

# **The Notion of Participation in the Early Work of St Thomas Aquinas**

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to build an understanding of St Thomas's notion of participation within his foundational metaphysical principles.

In the revival of philosophical interest in the thought of Thomas Aquinas that has been seen throughout the twentieth century and continues today, St Thomas's notion of participation has sometimes been nominated as offering a key insight to his metaphysics. This is an attractive proposition, although the scholarship, while of excellent quality, has now revealed fundamental points of contention. These points of contention, furthermore, seem to be fuelled by the differing philosophical allegiances of each scholar. In these circumstances, recent scholars with an interest in participation have been returning to the texts, seeking to re-construct St Thomas's notion within his own analysis. This thesis is a modest attempt at such a re-construction. The thesis consists of a close study of three of St Thomas's early works, namely, *De principiis naturae*, *De ente et essentia* and *Expositio libri Boetii De ebdomadibus*. In the course of studying these works I regularly refer also to some other of St Thomas's leading works, some of which also come from early in St Thomas's career, others of which are later. I have chosen the three works just mentioned by name for this reason: in the first two mentioned St Thomas lays out his basic metaphysical framework; this is found especially in his two modes of composition – each achieved through a structure of act and potency – and also in his distinction of essence and existence in all created substances. Also important here is the recognition of existence as actuality, and the sharp differentiation of the 'pure being' which is God from that 'universal being' by which everything else formally exists. In Chapters One to Six I examine these matters in detail. In my view, while participation for St Thomas is involved in the first mode of composition (matter-form composition), he extends significantly the notion of participation in order to explain the second mode of composition (essence-existence composition). This raises several very interesting questions; e.g., exactly how is existence added to essence in created substances and, if existence is received outside essence, is it properly spoken of as an accident? I seek to address such issues and to argue that, in such ways, St Thomas not only extends the notion of participation but re-constructs it on an extended Aristotelian terrain of efficient cause and act and potency. In Chapter Seven I come to St Thomas's *Expositio libri Boetii De ebdomadibus*. I seek to show that, while Boethius has participation locked in the Aristotelian categories and confined to accidents, St Thomas now has the metaphysical equipment with which to expand participation so that, while it is so that that which is predicated of a substance by essence cannot also be predicated by participation, participation need not be confined to predicamental accidents. In this chapter I also examine the role of divine exemplarity in participation for St Thomas.

In conclusion I argue that, 'being' and 'good' can be predicated of finite substances both intrinsically and by participation, this participation being a participation in a likeness of the divine essence rather than in the divine essence itself. St Thomas achieves this result not only through an extension of the Aristotelian notion of composition through act and potency, but also through the Neo-Platonic notions of exemplarity and a formal hierarchy of being.

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In a more general way I thank all the academic staff of the School of Philosophy at Australian Catholic University, who have invited me and all HDR students in Philosophy to participate in the academic life of the School, especially by participating in the School's seminar program.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	5
INTRODUCTION .....	9
CHAPTER ONE De Principiis Naturae Composition of Form and Matter.....	15
1.1 Introduction to the Study of <i>De principiis naturae</i> .....	15
1.2 Natural Composition and its Principles .....	16
1.3 Principles and Causes in Natural Composition.....	21
1.4 Relations Among the Causes .....	23
1.41 Priority in Causation .....	23
1.42 Coincidence Among the Causes .....	25
1.43 Subdivisions of the Causes .....	26
1.5 Intrinsic Principles and Analogy .....	30
CHAPTER TWO Equivocal Causation and Modes of Composition: Transition to <i>de Ente et Essentia</i> ....	32
2.1 Univocal, Equivocal and Analogous Causation.....	32
2.2 Composition, Act and Potency .....	36
2.21 The Order and Perfection of the Universe .....	37
2.22 Composition in Created Intellectual Natures.....	39
2.23 Act and Potentiality .....	45
2.3 Analogy: Causation, Act and Potentiality.....	48
2.31 Several Issues to do with Analogy.....	50
2.311 First Issue: the extension of analogy.....	51
2.312 Second Issue: perfections and analogy.....	52
2.313 Third Issue: many-to-one and one-to-another analogy.....	55
2.4 Summary of Results.....	58
CHAPTER THREE De Ente et Essentia: Prologue and Chapter One: Essential and Accidental Ens.....	60
3.1 First Conceptions of the Intellect .....	60
3.11 Ens: In the Categories and Propositional Truth.....	65
3.12 Essence in terms of Ens .....	66
3.2 Complexity of Ens .....	68
3.21 Order of Cognition.....	68
3.22 Equivocity of ‘ens’ .....	69
3.221 Context .....	72

3.222 Accidental Uses of ‘ens’ .....	72
3.223 Equivocity of ‘ens’: What it is doing in <i>de Ente et Essentia</i> .....	79
3.2231 Ens, Essence and Privation .....	80
3.2232 Answer to the Question put in Paragraph 3.223 .....	83
3.2233 Ens: Substance.....	84
3.224 Sense of ‘ens’ Composed with Essence.....	85
3.3 Substance, Essence and <i>Actus Essendi</i> .....	87
3.31 What May be Drawn from This Analysis? .....	92
3.32 What Does This Mean for Participation? .....	94
CHAPTER FOUR <i>De Ente et Essentia</i> Chapter 2: Definition, Composition and Participation .....	96
4.1 Essence, Definition and Matter: Sensible, Intelligible, Designated and Non-Designated .....	98
4.11 Natural Substance and Mathematical Quantities: Definition .....	98
4.12 Composition and Participation.....	99
4.13 Intelligibility and Matter.....	100
4.131 Substance and Quantity .....	101
4.132 Matter and Essence.....	102
4.14 Composition of Form and Matter and Substantial Unity.....	103
4.15 Individuation and Matter .....	104
4.16 Summary .....	105
4.2 Why the Essence of Natural Substances includes Form and Matter: a Reprise .....	106
4.21 Essence, Averroes and Avicenna .....	106
4.22 Essence, Form and Matter and Participation.....	110
4.221 Aristotle’s Criticism of Platonic Participation and St Thomas .....	110
4.222 Essence, Potentiality and Act: Participation .....	112
4.223 Actuality, Material and Separate Substance and Participation .....	116
4.3 A Summary of the Argument in this Chapter and Its Bearing on Participation .....	118
CHAPTER FIVE <i>De Ente Et Essentia</i> Chapter 4 .....	120
5.1 Moving beyond Platonism: The Efficient Causal Order and Participation .....	121
5.11 The ‘Intellectus Essentiae’ Argument.....	122
5.111 Interpreting the Argument.....	124
5.12 Essence-Esse Composition in Simple and Composite Substances: Efficient Cause .....	126
5.121 Esse and Per Se Efficient Causal Order.....	128

5.122 Efficient Cause Potentiality and Act .....	130
5.13 Observations on the Argument.....	131
5.131 The Rhetorical Force of the Argument.....	131
5.132 Participation, Receipt of Being and Efficient Cause: Moving Past Plato .....	133
5.2 Extending Aristotelian Potentiality and Act and Participation.....	139
5.21 Why does St Thomas explain Essence-Esse Composition in terms of Potentiality and Act? .....	139
5.211 The Existential Framework.....	140
5.212 Why Form is not Enough .....	141
5.213 Esse as Act .....	142
5.22 The Kind of Act Esse is: <i>De Potentia Dei</i> .....	143
5.221 De Potentia Dei and De Ente et Essentia .....	145
5.2211 One Cause of Being .....	146
5.2212 Secondary Causes and Participation in Esse .....	147
5.222 De Potentia Dei q. 5, a. 1: Introducing causae fiendi and causae essendi.....	148
5.223 Causae Fiendi, Causae Essendi and Participation .....	153
5.23 God alone Creates: Summa Theologiae I, q. 45, a. 5 .....	156
5.3 Brief Overview .....	159
CHAPTER SIX Two Further Issues .....	160
6.1 Is Existence an Accident? .....	161
6.11 Avicenna's Influence on de Ente et Essentia.....	163
6.12 The Argument of De Potentia q. 5 a. 4.....	165
6.13 Praedicamental Accidents.....	167
6.14 The Developments in the Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics .....	169
6.15 Accidentality of Esse and Participation .....	172
6.151 One by Essence: De Veritate q. 21 .....	174
6.152 Being and Good by Participation and Efficient Cause .....	175
6.2 How does Essence receive the Act of Being?.....	176
6.21 Reception of Being and Limitation of Being.....	179
6.22 Limitation of Being and Act and Potency .....	181
6.23 Limitation of Being, Participation and Act and Potency .....	185
6.24 De Potentia Dei q. 7 a. 2 again .....	186

6.241 Actus Essendi and Forma Essendi .....	187
6.3 St Thomas's Extension of the Aristotelian Couplet of Act and Potency, and Participation .....	189
6.4 Overview .....	193
CHAPTER SEVEN St. Thomas' Exposition of Boethius' De Hebdomadibus.....	195
7.1 Some transitional remarks and Important Further Issues .....	195
7.2 Expositio libri Boetii De ebdomadibus .....	197
7.21 Boethius' Approach to the Problem and the First Axiom .....	199
7.211 St Thomas's Interpretation of the First Axiom .....	201
7.212 The Significance of St Thomas's Interpretation of the First Axiom .....	203
7.22 Initial View of Participated Being .....	206
7.23 Is St Thomas Justified in Identifying His Own <i>Actus Essendi</i> with Boethius' <i>Forma Essendi</i> ? .....	207
7.24 St Thomas on Participation in the <i>Expositio</i> .....	208
7.241 Three Modes of Participation.....	209
7.2411 Modes of Participation, the Abstractly Said and the Concretely Said .....	210
7.2412 Participation, Admixture of the Extraneous and the Real and Intentional Orders .	211
7.242 The Significance of the Intentional/Real Distinction.....	213
7.243 The Importance of St Thomas's Moving Participation into His Metaphysics of Esse in His Exposition of Boethius.....	216
7.244 The Nature of Participated Being .....	218
7.2441 Participation in <i>Ipsium Esse Subsistens</i> .....	219
7.24411 The Parallel with the Air's Participation in the Light of the Sun .....	220
7.24412 Participation in <i>Ipsium Esse Subsistens</i> and the Divine Exemplars.....	223
7.2442 Participation in <i>Esse Commune</i> and <i>Actus Essendi</i> .....	234
7.245 St Thomas's Answer to Boethius.....	235
CONCLUSION .....	245
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	250



## INTRODUCTION

The notion of participation in the work of St Thomas, along with its companion topic of analogy, has attracted the attention of leading Thomist scholars for much of the twentieth century. In the case of analogy, this has been a fresh look at an established topic; in the case of participation, specialised scholarly interest has been fairly new. By the opening of the twenty-first century, participation had become and it remains a significant topic in Thomist scholarship. John Wippel observes that scholarly interest in participation as a significant aspect of St Thomas's metaphysics dates from about the late 1930s, led by two European scholars, Cornelio Fabro and Louis Geiger.<sup>1</sup> One may add that some scholars writing in English at about the same time were also giving prominence to the notion of participation.<sup>2</sup>

My own view is that the notion of participation offers a very useful avenue in which to concentrate one's attention if one seeks some understanding of St Thomas's metaphysics. It is for this reason that I have chosen to study participation within the academic framework leading to this thesis. I began my quest to understand participation by reading scholarly works on participation in St Thomas's metaphysics.<sup>3</sup> I also read many of the works of St Thomas to which these scholars refer.<sup>4</sup> I found however, significant differences among the scholars, on which I felt I had insufficient grounding to develop a critical perspective. Also, St Thomas's thought is so systematic that one can benefit from

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<sup>1</sup> John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington DC: CUA Press, 2000), 94.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Francis X. Meehan, in his book *Efficient Causality in Aristotle and St Thomas* (Washington DC: CUA Press, 1940), 353-374. Meehan stresses the role of efficient causality in St Thomas's notion of participation, modifying its "pure exemplarity". Meehan refers to the work of Fabro, although not his book, which appeared in 1939. Wippel gives the publication details of Fabro's book as *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino*, Milan 1939, 2nd Rev'd Ed. Turin 1950. Meehan agrees with Fabro that it is the notion of being by participation which leads to the real duality of essence and existence, and not the other way around. See Meehan, op. cit., 356.

<sup>3</sup> I will not list here all the scholarly works which I studied. A seminal work for me is Professor Wippel's "Thomas Aquinas and Participation", in *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, edited by John Wippel (Washington DC: CUA Press, 1987), 117. A later version of this article appears as Chapter IV in Professor Wippel's book, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*. I also read Rudi Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1995), and parts of the work of Jan Aertsen. These works are listed in the Bibliography, along with the work of Cornelio Fabro which I could find in English and which I found very helpful. Also very helpful to me has been the work of Joseph Owens and of W. Norris Clarke; again the work of theirs that I have read and found useful in preparing this thesis is listed in the Bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> This means that I undertook a close study of St Thomas's *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, a translation of which had recently appeared with parallel text on facing pages of Latin and English. This is the translation with an introduction and notes by Janice L. Schultz and Edward A. Synan, published by CUA Press in Washington DC in 2001.

even a relatively comprehensive treatment of participation such as one finds in St Thomas's *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, only if one has a reasonably clear picture of the metaphysical framework into which it fits. I therefore decided to return to some basic texts of St Thomas's and to some of his essential metaphysical notions and examine what they might reveal about St Thomas's notion of participation.

It appeared to me that, while St Thomas uses participation throughout his work, the ontological foundation of the notion must lie in his metaphysics of *esse*; and it further appeared to me that this foundation formed itself around St Thomas's key concepts of composition, act and potency, efficient cause and exemplary cause. I therefore decided to investigate these notions by concentrating on some of St Thomas's early works where he explains their essentials fairly clearly. That is the point of this thesis: to study this framework as St Thomas explains it in the works I have chosen, and to seek to locate participation within it. In this way, it may be possible to look at the notion of participation afresh. If at times this thesis reads as if it is concerned more with notions such as cause, essence and composition than it is with participation *per se*, this is because I am seeking to till the soil within which participation can bloom.<sup>5</sup>

Given that there are inevitable limits in a thesis of this kind, I have chosen to focus my attention on three of St Thomas's early works: *De principiis naturae*, *De ente et essentia*, and *Expositio libri Boetii De ebdomadibus*, all of which date from St Thomas's first period at the University of Paris, first as bachelor and then as master (1252-1259).<sup>6</sup> I have chosen these works for this reason: they are all early works and St Thomas offers in them a rather fuller explanation of his basic notions such as cause, composition, essence and act and potency than one finds in his later work. Furthermore, the first two works mentioned are related, in that in them St Thomas explains the two modes of

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<sup>5</sup> In adopting this strategy I have taken a lead from Siobhan Nash-Marshall, *Participation and the Good: A Study in Boethian Metaphysics* (New York: Crossroad, 2000). Professor Nash-Marshall says that, in order to determine and define Boethius' doctrine of participation, one has to use inductive method; i.e., one has to seek to re-construct what participation meant for Boethius. See pp 16-19.

<sup>6</sup> There are many catalogues and chronologies of the works of St Thomas. The best known and most informative are the following. James A. Weisheipl, "A Brief Catalogue of Authentic Works", in his *Friar Thomas D'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1974), 355-405. I.T. Eschmann, "A Brief Catalogue of St Thomas's Works", dated March 7, 1956, being the Appendix to Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas*, Third Revised Edition edited by G.A. Elrington and translated by Edward Bullough (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1924), 381-430. Weisheipl dates both of *De principiis naturae* and *De ente et essentia* to St Thomas's period in Paris before he became master, i.e., 1252-1256, and *Expositio libri Boetii De ebdomadibus* to his first period as master, i.e., 1256-1259. Weisheipl, 78-79, 386-387, 382, 137-138.

composition that he recognises, matter-form composition and essence-existence composition. St Thomas's *Expositio libri Boetii De ebdomadibus*, of course, must be included in a study of this sort, as it is the only work in which St Thomas offers anything resembling a systematic treatment of participation. Yet it too is an early work, and thus we are likely to find in it St Thomas laying his foundation for the role of participation in his metaphysics of *esse*. It is well known that St Thomas formed his basic metaphysical positions early and, by and large, did not change their essential character throughout his relatively short career.<sup>7</sup>

In support of my argument I will also refer frequently to other works of St Thomas, some of which are quite a bit later. The main works to which I will refer in this way are *Summa contra gentiles*, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Potentia Dei*, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* and *Summa Theologiae Prima Pars*.<sup>8</sup> Any work of St Thomas that is referred to in any way in this thesis is listed in the Bibliography.

**Organisation of the thesis.** With the above in mind, this thesis is organised as follows. First, there is a study of St Thomas's treatise *De principiis naturae*. This is followed by a transitional section in which I examine St Thomas's notions of composition and act and potency. The purpose of this section is to facilitate a transition to a detailed examination of St Thomas's treatise *De ente et essentia*, which follows. There is then another short transitional section, which is followed by a close examination of St Thomas's opusculum *Expositio libri Boetii De ebdomadibus*. Throughout my examination of these three works I hope to build up steadily a view of St Thomas's notion of participation, so that, by the time I have completed my examination of St Thomas's *Expositio libri*

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<sup>7</sup> St Thomas's scholarly career began in the latter half of 1252 when he arrived in Paris and was appointed *baccalarius Sententiarum*, or bachelor commenting on the *Sentences of Peter Lombard*. His scholarly career came to an abrupt end in Naples, when St Thomas ceased writing on 6 December 1273. Over these twenty or so years St Thomas's output was simply vast, not only in sheer volume but in scope. It has been estimated that St Thomas would have to have averaged some 1,190 words per day every day for twenty years to complete the work that he completed. And this is in addition to his studying, his lecturing, his disputing, his preaching, his administrative duties, and his work for the Church. St Thomas died on 7 March 1274 at the Cistercian Abbey of Fossanova in southern Italy. See Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino*, 53, 319-327. Weisheipl says that St Thomas completed "more than forty substantial volumes that benefited the Church and mankind" (320). The above estimate of St Thomas's daily output comes from Timothy McDermott's Introduction to his excellent collection *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Philosophical Writings* (Oxford: OUP, 1993), Re-issued in the Oxford World's Classics series 2008, xv.

<sup>8</sup> Weisheipl dates these works as follows: *Summa contra gentiles*: 1259-1264; *De Veritate*: 1256-1259; *De potentia dei*: 1265-1266; *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*: 1269-1272; *Summa Theologiae Prima Pars*: 1266-1268. See op. cit., 359-363, 379.

*Boetii De ebdomadibus* St Thomas's understanding of participation will have emerged with some clarity. In particular, I hope that the relation of participation to the structure of composition, act and potency, and cause in St Thomas's metaphysics will be fairly clear. There then follows a conclusion, wherein I seek to draw the strands together.

**Issues that will not be covered.** Owing to the approach that I have chosen, and owing to the constraints of the academic framework to which I have already referred, the following issues will not be covered.

First, there is no literature review. I have written a comparative review of the work of Fabro and Owens on participation, but I have not included any such work in this thesis, first owing to lack of space and secondly, and more importantly, because I feel it would be more appropriate to review the literature after this thesis is written and not before.<sup>9</sup>

Second, there is no discussion of the issues of contention among the commentators which arise on the literature. These issues concern mainly the proper subject matter of metaphysics and the use of *via resolutionis* as the method proper to metaphysics, as well as the relative priority of participation and the act of existence known in judgement in St Thomas's metaphysics of *esse*, and the role of cognition in metaphysics.<sup>10</sup> These issues of contention are so deeply rooted in St Thomas's metaphysics as to merit a thesis on their own.

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<sup>9</sup> As I have already stated in this Introduction, it is owing to significant differences of interpretation among established scholars that I believe it is necessary to return to basics and start afresh. When I have done that, I hope that I will have some modest basis on which to understand the existing scholarship and to learn from it.

<sup>10</sup> These issues arise mainly from the criticism of Fabro and other scholars of the existentialist Thomists, of whom Joseph Owens is a leading representative. In a two-part article, George Lindbeck argues that "it is more enlightening to characterize the philosophy of being of Aquinas as basically participationist, rather than existential", and "participationist motifs ... are a more likely source for the metaphysical theory of the *actus essendi* than is the judgmental knowledge of existence emphasized by Gilson". George Lindbeck, "Participation and Existence in the Interpretation of St Thomas Aquinas", *Franciscan Studies* 17 (1957), 1-22 and 107-125, at 1 and 107. Fabro picks up this criticism and argues that "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". See Cornelio Fabro, "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation", Trans. By B.M. Bonansea, *The Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1974), 449, 470, text and n. 68. The heart of Fabro's criticism is that the existential judgement achieves a knowledge of existence, but not a knowledge of *esse* as *actus essendi*. Therefore, participation offers a better entrance to St Thomas's metaphysics of *esse* than does the judgmental knowledge of existence. For a response by Owens to Fabro see Joseph Owens, "Aquinas on Knowing Existence", *The Review of Metaphysics* 29 (1976), 670, re-published in *St Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: Collected Papers of Joseph Owens, C.Ss.R.*, edited by John R. Catan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), 20. For a review of the issue

Third, I will not enter into the debate over the division and classification of participation. Geiger distinguishes participation by composition and participation by similitude, while Fabro prefers his own division of participation into transcendental and predicamental participation. Fabro however, does recognise the place of participation by similitude, in both the predicamental and transcendental orders.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, I will refer to participation by composition and to participation by similitude, but without actually entering the classification debate.<sup>12</sup>

Fourth, I will be concerned only with the role of participation in St Thomas's metaphysics. Therefore, I will not analyse the role of participation in other parts of St Thomas's thought, such as St Thomas's ethics. Nor will I analyse the relation between participation and specific topics, such as participation and the unicity of the substantial form.<sup>13</sup>

Fifth, I will not discuss specifically the relation of participation and human cognition and knowledge. This is an important and very interesting topic, but simply too large a topic to open in this thesis.<sup>14</sup>

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by another scholar see Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, "Existence and Esse", *The New Scholasticism* 50 (1976), 20. Also very helpful is Helen James John, "The Emergence of the Act of Existing in Recent Thomism", *International Philosophical Quarterly* 2 (1962), 595. For an interesting perspective on Owens' approach to the metaphysics of St Thomas, a perspective which also bears on Fabro's criticism, see John Knasas, *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists* (New York: Fordham UP, 2003), 65-70.

<sup>11</sup> Fabro, "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy", 476-477. For Fabro's own classification, see *ibid.*, 471.

<sup>12</sup> For a comprehensive review and discussion see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 124-131.

<sup>13</sup> Some scholars deal with the issue of the unicity of the substantial form within their general analysis of participation. This is because the unicity of the substantial form is directly related to St Thomas's view of a created essence as in potency to its *actus essendi*, so that two compose into one subsistent being, a view which is central to St Thomas's notion of participation. See, for example, Fabro, "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy", 465. See also his entry "Participation" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Vol. 10 (Washington DC: Thomson-Gale, 2003), 905, at 907-908. The unicity of the substantial form was a topic of contention in St Thomas's day; for a recent and comprehensive examination see John Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Unity of Substantial Form", in *Philosophy and Theology in the Long Middle Ages: A Tribute to Stephen F. Brown*, edited by Kent Emery, Russell L. Friedman, Andreas Speer, Maxime Mauriege and Stephen F. Brown (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 117.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Fabro, "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy", 477ff. Joseph Owens, "Immobility and Existence for Aquinas", *Mediaeval Studies* 30 (1968), 22, re-published in *St Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: Collected Papers of Joseph Owens, C.Ss.R.*, edited by John R. Catan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), 208. Fulvio Di Blasi, "Knowledge of the Good as Participation in God's Love", paper presented at the Ethics Without God? Conference, held at the Jacques Maritain Center, University of Notre Dame, July 13-20, 2003; available on the Jacques Maritain Center website. John Rziha, *Perfecting Human Actions: St Thomas Aquinas on Human Participation in Eternal Law* (Washington DC: CUA Press, 2009), Ch. 4.

