yet irreducible to, either beings themselves or the source of such coming-into-presence. The process of creation and conservation as an influx of being operates similarly as physical illumination wherein light—as distinct from either its source or its object—*opens* the space in which objects appear. Along such lines, *esse* can be viewed as really *other than* either its eminent source or its formal recipient, but requiring both a cause by which it is given and a virtual object in which it can be received. Such a metaphor helps to avoid a *reification* of *esse* as a *third something* between God and creatures, for example, as was the case with Giles of Rome’s “reading” (or misreading) of Aquinas. Such reification of *esse* is at least in part responsible for a relapse into a metaphysics of substance (i.e., *essentialism*). *Esse* in reference to creatures can retain its dynamism only once the giving of being is thought in terms irreducible to either the giver or the recipient, that is as neither a static part of the latter’s constitution nor an extension

⁷⁷ “*Esse* is the act that constitutes the proper terminus of transcendent causality (creation, conservation) and it is by virtue of this direct causality of *esse* that God operates immediately in every agent. Hence the derivation of participated *esse* from the *esse per essentiam* is direct, and along strict metaphysical lines, as grounded act from grounding Act. In fact, the participated *actus essendi*, precisely as participated, is intrinsically dependent on God. But once it has been created, and as long as it is not being annihilated, it remains an actuated act to the full extent of its metaphysical import. It belongs therefore to God to be the cause of *esse* by virtue of his very nature.” “Intensive Hermeneutics,” 474.

of the former's over-abundant actuality. Instead, creation is the opening (*initium*) of *the world* as an ordered totality of beings whose *being* is their varied acts of participation in and dependence upon the first; or to cash out our metaphor, their borrowed luminosity insofar as they refract the light of another.

The central issue that we have been following throughout this chapter is how to understand creation as participation in being (*esse*) in a way that neither deprives creatures of a real act of being nor communicates God's own being to creatures. Although Aquinas often discusses a creature's participation in *esse commune* and also its own *actus essendi*, without an appeal to *ipsum esse subsistens*, or to invoke Fabro's terms the "grounding Act," such participation remains existentially vacuous: To speak of a creature's participation in its own *actus essendi* formalizes such an act, making it really identical to a substance's essential perfection; whereas to speak of its participation in *esse commune* renders *esse* void, insofar as such communality contributes nothing over and above the beings themselves. In thinking together these three elements of participation in terms of the metaphor of illumination, however, we can appreciate the distinctly *existential* element of the created universe, or "world," as the irreducible space wherein beings emerge as determined by an essential intelligibility. But how far can this metaphor go in sustaining an existential reading that does not collapse a creature's *esse* into "the borrowed light of another?"

If the existential reading of Aquinas is to hold, *esse* must be thought as an act in the verbal sense, and not a state in the adjectival or participial sense. As both Gilson and Fabro have taken pains to show, a *static* conception of *esse* petrifies the *dynamic* activity into an extension of the substance itself, failing to capture being-in-act at the core of

every being differentiating it from mere essential possibilities.⁷⁸ And yet, does Aquinas's metaphor of illumination allot enough dynamism of act to creatures themselves or do they remain mere *reflections* of their grounding Act?

Section 5: The Illuminating Light of Being

As has been discussed, the metaphor of illumination often serves to buttress Aquinas's explanation of the diffusion of *esse* to creatures. As early as *De Ente*, we encountered Aquinas's use of this metaphor as a means of explaining that which happens upon something from outside its essence and thus is received in an accidental (i.e., incidental) way. And, as the metaphor suggests, beings *reflect* the radiance of divine being and yet themselves do not possess such. This seems to leave creatures with little in the way of "ontological density" apart from God.⁷⁹ However, Gilson assures us that such errors of misrepresentation, although numerous, are misguided: "Thomistic philosophy, in which the creature is nothing and does nothing without God, is set off against any teaching which would refuse to confer upon second causes the full share of being and efficacy to which they are entitled."⁸⁰ Thus, we must address whether Aquinas allots a *full share of being* to secondary causes who *reflect* God's perfect share.

In discussing the conservation of being by God in *Summa Theologiae* as part of the special effects of divine government, Aquinas introduces the example of air being illuminated by the light of the sun.⁸¹ Light, when received by the air, does not enter into

⁷⁸ One point to note is that although Siger agrees that *esse* signifies the act, while *ens* signifies the habit, the two are not really distinct.

⁷⁹ For the use of this term, see Stephen L. Brick, review of *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, by Rudi A. Te Velde, *Acta Philosophica* 8 (1999): 178.

⁸⁰ Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 181.

⁸¹ In response to the question of whether God conserves creatures in being, Aquinas answers in the affirmative. He begins by discussing cases of univocal causation, whereby one thing is the cause of

the nature of the air itself, as if air were on its way to becoming a source of light. Instead, light is “participated” by the air *so long as* the source of illumination has not withdrawn its causal influence.⁸² Since the light does not have “root in the air” (*radicem in aere*),

another’s becoming (i.e., this thing becoming that thing), but not of the cause of its being. If it were the cause of the effect’s being (e.g., a human), then it would be cause of its form (and not just its *becoming* that form), and thereby *causa sui*. In natural generation, when one human begets another human, the parent is only the cause of the child’s *becoming human*, which allows the child (in being human) to survive its parents. Or in the case of artificial generation, the material becomes a building through the builder, but does not require her to conserve it being. With a cause of being, however, the cessation of the cause entails the cessation of the effect. Because hot water is hot according to the same *ratio* as its cause, whereas illuminated air merely participates the light of the sun (i.e., its cause) according to a different and lesser *ratio*, water retains heat with the cessation of fire whereas air instantly passes back into darkness. The latter exemplifies the case of with divine conservation of being. If God were to withhold his conserving influence (i.e., continual influx of being), creatures would become nothing. As Aquinas states: “Sed aliquando effectus non est natus recipere impressionem agentis secundum eandem rationem secundum quam est in agente, sicut patet in omnibus agentibus quae non agunt simile secundum speciem; sicut caelestia corpora sunt causa generationis inferiorum corporum dissimilium secundum speciem. Et tale agens potest esse causa formae secundum rationem talis formae, et non solum secundum quod acquiritur in hac materia, et ideo est causa non solum fieri, sed essendi. Sicut igitur fieri rei non potest remanere, cessante actione agentis quod est causa effectus secundum fieri; ita nec esse rei potest remanere, cessante actione agentis quod est causa effectus non solum secundum fieri, sed etiam secundum esse. Et haec est ratio quare aqua calefacta retinet calorem, cessante actione ignis; non autem remanet aer illuminatus, nec ad momentum, cessante actione solis. Quia scilicet materia aquae susceptiva est caloris ignis secundum eandem rationem qua est in igne, unde si perfecte perducatur ad formam ignis, retinebit calorem semper; si autem imperfecte participet aliquid de forma ignis secundum quandam inchoationem, calor non semper remanebit, sed ad tempus, propter debilem participationem principii caloris. Aer autem nullo modo natus est recipere lumen secundum eandem rationem secundum quam est in sole, ut scilicet recipiat formam solis, quae est principium luminis, et ideo, quia non habet radicem in aere, statim cessat lumen, cessante actione solis. Sic autem se habet omnis creatura ad Deum, sicut aer ad solem illuminantem. Sicut enim sol est lucens per suam naturam, aer autem fit luminosus participando lumen a sole, non tamen participando naturam solis; ita solus Deus est ens per essentiam suam, quia eius essentia est suum esse; omnis autem creatura est ens participative, non quod sua essentia sit eius esse. Et ideo, ut Augustinus dicit IV super Gen. ad Litt., *virtus Dei ab eis quae creata sunt regendis si cessaret aliquando, simul et illorum cessaret species, omnisque natura concideret*. Et in VIII eiusdem libri dicit quod, *sicut aer praesente lumine fit lucidus, sic homo, Deo sibi praesente, illuminatur, absente autem, continuo tenebratur.*” *ST I*, q. 104, a. 1, resp.

⁸² Aquinas argues that light is not the substantial form of the sun because what is the substantial form of one thing cannot be the accidental form of another. Although it may seem that light is not really a quality of illuminated air, but instead merely something with intentional being, Aquinas argues otherwise. Thus light is not the substantial form of the sun, but a quality following upon the substantial form, just as heat is an active quality (but not the substantial form) of fire. Although light does not remain in air once its source has withdrawn, nevertheless light is a quality of air. The difference between such a quality that temporarily remains (e.g., heat in water) and one that vanishes immediately upon the withdrawal of its source concerns the mode in which the subject receives a quality: sometimes its matter perfectly receives the substantial form, and then the qualities consequent upon such a form are firmly rooted (*firmiter stabilitur etiam qualitas consequens formam*); sometimes the matter receives the substantial form imperfectly, and, before the patient returns to its natural state (e.g., water to cold), the qualities (e.g., heat) of the substantial form follow; and sometimes the matter is not transmuted toward the substantial form at all (e.g., light in air), and thus the qualities immediately disappear when the cause recedes. See *ST I*. q. 67, a. 3, resp and ad 1. His discussion of matter in reference to conservation of being in *De Potentia* (q. 5, a. 1, resp.) verges on thinking of the power of matter yet stops short. He argues that matter can be in a disposition unsuitable to

when the action of the sun ceases, the air returns to darkness. Water or iron, for example, can receive heat according to the same *ratio* as their cause and remain hot for some time after the cause ceases, returning to their original states due only to their matter. In the case of illuminated air, however, it requires the continual influx of light in order to remain illuminated, never possessing light according to the same *ratio* as its cause. Due to the *claritas* of the cause, its perfection cannot be communicated univocally. Likewise, creatures, apart from a continual influx of divine conservation, relapse into the nothingness from which they first emerged and against which they are continually measured. Their *being* (*esse*) amounts to—if we may borrow Aquinas’s own illuminative analogy—a reflection of being, a reflection, that is, of the conserving influence of divine power without which beings would expire, retreating into the darkness at their root.

Lacking a root in being, creatures remain existentially groundless. Thus, when a creature comes to be (e.g., when a human is generated), in addition to its cause of becoming, it also requires a cause of being, which “holds it in being” (*tenet in esse*). Thus, Aquinas argues, although creatures offer a real formal contribution to the act according to *what* they are (i.e., *omne agens agit sibi simile*), that is, they inherit their essential actuality from their particular causes, God must be *at work* in every being as the universal cause of all being to ensure its existential conservation. God is most intimate to every being because insofar as *esse* is the ground of all other perfections and yet

form. He goes on, however, to maintain that it will then require something to transmute it, thereby preparing it for the reception of a form. What is interesting to note, both with this physical example of illumination and the metaphysical example of conservation, is the conspicuous absence of materiality in the explanation. Aquinas merely states that air is not made (*natus est*) to receive the light of the sun according to its complete *ratio*. Likewise, to restate another example, he does not explain why the sun *melts* wax, but *heats* clay. The diversity must find ground in the character of matter, which, however, Aquinas only treats as an empty receptacle of forms, possessing no power of its own. Its inability to receive the complete form of light, we are meant to assume, is because it falls short of the agent’s perfection. Nowhere does matter take on a power of its own either to *endure* or to *resist* the reception of such forms; instead, such a failed production is ascribed to the inferiority of the patient, its inability to reach the superiority of its cause.

something that can never be communicated to or shared by any creature, the withdrawal of the existential ground would return beings to their root of nothingness.⁸³ Just as for the becoming visible of any particular color, the sun must *give* and *conserve* (*dat et conservat*) light as the universal cause of light, so too as the abiding cause of being, if God withdrew his conservation, the effect would expire. Instead its very presencing and remaining in presence requires conservation of being, which serves as a concurring cause in all particular acts of generation.⁸⁴

What is given in giving being (*dans esse*) is not some operating power (*virtutem operandi*) entrusted to the community of beings at the beginning of creation (*a principio*), and then left unattended. Conservation means not only that God does not interfere with the procession of nature (i.e., conservation *per accidens*), but actively and immediately imparts *esse* to each being for the duration of its being (i.e., conservation *per se*). Like the power for *self*-illumination, being is an act fundamentally other to the nature of any being, and thus cannot be imparted to it, but requires a sustained influx. God thus conserves creatures in being and applies them to act, dispensing them toward the end of

⁸³ “[...] considerandum est quod Deus movet non solum res ad operandum, quasi applicando formas et virtutes rerum ad operationem, sicut etiam artifex applicat securim ad scindendum, qui tamen interdum formam securi non tribuit; sed etiam dat formam creaturis agentibus, et eas tenet in esse. Unde non solum est causa actionum in quantum dat formam quae est principium actionis, sicut generans dicitur esse causa motus gravium et levium; sed etiam sicut conservans formas et virtutes rerum; prout sol dicitur esse causa manifestationis colorum, in quantum dat et conservat lumen, quo manifestantur colores. Et quia forma rei est intra rem, et tanto magis quanto consideratur ut prior et universalior; et ipse Deus est proprie causa ipsius esse universalis in rebus omnibus, quod inter omnia est magis intimum rebus; sequitur quod Deus in omnibus intime operetur.” *ST I*, q. 105, a. 5, resp.

⁸⁴ “[...] *et* non solum est causa quantum ad fieri rerum, sed et quantum ad totum esse et durationem, quod manifestat cum dicit: *et a nullo existentium recedit*: aedificatore enim recedente, domus remanet, quia est causa domus quantum ad fieri et non quantum ad esse, sed si Deus ab effectu recederet, effectus non remaneret, quia est causa ipsius esse.” *De Div. Nom.* Cap. V, Lec. 1 631.

all their action, which is God himself (“...*conservat eas in esse, et applicat eas ad agendum, et est finis omnium actionum, ut dictum est*”).⁸⁵

Like *being visible, being itself* is an act distinct from its object (i.e., beings) and is made possible by an external influx, which cannot be simply *given* to its recipient but requires an abiding presence. Air requires an abiding presence of light to sustain its luminosity, and so too, Aquinas argues, beings requires the abiding presence of God to sustain their being.⁸⁶ And yet, if the metaphor of illumination is meant to explain what that *esse* is proper to “really existing beings” and distinguishing them from mere possibilities, Aquinas comes dangerously close to making their *esse* the inhering presence of God. If God must be present to each thing (“*Deus adsit ei*”) according to its mode of being, as Aquinas states, then it seems that God himself is that which is *adveniens extra* to its essence. This is because insofar as *esse* most fundamentally inheres in all things as that which is received by all things (i.e., receivers) as the act of all acts, even their forms, *esse* is that by which such things exist as the most foundational or grounding of all acts.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ “Praeterea, faciens dicitur esse causa operationis facti, inquantum dat ei formam qua operatur. Si igitur Deus est causa operationis rerum factarum ab ipso, hoc erit inquantum dat eis virtutem operandi. Sed hoc est a principio, quando rem facit. Ergo videtur quod ulterius non operetur in creatura operante.” *ST I*, q. 105, a. 5, arg. 3. “Ad tertium dicendum quod Deus non solum dat formas rebus, sed etiam conservat eas in esse, et applicat eas ad agendum, et est finis omnium actionum, ut dictum est.” *ST I*, q. 105, a. 5, ad 3.

⁸⁶ See Aquinas’s response to the question of whether God is in all things. He states: “Respondeo dicendum quod Deus est in omnibus rebus, non quidem sicut pars essentiae, vel sicut accidens, sed sicut agens adest ei in quod agit. Oportet enim omne agens coniungi ei in quod immediate agit, et sua virtute illud contingere, unde in VII Physic. probatur quod motum et movens oportet esse simul. Cum autem Deus sit ipsum esse per suam essentiam, oportet quod esse creatum sit proprius effectus eius; sicut ignire est proprius effectus ignis. Hunc autem effectum causat Deus in rebus, non solum quando primo esse incipiunt, sed quandiu in esse conservantur; sicut lumen causatur in aere a sole quandiu aer illuminatus manet. Quandiu igitur res habet esse, tandiu oportet quod Deus adsit ei, secundum modum quo esse habet. Esse autem est illud quod est magis intimum cuilibet, et quod profundius omnibus inest, cum sit formale respectu omnium quae in re sunt, ut ex supra dictis patet. Unde oportet quod Deus sit in omnibus rebus, et intime.” *ST I*, q. 8, a. 1, resp.

⁸⁷ “[...] dicendum quod ipsum esse est perfectissimum omnium, comparatur enim ad omnia ut actus. Nihil enim habet actualitatem, nisi inquantum est, unde ipsum esse est actualitas omnium rerum, et etiam ipsarum formarum. Unde non comparatur ad alia sicut recipiens ad receptum, sed magis sicut receptum ad recipiens. Cum enim dico esse hominis, vel equi, vel cuiuscumque alterius, ipsum esse consideratur ut formale et receptum, non autem ut illud cui competit esse.” *ST I*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3. Here, insofar as

And from this Aquinas concludes that God is in all things and most intimate to them (“*Unde oportet quod Deus sit in omnibus rebus, et intime*”), which seems to make *God himself* the being of creatures. Such an agent becomes more intimate to each recipient than the recipient itself, becoming little more than a medium of reflection.

As reflections of *ipsum esse subsistens*, however, creatures are able to imitate being, to be like being, but are not able to actually be. Unable to subsist apart from divine conservation, the actual existence of creatures is the way in which their forms attract and refract (i.e., borrow) another’s sustaining light. As we have seen, Aquinas is careful not to make God the formal *esse* of creatures. God’s essence remains uncommunicated and unparticipated.⁸⁸ And yet, that similitude of divine being participated by creatures does not reference an intrinsic act by which they *are*, but merely their relation to an extrinsic source of sustenance. Although God is not the *esse* of creatures essentially, but only causally, the explanatory work left over for *esse commune* or a creature’s own *actus essendi* (i.e., in explaining the act by which a creature *is*) becomes vacuous. For a creature *to exist* (i.e., as a similitude of being) means that it is held in being by God because *esse* can never take root in or belong to a creature.

This mimetic posture of existing, however, turns out to be very much like the posture by which fictions imitate actual things. Although referencing Henry of Ghent’s equivocity of being, Stephen Menn’s apt statement fits just as well with Aquinas’s reduction of creatures to mere *similitudes* of being. Menn states:

The diminished, parasitic *esse* of creatures consists in their being somehow related to God; but, likewise, the diminished, parasitic *esse* of a fictive being, say a goatstag,

addressing a question concerning divine perfection and responding to an objection that holds *esse* to be most imperfect (i.e., most common and receptive of everything else), Aquinas clearly means “*ipsum esse subsistens*.”

⁸⁸ See, for example, the discussion of *In div. nom.*, cap. 2 lect. 3. 158 at p. 195 above.

consists in its being somehow related to creatures (to a goat and a stag, or to the mind that imagines it). What is remarkable about God, though, is that he can give *real esse* to the objects he creates, where a human mind gives only *fictive esse* to the objects it imagines.⁸⁹

Aquinas's account of *esse* as that which distinguishes something *in re* from a mere conception *in intellectu* fails to posit a distinct perfection in creatures whereby they appear as something distinct from their fictional counterparts. The difference between a merely "possible" being and an actual being, according to Aquinas, is that the entirety of the former's being is derived from the power of another.⁹⁰ Before creation, possibles derive the entirety of their being from the divine intellect, but after creation, created intellects can also *give them being* (e.g., my understanding of the essence "phoenix"). In either case, they are beings only by extrinsic denomination because they rely on the power of another. Thus, if *esse* is meant to explain the "what more?" of actual beings, and yet creatures never emerge from out of the shadow of the influx of divine power, then it seems that actual beings are also beings only by extrinsic denomination. Granted, possibles derive their being from the divine intellect alone whereas actual beings have a relation to the influx of the divine will (i.e., creation and conservation), but structurally both are cases of *being by extrinsic denomination* because in neither case does being designate anything *intrinsic* to the creature itself. Much like the air's illumination refers to the power of the sun (i.e., that power in which it participates), to speak of something's

⁸⁹ See Menn, "Metaphysics," 163. The real and fictive being of creatures (and even *virtually possible* beings, we may add)—for example, my dog, a phoenix, and my not-yet-conceived offspring—turns out not to be a fundamental distinction, but due to different types of derivation. All three cases resemble the true sense of being (i.e., *ipsum esse subsistens*) and stand in analogical relation to it. Obviously, my dog, unlike a phoenix or my future offspring, is *out there* in the world, and not merely an object conceived in the mind, as an object of either logical or virtual possibility.

⁹⁰ *ST I*, q. 9, a. 2, resp.

esse, we are already referencing that extrinsic power *by which* it is able to receive such a perfection, “*a quo esse habet.*”

Instead of merely consigning Aquinas’s understanding of *esse* to an existential metaphysics that blends a creature’s most fundamental actuality with the power of another acting upon it (i.e., that makes its highest perfection an extrinsic relation to another), making the perfection of all perfections an extrinsic relation of dependence to another, it seems that instead we should understand the “existential incident” only as a certain moment in the opening of being (*initium essendi*), a moment overcome by essential tendencies of each actual being. This means granting both the form of something, which gives to it the being it has (*dat esse*), but also the external efficient cause, which creates and conserves such a form (i.e., God). Such a reading, however, does not require an additional existential principle, which would provide an *actus essendi* distinct from either something’s essential constitution or its conserving efficient cause.

As Aquinas explains, the form of each thing gives being (*dat esse*) to that being.⁹¹ For any creature’s form to *give being* to it, for this *to be* human or that *to be* platypus, God must actively conserve (i.e., not annihilate) such a form. Being results for each creature consequent upon its form (*esse per se consequitur formam creaturae*), *supposing*, however, the influence of divine action, just as light follows the diaphanous nature of air following the influence of the sun. Thus the *actus essendi suum* follows the form of each creature and is proper to each thing (*quia esse uniuscuiusque est ei proprium*) and distinct from the *esse* that is God. Despite functioning like a real (i.e., more than intentional)

⁹¹ To the claim that *esse* follows form in creatures, Aquinas responds: “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod esse per se consequitur formam creaturae, 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.

quality or property, like light in the air, *esse* does not belong to the nature of creatures whereby they could exercise it on their own once the source has withdrawn itself. The forms of creatures are real and so is their conservation, but the identification of a further, extra-formal *existential* actuality remains unnecessary.

In response to the objection that certain *necessary* creatures (i.e., spiritual creatures and celestial bodies) do not require conservation, insofar as their nature “keeps them from departing” (*ne abscedat*), Aquinas objects, but not on the existential grounds one might suspect. Being (*esse*), he argues, results from the form of a creature, but only given the influence of divine action. Thus, there is divine action resulting in a created form that *gives being (dat esse)* to a substance. What is left out of this account, however, is a distinct act of being for the creature. Even “*the power not to be*” in necessary beings reflects the power of God to withdraw his influence instead of a separate *actus essendi* proper to the creature. Thus, between the form of creatures and its external cause, there remains no explanatory justification for a separate *actus essendi*.

There is the static condition of its essence and the external conserving activity of its cause, but apart from the form of each thing, “*esse*” indicates nothing more than a *reflection of the latter’s activity*, the thing’s refraction of an external activity. Aquinas addresses the claim that because everything has a natural appetite to conserve its existence, and a natural appetite cannot be null and void, a thing must be able to conserve its *esse* through itself. But he responds that such an appetite for conservation must be the desire for another’s actuality: “[...] quod licet quaelibet res naturaliter appetat sui conservationem, non tamen quod a se conservetur, sed a sua causa.”⁹² Thus, to speak of “something’s *esse*,” reference is made *either* to that extrinsic source by which (*a sua*

⁹² *De Pot.* q. 5, a. 1, ad 13.

causa) it remains in being *or* to its form which gives it the being it has. The explanatory power of *actus essendi suum* by itself is a surd, voiceless in indicating the perfective act by which a creature emerges from and withstands a retreat back into sheer nothingness.

In the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas takes up this question of conservation around the necessity imparted to non-contingent creatures (i.e., creatures incapable of generation and corruption).⁹³ Although he argues nothing is owed (*debitum*) to creatures and all things depend upon the gratuitousness of the divine will, necessity can be imparted to certain creatures according to God's indebtedness to his own purposes; that is, he freely bestows certain creatures with necessity in order to fulfill the ends of the universe.⁹⁴ Such necessity is not *owed* to creatures according to an essential economy (e.g., the derived necessity of Avicennian emanation), but *given* to them through the free act of creation and sustained through conservation, or the active act of not-annihilating. A necessary thing, Aquinas argues, can have a cause of its necessity (i.e., creation and conservation) and still be necessary.⁹⁵ The meaning of "*esse*," as can be gleaned from the fact that

⁹³ *SCG* II. 30-31.

⁹⁴ For the argument against a due-ness or debt, see *SCG* II.28-29. For a further discussion of the language of "indebtedness" in Aquinas's account of creation, see Section 3 of Chapter VI below.

⁹⁵ I have preferred the term "incidental" to "contingent" with respect to *esse* because of the usage of the latter term throughout Aquinas's corpus. That is, immaterial beings are *incidental* (at least at the decisive moment of creation in which outright nothingness and subsequent annihilation is possible) even if not *contingent*. In terms of Aquinas's understanding of the pair necessity/contingent, Kenny argues that in regard to the *third way* Aquinas adopts an understanding of necessity as *in corruptibility*, unlike his earlier understanding along more Avicennian lines as impossible not to be. With regard to the latter, only God is included and thus everything else is in some sense contingent. Kenny states: "Guy Jalbert has shown that at the time of writing the *contra Gentiles* Aquinas was converted by the reading of Averroes to a doctrine of necessity different from that of Avicenna. Henceforth he defined necessity not in terms of essence and existence, but in terms of unalterability, following Aristotle's definition of the necessary as that which cannot be otherwise (*Metaphysics* Δ 1015a 34). In this sense something is necessarily the case if it cannot cease to be the case, and a being has necessary existence if it cannot cease to exist (*ScG* II, 30). Since Aquinas believed that the heavenly bodies, the human soul, and the angels were all naturally incapable of ceasing to exist, he was henceforth prepared to say that their existence was necessary and to call them necessary beings..." Anthony Kenny. *The Five Ways*, 48. Note that with such necessary beings as the heavenly bodies, the human soul, and the angels, that they are *naturally* unable not to exist. In terms of *supernatural conservation*, however, God could have decided to annihilate them, which means that they are "incidental." Below, I explore the lingering *incidental*ity with respect to annihilation and ask whether

necessary beings cannot cease to exist, need only indicate the factual status of the essence, not an extra-essential act of existence. As this argument reveals, Aquinas can grant both that form gives *esse* and also that such forms have been caused (i.e., created and conserved) without needing to introduce an additional existential principle to explain each being's *actus essendi* as distinct from either its form or from God's causal activity.