And finally, I will not discuss in a systematic way St Thomas's response to participation as he believed it was understood by Plato and mediated to the medieval world via the Neo-Platonic tradition. There is a great deal of scholarly interest in these matters, but again the topic is too large and too complex to be addressed in a thesis of this sort; rather, the topic demands a thesis of its own.<sup>15</sup>

**Final remarks.** Modern scholarship suggests that the notion of participation in St Thomas's metaphysics centres on his metaphysics of *esse*, whereby the *actus essendi* of created substances is a participated actuality, participating in the likeness of the fullness of *esse* which is the essence of God. Yet modern scholarship also reveals major divisions on what this means. Joseph Owens says that the reason these divisions are so radical is that they lie at the very roots of the metaphysical thinking of each interpreter. In those circumstances, says Owens, "direct immersion in the text itself of Aquinas seems indispensable."<sup>16</sup> My thesis is a modest attempt at such immersion. I believe that it is appropriate to study three early works in which St Thomas lays down his basic positions, and at least two of which seem to have been written specifically for St Thomas's peers and therefore are uncluttered by later debates.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For those interested in this topic, the best starting point is the classic study by R.J. Henle, *Saint Thomas and Platonism: A Study of the Plato and Platonici Texts in the Writings of Saint Thomas* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956); see especially Chapter VII, "Platonic Participation", 374-386. Henle has collected all the texts of St Thomas in which the terms 'Plato' and 'Platonici' appear. To understand the aims of Henle's work, it is advisable to read his General Introduction, pp. xiii-xxiii. Note Henle's well-known remark at p. xxi that the only works of Plato available to the Latin West in St Thomas's day were *Meno*, *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*, and, while it is certain that St Thomas did not use either of the first two, there is also no convincing evidence that he was directly acquainted with the third. Therefore, St Thomas's knowledge of Plato and Platonism came from other sources, including the complex, medieval "Platonic tradition". In these circumstances, as Henle observes, the 'Platonism' in the texts of St Thomas is self-defining. Therefore, Henle's concern is to follow those texts themselves. Note too Henle's comments on the work of Little, Geiger and Fabro in his General Introduction, and his comparison of the direction and concern of his own study: pp. xvii-xxiii.

<sup>16</sup> Owens, "Aquinas on Knowing Existence", 33.

<sup>17</sup> *De principiis naturae* is addressed "*ad fratrem Sylvestrum*", while *De ente et essentia* is addressed "*ad fratres et socios suos*". Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino*, 386-387, 78-79.

# CHAPTER ONE

## De Principiis Naturae

### Composition of Form and Matter

#### 1.1 Introduction to the Study of *De principiis naturae*

*De principiis naturae* is one of the earliest of St Thomas's works. The work is assigned by scholars to the same period as *De ente et essentia*, viz., between 1252 and 1256, while St Thomas was *sententiarius* at Paris; i.e., lecturing on the *Sentences of Peter Lombard* as part of his progression to master. The words *ad fratrem Sylvestrum* may be added to the title. This Brother Sylvester, to whom the work was addressed, was presumably a colleague of St Thomas's at the Priory of Saint-Jacques. The work sets out systematically and in straightforward expository fashion the principles of natural things (matter and form) and the principles of their generation (the four causes) and the relation between them.<sup>18</sup>

The word "principle" is here used in the sense of "origin", and one of St Thomas's objects in this work is to distinguish clearly between principle and cause. This distinction, introduced by St Thomas in this work is, in my opinion, very important in understanding St Thomas's notion of participation. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle observes that for each account of principle there is an account of cause, because all causes are principles.<sup>19</sup> In his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* St Thomas agrees that all causes are principles, but refines the remark to observe that, while principle and cause are "the same in subject", they nevertheless have an important difference in meaning.<sup>20</sup> As a result, "the term principle is more common than the term cause, for something may be a principle and not be a cause".<sup>21</sup> This relation of less common to more common presumably means that "cause" is a species of the genus "principle"; yet, I hope to show that the important difference in meaning between the two identified by St Thomas opens up St Thomas's understanding of cause to a notion of participation in a way that does not occur with Aristotle's understanding of cause.

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<sup>18</sup> Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino*, 79 and 387. Eschmann, "A Catalogue of St Thomas's Works", 411. I am using the translation by Timothy McDermott in his collection *Aquinas: Selected Political Writings*, cited *supra*, pp 67-80. McDermott describes the work as "A sort of student's vade-mecum, an introduction to causality, heavily dependent on Ibn Rushd's interpretation of Aristotle's teaching in *Physics*, 1 and 2". P67.

<sup>19</sup> Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, Bk Delta, 1013a; Translated with an Introduction by Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin, 1998, reprinted with an updated bibliography 2004), 114.

<sup>20</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, Translated with an Introduction by John P. Rowan (Notre Dame, IA: Dumb Ox Books, 1995); Bk V, Lect. 1, nn. 751, 760.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 750.

Aristotle also states in his *Metaphysics* that privation or lack of form can be a cause or principle of substances.<sup>22</sup> Now, in St Thomas's metaphysics, privation or lack of form cannot be, in its own right, a principle or a cause of anything.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, in his *De principiis naturae*, St Thomas nuances the role of privation or lack of form in the generation of substances and thereby refines his concept of cause. The result again is to throw light on the role to be played by the notion of participation in St Thomas's metaphysics.

## 1.2 Natural Composition and its Principles

St Thomas opens the opusculum with a four-fold division of existence. First he introduces potential and actual existence and then he distinguishes essential and non-essential existence. The latter is the distinction between substantial existence (the essential existence of a thing as a substance), which is existence in an unqualified sense, and accidental existence, which is existence in a certain respect. A thing can be in potential to each kind of existence, substantial and accidental. Whatever exists potentially we call *matter*, although, St Thomas observes, this term should be confined to that which has the potential to exist as a substance, while that which has the potential to exist in some non-essential or accidental way should be termed a *subject*. Matter and subject may then be distinguished in this way: of itself, subject exists completely whereas matter exists incompletely of itself, needing something more in order to exist. Therefore observes St Thomas, form gives matter its existence, while non-essential properties are given existence by their subject ("forma dat esse materiae, sed subiectum accidenti").<sup>24</sup> St Thomas is here building on the distinction between matter properly so-called and subject, and his meaning is that, while form gives existence to matter, an accident does not give existence to its subject; rather the subject gives existence to the accident in the sense that the accident is in the subject.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk Lambda, 1069b; Penguin ed. 358.

<sup>23</sup> "what doesn't exist can't cause anything. So all causes must be some or other existent thing." St Thomas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk III, c. 10. Here quoted from McDermott, *Aquinas: Selected Philosophical Writings*, 285. See also, Francis X. Meehan, *Efficient Causality in Aristotle and St Thomas* (Washington DC: 1940), 173.

<sup>24</sup> The Latin phrase is quoted from Sancti Thomae de Aquino, *De principiis naturae ad fratrem Sylvestrum*, c. 1; Textum Leoninum Romae 1976 editum; available on the *Corpus Thomisticum* website; accessed 19.01.2011.

<sup>25</sup> Thus, St Thomas says that matter with potential to exist substantially is known as matter *from which*, while matter which is in potency to accidental existence is known as matter *in which*. St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 1; McDermott, 67. Professor Wippel says that St Thomas is here seeking to avoid assigning to matter when compared with substantial form the kind of ontological priority that substance has with respect to accidents. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 296-297.



St Thomas continues that, just as anything potential can be called *material*, anything that gives existence can be called *form*. We are now speaking of ‘form’ as actualising, whereupon ‘form’ is referred to as ‘act’: “Et quia forma facit esse in actu, ideo forma dicitur esse actus.” This structure furthermore, applies to both substance and accidents, so that substantial form makes something actually exist as a substance, while accidental forms make it exist in various non-essential modes.<sup>26</sup> However, St Thomas has not yet told us how form gives existence to matter; as formal cause presumably; but is there an efficient cause? If that also were assigned to the thing’s intrinsic form, then the thing would be its own efficient cause, which is impossible. Obviously, more is to be said on the issue of cause.

For the moment St Thomas observes that the change which introduces a form is called *being generated*. This term has two senses corresponding to the two senses of form, substantial and accidental. The same structure applies to decomposition, so that generation and decomposition apply strictly only in the genus of substance and apply qualifiedly in the other genera: “Generatio vero et corruptio simpliciter non sunt nisi in genere substantiae; sed generatio et corruptio secundum quid sunt in aliis generibus”.<sup>27</sup> Generation, then, moves from not existing to existing, but it is not any sort of not existing; it is not existing which is potential of existence. So generation requires three things: something potential of existence (matter), its lack of actualisation (lack of being) and something to give it actualisation (form). Consequently, concludes St Thomas, there are three principles (or origins) of nature: matter, form and lack of form.<sup>28</sup>

St Thomas makes clear that lack of form is not a principle in the sense of the other two. The other two are principles in their own right, whereas lack of form is a principle only incidentally, being coincident with matter: matter must lack the form. Lack of form, however, is meant here in the sense of privation: the lack is not a mere negation or absence, but a lack in a subject which should have that which is lacking. Therefore, though incidental, lack of form is a real requirement nonetheless.

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<sup>26</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 1. Mc Dermott 68.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> St Thomas, *de principiis naturae*, cc 1 and 2; McDermott, 68-69. St Thomas’s Latin is: “Ad hoc ergo quod sit generatio, tria requiruntur: scilicet ens potentia, quod est materia; et non esse actu, quod est privatio; et id per quod fit actu, scilicet forma.” And, at the start of c. 2: “Sunt igitur tria principia naturae, scilicet materia, forma et privatio;”.

St Thomas notes a further distinction between lack of form and the other two principles: matter and form are principles both of being and of coming to be, while lack of form is a principle of coming to be only. This is a consequence of the fact that lack of form is a principle not in its own right, but as coincident with matter. In the process of generation, matter sheds its lack of form and takes on new form. When the new complex of matter and form exists, matter and form will continue as principles of its existence. However, that very existence will contradict the previous lack of form. Therefore, while matter and form are principles of coming to be and of being, lack of form is a principle of coming to be only.<sup>29</sup> In this way St Thomas refines Aristotle's teaching that privation or lack of form is a principle of substances and, at the same time introduces an important distinction between principles of coming to be and principles of being. Transferred to cause as *causae fiendi* and *causae essendi*, the distinction plays an essential role in St Thomas's explanation of the generation of material earthly substances, and therefore is part of the structure of his metaphysics of participation through efficient cause.

So far St Thomas has been speaking of matter which lacks one form because it exists under another – as air lacks fire. Matter existing under one form contains *within itself* the privation of another form.<sup>30</sup> St Thomas now proceeds to speak of matter which is subject to form and lack of form but has no particular form and no particular lack of form in itself. This he calls *ultimate material* or prime matter.<sup>31</sup> However, as we know and define things by their forms, prime matter can be known and defined only by analogy; namely as that which relates to all forms and to all lack of forms. However,

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<sup>29</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 2; McDermott 69-70.

<sup>30</sup> This sentence comes from St Thomas's *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, Bk XII, Lect. 4, n 2470, emphasis added.

<sup>31</sup> The term "ultimate material" chosen by the translator in the edition that I am using is unusual in this context, although McDermott follows it with the term "first matter" in square brackets. I assume that McDermott chooses the term "ultimate material" because St Thomas's introduction of the term is followed by his observation that such material is so called "because it presupposes no other material". McDermott, op. cit., 70-71. In the Leonine edition, St Thomas's Latin runs as follows: "Ipsa autem materia quae intelligitur sine qualibet forma et privatione, sed subiecta formae et privationi, dicitur materia prima, propter hoc quod ante ipsam non est alia materia." Sancti Thomae de Aquino, *De principiis naturae ad fratrem Sylvestrum*, c. 2, as found on the website *Corpus Thomisticum*. I will use the term "prime matter", first because that is the term used by St Thomas himself (*materia prima*), secondly because that is the more familiar term in this context, and thirdly because it is the term chosen by other translators of *De principiis naturae*. See, for example, Mary T. Clark in her *An Aquinas Reader*, revised edition (New York: Fordham UP, 2000), 43-56 at 47. For the principles which have guided McDermott's selection and translation of passages, see his Introduction, pp xv-xvi.

prime matter never exists actually but only potentially, as existence comes with form. In this way St Thomas makes explicit the notion of prime matter as pure potentiality.<sup>32</sup>

What can this mean? St Thomas says that neither matter nor form is generated, as generation starts with matter and ends with form. Therefore, if matter and form were themselves to be generated, matter would need matter and form would need form endlessly. Furthermore, there is only one prime matter underlying all things. However, it is not one in the sense of having a single determinate form; it is one because it is understood without anything that could make it more than one; i.e., it is understood without any quality that could introduce numerical differentiation.<sup>33</sup>

Consequently, only the composite is generated. As actual existence comes with form, prime matter cannot be said to exist actually – nor can form for that matter; neither exists in itself; only the composite can be said to exist actually. But St Thomas does not say that prime matter “never exists” absolutely; rather he says that it “never exists stripped of form and lack of form”. Therefore, the non-existence of prime matter is not absolute but relative, and it is relative to lack of form and to lack of lack of form. To put the matter another way, the non-existence is not absolute non-existence, but signifies in prime matter the absence of an actualising principle, namely form; it is the stripping of form and lack of form that characterises the never existing. This is how we might read St Thomas’s dictum that, while prime matter has no form or lack of form in itself, it is nonetheless subject to form and lack of form. Therefore, when St Thomas says as he does that prime matter “exists potentially”, he means that prime matter *exists* in the sense that it is *potentially* a being.<sup>34</sup>

This observation is important for three reasons. First, prime matter must in some sense be real. St Thomas speaks of prime matter as caused by God and that “*materia prima dicitur una numero in*

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<sup>32</sup> St Thomas, *De Principiis Naturae*, c. 2; McDermott, 70-71.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 71. See also Clark, op. cit., at 47. And Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 299.

<sup>34</sup> “Sed per se nunquam potest esse, quia cum in ratione sua non habeat aliquam formam, non habet esse in actu, cum esse in actu non sit nisi a forma, sed est solum in potentia.” “By itself it can never exist for it has no form of its own and so - because actual existence comes with forms – matter by itself never exists actually but only potentially.” St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 2; McDermott, 71. Note also: “Materia prima aliquo modo est: quia est ens in potentia.” “... prime matter in some way is, for it is potentially a being.” St Thomas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk II, c. 16, n. 12. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by James F. Anderson (Notre Dame: UNDP, 1975). The Latin is quoted from S. Thomae De Aquino, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Editio Leonina Manualis (Roma: Marietti, 1934).

omnibus”: prime matter is numerically one in all things.<sup>35</sup> As already stated, prime matter is ‘one’ in the sense that it lacks that by which things are numerically distinct and, in itself, is pure potency. Thus prime matter never exists in the real order without some form and privation. In such a way we may speak of, prime matter as a real intrinsic principle which must be present in every corporeal being, both to account for the fact that such a being is capable of undergoing substantial change and to explain that a certain kind of being can be multiplied in numerically distinct individuals.<sup>36</sup> Secondly, St Thomas distinguishes actual existence which belongs to the compound alone, and an analogous existence “in some way” which belongs to prime matter.<sup>37</sup> This shows that existence and hence being, for St Thomas, is an analogous concept. It also shows that the existence which belongs to a substance is not merely an observable phenomenon but the actualisation of the substance, the substance’s *act*.<sup>38</sup> This gives St Thomas a clear perception of being, as I hope to show. And thirdly, even though prime matter has no form and lack of form in itself, it is nonetheless subject to form and lack of form. One would expect that prime matter, as pure potency, *seeks form*. In that sense, when we think of prime matter as numerically one in all things, we may think of it as underlying the order of the universe, as everything seeks the perfection appropriate to its form.<sup>39</sup> In these ways I believe that St Thomas’s observations on prime matter in the opusculum *De principiis naturae* are important for his understanding and use of the notion of participation. This I hope to make more apparent

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<sup>35</sup> This phrase comes from *De principiis naturae*, c. 2. St Thomas identifies God as the cause of prime matter in *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 16, n. 12.

<sup>36</sup> I have brought together here, not unfairly I hope, some remarks of John Wippel in his extensive discussion of prime matter and substantial form to be found in his *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, Ch. IX. Wippel’s remarks about the ‘oneness’ of prime matter and that it is never found in the real order without some form and privation will be found at p. 299. The statement that prime matter is a real intrinsic principle present in every corporeal being will be found at p. 317.

<sup>37</sup> I believe that the existence is analogous because St Thomas says that prime matter is known analogously “as that which relates to all forms and lack of forms”; *De principiis naturae*, c. 2; McDermott 71. The phrase “in some way” comes from *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk II, c. 16, n. 12.

<sup>38</sup> “Esse autem non convenit formae tantum nec materiae tantum, sed composito: materia enim non est nisi in potentia; forma vero est qua aliquid est, est enim actus. Unde restat quod compositum proprie sit.” “The act of being, however, does not belong to the form only, nor to the matter only, but to the composite. For matter exists only in potency, while form is that by which something is, since it is act. It remains, therefore, that it is the composite which, properly speaking, is.” St Thomas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk II, c. 43, n. 4.

<sup>39</sup> “Cum omne agens agat sibi simile, ab illo acquirit effectus formam cui per formam acquisitam similatur: ... Sed omnia simulantur Deo, qui est actus purus, in quantum habent formas, per quas fiunt in actu; et in quantum formas appetunt, divinam similitudinem appetere dicuntur.” “... since every agent produces its like, the effect obtains its form from that reality to which it is made like through the form acquired by it; ... But all things are like God, who is pure act, so far as they have forms, through which they become actual; and so far as they desire forms, they are said to desire the divine likeness.” St Thomas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk. II, c. 43, n. 9. This theme is developed in Graham McAleer, “Matter and Unity of Being in the Philosophical Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas”, *The Thomist* 61 (1997), 257-277.

when examining St Thomas's other type of composition explained in his opusculum contemporary with *De principiis naturae*; namely *De ente et essentia*.

### 1.3 Principles and Causes in Natural Composition

St Thomas now moves from principles to causes. He has identified three principles of nature – matter, form and lack of form; he now observes that these are not enough on their own to explain generation. That which exists potentially (i.e., matter) cannot bring itself to actualisation; what is needed is something to draw out the form from potentiality into actuality. And the form cannot draw itself out, for the form is the form of the thing generated and will not exist until the thing is made.<sup>40</sup>

This way of putting the matter involves some important observations. First, the form of the finished product has to be “drawn out” of the potentiality of matter into actuality: “educed” is the word St Thomas uses in other contexts.<sup>41</sup> Second, the form is then actualised in the thing made, which then exists as a composition of matter and form. This requires a mover or agent of change, which we call efficient cause. However, while the efficient cause exists in the coming-to-be, the thing generated and its form exist only in the composition of matter and form.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, the action, the actualisation, exists not in the moving agent but in the end product, the thing composed of matter and form through the structure of act and potency. This understanding also is of importance in St Thomas's notion of the analogy of being and therefore of participation, both within the created universe and between the universe and God.

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<sup>40</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 3; Mc Dermott 71-72.

<sup>41</sup> For example, in *De potentia dei*: “quia omnis forma quae exit in esse per generationem, vel per virtutem naturae, educitur de potentia materiae, ut probatur in VII *Metaph.* [com. 22].” “Every form that comes into being by generation or the forces of nature is educed from the potentiality of matter (*Metaph.* vii, 7).” St Thomas, *De potentia dei*, q. 3, a. 9, c. Latin edition *Quaestiones Disputatae*, Vol. II, Editio VIII revisa. Cura et studio P. Bazzi, M. Calcaterra, T.S. Centi, E. Odetto, P.M. Pession (Romae: Marietti, 1949). English edition *On the Power of God*, by Saint Thomas Aquinas, Book I, Literally translated by the English Dominican Fathers (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1932). In *De principiis naturae* St Thomas uses the verb “extraho, extrahere”, meaning “to draw out”: “sicut cuprum quod est potentia idolum, non facit se idolum, sed indiget operante, qui formam idoli extrahat de potentia in actum.” *De principiis naturae*, c. 3. One must not be misled by terms such as “drawn out” and “educed”; the form is drawn out or educed from the *potentiality of matter*. In other words, the form is not somehow “active” and “hidden” in matter. Such a position would contradict St Thomas's view that actuality belongs to the *composite* of matter and form, and also contradict his view that the composite subsists through the structure of act and potency. See St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VII, Lect. 7, nn. 1430 and 1431. See also Jan Aertsen, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas's Way of Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 319-320.

<sup>42</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 3; McDermott 71-72.

Returning to St Thomas's text, we now have three causes of the thing generated; matter, form and efficient cause. St Thomas now adds a fourth. Citing Aristotle in support of a principle that "to be active" that which "is acting must tend towards something", the fourth is the end or goal towards which the agent tends.<sup>43</sup> Every agent acts for a goal but not every agent deliberates about it. Voluntary agents will usually need to consider a goal and decide how to act, but natural agents simply tend towards a goal by natural inclination. St Thomas now identifies four causes: material, efficient, formal and final. He observes that these four causes are causes in their own right, although there may be incidental causes. Following Aristotle St Thomas recognises matter and form as intrinsic causes (being intrinsic to the thing) and efficient and final as extrinsic causes. Lack of form is intrinsic but not a cause; as already argued, it is only incidentally a principle.<sup>44</sup>

St Thomas's main aim in this part of *De principiis naturae* is to distinguish between causes, principles and elements. The distinction between principle and cause in particular had been left ambiguous by Aristotle.<sup>45</sup> St Thomas, following Averroes, explains that a principle is wider than a cause and a cause is wider than an element. Taking first principle and cause, both may be understood as beginning or origin but, while any origin may be termed a principle, only an origin which gives existence to what follows may be termed a cause. Thus, while a change from black to white originates in blackness, we would not speak of blackness as the source of the whiteness's existence. It is owing to this specification of cause as source of existence that lack of form, where generation starts, is an origin but not a cause, although it may be termed a cause coincidentally as coinciding with matter. The term "element", meanwhile, refers to that of which things are ultimately made up, which exist in things (elements of things maintain their integrity and do not break down throughout the process of generation) and which are indivisible in themselves. Letters, for example, are the elements of syllables. The term "element", then, will include some material causes but not others.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 3; McDermott 72. The Aristotelian principle will be found in *The Metaphysics*, Bk Alpha the Lesser 2, 994b. Penguin ed. 46-47.

<sup>44</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 3; McDermott 72-73.

<sup>45</sup> "Licet autem principium et causa dicantur convertibiliter, ut dicitur in quinto Metaph., tamen Aristoteles in Lib. Physic., ponit quatuor causas et tria principia." "And although Aristotle says the words *origin* and *cause* are interchangeable, in another place he lays down four causes and three origins or principles." St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 3; McDermott, op. cit., 72.

<sup>46</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 4; McDermott, op. cit., 73-74. St Thomas takes his criteria for "element" from Aristotle's glossary of metaphysical terms in Book Delta of his *Metaphysics*: 1024a-1014b; Penguin ed., 117-118.

## 1.4 Relations Among the Causes

St Thomas next examines relations among the causes. As far as efficient cause and final cause are concerned, efficient cause causes the end to be, but does not cause it to be an end in the first place. The end meanwhile is the cause of the efficient cause's causality, the cause of its productiveness. The end also makes material material and form form, because material takes on form and form makes something out of the material only because of the end. The end is thus the cause of causes, as it causes the causality of all other causes.<sup>47</sup> St Thomas also notes that matter causes form inasmuch as form can exist only in matter, and form causes matter inasmuch as matter can exist only under a form.<sup>48</sup>

### 1.41 Priority in Causation

This structure of the clear specification of cause within principle – a cause is an origin or beginning which gives existence to that which follows, as distinct from a mere beginning – the differentiation of the four causes and the identification of the final cause as “causa causarum”, leads St Thomas to an important position on priority in causation. Causes are always prior to what they cause, and St Thomas distinguishes two senses of “prior”: occurring earlier in the temporal process of generation, or ranking first in completeness of being.<sup>49</sup> Now St Thomas's notion of cause requires only the second kind of priority, priority of being. The notion of cause in its essence does not require temporal priority. The intrinsic causes, material and formal, will not be temporally prior anyway, as they are actualised in the effect.<sup>50</sup> But the important thing to notice is that there is nothing essential in the notion of efficient cause that requires it to be prior in time; it is enough that it be prior in being, as that is the essence of cause. This means that, while St Thomas recognises that an efficient cause may precede its effect in time, this is not essential. If an efficient cause acts by motion then, of necessity, it will be temporally prior to the effect. But if the action is instantaneous, then there is no

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<sup>47</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 4; McDermott, 74-75. McDermott actually uses the term “goal” where I have used “end”. St Thomas uses the term “finis”. Thus: “Unde dicitur quod finis est causa causarum, quia est causa causalitatis in omnibus causis.” *De principiis naturae*, c. 4.

<sup>48</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 4; McDermott 75. St Thomas continues: “Materia enim et forma dicuntur relative ad invicem, ut dicitur in secundo physicorum. Dicuntur enim ad compositum sicut partes ad totum, et simplex ad compositum.” “As Aristotle says, matter and form are correlatives, related as simple parts to the composite whole they together make up.” *Ibid.*, c. 4.

<sup>49</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, McDermott, 75. For some observations on St Thomas's use of this distinction see Anton Pegis, *St Thomas and Philosophy*, being the Aquinas Lecture for 1964 (Milwaukee: Marquette UP, 1964), 28-29ff.

<sup>50</sup> Meehan, *Efficient Causality in Aristotle and St Thomas*, 175. This is so where the material already exists under another form and it is so *a fortiori* in the case of prime matter, which presupposes no other material and lacks actualising form. Cf. Thomas Harper, *The Metaphysics of the School*, Vol. II (London: Macmillan & Co., 1881), 162. See also St Thomas, *De potentia dei*, q. 3, a. 13, ad 5.

need for temporal priority in the efficient cause.<sup>51</sup> The efficient cause will nonetheless be prior in being to the effect, as causes are always prior in nature to their effects. This means that St Thomas is able to extend efficient cause to cases where there is action without motion and succession, to cases where the action is instantaneous with the effect. I hope to show later that this distinction between cases of efficient cause with motion and cases of efficient cause without motion actually structures St Thomas's notion of participation through efficient cause.

Returning to St Thomas's presentation in *De principiis naturae*, St Thomas uses the two senses of "prior" to show that one thing can be both prior and posterior, caused and cause. This occurs because activity in nature moves from the incomplete and unachieved to completeness and achievement. Therefore the unachieved is prior to the achieved in the temporal process of generation, while the achieved is prior in completeness.<sup>52</sup> What that means is this: in the temporal process of generation the incomplete is prior to the complete, potentiality is prior to actuality; but in the order of substance and being, the complete is prior to the incomplete, actuality is prior to potentiality. Thus, in the process of human generation, the child is temporally prior to the adult; but from the standpoint of substance and being, the adult is prior to the child.<sup>53</sup>

Now, it is not difficult to see why, in the temporal process of generation, the potential precedes the actual; but why is it that from the standpoint of completeness of being the actual precedes the potential? The reason St Thomas gives is that the actual *actualises* the potential. Thus, matter precedes form in the temporal process of generation, because that which receives and takes on something is prior to that which is taken on. But from the standpoint of completeness of being, form precedes matter, because only through form does matter have complete existence. A similar pattern is seen in relation to efficient cause and final cause. Efficient cause is prior in the temporal process of generation, as it initiates the movement towards the end; but final cause is prior from the point of view of completeness, as it is only in the end that the action of the efficient cause fulfils itself. It

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<sup>51</sup> The distinction is explicitly recognised by St Thomas in these terms in his much later *Summa Theologiae*, q. 46, a. 2, ad 1. St Thomas's stock example of action instantaneous with its effect is illumination, and he gives that example in this response. I will comment on this example later in the thesis.

<sup>52</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 4; McDermott 75.

<sup>53</sup> "Cum ergo naturae operatio procedat ab imperfecto ad perfectum, et ab incompleto ad completum, imperfectum est prius perfecto, secundum generationem et tempus, sed perfectum est prius in complemento: sicut potest dici quod vir est ante puerum in substantia et complemento, sed puer est ante virum generatione et tempore." St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 4.



follows then that, in the temporal process of generation material cause and efficient cause are prior, while from the standpoint of completeness of being, formal cause and final cause are prior.<sup>54</sup>

St Thomas also observes that necessity also has two senses following this pattern. Absolute necessity attends the causes prior in the temporal process of generation while hypothetical necessity attends the causes posterior in the process of generation. Thus, the necessity of death arises from matter; we call it absolute because nothing can stop it; we may also call it material necessity. Hypothetical necessity however arises not absolutely but only on the hypothesis that a certain end is sought. Thus, it is not necessary that a woman should conceive except on the hypothesis that a human being is to be born. Thus, hypothetical necessity can be spoken of as necessity for a goal.<sup>55</sup>

I suggest that it is apparent from his discussion of priority that St Thomas's distinction of two senses of prior correlates with two types of composition. First, we have the temporal process of generation. Composition here is composition of matter and form; here matter precedes form, efficiency precedes finality. Then we have priority according to the completeness of being. What we are speaking of here is the actualisation of the thing, its existence. Here form precedes matter because it actualises matter; and finality precedes efficiency because it realises the action of the efficient cause. In *De principiis naturae* St Thomas introduces matter and form composition. The second type – actualisation – St Thomas introduces in his more or less contemporary opusculum *De ente et essentia*. I hope to show that the distinction between these two types of composition is important in grasping the structure of St Thomas's notion of participation.

#### 1.42 Coincidence Among the Causes

St Thomas now continues exploring relations among the causes. He notes that three causes – form, goal or end, and agent – may coincide; as when fire produces fire.<sup>56</sup> Matter however never coincides with the other causes, as it exists only potentially, whereas the other causes exist actually.<sup>57</sup> In the case of the end or goal, St Thomas distinguishes two senses of goal: the goal of production and the

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<sup>54</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 4; McDermott 75-76.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 76. The term "hypothetical necessity" is McDermott's, whose translation I am using. This term brings out the important point that this type of necessity is dependent on the contingency of the end or goal. Mary Clark uses the term "conditional necessity" in her translation: see her *An Aquinas Reader*, op. cit., 52. St Thomas's Latin is: "Et notandum quod duplex est necessitas: scilicet necessitas absoluta et necessitas conditionalis." *De principiis naturae*, c. 4.

<sup>56</sup> Fire is the agent, the form which realises the potentiality, and the goal towards which the agent tends and in which its activity is fulfilled. St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 4; McDermott 76.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 76-77.

goal of the product. Thus, in the case of the production of a knife, the goal of production is the form of the knife, whereas the goal of the product is the knife's own activity – cutting. The goal of production may coincide with the other two causes, but there cannot be coincidence with the goal of the product. Thus, in the case of the reproduction of species – human being reproduces human being, for example – goal and form may coincide in the same individual as the goal of production is the individual form produced, but the agent may coincide only in species. Thus, in the case of human generation, one individual produces another individual, like to it in species.<sup>58</sup> In this rather technical discussion St Thomas makes explicit some distinctions which will be helpful when considering some important questions which will need to be considered later in the thesis, such as how it is that one effect may have two cause relationships, as well as the difference between univocal and equivocal cause-effect relationships and the significance of this difference.

### 1.43 Subdivisions of the Causes

St Thomas now considers some subdivisions of the four causes. He distinguishes primary and secondary causes, and proximate and remote causes, proximate causes being secondary and remote causes primary. He observes that more general causes are more remote, while more specialised causes are proximate. Thus, we may say that the proximate form of a human being is what defines the human being – a mortal animal with reason - while the more general form – animality – is more remote, and substantiality even more so. St Thomas counsels that we should always press questions back to the primary cause.<sup>59</sup>

St Thomas's advice to press back to the primary cause is important in metaphysics, although he does not expand much on the point in this work. The reason is this: as St Thomas notes elsewhere, the order of agents follows the order of ends, so that the last end corresponds to the first agent while, in due proportion, other ends correspond to other agents. By "last end" here St Thomas means the last in execution; however this end, being the end of the primary cause, will be first in intention. St Thomas gives the example of the ruler of a city, the commander of the army and a soldier. The ruler is the first in the order of agents, and the ruler's end or goal – the safety of the city - is the first in intention. The ruler directs the commander to go into battle; the commander's end or goal is victory in the battle. The commander then commands the soldier to fight; the soldier's end or goal is to overthrow his opponents. Now we can see that even though the ruler's end or goal is first in

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 76

<sup>59</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 5; McDermott 77.

intention, it is last in execution. The soldier's end is realised first (defeat of his opponents); then is the commander's end realised (victory in the battle); only then is the ruler's end realised (safety of the city). Furthermore, as we press back through causes we see that the realisation of each end is the effect of the more specialised cause before it; the commander's victory in the battle is the effect of the soldier's defeating his opponents, and so on. Thus, not only is the end of the first agent first in intention and last in execution, it is actually the effect of the secondary causes, each in proportion to its place in the order. Now, if we apply this analysis to *ens commune* which, St Thomas says elsewhere is the proper subject matter of metaphysics, then we can see that *being* is the proper effect of the first cause, yet is caused through secondary agents. The being of the first cause then is itself uncaused.<sup>60</sup>

This method of pressing back to the primary cause is interesting in relation to participation, because it is essentially *via resolutionis*, the method which St Thomas identifies as proper to metaphysics. To grasp this we need to look briefly at what St Thomas says of reason and intellect. St Thomas consistently teaches that reason and intellect are not distinct powers; rather, they are distinct acts of the same power. The act of the intellect is to apprehend intelligible truth absolutely, while the act of reason is to advance from one understood thing to another, so as to know an intelligible truth. Human reasoning then begins and terminates in understanding: moving from things absolutely understood, namely first principles, and, in the order of judgement, returning by analysis to first principles, in light of which it examines what it has found.<sup>61</sup> In a well-known passage in his *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, St Thomas says that reason differs from intellect as multitude does from unity. He then distinguishes the two activities as follows. Rational thinking gathers one simple truth from many things by the process of analysis, terminating in intellectual

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<sup>60</sup> Most of this paragraph is derived from St Thomas, *De Potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 10. It is in St Thomas's *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, q. 5, a. 4 that St Thomas identifies *ens commune* or *ens inquantum ens* as the subject of metaphysics. In this science God is studied not as the subject of the science but as the principle of the subject; i.e. as First Cause of being. "Divine things", says St Thomas, are studied for their own sakes as the subject of another science, which he calls the science of Sacred Scripture. For a discussion see Leo Elders, *Faith and Science: An Introduction to St Thomas' Expositio in Boethii De Trinitate* (Roma: Herder, 1974), 111-116, esp. 114-116. This structure means that, for St Thomas, metaphysics is a "divine science" certainly, but nonetheless a self-contained rational enterprise, with its own subject, principles and method. See Armand Maurer, "Maimonides and Aquinas on the Study of Metaphysics", in *A Straight Path: Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture: Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman*, edited by Ruth Link-Salinger (Washington DC: CUA Press, 1988), 206, 214-215. The edition of St Thomas's *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius* that I am using is that translated with an Introduction and Notes by Armand Maurer, Questions V and VI published under the title *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, 4<sup>th</sup> rev'd ed. (Toronto: PIMS, 1986).

<sup>61</sup> This is in *Summa Theologiae* I, q.79, a. 8, c.

thinking. Intellectual thinking in turn is the beginning of rational thinking, following the process of synthesis, in which the intellect comprehends a multiplicity in unity.<sup>62</sup> The process of analysis, by which we proceed from that which is complex to that which is simple, and from effects to causes, has as its end the highest and most simple causes; or, in the mental order, as when we proceed from a multiplicity of forms to more universal forms, analysis has as its end *being* and the properties of *being as being*; i.e., being, true, good. This process St Thomas calls *resolutio*, and it is the method proper to metaphysics.<sup>63</sup> As can be seen from what has been said, *resolutio* moves in two ways: in the order of reality it is a reduction to extrinsic causes, seeking the highest and simplest causes; in the order of reason it is a reduction to intrinsic causes, proceeding from particular to universal forms, seeking that which is most universal and common to all beings, namely *being* and the properties of *being as being*. In this way we can say that *via resolutionis* reveals the structure of the participation of *entia* in *ens commune*.

St Thomas's analysis of *resolutio* is interesting for two further reasons: first, the method is apparent in some of St Thomas's own metaphysical works, in *De ente et essentia* for example, as I hope to show. And secondly the point is interesting because some participation scholars interpret St Thomas's works according to *via resolutionis* in such a way that the task of metaphysics becomes the resolution of being (*ens*) to its foundation in *esse* as *intensive act*. It is precisely in this resolution that these scholars find St Thomas's notion of participation.<sup>64</sup> A leading representative of this school is Cornelio Fabro. Indeed, it is Fabro's insistence on interpreting St Thomas in this way which underpins his criticism of the existential Thomists who, in his view, confuse the existence known in judgement with the *act* of being. Consequently argues Fabro, the existential Thomists have abandoned "the terminology of *essentia* (*substantia*, *id quod est*) and *esse* in order to adopt that of *essentia-existentia*". However, Fabro insists "that *existentia* is the 'fact of being' and no longer the profound

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<sup>62</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, q. 6, a. 1, c; Maurer 70-71.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.; Maurer 72-73. See also Elders, *Faith and Science*, 130-131. The method of synthesis, which deduces effects from their causes or, in the mental order, discovers multiplicity from unity, St Thomas calls *compositio*. In his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* St Thomas says: "Est autem duplex via procedendi ad cognitionem veritatis. Una quidem per modum resolutionis, secundum quam procedimus a compositis ad simplicia, et a toto ad partem ... Alia est via compositionis, per quam procedimus a simplicibus ad composita, qua perficitur cognitio veritatis cum pervenitur ad totum." Bk II, Lect. 1, n. 278. Quoted from Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Cura et Studio P. Fr. M.-R. Cathala (Romae: Collegio Angelico, 1915).

<sup>64</sup> See the text of the Introduction to this thesis for the second of the issues not covered in the thesis, and the references in the accompanying footnote.

*act* which St Thomas intends with *esse*".<sup>65</sup> I suggest that it is Fabro's interpretation of St Thomas metaphysics of *esse* according to his understanding of St Thomas's use of *via resolutionis* which underpins Fabro's view of participation and its relationship to *esse* as well as his criticism of the existential Thomists, as, in Fabro's view, it is the method of *resolutio* which alone facilitates the passage from phenomenal existence to its metaphysical foundation in *esse* as *act*.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, St Thomas distinguishes inherent and incidental causes, simple and composite causes, and actual and potential causes. In each pair, the adjectives follow the meanings they usually have for St Thomas. This short discussion then underlines for us St Thomas's understanding of each of the paired adjectives, and his understanding of cause. Thus, an inherent cause is the cause of something as such, while an incidental cause is incidental to the inherent cause. As *incidental cause* it must be incidental to the inherent cause, not the product. Similarly with simple and composite causes, it is as causes that they must be simple or composite. Thus, heat can be the simple cause of fire, while a complex of machinery and human labour may be needed to lift a heavy weight. So too with actual and potential causes: an actual cause is one actually engaged in causing, so that cause and effect will exist simultaneously; if we have one we must have the other. This need not be so with potential causes, as a potential cause is one able to cause but not actually engaged in doing so.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Cornelio Fabro, "Platonism, Neo-Platonism and Thomism: Convergencies and Divergencies", *The New Scholasticism* 44 (1970), 69, at 90. Fabro says the same thing in his better-known article "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation", *The Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1974), 449, at 470: "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." For some scholarly discussion on this matter, see the references in the footnote accompanying the second of the issues not covered, mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis.

<sup>66</sup> I am not aware of any systematic study by Fabro of *via resolutionis* or of the proper subject matter of metaphysics. I have, therefore, sought to summarise his views from the material that I could find. For Fabro's view that the task of metaphysics is the resolution of *ens* to its foundation in *esse* as intensive act, see his "The Problem of Being and the Destiny of Man", *International Philosophical Quarterly* I (1961), 407, esp. at 411-416. Also his "The Transcendentality of *Ens-Esse* and the Ground of Metaphysics", *International Philosophical Quarterly* VI (1966), 389, esp. 402-412. And his "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation", at 481-490. For Fabro's criticism of the existential Thomists see the same article at 469-471. And see also his "Platonism, Neo-Platonism and Thomism: Convergencies and Divergencies", at 89-90 and 98-100.

<sup>67</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 5, McDermott, 77-78. We could also speak of causes which are naturally limited to one effect and causes which are naturally capable of producing more than one effect, although St Thomas does not do so here.

In a similar vein, St Thomas continues that we compare general causes with general effects and individual causes with individual effects: builders are the cause of houses, but this builder of this house.<sup>68</sup>

## 1.5 Intrinsic Principles and Analogy

St Thomas next turns his attention to the intrinsic principles, such as matter and form, and sameness or difference among them. Whether they are the same or different is determined by whether that of which they are principles is the same or different. Some things are individually the same, such as “Socrates” and “this man”, when it is Socrates of whom we are speaking. Others are individually diverse but the same in species, such as Socrates and Plato. Still others differ in species but not in genus; and still others differ in genus but are the same analogically, such as substance and quantity, which are different genera of being but the same analogically, for they share being. Being, says St Thomas, is not a genus, for it is predicated not univocally but analogically.<sup>69</sup>

So that the last point may be understood, before proceeding any further, St Thomas embarks on an explanation of univocal, equivocal and analogical predication. Predication is univocal if the same word is used with the same meaning or definition each time. Predication is equivocal if the same word is used but with different meanings, as when “dog” is predicated both of that which barks and of a star in the heavens. Here the two agree in name but not in definition or meaning, for the definition is what the name signifies. Finally, predication is analogical if it is said of several things with different meanings, but all having reference to some one thing. Thus, “healthy” may be said of organisms, medicines and complexions; but the meaning is not the same in each case: organisms are the subject of health, medicines the cause of it and complexions the sign of it; yet all these meanings refer to the one health as their goal. The reference binds the meanings analogically, that is by proportion, relation or agreement. The reference may be to a single goal (as in the “healthy” example), to a single agency (as “healing” may be predicated of both skilled and unskilled practitioners, and even of their instruments, by reference to the one agency of the art of healing), and sometimes to a single subject. The third mode – reference to a single subject - occurs when we predicate “being” of substances and of all the other (Aristotelian) categories, for each of the others is called *being* because of its relation to substance as its subject, so that ‘being’ is attributed first to substance and only secondarily to the others. It follows that *being* is not a genus of which substance

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<sup>68</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 5; McDermott 78.

<sup>69</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 6; McDermott 78.

and the other categories are species, because genera are predicated equally of their species; here, however, 'being' is attributed only analogically. Thus and as already stated, substance and quantity are different genera and the same only analogically.<sup>70</sup>

Here an important point has been made; being is not predicated of things univocally but must be predicated analogically. The reason for the analogy is that 'being' is predicated primarily and properly of substance and only secondarily of accidents (things in the other categories). Therefore, 'being' is not said of substance and accidents in the same way. As I hope to show later, this analogy of being demands a participation structure for being. This will be clearer after I have examined the contents of the opusculum *De ente et essentia*.

St Thomas now returns to the point which occasioned this discussion: sameness and difference among the intrinsic principles. The matter and form of the one individual (e.g., Tully and Cicero) are the same individually; the matter and form of different individuals of the same species (Socrates and Plato) are the same in species but differ individually; the principles of things that are generically the same but differ in species are themselves generically the same but differ in species (the bodies and souls of donkeys and horses, for example); and finally, the principles of things which are analogically the same, are themselves analogically or proportionately the same.

Following this pattern, St Thomas concludes as follows: matter, form and lack of form, or potentiality and actuality, are the principles of substance and all the categories; but the matter and form and lack of form of substance and of quantity differ in genus and agree proportionately. Therefore, just as the matter of substance is material to substance, so the matter of quantity is material to quantity.

Furthermore, just as substance is the cause of the other categories, so the principles of substance are also the principles of every other category.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 6; McDermott 78-79.

<sup>71</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 6; McDermott, 79-80.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Equivocal Causation and Modes of Composition: Transition to *de Ente et Essentia*

It is my intention to move from the above discussion of *De principiis naturae* first to a discussion of St Thomas's opusculum *De ente et essentia* and then to his *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*. However, before doing so I wish to introduce some matters of which, I believe, it is necessary to be aware when reading those works.

#### 2.1 Univocal, Equivocal and Analogous Causation

First, the distinction between univocity, equivocity and analogy. St Thomas applies this distinction not only to predication but also to cause and effect relationships. Indeed, it is clear there is a close relation between predication and the underlying cause and effect relationship. We know from *De principiis naturae* that, for St Thomas, cause is a beginning which gives existence to that which follows. This occurs through the communication of actualising form. Furthermore, that which is communicated is actual in the agent cause and in potential in the material cause. Now, as every agent acts insofar as it is in act, it follows that there must be some likeness of the form of the agent in the effect. This likeness may be more or less remote. Now, if the agent is contained in the same species as its effect, there will be a likeness in form between maker and made. This will be the case in human generation for example, where the form has the same nature in both cause and effect. We may call this cause and effect relationship univocal.

It may happen however that the formal similarity is not in species but only in genus; here the form through which the agent acts is not specifically the same as that received in the effect, so that the name of the form cannot be predicated univocally of both. St Thomas's usual example of this situation is of things generated by the power of the sun.<sup>72</sup> When we come to God as agent we find

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<sup>72</sup> "Nam effectus qui non recipit formam secundum speciem similem ei per quam agens agit, nomen ab illa forma sumptum secundum univocam praedicationem recipere non potest: non enim univoce dicitur *calidus* ignis a sole generatus, et sol." "An effect that does not receive a form specifically the same as that through which the agent acts cannot receive according to a univocal predication the name arising from that form. Thus, the heat generated by the sun and the sun itself are not called univocally *hot*." St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 32, n. 2.



that God is in no genus and so we do not have even generic likeness. Therefore, all created beings, insofar as they are beings, are like God, as God is first and universal principle of being, but only according to some sort of analogy. In these cases the cause and effect relationship again cannot be called univocal.<sup>73</sup> St Thomas refers to the relationship sometimes as equivocal and sometimes as analogical.<sup>74</sup>

It seems to me that St Thomas regards the terms “equivocal” and “analogical” in this context not so much as interchangeable as indicating different elements of the cause-effect relationship. The term “equivocal” contrasts sharply with “univocal” and reminds us that in univocal relationships we are speaking of likeness owing to the shared formality of cause and effect belonging to the one species. However, in equivocal relationships the form of the effect “is certainly found in some measure in a transcending cause, but according to another mode and in another way”.<sup>75</sup> In other words, the likeness rests not on univocity of form but on generic likeness. In other cases however there may not be even generic likeness, so that the similarity of effect to cause rests simply on the causal axiom that, as every agent is an agent insofar as it is in act, it effects something similar to itself.<sup>76</sup> In these cases St Thomas uses the language of analogy.<sup>77</sup> If we understand the terms ‘equivocal’ and ‘analogical’ in this way, then they underline the important fact that the causal axiom applies even though the cause and the effect are dissimilar in nature, be that dissimilarity in form or even in genus. Therefore, while the effect has some share in the power of the cause, it has no share in the nature of the cause.

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<sup>73</sup> See St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q 4, a 3, c., where St Thomas discusses likeness in causation according to specific formality, generic formality, and likeness without even generic formality. See also *Idem*, q 4, a 2, c. For a very helpful discussion, see Brian J. Shanley, *The Treatise on the Divine Nature: Summa Theologiae I 1-13* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2006), 221-226.

<sup>74</sup> The term “equivocal” is used by St Thomas in *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 29, n. 2. However, St Thomas is there drawing a parallel between God as the cause of all perfections of all things and the sun as the cause of heat among bodies in the sublunary world. In the much later *Summa Theologiae*, q. 4, a. 3, and q. 13, a. 5, when speaking of God as first and universal principle of being, St Thomas insists that names are predicated of God and creatures only in an analogous sense. See Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 518. And See Shanley, *op. cit.*, 333-338.

<sup>75</sup> “Unde forma effectus in causa excedente invenitur quidem aliquialiter, sed secundum alium modum et aliam rationem, ratione cuius *causa aequivoca* dicitur.” St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 29, n. 2.

<sup>76</sup> The causal axiom mentioned is used by St Thomas in many places. I have here taken it from *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 29, n. 2. The axiom and related issues are discussed by John Wippel in his “Thomas Aquinas on Our Knowledge of God and the Axiom that Every Agent Produces Something Like Itself”, in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association* 74 (2000), 81.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 4, a. 3, c. and q. 13, a. 5, c., already cited.

Yet, an equivocal cause cannot be altogether equivocal, or it would not meet the basic definition of cause; nor would it meet the axiom that every cause produces something like itself.<sup>78</sup> In my view, St Thomas is using the term “equivocal” here not absolutely but relatively; i.e., St Thomas is using the term “equivocal” relative to the term “univocal”, in order to highlight their contrasting causal impacts on form and species. In *De Veritate* St Thomas says:

quod omnis multitudo supponit aliquam unitatem, et aequivocatio omnis univocationem; non tamen omnis aequivoca generatio praesupponit generationem univocam; immo e converso, sequendo naturalem rationem. Causae enim aequivocae sunt per se causae speciei: unde in totam speciem causalitatem habent; causae vero univocae non sunt causa speciei per se, sed in hoc vel illo: unde causa univoca non habet causalitatem respectu totius speciei, alias aliquid esset causa sui ipsius, quod esse non potest;

every multiplicity supposes some unity and every equivocation supposes univocity, but every equivocal generation does not presuppose univocal generation. Rather, if we follow natural reason, the opposite is true, for equivocal causes are essential causes of a species. Hence they exert causality on the whole species. But univocal causes are not essential causes of a species, but only of this or that individual. Consequently, a univocal cause does not exert causality with reference to the whole species. Otherwise it would be its own cause, which is impossible.<sup>79</sup>

This distinction, whereby equivocal causes are essential causes of a species while univocal causes are causes only of this or that individual, is important in the structure of participation, as I will mention in a moment. Before doing so I wish to point out that St Thomas teaches it is incorrect to apply names of perfections to God and to creatures in a *purely* equivocal sense. If names were to be predicated of God and creatures in a purely equivocal sense, says St Thomas, nothing could be known or demonstrated about God from creatures, for the reasoning would always be open to the fallacy of equivocation.<sup>80</sup> Such names, says St Thomas, can be predicated neither univocally nor equivocally and must be predicated of God and creatures in an analogous sense, that is, according to proportion.