According to this argument, the *esse eius*—or the *actus essendi* proper to each thing—differs between necessary creatures (i.e., the intelligences, the soul, and the heavenly bodies), whose actuality need not conquer the contrariety of *hylic* materiality, and contingent hylomorphic beings, whose forms do not fulfill the total potency of their matter, but instead remain open to contrariety. In hylomorphic beings, which lack a *necessitas essendi*, their *virtus essendi* follows from their form's victory over and subjugation of matter. Thus, its power of being (*virtus essendi*) is limited by its materiality, thus necessitating its ultimate corruption.⁹⁶ In separate substances, which contain no potency to not-being insofar as their forms are always able to be, or in heavenly bodies, whose forms equal the perfection of their ethereal matter, they are always in *virtute essendi* through their form, according to which they exist in act (“*per eam res actu existent*”).⁹⁷ In both cases, “the full extent of its metaphysical import,” to

God's resolution to create a universe in which nothing will be annihilated “covers over” or “neutralized” the incidentality to which the existential Thomists appeal. See Chapter VI Section 3 below. For an existential reading of such matters, see Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 163-167.

⁹⁶ Gilson rejects this equation of “*actus essendi*” with “*virtus essendi*” insofar as in the latter such *virtus* is measured by and corresponds with formal intensity and does not capture the extra-essential *actus essendi*.

⁹⁷ “Ex his autem principiis, secundum quod sunt essendi principia, tripliciter sumitur necessitas absoluta in rebus. Uno quidem modo, per ordinem ad esse eius cuius sunt. Et quia materia, secundum id quod est, ens in potentia est; quod autem potest esse, potest etiam et non esse: ex ordine materiae necessario res aliquae corruptibiles existunt; sicut animal quia ex contrariis compositum est, et ignis quia eius materia est contrariorum susceptiva. Forma autem, secundum id quod est, actus est: et per eam res actu existunt. Unde ex ipsa provenit necessitas ad esse in quibusdam. Quod contingit vel quia res illae sunt formae non in materia: et sic non inest ei potentia ad non esse, sed per suam formam semper sunt in virtute essendi; sicut est in substantiis separatis. Vel quia formae earum sua perfectione adaequant totam potentiam materiae, ut sic non remaneat potentia ad aliam formam, nec per consequens ad non esse: sicut est in corporibus

reference Fabro's phrase, which a being has in the *actus* or *virtus essendi* proper to it, does not reflect some really distinct existential actuality, but instead the mere *fact* of substantial being, a fact determined by its form. *Forma dat esse*.

The forms of necessary beings are impervious to corruption, and thus do not tend toward not-being (i.e., corruption) as do the forms of hylomorphic beings, which must overcome and conquer the material element through which they are realized. In his Commentary on the *Liber De Causis*, adopting the language of the Proclus, Aquinas even refers to such necessary beings as "beingly beings" (*enter* or *existenter ens*) or those which steadfastly abide in being (*esse stans*).⁹⁸ Nevertheless, despite their steadfast abidance, they require the conservational influx of another's power. If they did not, then they would be beings *per se* (i.e., they would have *esse* through their essence), which, as we have seen, Aquinas argues is impossible.⁹⁹ Granted, the forms of both necessary and contingent beings must be produced by an extrinsic efficient cause. Nevertheless, "*esse*" denotes only the result (i.e., necessity or contingency) following from something's form once it has been produced by its cause. Form gives being (*forma dat esse*) to creatures,

caelestibus. In quibus vero forma non complet totam potentiam materiae, remanet adhuc in materia potentia ad aliam formam. Et ideo non est in eis necessitas essendi, sed virtus essendi consequitur in eis victoriam formae super materia: ut patet in elementis et elementatis. Forma enim elementi non attingit materiam secundum totum eius posse: non enim fit susceptiva formae elementi unius nisi per hoc quod subiicitur alteri parti contrarietatis. Forma vero mixti attingit materiam secundum quod disponitur per determinatum modum mixtionis. Idem autem subiectum oportet esse contrariorum et mediorum omnium, quae sunt ex commixtione extremorum. Unde manifestum est quod omnia quae vel contrarium habent vel ex contrariis sunt, corruptibilia sunt. Quae autem huiusmodi non sunt, sempiterna sunt: nisi per accidens corrumpantur, sicut formae quae non subsistunt sed esse earum est per hoc quod insunt materiae." *SCG* II. 30.

⁹⁸ "His igitur praemissis sciendum est quod haec propositio in libro Procli LXXXVIII invenitur sub his verbis: *Omne enter, vel existenter, ens aut ante aeternitatem est, aut in aeternitate, aut participans aeternitate*. Dicitur autem enter ens per oppositum ad mobiliter ens, sicut esse stans dicitur per oppositum ad moveri; per quod datur intelligi quid est quod in hoc libro dicitur *omne esse superius*, quia scilicet est supra motum et tempus." *Super lib. De cau.* Prop. II. I borrow the translation offered by Guagliardo, et al. See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, trans. Vincent A. Guagliardo, O.P., Charles R. Hess, O.P., and Richard C. Taylor (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 15.

⁹⁹ See, for example, *De Pot.* q. 5, a. 2, resp.

necessity in the case of those beings that need not conquer a recalcitrant material in order to reach essential *per-fection* and *contingency* in the case of those beings that do.¹⁰⁰

Aquinas again returns to the insight that *forma dat esse*, even though not denying that *formae* are caused by God.¹⁰¹ And certain forms, once caused, take on a necessity of being. Once God has decided to create and conserve the intelligences, which Aquinas argues are required for the perfection of the universe such that the universe as a whole

¹⁰⁰ On this matter, Fabro states: “Thus the authentic notion of Thomistic participation calls for distinguishing *esse* as act not only from essence which is its potency, but also from existence which is the *fact* of being and hence a ‘result’ rather than a metaphysical principle” Fabro, “Intensive Hermeneutics,” 470. The difference, which reflects my discussion, is the distinct contribution of *esse* as a principle rather than the mere outcome of essential determination. Gilson, for example, also distinguishes between “the state of actual existence,” which is reducible to essence (i.e., the actually existing essence) and “the act of being,” which is the proper sense of *esse*. He states: “Existence may mean either a state or an act. In the first sense, it means the state in which a thing is posited by the efficacy of an efficient or a creative cause, and this is the meaning the word receives in practically all the Christian theologies outside Thomism, particularly those of Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, Scotus, and Suarez. In a second sense, existence (*esse, to be*) points out the interior act, included in the composition of substance, in virtue of which the essence is a ‘being,’ and this is the properly Thomistic meaning of the word.” *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, 130-131. Further: “To understand this doctrine in its proper nature, it is necessary to remember that *esse*, like every verb, designates an act and not a state. The state in which the *esse* places that which receives it is the state of *ens*, that is to say, of that which is a ‘being.’” Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 34. In response to Fabro and Gilson, both of whom argue that the principle “*forma dat esse*” does not compromise the radical distinction between the order of form/essence and the order of actual existence, Te Velde argues against such an “existential” reading. Although the form cannot be the cause of itself and thus cannot *give being* in the sense of being its own efficient cause, but requires God to continually give being to it, Te Velde suggests that such a principle should be understood to mean only that the form itself is something’s determinate act of being, not that a separate extra-formal act of being is required. Form is not the same as being in the sense that it is not the ultimate act of being, which is reserved for a single being (i.e., *ipsum esse subsistens*). Rudi Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 218. Further, he argues: “The more a form is what it is, that is, the more it participates in being, the greater its unity, in the sense that it comprehends all the lower and divided forms in a higher (more unified) unity.” *Ibid.*, 253. Thus, the existential import of any being is derived from its form. See also Dewan, “Etienne Gilson,” 86-87. He too rejects Gilson’s distinction between “an *act* of being” and the essence in “a *state* of actual existence.”

¹⁰¹ In terms of *esse* as being the existential actuality of all act, cf. “This text has become famous for the almost lyrical tone in which being is declared to be most perfect of all. It sounds like a eulogy of being; being is the actuality of all acts, the perfection of all perfections. It is one of the rare places where Thomas tries to explain how he thinks being should be understood. In all its lucidity and transparency this text requires a careful interpretation. It is by no means immediately clear what Thomas means by an unusual formulation like ‘the actuality of all acts.’ In the literature one often finds these expressions being quoted rather enthusiastically without their logical structure being analyzed and without an explanation why being should be understood in this way.” Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 197. He goes on to state that: “Being is not the same as actual existence by which the essence is posited outside its causes. I think the meaning of the formula ‘actuality of all acts’ should be taken quite literally. Being is the *actualitas*—a similar expression as *humanitas*—that is, the common ‘form’ of all acts/forms signified as such, the form of act by which all acts are in fact acts.” *Ibid.*, 198-199. Being is the most formal of all forms because it is the actuality *of* the essence.

“return to its principle” (SCG II.46), their immaterial forms give them necessary being. As Aquinas states, they lack the potency to “non-being,” but instead they enjoy a necessity of being through their immaterial forms.¹⁰² “*Esse*” here signifies a fact about their essences. Thus, although their necessity has a cause, namely God’s resolve to create and eternally conserve such forms, nevertheless through their forms, the intelligences have a necessity of being. Their forms give them the power of always being (*per suam formam semper sunt in virtute essendi*). On the other hand, the reason why hylomorphic beings lack necessity of being (*necessitas essendi*) concerns the fact that their power of being (*virtus essendi*) derives from the victory of their form over their matter (*non est in eis necessitas essendi, sed virtus essendi consequitur in eis victoriam formae super materia*). Such a victory must conquer matter, but due to the non-identity between matter and form, the conquest lasts only for a time. Once the form loses its hold over the matter, and another form comes to occupy its place (e.g., when heat causes *water* to become *air*), the one form no longer gives being (*dat esse*) to the matter, but instead the new form is responsible for giving being to the same material subject. And such transformation of forms is what Aquinas means by “contingency of being.”

Once again, what must be noted is the role attributed by Aquinas to form. *Form* gives being (*dat esse*) to beings. This is not to deny that God must conserve such forms as an external efficient cause, but once he has decided to sustain such an order—in other words, to *normalize* the operations of the universe—things have being through their form. We can continue to insist upon the fact that they require the sustaining influx of their

¹⁰² “Sunt enim quaedam in rebus creatis quae simpliciter et absolute necesse est esse. Illas enim res simpliciter et absolute necesse est esse in quibus non est possibilitas ad non esse. Quaedam autem res sic sunt a Deo in esse productae ut in earum natura sit potentia ad non esse. Quod quidem contingit ex hoc quod materia in eis est in potentia ad aliam formam.” SCG II.30.

creator, but such insistence does not diminish the role of form in giving being and even less does it uncover an existential act in addition to something's form or its external cause of conservation. Instead, such insistence on the part of Existential Thomists both minimizes the actuating role of form and also drowns out the actuality of the creature behind the radiance of another insofar as each thing's highest act is its *passively* being acted upon by another. Its deepest perfection is its *relation* of dependence upon its cause.

Here we witness a tension, if not a shift, in Aquinas's existential metaphysics wherein when called upon to explain some intrinsic "property" of the creature itself, *esse* must either refer back to form or outside itself to its cause: *pace* Gilson and Fabro, there seems to be no room for the third "act" as distinct from something's essence or its grounding Act.¹⁰³ Thus, to return to our earlier question of what "*esse*" signifies in relation to creatures, the *being* intrinsic to a creature is its formal determinations whereas its extra-formal determinations is the sustaining activity of its cause.¹⁰⁴ Absent in such an account is the emergence of an existentiality distinct from either the formal structure of a creature, on the one hand, or the factual positing of an essence outside its causes, on the other. Existentially speaking, the problem of delineating an extra-essential act of being for creatures is that thinking *esse* as a creature's participation in its cause (i.e., *ipsum esse subsistens*) seems altogether to deprive a creature of *its own* power to be and fails to seize

¹⁰³ In response to Fabro and Gilson, both of whom argue that the principle "*forma dat esse*" does not compromise the radical distinction between the order of form/essence and the order of actual existence, Te Velde argues against such an "existential" reading. Although the form cannot be the cause of itself and thus cannot *give being* in the sense of being its own efficient cause, but requires God to continually give being to it, Te Velde suggests that such a principle should be understood to mean only that the form itself is something's determinate act of being, not that a separate extra-formal act of being is required. Form is not the same as being in the sense that it is not the ultimate act of being, which is reserved for a single being (i.e., *ipsum esse subsistens*). Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, 218. For the views of Fabro and Gilson, see *passim*. Further, he argues: "The more a form is what it is, that is, the more it participates in being, the greater its unity, in the sense that it comprehends all the lower and divided forms in a higher (more unified) unity." *Ibid.*, 253. Thus, the existential import of any being is derived from its form.

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter III above.

upon the actuality which distinguishes it from a mere fiction. The creature gets lost in the radiant abundance of God's causal influx, just as, to return to the example from above, the darkened air as a medium for illumination gets drowned out behind its refraction of another's brilliance (*claritas*).

What lends permanence to Aquinas's universe and makes beings more than inefficacious specters, I would argue, is not any *real existential act* imparted to them in addition to their essences or forms, but God's providential *scientia* through which he eternally degrees an order for the universe, thereby rendering an account of the seemingly incidental fact of creatures' actual existence. What this means is that although *free* in an absolute sense to do or not do anything that does not pose a logical contradiction, including annihilate beings at any point, God has decided upon a universe that most resembles his own perfection, a universe in which beings in fact fulfill a role as secondary causes, and also will not be annihilated but remain in being. In other words, *nature* (i.e., the world or universe of beings) is not a "constant substitution of God's power for the power of creatures," but instead a real and lawful exchange: beings act according to their essences with causal regularity.¹⁰⁵

Although Aquinas argues that it is impossible for God to create creatures—even necessary ones—who do not require divine conservation, and thus the first act of *providing for* creation is an immediate and *per se* conservation of their being (*esse*), such a conservational act becomes institutionalized. Due to a divine resolve, the annihilation of

¹⁰⁵Although attempting to keep open the existential dimension, Gilson expresses such a notion: "It is this constant relationship between natural effects and their second causes which prevents our supposing that there is a pure and simple substitution of God's power for theirs. For if God's action were not diversified according to the different beings in which he operates, the effects which it produces would not be diversified in the way that the things themselves are, and anything might produce anything. The existence of the laws of nature prevents our supposing that God has created beings deprived of causality." Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, 181.

creatures, or the withdrawal of the conserving influence, becomes impossible for God.¹⁰⁶ Such impossibility does not belong to the creatures themselves (i.e., whereby the analysis of a created essence would *include esse* and *preclude* not-being), but to the necessity of annihilation's opposite (i.e., conservation). Conservation is *necessary* because God has bound himself to his own providential order in which he has decreed and foresaw what he will do (i.e., not annihilate, but conserve). Thus, God is not bound by natural necessity, but by his own infallible providential insight and wisdom, in which he cannot be deceived nor "change his mind."¹⁰⁷ Considered in itself, no created nature contradicts the predicate "does not exist at all," although from the presupposition of divine foreknowledge and degree (i.e., the *scientia* of providence), God will perpetuate his holding in being of such things that he has resolved *should be*.¹⁰⁸ God's power (*potestas*) considered absolutely does not contradict acting outside the order of his providence: for example, God can "repossess being" by annihilating any or all creatures. But due to his immutability, it *becomes impossible* that he act in such a way to contradict what eternally falls under his providential order, having been established in reference to divine goodness.¹⁰⁹ Thus, not even his own absolute power can undo what the divine providential *scientia* has decreed.

¹⁰⁶ This argument transpires over Question 5, Articles 2-4 of *De Pot.* Gilson notes this connection between conservation and providence in *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 179.

¹⁰⁷ "Si vero divinam dispositionem consideremus qua Deus disposuit suo intellectu et voluntate res in esse producere, sic rerum productio ex necessitate divinae dispositionis procedit: non enim potest esse quod Deus aliquid se facturum disposuerit quod postmodum ipse non faciat; alias eius dispositio vel esset mutabilis vel infirma. Eius igitur dispositioni ex necessitate debetur quod impleatur." *SCG* II. 28.

¹⁰⁸ "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, resp.

¹⁰⁹ "Ostensum est autem in secundo quod res ipsae quae a Deo sub ordine ponuntur, proveniunt ab ipso non sicut ab agente per necessitatem naturae, vel cuiuscumque alterius, sed ex simplici voluntate, maxime quantum ad primam rerum institutionem. Relinquitur ergo quod praeter ea quae sub ordine divinae providentiae cadunt, Deus aliqua facere potest; non enim est eius virtus ad has res obligata. Si autem consideremus praedictum ordinem quantum ad rationem a principio dependentem, sic praeter ordinem

Beginning with this initial commitment to conserve (i.e., the first resolution of normalcy), the possibility of radical withdrawal (i.e., annihilation) has been precluded by providence.¹¹⁰ Thus, the radical incidentality associated with the gratuitous *giving of being*, frequently highlighted by existential Thomists and others alike (e.g., Marion’s *incident par excellence*), has been pushed back to a primordial “moment of decision” and eclipsed by an unwavering commitment to conservation within a larger providential order. Despite the *decisiveness* of creation for Aquinas’s universe, in that according to a groundless decision on the part of the divine will being has been given, his account of conservation shows how quickly this moment fades, sustaining only a weak ontological force in the normal operations of the universe. An operational order takes effect as divine wisdom directs everything that is toward a common end.

There is a loss, we might say, of the radical groundlessness which had marked the extra-essential *incidentality* of being. Such a loss can best be seen in the case of beings necessary *ab alio*, in which the radical incommensurability between *esse* and essence comes to be nearly collapsed.¹¹¹ Remember Aquinas states that in such beings, their

illum Deus facere non potest. Ordo enim ille procedit, ut ostensum est, ex scientia et voluntate Dei omnia ordinante in suam bonitatem sicut in finem. Non est autem possibile quod Deus aliquid faciat quod non sit ab eo volitum: cum creaturae ab ipso non prodeant naturaliter, sed per voluntatem, ut ostensum est. Neque etiam est possibile ab eo aliquid fieri quod eius scientia non comprehendatur: cum voluntas esse non possit nisi de aliquo noto. Neque iterum est possibile quod in creaturis aliquid faciat quod in suam bonitatem non sit ordinatum sicut in finem: cum sua bonitas sit proprium obiectum voluntatis ipsius. Similiter autem, cum Deus sit omnino immutabilis, impossibile est quod aliquid velit cum prius noluerit; aut aliquid de novo incipiat scire, vel in suam ordinet bonitatem. Nihil igitur Deus facere potest quin sub ordine suae providentiae cadat: sicut non potest aliquid facere quod eius operationi non subdatur. Potest tamen alia facere quam ea quae subduntur eius providentiae vel operationi, si absolute consideretur eius potestas: sed nec potest facere aliqua quae sub ordine providentiae ipsius ab aeterno non fuerint, eo quod mutabilis esse non potest.” *SCG* III.98.

¹¹⁰ Scotus will take issue with this preclusion, to which we will return below. See Chapter VI Section 1.

¹¹¹ The tendency to *nothingness* or *not-being* results from the same tendency to being (i.e., the power of the agent). “Si autem dicatur quod ea quae sunt ex nihilo, quantum est de se in nihilum tendunt; et sic omnibus creaturis inest potentia ad non esse: manifestum est hoc non sequi. Dicuntur enim res creatae eo modo in nihilum tendere quo sunt ex nihilo. Quod quidem non est nisi secundum potentiam agentis. Sic igitur et rebus creatis non inest potentia ad non esse: sed creatori inest potentia ut eis det esse vel eis desinat esse influere; cum non ex necessitate naturae agat ad rerum productionem, sed ex voluntate, ut ostensum est.”

power not to be (*potentia ad non esse*)—and for that matter their power to be (*potentia ad esse*)—reflects some power in God (i.e., his ability to withdraw his influence) rather than some power in creatures.¹¹² Thus, once God has decided not to annihilate such creatures, their forms give them necessary being, that is, they are necessarily and eternally through their forms (*forma dat esse*), although one might continue to add the caveat that God *could have decided* to withhold conservation for such beings. But such a caveat does not suggest that *esse* is some distinct perfection intrinsic to the things themselves. Thus “*esse*”—when applied to creatures—does not signify some act they exercise through themselves. It is true that *conservation of being* still stands as the most intimate perfection of any being, but as inscribed in a providential order, it takes on new meaning. No longer does it mark the radical groundlessness and *incidentalness* of the gift of being, but now comes to signify the grounding act of a providential order. This means that creatures are no longer *receivers of a gift*, but instead debtors who must make return (*reddere*) on a loan, which they “pay back” through their service within God’s providential plan.

Given God’s rational commitment to his own order and his infallible knowledge of what will come to be (*fiendum*), the radical indeterminacy of this grounding act can be neutralized. God *knows* that he will not annihilate, but will continue to conserve creatures. Thus, his rational agency eliminates the possibility of withdrawal, which had provided a spectral absence to all existential presence, a matter whose consequences will be explored in more detail below. Furthermore, providence lends intelligibility to the

Furthermore, the nearer something is to this cause, the further it is from non-being. “Quanto aliquid magis distat ab eo quod per seipsum est ens, scilicet Deo, tanto magis propinquum est ad non esse. Quanto igitur aliquid est propinquius Deo, tanto magis recedit a non esse.” *SCG* II.30

¹¹² “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.

radical incidentality of creation, which *sub specie aeternae*, includes reference to *all being* and *all beings* (*esse et ens commune*) and thus captures being (*esse*) as an intelligible moment within a providential order. Any possible creature, if understood from the perspective of providence as a whole, would be made intelligible in terms of its being or non-being insofar as providence necessitated the emergence of certain beings (e.g., humans) and prohibited (i.e., made impossible according to its order) other beings (e.g., phoenixes). By inscribing creation and conservation within a providential order, and thereby relegating any radical *decisiveness* between being and non-being (i.e., either in the guise of creation/nothingness, conservation/annihilation, or concurrence/non-concurrence) to a bygone resolution, providence thus sublates the *real effectiveness* of incidental contingency at the heart of being. “Contingency” no longer means the real and ever-present possibility of nothingness, but merely the tendency of certain (i.e., hylomorphic) beings to be corrupted due to their material element. And even such corruption, as will be seen, has a necessary allotment in the providential order.¹¹³ This limited sense of contingency and “not-being”—for example that the lion will consume its prey, thereby bringing corruption and “not-being” to such an animal—finds intelligibility within the providential order through whose sublation God as essential *and* as existential ground finds its highest expression of unity.

In response to Gilson, Fabro, et al., it appears that *esse* in reference to creatures turns out not to be their own expression of an act of being, but the *fact* that they reflect the conserving influence of *ipsum esse subsistens*. Such a “fact of being,” even for the most mundane creatures (i.e., those who are present to sensory intuition), is a fact whose

¹¹³ As will be discussed in Chapter VI below, contingency is necessary for Aquinas, and even though foreseen by God, it happens in a contingent manner. See also *De Pot.* q. 3, a. 6, resp.

content finds its highest expression and intelligibility within a providential order. Although we may have some limited insight into the factual presence of certain things and the factual absence of others (e.g., phoenixes), and express various modes of being or non-being in the dynamic acts of judgment, such *existential expressions of being* become part of intelligible content of the divine practical *scientia* of providence and can be understood—although not to us—as necessitated by God’s resolution to provide according to a certain order (i.e., the best possible). The *esse* of creatures turns out to be the conserving influence of their *provider*, which refers not to their own act of being against which they withstand a tendency toward nothingness, but the providential *fact of being* for certain creatures and not others. Each creature’s “share of being” is not some existential act proper to it, but its “share in providence” by which—first and most generally—it reflects the fact that God has resolved to provide for it. Thus, if we could understand the universe according to God’s practical *scientia* of providence, the factual absence of phoenixes would be most intelligible as a reflection of their incommensurability with the best possible order—to which God has resolved himself—and not an existential lack at the root of their being.

Conclusion

Although the above discussion of analogy warned of treating *esse* as a perfection proper to God, thereby depriving a meaningful reference to everything else due to its purity of act, now having brought Aquinas’s account of analogy in constellation with his metaphysics of creation (i.e., the giving of being), we can see the full effects of the concentration of *esse* in a *primus et purus actus essendi*. The problem faced by

existentialism is that an analogical concept of being *borrow*s against the content derived from experience (i.e., of created beings) in order to arrive at a purified and perfected *ratio essendi* attributable to *ipsum esse subsistens*. And yet, when it comes time to pay back this loan, *esse* as reapplied to creatures—either in the form of *esse commune* or *actus essendi suum*—turns out to be devoid of real meaning apart from the substantial being of the creature itself on the one hand or God’s external causal influence on the other. “*Esse*” fails to capture a distinct perfection intrinsic to creatures themselves, which would differentiate them from “non-existing possibles.” Where Fabro envisions a seamless passage from finite to Infinite accomplished through analogical discourse and marked by intensification, there seems to be *equivocation*, or better yet *evacuation*.¹¹⁴ That which “*esse*” is originally meant signify in creatures (i.e., the *reality* by which they *are* and are distinguished from mere possibilities), once invested in the incommunicable *ipseity* of *ipsum esse subsistens*—that sovereign actuality neither beyond being nor *primum inter pares*—no longer captures the dynamic actuality of being, but grounds a mere semblance of actuality.

One sees from the metaphor of illumination, which Aquinas often uses to explain the distribution of being, how he has invited a deeper problem for the creation and conservation of *esse* on the metaphysical level. Illuminated air, especially as it becomes more and more illuminated, reflects the majesty of its cause to such an extent that the air itself disappears behind its reflection of light. The air *itself*, permeated by light, merely becomes a reflection of something else’s perfection and it has no power of its own. So too created existence gets lost as a pale reflection of the plenitude that is divine existence, drowned out by the radiance of *ipsum esse subsistens*. God touches things by his power

¹¹⁴ *Intensive Hermeneutics*, 481. See Section 1 of Chapter VI below.

of creation and conservation, allowing them to remain in being, but by no power of their own. The problem faced by an existential metaphysics is that creatures turn out to be little more than reflections of God's *actuating presence*, a position which deprives them of their own share of being.