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<sup>78</sup> A causal relation cannot be a relation of pure equivocity. Recall that in *De principiis naturae*, c. 3, St Thomas says: “Sed causa solum dicitur de illo primo ex quo consequitur esse posterioris: unde dicitur quod causa est ex cuius esse sequitur aliud.” “A beginning is only called a *cause*, however, if it gives existence to what follows, for a cause, we say, is that from the existence of which another follows.” McDermott 73. And in *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 29, n. 2 already cited St Thomas says of equivocal causation: “Effectus enim a suis causis deficientes non conveniunt cum eis in nomine et ratione, necesse est tamen aliquam inter ea similitudinem inveniri; de natura enim actionis est ut agens sibi simile agat, cum unumquodque agat secundum quod actu est.” “Effects that fall short of their causes do not agree with them in name and nature. Yet, some likeness must be found between them, since it belongs to the nature of action that an agent produces its like, since each thing acts according as it is in act.”

<sup>79</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 13, ad 3.

<sup>80</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 13, a. 5, c., emphasis added. St Thomas develops the same point in *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 33, nn. 1, 2, 3 and 4, where he equates predication “in a purely equivocal way” with predication “in the manner of equivocals by chance”.

This is the terminology of St Thomas in the *Summa Theologiae Prima Pars*.<sup>81</sup> The same terminology and a more detailed argument appear in the rather earlier *De Veritate*. Here St Thomas observes that proportion can occur in two ways; first between two things which have a proportion to each other and secondly, between two proportions; e.g., as six is to three so four is to two. St Thomas says that something can be predicated analogously of two realities according to the first mode when one reality has a relation to the other, as when being is predicated of substance and accident. St Thomas continues that nothing can be predicated of God and creatures in this mode, as it requires some definite relation between the two realities having something in common analogously. The second mode, that between two related proportions rather than between two things, St Thomas calls “proportionality”. This mode requires no definite relation between the realities themselves and, therefore, it is in this sense that names can be predicated analogously of God and creatures. However, even then, when applied to God and creatures, this mode of analogy excludes names which imply something which cannot be common to God and creatures, such as names which include matter in their definition. Therefore, while names such as “lion” and “fortress” may be predicated of God metaphorically, names such as “being” and “good” must be predicated of God and of creatures analogously.<sup>82</sup> What this means is that in the case of being and good, while the creature shares what belongs to God and in that sense is said to be like God, this is not according to agreement in *form* whether in genus or species, but according to *analogy*. And this analogy involves participation, for while God is being by essence creatures are beings by participation.<sup>83</sup>

In my opinion, the heart of St Thomas’s distinction of univocal, equivocal and analogical causation is that in univocal causation there is shared form or nature and in equivocal and analogical causation there is not. Therefore, in univocal causation the agent is not the essential cause of the species (or form or nature) in the effect but merely produces another individual in its own species, whereas in

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<sup>81</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 13, a. 5, c. “Dicendum est igitur quod huiusmodi nomina dicuntur de Deo et creaturis secundum analogiam, idest proportionem.”

<sup>82</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 11, c. St Thomas’s expression concerning the two kinds of analogy according to proportion is as follows: “Est enim *quaedam* convenientia inter ipsa quorum est ad invicem proportio, eo quod habent determinatam distantiam vel aliam habitudinem ad invicem, sicut binarius cum unitate, eo quod est eius duplum; convenientia *etiam quandoque* attenditur duorum ad invicem inter quae non sit proportio, sed magis similitudo duarum ad invicem proportionum, sicut senarius convenit cum quaternario ex hoc quod sicut senarius est duplum ternarii, ita quaternarius binarii. *Prima* ergo convenientia est proportionis, *secunda* autem proportionalitatis;” From S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones Disputatae Volumen I: De Veritate*, Cura et studio P. Fr. Raymundi Spiazzi, O.P., Editio VIII revisa (Romae: Marietti, 1949).

<sup>83</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 4, a. 3, c; see also *idem* ad 2, 3 and 4. *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 29, n. 5. And see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 518.

equivocal or analogous causation the agent is the essential cause of the species (or form or nature) in the effect, which differs from its own. The distinction is important in the structure of participation, because it means that in equivocal and analogical causation the effect is able to participate in the power of the cause without participating in the nature of the cause.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, in univocal causation, because the agent produces another individual of its own species, it places that individual under the species by way of participation.<sup>85</sup> However, as I will explain later, this mode of participation is merely intentional or logical, while the participation that follows equivocal or analogical causation is real. The distinction between univocal and equivocal or analogical causation also correlates with the distinction between *causae fiendi* and *causae essendi* already mentioned, and becomes important in the structure of participation in that way also.<sup>86</sup> I shall return to these matters later in the thesis.

## 2.2 Composition, Act and Potency

The second transitional matter that I wish to introduce before moving to *De ente et essentia* is this: the two modes of composition of creatures recognised by St Thomas. We have already examined composition of matter and form, introduced by St Thomas in *De principiis naturae*. St Thomas explains the second mode in *Summa contra gentiles* Book II, and he refers to it as composition of substance and being.

The way in which St Thomas approaches this issue is as follows. St Thomas explains that there are two sorts of operation: one that remains in the agent and is a perfection of it (e.g., understanding, willing), and another which passes over into an external thing and is a perfection of the thing made as a result of the operation. St Thomas continues that both types of operation belong to God, and that the first is the ground of the second and naturally precedes it. The first type of operation, St Thomas says, is the subject of Book I of the *Summa*; the second type, whereby things are made and governed

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<sup>84</sup> Gregory T. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes* (Washington DC: CUA Press, 2008), 175-176. St Thomas's favourite illustration of an equivocal cause is the sun lighting and heating the air. St Thomas says that the sun causes heat among the sublunary bodies by acting as it is in act. However, while the heat thus generated in sublunary bodies bears some likeness to the active power of the sun, the two are not 'hot' in one and the same way. According to St Thomas, the sun is a transcending cause of heat; i.e., as the cause of all heat, the sun transcends 'heat' as we know it and name it from earthly things. St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 29, n. 2. See also Brian Shanley, *The Treatise on the Divine Nature; Summa Theologiae I 1-13* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2006), 337.

<sup>85</sup> St Thomas makes this point in *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 13, a. 5, ad 1.

<sup>86</sup> Meehan, *Efficient Causality in Aristotle and St Thomas*, 319-320.

by God, is addressed in Book II.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, in Book II of the *Summa contra gentiles* the issue that St Thomas is addressing is the procession of creatures from God. St Thomas arranges the issues for consideration in the following order: first, the bringing forth of things into being; second, the distinction among created things; and third, their nature.<sup>88</sup> The issue of composition of substance and being arises under the third heading. St Thomas comes to it this way: he argues that the perfection (i.e., completion) of the universe requires diversity and a formal hierarchy among creatures; the perfection of the universe further requires the existence of intellectual creatures. St Thomas proceeds to consider the nature of intellectual creatures, and finds them to be possessed of reason and free will, and to be incorporeal and immaterial. St Thomas is then led to consider the second mode of composition of creatures beyond matter-form composition, namely the composition of form (or essence) and the act of being, through a structure of potency and act.<sup>89</sup> I will approach this issue in broadly the same way.

### 2.21 The Order and Perfection of the Universe

We have seen that when we speak of the likeness of created things to God we must speak in terms of proportion and analogy. This is owing to the multiplicity and variety and indeed, inequality among created things, according to their manner of being. And as the formal exceeds the material, the multiplicity of individuals is grouped into a multiplicity of species and the lot overlaid with the good of order. The diversity and inequality of created things then is not the result of chance nor of the diversity of matter, but of God's intention.<sup>90</sup>

Within this structure God wills each creature to have the optimum perfection consonant with its manner of being. In this way each being contributes to the perfection of the universe. So we are speaking of perfection as finality or teleology, and so far we have been speaking of what St Thomas

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<sup>87</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 1, nn. 2, 3, 5.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., c. 5. One might have expected that St Thomas would proceed in the opposite manner; i.e., that he might begin with creatures and be led from them to the knowledge of God. However, one must remember the occasion for which St Thomas prepared the *Summa contra gentiles*; it was prepared not for students but for missionaries, to assist them in defending the truth of the Catholic faith against the errors of learned Moslems and Jews. See Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino*, 130-131. Therefore, as St Thomas explains, it is necessary to consider God first and creatures after, so that the doctrine of faith might appear more perfect and more like the knowledge of God Himself who, in knowing Himself immediately knows other things: *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 4, n. 5. For an explanation of St Thomas's approach in this book see the Introduction by James Anderson to his translation: *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Two: Creation* (Notre Dame: UNDP, 1975), 11-20.

<sup>89</sup> Anderson, Introduction, 15-16.

<sup>90</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 45, n.9.

calls first perfection. First perfection is found in the thing's act of being and its completion in the sense of the realisation of its nature. The nature of a thing is that for the sake of which it has come to be; its perfection then is the realisation of its *telos*, which is inherent in it as its potential. First perfection then refers to a thing's realisation of the fullness of its nature, known as its "entelechy". St Thomas says that an effect is most perfect when it returns to its source, so that a creature enjoys a certain perfection insofar as it bears a likeness to its source in its being and nature.<sup>91</sup> St Thomas speaks also of a thing's second perfection, and second perfection is realised in the thing's operation. This second perfection then belongs to intellectual creatures, which return to God not only as regards likeness of nature but also by their action, which requires intellect and will.<sup>92</sup>

This structure must be understood according to the principles of participation and analogy. What we have here is a structure of participation in which the perfection of created things is ordered by the will of God to the perfection of God, but according to analogy.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, the goodness of created things is proportioned to their natures, just as God's absolute goodness is proportioned to God's absolute nature. This is the analogy of proportionality, and it privileges the perfection of the species over the perfection of the individual, as St Thomas recognises.<sup>94</sup> Second perfection is the perfection of operation, yet both first and second perfections are the end (in the sense of *telos*) of a process; even first perfection is realised in a thing only when its full range of potentiality to the active power of the agent is realised.<sup>95</sup> The point is the realisation and fulfilment of the individual's nature. Therefore, if an individual human being were to strive to be an angel, thinking that must be better as

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<sup>91</sup> Oliva Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas: A Teleological Cosmology* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 44-45. St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 46, n. 2. St Thomas says that a house will be perfect in this sense when it most closely resembles the art by which it was produced, a remark which indicates that we are not speaking of the excellence of activity here, but rather the successful completion of a process and the realisation of a form. Cf. Blanchette, op. cit.

<sup>92</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 46, n. 3. St Thomas comments then that the perfection of the universe demands the existence of some intellectual creatures.

<sup>93</sup> St Thomas says: "Est igitur diversitas et inaequalitas in rebus creatis non a casu [cap.39]; non ex materiae diversitate [cap. 40]; non propter interventum aliquarum causarum [cap. 41-43];, vel meritorum [cap. 44]; sed ex propria Dei intentione perfectionem creaturae dare volentis qualem possibile erat eam habere." "The diversity and inequality in created things are not the result of chance, nor of a diversity of matter, nor of the intervention of certain causes or merits, but of the intention of God Himself, who wills to give the creature such perfection as it is possible for it to have." St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 45, n. 9.

<sup>94</sup> St Thomas says: "Bonitas specie excedit bonitatem individui, sicut formale id quod est materiale. Magis igitur addit ad bonitatem universi multitudo specierum quam multitudo individuorum in una specie. ..." "... the good of the species is greater than the good of the individual, just as the formal exceeds that which is material. Hence, a multiplicity of species adds more to the goodness of the universe than a multiplicity of individuals in one species. ..." St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 45, n. 6.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., c. 45, n. 3.

angels are superior to humans, in fact it would not be good. Not only would such an operation be contrary to the individual's first perfection ordained in human nature by God, it would seek to prefer the "end" of the individual over the end of the species. Perfection then rests not so much upon individual moral judgement in the manner that we might think today, but on individual activity proportioned to that which makes a thing the kind of the thing that it is. In this way the ultimate perfection, the order of the universe rests on the multiplicity, diversity and inequality of things, so that while each thing in its nature is good, all things together are very good.<sup>96</sup>

Furthermore, the universe is conceived as a formal hierarchy, and it is in precisely this hierarchical unity that the goodness of the universe resides. Again, this is the structure of participation and analogy willed by God. Therefore, while God can alter the accidental properties of creatures, God cannot alter the essential nature of creatures without altering the hierarchy. However, God could add in new species, as that would not alter the relative positions of existing things already in the hierarchy.<sup>97</sup>

## 2.22 Composition in Created Intellectual Natures

We are now in a position to examine the introduction of creatures whose *nature* is intellectual. St Thomas offers two related axioms of perfection in the sense of entelechy. First, an effect is most perfect when it returns to its source, and second, an effect is most perfect when it is most like its efficient cause. It is therefore necessary that each creature return to its principle in order that the perfection of the universe may be realised.<sup>98</sup> Now, as God's intellect is the principle of creation, it is necessary that there be some creatures endowed with intelligence. Furthermore, as second perfection is an addition to a thing's first perfection, the perfection of the universe requires that there be some creatures which return to God not only as regards likeness of nature but also by their

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<sup>96</sup> St Thomas says: "Quia singula quidem sunt in suis naturis bona: simul autem omnia *valde bona*, propter ordinem universi, quae est ultima et nobilissima perfectio in rebus." "For each thing in its nature is good, but all things together are *very good*, by reason of the order of the universe, which is the ultimate and noblest perfection in things." St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 45, n. 10. Also: "Sed bonum ordinis diversorum est melius quolibet illorum ordinatorum per se sumpto: est enim formale respectu singularium, sicut perfectio totius respectu partium." "But the good of order among diverse things is better than any of the members of an order, taken by itself. For the good of order is formal in respect to each member of it, as the perfection of the whole in relation to the parts." Ibid., n. 8.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Isabel Iribarren, "Angelic Individuality and the Possibility of a Better World: Durandus of St Pourcain's Criticism of Thomas Aquinas", in *Angels in Medieval Philosophical Inquiry: Their Function and Significance*, edited by Isabel Iribarren and Martin Lenz (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 45, at 46-47.

<sup>98</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, BK II, c. 46, n. 2.

action. And as God's operation is by intellect and will, it is necessary that the operation of intellectual creatures also be by intellect and will. Now, St Thomas says that "an agent produces its like with respect to the form by which it acts", and sometimes the form is received in the effect according to the same mode of being that it has in the agent and sometimes the form is received in the effect according to another mode of being. The highest perfection of the universe requires not only the second mode but the first, so far as that is possible. This means that the highest perfection of the universe demands the existence of some creatures in which the form of the divine intellect is represented according to intelligible being; that is to say, creatures of an intellectual nature.<sup>99</sup> St Thomas refers to such creatures as "intellectual substances",<sup>100</sup> and they include the human intellectual soul and what St Thomas elsewhere calls separated substances, namely angels.

Now, St Thomas says that intellectual creatures act (in the sense of operation) in the same way as God acts, that is by intellect and will.<sup>101</sup> However, in no created substance can its act of being and its operation be identical.<sup>102</sup> Such identity belongs to God alone as part of God's simplicity. Therefore, it is necessary for St Thomas to show that created intellectual substances are endowed with will, judgement and freedom of action, as he proceeds to do.<sup>103</sup> He then proceeds to show that intellectual substances are not bodies and, indeed, are immaterial. From this it follows that an intellectual substance is not composed of matter and form. In the proof of this proposition we see two of St Thomas's more familiar axioms in operation. First is the axiom that a thing's mode of presence in its recipient accords with the latter's mode of being. Therefore, if the intellect were composed of matter and form, then the intelligible forms of things would exist in it materially, whereupon they would become unintelligible. The other axiom is that the forms of contraries,

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., nn. 2, 3, 4, 5; the quoted words are in n. 5. When St Thomas says that the form of the agent may be received in the effect according to the same mode of being that it has in the agent, or according to a different mode, his contrast is between fire generating fire, where the mode of being of both fires is the same (i.e., material being), on the one hand, and the form of a house, which exists in an intelligible manner in the builder's mind, yet is received in material mode in the house, on the other. Ibid., n. 5. Therefore, when St Thomas says that the form of the divine intellect is received according to the same mode of being that it has in the agent (i.e., God), he means that it received according to the mode of intelligible being, not material being. Hence, the perfection of the universe requires the existence of some creatures of an intellectual nature. Yet, we must remember that, because we are speaking of causation between God and creatures, we are speaking of analogical causation.

<sup>100</sup> This term appears at the beginning of the very next chapter: "Has autem substantias intellectuales necesse est volentes." "Now, these intellectual substances must be capable of willing." St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 47, n. 1.

<sup>101</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 46, n. 4.

<sup>102</sup> Cf., Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of St Thomas Aquinas*, 279.

<sup>103</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, cc. 47 and 48.



insofar as they exist in matter are contrary; but insofar as they exist in the intellect, forms of contraries are not contrary but complementary, as one is the intelligible ground of the other (think of hot and cold, or wet and dry). Therefore, as a thing's mode of presence in its recipient depends on the latter's mode of being, if the intellect were composed of matter and form, it would receive the forms of contraries as they exist in matter, whereupon they would become unintelligible.<sup>104</sup>

St Thomas also makes the important point that matter does not receive a fresh form except through motion or change. The intellect, however, is not moved through receiving forms; rather it is perfected and at rest while understanding, whereas movement is a hindrance to understanding. Therefore, forms are not received in the intellect as in matter, for intellectual substances are both immaterial and incorporeal.<sup>105</sup> Without matter there can be no composition which would lead to a third thing, namely the composite. Remembering that the thing known is intelligible through its form, reception of the form without composition must mean that the thing known exists in the knower and is identical with the knower.<sup>106</sup>

St Thomas proceeds to show that intellectual substances are subsistent forms. The proof of this has already more or less been seen: if the intellect were a form in matter then what is received into the intellect would be received into matter. It has just been shown that this is not the case and indeed, cannot be the case. Therefore, an intellectual substance is not composed of matter and form but is a subsistent form.<sup>107</sup> To this extent an intellectual substance can be called simple. However, an intellectual substance is not simple in the way that God is simple, i.e., free of composition. An intellectual substance is free of composition with matter, but it is not absolutely free of composition. Therefore, in an intellectual substance we will find composition, act and potency, posteriority both to its cause and to that of which it is composed, and participation.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., cc. 49 and 50. The proofs referred to are in c. 50, nn. 6 and 7.

<sup>105</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 50, n. 8.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, originally published Milwaukee: Bruce Pub. Co., 1963, re-published Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1985, 218-219, incl. n. 3, p. 219. If we find this difficult to grasp then, as Owens points out, we should recall that, for St Thomas, in every being other than God essence and existence are distinct. Therefore, the one thing or essence can have different existential acts, one real, the others intentional.

<sup>107</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 51.

In what way are intellectual substances composed? St Thomas says that a certain composition is found in intellectual substances “by the fact that in them *being* is not the same as *what is*”.<sup>108</sup> Owing to this composition we may say of created intellectual substances that the substance itself is not its being; or, to put it another way, in created intellectual substances two principles are found: the substance itself and its being.

St Thomas now proceeds to show that the composition in created intellectual substances is composition of act and potency. Where we find two principles in a thing, one of them the complement of the other, the proportion of one of them to the other is the proportion of potentiality to act. This is because nothing is completed except by its proper act. Now, being is the complement of substance, for each and every thing is in act through having being. Furthermore, whatever is present in a thing from an agent must be act, for an agent causes insofar as it is in act and it makes something in act. Now, all substances are caused in that they have being from another and ultimately from the first agent. This causal relation means that being is present in caused substances as an act of their own. But that in which act is present is a potentiality, as act as such is referred to potentiality. Therefore in every created substance there is potentiality and act.<sup>109</sup>

From this structure, further consequences flow. The first is this: being itself belongs to God according to God’s proper nature, as being is God’s substance. God is then first agent and first cause of being, and no other being can hold being by nature or by substance. Therefore, while created substances have being as their own act as was just said, their being is held not by substance but by participation.<sup>110</sup> This suggests three things: first, in every created substance including intellectual

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., c. 52, n. 1. The proof of this proposition is offered by St Thomas in several places, including in the remaining paragraphs of chapter 52 of the *Summa contra gentiles*. However, as there is a significant proof in *De ente et essentia*, I will leave the matter of proof until my discussion of that work. We are, of course, speaking of created intellectual substances.

<sup>109</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, BK II, c.53, nn. 1-3.

<sup>110</sup> In *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 52, n. 8 St Thomas says; “Amplius. Ipsum esse competit primo agenti secundum propriam naturam: esse enim Dei est eius substantia ut supra [lib. I, cap. 22] ostensum est. Quod autem competit alicui secundum propriam naturam suam, non convenit aliis nisi per modum participationis: sicut calor aliis corporibus ab igne. Ipsum igitur esse competit omnibus aliis a primo agente per participationem quandam. Quod autem competit alicui per participationem, non est substantia eius. Impossibile est igitur quod substantia alterius entis praeter agens primum sit ipsum esse.” “Moreover, being itself belongs to the first agent according to His proper nature, for God’s being is His substance, as was shown in Book I. Now, that which belongs to a thing according to its proper nature does not belong to other things except by way of participation, as heat is in other bodies from fire. Therefore, being itself belongs to all other things from the first agent by a

substances there are two distinct principles: the substance itself and its being. Second, there is a dichotomy between participation and substance, so that that which is held in one way is not held in the other way; this in turn suggests that whatever is received by participation is received in the manner of accident, i.e., outside substance. And third: whatever participates in a thing is compared to the thing participated in as potentiality to act, since by that which is participated the participator is actualised in such and such a way. To put it another way, every created substance is compared to its own being as potentiality to act. This shows a systematic correlation between participation and the structure of act and potency, so that where we find one we would expect to find the other.<sup>111</sup>

The structure outlined above also has a second consequence. St Thomas says that it is through act that a thing resembles its efficient cause, for an agent produces its like insofar as it is in act. Now, it is through being itself that every created substance is likened to God, wherefore being itself is compared to all created substances as their act. This is further proof that in every created substance there is composition of act and potency.<sup>112</sup> These observations also direct our attention to the analogy of being and the structure of participation, referred to in section 2.21 above. I also observe at this stage that St Thomas frequently distinguishes between being itself (*ipsum esse*) and being insofar as it is being (*ens commune*). The correlation between act and potency suggests that created substances participate in both; indeed, that correlation suggests that each created substance participates in its own act of being.<sup>113</sup>

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certain participation. That which belongs to a thing by participation, however, is not that thing's substance. Therefore, it is impossible that the substance of a thing other than the first agent should be being itself."

<sup>111</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, c. 53, nn. 2, 3, 4. St Thomas's terminology in n. 4 is: "Omne participans aliquid comparatur ad ipsum quod participatur ut potentia ad actum: per id enim quod participatur fit participans actu tale. Ostensum autem est supra [cap. 15] quod solus Deus est essentialiter ens, omnia autem alia participant ipsum esse. Comparatur igitur substantia omnis creata ad suum esse sicut potentia ad actum." I will take up later in the thesis the dichotomy between participation and substance, and also the issue of whether existence can be said to be an accident. The former arises in St Thomas's *Exposition of the De Heptadibus of Boethius* and the second arises in connection with St Thomas's analysis in *De ente et essentia*.

<sup>112</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 53, n. 5. It may be noted that St Thomas often observes that an agent acts insofar as it is in act and that it is through act that a thing resembles its efficient cause; see, for example, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 29, n. 2.

<sup>113</sup> In John Wippel's analysis, St Thomas refers to created beings participating in *esse* in each of three senses: *esse commune*, *ipsum esse subsistens* and *actus essendi*, the last in the sense that each created substance participates in its own 'act of being'. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 120-121. I will take up this issue when discussing St Thomas's notion of participation as it appears in his *Exposition of the De Heptadibus of Boethius*. For Wippel's explanation of the relationship between *ens commune* and *esse commune* see op. cit. 123.

It will be noted that St Thomas says that *every* created substance is compared to its own being as potentiality to act.<sup>114</sup> Therefore, in the case of substances composed of matter and form there is twofold composition of act and potentiality; first, the composition of the substance itself of matter and form; and second the composition of the substance thus composed and being.

St Thomas now proceeds to compare and to differentiate these two modes of composition.<sup>115</sup> First, matter and form composition: matter cannot be said to be the substance of the thing, because then it would follow that all forms are accidents; matter then is not the substance but only part of the substance. In a similar way, being itself is the proper act not of matter but of the whole substance, for only the substance can be called “that which is”. Furthermore, being is compared even to form as its act, for in things composed of matter and form, the form is the principle of being. Thus, form can be called not “that which is” but “that by which it is”. Being meanwhile is that by which the substance is called a being. Accordingly, in things composed of matter and form, neither the matter, nor the form nor even being itself can be called “that which is”; only the substance itself is that which is. In the case of intellectual substances however we find a different pattern. In intellectual substances the form itself is a subsisting substance, so that we can say that *form* is *that which is* and being itself is act and *that by which* the substance is. Consequently, in such substances there need be but one composition of act and potentiality, namely the composition of substance and being. The comparison shows however that in substances composed of matter and form there is a twofold composition of act and potentiality, because before we can speak of the composition of *that which is*, or substance, and being, we have to speak of the composition of the substance itself.

St Thomas draws some important conclusions from this comparison, conclusions which turn out to be very significant in his understanding of participation. First, St Thomas observes that composition of act and potentiality has greater extension than that of form and matter. As St Thomas puts it, matter and form divide natural substance, while potentiality and act divide common being. Accordingly, whatever follows on potentiality and act as such is common to both material and immaterial created substances. And what follows on potentiality and act as such? St Thomas instances *to receive* and *to be received*, *to perfect* and *to be perfected*. Yet all that is proper to matter and form as such are

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<sup>114</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 53, n. 4; my emphasis.

<sup>115</sup> What follows in this paragraph comes from *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 54, nn. 1-9.

proper to material substances alone, and in no way belong to immaterial created substances; and here St Thomas instances *to be generated* and *to be corrupted*, “and the like”.<sup>116</sup>

### 2.23 Act and Potentiality

This analysis has some consequences. First, St Thomas instances *to receive* and *to be received* and *to perfect* and *to be perfected* as following on potentiality and act as such. These are relations of participation, as well as of potentiality and act.<sup>117</sup> Therefore, if any created substance, material or immaterial, receives a perfection, such as being, clearly, but also goodness and other perfections, this will be a relationship of participation, insofar as it follows potentiality and act as such. Secondly, St Thomas instances *to be generated* and *to be corrupted* as proper to matter and form as such. This means that generation and corruption are not to be spoken of in terms of participation or, at least, not in the same way.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, BK II, c. 54, n. 10. St Thomas’s Latin is: “Sic igitur patet quod compositio actus et potentiae est in plus quam compositio formae et materiae. Unde materia et forma dividunt substantiam naturalem: potentia autem et actus dividunt ens commune. Et propter hoc quaecumque quidem consequuntur potentiam et actum in quantum huiusmodi, sunt communia substantiis materialibus et immaterialibus creatis: sicut *recipere* et *recipi*, *perficere* et *perfici*. Quaecumque vero sunt propria materiae et formae in quantum huiusmodi, sicut *generari* et *corrumpi* et alia huiusmodi, haec sunt propria substantiarum materialium, et nullo modo conveniunt substantiis immaterialibus creatis.”

<sup>117</sup> For the language of participation, see St Thomas’s *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, where he says: “Est autem participare quasi partem capere. Et ideo quando aliquid particulariter recipit id quod ad alterum pertinet uniuersaliter, dicitur participare illud, ...” “For ‘to participate’ is, as it were, ‘to grasp a part’. And, therefore, when something receives in a particular way that which belongs to another in a universal way, it is said ‘to participate’ in that ...”. Both Latin text and English translation are taken from the edition by Janice L. Schultz and Edward A. Synan (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2001), c. 2. For the language of potentiality and act, see *De ente et essentia*, where St Thomas says: “Omne autem quod recipit aliquid ab alio, est in potentia respectu illius; et hoc quod receptum est in eo, est actus eius.” “Everything that receives something from another is potential with regard to what it receives, and what is received in it is its actuality.” The Latin is from S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Opusculum De Ente et Essentia*, Editio Tertia, Marietti, 1957, c. 5, n. 5. The English is from St Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Armand Maurer, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev’d ed. (Toronto: PIMS, 1968), c. 4, n. 8.

<sup>118</sup> As I have already observed, in *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 13, a. 5, ad 1 St Thomas says that a univocal agent (as in matter-form generation) is not the universal efficient cause of the whole species but a particular cause of the individual generated, which it places under the species by way of participation: “Agens vero univocum non est causa agens universalis totius speciei ... sed est causa particularis respectu huius individui, quod in participatione speciei constituit.” In his *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius* St Thomas speaks of this mode of participation as logical or intentional only and distinguishes it from the mode of real participation by which an effect participates in a perfection received from a transcending cause. St Thomas’s classification of the modes of participation is in c. 2 of the *Exposition*, immediately following the passage quoted in the preceding footnote. I will discuss these issues in due course.

What can this mean? I think that the key is to recognise that St Thomas, in his analysis of composition of act and potentiality, has extended the structure of act and potency beyond the composition of form and matter. As St Thomas says, while matter and form divide natural substance, potentiality and act divide common being. In other words, the structure of potentiality and act *as such* does not presuppose matter. Furthermore, because St Thomas has extended the structure of act and potency beyond generation he has extended it beyond motion and change, which presuppose not only matter but also a subject on which to exercise their activity. Yet, insofar as St Thomas speaks of a substance as potential with regard to the being it receives from God, which being is received as an actuality, God's creative activity presupposes no subject.<sup>119</sup> Therefore, St Thomas has extended the structure of potentiality and act beyond motion and change into being as being (common being).

This extension, it seems to me, parallels St Thomas's specification of cause within principle (a cause is a beginning but a beginning which gives existence to that which follows) and his differentiation of two senses of prior (prior in the temporal process of generation and prior in completeness of being) which we have already observed in his *De principiis naturae*. As already argued, St Thomas's treatment of causality in that work suggests that, for him, the essence of causality, and especially of efficient causality, lies not in motion and succession but in the bringing about of being or of the state of coming to be; and in efficient cause this is achieved by the action of the agent, as it is through act that an effect resembles its efficient cause.<sup>120</sup>

Now, when the bringing about of existence is distinguished from the process of generation, we can understand cause and a structure of act and potency which occur without presupposing matter, without temporal succession and without presupposing a subject. Such a causal event is creation. St Thomas does say that because creation is neither motion nor change, then in the action which is creation nothing potential pre-exists to receive the action; but here he is speaking of potentiality as it

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<sup>119</sup> "Deus simul dans esse, producit id quod esse recipit; et sic non oportet quod agat ex aliquo praeexistenti." "God at the same time gives being and produces that which receives being, so that it does not follow that his action requires something already in existence." St Thomas, *De potentia dei*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 17. God's creative power, however, cannot be shared with a creature, not even instrumentally: *idem*, a. 4. See also Meehan, *Efficient Causality in Aristotle and St Thomas*, 50-52.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Meehan, *Efficient Causality in Aristotle and St Thomas*, 184-189. See also St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 29, n. 2.

is proper to motion and change.<sup>121</sup> However, because St Thomas has extended act and potentiality as such beyond motion to substances and their receipt of being, and as God alone can cause being as such, we can expect to find potentiality and act and therefore participation within the relation that created things have to God as their first cause and first cause of being as being. The same, of course, can be said of the other perfections received from God as first cause, such as goodness. Furthermore, in St Thomas's view there were some natural processes which occurred without motion and temporal succession; illumination is the leading example.<sup>122</sup>

Therefore, we can speak of a created substance participating in a received perfection, but only insofar as this follows on potentiality and act as such. I believe the matter can be put as follows. If we speak of matter actualised by form, we may speak in terms of participation, but not in the same way. Why is that? Because the actualisation of matter by form follows on matter as such, as it is only matter which is actualised by form. Therefore, while the actualisation of matter by form certainly involves potentiality and act, it does not follow on potentiality and act as such. However, if we speak of the receipt of a perfection by a substance, be that substance material or non-material, we can and do speak in terms of participation. Why is that? Well, if the substance is material, it will already have been made by the actualisation of matter by form; and if the substance is non-material, then the form is itself the substance. Either way, matter as such plays no role in the receipt of the perfection; or, to put it another way, the receipt of a perfection applies to material and non-material substances alike, indifferently. Yet, the receipt of a perfection involves potentiality and act and, as it is indifferent to materiality and non-materiality, we can say that it follows on potentiality and act as such. Does this mean that we can never speak of the first mode of composition, that is composition of matter and form, in terms of participation? No; but it does mean that if we wish to speak of matter participating in form and, indeed, of subject participating in accident, we will be speaking in terms of another mode of participation.

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<sup>121</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 17, nn. 1,2 and 3.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Meehan, *Efficient Causality in Aristotle and St Thomas*, 186-187, text and note 61. More will be said of the illumination example when discussing St Thomas's *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*. And more will be said of the participation of created essences in being when discussing St Thomas's *De ente et essentia*.

We will observe St Thomas negotiating these difficult waters in his *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*. For the moment, I wish to return to that which St Thomas has to say about the analogy of being in his *De principiis naturae*.

### 2.3 Analogy: Causation, Act and Potentiality

It will be recalled that in *De principiis naturae* St Thomas says that being is not a genus, and the reason he gives for this is that being is said *per prius* of substance and *per posterius* of the other categories. That means that being is not a genus comprising substance, quantity and the other categories, because a genus is predicated equally of its species. Therefore, being is predicated of substance and accidents by analogy, and that is why we say that being and quantity are different generically and similar only by analogy. Here are St Thomas's words:

Et ideo ens dicitur per prius de substantia, et per posterius de aliis. Et ideo ens non est genus substantiae et quantitatis, quia nullum genus praedicatur per prius et posterius de suis speciebus, sed praedicatur analogice. Et hoc est quod diximus quod substantia et quantitas differunt genere, sed sunt idem analogia.<sup>123</sup>

There are a number of remarks that may be made about this passage. First, to predicate 'being' *per prius* and *per posterius* is not to predicate equally, as St Thomas has already indicated that to be prior in being is to rank first in completeness of being; therefore, being is not a genus of which substance and accidents are species. Furthermore, a relation of priority and posteriority points to an order, and the order is one of cause because, again as St Thomas has already indicated, the essence of causality lies in priority of being. As St Thomas puts it, even though quantity, quality and the rest are not *being* in the sense that substance is *being*, each of the accidental categories is called *being* because of its relation to substance as its subject. And this relation is one of priority and posteriority, and hence one of dependence and cause. It is this causal-dependent relation which grounds the analogical predication of 'being' between a substance and its accidents. This analogy expresses a unity and diversity within the causal order of a substance and its accidents.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> ST Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 6; quoted from the *Corpus Thomisticum* website, *De principiis naturae*, c. 6: [www.corpusthomisticum.org/opn.html](http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/opn.html) accessed 19.01.2011. McDermott translates the passage as follows: "So being is attributed first to substance and only secondarily to other attributes, and that means being is not a genus comprising substance and quantity [and the rest] – since genres are predicated equally of their species – but is attributed analogically. And that is why we said earlier that substance and quantity are different genres, the same only by analogy." McDermott, op. cit., 79.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 74ff for a very helpful discussion of this difficult area. My discussion which follows draws extensively on Professor Wippel's analysis, although, as always, I



One might recall that in *De principiis naturae* St Thomas introduces his discussion of analogy in order to help explain his point that, when speaking of intrinsic principles such as matter and form, whether they are the same or different depends on whether those things of which they are principles are the same or different.<sup>125</sup> So, things can be the same individually, specifically, generically or by analogy. So, for example, Socrates and Plato differ individually but are the same in species; so, therefore, their intrinsic principles, matter and form, differ individually but are the same in species. Now, when we come to the categories, the principles of all the categories are matter, form and lack of form, potentiality and actuality. These principles will differ in genus and agree only by analogy, and that means that they will agree proportionately. In other words, as the matter of substance is material to substance, so the matter of quantity is material to quantity, and so on.<sup>126</sup> Therefore, St Thomas has co-ordinated the intrinsic principles of substance and accidents according to analogy of proportion. However, it is the relation of causal dependence that each accident has to its substance that holds this together. Therefore, St Thomas concludes his treatise with the observation that, as substance is the cause of the other categories, the principles of substance are the principles of every other category.<sup>127</sup>

There is more that can be said of this analysis. St Thomas says that substances, quantities and all the other categories may be called *beings*. However, quantity and the others are not called beings in exactly the same sense as substance is being, but each is called ‘being’ because of its relation to substance as its subject. St Thomas then remarks that ‘being’ is said *per prius* of substance and *per posterius* of the other categories. St Thomas is actually here tumbling together two foundations for analogy. First we have the principles of substance and accident co-ordinated according to analogy of proportion. Then we have causal foundation: substance is prior to the other categories in being and the other categories are related to substance as posterior to prior. In other words, St Thomas is here drawing analogy of proportion into a relation of cause, and thereby running together analogy of proportion and analogy by priority and posteriority.<sup>128</sup>

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would not wish to attribute everything I say to him. Also helpful is Iribarren, “Angelic Individuality and the Possibility of a Better World”, 54.

<sup>125</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 6; McDermott, 78.

<sup>126</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 6; McDermott, 79-80.

<sup>127</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 6; McDermott, 80.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 77-78.

I wish to recall at this stage that in Section 2.1 of this thesis I have discussed St Thomas's distinction of two modes of analogy, and they are analogy between things having a proportion to each other, and analogy of proportionality, where the similarity is not between things but between proportions. I there stated St Thomas's view that names must be predicated of God and of creatures according to analogy of proportion, but only in the second mode.<sup>129</sup> Now, in both *De Veritate* and in *De principiis naturae* St Thomas gives as illustrations of the first mode of analogous predication 'being' predicated of substance and accident, because of the relation accident has to substance, and 'healthy' said of bodies, medicine and urine, as all refer to the one 'health'.<sup>130</sup> This type of analogy is often referred to as "many-to-one analogy", and many-to-one analogy is not appropriate to perfections such as 'being' shared between God and creatures. However, in *De principiis naturae*, when St Thomas mentions the 'health' analogy, he adds that the meanings are bound together analogically because they all refer to the one health as their goal.<sup>131</sup> In other words, St Thomas draws this analogy into final cause. And when St Thomas speaks of 'being' predicated of accident because of its relation to substance as its subject, he immediately puts this into a relation of priority and posteriority, which is also a relation of cause, as already observed.<sup>132</sup> I suggest that St Thomas's drawing analogy into relations of priority and posteriority and of cause in this way is of first importance, as I hope to show.

### 2.31 Several Issues to do with Analogy

At this point several important and interesting issues arise. In *De principiis naturae* St Thomas is speaking of natural substances composed of matter and form and, when he speaks of the being of accidents by reference to their subject he does so in terms of analogy of proportion, but founded in a relation of priority and posteriority in cause. Therefore, the first issue is: can this view of the analogy of being founded in priority and posteriority extend to the second mode of composition, in which creatures receive their being from God? In other words, does this model extend to being and the other perfections shared between God and creatures? This issue is addressed in Section 2.311 following. This leads to the second issue: when we come to speak of 'being' and other perfections shared by analogy between God and creatures, would it not be better to speak of this analogy as

<sup>129</sup> St Thomas says this in *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 11, c., as shown in Section 2.1 above.

<sup>130</sup> This is in *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 11, c., and in *De principiis naturae*, c. 6; McDermott, 79.

<sup>131</sup> "Dicitur enim de urina ut de signo sanitatis, de corpore ut subiecto, de potione ut de causa; sed tamen omnes istae rationes attribuuntur uni fini, scilicet sanitati." St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 6.

<sup>132</sup> "Non enim ex toto est eadem ratio qua substantia est ens, et quantitas, et alia, sed omnia dicuntur ex eo quod attribuuntur substantiae, quod est subiectum aliorum. Et ideo ens dicitur per prius de substantia, et per posterius de aliis." St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 6.

based on cause alone? This issue is addressed in Section 2.312 following. In discussing the third issue I hope to show the significance of the step taken by St Thomas in *De principiis naturae* when he draws the analogy of proportion into a relation of priority and posteriority. I will argue that this move enables St Thomas to present the analogy of proportion, including proportionality of course, in one-to-another mode. This is important as, according to St Thomas, one-to-another is the mode of analogy that must be used when names are said of God and creatures according to analogy. Therefore, the issue of how names are said of God and creatures in one-to-another mode is the third issue, and it is addressed in Section 2.313 below. Finally, in Section 2.4, there follows a short summary of propositions that may be drawn from this discussion.

### *2.311 First Issue: the extension of analogy*

In *De principiis naturae*, as already stated, St Thomas draws his illustrations of analogy into cause. In the case of the ‘healthy’ analogy the cause is evidently final cause, and it is precisely because of the reference of each meaning to the one end of ‘health’ that the meanings are proportionately (i.e., analogously) related. In the case of substance and accidents it is not clear exactly what type of cause is in operation, but it is clearly a relation of priority and posteriority, which is a relation of cause; and it is owing precisely to this relation that we may speak of accidents as ‘being’. In other words, ‘being’ is said proportionately of substance and accidents precisely because of the causal dependence of accidents as secondary instances of ‘being’, on substance as the primary instance of ‘being’.<sup>133</sup> In other words and in each case, the proportion which grounds the analogy turns out to rest upon cause, and therefore, necessarily, upon priority and posteriority.

The immediate issue to be addressed then is this: is the view of analogy in *De principiis naturae*, where the proportion rests upon cause, confined to natural substances composed of matter and form, or may it extend to the second mode of composition recognised by St Thomas, namely the composition of substance and being? The issue is important because, as I hope to show in Section 2.313 below, the effect of founding analogy on cause and therefore on priority and posteriority is to enable the analogy to be presented as one-to-another rather than as many-to-one; and one-to-another is the appropriate mode when speaking of perfections shared between God and creatures.

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<sup>133</sup> Recall that in *De principiis naturae* St Thomas gives three ways in which the proportion binding the meanings together in analogy may arise: by reference to a single goal (as in ‘healthy’), by reference to a single agency (as in the art of healing), and by reference to a single subject (as with substance and accidents). St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 6; McDermott, 79.

This second mode of composition it will be recalled turns on act and potency as such, and does not depend upon matter. One would expect the view of analogy under discussion to extend to the second mode of composition. After all, St Thomas is discussing the circumstances whereby substances, quantities and the other categories are called *beings* in an analogical manner, and the predication of *being*, analogical or otherwise, does not depend on matter (no substance is its own being). Therefore, we can assume that the analysis extends to the second mode of composition, unless there is reason to think otherwise. As we proceed we will see that this position is verified and there is no reason to think otherwise.

### **2.312 Second Issue: *perfections and analogy***

The second issue is this. When we come to speak of the composition of substance and being, we speak of perfections shared by God and creatures. We have already seen that in that situation we must speak in terms of analogy, that is to say proportion (or proportionality, in the case of God and creatures). And we have further seen that St Thomas teaches in *De principiis naturae* that, in the case of substance and accidents, the analogy of being must be understood in the order of priority of being, which is the order of cause. In my opinion it would be an error to separate these two foundations and treat them as alternative, or the latter as simply following on the former, or either as enough on its own; it is quite clear that St Thomas is tumbling the two together.<sup>134</sup> However, when we come to speak of the composition of substance and being, or the composition of substance and a perfection such as goodness, we will be speaking of God as first cause. Would it not then be preferable to speak of analogy as based on cause alone?

I would argue that St Thomas's answer to such a question would be no. The perfections of which we are speaking here are what we might call "absolute perfections". These are those perfections whose name signifies the perfection without any involvement of materiality, finiteness or limitation to a

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<sup>134</sup> To quote St Thomas again: "Non enim ex toto est eadem ratio qua substantia est ens, et quantitas, et alia, sed omnia dicuntur ex eo quod attribuuntur substantiae, quod est subiectum aliorum. Et ideo ens dicitur per prius de substantia, et per posterius de aliis." "for although quantity and the others are not beings in exactly the same sense as substance is being, still each of the others is called *being* because of its relation to substance as its subject. So being is attributed first to substance and only secondarily to other attributes ..." *De principiis naturae*, c.6. McDermott, 79.

mode of being. They are perfections such as being, goodness, wisdom, life, love, and so on.<sup>135</sup> In St Thomas's view, if names of such perfections were applied analogically to God within the order of cause alone, several undesirable consequences would follow. First, it would mean that God could not be spoken of Godself as being, good, wise, etc., but only as the *cause* of the being, goodness and wisdom of creatures. These perfections as perfections then would belong primarily to creatures and, when we applied the names to God, we would include in that meaning the creatures' being, goodness and wisdom. The reason for that is this. Whenever a name is said of many by analogy there is always one instance in which the reality signified by the name is realised primarily; other things are then named in a secondary or derivative way, because each of them has some kind of relation to the primary instance. Therefore, we cannot understand or explain the derivative uses without invoking the primary instance. This is so whether we have many-to-one analogy or one-to-another analogy. Thus, if we say that medicine is healthy, we say this implicitly by reference to the primary instance which is the healthy state of the patient's body. In the same way, we cannot speak of the being of accident without pre-supposing the prior instance of substance.<sup>136</sup> In St Thomas's view, names of absolute perfections cannot be said of God in secondary or derivative fashion. Therefore, when we apply these names to God, we do so not only to God as cause but also essentially. St Thomas never doubted that the human mind cannot know God's essence; nor did he ever doubt that the human mind cannot know quite how absolute perfections are realised in God; but he also believed that when we apply names such as good and wise to God we signify not only that God is the cause of those perfections but also that they exist in God in a more excellent way. The perfections as perfections exist primarily in God, but the names are applied by ourselves primarily to creatures, which we know first.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> The contrast is with a name such as "fortress", where materiality is part of the very signification of the name. St Thomas's point is that a name such as "fortress" can be applied to God certainly, but only metaphorically. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 13, a. 3, ad 1. *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 39, n. 2.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Shanley, *The Treatise on the Divine Nature*, 338-339.

<sup>137</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 13, aa. 2 to 6. See also *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 32, n. 7, which explains why absolute perfections cannot be said of God in a secondary or derivative fashion. For the inability of the human mind to know God in God's essence, see *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 1. There is a huge number of questions which arise here, none of which I will address at the moment. Foremost among them is St Thomas's distinction, crucial to his understanding of analogy and participation, between *res significata* (the thing signified) and *modus significandi* (the mode of signification); see *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 13, a. 3. Of similar importance in this context is St Thomas's distinction between the thing understood and our way of understanding: *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 13, a. 12, ad 3. See also *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 36, n. 2, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 30, n. 3. Perhaps the most significant issue which arises is that, while St Thomas accepts the Christian position held since the earliest days of the Church that the human mind cannot know God in God's essence, he also taught that humans can predicate perfections *positively* of both God and creatures according

It follows that, even though we cannot know God in God's essence, we can nonetheless say something positive, substantial and true about God in God's essence. However, this must be done by analogy, as has already been shown. We name and signify perfections from our knowledge of creatures. However, when we predicate a perfection of both God and creatures we do this by analogy, first according to priority and posteriority because the reality signified is prior in God, and secondly within an order or reference to something one, for the perfection is intrinsic to both God and creature, but is predicated of God essentially and of creatures by participation. This also shows why we must use the language of proportionality, for when we say "God is being" and "a creature has being", we mean in each case, "proportioned to essence". In the case of God, 'being' is predicated essentially, as God is *ipsum esse subsistens*. In the case of the creature however, 'being' is predicated by participation only, as the creature merely *has* 'being'. <sup>138</sup>

However, analogical predication has its limits when we come to speak of God. We can speak of perfections intrinsic to God and creatures and understand that the perfections are present in God in a more eminent way, so long as we signify with names which designate without qualification – goodness, wisdom, being, and so on. However, if signify something of God with a name which incorporates in its very signification materiality or finiteness or a mode proper to a creature, we can signify this of God only according to a likeness or metaphor – e.g., if we speak of God as having leonine courage, or as our fortress. St Thomas does not regard such metaphorical predications as within his notion of analogy. At the other end of the scale, if we wish to signify a perfection along with the mode of super-eminence with which it belongs to God, this also is not a question of analogy. Here we are speaking not of a community of meaning as in analogy, but of God alone. Furthermore, we are seeking to speak of God in God's essence; yet, while the human mind can know by unaided reason *that* God is, we cannot grasp *what* God is – only what God is not. We can, however, form some knowledge of God from God's effects. Therefore, if we wish to speak of the mode of super-eminence in which perfections are found in God, we are driven to use language based on our

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to analogy, that is, according to proportion. For a discussion see George P. Klubertanz, *St Thomas Aquinas on Analogy: A Textual Analysis and Systematic Synthesis* (Chicago: Loyola UP, 1960), 151ff. In an appendix Fr Klubertanz sets out all the texts in which St Thomas deals formally with analogy: *Ibid.*, Appendix I, 158-293.

<sup>138</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 32, n. 7; *idem*, c. 34, n. 1. See also *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 11, c.

knowledge of God's creation. This may be the language of negation (e.g., God is eternal), or the language of relation (e.g., God is the highest good).<sup>139</sup>

### 2.313 Third Issue: *many-to-one and one-to-another analogy*

I will now address the third issue that arises. St Thomas says that names said of God and creatures are predicated neither univocally nor equivocally but analogically, "that is, according to an order or reference to something one".<sup>140</sup> The question is: is the reference to something one within an order of many to one or an order of one thing to another, and does this distinction matter? My answer is that when names such as being and good are predicated of God and creatures they are always said analogically and always within an order of one thing to another, and the difference of that mode from many-to-one does matter. Needless to say, precisely the same can be said when substance and accident are called *being*.