This return to (or approach toward) "God as the formal *esse* of creatures" position is not, however, accidental or due to an over zealous fidelity to the metaphor of illumination. Instead, it results in attempting to both *elevate* and *isolate* a concept of *esse* applicable only to God (i.e., *ipsum esse subsistens*). By isolating such a pure concept, which would analogically exclude the impurities of created "being," *esse* as an intensive concept no longer retains its extensive range, and thus necessarily deprives creatures of their "ontological density," a matter to be explored further below.¹¹⁵ Being is the richest of concepts, as Gilson, Owens, Fabro, and others have argued, because it can be isolated in an intensified and purified form without rendering it empty and abstract. "Its wealth consists, first, of all the judgments of existence it virtually comprises and connotes, but much more of its permanent reference to the infinitely rich reality of the pure act of existing."¹¹⁶ The problem, however, that emerges with such an analogic of being, as seen from the metaphor for illumination, is that the being of creatures (i.e., being according to a secondary or derived *ratio*) becomes little more than a "reflection" of being itself. The making permanent of this reference to "the pure act of existing" deprives "*esse*" of significance for creatures insofar as what distinguishes the "real existence" of an actual being from the "intentional existence" of a possible being (e.g., a phoenix) concerns only the distinct ways in which "*esse*" *extrinsically* denominates each as dependents, and yet

¹¹⁵ See Chapter VI Section 1 below.

¹¹⁶ Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 44.

neither as beings *in their own right*. When the derivative (i.e., analogical) concept is reapplied to creatures, from whence it originated, it no longer captures the dynamic actuality differentiating a mere possibility (e.g., a phoenix) from a *real something*, but comes to signify something's passive reflection of God's activity (*actuating presence*).

Despite the lobby of existential Thomists, "*esse*" becomes unable to think the real, at least *the real* apart from God himself: as reflections of divine radiance, beings are flooded to the point of disappearance. Just as the more air is illuminated by light, the more the air itself as the medium disappears, so too the more we shift focus from the essential determination of something to its existential actuality, the more the creature's own actuality makes reference to the abiding omnipresence of an external power. In the end, "*esse*" comes to mean only the *fact* of an essence's having been caused, much in the semi-repetitive and *essential* way observed above with Sigerian essentialism, or more properly how this fact extrinsically denotes a relation to the universal cause of all being.

The deeper structural problem with existential metaphysics is not that it fails to conceptually think the actuality of existing things as exceeding their formal actuality. Instead, the problem results because the only actuality left in excess of their formal natures is God himself. Thus, *to think* the being of something, not merely as this or that (e.g., as a mule or as a runner) but *simpliciter*, means to think the factual status of the essence, how it in fact *reflects* its cause. As seen from the distinction between necessary and contingent beings, *esse* comes to indicate a decision or providential resolution on the part of God that certain *rationes* should come to be exemplified, and others not. If Aquinas or his existential apologist were to argue that unlike mere possibles, actual beings have been legislated by the divine *will*, and this having-been-legislated through

the efficiency of the divine will marks the extra-essential actuality of *esse* unaccountable in terms of the essence, then “*esse*” merely signifies the factual relation of an essence in reference to God’s plan, of what God has decided *should come to be* (*fiendum*). But the reference once again is not to anything (or any perfection) intrinsic to the creature itself, but to its relation to God as its efficient cause of being. The full entailment of such a move to treat *esse* as the decision of “what should come to be” on the part of God’s providential plan will be explored in what follows.

Chapter VI. Conceptualism without Imperialism and the Collapse of the Existential Project

Following from the conclusions drawn above that Aquinas reduces creatures to analogical similitudes of divine *ipseity* lacking their own act or power of being, and “*esse*” becomes something of an extrinsic attribute when applied to everything outside of such incommunicable perfection of being, three consequences of Aquinas’s *existential* metaphysics need to be considered: First, given that a real composition between *esse* and essence was introduced to secure the real diversity between God and creatures, and yet creatures turn out to be not-much-more than essential dependents on divine *esse*, reflections of an incommunicable *ipseity* without their own *esse*, why persist in upholding such a composition? Why not, instead, rethink creation without bracketing a distinct existential act? Such a rethinking will be outlined presently.

Second, what is the contribution of Aquinas’s existential metaphysics for thinking, or rethinking, the history of metaphysics? In other words, must a new beginning be found for metaphysics and what does Aquinas’s existential problematic offer for such an inception? In particular, I will address the claim of existential Thomism that “judgment” (i.e., the second operation of the intellect) offers a means by which to think the real, that is, “*esse*” beyond the imperialism of the concept and to reawaken a questioning of being beyond (or better “underneath”) essentialized “ontic” forgetfulness. Against such an attempt to overcome metaphysical essentialism, I will argue that it merely mystifies the essential economy without exceeding it. Instead, what needs to be realized is a “conceptualism without *imperium*,” that which locates a gap within thinking and a conceptual remainder from *within* the essential economy itself.

And third, we will treat how the *finality* of the created universe complicates (in the most literal sense of the word) the original groundlessness of this existential perfection. We started our inquiry by noting how the gift of being has been characterized as a radical incidentality incommensurable with and unaccountable by an essential economy. Yet, by tracing such existential gift throughout Aquinas's thought, he seems to cover over and neutralize this original groundlessness in terms of the teleological and providential finality of the universe. As will be discussed, his attempt to render a reason for each singular creature in terms of the good the universe *not only* reduces singularity to particularity (and thereby inscribes such within an essential order and within a hierarchical rank) *but also* renders a return on the very "gift" of being.¹ Each being must "pay back" that which it has been given by fulfilling its natural end in service of the good. Such service by which return is made on the investment of being undermines the very nature of the gratuity of the gift itself. Creation, although initiated by a radical unaccountability of the free act of divine volition, finds ground in a totalized order directed to the good. The return (*reditus*) of creatures to God through their providential orientation overcomes the groundlessness by which they been created (*exitus*): i.e., as radically *incidental*. Furthermore, *esse* becomes reinscribed as part of the essential economy of divine ideas, the *terminus* of what the divine practical intellect plans "should come to be" (*fiendum*) as opposed to "should not come to be" (*non-fiendum*). The divine practical *scientia* of providence adopts the means the ordered totality of this universe

¹ Singularity differs from particularity insofar as the former has not yet been conceptualized according to universal determinations whereas the latter falls under a universal concept as a particular instantiation of such. Such a process reflects the move from a *this* to a this X, where "X" reflects a general term. See, for example, Reiner Schümann, *Broken Hegemonies*. trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003). See also Richard A. Lee, *Science, the Singular, and the Question of Theology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

toward the end of *best realizing* divine goodness, which offers an account for the incidental *esse* of all creatures. Together these three considerations will be used in assessing both the legitimacy of Aquinas's existential problematic and also its historical effects within scholastic thought and beyond.

Section 1: Analogical Concept Laundering—A Case for the Univocity of Being beyond Conceptual Imperialism

A real composition between *esse* and essence was introduced to solve the problem of how *all* created essences, including those without materiality such as the soul or intelligences, are marked by some degree of potency and non-simplicity. Relying merely on the Aristotelian couplet of form/matter would entail that immaterial essences (i.e., souls and intelligences) are pure actuality uncomposed with any potency.² In order to protect the uniqueness of God's pure actuality, Aquinas needed to find a means by which to complicate all creatures. As we have seen, he does this by introducing a composition between *esse* and essence, which entails that even the actuality of immaterial forms stands in potency to the actuality of *esse*. God alone enjoys a pure simplicity of being, an identity between essence and *esse* indivisible in any way. Such self-subsisting being is what I have been calling "*ipseity*," which signifies its incommunicable pure perfection and eminent power as being itself.

In order, however, for us to know God—the "we" being defined by embodied humans whose knowledge of God is not *per se nota*, but taken from sensitive cognition—there

² The human soul according to Aquinas differs from the intelligences insofar as it informs matter and thereby is not a species onto itself. For a detailed exploration of the complicated relationship of the human soul to matter, both in its "separate" and restored condition, see William E. Carroll, "Thomas Aquinas On Science, *Sacra Doctrina*, and Creation," in *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: Up to 1700*, vol. 1, ed. J.M. van der Meer and S. Mandelbrote. Brill's Series in Church History, 36 (Leiden-Boston: Brill 2008), 219-248.

must be some semblance or trace of the first cause within its observable effects. In order to ground a community of beings somehow related to a first being without flattening all beings (including God) to a single voice or *ratio* of being, Aquinas invokes analogical causation to hold together “the bond of being”³ around the principle of similitude. God as eminent cause causes beings to be like himself without allowing them to share in his incommunicable *ratio essendi*. Participation in *esse* (i.e., the manner in which creatures *have being*) allows for creatures to resemble God, to liken and assimilate themselves to his perfection of being, but to remain fundamentally other than God. Such a remaining other is secured because all creature must participate being according to a determinate mode of being (i.e., through their essence), which entails that they defect from perfect plenitude of being. Even immaterial substances resemble God in a limited and imperfect manner because *esse* remains distinct from their essential determinations. They may be *essentially perfect*, but nevertheless *existentially imperfect* (i.e., incomplete, limited).

According to such an account, God does not communicate his own nature to creatures (i.e., *ipsum esse*) such that his own being and that of creatures would fall under a single *ratio*. Analogical causation instead brings together a multiplicity of disparate beings in reference to a common principle, whose perfect instantiation of the *ratio*—in this case, being (*esse*)—they resemble imperfectly to greater and lesser degrees. Thus, amidst a diversity of beings, there can be repetition of a shared perfection. Such repetition, however, does not undermine the radical diversity between the proper *ratio* of that perfection in which being is *rooted*, on the one hand, and those derivations that follow from such a perfection but which remain participants unable to receive its full power, on

³ For an explicit use of this phrase, see James Anderson, *The Bond of Being*. See also, Lovejoy’s classic *The Great Chain of Being*.

the other. Analogy purports to solve the metaphysical problem first issued by Parmenides of what divides being into a multiplicity if not being (or if not-being). The answer, offered by Aquinas, is that being according to its proper *ratio* remains fundamentally indivisible (an *ipseity*), whereas for everything else, being must be participated, and according to such participation, a multiplicity of diverse participants arise. Participation of the many in the one thus provides the connective tissue of Aquinas's universe, a universe crowned by the sovereign perfection of something exceeding the order itself, *actus essendi primus et purus*.⁴ God, thus, is neither merely *primum inter pares* nor beyond being in his utter transcendence.

By ordering the community of beings to this one true being (i.e., *ipsum esse subsistens*) and removing all finite traces from its purified *ratio essendi*, in order that it may be the universal cause of all being without being cause of itself (*causa sui*), Aquinas's metaphysics of analogical causation has incurred a deeper cost. The cost, one recognized by Scotistic univocity, is that all the content of *our knowledge* is on loan from creatures, but once demonstration reaches its terminus (i.e., in *maxime ens* and *ipsum esse subsistens*), according to Aquinas's theory of analogy, any trace of the finite must be excluded from the "purified" concept. Otherwise, the latter, or the "primary analogue," would retain contact with those derivations based on it and share in a univocal *ratio* with them. As will be seen in what follows, Aquinas's attempt to *intensify* the concept (e.g., moving from *less and more* to *most*) in order to remove it from the scale altogether meets not with the purification and perfection of the *ratio*, but its obliteration. Excluding *esse commune* from communion with *ipsum esse subsistens* leaves Aquinas with nothing in

⁴ For such a characterization, see for example *De Pot.*, q. 3, a. 5, resp., *De Ente* IV l. 54., *Super lib. De cau.* IX.

hand by which to designate the latter save an empty name appropriated from creatures. By dislodging divine being from *esse commune*, Aquinas's remotional procedure has not removed the finite impurities and extracted a refined and intensified concept of being (i.e., *ipsum esse subsistens*). Instead, its "excavations" linger as irreducible traces of the concept's origin and any attempt to secure a purified concept (i.e., of *actus essendi primus et purus*) results in a failed laundering operation.⁵

Analogical causation, as we have seen, removes God from the existential order while maintaining enough of a resemblance to draw the conclusion *that God exists* based upon our knowledge of creatures. Aquinas maintains that if God agreed with creatures according to a common *ratio essendi*, then two consequences would follow.⁶ First, the entire proper concept of being would not belong to God, but would be shared between God and creatures. Second, God could not be the universal cause of all being because he would be part of the order of which he was the cause. Thus, analogical causation allows Aquinas to extract a proper concept of being (i.e., *ipsum esse subsistens*), purified of any traces of its derivations (i.e., *esse commune*), and to posit a universal cause of *all being*, which itself is uncaused and outside the metaphysical economy. If the entirety of being (i.e., *esse commune*) included both God and creatures, however, then God would be principiated by something not entirely identical to him (i.e., because it would at least virtually include the modification *created*). Such non-identity would upset a metaphysical account of being because even though "all subsequent beings" would be

⁵ Scotus uses this term "to excavate" or "dig beneath" (*suffodere*) to describe how the intellect derives all of its concepts from creatures and thus by excavating such concepts, it cannot reach some notion with no finite traces. This means that if we are to have natural knowledge of God, it cannot be by using concepts of a different sort (*alterius rationis*) because our intellect has no such concepts at its disposal. Thus, with the concepts we have derived from creatures, we can have natural knowledge of God, but only according to a univocal *ratio* as derived from creatures. See *Ordinatio* I, d. 3, pars 1, q 1-2, 62.

⁶ See, for example, *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 2, resp. and above Chapter 3.

caused by the *primum inter pares*, this would not be an account of *all being* and its universal cause. God would not transcend the order of being, but be one of its members. Aquinas, thus, attempts to overcome this accounting gap by removing God from the economy so as to secure a complete field of being (i.e., *esse commune*) and ground such based on the similitude it bears to its cause, the universal cause of all being.

As we have seen, in univocals, the *ratio* is one and the same, whereas in equivocals, the *rationes* are totally diverse. In the case of being (*esse*), however, there must be an analogy between the terms such that there is multiple usage of the name according to the diverse proportions to one and the same thing.⁷ This same thing is *ipsum esse subsistens*, which constitutes the proper and primary *ratio essendi*. Thus, the term can be used demonstratively without reducing all the usages to a single *ratio*. What Aquinas attempts to argue on the basis of analogical predication is that a universal agent (i.e., cause of everything in a kind) produces its own likeness in its effects only because it is neither a univocal agent nor an equivocal agent.

Thus, to be the demonstrable, universal cause of all being, God must be both “not being” (at least in the sense of the *esse commune* caused by him) otherwise he would either need a cause or be uncaused, and also be “most being” (that is, according to an elevated and separate *ratio essendi*) otherwise he would leave behind no trace of himself in creatures whereby demonstration of their cause would be possible. Thus, each creature as an effect bears some proportional likeness to its cause whereby it can testify that it is

⁷ “Et sic, quidquid dicitur de Deo et creaturis, dicitur secundum quod est aliquis ordo creaturae ad Deum, ut ad principium et causam, in qua praeexistunt excellenter omnes rerum perfectiones. Et iste modus communitatis medius est inter puram aequivocationem et simplicem univocationem. Neque enim in his quae analogice dicuntur, est una ratio, sicut est in univocis; nec totaliter diversa, sicut in aequivocis; sed nomen quod sic multipliciter dicitur, significat diversas proportionales ad aliquid unum; sicut sanum, de urina dictum, significat signum sanitatis animalis, de medicina vero dictum, significat causam eiusdem sanitatis” *ST I*, q. 13, a. 5, resp.

an effect of this cause. Such a testimony serves as the foundation for all of Aquinas's demonstrations for the existence of God. He begins with the imperfect nature of creatures, which as inadequate effects of their cause fall short of its perfection, yet as similitudes reflect the fact that (*quia*) such a cause must exist in order to account for the effect.⁸ And yet, as will be seen presently, such a move to isolate a separate analogously elevated *ratio* falls short.

In reference to what has been discussed, we continually witness such moments in Aquinas's metaphysics. For example, throughout the three stages of the *De Ente* argument, Aquinas moves from essences that can be understood without *esse*, through the possibility of something that is only *esse*, to the actuality of such a subsisting being itself (*ipsum esse subsistens*). As argued in detail above, it is only after Aquinas reaches the third stage does *esse* fully emerge as an extra-essential actuality distinct from the common and indeterminate "*ens*." And yet, this argument attempts to elevate the concept of being (*esse*) outside the register of those beings whose essences do not include *esse* so that the former can account for this field in its entirety as the universal cause of being for all beings. Such a *per se* first cause is necessary in order to secure the causal economy from an infinite regress, whereby all accounting would become useless because running to infinity there would be no first and everything would be without a reason why.⁹ There must be, Aquinas argues, something that is the cause of being for all things (*causa*

⁸ "Respondeo dicendum quod impossibile est aliquid praedicari de Deo et creaturis univoce. *Quia omnis effectus non adaequans virtutem causae agentis, recipit similitudinem agentis non secundum eandem rationem, sed deficienter* [m.e.], ita ut quod divisim et multipliciter est in effectibus, in causa est simpliciter et eodem modo [...]" *ST I*. q. 13, a. 5, resp.

⁹ The argument states: "Ergo oportet quod omnis talis res cuius esse est aliud quam natura sua habeat esse ab alio. Et quia omne quod est per aliud reducitur ad id quod est per se sicut ad causam primam, oportet quod sit aliqua res que sit causa essendi omnibus rebus eo quod ipsa est esse tantum; alias iretur in infinitum in causis, cum omnis res que non est esse tantum habeat causam sui esse, ut dictum. Patet ergo quod intelligentia est forma et esse, et quod esse habet a primo ente quod est esse tantum, et hoc est causa prima que Deus est." *De Ente*, Cap. IV, ll. 127-146.

essendi omnibus rebus), which itself is only being (*esse tantum*). The ground of all being (*esse*) as *esse tantum* must be of different kind, however, otherwise it would have to be ground of itself and thus be *causa sui*. Such *esse tantum*, or *ipsum esse subsistens*, must expel from its own proper *ratio* of being any reference to the being that it grounds, otherwise God would enter into a univocal community with such beings and he would have to ground his own being (i.e., as the universal cause of all being).

And yet, to conclude to such a subsistence of being, demonstration must utilize a single concept of being (*ratio essendi*) such that we can begin with one concept and reach *its* superlative degree of intensity (i.e., remaining within the bounds of a single concept). Otherwise, by removing the derivative elements of the *ratio* in hopes of retaining its purified and proper ground, Aquinas removes the entirety of the concept and is left with an empty name. To seek the universal cause of being, one need only acknowledge that it itself is *not-being*, not that it is being according to an elevated and distinct *ratio*. Now in the lands of negative theology, Aquinas does not hold a purified and intensified concept of being, shed of any trace of that which it grounds. Instead, he faces a silent abyss across which the superlative of being can bridge no more than could any superlative name (e.g., “most rock”). To seek the ground of being in its entirety, he must leave being altogether.

One can find this *reductio ad absurdum* (i.e., concluding “God is most rock”) around the Scotistic position of univocity, which brings to the fore the detrimental consequences of such an analogic for natural knowledge of God.¹⁰ Scotus maintains that every inquiry

¹⁰ “Quod si dicas, alia est formalis ratio eorum qua conveniunt Deo, ex hoc sequitur inconueniens, quod ex nulla ratione propria eorum prout sunt in creaturis, possunt concludi de Deo, quia omnino alia et alia ratio illorum est et istorum; immo non magis concludetur quod Deus est sapiens formaliter, ex ratione sapientiae quam apprehendimus ex creaturis, quod quod Deus est formaliter lapis: potest enim conceptus aliquis, alius a conceptu lapidis creati, formari, ad quem conceptum lapidis ut est idea in Deo habet iste lapis attributionem, et ita formaliter diceretur ‘Deus est lapis’ secundum istum conceptum analogum, sicut ‘sapiens’ secundum illum conceptum analogum.” *Ordinatio* I, d. 3, pars 1, q. 1-2, 40.

regarding God presupposes the intellect's having a univocal concept taken from creatures. The difference, however, between this view and that of Aquinas is not the taking of the concept from creatures, but its ability to extend both to God and creatures. Thus, says Scotus, the concept of being (*ens*) taken from creatures covers both finite being and infinite being without variation in its intelligible content (i.e., *ratio*). To deny this (i.e., to say that God's *ratio* is other than that of creatures) would amount to saying that from the intelligible content taken from creatures nothing can be inferred about God because his *ratio* is altogether different. The explanatory gap between the two *rationes*—Scotus gives the example of divine wisdom and human wisdom—cannot be bridged by analogy because when we say “President Obama is wise” and when we say “God is wise” the intelligible content in each case is different. If we begin with the former (i.e., human wisdom), and the former cannot be broken up into a generality (i.e., wisdom) and its modification (i.e., human), how does removing all finite measures give us the latter (i.e., divine wisdom), *which is of a different sort* (i.e., *ratio*)?

As addressed in reference to *De Ente*, being (*ens*) is the first object of the intellect according to Aquinas. However, if the concept of being from which we commence is proper only to creatures and does not univocally include God, then there can be no separation of the concept from itself: *being* and *finite being* are synonymous. Furthermore, an *intensification* of the latter in order to remove finite “impurities” would destroy the concept itself. We no more have an elevated concept of “divine being” (or “divine wisdom”) with its own *ratio* than we have of “divine rockness” because neither can be derived from the *ratio* of human wisdom if the latter is treated non-univocally. The concept of wisdom—or being—taken from finite creatures, such as humans, once

purified by remotion does not leave behind a *ratio* of a different sort, but either provides a concept attributable to God according to the same voice (i.e., univocally) or nothing is left at all besides a *trace* (i.e., equivocity).

What is needed, Scotus argues, is a single concept virtually containing disjunctive modifications, themselves really diverse from one another. Otherwise, how could the finite human intellect ever achieve a concept worthy of God? No object produces a simple and proper concept of itself and a simple and proper concept of another in the intellect unless the first object contains the second essentially or virtually. Scotus argues that a created object does not virtually or essentially contain the uncreated, and thus cannot produce such a concept in the mind.¹¹ Instead, something more common than and modally distinct from either one must give rise to both. Such is the *univocal concept of being (ens)*, which arises through our contact with finite beings, but because the modification of “finite” can be separated from the concept and yet the concept itself remain the same, *the same concept* can be applied to infinite being.

A univocal concept of being is one with *sufficient unity* such that to affirm and deny it of one and the same thing would be a contradiction and such that can serve as the middle term of a syllogism uniting the two extremes without equivocation.¹² As he goes on to

¹¹ “Et confirmatur ratio, quia ‘obiectum’: praeter conceptum suum proprium adaequatum, et inclusum in ipso altero duorum modorum praedictorum, nihil potest cognosci ex isto obiecto nisi per discursum; sed discursus praesupponit cognitionem istius simplicis ad quod discurritur. Formetur igitur ratio sic, quia nllum obiectum facit conceptum simplicem proprium, in isto intellectu, conceptum simplicem proprium alterius obiecti, nisi contineat illud aliud obiectum essentialiter vel virtualiter; obiectum autem creatum non continet increatum essentialiter vel virtualiter, et hoc sub ea ratione sub qua sibi attribuitur, ut ‘posterius essentialiter’ attribuitur ‘priori essentialiter’, --quia contra rationem ‘posterioris essentialiter’ est includere virtualiter suum prius, et patet quod obiectum creatum non essentialiter continet increatum secundum aliquid omnino sibi proprium et non commune; ergo non facit conceptum simplicem et proprium enti increato.” *Ordinatio* I, d. 3, p. 1, q. 1-2, 23-24.

¹² “Et ne fiat contentio de nomine univocationis, univocum conceptum dico, qui ita est unus quod eius unitas sufficit ad contradictionem, afirmando et negando ipsum de eodem; sufficit etiam pro medio syllogistico, ut extrema unita in medio sic uno sine fallacia aequivocationis concludantur inter se uniri.” *Ordinatio* I, d. 3, p. 1, q. 1-2, 18.

argue, the intellect can be certain about one concept, but doubtful about another, as is the case with “being” (*ens*) and “infinite or finite.” Every philosopher was *certain* that his first principle was a being (e.g., fire, water, love, or number). And yet such conceptions—in being false—lacked certitude about whether such were *first* or secondary beings, and likewise created or uncreated (beings). Thus, the fact that Thales believed—falsely, according to Scotus—water to be the first, uncreated principle of everything else in no way undermined his certitude that water was a being.¹³ Despite our ignorance of anything’s modification (e.g., whether a given being is primary or secondary), we still retain an equally applicable conception of it *as a being*: thus, if it turns out as one rather than the other (e.g., primary as opposed to not primary) we still retain the *same conception* of it as a being, but add the proper *modification*.

At the risk of overly conceptualizing being, a risk to which we will return below,¹⁴ being cannot be an analogous concept lest the realization that water is not the *first* being introduce a *completely* new concept. This may seem trivial, but the very nature of demonstration, which moves from something prior for us to something prior by nature without presupposing the latter’s *ultimate* primacy, depends upon such *mediated* movement between terms. A univocal concept, such as being, allows one to *neutralize* its modifications while demonstrating the actual existence of the one from the other (e.g., infinite from finite, or necessary from contingent) without moving between concepts during the process. To obtain a distinct and proper concept of God, conceptually unrelated to the finite *ratio essendi*, the human mind would need extra-sensory

¹³ See *Ordinatio* I, d. 3, p. 1, q. 1-2. See also *Lectura* I, d. 3, p. 1, q. 1-2.

¹⁴ See Section 2 below.

illumination, which Scotus (and Aquinas) deny.¹⁵ All concepts pertaining to God retain traces of creation, although in neutralizing the created modifications, the infinite modifications can be attributed to the univocal concept. Being as a unifying concept thus holds a certain *indifference* to the diverse and disjunctive modifications of finite/infinite without “absorbing” all real beings—themselves *either finite or infinite*—into its wake.¹⁶ Although God and creatures remain unified in their concept, they remain radically diverse in their reality due to their intensive modes, as will be discussed below.

Unlike for Scotus who attempts to neutralize modifications of finitude from our concepts in order to retain a *ratio* common to both creatures and God, for Aquinas, such removal must also elevate the isolated concept outside the field of creatures in order to secure its sovereignty of meaning divested of all traces of finitude. Aquinas also extends such sovereignty to the causal realm insofar as that which gives meaning to all beings in their being and serves as their transcendental signifier is also the cause of all beings in their being and not itself *primum inter pares* or part of what it causes in its entirety: the *ratio essendi* is the *causa essendi*. Such a procedure, mostly clearly executed by *the fourth way*, however, deconstructs itself. The borders of the sovereign *ipseity* could only be fortified by a *radically* non-univocal concept proper only to God. In other words, such a concentrated actuality of “only being” excluding all reference to anything other than itself and incommunicable to anything outside of itself, could only be designated by a proper name intrinsically belonging to one.

¹⁵ *Ordinatio* I, d. 3, p. 1, q. 1-2, 45.

¹⁶ This term is meant to resonate the earlier concerns on the part of Owens such that *esse* and essence must be really distinct in creatures lest the single subsisting instance of being absorb everything else in a Parmenidean/pantheistic fashion.