In *Summa contra gentiles* St Thomas points out that in the case of *health* we use a many-to-one reference, when we say that an animal is healthy as the subject of health, medicine as its cause, food as its preserver and urine as its sign. The reference here, St Thomas says, is to the *one health*. The perfection in question – here, health – is held primarily by one analogate, here the animal. The health predicated of medicine, food and urine is none other than the health properly and primarily in the animal. However, when *being* is said of substance and accident the reference is not to a third thing but to one of them; i.e. substance and accident are not referred to a third thing in which both share, but the being of accident refers to substance as its subject. The "being" which is predicated analogously is not the one "being" as there is one health in the many-to-one example. As St Thomas says in *De principiis naturae*, substance and accidents are beings, but accidents are not beings in exactly the same sense as substance is being; rather, each accident is called being because of its relation to substance as its subject.<sup>141</sup> A similar analysis must apply to the names of perfections said of God and creatures. First, the names cannot be said in many-to-one mode, as then we would have to posit something prior to God. Again, there is not one perfection in which God and creature share; rather we are referring to a perfection which is intrinsic to each of God and creature. Yet, this

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<sup>139</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 30, nn. 2 and 4. For the proposition that the existence of God, while it is not self-evident to us can nonetheless be known from God's effects, see *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 2, c.

<sup>140</sup> "ea quae de Deo et rebus aliis dicuntur, praedicantur neque univoce neque aequivoce, sed analogice: hoc est, secundum ordinem vel respectum ad aliquid unum." St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 34, n. 1.

<sup>141</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 6; McDermott 79.

perfection is not exactly the same in each; the creature has its own *actus essendi* distinct from that of God. The creature is nonetheless dependent on God for its act of being and other perfections; it is this relation which is the source of the analogy, not the diverse proportions of many things to one perfection, as in the many-to-one variety.<sup>142</sup>

St Thomas observes that in the second mode of analogical predication the order according to name and the order according to reality are not necessarily the same. The order of name follows the order of knowledge while the order of reality follows the order of nature. Thus, In the case of substance and accident the order of name and the order of reality are the same, as substance is prior to accident both in knowledge and in nature. However, it may be that that which is prior in nature is subsequent in our knowledge, and then there will not be the same order in analogical predication according to reality and according to the meaning of the name. We would expect St Thomas to illustrate this from the *being* said of God and creatures but, surprisingly, he illustrates it from the power to heal. The power to heal found in all health giving things is prior to the health of the animal, as a cause is prior to its effect; but because we know this healing power through an effect, we name it from its effect. Thus, health-giving is prior in reality, but an animal is called “healthy” by priority, according to the meaning of the name.<sup>143</sup>

The unexpected introduction of the analogy of health at this point means that St Thomas is able to see the analogy of health in either of the two ways of analogous predication which he has identified. He can see it in the diverse proportions of many-to-one, and he can see it when one thing has a proportion to another in a relation of cause. Thus, we might predicate “healthy” of the animal and of the medicine, because the medicine is the cause of the health of the animal owing to its healing power. What are we to make of this flexibility?

One’s first impression is that the flexibility suggests that St Thomas’s two modes of analogy are not sharply defined types, each with its characteristic content and each exclusive of the other. Indeed, the flexibility suggests that we should not reduce St Thomas’s notion of analogy to closely defined

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<sup>142</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 34, nn. 1, 2, 3, 4. See also, W.W. Meissner, “Some Notes on a Figure in St Thomas”, *The New Scholasticism* 31 (1957), 68, 71-72, 73-74. Fr Meissner says: “there is no text in which St Thomas indicates that the analogy of God and creatures is of the many-to-one variety”. Ibid., 73. Fr Meissner also sets out all the texts in which St Thomas uses the figure of health in his use of analogy: 75-84.

<sup>143</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 34, n. 5.



types at all. What we have here then are two modes of analogy that show some tendency to bleed into each other. If that is so, why does St Thomas insist that names said of God and creatures may not be said according to the many-to-one mode of analogy but only according to the one-to-another mode? In my view it is, ironically, precisely the flexibility of the many-to-one mode which underlies St Thomas's insistence that names said of God and creatures are not said in that mode. Note from the discussion of the many-to-one mode above the ease with which St Thomas is able to shift the analogy of health into a structure of priority and posteriority, so that the health of the animal, which is the prime analogate in the many-to-one mode, now appears as determined by the cause: the power to heal. Therefore, if a common name were predicated of God and creatures in many-to-one mode, this may be thought to be by reference to some third reality, prior to and external to both and by which God's own being and goodness is determined. That is impossible, of course, and the second mode guards against such error by actually building into the analogy two crucial elements: first, the priority of God and the posteriority of the creature in relation to being or other perfection; and secondly, the intrinsicity of being or other perfection in both God and creature, as each holds its own act of being. Therefore, the second mode of analogy is necessary in order to protect God's transcendence, absolute priority and freedom of action, and also to protect the creature's own act. Something similar can be said of the analogical predication of being in substance and accident. Only when being is said by reference to substance as its subject and cause, are the natural priority of substance over accident and the actualisation of accident protected.<sup>144</sup>

The hallmark of St Thomas's second mode of analogy as distinct from the first seems to me to be that, in the second mode, the perfection predicated is *intrinsic* to each analogate, although not in quite the same way. The two are then related as prior and posterior in a relation of cause. That is why the second mode and not the first is needed to capture the analogous predication of being and other perfections between God and creatures.<sup>145</sup> Furthermore, in the case of God and creatures, because the perfection is intrinsic to both God and creature in a relation of priority and posteriority, it is intrinsic in each according to its own act. In this way the analogy articulates a relation of

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<sup>144</sup> For a stimulating examination of the issues surrounding St Thomas's two modes of analogy, along with references to further literature, see Ian Wilks, "Aquinas on Analogy: The Distinction of Many-to-One and One-to-Another", *The Modern Schoolman* 75 (1997), 35. Also very helpful is Gregory P. Rocca, "Aquinas on God-Talk: Hovering Over the Abyss", *Theological Studies* 54 (1993), 641.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Meissner, "Some Notes on a Figure in St Thomas", 72-75.

participation, whereby the perfection is held by God in God's essence and held by the creature by participation.<sup>146</sup>

Returning to the order of name and of reality in the second mode of analogous predication, St Thomas offers us the following important observation.

Sic igitur, quia ex rebus aliis in Dei cognitionem pervenimus, res nominum de Deo et rebus aliis dictorum per prius est in Deo secundum suum modum, sed ratio nominis per posterius. Unde et nominari dicitur a suis causatis.

Thus, therefore, because we come to a knowledge of God from other things, the reality in the names said of God and other things belongs by priority in God according to His mode of being, but the meaning of the name belongs to God by posteriority. And so He is said to be named from His effects.<sup>147</sup>

When, therefore, we predicate *being* of God and creatures we do so by analogy, although *being* is intrinsic to each as its act. This is because the reality of being is prior in God and posterior in the creature, so that the *being* of God stands to that of the creature as cause to effect. *Being* is therefore predicated analogically of God and creature by reference to one of them, namely God. However, the meaning of the name belongs primarily to the creature and secondarily to God, as our manner of signification is always grounded in our sensible experience of the world. Thus, there is a sense in which we can say that it is God who is named analogically from creatures. Be that as it may, we must always remember that St Thomas teaches that an agent acts insofar as it is act, and it is through act that an effect resembles its cause. Therefore, the reality of *being* is prior in God and posterior in the creature. The same, of course, may be said of the other absolute perfections, such as goodness and wisdom.<sup>148</sup>

## 2.4 Summary of Results

From the above discussion, I propose as follows. When we speak of being and other perfections shared between God and creatures:

- we always speak in terms of analogy.
- This analogy will usually be one of proportionality, but the relationship should not be reduced to proportionality. St Thomas's flexibility with the notion of analogy cautions us against

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<sup>146</sup> Cf. St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 53.

<sup>147</sup> *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 34, n. 6.

<sup>148</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 37, n. 5.

substituting new modes for his. To St Thomas analogy is simply a relation of proportion, and the important thing is to recognise the criteria by which it is identified.

- The analogy will be in St Thomas's second mode of predication, where the order or reference between the two analogates is not to something else but to one of them, and where the analogates are ordered in a relationship of cause as prior and posterior.
- In the context of perfections shared between God and creatures, this comes about as follows.
- St Thomas teaches that an agent acts and produces its like insofar as it is in act. Therefore, an agent must produce something similar to itself, and it is through act that an effect resembles its cause.
- Therefore, when a creature receives a perfection the creature does so in a relation of potentiality and act as such. Therefore, the creature is related to the perfection received as potentiality to act.
- This relation necessarily involves participation. This is because through that which is received the creature is actualised in a certain manner.
- The relation also necessarily involves a relation of analogy of creature to God, as the perfection is held by God essentially and by the creature by participation.
- This is St Thomas's second mode of analogy, as the creature is called "being", "good", etc., by reference to something one, namely God's essence, in whom the perfection is prior in reality.

St Thomas also teaches that every created substance is composed of potentiality and act. Therefore, every created substance is compared to its own being as potentiality to act, and being itself is compared to all created substances as their act; similarly with the absolute perfections of goodness, wisdom, etc., when they are held by participation.<sup>149</sup> In my view then, the hallmark of participation with its attendant analogy, in the context of shared perfections, is act and potentiality as such.

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<sup>149</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 53. St Thomas speaks only of *being* in this chapter. He applies a similar analysis to goodness in *idem*, Bk I, c. 38, nn. 4 and 5.

## CHAPTER THREE

### De Ente et Essentia: Prologue and Chapter One: Essential and Accidental Ens

As I stated when introducing *De principiis naturae*, *De ente et essentia* was written by St Thomas at about the same time, so that the two appear as complementary works. The words *ad fratres et socios suos* may be added to the title, suggesting that St Thomas wrote the work for the sake of his brethren at the Priory of Saint-Jacques. Scholars assign the work to the period after the autumn of 1252, when St Thomas arrived in Paris as *sententiarius*, and before March 1256, when he was incepted as master in theology.<sup>150</sup>

St Thomas begins the treatise with a famous warning taken from Aristotle that a small initial error leads to larger error in the end.<sup>151</sup> It is fairly clear that St Thomas is giving this advice from the point of view of a teacher who seeks to lead his/her students to good understanding, and he is doing that within his own understanding of the process of human cognition. The remark also suggests that within this treatise we will find the foundation concepts of St Thomas's metaphysics; therefore, we need to proceed with attention and care.

### 3.1 First Conceptions of the Intellect

In his next sentence St Thomas says

ens autem et essentia sunt quae primo in intellectu concipiuntur, ut dicit Avicenna in *Metaphys.*, (lib. I, c. 6); ideo primo, ne ex eorum ignorantia errare contingat, ad horum difficultatem aperiendam, dicendum est, quid nomine *essentiae* et *entis* significetur, et quomodo in diversis inveniuntur, et quomodo se habeant ad intentiones logicas, scilicet genera, species et differentias.

Now the first conceptions of the intellect are (as Avicenna says) 'a being' and 'an essence'. If, then, we are to avoid mistakes through ignorance of these, we must begin exploring their difficulty by stating what is

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<sup>150</sup> Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino*, 78 and 386. Eschmann, "A Catalogue of St Thomas's Works", 411. There are many English translations of this work. I will rely mainly on that of Armand Maurer, *St Thomas Aquinas On Being and Essence*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes, 2<sup>nd</sup> revd. ed. (Toronto: PIMS, 1968). I will also use the translation and commentary by Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A Translation and Interpretation* (Notre Dame: UNDP, 1965). The Latin edition which I am using is the third Marietti edition, 1957.

<sup>151</sup> In his article "Little Errors in the Beginning", *The Thomist* 38 (1974), 27, Mortimer J. Adler explores the philosophical implications of this observation and seeks to show that many of the problems characteristic of modern philosophy may be traced to a failure to correct little errors in the beginning.

meant by saying ‘a being’ and ‘an essence’, how they are found in different things, and how they are related to the logical notions of genus, species, and difference.<sup>152</sup>

The first question is: what does St Thomas mean by “first conceptions of the intellect”? In the first article of the first question of *De Veritate*, St Thomas asks “What is Truth?” His answer begins:

Dicendum, quod sicut in demonstrabilibus oportet fieri reductionem in aliqua principia per se intellectui nota, ita investigando quid est unumquodque; alias utrobique in infinitum iretur, et sic periret omnino scientia et cognitio rerum. Illud autem quod primo intellectus concipit quasi notissimum, et in quo omnes conceptiones resolvit, est ens, ut Avicenna dicit in principio *Metaphysicae* suae [lib. I, c. ix]. Unde oportet quod omnes aliae conceptiones intellectus accipiantur ex additione ad ens. Sed enti non potest addi aliquid quasi extranea natura, per modum quo differentia additur generi, vel accidens subiecto, quia quaelibet natura essentialiter est ens;

When investigating the nature of anything, one should make the same kind of analysis as he makes when he reduces a proposition to certain self-evident principles. Otherwise, both types of knowledge will become involved in an infinite regress, and science and our knowledge of things will perish. Now, as Avicenna says, that which the intellect first conceives as, in a way, the most evident, and to which it reduces all its concepts, is being. Consequently, all other conceptions of the intellect are had by additions to being. But nothing can be added to being as though it were something not included in being – in the way that a difference is added to a genus or an accident to a subject – for every reality is essentially a being.<sup>153</sup>

St Thomas here sets out the conditions of inquiry when one asks what something is. I suggest that St Thomas is arguing that we need to proceed *via resolutionis*; that is, when investigating the nature of anything we proceed from the particular to the more universal, a resolution from the extrinsic, phenomenal manifestation into concepts ever more general, ever more universal, ever more simple.<sup>154</sup> However, this resolution cannot proceed indefinitely, or science would become impossible. It ceases in notions that are self-evident, and which, therefore, the intellect knows naturally; these are the first conceptions of the intellect. Thus, the first conceptions of the intellect are not the first things we think of, nor are they the principles of motion impressed upon the senses. They are, rather, I suggest, the termini of the *via resolutionis* and the principles of intellectual consideration. In his *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius* St Thomas says:

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<sup>152</sup> The Latin is quoted from S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Opusculum De Ente et Essentia*, Diligentissime Recognitum, Editio Tertia, Marietti, 1957, Prooemium, p. 9. The English is quoted from the translation by Armand Maurer, already cited: *De ente et essentia*, Prologue; Maurer 28.

<sup>153</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 1. c. The Latin is quoted from *Quaestiones Disputatae* Volumen I *De Veritate*, Cura et studio P. Fr. Raymundi Spiazzi, O.P., Editio VIII revisa (Romae: Marietti, 1949). The English is quoted from St Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, Vol. I, Translated from the definitive Leonine text by Robert W. Mulligan, S.J. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1952). Both these works have already been cited and are used throughout this thesis.

<sup>154</sup> I have sketched St Thomas’s understanding of *via resolutionis* earlier in this thesis, viz., at Section 1.43.

Sic ergo patet quod rationalis consideratio ad intellectualem terminatur secundum viam resolutionis, in quantum ratio ex multis colligit unam et simplicem veritatem. Et rursum intellectualis consideratio est principium rationalis secundum viam compositionis vel inventionis, in quantum intellectus in uno multitudinem comprehendit. Illa ergo consideratio, quae est terminus totius humanae ratiocinationis, maxime est intellectualis consideratio.

It is clear, then, that rational thinking ends in intellectual thinking, following the process of analysis (*secundum viam resolutionis*), in which reason gathers one simple truth from many things. And again, intellectual thinking is the beginning of rational thinking, following the process of synthesis (*secundum viam compositionis vel inventionis*), in which the intellect comprehends a multiplicity in unity. So the thinking that is the terminus of all human reasoning is supremely intellectual.<sup>155</sup>

Thus, ‘a being’ and ‘an essence’ as first conceptions of the intellect are conceptions naturally known and knowledge in which all things are included. They are also the principles of intellectual thinking, which terminates in the consideration of ‘being’ and ‘essence’. In this way, concludes St Thomas, the terminus of human reasoning is supremely intellectual.<sup>156</sup>

In the passage quoted above from *De ente et essentia* St Thomas speaks of ‘a being’ and ‘an essence’ as the first conceptions of the intellect, whereas in the passage quoted from *De Veritate* he mentions only ‘being’ as first conception of the intellect. I do not think that there is any significance in this. It is not unusual for St Thomas to add notions such as “unity” and “good” and “true” to being as primary notions, and this, St Thomas explains, is permissible so long as that which is added is universally referable to being.<sup>157</sup> One might observe however that “unity”, “good” and “true” are terms convertible with being, but this can hardly be said of ‘an essence’.<sup>158</sup> This is so, yet in *De Veritate* St Thomas observes that its essence may be predicated of every being in the same manner

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<sup>155</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, q. 6, a. 1, c. The Latin is quoted from Sancti Thomae de Aquino, *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, found on the Corpus Thomisticum website, [www.corpusthomicum.org/cbt.html](http://www.corpusthomicum.org/cbt.html) accessed 09.08.11. The English is quoted from St Thomas Aquinas, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, Questions V and VI of his *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, 4<sup>th</sup> rev'd ed., Translated with Introduction and Notes by Armand Maurer (Toronto: PIMS, 1986).

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. Several authors comment on the “circularity” of human reasoning in St Thomas’s model, which starts from ‘being’ and terminates in ‘being’. Jan Aertsen draws a parallel here between the circularity of the knowledge of being and the hallmark of a spiritual substance, such as the human soul, which seeks a complete return to itself. Jan Aertsen, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas’s Way of Thought* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1988), 255.

<sup>157</sup> St Thomas, *De Potentia Dei*, q. 9, a. 7, ad 6.

<sup>158</sup> One may wonder how “true” can be convertible with being, as truth is a relation. St Thomas explains in *Summa Theologiae*, q. 16, a. 3 how the terms “good” and “true” are convertible with being. His argument runs this way: *Good* has the nature of what is desirable and *the true* is related to knowledge. Now, everything is knowable insofar as it has being. That is why Aristotle says in *De Anima* iii that *the soul is in some manner all things*, and it is so through the senses and the intellect. Therefore, just as good is convertible with being, so is the true. But good adds to being the notion of the desirable, while the true adds a relation to the intellect.

as its unity or undividedness, that is affirmatively and absolutely, for a being is what it is and is one thing.<sup>159</sup> In any event, St Thomas will shortly differentiate ‘a being’ and ‘an essence’ and argue that we must proceed from the meaning of the former to the meaning of the latter.

In keeping with his understanding of ‘first conceptions of the intellect’, in his very next sentence St Thomas indicates that the subject matter of the study he is about to begin is not ‘things which are’ or ‘being and essence as realised here and now’. Rather, St Thomas continues in *De ente et essentia*, if we are to avoid mistakes, we must begin by stating *what is meant by saying* ‘a being’ and ‘an essence’, *how they are found* in different things, and *how they are related* to the logical notions of genus, species and difference.<sup>160</sup> It will be noticed that St Thomas does not propose to study being and essence as realised in things, nor does he propose to investigate directly the abstract concepts ‘being’ and ‘essence’; rather, what he is seeking is the *ratio nominis*, or the meaning of the name.<sup>161</sup>

An order of priority and posteriority in cognition is introduced by St Thomas in the next paragraph. St Thomas observes that we ought to get our knowledge of simple things from composite things and arrive at what is prior by way of what is posterior, so that the learning process may begin with what is easier. This is consistent with St Thomas’s technique of beginning with the better known in order to arrive more reliably at the less well known. It is for this reason, St Thomas now says, that we must begin with the meaning of ‘a being’ and proceed to the meaning of ‘an essence’.<sup>162</sup> So far so good; but might we not expect the order of knowing to be the other way about? Might we not expect ‘an essence’ to be composite and posterior in relation to the simplicity and priority of ‘a being’? In grasping the order of understanding that St Thomas is laying out here, it is necessary to recall that he is at this stage exploring what is meant by saying ‘a being’ and ‘an essence’, what the words signify. He is not at this stage speaking of being as other than essence in composite things.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 1, c.

<sup>160</sup> This is Maurer’s translation, with emphasis added. Bobik has: “we must point out what is signified by the words “being” and “essence”, and how they are found in diverse things, and how they are related to the logical intentions, genus, species, and difference.” Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence*, 1.

<sup>161</sup> Here is St Thomas’s Latin again: ideo primo, ne ex eorum ignorantia errare contingat, ad horum difficultatem aperiendam, dicendum est, quid nomine *essentiae* et *entis* significetur, ...

<sup>162</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 1, n. 1; Maurer 29.

<sup>163</sup> I am here following Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence*, 30. Bobik continues: “This is why it is not acceptable to interpret St Thomas’s reason for proceeding from the meaning of being to that of essence in terms of the distinction between essence and existence, as some do, following Cajetan.” A footnote indicates that Bobik believes that Maurer interprets the passage in this way. In a footnote in his own work Maurer says: “A being (*ens*) can be analysed into two principles, essence and being (*esse*). It is thus a composite notion;

Now, as St Thomas says elsewhere, a thing is knowable to the extent it has being, because it is in this way that a thing impresses itself upon the senses. This is so even for those things which have little being (privations and accidents, for example) and are therefore less knowable by nature yet, nonetheless, are more knowable to us. Human knowledge is itself described by St Thomas in terms of being. It grows by actualisation of potential within us and, therefore, always requires some prior knowledge within us, based on sense perception.<sup>164</sup> Knowledge, says St Thomas, means the *existence* of the thing known in the knower.<sup>165</sup> It is in this sense, one might say, that we proceed from the meaning of ‘a being’ to the meaning of ‘an essence’, because the expression ‘a being’ includes the expression ‘an essence’; or, to put it another way, the meaning of the word ‘being’ is included in the meanings of other words, while the reverse is not true. This is so not only of words used in philosophical discourse (e.g., cause, substance, accident, good) but also of words used in everyday discourse.<sup>166</sup>

Thus, to quote again from *De Veritate*, St Thomas says:

Illud autem quod primo intellectus concipit quasi notissimum, et in quo omnes conceptiones resolvit, est ens, ut Avicenna dicit in principio *Metaphysicae* suae [lib. I, c. ix]. Unde oportet quod omnes aliae conceptiones intellectus accipiantur ex additione ad ens. Sed enti non potest addi, aliquid quasi extranea natura ... quia quaelibet natura essentialiter est ens;

Now, as Avicenna says, that which the intellect first conceives as, in a way, the most evident, and to which it reduces all its concepts, is being. Consequently, all the other conceptions of the intellect are had by additions to being. But nothing can be added to being as though it were something not included in being ... for every reality is essentially a being.<sup>167</sup>

The intellect seeks to reduce all its concepts to ‘being’, so that all things are included in ‘being’. This approach explains why ‘a being’ is composite and posterior while ‘an essence’ is simple and prior. ‘A

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essence is one of its components, and its notion is disengaged only after we know the meaning of a being.” Maurer, in his translation of *St Thomas Aquinas On Being and Essence*, p. 29, n. 1.

<sup>164</sup> Cognition and learning are large topics in St Thomas’s corpus. The remarks in the text, which are very general, are drawn from St Thomas’s *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, Bk VII, Lect. 2, nn. 1301 and 1304. For further analysis of cognition see *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 79, esp. aa. 2, 3 and 4. For St Thomas’s analysis of teaching and learning see *idem*, q. 117, aa. 1 and 2; and, for a fuller treatment, *De Veritate*, q. 11.

<sup>165</sup> *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 5, ad 15; emphasis added. This is significant because it means that St Thomas declined the illumination theory of knowledge, still current in his time. See Joseph Owens, “Faith, Ideas, Illumination and Experience”, in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, edited by Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), 440, esp. 450-455.

<sup>166</sup> Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence*, 11-12.

<sup>167</sup> *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 1, c.



being' is composite because it is a whole in relation to its parts. 'An essence' meanwhile is simple because it is one in relation to the whole. As for priority and posteriority, we recall from *De principiis naturae* that the relationship of priority and posteriority may be other than temporal. Now, the term 'a being' even in relation to one thing has multiple meanings, applying to essence and to accidents as well as to the thing itself. We have already seen that it is 'being' in this sense which is first apprehended by the intellect, and, in that sense, 'a being' is temporally prior to 'an essence'. In the process of understanding however, the intellect will seek to reduce the multiple meanings of 'a being' to its component parts, one of which is 'an essence'. Thus, 'an essence' is *analytically* prior to 'a being'. This is in the same sense, as we saw in *De principiis naturae*, that an element is prior to the whole, because the whole is divisible and the element is not, as letters are the elements of syllables.<sup>168</sup>

### 3.11 Ens: In the Categories and Propositional Truth

St Thomas now introduces two meanings of the term 'a being'. He is speaking of *ens per se*, or 'a being in itself'. In the first way the term is divided by the ten categories. In other words, 'a being' is anything in the category of substance or one of the nine accidents; for example, the substance 'man' or the quality 'musicality'. However, a being in this sense is not the same as accidental combinations of being, such as 'a musical man'; that is *ens per accidens*, as there is nothing in the nature of 'a man' as such which demands musicality. Therefore, being expressed *per accidens* is not 'being' as it found in any of the categories. In the second meaning identified by St Thomas, the term 'a being' signifies the truth of propositions.