Of the divine names, *esse* holds a special place for Aquinas.¹⁷ Referring to the scene from *Exodus* 3:14, in what comes across more as a rebuke than an answer, God reveals to the inquisitive Moses that “I am who I am.” He bids Moses to tell the Israelites that “I am” sent me to you.¹⁸ Aquinas renders the “who I am” in the third person form *qui est* (“he who is”), nevertheless capturing the sense of being at the heart of this divine revelation. To the question “*Utrum esse proprie dicatur de Deo,*” which he treats on multiple occasions,¹⁹ Aquinas argues that such is the maximally proper (*maxime proprium*) name of God, even more than the other divine names.²⁰ The general argument behind Aquinas’s privileging *qui est* above the other divine names stems from its indeterminacy with regard to the other names, whereas each of them already presupposes *esse*.²¹ That name which sustains and is included in all the others must be the principal of all the rest.²²

¹⁷ See, for example, *ST I*. q. 13. a. 11; *De Veritate* q. 10, a. 12; *In Sent.* I d. 8, q. 1, a. 1. Aquinas does not take up this issue in *SCG*.

¹⁸*ST I*. q. 13, a. 11, s.c. See also *De Veritate* q. 10, a. 12. ll. 263-265. In response to the argument that according to *Exodus* 3:14, God’s proper name is “He Who Is” and therefore it is impossible to think God is not, he states: “Ad decimum dicendum quod, quamvis nomen Dei sit ‘Qui est’, non tamen hoc est per se notum nobis, unde ratio [*supra*] non sequitur.”

¹⁹ See, for example, *ST I*. q. 13, a. 11; *In Sent.* I d. 8, q. 1, a. 1.

²⁰ Two caveats must be mentioned: “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod hoc nomen qui est est magis proprium nomen Dei quam hoc nomen Deus, quantum ad id a quo imponitur, scilicet ab esse, et quantum ad modum significandi et consignificandi, ut dictum est. Sed quantum ad id ad quod imponitur nomen ad significandum, est magis proprium hoc nomen Deus, quod imponitur ad significandum naturam divinam. Et adhuc magis proprium nomen est tetragrammaton, quod est impositum ad significandam ipsam Dei substantiam incommunicabilem, et, ut sic liceat loqui, singularem. Ad secundum dicendum quod hoc nomen bonum est principale nomen Dei inquantum est causa, non tamen simpliciter, nam esse absolute praeintelligitur causae.” *ST I* q. 13, a. 11, ad 1-2. On the *Reply to Objection 1*, in reference to the tetragrammaton (i.e., YHWH), Dobbs-Weinstein makes the following observation: “The incommunicability of the divine name, its very singularity, its ineffable nature, is likewise the focus of Aquinas’ only reference to the Tetragrammaton. In the body of the response to article 9, in an equally hesitant manner, Aquinas mentions that among the Jews the Tetragrammaton perhaps is an incommunicable name. One cannot over emphasize the great caution, the hesitancy, manifest in the two very brief references to the Tetragrammaton, the one mention proceeded by *forte est*, the other succeeded by *ut sic liceat loqui*. This ineffable name, about which Aquinas says nothing, is the one name, even more appropriate than *Qui Est*, because it clearly exceeds being.” Dobbs-Weinstein, *Maimonides and St. Thomas*, 194.

²¹ The other names say *esse* according to some determinate *ratio*, but the name “qui est” says *esse* absolutely and not determined through some addition. See *In I Sent.* d. 8, q. 1, a.1, ad 4. Even the other

Aquinas counters the objection that, since every divine name implies relation to creatures, and yet *qui est* holds no such relation, it cannot properly be a divine name.²³ The divine names do not need to import a relation to creatures, which *qui est* clearly does not: God *is* apart from any relation to creation. Instead, Aquinas argues, the name signifies a perfection proceeding from God to creatures. Thus, *esse* stands as the most appropriate of the divine names signifying more than God as the causal fund of some created perfection, but instead as the analogical ground that sustains such a perfection in creatures through their similitude to God's own *pure* plenitude of such perfection. But has Aquinas not borrowed such a term from creatures (i.e., "*esse*") and now laundered any traces of finitude in order to enshrine a proper name for God? And once proper to God, the reapplied quasi-concept becomes radically other to all creatures in such a way that the once most-extensive of all concepts now becomes so closely identified with its proper signification so as to become devoid of meaning when attributed (extrinsically, that is) to anything else.

transcendentals, *unum*, *bonum*, *verum*, add something to *ens*, as *unum* adds indivisibility, *bonum* relation to an end, and *verum* relation to an exemplary form. *In I Sent.* d. 8, q. 1, a. 3, solution.

²² One argument in particular, from his commentary on the *Sentences*, should be noted. This argument holds special interest because it utilizes the identity of *esse* and essence in God, and their distinctness in creatures, to impose the name *qui est* on him, while withholding it from creatures. In this argument taken from Avicenna, Aquinas argues: "[...] cum in omni quod est sit considerare quidditatem suam, per quod dicitur de eo quod est in actu, hoc nomen <<res>> imponitur rei a quidditate sua, secundum Avicennam, tract. II *Metaph.*, cap. I, hoc nomen <<qui est>> vel <<ens>> imponitur ab ipso actu essendi. Cum autem ita quod in qualibet re creata essentia sua differat a suo esse, res illa proprie denominatur a quidditate sua, et non ab actu essendi, sicut homo ab humanitate. In Deo autem ipsum esse suum est sua quidditas: et ideo nomen quod sumitur ab esse, proprie nominat ipsum, et est proprium nomen ejus: sicut proprium nomen hominis quod sumitur a quidditate sua." *In I Sent.* d. 8, q. 1, a.1, solution. For created things, in which *esse* differs from their essence, the thing is properly denoted by its essence (e.g., the name "human" from humanity). Because of this difference between quiddity and *esse*, however, created things are not properly denoted by their *actu essendi*. In the case of God, as has been shown, the identity between his essence and his *esse* ("ipsum esse suum est sua quidditas") entails that the name taken from *esse* (i.e., *qui est*) properly names him.

²³ See *ST I.* q. 13, a. 11. arg. 3 and the response: "Ad tertium dicendum quod non est necessarium quod omnia nomina divina importent habitudinem ad creaturas; sed sufficit quod imponantur ab aliquibus perfectionibus procedentibus a Deo in creaturas. Inter quas prima est ipsum esse, a qua sumitur hoc nomen Qui est."

We see this aforementioned problem of using “*esse*” as a proper name in Aquinas’s other arguments as well. With the fourth way discussed above, he argued that something that is more or less being requires there to be something that is most being. This *maxime ens* causes to be (*esse*) for all beings, which exhibit various degrees of being but none equal to the superlative. Similar to the argument of *De Ente*, the fourth way attempts to remove the various degrees of being in order to retain a concept of that which is *maxime ens*. In addition to removal, the argument needs to elevate the maximal outside the order that it grounds (i.e., all being) otherwise it would need to account for its own being. Furthermore, such elevation must diversify the superlative from all comparative degrees so that *more*, *less*, and *most* do not all occupy a single conceptual register. Instead, *most being* as the universal cause of all being transcends the field of beings in order to account for the field in its entirety. Just as the king as the universal cause of all governance (*universalis causa regiminis*) in his realm cannot *participate* in the governance to which he gives rise—otherwise he too would need a cause, which could only be himself—the most being cannot be bound by being if it is to be the principle and cause of *all* being (*principium et causa essendi*). Once again, as seen from the Scotistic rejoinder, to elevate the concept of being so as to render a distinct principle of all “being” that nevertheless is itself “being,” Aquinas not only removes any traces of finitude—or those *imperfect* degrees of being from which the concept is derived—he in turn removes the concept altogether: “Most being,” as something with a proper and pure *ratio* distinct from all other degrees of being, cannot be virtually contained in the original concept. If Aquinas seeks to retain the name of being (*esse*) for that cause of all being, then the former must

function as a proper name divorced from its conceptual and causal bonds to the latter. But to repeat the Scotistic refrain, “most rock” (or just “Rock”) would function just as well.

As both the *De Ente* argument and the *fourth way* show, a first with its own separate and purified account, which transcends the field of finite being and yet stands close enough to be reached through demonstration, collapses in upon itself. By removing *ipsum esse subsistens* or *maxime ens* from a univocal field of being, the cause of all being no longer should bear the name of being (i.e., equivocity). Thinking in terms of Aquinas’s example of governance, a sovereign who stands as universal cause of all governance should not *himself* be called a governor.²⁴ Removing or extricating all particular causes from the field does not leave behind the most purified and proper sense of governance, but a void and abysmal ground that is itself bound by no governance. The universal cause of all governance is not *himself* subject to the economy of governance, but is the very ground of the economy itself. To analogically call such a sovereign cause by the name “governor,” as if a unity of the original concept were retained, just elevated to a higher level, would be a grave misnomer. Likewise, “a most being” or “a subsisting being itself” that does not share a common *ratio essendi* with finite being is no more worthy of such a name than of any other name. Having started our assent from within finite being, we cannot reach infinite being unless the latter shares a common *ratio* with the former.

Again we find a similar pattern with the “argument from participation” as offered in Aquinas’s exposition on *De Hebdomadibus*. The crucial step in this argument is to show that *ipsum esse* is absolutely simple, following which Boethius *via* Aquinas can argue anything composite cannot be *ipsum esse*. As argued above, although one can put forth an account of “human itself” or “to run itself,” conceptually excluding any foreign content

²⁴ See SCG II.15.

from the account (i.e., anything other than *to be human* or *to run*), a real multiplicity always accompanies these concepts insofar as all concrete humans or runners contain elements other than *to be human* or *to run*, such as “musicality” or “paleness.” The account of being itself, on the other hand, must actually exclude real multiplicity and anything alien to itself—not even allowing the virtual containment of disjunctive modifications *a la* Scotus. This is because unlike the other concepts, *ipsum esse* actually subsists and, as dictated by the conditions for such pure subsistence, it must exclude anything other than or in excess of its *self*-subsistence. Furthermore, such actual subsistence is necessary for there to be a real participation, which itself demands there to be a real distinction between the participants (i.e., beings other than *subsisting being itself*) and that in which they participate. To repeat a common refrain, Socrates only logically participates in “human itself” because such a form does not subsist apart from concrete humans such as Socrates. And with such logical participation, a real distinction does not result.

The underlying problem with this argument, as with the others, is that Aquinas transforms the transcendental concept with which he begins (i.e., *ens* and *esse* as most indeterminate and abstract) into an actual perfection excluding the real multiplicity of beings, and once transformed, belongs *properly* to God alone and only derivatively to creatures. There is no univocal share between the finite and infinite, but insofar as being is made to subsist, all causal and linguistic exchange between finite and infinite “beings” must be curtailed. Although analogy is not explicitly operative in this argument, it is close at hand, especially in terms of the account of participation: because something that only participates a perfection, but is not such through its essence, can make claim to that

perfection only according to a *lesser ratio*. Thus, the argument really seeks to exclude multiplicity from the unity of being and find the latter's proper voice when speaking of "the simple, one, and sublime, God himself." For the very reason, however, that any concept of being with which human intellection begins *borrow*s its content from creatures (e.g., Scotus's confused and indeterminate concept of being indifferent with respect to modification) Aquinas's tactics of remotional elevation erect nothing less than a phantasmatic pure act of being itself by itself (i.e., *ipseity*) and instituted around the proper name of "*esse*."

We can also see such move with the argument from act and potency. The existential impotence of every created essence, such that the essence "seraphim" is no closer to being *qua essence* than is the essence "phoenix," requires there to be some actual existential ground by which such essences can come to be. This means that such a ground must be *per se*, otherwise it too would stand in potency to its existential actuality. Any traces of potency refer to something more actual and prior to it. And, once again, to keep the chain from running into infinity, Aquinas must both find a first, but then also elevate this first to a position outside the order as a whole. The reason why such an elevation takes place is that to account for the cause of all being, something which itself is not being must be posited. Otherwise, if it itself were part of this same order it would be *causa sui*.²⁵ Aquinas concludes with something that must be only being, that is by "removing" any ground for composition, otherwise we could not account for the causal chain itself.

²⁵ This argument is similar to his arguments against a composition in God, put forth both in his *Expositio* and also in *ST I*, q. 3, a. 1, resp. I will skip over a separate discussion of these arguments.

Like with the other arguments, once elevated above all being of which it is the cause (*causa essendi*), it seems that the most proper name for the cause itself should be “not-being.” Once again, however, Aquinas concludes that such a cause is *still being*, but being *according to a different and elevated ratio*. If Aquinas seeks to provide an account of “all being,” then he needs either some cause that is not itself included within being or something with being that is cause of itself (*causa sui*).²⁶ But such an eminent cause need not be an analogical cause. At best, we could say that such a cause is “beyond being” but we cannot conclude that it is “only being” or “most being” or “pure being,” or any of the other superlatives that Aquinas uses on an analogical register. Aquinas smuggles in an analogical concept of being to do the demonstrative work of a univocal concept, but concluding to such a concept is unfounded. As Scotus argues, the ground of all being, if not itself included under the same *ratio essendi* as its effects, should no more be called most being or subsisting being (i.e., being according to a separate *ratio*) than it should be called a rock.

For metaphysical demonstrations that utilize the process of *remotion*, the removal must operate within one and the same concept so that after the removal, what is left (i.e., the concept applicable to God) is still linked to the original concept. If the finite wisdom or finite being of creatures is not wisdom or being in the same sense (*ratio*) as that of their cause (i.e., univocally), then by removing the former we are left with no concept at all. Based on our knowledge of the former, we have just as much reason to conclude that

²⁶ One argument in particular, from his commentary on the *Sentences*, should also be noted. This argument holds special interest because it utilizes the identity of *esse* and essence in God, and their distinctness in creatures, to impose the name *qui est* on him, while withholding it from creatures. For Aquinas’s argument taken from Avicenna, see above fn. 22. For created things, in which *esse* differs from their essence, the thing is properly denoted by its essence (e.g., the name “human” from humanity). Because of this difference between quiddity and *esse*, however, created things are not properly denoted by their *actu essendi*. In the case of God, as has been shown, the identity between his essence and his *esse* (“*ipsum esse suum est sua quidditas*”) entails that the name taken from *esse* (i.e., *qui est*) properly names him.

God is a stone. We are left only with a *trace* of the cause, best accompanied by *apophatic discourse*, but not positive affirmations that continue to use the original name (i.e., *esse*) in a dual manner of both *intrinsically* relating to God and *extrinsically* to creatures as having been caused by God. The problem, however, is that being is a concept derived from creatures; thus attempting to purify the concept by removing any vestiges of finitude in order to retain a proper concept that signifies an *actus primus et purus* eradicates the concept in its entirety. To institute the empty signifier, or phantasm, that remains as the proper name of God would require a great metaphysical *imperialism*.

We see this imperialism enacted when Aquinas's existential metaphysics, and even more his existential apologists, must explain what exactly *esse* means in reference to creatures. In other words, once God has been established as *ipsum esse subsistens*, what does the reapplication of *esse* to creatures entail? We have found that the problem with an "existential metaphysics" is that beings must participate *ipsum esse subsistens* in order to be and yet such a perfection, having been introduced to explain the actuality of real beings as distinct from mere fictions, turns out to be nothing more than their participative relation to something else. Because *esse* and essence are really distinct in creatures, and really identical only in God, an analogical concept of being (*ens*) must be used to bridge the gap. But in terms of creatures, they are *beings (entia)* only insofar as having being (*esse*) from another (i.e., through participation); but the *esse* that they have turns out to be nothing more than a semblance or reflection of *being itself*, and thus they are "*entia*" only by relation, not by their own intrinsic act.

As illustrated by the sun's illumination of air, the air itself lacks the act of illumination by itself and does not have the power to be illuminated apart from its cause.

“Illumination” turns out to be nothing more than the intimacy of the sun’s radiance to the air, which more and more overruns the air itself as it becomes increasingly illuminated. Likewise with the corresponding conservation of being, God’s intimacy to beings as the cause of their “being” fails to reveal what it is about these beings themselves by which they (formally) are.²⁷ As a name proper to God, and God’s most proper name, the signifier “*esse*” comes to deprive creatures of the very perfection it was introduced to signify (i.e., actual existence) and to enshrine such deprivation as the ultimate actuality of created beings. Such a signifier comes to properly name only divine perfection and thereby, even when used to designate created existence in a secondary or analogical sense, it fails to signify the perfection of creatures beyond their substantiality or thingness. The innermost perfection of creatures is their being related to God through the act of creation and the continued act of conservation. Thus, their proper and intrinsic act of being by which they stand outside of nothingness is the spectral omnipresence of God.

But to argue that “God’s presence” is what distinguishes an actual being from a mere fiction, or that which allows us to reach the thing in its reality beyond the mere determinations of our intellect and imagination, evacuates the explanatory power of *esse* as indicating some intrinsic act of being other than its essence. To return to Fabro’s term from above, the full metaphysical import of any creature seems to be either its essential determinations (i.e., form and matter in the case of sublunary beings, and form alone in the case of simple substances) or its relation to its cause, but not its own *intrinsic act of*

²⁷ See *ST I*, q. 8, a.1, resp. and Chapter V Section 3 above. Aquinas had asked whether God is in all things. He answers that God is in all things, but not as part of the essence or as an accident, but as an agent is present in that which it acts. He further explains that the agent must conjoined to that in which it immediately acts and touch it with its power (“*Oportet enim omne agens...sua virtute illud contingere*”). He once again invokes the analogy of illuminated air and its need for the conserving presence of light, without which it would relapse into darkness. Thus, he argues, being is most intimate to each thing.

being.²⁸ Although Fabro, along with Gilson and others, attempts to carve out a larger role for each being's intrinsic act of being, to argue that "as long as it is not being annihilated, it remains an actuated act," overly existentializes what for Aquinas can be rendered in essential terms: something's "not being annihilated" relates to a commitment on the part of God as his first providential act, and thus concerns not the creature itself, but the way in which its cause has decided to relate to it. This allows some "actuated acts" to be necessary in virtue of their forms (i.e., they need not overcome materiality), whereas others are contingent due their formal act of informing the contrariety of a *hylic* matter. What seems to be left out of this account, once again, is a distinct extra-formal act of being, which would signify anything more than the factual status of various essences as determined by God.

Although an existential reading of Aquinas would resist this reduction of *esse* to the mere factual status of the essence, appealing to the *incidental*ity of the free act of creation, such a continued insistence only serves to deprive the creature of its most fundamental actuality insofar as *esse* can never explain anything "proper" to it. Furthermore, Aquinas's thought seems to quickly move beyond this groundless *initium* of creation, focusing instead upon the intelligibility that results from the universe's order as guided by a first *principium*, who in its wisdom dispenses all things according to their form toward a common end. In terms of such order, *esse* (or *non-esse*) comes to be

²⁸ "*Esse* is the act that constitutes the proper terminus of transcendent causality (creation, conservation) and it is by virtue of this direct causality of *esse* that God operates immediately in every agent. Hence the derivation of participated *esse* from the *esse per essentiam* is direct, and along strict metaphysical lines, as grounded act from grounding Act. In fact, the participated *actus essendi*, precisely as participated, is intrinsically dependent on God. But once it has been created, and as long as it is not being annihilated, it remains an actuated act to the full extent of its metaphysical import. It belongs therefore to God to be the cause of *esse* by virtue of his very nature" "Intensive Hermeneutics," 474. It is exactly this "it remains an actuated act to the full extent of its metaphysical import" that I do not think that Aquinas's account achieves.

treated as a mere moment in the *essential content* of something's teleological and providential intelligibility. This does not mean, however, that Aquinas allots a status to essences themselves prior to creation apart from the divine intellect in the form of *esse essentiae* or Platonic subsistence.²⁹

Nevertheless, according to Scotus, Aquinas's account draws a set of troubling distinctions in terms of the separation of *exemplares* from *rationes* as they relate to his separation of practical from speculative cognition. The trouble, according to Scotus, is minimization of the divine will in the actual production of things. As Aquinas argues in the *Summa Theologica*, ideas in their capacity as principles of divine knowledge are *rationes*, whereas in their capacity of divine production, they are *exemplares*.³⁰ Although in agreement that any account of divine ideas must secure the absolute *groundlessness* of creation with respect to all essential or ideational orders against the encroachment of an overabundant *necessitation* (i.e., emanation), Scotus highlights Aquinas's failure to place enough emphasis on the divine will. Aquinas's argument, he maintains, makes "the coming-to-be" or "not-coming-to-be" (*fiendum et non fiendum*) of any given *ratio* part of its ideational content.³¹ Thus, although, on the one hand, God is radically free to create or

²⁹ See Chapter IV above.

³⁰ For a discussion of both these distinctions, see Chapter IV above. Scotus seems to be unaware of Aquinas's distinction between *speculative* and *virtually* (i.e., *non-actual*) *practical cognition*. As Aquinas argues in *De Veritate*, God's ideas of those things that are not, were not, and never will be are part of his virtually practical cognition. See *De Veritate* q. 3, a. 6, resp. In *ST I*, q. 15, a. 3, ad. 2, where Aquinas states that of non-existent things, God does not have practical knowledge, except *virtually*. Thus, there is no *exemplar* of such things in God, only a *ratio*. Scotus seems to be referring to this article and thus (seems to be) primarily concerned with the distinction between *rationes* and *exemplares*. For Scotus's argument, see John Duns Scotus, *The Examined Report of the Paris Lecture Reportatio I-A: Latin Text and English Translation*. Volume 2. trans and ed. Allan B. Wolter and Oleg V. Bychkov (St. Bonaventure: The Franciscan Institute, 2008). Hereafter "*Reportatio*."

³¹ "Minor patet, quia si idea ante actum voluntatis respiceret diversimode possibile fiendum et non fiendum, ergo, intellectus ostendens hoc voluntati ut unum possibile fiendum et aliud non fiendum, aut voluntas non posset non velle illud fieri (et sic non esset libera sed necessaria, respectu aliorum a se), vel si posset velle illud non fieri, posset esse non recta, quia faceret contra rationem rectam dictantem hoc esse faciendum—quorum utrumque est impossibile. Ergo penes possibile futurum et non futurum non accipitur distinction

not create, God, on the other hand, also *knows* what God will do. Barring any considerations of self-deception or change of mind, what God *knows* he is going-to-will must in fact happen. Thus, the infallibility of divine knowledge *objectifies* the extra-essential *incidental*ity of the founding act of creation: what existential Thomists took pains to describe as an extra-essential *event*, a grounding act outside of and presupposed by any essential economy of substances, has been rendered substantial and objective by the divine intellect. The *coming-to-be* or *not-coming-to-be* of any creature becomes part of its *essential* content as conceived by the divine intellect. The being *per accidens*, or *incidental*ity, of the giving of being is absorbed into the ideational structure of God's knowledge.

The problem, Scotus argues, concerns Aquinas's impartation of necessity (as reflected by Scotus's use of the gerundive *fiendum* or *non-fiendum*) to the content of the idea before it has been offered to the will: the practical role of the intellect, Scotus charges, should not add anything to speculation prior to the operation of the will lest we undermine the will's free act.³² By distinguishing practical ideas containing the mark "*meant to come to be*" (*fiendum*) from the mere theoretical content of the idea itself, Scotus argues that such a view bars the will from its own radical act of legislation. Only the divine will, and not some essential difference between possible objects or divine ideas, should account for something's *coming into being*.³³ What distinguishes the two according to Scotus is not something contained within their concept or idea—even as

ideae practicae a speculativa." *Reportatio* d. 36, p. 2, q. 1-2, 101. For an extended analysis of this argument, see also Timothy B. Noone, "Aquinas on Divine Ideas: Scotus's Evaluation," 316-318.

³² What worries Scotus is the type of argument established in *SCG* III.98.

³³ "Sed fiendum et non fiendum non sunt aliquae differentiae essentiales 'possibilis' in obiectis vel in finibus ideae practicae vel speculativae, —sed solummodo per actum voluntatis divinae—acceptantis hoc fieri et non acceptantis aliud fieri—illud est possibile fiendum et aliud non fiendum; et est ista differentia in obiectis, et non penes aliquas differentias possibilis in se, essentiales sibi." *Reportatio* d. 36, p. 2, q. 1-2, 102.

conceived perfectly by God from the perspective of the universe as a whole—but the divine will (*voluntas*) in its independence from the intellect.

The importance of Scotus's argument, I would argue, relates back to the issue of God's providential resolve as discussed above.³⁴ Although the choice between being and nothingness and conservation and annihilation required a free act of divine will in order to ground what otherwise would have remained groundless, God's role quickly transitions from *benefactor of a gift* to *provider of a loan*. Thus the radical *incidental*ity at the root of being, grounded upon a radical act of gratuity incommensurable with any created nature, comes to be neutralized through its inscription within a providential plan. Insofar as God indebts himself to his own plan, and short of any *unforeseen* intervention of his will, there is no room for the departure from nor interference with such a plan. A creature's *esse* is the result (*consequitur*) following from its essential determination in the divine intellect of what should and should not come to be as necessitated by the providential plan to which God has indebted himself. Thus, for Aquinas, contingency barely retains traces of the radical incidental*ity* of *being otherwise* (i.e., nothingness) against which being emerges. Such radical *incidental*ity, which had formed a central mode of analysis for existential Thomism, comes to be neutralized once *fiendum* and *non-fiendum* become part of the ideational content of divine ideas.

The will, according to Scotus's reading of Aquinas, becomes but the expression of *that which has been resolved* by the divine intellect according to its providential resolution to carry out the best possible order. Gilson, however, interprets Scotus's insistence on the *divine will* contra-Aquinas as the direct result of the former's univocal theory of being and its concomitant rejection of a *pure* Act of Being. Once beings are

³⁴ See Chapter V Section 5 above.

flattened into a univocal field of beings and nothing radically exceeds the field such that it *in excelsu* could ground the field as a whole and retain for itself an *excellence by purity* whereby it would be radically diverse from everything else, *then* from within the univocal field something else must distinguish the *primum inter pares*. The Scotistic *primum*'s mark of distinction, Gilson argues, by which it affirms its own necessity and renders all other beings *contingent*, due to their equality with it *qua being*, can only be the divine will.³⁵ Lest Scotus make the same “mistake” as Avicenna and render everything necessary via a second order necessity, the divine will assures the radical contingency of all other beings. *They* (i.e., the *pares*) require the free act of the *primum* to bring them into existence. But once they come to be as beings, they have the same claim to being as the first, albeit as *modified* by finite attributes (i.e., finite, created, contingent, etc.). Thus, Gilson seems to suggest, Thomistic existentialism holds open the existentiality of any creature through a dynamic interplay and exchange between analogically distinct and irreducible acts-of-being, all crowned by the pure Act of Being of *Qui Est*. Although the divine intellect may infallibly *know* the workings of the existential economy, of everything that will or will not *come to be* as seen by His complete and eternal gaze over *esse*'s temporalized unfolding, and this would seem to render it an *idea* and part of the essential economy, the primary exchange between God and creatures is not between

³⁵ “In a doctrine which is based on univocal being and not upon analogical acts of being, a dividing line other than the act of being must be drawn between God and creatures. The role played in Thomism by the existential purity of the divine Act of Being is played in Scotism by the divine will.” Gilson, *Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 460. See also Maritain's *Existence and the Existent*. In speaking of an authentic Thomistic existentialism, he places Descartes—as an heir of Scotism—within a tradition (called “inauthentic existentialism” by Maritain) that emphasizes divine liberty at the expense of intelligibility. Maritain argues that “authentic existentialism” is one that affirms the primacy of existence, “but as implying and preserving essences or natures and as manifesting the supreme victory of the intellect and intelligibility” (3). “Inauthentic existentialism,” of which twentieth-century existentialism is the heir, also affirms the primacy of existence, but “destroys and abolishes” essences and natures and thus “manifests the supreme defeat of the intellect and intelligibility.” Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 3-5.

knowing subject and known object, but between the purity of an Act and its limited imitating acts. Thus, Gilson would argue, what God knows is himself as *imitable* by other *acts-of-being* (i.e., creatures), able to *enact* imitations of his own pure act. As Aquinas argues, God knows all things as an imitation of himself, just as, if light knew itself, it would know all other colors, or if the center knew itself, it would know all other lines.³⁶ The emphasis on the primacy of act is retained without an overly-essentialized reduction to *what* is known.

The problem with such a response, however, is that existentialism deprives creatures of their own *actus essendi*, making them instead spectacles of divine radiance. Insofar as the real distinction between essence and existence (*esse*) attempts to separate the conditions of essential possibility from existential actuality, such a view threatens creation *ex nihilo*, according to Scotus.³⁷ The problem with holding onto *esse* as a really distinct act of being is not that it resists definition. *Haecceitas*, as will be seen, resists definition and yet remains indispensable in the account of the thing, according to Scotus. Instead, the problem arises from the fact that such “perfection” deprives the creature of what should be most fundamental to it (even if caused by another), namely, its factual emergence as being of a fundamentally different order than mere fictions. Such an emergence, as I will argue against Gilson below, requires real beings to be *in their own right*. Otherwise, creation merely creates a diminished and parasitical extension of divine being without issuing forth *in re* a diverse order of beings. Thinking creation as the “gift

³⁶ See *ST I* q. 14, a. 6, resp.

³⁷ “igitur si propter scientiam Dei, quam ab aeterno habet de lapide, oportet ponere lapidem in esse essentiae, eadem ratione poneretur in esse existentiae ab aeterno; item, sicut argutum est, non erit creatio de nihilo,-vel si aliquo modo salvetur creatio, verius erit creatio rei secundum esse essentiae, ut supra argutum est.” *Lectura I. d. 36 Unica*, 24

of being,” and yet as a gift that is not really given, fails to diversify God from creatures, the very diversity for which “*esse*” was introduced in the first place.

The problem with thinking creation as the gift of being is not that *esse* fails to appear as a “real predicate” possessed by some beings and lacked by others. Such reification most certainly would reduce *esse* to the economic exchange of the essential economy, as merely one more property transferable between substantial agents grounded in the gold standard of divine *esse*. Creation must be thought in terms of givenness and this entails thinking the act of creation outside an economy of exchange and the logic of necessity bound by the principles of sufficient reason. Such a groundless arrival, what Marion refers to as “an unpredictable landing,” exceeds all essential determinability.³⁸ The problem thus results not from the groundlessness of creation as gift, but from the shackles of existential participation. With *esse* as the basis of creation and that which is given through the creative act, the landing is not unpredictable, but providentially ratified.

The mistake of an overly existentialized reading of Aquinas has been to mark off a separate role for *esse* as some *act* really distinct from essence.³⁹ If, however, the goal is

³⁸ See Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. Especially, pp. 131-139. “Only a phenomenology of givenness can return to the things themselves because in order to return to them, it is necessary first to see them, therefore to see them as they come and, in the end, to bear their unpredictable landing” Ibid 4. To think the true givenness of creation, creatures must emerge in their own right, an emergence stifled by binding creation to *esse*. The gift is not given, but necessarily misfires; such a failed landing results not on account of the demands of conforming to an essential economy, but from wedding *esse* so closely with the indivisible simplicity of divine *ipseity*.

³⁹ A real distinction, Scotus argues, places too much emphasis on a pre-created *esse essentiae* (or “essential being”), which serves almost as a cosmic blueprint *ready to be actualized* when imparted with *esse existentiae* (or existential being). Against such an essentially robust account of pre-created possibility, Scotus argues that the relation of God to creatures from eternity does not require a *real relation*. There is instead an ideal relation according to “diminished being” (*esse deminutum*), which Scotus also calls “known being” (*esse cognitum*) and distinguishes from *both* essential being (*esse essentiae*) and existential being (*esse existentiae*). He thus moves to separate mere known being, which humanity has from itself as a “supposed being” (*ens ratum*) even before creation, from both essential being and actual existence, neither of which the *ens ratum* possesses before creation. “Ideo dico quod res ab aeterno non habuit esse verum essentiae vel existentiae, sed fundat relationem idealem secundum esse deminutum, quod habuit ab aeterno (quod est esse verum, distinctum contra esse essentiae et esse existentiae, sicut patet ex VI *Metaphysicae*): sicut si ponatur quod ego fuissem ab aeterno et quod ab aeterno intellexissem rosam, ab

to think the real, which somehow the conceptual imperialism of essentialism fails to capture, then perhaps instead, Scotus, Suarez, and others are correct in rejecting the real otherness of *esse* in the act of creation. As Scotus argues, creation creates *something*, that is, a fully actualized being. Why not simply reduce the fully actualized being to the creative act, instead of withholding a (really) distinct contribution for *esse* in this act, especially once *esse* becomes a perfection only extrinsically related to creatures? Why continue to emphasize *esse* as the unique effect of the act of creation? Above we addressed Aquinas's argument that to create even the most finite effect, an infinite power

aeterno tunc intellexi rosam secundum esse suum essentiae et secundum esse existentiae; et tamen non habuit nisi cognitum, -sicut si modo rosa omnino nihil esset, intelligo rosam et secundum esse essentiae et existentiae, et tamen neutrum habet. Unde terminus intellectionis est esse essentiae vel esse existentiae, - et tamen illud quod obicitur intellectui, tantum habet esse diminutum in intellectu.” *Lectura* I d. 36 q. Unica, 26-27. For a discussion of this term “*esse diminutum*,” see Armand Maurer, “*Ens Diminutum: A Note on its Origins and Meaning.*” *Medieval Studies* 12 (1950): 216-222. Closely associated with “*ens diminutum*” is the concept of “*ens ratum*.” Scotus states: “...quando arguitur quod humanitas de se non est ens ratum, dicendum quod si intelligatur per ‘ens ratum’ ens prout distinguitur ab impossibili, cui non repugnat esse, sic homo de se est ens ratum formaliter, -et a quod habet quod sit ens, ab eodem habet quod sit ens ratum de se formaliter: nec huius est aliqua causa, sicut non est aliqua causa quare albedo repugnat nigredini nisi quia est albedo; sed tamen non sequitur quod tunc humanitas sit Deus, quia Deus non tantum est ens cui competit esse, sed est ipsum esse. Si autem intelligatur per ‘esse ratum’ esse essentiae, tunc dico quod homo non est de se ens ratum quia de se non habet esse essentiae. - Et quando dicitur quod habet tunc respectum ad Deum et non ad Deum ut efficiens est, quia ‘efficiens’ non terminat quaestionem ‘quid est’ sed definitio, dico quod illud esse ratum, quod causa esse actualis existentiae; et ideo Deus sic terminat relationem utriusque, in quantum dat utrumque esse effective.” *Lectura* I d. 36 q. Unica, 32. Scotus argues that if by ‘ens ratum’ one understand that which is distinguished from the impossible and is not repugnant to *esse*, then “human”—or any other possible essence—has from itself ‘ens ratum.’ For example, there is no cause for why whiteness is repugnant to blackness “nisi quia est albedo.” Scotus makes known, however, that such *ens ratum* cannot be accounted for by preexisting essential being (*esse essentiae*). He states: “Si autem intelligatur per ‘esse ratum’ esse essentiae, tunc dico quod homo non est de se ens ratum quia de se non habet esse essentiae.” *Lectura* I d. 36 q. Unica, 32. In response to the position that creation adds actual existence to already (*existing*) essential possibility, Scotus offers the following response: According to such view, which attempts to safeguard essential possibility apart from actual existence, God would create *de nihilo* (as Scotus here calls it) only in a limited and restricted manner. *Ordinatio* II, d. 1, q. 2, 77-78. That is, He would create *secundum esse existentiae*, but not *secundum esse essentiae*. Against those who hedge their bets around such a distinction—and Scotus probably has Henry of Ghent in mind—Scotus argues that from nothing, God creates *both* existential *and* essential *esse* because “...essential being is never really separate from existential being.” Instead, the two are modally distinct. The full passage reads: “Quantum ergo ad istum articulum [scil: n.76], dico quod de nihilo (id est non de aliquo) secundum esse existentiae postest Deus creare, et per consequens de nihilo (id est non de aliquo) secundum esse essentiae, quia ut probatum est distinctione 36 primi libri, *numquam esse essentiae realiter separatur ab esse existentiae.*” *Ordinatio* II, d. 1, q. 2, 82.

is required.⁴⁰ The importance of this argument for existential Thomism is what it reveals in contrast to essentialism and its account of creation. Gilson, for example claims that Aquinas's argument highlights the infinite distance between being and nothingness, a gap that no created essence, no matter how essentially complete, can overcome. Only God as the pure Act of Being can provide such being to creatures.

What certain readers of Aquinas miss, according to Gilson, is that creation is the "giving of being" from out of the dark abyss of nothingness. Duns Scotus, conceptual imperialist *par excellence*, is clearly guilty of such a charge. Gilson states:

On this precise point, and obviously with the position of Thomas Aquinas in mind, Scotus argues along entirely different lines. Of course, he too agrees that God alone can create, but not for the reason that God alone can give *esse*. In point of fact, Scotus could not well accept such a principle without giving up his own notion of being. What is it, according to him, to be an actually existing being? As has been said, it is to be an actually complete essence. Now every time any efficient cause produces a compound of matter and form, all complete with all its individual determinations, since what it produces is a real essence, it also produces a real existence.⁴¹

Creatures are productive of *esse* for Scotus because generation brings about essential completion. The problem, as Gilson sees it, is that Scotistic *esse* is nothing other than the complete essence, which entails that God's infinite distance from creatures is not his being *being itself* (*ipsum esse*). Instead, such distance persists only because he is *infinite being* (*ens*), and they *finite*. Thus, God infinitely transcends creatures but only in terms of essence. Furthermore, although there is an infinite distance between infinite and finite being, the same distance does not hold between finite beings and nothingness. Each created being is removed from nothingness in proportion to its degree of being (i.e., essence). Existence becomes an *intrinsic mode* of created essences. Although only God's

⁴⁰ See Chapter V above.

⁴¹ *Being and Some Philosophers*, 90.

existence necessarily belongs to his essence, once any creature comes to be (i.e., contingently through an act of divine will), such an intrinsic mode *belongs* to its essence. According to Gilson, placing existence under essential dominion as one of its modes undermines the revolution undertaken by Aquinas.

For Scotus, actual existence is the outcome of a fully determined essence. As outcome, *esse* does not add anything to the essence, but merely marks the essential completion. Such “modification” of the essential reality does not change nor perfect the essence because an existing essence does not acquire any additional reality than a “non-existing essence.”⁴² What the latter signifies is that the essence has not been individuated,

⁴² For Scotus, a created being’s *esse* is “modally” distinct from its essence. *Esse* is an essential modification. By “mode” Scotus implies the degree of intensity of a certain nature. In his *Ordinatio*, he defines the modal distinction as follows: “Requiritur ergo distinctio, inter illud a quo accipitur conceptus communis et inter illud a quo accipitur conceptus proprius, non ut distinctio realitatis et realitatis sed distinctio realitatis et modi proprii et intrinseci eiusdem, -quae distinctio sufficit ad habendum conceptum perfectum vel imperfectum de eodem, quorum imperfectus sit communis et perfectus sit proprius.” *Ordinatio* I, d. 8, Pars 1, q. 3, 139. The two concepts formed around this distinction do not conceive two distinct realities, but a distinction of *a reality* and *its particular and intrinsic mode*. The common concept of the nature as conceived without the intrinsic and proper mode is understood imperfectly, while that particular (*proprius*) concept which includes the mode is understood more perfectly. The modal distinction is less than real because no nature subsists *in re* without intensive modification. For example, the nature whiteness and this intensity or degree of whiteness marks a modal distinction. This particular whiteness with its degree of intensity could be conceived merely as common whiteness; and yet unmodified whiteness does not really exist apart from a specific degree. As Peter King succinctly states: “The core intuition behind Scotus’s modal distinction is, roughly, that some natures come in a range of degrees that are inseparably a part of what they are.” Peter King, “Scotus on Metaphysics,” *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, ed. Thomas Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 25. Perhaps the most noted use of this distinction for Scotus is distinguishing between the transcendental concept being (*ens*) and its modes of infinite and finite: although one can conceive a being apart from finite and infinite, there is no being that is not either finite or infinite. “...conceptus speciei non est tantum conceptus realitatis et modi intrinseci eiusdem realitatis, quia tunc albedo posset esse genus, et gradus intrinseci albedinis possent esse differentiae specifica; illa autem per quae commune aliquod contrahitur ad Deum et creaturam, sunt finitum et infinitum, qui dicunt gradus intrinsecos ipsius...” *Ordinatio* I, d. 8, Pars 1, q. 3, 108. Thus, when treating the mode as separate from the nature, a less than real distinction pertains between the two. According to Grajewski, an intrinsic mode allows a reality to be understood as a perfect concept; without such a mode the reality can only be understood imperfectly. Thus, the reality is not understood under two distinct concepts, and even less are two distinct realities understood, but one reality conceived either perfectly or imperfectly. See Maurice J. Grajewski, *The Formal Distinction of Duns Scotus: A Study in Metaphysics* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1944), 86-87. Thus, to understand a created essence without *esse* would be to understand it imperfectly. *Esse*, for Scotus, is an intrinsic mode of the essence and not an extra-essential perfection as it is for Aquinas. Scotus describes the relationship between an essence and the mode of existing as a “modal distinction,” which does not require two distinct realities, nor two distinct concepts, but the conceptualization of a single reality according to

and thus has not taken on necessary determinations to actually exist. Against an essentialist reduction of *esse* to the mere emergence of a fully determined essence, Gilson notes both Aquinas and Scotus posit an ultimate actuality of form, which is itself *not form*: in the case of Aquinas, this is *esse*; for Scotus, however, it is *haecceitas*. On the latter, Gilson states:

The Scotist “thisness” is not the cause of existence, but it is the unmistakable sign that the essence under consideration is now fit to exist; then, as a matter of fact, it does exist. Be it in God or in finite things, existence is that modality of being which belongs to completely individualized essence. Whether they be such by themselves, which is the case of God alone, or they be such by another one, which is the case of all creatures, fully individualized essences *exist in their own right* [m.e.].⁴³

This “to exist in their own right,” which Gilson attributes to a failure on the part of Scotistic thought, is exactly where Aquinas’s thought on *esse* has fallen short. As argued above, creatures in Aquinas’s analogical universe become nothing more than a reflection of divine *esse* in whose perfect radiance they are lost. Instead of allowing thought to reach that condition by which things emerge as diverse from everything else, most especially from God, *esse* over-fortifies against the encroachment of the finite. This entails that God alone has being; everything else is reduced to a reflection, a pale similitude, of divine *esse* without actually emerging in its own right. Unlike with Scotus’s

various degrees of perfection. A conception of the essence alone provides an imperfect conception, whereas an essence along with existence provides a more perfect conception. *Esse* merely marks the degree of being something has until it reaches completion in the individual, or what, for Scotus, marks the “perfection” of the essence. Gilson discusses Scotus’s reading of *esse*: “For each and every condition of the essence, there is a corresponding degree of being (*esse*), which is exactly proportional to it. In other and perhaps better words, being (*esse*) is nothing else than the intrinsic reality of essence itself, in each one of the various conditions in which it is to be found. This is why, wherever there is essence there is being, and what we call existence is simply the definite mode of being which is that of an essence when it has received the complete series of its determinations. It is nothing new for it to be. Essence always is.” See Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 86. Most significant to note is the claim that “it is *nothing new* for [an essence] to be.” According to Gilson, *esse* is something an essence takes on in proportion to its degree of determination. Thus, when an essence is fully determined as *this* (i.e., *haecceitas*), it “exists.” As an *intrinsic mode* of an essence, however, *esse* must admit of degrees. What Gilson finds missing from such an account is an *originary act of radical newness* to supervene upon the essence from outside the essential order.

⁴³ *Being and Some Philosophers*, 94.

univocal community of being, which God exceeds through his infinite modification, the analogical community becomes a community of one sovereign *ipseity* of being.

For Gilson, Scotus's fully modified essences (i.e., individuals) bound together by a common conception of being, which includes both finite and infinite modes, would seem to flatten the distance Aquinas strives to uphold through analogy. Furthermore, with creatures no longer needing to participate their being, they emerge in their own right as individuals. Instead of multiplying being into a multiplicity of subsisting *ipseities*, where each individual becomes its own sovereign subsistence (the concern of Dewan addressed above), being as a univocal *ratio* can hold together because singularity offers the source of radical *diversity* (i.e., not merely *difference*).⁴⁴ Scotistic community is conceptual, to use Bettoni's words, but not real.⁴⁵ Thus, "being" as the common conceptual condition for membership in such a community extends equally to all its members. The consequence of such an extension is that there is nothing like a pure act of being (or Being) because everything is equally contained in the community of beings. Such a univocal community, although *conceptual*, is neither an *imperialism* (Gilson) nor a "uniform regime of entity" (Marion), because the concept of being (*conceptus entis*) reigns over a *reality* whose ultimate perfection (i.e., in terms of singularity), which serves both to identify each thing as a *this*, but to also (and in the very same process) distinguish it from everything else, cannot be represented in conceptual terms. Thus, the concept's *imperium* extends *qua being* to everything, but only in conceptual, not real, communion, and *qua essence* to all creatures as part of quidditive communities bound by some real

⁴⁴ For Scotus, singularity (*haecceitas*) is not without being determined by the otherness of everything which it is not. Thus, diversity stands as an irreducibly defining characteristic of singularity.

⁴⁵ Efreem Bettoni, *Duns Scotus: The Basic Principles of His Philosophy*, trans. Bernadine Bonansea (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1961), 37.

essential core (e.g., humanity or equinity) and yet comprised of individuals incommensurable as *thises*, an incommensurability unrepresentable by the concept.

Univocity, I would argue, functions in a metaphysical economy whose basic units are singular individuals irreducible in their singularity to an “analogical community.”⁴⁶ Ontologically, beings resist analogical communion according to Scotus due to *haecceitas*, or that by which each thing is both perfected, but also diversified, each one from the next. Such diversity resists analogical comparison insofar as there can be no commerce between a *this* and that: they remain radically incommensurable for Scotus, and a central feature of each thing’s *haecceitas* is the fact of *not-being* anything else. *Haecceitas* presupposes real diversity, whereas all commonality transpires in terms of *essence*. Thus, beings are both constituted by their radical diversity (i.e., part of what it means to be *this* is to be *not-that*), but also come-together in real unities of essences, which in each individual is *formally distinct* from its *haecceitas*.

Individuals of the same nature, Scotus argues, both agree with one another in something (i.e., that they are of the same nature), but also differ in that they are diverse beings. That by which they differ must be reduced to some item that is *diverse primarily*. This means that even though this individual and that individual formally agree in their nature, their *thisness* and *thatness* by which they differ cannot be reduced to a common ground (i.e., primarily diverse). This “lateral move” between this and that, to borrow a phrase from Timothy Noone, cannot be bridged by a difference reducible to a common

⁴⁶ “...conceptus speciei non est tantum conceptus realitatis et modi intrinseci eiusdem realitatis, quia tunc albedo posset esse genus, et gradus intrinseci albedinis possent esse differentiae specificae; illa autem per quae commune aliquod contrahitur ad Deum et creaturam, sunt finitum et infinitum, qui dicunt gradus intrinsecos ipsius...” *Ordinatio* I, d. 8, Pars 1, q. 3, 108. Anderson goes so far as to state: “In fact, every essentialism which purports to be a metaphysics is based on a univocal idea of being. In those philosophies, ‘being,’ as *summum genus*, has many different names, but they are all fundamentally univocal: the supreme category, or the class of all classes is still a logical intention.” *The Bond of Being*, 276-277.

third, but must remain incommunicably “diverse.”⁴⁷ Such primary diversity must fall outside the nature and its essential determinations otherwise the two individuals would agree in nothing. In addition, such diversity must be more than mere difference lest the process of accounting for difference reach to infinity. Without such primary diversity, “every difference among the differing” would fall back into some identity or commonality, and thus be unable to explain difference. Thus:

Ergo praeter naturam in hoc et in illo, sunt aliqua primo diversa, quibus hoc et illud differunt (hoc in isto et illud in illo): et non possunt esse negationes, ex secunda quaestione, -nec accidentia, ex quarta quaestione; igitur erunt aliquae entitates positivae, per se determinantes naturam.⁴⁸

Having already shown that neither negations nor accidents can account for individual diversity, Scotus now can conclude that the principle of individuation must be positive (i.e., because not through a negation), *per se* (i.e., because not through accidents), and determinative of the nature, but not identical to the nature itself.

Because the nature is distinct from *this* or *that*, Scotus does not foreclose a real commonality between *this* and *that*. The real commonality, however, transpires between them at the level of essential reality, itself a less than numerical unity *formally distinct* from diverse individual realities. Numerical unity, on the other hand, explains the unity of the individual and determines the nature to *this*, and although not numerically distinct from the nature, such an item cannot be accounted for by the *ratio* (account) of the nature but requires its own account. Scotus goes on to explain this nonidentity between the unity that is the nature and the unity that is the individual. Between the nature and the individual, there is not a real distinction between two individuals or things (*res*), he

⁴⁷ See *Ordinatio* II, d. 3, Pars I, q. 6, 169. Also Timothy Noone. “Universal and Individuation,” *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, ed. Thomas Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 100-128.

⁴⁸ *Ordinatio* II d. 3 Pars I q. 6, 170.

argues, but a formal distinction between two entities or realities.⁴⁹ The less-than-numerical unity of the common nature is real and belongs to some numerical unity from which it is formally distinct.⁵⁰

Scotus follows Avicenna in treating the common nature as a reality apart from its universalization in the intellect or its individualization in the thing.⁵¹ It is important to emphasize that although the nature and the individual constitute formally distinct realities, such realities must belong to a single numerical unity. For the matter at hand, Scotus argues that *thisness* offers a different account than *whatness*. The less-than-numerical unity of the nature “stone” cannot account for the *thisness* of this stone.

Otherwise, there would be no account of that by which *this* and *that* differ as diverse beings. The account of stoneness would account for *this stone*, and also *that stone*, thus

⁴⁹ “In eodem igitur quod est unum numero, est aliqua entitas, quam consequitur minor unitas quam sit unitas numeralis, et est realis; et illud cuius et talis, unitas, formaliter est ‘de se unum’ unitate numerali. Concedo igitur quod unitas realis non est alicuius existentis in duobus individuis, sed in uno” *Ordinatio* II d. 3, Pars I, q. 6, 172.

⁵⁰ The formal distinction, more real than the modal distinction, pertains to distinct realities each with a separate account or *ratio* relating to a single thing (*res*). Modalities modify something’s essential reality, whereas formalities constitute separate realities with their own *ratio*. Early in the text, Scotus had defined the formal distinction as preceding every act of created and uncreated intellect, and thus as a type of “real distinction.” *Ordinatio* I, d. 2, Pars 2, qq. 1-4, nn. 388-410. This is because the mind forms different *rationes*, which it takes as its object *from* the thing itself, and not merely from its own activity. One object is understood but according to *formally* non-identical perfections. He cites the example in something white (*in albedine*), there is something from which it has the *ratio* of color and something else from which it has the *ratio* of the specific difference. Each reality is outside the other and has its own *ratio*, which does not include the account of the other and yet both subsist in a single thing (i.e., *in albedine*). Otherwise, to use another example, “rational” and “animal” would account for the same reality in the individual human. Instead, both the genus and specific difference pertains to a formally distinct reality in the individual because the one does not merely modify the other: rational is not a mere modification of animality because rational also belongs to non-animals. “Comparando autem naturam specificam ad illud quod est supra se, dico quod illa realitas a qua sumitur differentia specifica, est actualis respectu illius realitatis a qua sumitur genus vel ratio generis, ita quod haec realitas non est formaliter illa; alioquin in definitione esset nugatio, et solum genus sufficienter definiret (vel illa differentia), quia indicaret totam entitatem definiti. Quandoque tamen istud ‘contrahens’ est aliud a forma a qua sumitur ratio generis (quando species addit realitatem aliquam supra naturam generis),-quandoque autem non est res aliqua, sed tantum alia formalitas vel alius conceptus formalis eiusdem rei; et secundum hoc aliqua differentia specifica habet conceptum ‘non simpliciter simplicem’, puta quae sumitur a forma,-aliqua habet conceptum ‘simpliciter simplicem’, quae sumitur ab ultima abstractione formae (de qua distinctione differentiarum specificarum dictum est distinctione 3 primi libri, qualiter aliquae differentiae specificae includunt ens et aliquae non).” *Ordinatio* II, d. 3 Pars 1, q. 6, 179.

⁵¹ *Ordinatio* II, d. 3, q. 1.

obliterating the diversity between them. Instead, Scotus argues, separate accounts must be rendered for each in its singularity in order to secure the real diversity of individuals.