Sciendum est quod, sicut in 5 Metaphys. (text. 14) Philosophus dicit, ens per se dupliciter: *Uno modo*, quod dividitur per decem genera; *alio modo*, quod significat propositionum veritatem.<sup>169</sup>

The two usages differ in that in the second sense anything can be called 'a being' if an affirmative proposition can be formed about it, even if the thing is a privation or negation; for example, we may say that blindness is in the eye. However, in the first sense nothing can be called 'a being' unless it is something positive in reality: "*Sed primo modo non potest dici aliquid quod sit ens, nisi quod in re*

<sup>168</sup> Cf. Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence*, 28-30. The references to *De principiis naturae* come from cc. 3 and 4; see McDermott, 73-74 and 75.

<sup>169</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marietti edition (1957), c. 1, n. 1, p. 9. In Maurer's translation this passage will be found at c. 1, n. 2, 29-30. In a footnote, Maurer gives the reference to Aristotle as *Metaph.*, V, 7, 1017a22-35.

aliquid ponat.”<sup>170</sup> Therefore a privation or negation such as blindness may be ‘a being’ in the second sense but not the first.<sup>171</sup>

### 3.12 Essence in terms of Ens

St Thomas now turns to the meaning of the term ‘an essence’. The term is not derived from the second meaning of ‘a being’, for in that sense some things are called beings which do not have an essence; privations for example. Therefore ‘an essence’ is derived from ‘a being’ in the first meaning of the term. As Averroes says, ‘a being’ in the first sense signifies the essence of a thing.<sup>172</sup> Now, St Thomas has said that ‘a being’ in the first sense is divided by the ten categories. Therefore, the word ‘essence’ must signify something common to all the natures through which different beings are placed in different genera and species. St Thomas gives the example of humanity as the essence of man.<sup>173</sup> What that means is this: essence is that by which real beings can be differentiated and placed in one or other of the ten categories. Placement in a category is taken in the sense in which a genus or species is placed in a category. Hence, humanity is the essence of man because it is humanity which groups human beings into a species of substance.

Furthermore St Thomas continues, it is by their definitions that things are sorted into their proper genus and species and hence located in a category; therefore, other philosophers have used other

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<sup>170</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*; Marietti, c. 1, n. 1, p. 9; Maurer, c. 1, n. 2, p. 30.

<sup>171</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 1, n. 2. Maurer 29-30. The passage is in the Marietti edition at c. 1, n. 1, p. 9. St Thomas explains the difference between privations and negations in *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 48, a. 3. Negation is a mere absence whereas privation is negation in a subject. The subject of privation and the subject of form are one and the same, namely, being in potentiality. The form which makes a thing actual is a perfection and a good, while a privation, which is the lack of a good which the subject should have, is an evil. The privation then can exist only in a being which, insofar as it is a being, is actualised and good. Thus, the subject of blindness is not sight but the animal. See also *idem*, q. 49, a. 3. It follows that St Thomas’s comment in *De ente et essentia* does not mean that privations do not exist in reality, for in fact privations are found in things as the lack of a good they should have. However, a privation is not a ‘thing’, with an essence and being of its own, although we may speak of it as if it were a being. See Maurer’s comment, *op. cit.*, n. 3, p. 30.

<sup>172</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*; Marietti, c. 1, n. 1, p. 9; Maurer, c. 1, n. 3, p. 30. The Latin in the Marietti edition is: “Nomen igitur essentiae non sumitur ab ente secundo modo dicto; aliqua enim dicuntur hoc modo entia, quae essentiam non habent, ut patet, in privationibus; sed sumitur essentia ab ente primo modo dicto. Unde Commentator, in eodem loco (5 Metaphys., text 14 – editorial footnote), dicit: < Ens primo modo dictum, est quod significat substantiam rei >.” What I have written in the text follows Maurer’s translation, including the translation of “substantiam rei” as “the essence of the thing”.

<sup>173</sup> St Thomas says: “Et quia, ut dictum est, ens hoc modo dictum dividitur per decem genera, oportet quod essentia significet aliquod commune omnibus naturis, per quas diversa entia in diversis generibus, et speciebus collocantur, sicut humanitas est essentia hominis, et sic de aliis.” *De ente et essentia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marietti ed., c. 1, n. 2, p. 9. The passage will be found in Maurer’s translation at c. 1, n. 3, p. 30.

terms for ‘essence’. Thus, philosophers sometimes use the term ‘quiddity’ for ‘essence’. Aristotle calls this *quod quid erat esse* – what something was to be; that is, that which makes a thing to be what it is.<sup>174</sup> Essence is also called ‘form’, because the word “form” signifies the determination of each thing, as Avicenna says. The term ‘form’ is here used in the sense of the ‘form of the whole’, which is nothing other than that which is expressed in the definition, and therefore is the equivalent of ‘essence’.<sup>175</sup> Another term which is the equivalent of ‘essence’ is ‘nature’, when using this term in the first of the four ways given by Boethius, where a nature is anything which can be grasped by the intellect, for a thing is intelligible only through its definition and essence. Aristotle also says that every substance is a nature, but the term used in this sense signifies the essence of a thing as directed to its proper operation, for no reality lacks its proper operation; so essence is that by which real beings are ordered to their proper operations.<sup>176</sup>

St Thomas closes this section with the following significant remark

*Quidditatis vero nomen sumitur ex hoc quod per definitionem significatur: sed essentia dicitur secundum quod per eam et in ea res habet esse.*<sup>177</sup>

In other words, the term ‘quiddity’ is taken from that which signifies the definition of a thing, while the term ‘essence’ is used because through it and in it (“per eam et in ea”) a real thing has existence (“res habet esse”).<sup>178</sup> Quite how a substance receives existence (*esse*) in and through essence St Thomas explains in the remainder of this treatise. For the moment he observes that, because we use the term ‘a being’ (*ens*) absolutely and primarily of substances and secondarily and with qualification of accidents, essence is in substances truly and properly, but is in accidents in a restricted and

<sup>174</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 1. Again, what I have written in the text is following Maurer’s translation: n. 4, p. 31; see also his editorial footnote 6. St Thomas’s Latin in the Marietti edition is: “inde est quod nomen essentiae a philosophis in nomen *quidditatis* mutatur; et hoc est quod Philosophus in 7 Metaphysicae frequenter nominat *quod quid erat esse*, idest hoc per quod aliquid habet esse quid.” Marietti ed., n. 2, p. 9. See also. Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence*, 47.

<sup>175</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 1; Maurer, n. 4, p. 31; Marietti, n. 2, p. 9. The ‘form of the whole’ is not the same as the substantial form which composes with matter to make a material substance. As St Thomas is using ‘form’ in the sense of the determination of each thing (“Dicitur etiam *forma*, secundum quod per formam significatur perfectio vel certitudo uniuscuiusque rei”), then he means ‘form’ in the sense of the nature or essence of a thing which, in a material substance, includes its matter. See Maurer’s editorial footnotes 7 and 8, p. 31. Hence, St Thomas’s point is that ‘essence’ signifies the total determination of a real being. See Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence*, 47.

<sup>176</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 1; Maurer, n. 4, pp. 31-32. Marietti ed., c. 1, n. 2, pp. 9-10. See also Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence*, 47.

<sup>177</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 1; Marietti ed., n. 2, p. 10.

<sup>178</sup> Cf. Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence*, 48.

qualified way. Furthermore, while essence is in both simple and composite substances, it is more truly and more perfectly in the former, because they have 'being' (*esse*) more perfectly. However, in accordance with the pedagogic principle of beginning with that which is easier, St Thomas begins the study of essences with composite substances.<sup>179</sup> However, before moving to St Thomas's study of 'essence' in composite substances, I wish to explore some implications for the understanding of '*ens*' in what has been said so far.

## 3.2 Complexity of Ens

### 3.21 Order of Cognition

**First**, St Thomas has introduced metaphysical language in speaking of being as composite and posterior in relation to essence as simple and prior. These relations imply some order between being and essence. St Thomas says that order always has reference to some principle, and that the term 'principle', while it seems to be derived from 'priority', signifies not priority but origin.<sup>180</sup> We recall too from *De principiis naturae* that while every cause is a principle, not every principle is a cause; for, while cause is also a beginning, it has the added characteristic of dependence of the effect upon the cause.<sup>181</sup> So, a relation of priority and posteriority implies order, and order requires some principle according to which the elements are designated as prior and posterior, and which itself operates as origin. Here we are speaking of the order of cognition; what can be the principle in such an order? It cannot be 'being', of course, as 'being' is itself one of the elements to be related to the principle.

In his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* St Thomas says that the principle in the order of cognition is that from which a thing first becomes known. Such principle may be intrinsic, that is grounded in motion evident to the senses, as our act of understanding bears a certain resemblance to motion, or extrinsic, as with axioms and other principles of demonstration. St Thomas suggests the *telos* of a thing as an intrinsic principle of knowledge and motion; the principle of non-contradiction, one would think, could be an extrinsic principle.<sup>182</sup> Be that as it may, the point to be

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<sup>179</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 1, nn. 5 and 6; Maurer, 32-33.

<sup>180</sup> These statements will be found at *Summa Theologiae*, q. 42, a. 3, c, and q. 33, a. 1, ad 3 respectively.

<sup>181</sup> *De principiis naturae*, c. 3; McDermott 73. St Thomas makes the same point at *Summa Theologiae*, q. 33, a. 1, c. In his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk. V, Lect. 1, n. 751, St Thomas says that while principle and cause are the same in subject they differ in meaning, for 'principle' implies an order or sequence while 'cause' implies some influence on the being of the thing caused; see also n. 760.

<sup>182</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk V, Lect. 1, nn. 754, 759, 762; see also *idem*, Lect. 13, nn. 937, 946-949.

observed is that, in beginning with the meaning of ‘a being’ and proceeding to the meaning of ‘an essence’, St Thomas is following an *order* of cognition, and within an order of cognition one seeks to understand not only the elements of the order but the relation between them. It is by submitting our understanding of ‘a being’ and ‘an essence’ to this discipline that St Thomas is able to move to the very structure of reality, as he does in his study of simple and composite substances.<sup>183</sup>

### 3.22 Equivocity of ‘ens’

**Secondly**, I wish to comment on the two meanings of the term ‘a being’ given by St Thomas: *ens per se* and the truth of propositions. St Thomas says he is taking the two meanings from Aristotle. In fact Aristotle gives four meanings for the expression ‘a being’, as follows: (i) accidental being (ii) *per se* being (iii) to say that something is true (iv) what is potentially and what is actually.<sup>184</sup> Joseph Owens argues that St Thomas groups (ii) and (iv) above to yield his first meaning of ‘a being’ (being as it is in the categories) and (i) and (iii) to yield his second meaning (signifying the composition of a proposition).<sup>185</sup> This grouping neatly correlates St Thomas’s two senses of being with essentiality and accidentality. The first sense (corresponding to Aristotle’s (ii) and (iv)), includes the being found in the ten categories, actual or potential. The categories, as St Thomas says, denote natures or essences, and therefore this way of saying ‘a being’ is an essential predication: it signifies the nature or essence of the very thing that exists. Meanwhile, St Thomas’s second sense of ‘a being’ (corresponding to Aristotle’s (i) and (iii)), denotes an accidental predicate; ‘accidental’ in what way?

<sup>183</sup> The opening sentence of St Thomas’s *Summa contra gentiles* is: “Multitudinis usus, quem in rebus nominandis sequendum Philosophus censet [II *Topic.*, I, 5; 109a], communiter obtinuit ut *sapientes* dicantur qui res directe ordinant et eas bene guberant.” “The usage of the multitude, which according to the Philosopher is to be followed in giving names to things, has commonly held that they are to be called *wise* who order things rightly and govern them well.” The Latin comes from S. Thomae De Aquino, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Roma: Casa Editrice Marietti, 1934). The English comes from Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book One: God, Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Anton C. Pegis, University of Notre Dame Press edition, 1975, Copyright 1955 by Doubleday & Co. These editions are used throughout this thesis. For an introduction to St Thomas’s notion of order see Andrew N. Woznicki, *Being and Order: The Metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas in Historical Perspective* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 11-22.

<sup>184</sup> Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, Bk Delta, Sect. VII, 1017a-1017b; Penguin ed., 125-126.

<sup>185</sup> Joseph Owens, “The Accidental and Essential Character of Being in the Doctrine of St Thomas Aquinas”, *Mediaeval Studies* 20 (1958), 1; re-printed in *St Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: Collected Papers of Joseph Owens, C.Ss.R.*, edited by John R. Catan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), 52, at 56-60. Page numbers are here taken from the collection edited by Catan. Owens takes the four senses of ‘being’ identified by Aristotle in a slightly different order from that above; (i) and (iii) above become (i) and (ii) in Owens’ treatment.

Well, as St Thomas says, only the first sense of ‘a being’ can give us ‘an essence’, so the second sense is accidental in the sense that it is outside the essence.<sup>186</sup>

In his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* St Thomas describes this usage of the term ‘being’ as ‘equivocal’ (*ex aequivocatione entis*), and for this reason. Being as signifying the composition of a true proposition is predicated accidentally, as the composition is made by the intellect with regard to a definite time, and to exist at this or that time is to be an accidental predicate. However, being as divided by the ten categories signifies the very nature of the ten categories insofar as they are actual or potential.<sup>187</sup> In other words, the usage of the term ‘being’ is equivocal, for the term may be predicated essentially (first way in *De ente et essentia*) and it may be predicated accidentally (second way in *De ente et essentia*).

A comment on St Thomas’s use of the term ‘equivocal’ is called for. Elsewhere in his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* St Thomas distinguishes between ‘pure’ or ‘absolute’ equivocation and other equivocation.<sup>188</sup> He does this in the context of commenting on Aristotle’s criticism of Plato’s theory of Ideas. St Thomas is considering the argument that, if both sensible things and intelligible things are substances, as the Platonists maintain, then it is necessary to posit in addition to both some common entity which is one-in-many. In other words, if sensible substances and the Ideas

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<sup>186</sup> “Unde, cum omne quod est praeter essentiam rei, dicatur accidens; esse quod pertinet ad quaestionem *an est*, est accidens.” “So, since all that is outside a thing’s essence may be called an accident, the being which pertains to the question ‘Is it?’ is an accident.” St Thomas, *Quodlibetal Questions* II, q. 2, a. 1, c. The Latin comes from S. Thomas Aquinatis, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, Editio VIII revisa., Cura et studio P. Fr. Raymundi Spiazzi, O.P. (Romae: Marietti, 1949), at 24. The English comes from St Thomas Aquinas, *Quodlibetal Questions 1 and 2*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Sandra Edwards (Toronto: PIMS, 1983), at 79. These editions are used throughout this thesis for this material. See also Owens, “The Accidental and Essential Character of Being”, 56-60. At p.57 Owens quotes the same passage from the *Quodlibetal Questions*, but cites it as “II, 3c; ed. Mandonnet, Paris, p. 43”.

<sup>187</sup> Having referred to the equivocal use of the term ‘being’ (“*ex aequivocatione entis*”), St Thomas continues: “Nam ens quod significat compositionem propositionis est praedicatum accidentale, quia compositio fit per intellectum secundum determinatum tempus. Esse autem in hoc tempore vel in illo, est accidentale praedicatum. Sed ens quod dividitur per decem praedicamenta, significat ipsas naturas decem generum secundum quod sunt actu vel potentia.” “... for being as signifying the composition of a proposition is predicated accidentally, since composition is made by the intellect with regard to a definite time. Now to exist at this or at that particular time is to be an accidental predicate. But being as divided by the ten categories signifies the very nature of the ten categories insofar as they are actual or potential.” St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk X, Lect. 3, n. 1982. The Latin and English quotations come from the editions already cited, details of which will also be found in the Bibliography. The context of this dictum is important, and I will return to it.

<sup>188</sup> The distinction between ‘pure’equivocation and other equivocation has already been referred to briefly in Section 2.1 above.

share a common nature, then it is necessary to posit some entity common to both and apart from both. On the other hand, if sensible substances which participate in the Ideas do not have the same form as the Ideas, then the name which is predicated of both Ideas and sensible substances is predicated in a purely equivocal way. Why is this? Because the sensible substances and the Ideas would then share a name but differ in their intelligible structure. Pure or absolute equivocation occurs where names are said to be “equivocal by chance”; i.e., they are given without any regard for a common attribute. However, in the case of things equivocal by chance, one cannot be known through the other. Therefore, it seems that this is not what Plato had in mind. Plato, says St Thomas citing Aristotle, speaks of the Idea of man as “man in himself”, whereas the man apprehended by the senses is said to be man by participation. Now here, St Thomas observes, the name which is predicated by participation is predicated with reference to something that is predicated essentially. This says St Thomas is not pure equivocation but rather “the multiplicity of analogy”.<sup>189</sup>

Therefore, the term ‘equivocal’ in St Thomas’s vocabulary does not carry the perjorative sense of the English ‘equivocation’. Indeed and as the above argument shows, St Thomas sometimes uses the term ‘equivocal’ where the difference is one of proportion or analogy.<sup>190</sup> Furthermore, again as the above argument shows and as Joseph Owens argues, in the Scholastic vocabulary to which St Thomas was heir, the term ‘equivocal’ could extend to cases where the equivocity is rooted in the things which are themselves named; indeed, the equivocity may be required by their very nature.<sup>191</sup> This is the case in the “man in himself” “man by participation” example given above; the equivocity is demanded by the fact that the nature “man” is held by essence in one case and in the other case by participation. Therefore, when St Thomas describes as equivocal the two usages of the term ‘a being’ identified by him in *De ente et essentia*, he may not mean that those usages are purely or absolutely equivocal, so that they have nothing to do with each other. Indeed, Owens argues that the equivocity here is rooted in the nature of the predications themselves, and is owing to St Thomas’s conception of *being as act*.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk I, Lect. 14, nn. 221-224.

<sup>190</sup> See, for example, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 29, n. 2. See also Roy J. Deferrari, Sister M. Inviolata Barry and Ignatius McGuinness, *A Lexicon of St Thomas Aquinas based on the Summa Theologica and selected passages of his other works* (Washington DC: CUA Press, 1948), sv ‘aequivocatio’, p 33.

<sup>191</sup> Joseph Owens, “The Accidental and Essential Character of Being in the Doctrine of St Thomas Aquinas”, 54-55. Owens gives the example of ‘being’, which “is of such a character that it can be either substantial or accidental.” Ibid., 55.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 59-60.

It is clear that St Thomas's identification of a twofold use of the term 'a being' is turning out to have significant implications. In order to draw out and assess these implications, I will first identify the context in which St Thomas recognises the equivocal use of the term 'being' in his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*. Then I will ask what St Thomas means when he says that 'being' as signifying the composition of a proposition is predicated accidentally. Finally I will consider why it might be that St Thomas introduces the equivocal use of the term 'being' (*ens*) at the stage that he does in *De ente et essentia*.

### 3.221 Context

At the point referred to above in his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* at which St Thomas deploys the equivocal use of the term 'being' in his argument, he is supporting the Aristotelian teaching that unity and being signify the same thing, as they have meanings corresponding to each of the categories and yet are contained in none of them; furthermore, unity and being signify the natures of the things of which they are predicated and not something added, like accidents.<sup>193</sup> St Thomas then refers to the opinion of Avicenna, who held that unity and being are accidental predicates, signifying a nature added to the things of which they are predicated. However continues St Thomas, Avicenna was led to this position because he was deceived by the equivocal use of the terms 'one' and 'being'.<sup>194</sup> From this we can see that St Thomas's recognition of the equivocal use of the term 'being' enables him to defend the Aristotelian teaching that 'being' (*ens*) signifies the nature of the thing and not something added to the nature, while yet recognising that the same term *ens* used in another way is predicated accidentally. Why is this? Because insofar as 'being' (*ens*) signifies essence or nature it signifies the very natures of the things found in the categories, actual or potential.<sup>195</sup>

### 3.222 Accidental Uses of 'ens'

What then, are the essential and accidental uses of the term 'being' (*ens*)? If one says "Socrates is a man" this is an essential predication, because it predicates of Socrates a nature in the category of

<sup>193</sup> This is in St Thomas's *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk X, Lect. 3. The paragraph already referred to in which St Thomas deploys the equivocal use of the term 'being' in his argument is 1982. The statement that unity and being signify the natures of things and not something added will be found in n. 1980. The Aristotelian teaching that unity and being signify the same thing is quoted by St Thomas at the beginning of this *Lectio*, and comes from Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, Book Iota, Ch. 2, 1054a; Penguin ed., 291-292.

<sup>194</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk X, Lect. 3, nn. 1981, 1982.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. Owens, "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being", 60-61.



substance – man. This is to predicate being ('is') by essence, because to signify nature in this way is to signify essence. Yet, the term 'being' (*ens*) is also used to signify the truth of the proposition. The term 'being' now signifies that the proposition "Socrates is a man" is a true proposition. This proposition is the fruit of a judgement one has made.<sup>196</sup> Therefore, 'is' now signifies that one has correctly joined "Socrates" and "man" in a proposition. In this case says St Thomas, 'being' is predicated accidentally, because the proposition is made by the intellect with regard to a definite time. Why should this make the predication accidental? St Thomas says: "to exist at this or that particular time is to be an accidental predicate", and the composition of subject and predicate in a proposition is made by the intellect with regard to a particular time.<sup>197</sup> In this case the term 'being' (*ens*) designates something that is accidental to the nature of which it is predicated.<sup>198</sup>

One may ask: why should the time at which the composition is made make its predication of being contained in the verb 'is' accidental? One explanation is that what we do in a judgement is express that our present knowledge is true. "It is completely accidental to Socrates, however, whether we know him today or tomorrow."<sup>199</sup> This approach, it seems to me, roots the accidentality in the time-conditioned contingency of our knowledge, while the object of our knowledge is itself constant in its nature.

Joseph Owens has a different focus. He argues that St Thomas's doctrine is sketched against an Aristotelian background: "The notion of the verb in a proposition as a speech form dependent upon

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<sup>196</sup> In his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* St Thomas cites the Aristotelian teaching that the terms 'being' and 'is' signify the composition of a proposition which the intellect makes when it combines and separates. Being then signifies that the statement is true, so that the truth of the thing can be said to determine the truth of the proposition after the manner of a cause. "Unde veritas propositionis potest dici veritas rei per causam. Nam ex eo quod res est vel non est, oratio vera vel falsa est. Cum enim dicimus aliquid esse, significamus propositionem esse veram. Et cum dicimus non esse, significamus non esse veram; et hoc sive in affirmando, sive in negando." "Thus the truth of a thing can be said to determine the truth of a proposition after the manner of a cause; for by reason of the fact that a thing is or is not, a discourse is true or false. For when we say that something is, we signify that a proposition is true; and when we say that something is not, we signify that it is not true. And this applies both to affirmation and to negation." Bk V, Lect., 9, n. 895. See James C. Doig, *Aquinas on Metaphysics: A historico-doctrinal study of the Commentary on the Metaphysics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), 164-165, 348-349.

<sup>197</sup> *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk X, Lect. 3, n. 1982.

<sup>198</sup> Owens says that in this context the grammatical form is not crucial; whether 'being' is expressed by the participle *ens* or the infinitive *esse*, it designates something accidental to the nature of which it is predicated. The reason that the grammatical form is not crucial is that accidental being does not enter the definition of the thing. See his "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being", 56 and 57.