Insofar as *haecceitas* is non-identical to essence, Scotus's approach operates by way of remotion. By removing the essential features of an individual thing, and being left with a remainder that cannot be defined, but must be present to account for the diverse individuals through which a common agreement can be formed, *haecceitas* can be detected. The principle of individuation is neither matter, nor form, nor the composite of matter and form, but some reality distinct from the quiddity.⁵² The common nature, even though it is one and real, can be distinguished into a multiplicity of *formally* distinct realities: *this* one is not *that* one, and yet both share a common nature. Such is the work of individuation according to Scotus. Distinct singularities, unrepeatable in themselves and incommunicable with each other, nevertheless share in a common nature. As primarily diverse through *haecceitas*, formal agreement can be reached between individuals but not on account of their singularity. The entity of each singularity thus requires its own non-quidditative account. As non-quidditative it thus stands outside definition, demonstration, and scientific objectification.

On the non-definability of the singular, Scotus states: "Et ideo concedo quod singulare non est definibile definitione alia a definitione speciei, et tamen est per se ens, addens aliquam entitatem entitati speciei; sed illa 'per se entitas' quam addit, non est entitas quidditativa."⁵³ The singular is without definition and even though adding a *per se*

⁵² Non est igitur 'ista entitas' materia vel forma vel compositum, in quantum quodlibet istorum est 'natura',--sed est ultima realitas entis quod est materia vel forma vel quod est compositum; ita quod quodcumque commune, et tamen determinabile, adhuc potest distingui (quantumcumque sit una res) in plures realitates formaliter distinctas, quarum haec formaliter non est illa; et haec est formaliter entitas singularitatis, et illa est entitas naturae formaliter. Ibid., 188.

⁵³ *Ordinatio* II, d. 3, Pars 1, q. 6, 192. Thus, the singular has its own (formally distinct) *ratio* and yet does not have a definition other than that of the species. Further, he states: "...singulare autem non habet

entitativity to the species, it does not add a quidditative entity. *Haecceitas* adds nothing more to defining what it was to be a thing: Socrates is no more what he is (i.e., human) by being this human. Furthermore, there can be no demonstration or *scientia* of the singular: from “human,” Socrates cannot be reached. However, unlike *esse* which modifies the essence without determining it, *haecceitas* contributes its own indefinable and indemonstrable reality to the essence in order to account for determination to this (as distinct from that). Otherwise, the essence would be left uncontracted to singularity and would be unable to account for diverse individuals. The community instituted around the common nature neither subsumes the singular, whose *haecceitas* possesses its own non-quidditative ratio, nor completely excludes it as a fundamentally incommensurable act. *Haecceitas* instead serves as a necessary ground for a common exchange within the essential economy itself. Without singularity, there would be no difference to measure as common. Such a notion in its formal distinctness from quiddity cuts across Gilson’s divide between essentialism and existentialism.

A final question must be answered: To echo Gilson’s earlier claim, if *haecceitas* does the work for Scotus that *esse* does for Aquinas, what more is at stake philosophically than the semantic substitution of one term for another (i.e., *haecceitas* for *esse*)? Is this not merely a dispute with Gilson over whose pet term sounds better? The answer, I maintain, is philosophically more significant for the following reason: Scotus has argued that actual existence cannot be the ultimate act of the thing because, as act determines and distinguishes, ultimate act must bring with it the ultimate determination and distinction.⁵⁴

definitionem propriam, sed tantum definitionem speciei,- et ita non est de ipso demonstratio propria, sed tantum demonstratio quae est de specie (non enim habet passionem propriam, sed tantum passionem speciei). Ibid, 193.

⁵⁴ *Ordinatio* II, d. 3, Pars 1, q. 3.

But *esse* does not distinguish or determine except through essence. Hence, *esse* is determined by the determinations of another.⁵⁵ *Esse* cannot perfect and determine the essence because actual existence, unlike thisness, does not bring any determinations of its own beyond those of the essence.

This critique of *esse* by Scotus reveals how an existential metaphysics reduces the individual into a mere participant in Divine *Esse*. When pressed to give an account of the actuality added to an essence by *esse*, existential metaphysics explains such donation of *esse* (i.e., creation) as participation in Divine *Esse*. Thus, the ultimate actuality of any created being is its relation to another. Gilson, however, does not think such a view of a creature's ultimate perfection as participated *esse* collapses the diversity of God from creation. He states, "...the fact of receiving being from God is the best proof that its receiver is not God."⁵⁶ True, in such an account "the receiver is not God." Perhaps more troubling, however, is that neither is the receiver a true being (*ens*). By making participation the ultimate created perfection, such an account fails to explain the real diversification of God from creation, such that created beings come to take a stand as individuals, each with its own determination to *this*. Instead, each individual being as fundamentally "receiver of *esse*" becomes a diminished repetition of *Ipsum Esse*, and thus not *primarily diverse* from that which it inadequately repeats. *Haecceitas*, however,

⁵⁵As Scotus states in reference to *esse*: "quia illud quod praesupponit determinationem et distinctionem alterius, non est ratio distguendi vel determinandi ipsum [...]" (Ibid., 62). This is why "*this* man" no more includes actual existence than "man."

⁵⁶"The connection between creature and creator, as it results from creation, is called participation. It must be noted *at once* [m.e.] that, far from implying any pantheistic signification, that expression, on the contrary, aims at removing it. Participation expresses both the bond uniting the creature to the creator, which makes creation intelligible, and the separation which prohibits them from intermingling. To participate in the pure act or perfection of God is to possess a perfection which was pre-existent in God, but is not to be 'part of' what one participates in; it is to derive and to receive being from another being, and the fact of receiving being from God is the best proof that its receiver is not God" Etienne Gilson, *Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 373.

brings its own non-quidditative *ratio determinandi* which accounts for individual diversity. Thus, counter to Gilson's charge of conceptual imperialism, *haecceitas* while taking seriously the domain of the concept, outstrips its *imperium*.⁵⁷

By continuing to stress the otherness between a creature and its act of being, Aquinas—at least in the hands of his existential readers—fails to delimit where a being begins and God's causal influence ends. So long as *esse* remains really other to creatures and their being stands as an analogical semblance of subsisting being itself—a failed iteration of its *ipseity*—creatures cannot *be* in any meaningful sense of the term. Nothing, including *esse*, marks their distinct status outside the divine mind as any such denotation can only ever be a parasitic iteration of divine perfection. Creatures are only a reflective similitude of being, which, apart from God's continual conservation and concurrence, lack their own power by which to emerge in their own right. In the end, “*esse*” denotes not some distinct existential perfection, but essential dependence. Aquinas, thus, has made the *esse* of creatures—or that very perfection that he introduced to explain what

⁵⁷ The univocal predication of being (*ens*) for both *ens infinitum et ens finitum* stems from Scotus's argument for the univocity of being against treating being as analogical (e.g., Aquinas) or equivocal (e.g., Henry of Ghent). In an excellent discussion of Scotus's larger role in the transition from scholasticism to modern and post-modern philosophy, Catherine Pickstock assesses the changes that result with such a concept of being. Instead of thinking of the abstraction to being as an elevation of the mind (the ascent from the finite to the infinite), such abstraction *empties* but no longer *elevates*. Being is no longer the most exalted concept, but the most common. Above (see fn. 5 p. 4), I discussed Joseph Owens's claim that scholasticism inherited two concepts of being (i.e., being as most common and being as most perfect), neither of which they could accept wholesale. Pickstock argues that Scotus puts forth the empty commonality of being at the expense of a certain transcendent richness of being that can only be imitated by finite creatures. Such emptiness means that being can even be thought without God: even though every being is either finite or infinite, we can know something as a being without knowing whether it is finite or infinite. The ability to think a being independent of its causes and all other realities, “tends to encourage,” Pickstock argues, both epistemological and political atomism. Such atomism is at odds with a “space of participation.” See Catherine Pickstock, “Duns Scotus,” 545-553. On a similar note, the treatment of God and creatures both as *beings* has led some such as Marion to charge Scotus's thought as *onto-theo-logy*: being for Scotus can be thought in terms of entity; even God becomes merely an *infinite* entity, but not something radically transcendent, or to put in Marion's term “God without being.” See Jean-Luc Marion, “Thomas Aquinas and Onto-Theo-Logy,” 47-48.

more the essence human has than the essence phoenix—into something of an ephemeral specter: creatures reflect being, but they themselves do not have being.

An apologist for existential metaphysics might respond that this reading of *esse* has missed the dynamism of the existential act, a dynamism that I have rendered inert through an over-conceptualization. Thus, they might argue, to reawaken such dynamism, a correction must be made: such gift of being must be reached not through the static categories of conceptualization, but through judgment. This move, which I will address in turn, will help at least in part return metaphysics to a new beginning outside the essential order. If we wish to further inquire about the stakes of rejecting the real otherness between *esse* and essence along with its concomitant analogic of being in order to address Gilson’s claim that “[t]he chronic disease of metaphysical being is not existence, but its tendency to lose existence,”⁵⁸ we must turn to the proposed means by which to restore existence to its rightful place within metaphysical being: judgment. Thus, we both must determine the sufficiency of judgment to *think* (in the broad sense of the term) the reality of actual existence, but also must reconsider the possibility of conceptualism without *imperialism*.

Section 2: Being and Judgment

A frequent argument put forward by defenders of existential Thomism has been that *esse* has been improperly conceived by the tradition of metaphysics insofar as it is not a concept at all. Even Aquinas himself had a difficult time describing this actuality of all acts without using a philosophical vocabulary that favors essence and categorial predicamentality. As discussed above, because *esse* “happens to” essence without being

⁵⁸ *Being and Some Philosophers*, 214.

part of the essence, Aquinas goes so far as to use “*accidit*” to describe this relationship, even though such description does not seem to accord with Aquinas’s usual understanding of the matter.⁵⁹ On orthodox Aristotelian grounds, as was seen above, Siger of Brabant rejects *esse* as some unwarranted posited “mysterious fourth” (i.e., not substance; not accident; not composite).⁶⁰ For a tradition that thinks being conceptually, it is no surprise that metaphysics has “lost existence,” and existence’s restoration to ontological primacy requires great difficulty. Thus, it has been argued, against the static essentializing of conceptualization, the dynamism of *esse* can only be reached through judgment. “Judgment” as the second operation of the intellect *thinks being* as the dynamic act of beings (i.e., their *having* being), against static conceptualization.

Although Aquinas’s discussions of judgment as the act of the intellect by which the intellect reaches the “*esse rei*” are infrequent and always occur within the context of another question (i.e., the matter is never itself thematized), and although there has been dissenting opinions concerning such an existentialized reading of such a operation, the places where he does introduce such an operation must be treated carefully.⁶¹ In the *Sentences* Commentary, Aquinas introduces the two operations of the intellect: one, which has been called the “imagination of the intellect,” and Aristotle called the “understanding of indivisibles” (*intelligentiam indivisibilium*), which is responsible for

⁵⁹ One case in which Aquinas refers to *esse* as an accident: “...quod accidens dicitur hic quod non est de intellectu alicujus, sicut rationale dicitur animali accidere; et ita cuilibet quidditati creatae accidit esse, quia non est de intellectu ipsius quidditatis; potest enim intelligi humanitas, et tamen dubitari, utrum homo habeat esse.” *In I Sent.* d. 8 *Expositio Primae Partis Textus*.

⁶⁰ See Chapter I above. See also Suarez, *DM* 31.6. In favor of the rational distinction, he argues that because creatures do not exist necessarily, they can be conceived apart from their efficient cause. Thus, the intellect abstracts the essence, precinding from actual existence.

⁶¹ The *locus classicus* of existential Thomism’s emphasis on judgment are the following texts: *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad. 7. *Ibid* d. 38, q. 1, a. 3. *ST I*, q. 14, a. 14. obj. 2. *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P.M. edita, t. 1*/1: Expositio libri Peryereneias* (2^a ed.: Commissio Leonina-J. Vrin, Roma-Paris 1989) I. lect. 8, n. 3, n. 21 and lect. 9 n. 2. *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P.M. edita, t. 50: Super Boethium De Trinitate* (Commissio Leonina-Éditions Du Cerf, Roma-Paris, 1992) q. 5, a. 3. Hereafter: “*In Boethium De Trinitate*.” For the dissenting opinion, cf. L.M. Régis, *Epistemology*.

apprehending the simple quiddity; the other, which some call “faith” (*fidem*), is responsible for the composition and division of propositions.⁶² The former activity receives the quiddity of something and the latter looks to the “being of it” (*esse ipsius*). Thus, we *understand* the essence of phoenix or human and the second activity is responsible for judging its *esse* or withholding judgment through doubt. An account of truth (*ratio veritatis*), Aquinas argues, is founded in being (*funditur in esse*), and not in *quiddity*. Thus, once static quiddities have been received from their dynamic element of being (i.e., either *in re* or *in intellectu*), judgment is the act responsible for restoring them to “the real,” and even essential judgments (e.g., “man is an animal”) requires an existential synthesis. It will be this grounding of truth in the real (i.e., in *esse*) that, *per existential Thomists*, allows Aquinas to avoid conceptual imperialism whereby truth merely becomes part of the interplay of a *conceptual* exchange.

“Truth,” Aquinas argues in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, is the adequation of intellect and thing (*adequatio intellectus et rei*). Thus, to partake of truth or falsity there needs to be a ground in reality (*res*), not merely in concepts alone. This means, Aquinas maintains following Aristotle, definition as the expression of the *quiddity* of the thing (i.e., as an indivisible) cannot by itself be true or false. As Aristotle argues concerning indivisibles,

⁶² The account of truth is funded (*funditur*) in *esse*. To the question “whether truth is the essence of a thing,” Aquinas addresses the argument “Item, veritas et falsitas sunt tantum in complexis; quia singulum incomplexorum neque verum neque falsum est. Sed essentia est rerum incomplexarum. Ergo non est idem quod veritas.” He responds: “Ad septimum dicendum, quod cum sit duplex operatio intellectus: una quarum dicitur a quibusdam imaginatio intellectus, quam Philosophus III *De anima*, text. 21, nominat intelligentiam indivisibilem, quae consistit in apprehensione quidditatis simplicis, quae alio etiam nomine formatio dicitur; alia est quam dicunt *fidem*, quae consistit in compositione vel divisione propositionis: prima operatio respicit quidditatem rei; secunda respicit *esse ipsius*. Et quia ratio veritatis fundatur in *esse*, et non in quidditate, ut dictum est, ideo veritas et falsitas proprie invenitur in secunda operatione, et in signo ejus quod est enuntiatio, et non in prima, vel signo ejus quod est definitio, nisi secundum quid; sicut etiam quidditatis *esse* est quoddam *esse rationis*, et secundum istud *esse* dicitur veritas in prima operatione intellectus: per quem etiam modum dicitur definitio vera.” *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad. 7.

falsehood is impossible.⁶³ If *nous* grasps the essence of something, it cannot be mistaken in such an immediate grasp. Aquinas argues that only insofar as definition involves some composition can it be “accidentally false.”⁶⁴ Thus, truth and falsity are based in judgment as grounded in *esse*. Even when we judge, for example, that “a phoenix *is not* (i.e., *in re*)” or that “a phoenix *is* (i.e., *in intellectu*)” the truth derived—from even such an existentially sparse judgment—is grounded in *esse*.

As Owens and others have argued, what is known in the second operation of the intellect is the synthesis that is the thing’s existence (*esse rei*).⁶⁵ Such existential syntheses can most easily be seen in cases where an accident is synthesized with a subject both as predicamental (i.e., as one of the nine categories of accidents) and also as predicable (i.e., as being *per accidens* in the sense of not following from genus, species, property, or quality). As Owens states: “‘Cleon is pale’ follows neither from the nature of Cleon as a man nor from the nature of the accident ‘pale.’ It is a synthesis in existence at the moment.”⁶⁶ Although existential syntheses also fund substantial and essential judgments, such a fund goes unnoticed, however, due to the conceptual imperialism of metaphysical thought, which attempts to render all thinking in terms of substantial units reducible to the pictorial-images of the first operation of the intellect (*imaginatio intellectus*). Thus, “Cleon’s being pale” would be grounded only in static and atemporal images, not in the dynamic reality that temporally brings together this man with paleness.⁶⁷

⁶³ In this claim, Aquinas follows Aristotle (*De Anima*, Book 3, Chapter 6).

⁶⁴ *SCG* I.59.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Owens, “Aquinas on Knowing Existence,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 29.4 (June 1976): 678.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Owens wants to argue that the existence reached through judgment is always analogically diverse insofar as each instance cannot attain to the unique primary instance (i.e., subsisting existence). Existence is

The reason why metaphysics has been and continues to be so “*esse*-blind,” and thinkers from Aristotle to Siger to Scotus and Suarez even when thoroughly conceiving a being (*ens*), have all managed to lose *esse*, is because *esse* cannot be “seen” or “pictured.” The tradition of conceptualism, so thoroughly rooted in concepts as picture-images corresponding to reality, has failed to place enough emphasis on the dynamic activity of judgment.⁶⁸ Thus, once Aquinas begins speaking of *esse* as “otherwise than substance,” in the ears and eyes of conceptual metaphysics such a “concept”—and here we see the problem—becomes relegated to the register of the accidental. What is not substance must be an accident.

But the “*esse*” thought by judgment, Owens argues, is not *accidental* in the sense of a predicamental accident posterior to substance and should—I would reassert—be referred to as *incidental* (i.e., *per accidens*). When avoiding this confusion of *incidental being* with predicamental form of accidentality (i.e., an accidental *form* inhering *in* the nature and following substance), one can behold against the dominance of the concept’s imperialism how existential synthesis underlies all forms of judgment.⁶⁹ As Owens states noting the difficulty:

The problem, however, becomes more difficult in the case of predicates that remain within the category of substance, and in general wherever the predicate is a generic

diverse for each individual and constitutes a temporally located existential synthesis varying from moment to moment. Judgment says being at determinate moments of time, unlike the prior act of essential apprehension which had abstracted the essence from such temporality. Owens, “Aquinas on Knowing Existence,” 29-31.

⁶⁸ “[...] the *intellectus essentiae* argument if alleged to conclude immediately to a real distinction would be taking for granted that existence has a real positive content of its own over and above the content of the quiddity. But this is something very difficult to prove. Spontaneously, when the question is faced for the first time, a thing and its existing may appear to be really the same. The expression ‘existing’ would seem to add merely a reference to the duration between beginning and end, but imply no real content besides the thing itself. For a number of modern thinkers, in fact, existence has been an empty concept, a blank, a surd.” Owens, “Aquinas’ Distinction,” 280.

⁶⁹ Owens, “The Causal Proposition—Principle or Conclusion,” *The Modern Schoolman* XXXII (May 1955): 323-339. Owens, *An Interpretation of Existence*, 33-38.

characteristic of the subject. “Socrates is a man,” for example, or “Man is an animal,” may seem at first sight beyond the need of existential synthesis and above the conditions of time. Yet there is nothing in the nature of “man” that requires it to be found in Socrates. Human nature can be found just as easily apart from Socrates, for instance, in Plato, in Beethoven, in Johnson. Similarly, there is nothing in the nature of “animal” that requires it to be realized in man. Animality can be found equally well apart from man in brutes. The apparent difficulty here lies in the one-sided approach. Socrates is necessarily an animal. But man is not necessarily Socrates, nor is an animal necessarily a man. To see the requirement for existential synthesizing in this area, one approaches from the more generic or, in the case of the individual, from the specific side. [...] So, for a subject to be anything at all, in a way that offers the ground for a proposition, existence in its synthesizing function has to be involved.⁷⁰

Thus, existence provides the ground from which *all* judgment arises, even though we often fail to recognize its activity behind the balanced totality of the essential equation (i.e., S=P). Judgment reaches beyond the static images and concepts of the first operation and restores thought to the real, the foundation upon which truth (i.e., as adequation between the intellect and the thing) emerges.⁷¹

As noted, such an interpretation of Aquinas departs from standard Aristotelianism and is not without its opponents. Régis, for example, argues that judgment—by working with concepts already known by apprehension—completes and perfects the act of

⁷⁰ Ibid., 34. Elsewhere, Owens argues that only in logic, where terms precede propositions, are indivisibles prior to the synthesis. See Owens, “Knowing Existence,” 679.

⁷¹ See also Gilson: “[...] the actual object of a concept always contains more than its abstract definition. What is contains over and above its formal definition is its act of existing, and, because such acts transcend both essence and representation, they can be reached only by means of judgment. The proper function of judgment is to say existence, and this is why judgment is a type of cognition distinct from, and superior to, pure and simple abstract conceptualization.” *Being and Some Philosophers*, 202. This *saying existence*, which finds existence through judgment, reaches beyond the categories of essence. And Maritain: “The intellect, laying hold of the intelligibles, disengaging them by its own strength from sense experience, reaches, at the heart of its own inner vitality, those natures or essences which, by abstracting them, it has detached from their material existence at a given point in space and time. But to what end? Merely in order to contemplate the picture of the essences in its ideas? Certainly not! Rather in order to restore them to existence by the act in which intellection is completed and consummated, I mean the judgement pronounced in the words *ita est*, thus it is.” Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 11-12.

apprehension without moving beyond the concepts themselves to an external reality.⁷²

Truth, he argues, is found in the mind, and judgment—from which the *ratio veritatis* emerges—concerns mental activity.⁷³ What judgment perfects is not the mind's extension to some extra-mental existential actuality, but a regrouping of conceptual content for the sake of greater conceptual clarity. He states:

Thus, we must insist that judgment consists not in knowing what things are, neither in their quiddity nor in their existence, for apprehension does that, but rather in regrouping the concepts by which we apprehend the quiddity and the *existere* of things, in order to perfect our initial knowledge of them.⁷⁴

⁷² “In other words, judgment works with concepts, with the already known, and not with exterior reality.” Régis, *Epistemology*, 312. This passage is cited by Salas, “The Judgmental Character,” 121. See also the “exchange” between Gilson and Régis in the Appendix to *Being and Some Philosophers*, 216-227.

⁷³ “Thus, to know truth is first and foremost simultaneously to know *distinct concepts*, previously possessed; it is not to apprehend an aspect of the real that has escaped apprehension. In the judgment there is no superexistence of a new thing in us, as there is in apprehension, but the unified superexistence of that which previously was multiple: *No more things are known, but the same thing is better known.*” Régis, *Epistemology*, 313 [Emphasis in Original].

⁷⁴ Ibid. Régis's project is situated as an attempt to overcome the naïve or direct realism to which many Thomists fall prey. We see such naïve realism in play in Owens's attempt to explain the difference between a judgment that reaches the real (e.g., *this is a chair*) versus one concerning fictional objects (e.g., *Zeus is mightier than Poseidon*). Owens answers that such “existence in thought” is not some partial existence half-way between being and nothingness *en route* to real existence, but a genuine, albeit lesser, way of existing. What needs to be explained, however, is how exactly judgment puts us in contact with the real as something distinct from the merely fictional. Ibid., 38. To make the case, Owens appeals to a noetical difference available to judgment upon reflection such that we can recognize when we are performing fictitious judgments and when real judgments. He states: “These two ways of existence, real and cognitional, are known by means of different judgments, each radically irreducible to the other.” Ibid 41. This passage continues “To know whether a thing exists in the external world, you have to ‘look outside and see.’ The ‘look,’ on the intellectual level is the judgment that grasps real existence. Correspondingly, to know that one is thinking or feeling or deciding, one has to look *in* and see. One has to reflect on one's own activities. The inward look also is a judgment, in the technical sense of the term as an intuition of existence. Again, the existence known is real existence, existence of the really occurring activity in oneself. But within the cognitional activity one is aware of the existence it gives the objects known. Reflexively, one judges that they exist in one's cognition. It is this judgment that is the knowledge of cognitional existence. It is a new and different judgment from the judgment by which the thing's real existence is grasped.” Thus, he argues, *reflection* judges that the objects in such cases are merely cognitional objects and their *esse*, a fictional *esse* given to them by the mind. Such reflection makes one aware of the fictitiousness of the object as distinct from cases involving *real existence*. But how does such a view protect against relapse into idealism, a position existential Thomism certainly intends to avoid and one held by their transcendental brethren. Hegel was well aware of the dynamism of judgment set against the static abstractions of concepts; to reach existence outside conceptual determinations through the movement of synthetic thought, however, requires existentialism to locate the gap in thought where the ideal encounters the real without the latter being enfolded by the former. But does the synthetic dynamism of judgment locate this gap and allow us to *think the real* beyond conceptual determinations? The question, however, remains: why treat *esse* as really other than (or composed with) essence? Why not count *esse* as the determination of the essence in time, but

Thus all thought, even the so-called second operation of the intellect, operates within the conceptual exchange. Such a view of judgment presents an obvious departure from the existential tradition, which heralded judgment as the break from conceptual imperialism.

Against Régis's attempt to return Aquinas's thought to conceptual imperialism, Salas argues judgment is a mental operation that thinks existential reality beyond the concept.

He states:

When, however, one shifts ontological perspectives [from the substantialism of Aristotle] to the 'creation' metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas, in which the ultimate ground of being is an act beyond form, then one realizes that to apprehend a thing's nature or quiddity is not thereby to encounter its existence...Now, if simple apprehension, the first operation of the intellect, is directed only to a thing's quiddity, then we must turn to another intellectual act whereby the human knower encounters the actual existence of a thing; and this faculty I suggest, contrary to Régis and in agreement with Gilson and Owens, is none other than judgment.⁷⁵

Where Régis in particular and essentialism in general go wrong, Salas argues, is in treating Aquinas's "epistemology" as an extension of Aristotle's essentialism wherein all being is parsed in terms of substance and the "*an sit?*" of *Posterior Analytics* represents nothing more than a fact of being.⁷⁶ As soon as one departs from essentialism wherein all intelligibility is inscribed in terms of formal actuality, another operation of the intellect is required to think extra-formal actuality. This activity is judgment. Even if—as Gilson acknowledges in his exchange with Régis—the existential reading of the second

not as a distinct principle apart from its essential constitution? This, of course, would mean that *esse* is merely a surd, a slight variation in the syntax of "thing" or "substance," not rising to the level of a distinct utterance. Judgment, which is supposed to find the gaps in thinking, relapses into ideas and does not reach materiality. Judgment for Aquinas does not find the other of thought allowing him to think the real. P.T. Geach, "Assertion," *The Philosophical Review*, 40.4 (Oct, 1965): 449-465. Owens argues that *esse* as the actuality of all actuality indicates the dynamism of actuality known only through judgment. Owens, "Stages and Distinction in 'De Ente,'" 107

⁷⁵ Salas, "The Judgmental Character," 122.

⁷⁶ Ibid. For an attempt to understand Aristotle's *an sit* in existential terms *contra Gilson*, see McInerney, *Praeambula Fidei*, 293-306.

operation of the intellect requires some historically inaccurate formulation in order to prune any lingering essentialism from the existential lexicon of Aquinas, much of which he inherits from Aristotle, such is the price to be paid to free “judgment” (i.e., the second operation of the intellect) from the imperialism of the concept (*conceptus*).⁷⁷

Again in his Commentary on Boethius’s *De Trinitate*, Aquinas discusses the two operations of the intellect, one which concerns an “understanding of indivisibles” (*intelligentia indivisibilium*), the other which composes and divides by forming affirmative and negative enunciations.⁷⁸ Each operation corresponds to a principle in the thing. The first looks to the nature of the thing, according to which the understood thing (*res intellecta*) obtains some grade amongst entities, whether it be a complete thing (*res completa*) or incomplete like an accident or a part. Unlike the first operation, which divests the *intellecta* from its real status—whether it be *in rerum natura* or *in intellectu*—the second operation synthesizes such isolated “frames” through composition and

⁷⁷ *Being and Some Philosophers*, 216-227. Gilson uses “*conceptus*” to distinguish “concept” in the narrow sense of simple apprehension of the intellect from “*conceptio*” in the broader sense of conception, or what might be called “thinking,” which could include judgment. *Ibid.*, 223.

⁷⁸ “Sciendum est igitur quod secundum philosophum in III De anima duplex est operatio intellectus: una, que dicitur intelligentia indivisibilium, qua cognoscit de unoquoque quid est, alia uero, qua componit et diuidit, scilicet enuntiationem affirmativam vel negativam formando. Et hee quidem due operationes duobus que sunt in rebus respondent. Prima quidem operatio respicit ipsam naturam rei, secundum quam res intellecta aliquem gradum in entibus obtinet, siue sit res completa, ut totum aliquod, siue res incompleta, ut pars vel accidens. *Secunda uero operatio respicit ipsum esse rei; quod quidem resultat ex congregatione principiorum rei in compositis, uel ipsam simplicem naturam rei concomitatur, ut in substantiis simplicibus* [m.e.]. Et quia ueritas intellectus est ex hoc quod conformatur <rei>, patet quod secundum hanc secundam operationem intellectus non potest vere abstrahere quod secundum rem coniunctum est; quia in abstrahendo significaretur esse separatio secundum ipsum esse rei, sicut si abstraho hominem ab albedine dicendo homo non est albus, significo esse separationem in re, unde si secundum rem homo et albedo non sint separata, erit intellectus falsus. Hac ergo operatione intellectus uere abstrahere non potest nisi ea que sunt secundum rem separata, ut cum dicitur homo non est asinus. Set secundum primam operationem potest abstrahere ea que secundum rem separata non sunt, non tamen omnia, sed aliqua. Cum enim unaqueque res sit intelligibilis secundum quod est in actu, ut dicitur in IX Metaphisice, oportet quod ipsa natura siue quiditas rei intelligatur uel secundum quod est actus quidam, sicut accidit de ipsis formis et substantiis simplicibus, uel secundum id quod est actus eius, sicut substantie composite per suas formas uel secundum id quod est ei loco actus, sicut materia prima per habitudinem ad formam et vacuum per privationem locati; et hoc est illud ex quo unaqueque natura suam rationem sortitur.” *In Boethium De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 3.

division whose truth requires a restoration to its original unity (...quod secundum hanc secundam operationem intellectus non potest vere abstrahere quod secundum rem coniunctum est, quia in abstrahendo significaretur esse separatio secundum ipsum esse rei).

This second operation—which we will call “judgment,” once again, following the existential Thomists—is concerned with the being of the thing (*Secunda vero operatio respicit ipsum esse rei...*), for example “a man’s not being white.” As Aquinas goes on to specify, such *esse* is “that which results (*resultat*) from the congregation of principles in composite things and accompanies (*concomitatur*) the simple nature in simple substances.” The terms “*resultat*” and “*concomitatur*,” however, suggest a greater intimacy to essential principles than would be granted by an existential interpretation. “*Esse*,” in this context, suggests only the condition of the essence, not a distinct existential act. Following from the first operation’s grasp of an essence, the second operation judges *that it is so* or *that it is not so*. But that temporal dynamism of judgment—“Barack Obama *is* President,” “Socrates *is* no longer,” “a phoenix *is not* and *never was*”—which restores the isolated frame of intellection (i.e., the first operation) to the moving picture of reality, fails to indicate an extra-essential *actus essendi*. The reason, I would argue in keeping with my ongoing claim, is that “*esse*” for Aquinas can only signify the condition of something’s essence or its causal relation to *ipsum esse subsistens*, but not an intrinsic *actus essendi*.

Even though all of our concepts—*esse* and otherwise—originate on *this side* of creation, through the need to purify *esse* of any traces of finitude so that it can be applied to *actus essendi primus et purus*, *esse* no longer retains the dynamic actuality of

something's ultimate reality.⁷⁹ The unity reflected by judgment, a unity of formal components synthesized by an existential act, thus fails to indicate some existential perfection exercised by each existent, but instead establishes the *enacting* of *esse* for an essence by its cause, *ipsum esse subsistens*, or if we are to grant a more active role to the essence, the way in which it *reflects* the influence of its cause. Against existential Thomism, which would argue such a unity is that of the existential act having been restored to its original dynamism from out of the intellect's conceptual fragmentation, I would argue instead that such a unity is not existential, but providential. Such a unity is providential because the *that it is so* or *that it is not so* of any being—what for us appears as the *fact* of its being—reflects a higher unity of principles (i.e., both existential and essential) according to what *should and will be* according to God's indebtedness to his

⁷⁹ It is with this difficulty of getting a philosophical tradition so thoroughly immersed in essentialism that Gilson turns to a more theological solution. "All our notions of God are directly or indirectly borrowed from our notions of finite beings, and if we did not first discern the act of existing in the structure of God's creatures, how could we think of identifying it with the very essence of the divine being? Still, this is a good time to remember the curious remark made by Thomas himself at the end of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, chapter 22, where, after establishing God's essence is his very *esse*, the theologian adds that 'this sublime truth Moses was taught by our Lord.' Now, Moses could not learn this sublime truth from our Lord without at the same time learning from Him the notion of what it is to be a pure existential act. This invites us to admit that, according to Thomas himself, his notion of *esse* can be learned from the very words of God." Gilson points to such a burden of proof as follows: "[...] but if an actually existing being has been produced by its cause, why should one attribute to it an 'existence' distinct from the fact that it exists? This is the very point that Thomas is anxious to make us understand; but how can he make us see it if we don't? One cannot abstract from reality a notion whose object one fails to perceive. What has divided the Thomist school from the other great schools of theology, ever since the thirteenth century, is a general reluctance to conceive the act of being (*esse*) as a distinct object of understanding. To tell the whole truth, even the so-called 'Thomists' have been and still are divided on this point. No such disagreement would take place if the presence, in things themselves, of an act in virtue of which they can be called 'beings' were a conclusion susceptible of demonstration. This impasse is an invitation to us to give up the philosophical way—from creatures to God—and to try the theological way—from God to creatures. Thomas Aquinas may well have first conceived the notion of an act of being (*esse*) in connection with God and then, starting from God, made use of it in his analysis of the metaphysical structure of composite substances. At first sight, this is not very likely." *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, 130-131. This difficulty, I have argued, is insurmountable insofar as the "acts of existing" borrowed from the structure of God's creatures, must retain a univocal commonality with the concept of being attributable to God. Thus, a proper name of "*esse*" can only result for humans through illumination or revelation. But, we might ask, without embracing Gilson's theological way, can we not seek a conceptualism without imperialism, such that we both reject a real otherness between *esse* and essence and yet—with respect and deference to the insights of existential Thomism against essentialism—avoid the hegemonic totalizing by which reality becomes a perfectly adequate object of the concept's dominion (i.e., imperialism)?

own providential plan. Our judgmental knowledge, which restores unity to that which is known and thereby serves as the ground of truth, corresponds to a more fundamental unity contained within the divine intellect and expressed through his providential plan for the universe *as a whole*. Thus, what we judge *that it is so* as an enunciation, God *plans* (i.e., practically knows) that it should (and will) be so (*fiendum*). The incidental has a practical *scientia*. This can be seen in reference to Aquinas's treatment of what God knows in the case of enunciabiles.

In the *Sentences Commentary*, and again in *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas addresses the issue of *esse* and judgment in asking whether God knows "enunciabiles."⁸⁰ It seems that due to the simplicity of divine cognition, God would not know enunciabiles, especially as they relate to singulars (i.e., insofar as they are individuated through *matter*) and future contingents. Such intellectual *oversight*, however, would pose problems for a

⁸⁰ "Respondeo dicendum, quod secundum opinionem Avicennae et ex dictis Algazelis videtur sequi quod Deus enunciabilia nesciat, et praecipue in rebus singularibus; quia ponunt quod scit singularia tantum universaliter, id est secundum quod sunt in causis universalibus, et non particulariter, id est in natura particularitatis suae. Unde concedunt quod scit hoc individuum et illud; sed non scit hoc individuum nunc esse et postmodum non esse; sicut si aliquis sciret eclipsim quae futura est cras in suis causis universalibus, non tamen sciret an modo esset vel non esset, nisi sensibiliter videret. Sed quia supra ostensum est quod Deus non solum habet huiusmodi cognitionem de particularibus, sed perfectam, in quantum cognoscit ea in sua particularitate secundum omnes conditiones individuales quae in eis sunt; ideo dicendum est, quod Deus non solum cognoscit ipsas res, sed etiam enunciabilia et complexa; tamen simplici cognitione per modum suum; quod sic patet. Cum in re duo sint, quidditas rei, et esse ejus, 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 materia et forma compositae, a qua cognitionem accipit, consistit in quadam compositione formae ad materiam, vel accidentis ad subjectum. Similiter etiam in ipso Deo est considerare naturam ipsius, et esse ejus; et sicut natura sua est causa et exemplar omnis naturae, ita etiam esse suum est causa et exemplar omnis esse. Unde sicut cognoscendo essentiam suam, cognoscit omnem rem; ita cognoscendo esse suum, cognoscit esse cujuslibet rei; et sic cognoscit omnia enunciabilia, quibus esse significatur; non tamen diversa operatione nec compositione, sed simpliciter; quia esse suum non est aliud ab essentia, nec est compositum consequens; et sicut per idem cognoscit bonum et malum, ita per idem cognoscit affirmationes et negationes." *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, resp. In the *Summa*, against the question "does God know enunciabiles," Aquinas presents the following objection: "Praeterea, omnis cognitio fit per aliquam similitudinem. Sed in Deo nulla est similitudo enunciabilium, cum sit omnino simplex. Ergo Deus non cognoscit enunciabilia." To this he responds: "Ad secundum dicendum quod compositio enunciabilis significat aliquod esse rei, et sic Deus per suum esse, quod est eius essentia, est similitudo omnium eorum quae per enunciabilia significantur." *ST I*, q. 14, a. 14, ad et obj. 2. See also *SCG I*. 59.

view of personal providence. In response to the question, Aquinas argues God not only knows individuals (i.e., as opposed to merely knowing them through their species), but he also has knowledge of that which is enunciable and complex. God's cognition nevertheless remains simple because all that is is a reflective similitude of the divine essence. God's knowledge extends as far as his causality extends: he *knows* things insofar as he is their *principle*.⁸¹ As the principle for the production of everything that is, God's practical cognition must co-extend with God's causality to singulars, which are the terminus of such practical activity.

Following Dionysius, Aquinas states that God knows things in the same way he *hands down* (*tradidit esse*) to them: as the total principle of their production.⁸² In the “handing down of being to things” (i.e., the act of creation), God operates as the *immediate cause* of all that follows in its totality. From this passage, we witness how Aquinas's primary concern is not to distinguish *esse* from the essential structure of the thing, although God is the cause and exemplar of both its nature and its *esse*.⁸³ Instead, the concern—and this seems to be a dominant concern throughout Aquinas's

⁸¹ See, for example, *SCG* I.65.

⁸² “[Dionysius] Dicit enim, quod cum Deus cognoscit res per essentiam suam quae est causa rerum, eodem modo cognoscit res quo modo esse rebus tradidit; unde si aliquid est in rebus non cognitum ab ipso, oportet quod circa illud vacet divina operatio, idest quod non sit operatum ab ipso; et ex hoc accidit difficultas philosophis propter duo: primo, quia quidam ipsorum non ponebant Deum operari immediate in rebus omnibus, sed ab ipso esse primas res, quibus mediantibus ab eo aliae producuntur; et ideo non poterant invenire qualiter cognosceret res quae sunt hic, nisi in primis causis universalibus: secundo, quia quidam eorum non ponebant materiam esse factam, sed Deum agere tantum inducendo formam. Et ideo cum materia sit principium individuationis, non poterat inveniri apud eos, quomodo Deus singularia, in quantum hujusmodi, cognoscat. Sed quia nos ponimus Deum immediate operantem in rebus omnibus, et ab ipso esse non solum principia formalia, sed etiam materiam rei; ideo per essentiam suam, sicut per causam, totum quod est in re cognoscit, et formalia et materialia; unde non tantum cognoscit res secundum naturas universales, sed secundum quod sunt individuatae per materiam; sicut aedificator si per formam artis conceptam posset producere totam domum, quantum ad materiam et formam, per formam artis quam habet apud se, cognosceret domum hanc et illam; sed quia per artem suam non inducit nisi formam, ideo ars sua est solum similitudo formae domus; unde non potest per eam cognoscere hanc domum vel illam, nisi per aliquid acceptum a sensu.” *In I Sent.* d. 36, q. 1, a. 1, resp.

⁸³ For “God as the cause and exemplar of all natures,” see Chapter IV above. For “God as the cause and exemplar of all *esse*,” see Chapter V above.

metaphysics—is to find a unity for both grounds (i.e., the essential and the existential) in an effect that terminates God’s *practical* activity: an actually existing individual *totally and immediately* caused by the first. This concern, I would argue, reflects the perceived need to counter those who would deny causal immediacy and totality to the first as the *principium* of the total order of being.

Thus, to establish such a principative role, the first must hand down *esse* to all possible beings deemed *necessary* by it to fulfill its (i.e., the first’s) intended order for the universe as a whole. Aquinas confronts those who would deny a causal immediacy of God to the total effect, but instead remove his causal influence to the production of secondary plenipotentiaries, which would *mediately* cause further effects on God’s behalf. Instead, Aquinas argues, “we hold that God operates immediately in all things” (*nos ponimus Deum immediate operantem in rebus omnibus*), which entails that the total effect has been produced by God. Thus, “the *handing down* of *esse*,” a relation of dependence sustained by conservation, needs mean nothing more than the practical production of a complete effect, that is, of both its *form* and *matter* in the case of hylomorphic substances. Aquinas’s concern, once again, is to show how the divine causal operation permeates the entirety of its effect, thus assigning no part of the effect to causal influences outside the allotment of divine provision.

Forms in the divine intellect, by reaching (*pertingat*) to the “least of things” (*ad rerum minima*) by both divine exemplarity and causality, reaches to the singularity of sensible and material forms.⁸⁴ Insofar as divine knowledge functions like *practical*

⁸⁴ “Forma igitur rei sensibilis, cum sit per suam materialitatem individuata, suae singularitatis similitudinem perducere non potest in hoc quod sit omnino immaterialis, sed solum usque ad vires quae organis materialibus utuntur; ad intellectum autem perducitur per virtutem intellectus agentis, inquantum omnino a conditionibus materiae exiit; et sic similitudo singularitatis formae sensibilis non potest pervenire usque

knowledge, such knowledge—unlike speculative knowledge—terminates in the domain of singulars.⁸⁵ The importance of God’s knowledge of both singulars and enunciabiles concerns the extent to which creation can be made intelligibile as a providential whole, thereby bringing together principative duality of essence and *esse* within a single unified order.⁸⁶ Lest the individual fall to the purview of chance and only be known by its architect *qua* universal, God must know the particular not only as such, but as this.⁸⁷ As Mark D. Jordan has argued, Aquinas’s unique achievement with respect to divine ideas has been to “secure the principle of direct exemplarity for the disposition of beings within providence.” Further, he states: “The single existing thing, the particular composite of form and matter with its accidents, stands in relation to the Ideas as a direct effect of divine creation and as a subject of divine providence.”⁸⁸ The totality of the existing individual (i.e., form, matter, and accidents) follows as the product of divine creation and the subject of divine providence. Thus, *esse* no longer stands out in such a scheme as something radically extra-essential, but merely expresses the condition or the state of essences within the total order of the universe as a whole, as terminated in *existing individuals* who complete such an order.

ad intellectum humanum. Similitudo autem formae intellectus divini, cum pertingat usque ad rerum minima, ad quae pertingit sua causalitas, pervenit usque ad singularitatem formae sensibilis et materialis. Intellectus igitur divinus potest cognoscere singularia, non autem humanus.” *SCG* I.65.

⁸⁵ “Divinus intellectus ex rebus cognitionem non sumit, sicut noster, sed magis per suam cognitionem est causa rerum, ut infra ostendetur: et sic eius cognitio quam de rebus aliis habet, est ad modum practicae cognitionis. Practica autem cognitio non est perfecta nisi ad singularia perveniatur: nam practicae cognitionis finis est operatio, quae in singularibus est. Divina igitur cognitio quam de aliis rebus habet, se usque ad singularia extendit.” *SCG* I.65.

⁸⁶ On the relation between divine ideas of essential possibilities in relation to individuals, see: *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 8, ad 2. “Ad secundum dicendum, quod si loquamur de idea proprie, secundum quod est rei, eo modo quo est in esse producibilis; sic una idea respondet singulari, speciei, et generi, individuatis in ipso singulari, eo quod Socrates, homo et animal non distinguuntur secundum esse. Si autem accipiamus ideam communiter pro similitudine vel ratione, sic, cum diversa sit consideratio Socratis ut Socrates est, et ut homo est, et ut est animal, respondebunt ei secundum hoc plures ideae vel similitudines.”

⁸⁷ For this argument, see *ST I*, q. 15, a. 3, resp.

⁸⁸ Jordan, “The Intelligibility of the World and the Divine Ideas in Aquinas,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 38.1 (September 1984): 23.

The existing singular, as stated in *De Veritate*, receives its true intelligibility *only* as the subject of providence: “Ponimus etiam, quod per divinam providentiam definiuntur omnia singularia.”⁸⁹ The unity of God’s principative duality, and thereby the unity of the universe as an ordered totality, arises through a “providential integration” first instituted through God’s commitment to *conserve* all things in being, an intellectual commitment which, as outlined by Scotus, neutralizes the will’s free spontaneity. In the existing singular *qua* providential subject, the essential and existential threads of Thomistic metaphysics merge and find their highest expression. In those individuals terminating the operation of God practical cognition, already marked “*fiendum*” due to God’s unwavering foreknowledge of those components necessary to execute his plan, the existing individual becomes part of divine providential *scientia*. *Esse*, however, loses its otherness to thought, as even human judgment—the existential operation enunciating *ita est*—becomes the attempt to restore unity, a unity whose true ground resides in providential intelligibility.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Aquinas argues against Plato that divine ideas of singulars are necessary to uphold an account of providence. He states: “[E]t eadem ratione Plato non ponebat ideas generum, quia intentio naturae non terminatur ad productionem formae generis sed solum formae speciei. Nos autem ponimus Deum causam esse singularis et quantum ad formam et quantum ad materiam, ponimus etiam, quod per divinam providentiam definiuntur omnia singularia; et ideo oportet nos etiam singularium ponere ideas.” *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 8, resp. In *De Potentia* q. 3, a. 6, resp., Aquinas addresses the same problem and attempts to show how everything (i.e., corruptible and incorruptible, corporeal and spiritual, etc.) come together in one order.

⁹⁰ Jordan states: “[...] the intelligibility of the concrete substance depends on its relation to God in creation and providence. Those relations are deeply obscure. Each relation ties the intelligible character of the world to God’s self understanding. In divine knowing there is neither prediction, nor abstraction, nor judgment. Human understanding, by contrast, begins by collation of sensibly perceived particulars, making meaning out of them by subsuming them under logically manipulable classes. If the intelligibility of the world depends upon the direct exemplarity of the divine essence in particulars, then abstractive knowing is at best a distant and refracted acquaintance with reality.” “The Intelligibility of the World,” 24. Jordan goes on to argue that Aquinas does not back away from such conclusions, but comes to embrace such a conclusion throughout his subsequent (to the *Sentences* Commentary) writings. He cites the passage from *De Veritate* q. 3, a. 8, resp. in support of this claim.

Section 3: Providence, *Esse* as Gift or God as *Patron*?

We began by reviewing the existentialist's claim that being (*esse*), for Aquinas, functions as the extra-essential ground of all essential actuality. Given a being's lack of existential determination *per se*, it requires a cause with being *per se* to give being to it. This "giving of being," which happens through creation and is preserved through conservation, is the mark of creation according to existential Thomists, both because of its *manner* and because of its *object*. Unlike Avicennian emanation, *esse*, for Aquinas, does not *result* from an essential determination on the part of the creator, but is *given* in a free act of the will. Also, in contrast to fellow creationists (e.g., Scotus and Suarez), *esse* is the highest perfection (or gift) given in creation because such can only be given by divine efficient causation. This has led existential Thomists and others to emphasize the irreducibly *existential* nature of Aquinas's account of creation. Creation is the *incident par excellence*, Marion holds, because it arrives without any sufficient reason. He states:

All the reasons, all the circumstances, and all the passions in the world cannot provoke the gift necessarily—except by making it necessary, therefore annulling it as gift. The calculation of the best is opposed to the good of the gift in that it submits it, though at the limit, to the principle of sufficient reason. The freedom of the gift implies that the decision to give it obeys only the logic of givenness, therefore its [*sic*] gratuity without return.⁹¹

Esse, as that which is given outside all essential determination, offers no return.

A thread we have been tracing over the last two chapters, however, is the role of providence in Aquinas's thought, especially in regard to the "gratuity without return" of creation. We saw above with Scotus that by submitting certain divine ideas to the practical intellect for approval—whereby they are marked *fiendum* and *non-fiendum* in

⁹¹ *Being Given*, 106-107.

terms of fulfillment of God's plan—the will faces certain constraints in its execution. Likewise, in reference to the possible annihilation of creatures (i.e., withdrawal of conservation), Aquinas argued that God's first providential act was to resolve himself to their preservation. This allowed certain creatures to take on a *necessity of being*, whereas others only a *contingency*, albeit contingency with respect to generation and corruption, not being and nothingness. This means that the radical contingency emphasized by existential Thomists is quickly sublated once God resolves himself to a certain plan. Although God owes nothing to creatures, nor could they offer return on anything given to them—as of themselves they are nothing and even their ideational pre-existence borrows its being from God—Aquinas's account of providence minimizes the radical gratuity of creation by making intelligible (even though if not *for us*) the being of creatures. This happens insofar as God both *indebts himself* to his own plan, and as integral parts of this plan, creatures *pay back* the gift they have on loan.

To understand the nature of the gift, and the extent to which such is even possible, we might for a moment turn to an unlikely source the Roman Stoic Seneca, who provides a profound analysis of such a matter. In his *De Beneficiis*, a tract produced within the context of the Roman system of patronage, Seneca observes that in order *to give*, as opposed to merely *to lend*, an account cannot be rendered of the benefit given.⁹² Otherwise, the gift functions like a loan, operating within an economy of exchange, reducible to an account. A true gift, he argues, if such a thing is possible, would have to be given without any horizon of return. There could be no *recognition* of the giver lest such an act of recognition be itself a return upon that which was given. Any gift,

⁹² See Seneca, *Moral Essays vol. III De Beneficiis*, trans. John W. Basore (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library No. 310, 1935).

including being (*esse*), in which the recipient could offer return upon the gift violates the very logic of the gift. Thus, the problem with understanding creation primarily in terms of givenness and *esse* in terms of a gift is that a benefit given for the realization of the good, whereby each existing singular renders a return upon its being as part of providential whole, likewise inscribes the “gift of being” within an order of providential patronage.

Above we outlined how Aquinas separates the grounds of something’s possibility in the divine intellect from its actuality through the divine will.⁹³ As the *principium essendi*, God must act as unmotivated by any purpose for the very reason that such an act is the very inscription of purpose itself. Thus, if creation is not to be transformed into a system of divine patronage, there can be no sufficient reason for creation. And yet, there seems to be a tension in Aquinas’s thought between *making intelligible* the universe in terms of rendering return on the gift of being through providence, thereby making it a closed system of calculability and covering over the incalculability of the gift, one the one hand, and leaving open existential gratuity as that which is without return on the other.

It seems obvious enough why the gift of being should be without ground: there is nothing besides God in his pure act of perfection that could prompt him or require him to supplement his being; thus anything that does result is purely gratuitous. Because the first is *primus et purus actus essendi*, it must remain unmoved by desire insofar as desire would constitute a breach of pure actuality. Just as one can reach the end of a journey without the means of a horse (e.g., traveling by foot alone), so too divine perfection need not include the addition of creatures in order to supplement its goodness.⁹⁴ In other words, if the whole of creation were to move God toward an actualization of his own

⁹³ See Chapters IV and V above.

⁹⁴ SCG I.81.

goodness, this would introduce a *potency* in the divine nature—a potency satiated by creation.⁹⁵ God wills for the sake of an end (i.e., goodness). Although *necessarily* willing his own goodness as an end, because such an end does not require other things (i.e., creatures) for its fulfillment, God is in no way indebted to such supplemental beings.⁹⁶ Any creative expression by the first thereby is not the result of a necessary overflow of itself, but what we can only call a “gratuitous” act of generosity (*actus liberalitatis*).⁹⁷ Aquinas relates such an unnecessary use of means to a doctor, who based on her intention to heal, only gives the patient medicine in cases when the medicine is necessary to achieve such an end; otherwise, if health can be reached without medicine, such a means is excessive.⁹⁸ This is because God does not will creatures on account of any necessity of his nature. But as Aquinas goes on to argue, God acts on account of his wisdom, which means that he produces everything like an artisan, who orders his works according to intellect and wisdom.⁹⁹ This means that God neither acts according to absolute necessity

⁹⁵ *ST I*. q. 19, a. 3, ad 3.

⁹⁶ *ST I*. q. 19, a.3. resp.

⁹⁷ “Amplius. Sicut supra ostensum est, finis ultimus propter quem Deus vult omnia, nullo modo dependet ab his quae sunt ad finem, nec quantum ad esse nec quantum ad perfectionem aliquam. Unde non vult alicui suam bonitatem communicare ad hoc ut sibi exinde aliquid accrescat, sed quia ipsum communicare est sibi conveniens sicut fonti bonitatis. Dare autem non propter aliquod commodum ex datione expectatum, sed propter ipsam bonitatem et convenientiam dationis, est actus liberalitatis, ut patet per philosophum, in IV Ethicorum. Deus igitur est maxime liberalis: et, ut Avicenna dicit, ipse solus liberalis proprie dici potest; nam omne aliud agens praeter ipsum ex sua actione aliquod bonum acquirit, quod est finis intentus. Hanc autem eius liberalitatem Scriptura ostendit, dicens in Psalmo: *aperiente te manum tuam, omnia implebuntur bonitate*; et Iac. 1-5: *qui dat omnibus affluenter et non improperat.*” *SCG I*.93. The passage Aquinas references from Avicenna (i.e., *Metaphysics* Book VI Chapter 5 231-234) discusses “liberality” as an act of giving for which there is no recompense for the giver. For Avicenna, however, unlike Aquinas, although the giving of a benefit does not supplement the giver, there need be a *cause* if it is given.

⁹⁸ *SCG I*.81.

⁹⁹ See *SCG I*.81. Also: “Ea quae sunt a voluntate, vel sunt agibilia, sicut actus virtutum, qui sunt perfectiones operantis: vel transeunt in exteriorem materiam, quae factibiles dicuntur. Et sic patet quod res creatae sunt a Deo sicut factae. Factibilium autem ratio est ars, sicut philosophus dicit. Comparantur igitur omnes res creatae ad Deum sicut artificiata ad artificem. Sed artifex per ordinem suae sapientiae et intellectus artificiata in esse producit. Ergo et Deus omnes creaturas per ordinem sui intellectus fecit... Per haec autem excluditur quorundam error qui dicebant omnia ex simplici divina voluntate dependere, absque aliqua ratione.” *Ibid.*, II.24.

nor, however, by simple act of his will. Instead, he acts on account of some reason (*aliqua ratione*), which is grounded in divine wisdom and its grasp of the *best possible* order for a would-be universe. Thus *a reason* can be assigned to the divine will, even though this reason is not a *necessitating cause* that would compel God to act. Although God's own self-sufficiency of being and goodness does not require other creatures in order to reach this end of goodness, once divine wisdom elects them to be,¹⁰⁰ nevertheless they *are* on account of this end, and thus indebted to it.¹⁰¹ As will be seen, such a debt is repaid in terms of service to the good: insofar as anything exists it is ordered to divine goodness as to an end, which Aquinas argues, makes it a subject of providence.¹⁰²

As Aquinas argues in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, the incident of creation cannot be due to any debt of justice on the part of God to creatures.¹⁰³ Insofar as justice is "rendering what is due," God *owes* nothing to creatures: a debt of justice cannot precede having something as one's own; and without *esse* prior to creation, creatures *per se* can exact nothing from God. As Aquinas argues, prior to the universal production of things, there is nothing to which being could be due.¹⁰⁴ However, once God has resolved himself to

¹⁰⁰ *Will*, Aquinas argues, is of the end, and *election* is of that which is for an end. *SCG* I.88.

¹⁰¹ *SCG* I. 86-87 "Colligere autem ex praedictis possumus quod divinae voluntatis ratio assignari potest. Finis enim est ratio volendi ea quae sunt ad finem. Deus autem vult bonitatem suam tanquam finem, omnia autem alia vult tanquam ea quae sunt ad finem. Sua igitur bonitas est ratio quare vult alia quae sunt diversa ab ipso. Rursus. Bonum particulare ordinatur ad bonum totius sicut ad finem, ut imperfectum ad perfectum. Sic autem cadunt aliqua sub divina voluntate secundum quod se habent in ordine boni. Relinquitur igitur quod bonum universi sit ratio quare Deus vult unumquodque particulare bonum in universo." *SCG* I.86. And further: "Quamvis autem aliqua ratio divinae voluntatis assignari possit, non tamen sequitur quod voluntatis eius sit aliquid causa. Voluntati enim causa volendi est finis. Finis autem divinae voluntatis est sua bonitas. Ipsa igitur est Deo causa volendi, quae est etiam ipsum suum velle." *SCG* I.87. "Vult enim Deus ut creaturae sint propter eius bonitatem, ut eam scilicet suo modo *imitentur et repraesentent* [m.e.]; quod quidem faciunt in quantum ab ea esse habent, et in suis naturis subsistunt." *De Pot.* q. 5, a. 4, resp.

¹⁰² *SCG* III.64, 65, and 97.

¹⁰³ *SCG* II.28-29.

¹⁰⁴ "Licet autem universalem rerum productionem nihil creatum praecedat cui aliquid debitum esse possit, praecedit tamen aliquid increatum, quod est creationis principium. Quod quidem dupliciter considerari

create, due to his own necessary act of self-love, this same necessary orientation is handed-down to creatures and there is a propriety (*condecet*) between such goodness and the order of creation.¹⁰⁵ This is, if God creates, then he must indebt creatures to his own goodness. If God were to will creatures to be and yet allow them to remain without an orientation toward the good, they would not be loved as God loves himself. Allowing the being of creatures to remain a sheer *excess* of divine generosity would make creatures idle and useless and the universe would not be a work of intelligence and wisdom, but a constant display of unguided power. God, who necessarily indebts himself to his own goodness, would act *unwisely* if he were to create and yet not indebt creatures toward the end of goodness.¹⁰⁶ That is, lest the recipients of the gift of being become useless and

potest. Ipsa enim divina bonitas praecedit ut finis et primum motivum ad creandum: secundum Augustinum, qui dicit: *quia Deus bonus est, sumus*. Scientia autem eius et voluntas praecedunt sicut ea quibus res in esse producuntur. Si igitur ipsam divinam bonitatem absolute consideremus, nullum debitum in creatione rerum invenimus. Dicitur enim uno modo aliquid alicui debitum ex ordine alterius ad ipsum, quod scilicet in ipsum debet referre quod ab ipso accepit: sicut debitum est benefactori quod ei de beneficiis gratiae agantur, in quantum ille qui accepit beneficium hoc ei debet. Hic tamen modus debiti in rerum creatione locum non habet: cum non sit aliquid praeeexistens cui possit competere aliquid Deo debere, nec aliquod eius beneficium praeeexistat. Alio modo dicitur aliquid alicui debitum secundum se: hoc enim est ex necessitate alicui debitum quod ad eius perfectionem requiritur; sicut homini debitum est habere manus vel virtutem, quia sine his perfectus esse non potest. Divina autem bonitas nullo exteriori indiget ad sui perfectionem. Non est igitur per modum necessitatis ei debita creaturarum productio.” *SCG II.28-29*.

¹⁰⁵ For the former argument, see *SCG I.8*. For the latter: “Potest tamen dici esse sibi debitum per modum cuiusdam condecetiae. Iustitia autem proprie dicta debitum necessitatis requirit: quod enim ex iustitia alicui redditur, ex necessitate iuris ei debetur. Sicut igitur creaturarum productio non potest dici fuisse ex debito iustitiae quo Deus creaturae sit debitor, ita nec ex tali iustitiae debito quo suae bonitati sit debitor, si iustitia proprie accipiatur. Large tamen iustitia accepta, potest dici in creatione rerum iustitia, in quantum divinam condecet bonitatem.” *SCG II.28-29*

¹⁰⁶ “Item. Contra rationem sapientiae est ut sit aliquid frustra in operibus sapientis. Si autem res creatae nullo modo operarentur ad effectus producendos, sed solus Deus operaretur omnia immediate, frustra essent adhibitae ab ipso aliae res ad producendos effectus. Repugnat igitur praedicta positio divinae sapientiae. Adhuc. Quod dat alicui aliquod principale, dat eidem omnia quae consequuntur ad illud: sicut causa quae dat corpori elementari gravitatem, dat ei motum deorsum. Facere autem aliquid actu consequitur ad hoc quod est esse actu, ut patet in Deo: ipse enim est actus purus, et est etiam prima causa essendi omnibus, ut supra ostensum est. Si igitur communicavit aliis similitudinem suam quantum ad esse, in quantum res in esse produxit, consequens est quod communicaverit eis similitudinem suam quantum ad agere, ut etiam res creatae habeant proprias actiones. Amplius. Perfectio effectus demonstrat perfectionem causae: maior enim virtus perfectiorem effectum inducit. Deus autem est perfectissimum agens. Oportet igitur quod res ab ipso creatae perfectionem ab ipso consequantur. Detrahare ergo perfectioni creaturarum est detrahare perfectioni divinae virtutis. Sed si nulla creatura habet aliquam actionem ad aliquem effectum producendum, multum detrahatur perfectioni creaturae: ex abundantia enim perfectionis est quod

idle, God must *pass on* to creatures his own indebtedness to himself. Just as the cause of weight also causes downward propensity, Aquinas argues, by communicating his own likeness as a pure act of being to creatures, God also *communicates* his own action of necessary indebtedness to divine goodness. Thus to love creatures, God must place the debt of necessity upon them, the debt of necessarily loving his goodness, which he himself owes.

To overcome any lingering imbalance between a receiver to whom nothing is owed and a giver to whom nothing can be gained, God employs the universe of creatures in *useful ways* whereby he receives nothing in return and yet they repay their debt of being to the good of the universe as a whole.¹⁰⁷ We might say that God indebts himself not to creatures, but to his own providential *scientia* aimed at matching the means of created being to the end of goodness (i.e., the ordered diversity of created being imitating God's incommunicable being). And, as we have discussed, insofar as he *resolves* that he shall do something, it is impossible for him not to do it (*non enim potest esse quod Deus aliquid se facturum disposuerit quod postmodum ipse non faciat*). Although God's power has no obligation or debt to things of this order, his immutability requires that he cannot do otherwise than carry out what eternally falls under his providential order.¹⁰⁸ God is correctly said to be a debtor, not to creatures, but to the fulfillment of his own ordered arrangement (*suae dispositioni implendae*).¹⁰⁹

perfectionem quam aliquid habet, possit alteri communicare. Detrahit igitur haec positio divinae virtuti.”
SCG III.69

¹⁰⁷ SCG III.69.

¹⁰⁸ “Potest tamen alia facere quam ea quae subduntur eius providentiae vel operationi, si absolute consideretur eius potestas: sed nec potest facere aliqua quae sub ordine providentiae ipsius ab aeterno non fuerint, eo quod mutabilis esse non potest.” SCG III.98.

¹⁰⁹ “In quibus omnibus, si recte attenditur, Deus creaturae debitor non dicitur, sed suae dispositioni implendae.” SCG II.28-29.

Although any creature can be parsed in terms of its dual influences from the divine will, which causes its *esse*, and divine intellect, which causes its essence, as we have done, such principles themselves find their highest expression in terms of the existing individual as subject of providence. Despite Aquinas's constant insistence on the originary act of will by which God freely *decides* on being against nothingness and conservation against annihilation, once resolved, such an act loses its vitality and becomes eclipsed by the rational design of providence.¹¹⁰ Thus, what is need not be: creatures lack the "vehemence of being" (*vehementia essendi*) or second-order necessity ascribed to them by Avicennian emanation. But because God has resolved himself according to a certain plan, everything that is becomes intelligible in terms of such plan. Such providential unity helps Aquinas to overcome the dual errors either of extreme intellectualism, on the one hand, which would limit God's power by intellectual necessity, or extreme voluntarism on the other, which would make everything follow from the sheer will of God.¹¹¹ Either extreme misses the *wise* order grounding the totality of the universe.

We have surveyed above Aquinas's responses to Avicenna and the problems of such intellectual necessity. The problem, however, with voluntarism, has not occupied our immediate attention. On this matter, Aquinas states the following: "Per praedicta autem

¹¹⁰ "Manifestum igitur fit quod providentia secundum rationem quamdam res dispensat: et tamen haec ratio sumitur ex suppositione voluntatis divinae." *SCG* III.97.

¹¹¹ Although Aquinas does not use these terms, they fit his argument: "Sic igitur per praedicta excluditur duplex error. Eorum scilicet qui, divinam potentiam limitantes, dicebant Deum non posse facere nisi quae facit, quia sic facere debet; et eorum qui dicunt quod omnia sequuntur simplicem voluntatem, absque aliqua alia ratione vel quaerenda in rebus vel assignanda." *SCG* II.28-29. Also: "Sic igitur per praemissa duplex error excluditur. Eorum scilicet qui credunt quod omnia simplicem voluntatem sequuntur absque ratione. Qui est error loquentium in lege Saracenorum, ut Rabbi Moyses dicit: secundum quos nulla differentia est quod ignis calefaciat et infrigidet, nisi quia Deus ita vult. Excluditur etiam error eorum qui dicunt causarum ordinem ex divina providentia secundum modum necessitatis provenire. Quorum utrumque patet esse falsum ex dictis." *SCG* III.97.

excluditur error quorundam dicentium omnia procedere a Deo secundum simplicem voluntatem: ut de nullo oporteat rationem reddere nisi quia Deus vult.”¹¹² The error has been refuted, Aquinas argues, an error that he himself at times commits, that all things proceed from God *only according* to simple will, without *rendering an account (rationem reddere)*.¹¹³ Aquinas argues that there is a reason for the divine will, even though this is not a necessitating cause that would compel God’s will. Thus, he argues, will alone does not suffice to explain the procession of creatures from God. This means that in explaining the universe, more reason must be offered than “because God wills it.” Instead, divine wisdom seems to factor heavily into the original decision to *institute* an order of creation in the first place, a factoring, according to Scotus, that compromises the groundless contingency of the universe. It is true that in regard to the “original institution of things,” such dependents in their subordination to God come forth through an act of simple will.¹¹⁴ However, despite the absolute consideration of the divine will, given God’s

¹¹² SCG I.87.

¹¹³ Elsewhere, Aquinas seems to maintain this position himself: “Cum enim loquimur de productione alicuius singularis creaturae, potest assignari ratio quare talis sit, ex aliqua alia creatura, vel saltem ex ordine universi, ad quem quaelibet creatura ordinatur, sicut pars ad formam totius. Cum autem de toto universo loquimur educendo in esse, non possumus ulterius aliquod creatum invenire ex quo possit sumi ratio quare sit tale vel tale; unde, cum nec etiam ex parte divinae potentiae quae est infinita, nec divinae bonitatis, quae rebus non indiget, ratio determinatae dispositionis universi sumi possit, oportet quod eius ratio sumatur ex simplici voluntate producentis ut si quaeratur, quare quantitas caeli sit tanta et non maior, non potest huius ratio reddi nisi ex voluntate producentis.” *De Pot.* q. 3, a. 17, resp.

¹¹⁴ “Ostensum est autem in secundo quod res ipsae quae a Deo sub ordine ponuntur, proveniunt ab ipso non sicut ab agente per necessitatem naturae, vel cuiuscumque alterius, sed ex simplici voluntate, maxime quantum ad primam rerum institutionem. Relinquitur ergo quod praeter ea quae sub ordine divinae providentiae cadunt, Deus aliqua facere potest; non enim est eius virtus ad has res obligata. Si autem consideremus praedictum ordinem quantum ad rationem a principio dependentem, sic praeter ordinem illum Deus facere non potest. Ordo enim ille procedit, ut ostensum est, ex scientia et voluntate Dei omnia ordinante in suam bonitatem sicut in finem. Non est autem possibile quod Deus aliquid faciat quod non sit ab eo volitum: cum creaturae ab ipso non prodeant naturaliter, sed per voluntatem, ut ostensum est. Neque etiam est possibile ab eo aliquid fieri quod eius scientia non comprehendatur: cum voluntas esse non possit nisi de aliquo noto. Neque iterum est possibile quod in creaturis aliquid faciat quod in suam bonitatem non sit ordinatum sicut in finem: cum sua bonitas sit proprium obiectum voluntatis ipsius. Similiter autem, cum Deus sit omnino immutabilis, impossibile est quod aliquid velit cum prius noluerit; aut aliquid de novo incipiat scire, vel in suam ordinet bonitatem. Nihil igitur Deus facere potest quin sub ordine suae providentiae cadat: sicut non potest aliquid facere quod eius operationi non subdatur. Potest tamen alia

immutability, he cannot do something which is not under his order of providence (“*nec potest facere aliqua quae sub ordine providentiae ipsius ab aeterno non fuerint...*”).

What comes to be “should come to be” (*fiendum*) according God’s practical intellection and providence of the universe as a whole. Aquinas, however, is clear to point out that this does not necessitate the contingent affairs of the sublunary world. The *rational* may be the *actual*, and the *actual* the *rational*, but such intelligibility results from a providence that, as a concurring cause, would *make an allowance* for contingency without either necessitating it—as in the case of occasionalism—or being ignorant of it.

For Aquinas, even the cropping up of bad, of which God is the providential cause *per accidens*, can be recovered within the work of divine providence. God allows and provides for contingency, despite the fact that he does not actively necessitate the unfolding of future contingents. God preordains and chooses a universe in which the events unfold, as Blanchette states “not any more closed to the initiative of creatures than [...] necessitated by any requirement of the final end of creation as a whole, which is the divine goodness itself.”¹¹⁵ Such a final end for creation as a whole (i.e., divine goodness) integrates the otherwise disparate parts into a unity, or “universal order.” The allowance from which contingency follows can be restored to intelligibility as an integral part of divine providence. This is why Aquinas can justify sublunary excess and even monsters,

facere quam ea quae subduntur eius providentiae vel operationi, si absolute consideretur eius potestas: sed nec potest facere aliqua quae sub ordine providentiae ipsius ab aeterno non fuerint, eo quod mutabilis esse non potest.” *SCG* III.98.

¹¹⁵ Blanchette discusses the ways in which spiritual creatures as secondary *providers* come to reflect divine providence. Thus, against a Hegelian preconception of providential determinism, he argues that for Aquinas: “[...] the order of divine providence is not any more closed to the initiative of creatures than it is necessitated by any requirement of the final end of creation as a whole, which is the divine goodness itself. In fact, it may even require such activity and initiative, not out of any necessity or any ‘deficiency of His power, but because of the abundance of His goodness, so that He communicates the dignity of causality even to creatures’ (*S.T.*, I, q. 22, a. 3, c). ‘The magnitude of His goodness is manifested more in that He governs the lower by the higher (*De Ver.*, q. 5, a. 8, ad 12). God is therefore not the only one with providence for the perfection of the universe. Creatures can also exercise such providence, or participate in it, but once again, in diverse ways.” *The Order of the Universe*, 311.

arguing for example, that a lion would cease to live if there were no slaying of animals; and there would be no martyrs without tyrannical persecution.¹¹⁶

According to Aquinas, insofar as everything is *immediately* created and preordained by God, to that extent the contingency of “chance” can be resolved within the providential order foreknown (*praescit*) by its creative First Cause. There is an allowance or *provision* for contingency. Even human affairs, where contingency seems to reign the greatest and which unfold according to deliberation and choice, do not proceed by brute chance but are reduced to higher causes and are immediately arranged by God.¹¹⁷ He argues that the origin of contingency is divine providence, which does not mean that God necessitates such contingent events, but allows for their occurrence in accordance with his providential foresight. God as the cause of all existence (*omnium existentium causa*), who has conferred being upon all things (*rebus omnibus conferens esse*) through his creative act, also must provide for all creatures.¹¹⁸ From the handing down of being to creatures, divine wisdom decrees that God should provide for such beings, first of all, by not annihilating, but instead, conserving beings, some according to an eternal necessity of being, others only for a time. Providence thus arranges all things by the eternal forethought of wisdom.¹¹⁹ The creative provider foreknows what will unfold, although

¹¹⁶ *ST I*. q. 22, a. 2, ad 2. See also *De Pot.* q. 3, a. 6, ad 4. On the claim that monsters may exceed something’s particular nature, but cannot exceed universal nature, see *Ibid.* q. 6, a. 2, ad 8.

¹¹⁷ Aquinas puts forward the maxim (*ratio*) that all things manifold, mutable, and able to fail may be reduced to a uniform, unchangeable, and unfailing principle. “Ex his ergo quae supra ostensa sunt, colligere possumus quomodo humana ad superiores causas reducuntur, et non aguntur fortuito. Nam electiones et voluntatum motus immediate a Deo disponuntur. Cognitio vero humana ad intellectum pertinens a Deo mediantibus Angelis ordinatur. Ea vero quae ad corporalia pertinent, sive sint interiora sive exteriora, in usum hominis venientia, a Deo mediantibus Angelis et caelestibus corporibus dispensantur. Huius autem ratio generaliter una est. Nam oportet omne multiforme, et mutabile, et deficere potens, reduci sicut in principium in aliquod uniforme, et immobile, et deficere non valens. Omnia autem quae in nobis sunt, inveniuntur esse multiplicia, variabilia, et defectibilia.” *SCG III*.91.

¹¹⁸ *SCG III*.94.

¹¹⁹ God foresees things, Aquinas argues, as unfolding either by necessity or contingently. Thus, Aquinas can conclusively state that it is true that whatever is foreseen by God, will come to be. “Sicut autem dictum

such knowing does not *necessitate* its occurrence. Thus, such contingency unfolds only according to divine provision and thus, given such allotment, cannot hinder or annul the execution of divine providence in any way.

Aquinas's providential account can absorb contingency without denying it because God's knowledge extends to everything of which he is the cause, and as the cause of both singulars and accidents, even *future contingent singulars* fall under divine purview.

Aquinas argues that the being (*esse*) of such future contingent singulars is known by God, not only in their causes, but according to the being that they have in themselves

(“*secundum esse quod habent in seipsis*”).¹²⁰ The *esse* that it has in itself is the factual state of its essence as part of the divine plan. Thus, the existing individual in its

est, ens in quantum ens est, habet causam ipsum Deum: unde sicut divinae providentiae subditur ipsum ens, ita etiam omnia accidentia entis in quantum est ens, inter quae sunt necessarium et contingens. Ad divinam igitur providentiam pertinet non solum quod faciat hoc ens, sed quod det ei contingentiam vel necessitatem. Secundum enim quod unicuique dare voluit contingentiam vel necessitatem, praeparavit ei causas medias, ex quibus de necessitate sequatur, vel contingenter. Invenitur igitur uniuscuiusque effectus secundum quod est sub ordine divinae providentiae necessitatem habere. Ex quo contingit quod haec conditionalis est vera, si aliquid est a Deo provisum, hoc erit. Secundum autem quod effectus aliquis consideratur sub ordine causae proximae, sic non omnis effectus est necessarius; sed quidam necessarius et quidam contingens secundum analogiam suae causae. Effectus enim in suis naturis simulantur causis proximis, non autem remotis, ad quarum conditionem pertinere non possunt. Sic ergo patet, quod cum de divina providentia loquimur, non est dicendum solum, hoc est provisum a Deo ut sit, sed hoc est provisum a Deo, ut contingenter sit, vel ut necessario sit. Unde non sequitur secundum rationem Aristotelis hic inductam, quod ex quo divina providentia est posita, quod omnes effectus sint necessarii; sed necessarium est effectus esse contingenter, vel de necessitate. Quod quidem est singulare in hac causa, scilicet in divina providentia. Reliquae enim causae non constituunt legem necessitatis vel contingentiae, sed constituta a superiori causa utuntur. Unde causalitati cuiuslibet alterius causae subditur solum quod eius effectus sit. Quod autem sit necessario vel contingenter, dependet ex causa altiori, quae est causa entis in quantum est ens; a qua ordo necessitatis et contingentiae in rebus provenit.” *Expositio Metaphysicorum Aristotelis*, lib. 6, lec. 3. As argued in the *Summa Theologiae*, as present to the eternal gaze of God, everything happens infallibly; only in relation to its proximate causes do things happen contingently. Although contingents actually come to be in succession, God knows each thing in its own true being (*in suo esse*), the totality of which he grasps in a simultaneous presence. Thus, everything that is bears his gaze from eternity (*eius intuitus fertur ab aeterno super omnia*) (*ST*. I, q. 14, a. 13, resp.). Aquinas describes this non-interfering gaze as one watching two travelers along a road, one following the other. Although the preceding traveler does not see the consequent (traveler), an observer perched in a tree can witness their simultaneous movement *ST*. I, q. 14, a. 13, ad 3. Likewise, the *remote* observation of the divine gaze captures the entirety of the situation, which for Aquinas corresponds to the *de dicto* necessity of divine knowledge, but not a necessity *de re* (i.e., concerning its causes). Proximate causes, although relegated to the necessary *imperium* of divine providence, work to save contingency for Aquinas.

¹²⁰ “Divinus autem intellectus ab aeterno cognoscit res non solum secundum esse quod habent in causis suis, sed etiam secundum esse quod habent in seipsis.” *SCG* I.67.

singularity becomes for Aquinas some ideational content marked out to be a subject of divine providence. *Esse*, it seems, contrary to the role reserved for it by existential Thomism, does not express a radical act through which a being stands out against the canvass of nothingness, but instead, the mode (i.e., contingent or necessary) by which all beings have been dispensed with the task of seeking the good.

Even though Aquinas will continue to insist on the original act of the divine will, and thereby to uphold the radical gratuity of *esse* and the incidentality of *having resolved* to create and conserve, nevertheless, by accounting for the creative procession from God in terms of “the good of the universe,” every being can be measured according to a providential exchange. Such an exchange unifies, and also sublates, what we have treated as distinct essential and existential grounds. The radical inceptuality of giving being (*esse*) comes to be marked as a *benefit* entrusted for the sake of an end. The teleo-providential order of the universe, wherein everything desires the good on account of its nature, provides the proper orientation for creatures *to give back* or *repay* their gift of being, making the seemingly-excessive and incidental phenomenon of creation part of the divine *scientia* of providence. The providential return (*reditus*) of everything to its first principle thus banishes the irrationality at the ground of creation.

The radical break of the first act by which *esse* comes forth in creation is covered over by this second act whereby every being as recipient of such a gift must *be* for the good of the universe. Once inscribed within this totalized order, an order oriented toward the good, the groundlessness from whence *esse* first arises finds a providential ground in the good. We even witness such a return with Gilson, who speaks of the universe as a cooperation of all beings in harmony. Expressing the underlying unity of the three

grounds—existential, essential, and providential—he states: “To be, to be a certain a certain nature, and to operate according to the specific determination of such a nature, all this is identically, to resemble God and to co-operate with God.”¹²¹ Such *cooperation*, although overlooked by Gilson at this point, is that by which each creature—albeit inadequately—repays a debt to its divine *patron*, whereby the originary gift of being in its existential excess comes to function as a providential loan of which an account is rendered.

¹²¹ *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, 195.

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