<sup>199</sup> This is the explanation of James C. Doig in his *Aquinas on Metaphysics*, 164-165.

time for its signification is Aristotelian teaching, as is likewise the description of the verb ‘to be’ as the expression of the composition in a proposition.”<sup>200</sup> However, argues Owens, St Thomas modifies this background and moulds it to his own teaching. Thus, St Thomas collapses Aristotle’s four ways of expressing ‘being’ into two. Significantly, St Thomas brings together ‘being *per accidens*’ and ‘being in the sense of the true’. These two ways are contrasted with Aristotle’s other two, also collapsed into one: ‘being *per se*’ and ‘being as act and potentiality’. The point Owens is making is that the two ways of being in the first combination just mentioned, ‘being *per accidens*’ and ‘being as true’, now function in the same way; i.e., they both pre-suppose being as it is in the categories as ‘being *per se*’, and then predicate further combinations “across categories”, as it were. These predications are ‘accidental’ in the sense that they are subsequent to the categorial being pre-supposed.<sup>201</sup> Owens now quotes, in Latin, a passage from St Thomas’s answer to a question from Quodlibetal Question Two already referred to, as follows:

Ens autem non ponitur in definitione creaturae, quia nec est genus nec differentia; et ideo alia quaestio est *an est* et *quid est*. Unde, cum omne quod est praeter essentiam rei, dicatur accidens; esse quod pertinet ad quaestionem *an est*, est accidens; et ideo Commentator dicit in V Metaphysic., quod ista propositio, *Socrates est*, est de accidentali praedicato, secundum quod importat entitatem rei, vel veritatem propositionis. Sed verum est quod hoc nomen *ens*, secundum quod importat rem cui competit huiusmodi esse, sic significat essentiam rei, et dividitur per decem genera; ...

but being (*ens*) is not included in the definition of a creature because it is neither a genus nor a difference. So it is participated in as something not belonging to the thing’s essence. And therefore, the question “Is it?” is different from the question “What is it?” So, since all that is outside a thing’s essence may be called an accident, the being which pertains to the question “Is it?” is an accident. Therefore, the Commentator says on *Metaphysica* 5 that this proposition, ‘Socrates is’, is an accidental predication when it signifies either a thing’s being (*entitatem*) or the truth of a proposition. But it is true that this noun ‘being’ (*ens*), when it signifies a thing to which such being (*esse*) is attributable, signifies the thing’s essence and according to this signification being is divided into the ten categories.<sup>202</sup>

There is a lot packed into this passage. The crucial phrase “Unde participatur sicut aliquid non existens de essentia rei;”, translated by Edwards above as “So it is participated in as something not belonging to the thing’s essence” is not included by Owens, although it is in the edition which

<sup>200</sup> Owens, “The Accidental and Essential Character of Being”, 56.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 56-57. I am paraphrasing Owens; he does not use the expression “across categories” for example.

<sup>202</sup> The Latin is as quoted by Owens in his article “The Accidental and Essential Character of Being”, at 57. Owens cites the passage as *Quodl.*, II, 3c; ed. Mandonnet, Paris, 1926, p. 43. The English translation is taken from St Thomas, *Quodlibetal Questions 1 and 2*, q. 2, a. 1, c., translated with an Introduction and Notes by Sandra Edwards, already cited (p. 79). Edwards gives the Latin forms of ‘being’ as shown.

Edwards is using.<sup>203</sup> Nonetheless, we may observe that, because St Thomas is speaking of the being of creatures, he is speaking of being by participation. Earlier in the answer St Thomas has established that ‘being’ (*ens*) is predicated essentially of God alone and is predicated of any creature by participation. With that in mind, the heart of the argument, I suggest, is this: being is neither a genus nor a difference; therefore, the being of a creature cannot be placed in a category; it follows that it does not belong to the thing’s essence. Consequently, the questions “Is it?” and “What is it?” must be distinguished. Now, as everything which is outside a thing’s essence is an accident, the being which answers the question “Is it?” must be accidental to the thing. Therefore, following Averroes, the proposition ‘Socrates is’ is an accidental predication when it signifies either a thing’s being or the truth of a proposition. Yet it is also true that the noun ‘being’ in the sense of *ens* may signify a thing to which ‘being’ in the sense of *esse* is attributable, whereupon the noun ‘being’ in the sense of *ens* signifies the thing’s essence as that which is the thing; and according to this signification, ‘being’ is divided into the ten categories.

This passage makes clear why ‘being’ as signifying the truth of a proposition composed around the verb ‘to be’ is accidental to the thing of which it is predicated – it is outside the essence of the thing, and this is owing to the fact that ‘being’ cannot be located in a category in the manner of a genus or species but transcends all the categories. In my opinion, St Thomas uses the term *esse* strategically in this passage, namely to signify the answer to the question *an est* as distinct from the answer to the question *quid est*. I submit, therefore, that this usage puts a perspective on St Thomas’s teaching that being as signifying the composition of a proposition such as ‘Socrates is’ is an accidental predication made by the intellect at a definite time. The accidentality, I submit, is rooted not in the time-conditioned contingency of our knowledge, but in the nature itself of the participated being of the creature, and in the consequential character of our predications of being.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Edwards says in her Introduction (p. 24) that she is using the Spiazzi edition published by Casa Marietti. I have already cited this edition and the phrase will indeed be found there, in QuodL. II, q. 2, a. 1, c., at p. 24.

<sup>204</sup> As the discussion here is of beings existing in time, a word could be said on St Thomas’s conception of time. St Thomas teaches that God created together the heavens and the earth, the angelic nature, and time (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 46, a. 3, c. and ad 1). St Thomas frequently speaks of time as the measure of movement (for example, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 10, a. 4, c.). Now, as God is absolutely without motion, God is not measured by time, while those beings which are measured by time will be only those that are moved: see *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 15, n. 3. Thus, eternity is the measure of a permanent being while time is the measure of movement. The beings measured by time then will be material beings, those composed of matter and form. This raises the question of spiritual substances such as angels, which are simple but not simple in the way that God is simple (St Thomas establishes this in c. 4 of *De ente et essentia*). Is their substantial being measured by eternity or by time? St Thomas answers that their substantial being is measured neither by eternity nor by

The argument turns on the following: first, St Thomas has moved beyond Aristotle in sharply distinguishing the *an est* and *quid est* questions. Consequently, St Thomas has also moved beyond Aristotle in seeing the ‘being’ of creatures as participated. As St Thomas says many times, if we understand a perfection such as ‘being’ as participated in some beings, then this means that the same perfection must be held essentially by another being from whom the participated perfection is derived.<sup>205</sup> Furthermore, as every agent acts insofar as it is in act, and confers something similar to itself, then the participated perfection will be received as act.<sup>206</sup> Therefore, in every creature there must be a distinction between its essence and its existence. That existence will be the act of being of the creature, its actuality, its *actus essendi*, as *being* is the *actuality* of every form, nature or essence. This actuality St Thomas signals in the passage quoted above with the introduction of the word *esse*.<sup>207</sup> Therefore I submit that, in the case of material beings composed of matter and form, when

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time, but by that which St Thomas calls *aevum*, a word usually translated as “aeviternity”. Aeviternity, teaches St Thomas, differs from both eternity and time as the mean between them both (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 10, a. 5, c.). This structure, I would suggest, accords with St Thomas’s teaching that God is the creator of both time and the angelic nature, a teaching which entails, in my view, that God’s eternity is the principle of order between eternity, aeviternity and time. This is how St Thomas describes them in *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 10, a. 5, c. In this article, St Thomas describes aeviternity and time, not according to their individual characteristics, but according to the extent to which they recede from the permanence of being which is eternity. Some things recede from permanence of being to such an extent that their very substantial being is subject to change or consists in change. Here we find things composed of matter and form and they are measured by time. Other things recede less from permanence of being, so that their substantial being is neither subject to change nor consists in change; yet these things may be subject to change in their accidental being, either actually or potentially. Here we find angels, who may undergo change of place, and change in acts of understanding and of affection. It is in this way that aeviternity is a mean between eternity and time; i.e., aeviternity has no before and after in itself, but it is not incompatible with it either (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 10, a. 5, c.). The upshot of this is that spiritual substances are not measured by time in their substantial being. Therefore, the discussion in the text concerning being measured by time applies only to material beings composed of matter and form.

<sup>205</sup> For example, see *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 44, a. 1, c. *Idem* q. 61, a. 1, c.

<sup>206</sup> In *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 3, c, St Thomas says: “cum omne agens agat in quantum est in actu, oportet quod in quod per agentum efficitur, aliquo modo sit in agente; et inde est quod omne agens agit sibi simile.” “since every agent acts to the extent that it is in act, that which is effected by the agent must in some way exist in the agent. This is the reason why every agent causes something similar to itself.”

<sup>207</sup> One can generalise that, while in St Thomas’s day the infinitive *esse* could be used both concretely and abstractly, St Thomas’s custom was to use *esse* only in the latter sense. For example, in his *Exposition of the De Heptadibus of Boethius* St Thomas says: “Set id quod est siue ens, quamvis sit communissimum, tamen concretive dicitur, et ideo participat ipsum esse, non per modum quo magis commune participatur a minus communi, set participat ipsum esse per modum quo concretum participat abstractum.” “However, that-which-is, or being, although it is most common, is nevertheless said concretely. And so it participates in ‘to be’ itself, not in the way the more common is participated in by the less common, but rather it participates in ‘to be’ itself in the way in which the concrete participates in the abstract.” St Thomas, *An Exposition of the “On the Heptads” of Boethius*, c. 2, shortly before and shortly after line 100; translated with an Introduction by Janice L. Schultz and Edward A. Synan (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2001), pp. 18 and 19-20. I suggest therefore that St Thomas’s introduction of the infinitive *esse* in the passage quoted from *Quodlibetal Question II*, q. 2, a. 1

their being is signified propositionally and so subject to the discipline of time, the reason that their being is predicated accidentally is that the being so signified is the act of being of the thing. This act of being is necessarily occurring in time and defined in time. This existential character is necessarily built into the existential composition of the proposition: Socrates is.<sup>208</sup>

Furthermore, in my opinion this interpretation holds precisely because we are speaking of the participated being of creatures. In the *Summa Theologiae* St Thomas poses the question whether essence and being are the same in God. He answers that God is God's own essence and also God's own being – therefore essence and being are the same in God. One of St Thomas's reasons for this conclusion is that, where essence and being are distinct, being must be compared to essence as actuality to potentiality, as being is the actuality of essence. In God however there is no potentiality and, therefore, God's essence is God's being. However, an objection runs: we can know *whether* God exists, but we cannot know *what* God is. Therefore God's being (answer to the *whether* question) is not the same as God's essence (answer to the *what* question). St Thomas answers this objection as follows:

*To be* can mean either of two things. It may mean the act of being, or it may mean the composition of a proposition effected by the mind in joining a predicate to a subject. Taking *to be* in the first sense, we cannot understand God's being (or His essence); but only in the second sense. We know that this proposition which we form about God when we say *God is*, is true. And this we know from His effects, as was said above.<sup>209</sup>

The verb *esse* appears for *to be* in the Latin original:

Ad secundum dicendum quod *esse* dupliciter dicitur: uno modo, significat actum essendi; alio modo, significat compositionem propositionis, quam anima adinvenit coniungens praedicatum subjecto. Primo igitur modo accipiendo *esse*, non possumus scire *esse* Dei, sicut nec eius essentiam: sed solum secundo modo. Scimus enim quod haec propositio quam formamus de Deo, cum dicimus *Deus est*, vera est. Et hoc scimus ex eius effectibus, ut supra dictum est.<sup>210</sup>

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has to be significant. St Thomas's use of *ens* and *esse* is extensively discussed by Owens throughout his article "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being"; see esp. 66-71.

<sup>208</sup> Cf. Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 51-52.

<sup>209</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 4, ad 2. This is Anton Pegis's translation published by Random House in 1945: *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Volume One. The assertions in this paragraph appear more than once in St Thomas's work. See also *De Potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 1, for example.

<sup>210</sup> Taken from Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa Theologiae, Prima Pars*, Tertio Editio; Cura Fratrum eiusdem Ordinis, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Matriti, 1961.

When we speak of God we cannot use *esse* in the sense of God's *actus essendi*, because we cannot know God in God's essence. And as God's essence is God's being, we cannot know God's being either. In other words, to predicate *esse* of God in the sense of God's *actus essendi* would not be accidental but essential, and that we cannot do. However, we can predicate *esse* of God in the second sense, and we do so when we say "God is". We conceive this proposition in our minds and we know that it is true by reasoning from God's effects. This predication we would call not so much accidental as analogical. This dual situation is so because in God essence and being are one and the same – God's essence is to be. That is, in relation to God, the existential proposition 'God is' is either essential but one we cannot understand, or one we can understand but analogical. *Ens* cannot be used accidentally of God even when it is the truth of a proposition that is involved.

However, in creatures essence and being are not one and the same. Indeed, the being of creatures "is participated in as something not belonging to the thing's essence", and being is compared to essence as actuality to potentiality. Therefore, in relation to creatures, the infinitive *esse* signifies *both* the being that is actually exercised by the thing (its *actus essendi*) *and* the composition expressed in the existential judgement.<sup>211</sup> And in *both* cases *esse* signifies *being* according to a particular time. And in both cases the signification is accidental to the thing, as it signifies the actualisation of the essence rather than the essence *per se*.<sup>212</sup> I suggest that, this is precisely why St Thomas brings together Aristotle's meanings (i) and (iii) of 'being', being *per accidens* and being as the composition of a true proposition: both are accidental to the thing in the sense they are not part of the essence of the thing, not part of what the thing definitively is.<sup>213</sup> Furthermore, in both cases the being signified is outside all the categories.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Joseph Owens reaches a similar conclusion. Owens asks: "Does St Thomas then understand that the verb, which according to Aristotelian doctrine expresses being according to a particular time, signifies both the being that is actually exercised by the thing and the composition that is found in the judgement?", and answers that St Thomas does indeed so understand. "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being", 58. Owens, however, relies on a different text from that on which I have relied, and cites it as *In I Periherm.*, lect. 5; ed. Leonine, no. 22.

<sup>212</sup> "Hoc autem primo sciendum est de eo quod quid erat esse, quod oportet quod praedicetur secundum se. Illa enim quae praedicantur de aliquo per accidens, non pertinent ad quod quid erat esse illius." "Regarding essence it should first of all be borne in mind that it must be predicated of a thing essentially; for those things which are predicated of a thing accidentally do not belong to its essence." St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VII, Lect. 3, n. 1309. Each of the Latin and the English is quoted from the Latin and the English editions already cited, so that the English translation is that of John P. Rowan.

<sup>213</sup> "Hoc enim intelligimus per quod quid erat esse alicujus, quod convenienter responderi potest ad quaestionem de eo factam per quid est. Cum autem de aliquo quaerimus quid est, non possumus convenienter respondere ea quae insunt ei per accidens;" "For by the essence of a thing we mean the proper answer which

This then is why the term ‘being’ is equivocal; on the one hand it may signify the very essence or nature of a created thing while on the other hand it may signify an actuality that lies outside the essence. The latter usage is accidental to the thing for that very reason. This structure is directly related to participation because we are able to speak in this way only in relation to created beings whose being is compared to their essence as actuality to potentiality. This sharp distinction between essence and actuality will be developed by St Thomas in subsequent chapters of *De ente et essentia*, yet it is already underpinned by the two senses of ‘being’ introduced in chapter one. This is because the differentiation of the two senses of being at the start of *De ente et essentia* points directly to essence as something positive in reality which can be defined by means of genus and specific differentia, a nature located in a category, that which a thing definitively is; an essence is not merely something about which an affirmative proposition can be formed. In this way the differentiation of the two senses of ‘being’ helps to define St Thomas’s notion of participation in at least some of its manifestations. One would not expect to speak of participation in relation to essence if essence is the nature of the thing itself, that which the thing definitively is.<sup>215</sup>

### 3.223 Equivocity of ‘ens’: What it is doing in *de Ente et Essentia*

This brings me to the third question adumbrated at the end of Section 3.22 above: why might it be that St Thomas introduces the equivocal use of the term ‘being’ at the stage that he does in *De ente et essentia*? I address this question over the next several paragraphs and offer an answer in paragraph 3.2232. One reason for St Thomas’s strategy is that just mentioned – to sharpen the meaning of ‘an essence’; another is to sharpen the meaning of ‘a being’. Furthermore, the distinction of uses of the term ‘being’ enables St Thomas to follow the Aristotelian teaching that ‘being’ in the sense of the truth of a proposition is not studied within metaphysics; rather

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can be given to the question asking what it is. And when we ask what a thing is we cannot give a proper answer by mentioning attributes which belong to it accidentally;” St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VII, Lect. 3, n. 1309; Latin and English editions already cited.

<sup>214</sup> In developing this argument I have drawn extensively on Owens, “The Accidental and Essential Character of Being”, esp. pp 56-61. I have also found assistance in Peter Weigel, *Aquinas on Simplicity: An Investigation into the Foundations of his Philosophical Theology* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), 68ff. I acknowledge these debts with gratitude, but I do not wish to father my argument on either Owens or Weigel. Their analyses bear more similarity to each other than they do to what I have written.

<sup>215</sup> See, for example, St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk I, Lect. 10, nn. 154 and 155. St Thomas is here discussing Plato’s notion of participation rather than his own, but the general remarks to do with the nature of participation would seem to apply to both. See also *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 52, n. 8.

metaphysics is concerned with 'being' in the sense of the categories, which express the natures of things according to genus and species.<sup>216</sup>

### 3.2231 Ens, Essence and Privation

I wish to begin by sharpening a little further St Thomas's understanding of 'an essence'; and in order to do that I wish to address first this issue: how does St Thomas's differentiation of the two senses of 'being' illuminate the distinction between an essence and a privation advanced at the beginning of *De ente et essentia*? I have already said that St Thomas's differentiation of the two senses of 'being' enables him to point to 'an essence' as something positive in reality, which, of course, a privation is not. But how does that come about, as we can speak of a privation too as if it were something positive in reality, as for example when we say "Blindness is in the eye". To answer these questions we need to examine closely the manner in which St Thomas introduces the two senses of 'a being' in *De ente et essentia*.

St Thomas introduces 'a being' (*ens*) as referring to a composite.<sup>217</sup> I have already observed that this means that the term 'a being' (*ens*) which St Thomas is about to differentiate into two meanings is being used to designate not first 'an essence' and secondly its act of being, but the composite whole, which includes both. This is how the two meanings of 'a being' can be used to plot the difference between 'an essence' and a privation. Up until now I have been speaking of the differentiation of the two meanings of 'a being' as if that differentiation mirrors a sharp differentiation of 'an essence' and its act of being. However, the term 'a being' can also refer to a composite, a substance, in which essence and act of being are composed, and which is something positive in reality. In that case, the first sense of the term 'a being' (i.e., as it is divided by the ten categories) can refer to *both* the essence *and* its act of being. Or, to put it another way, the act of being of a thing can be spoken of in *both* senses of 'being'.

Indeed, St Thomas does refer to the two senses of 'being' in precisely this way:

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<sup>216</sup> Doig, *Aquinas on Metaphysics*, 164-165. St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VI, Lect. 4, nn. 1241 and 1242.

<sup>217</sup> "Quia vero ex compositis cognitionem simplicium accipere debemus, ... ideo ex significatione *entis* ad significationem *essentiae* procedendum est." "We ought to get our knowledge of simple things from composite things ... For this reason we must begin with the meaning of 'a being' and proceed to the meaning of 'an essence'." St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*; Marietti ed., Prooemium, n. 2, p. 9; Maurer's translation c. 1, n. 1; p. 29.



quod ens et esse dicitur dupliciter, ut patet V *Metaph.* [lib. X, text. 13 et 14]. Quandoque enim significat *essentiam* rei, sive actum essendi; quandoque vero significat *veritatem* propositionis, etiam in his quae esse non habent: sicut dicimus quod caecitas est, quia verum est hominem esse caecum.

‘Being’ and ‘is’ may be taken in two ways (*Metaph.* X, 13, 14). Sometimes they signify the essence of a thing and the act of being, and sometimes they denote the truth of a proposition even in things that have no being: thus we say that *blindness is* because it is true that a man is blind.<sup>218</sup>

One may ask, however, how this can be. ‘A being’ (*ens*) in the first sense points to ‘an essence’ in the sense of the nature of a thing which locates it in a category. However, ‘being’ in the sense of ‘act of being’ (*esse*) is not located in a category, as ‘being’ is neither a genus nor a difference. However, when we speak of ‘a being’ in the sense of a composite whole, we speak of the ‘act of being’ of the thing proportioned to its nature or essence. Hence, in Book Five of his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, St Thomas, discussing the Aristotelian division of being and the ways in which ‘being’ can be essential and accidental, says:

Accidit autem unicuique rei quod aliquid de ipsa vere affirmetur intellectu vel voce. Nam res non referetur ad scientiam, sed e converso. Esse vero quod in sui natura unaquaeque res habet, est substantiale. Et ideo, cum dicitur, Socrates est, si ille Est primo modo accipitur, est de praedicato substantiali. Nam ens est superius ad unumquodque entium, sicut animal ad hominem. Si autem accipitur secundo modo, est de praedicato accidentali.

Now it is accidental to a thing that an attribute should be affirmed of it truly in thought or in word, for reality is not referred to knowledge but the reverse. But the act of being which each thing has in its own nature is substantial; and therefore when it is said that Socrates is, if the *is* is taken in the first way, it belongs to the class of substantial predicates; for being is a higher predicate with reference to any particular being, as animal with reference to man. But if it is taken in the second way, it belongs to the class of accidental predicates.<sup>219</sup>

I take this to mean the following. In this *lectio* St Thomas discusses the division of ‘being’ into ‘essential being’ and ‘accidental being’. This division refers to the manner of predication; so that, when something is predicated essentially of something else, the ‘is’ is part of the predicate. This is

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<sup>218</sup> St Thomas, *De Potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 1. The Latin is quoted from S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones Disputatae*, Vol. II *De Potentia*, Editio VIII revisa., Cura et studio R.P. Pauli M. Pession (Romae: Marietti, 1949). The English is quoted from Saint Thomas Aquinas, *On the Power of God (Quaestiones Disputatae De Potentia Dei)*, Third Book, Literally translated by the English Dominican Fathers (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1934). See also *Summa Theologiae*, q. 3, a. 4, ad 2, quoted above: “quod esse dupliciter dicitur: uno modo, significat actum essendi; alio modo, significat compositionem propositionis, quam anima adinvenit coniungens praedicatum subiecto.” “*To be* can mean either of two things. It may mean the act of being, or it may mean the composition of a proposition effected by the mind in joining a predicate to a subject.”

<sup>219</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk V, Lect. 9, n. 896. The Latin and English editions quoted are the ones previously cited. Cf. Doig, *Aquinas on Metaphysics*, 311-313,

referred to in the passage just quoted as the “first way” in which ‘is’ might be taken. In this sense ‘being’ is divisible into the ten predicaments (“ens secundum se dividitur in decem praedicamenta”). However, the word ‘is’ can also signify the truth of a proposition, and this is referred to as the “second way” in the passage just quoted.<sup>220</sup> In the same passage St Thomas also introduces the notion of “substantial being”, which is the *esse* which each thing has *in sui natura*. Therefore, when the term ‘a being’ refers to a composite, so that its act of being is proportioned to and composed with its essence (“the act of being which each thing has in its own nature”), the ‘act of being’ can be understood in both senses of ‘being’. In the first sense it is a substantial predicate, because it is the ‘being’ of the substance. This fits the description of the first sense of ‘being’, because ‘being’ is a “higher predicate” with reference to the composite being. Why is ‘being’ a “higher predicate”? Well, as St Thomas’s example of “animal with reference to man” shows, ‘being’ is more general and more universal than ‘nature’; therefore, it is ‘being’ which is divided by the ten categories. However, the ‘act of being’, the ‘is’ of “Socrates is”, can also be understood in the second sense, and then it is an accidental predicate. And why is it then accidental? Because it is accidental to a thing to affirm truly, in thought or in word, an attribute of it, “for reality is not referred to knowledge but the reverse”.<sup>221</sup>

I suggest then that St Thomas’s distinction of the two senses of ‘being’ underlines this point for us: When we speak of *esse* as ‘substantial being’, we speak of that which is *intrinsic* to the thing. As St Thomas says elsewhere, nothing can be more formal than *being*. Therefore, *being* is not determined as if it were potentiality determined by something else in act; rather *esse* is determined to the recipient nature as act determined by potentiality. Thus, it is because of its *actus essendi* that a thing actually exists.<sup>222</sup>

How does this analysis of our understanding of ‘being’ and our use of the copula ‘is’ illuminate the distinction between an essence and a privation, given that we can and do speak of both of them in

<sup>220</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk V, Lect. 9, nn. 885, 893, 894, 895. The words quoted in Latin will be found in n. 885.

<sup>221</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk V, Lect. 9, n. 896.

<sup>222</sup> As St Thomas says in the passage from his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* already quoted: “Esse vero quod in sui natura unaquaeque res habet, est substantiale.” “the act of being which each thing has in its own nature is substantial”. Bk V, Lect. 9, n. 896. The points made in the text to do with nothing being more formal than ‘being’ and, consequently, the determination of ‘being’ as act by potentiality, are made by St Thomas in *De potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9. In the same paragraph St Thomas insists, of course, that *being* is essentially distinct from that to which it is added and by which it is determined. On the intrinsicity of the *actus essendi* to the subsisting thing see Luis Cortest, *The Disfigured Face: Traditional Natural Law and Its Encounter with Modernity* (New York: Fordham UP, 2008), Ch. One, esp. pp. 8ff.

terms of being? The analysis means that, for whatever exists in nature, such a thing 'is' according to the first way, and it is also the subject of 'being' according to the second way. This is because an affirmative proposition ("Socrates is") can always be formed concerning whatever exists in nature. Indeed, the second way is related to the first as effect to cause, for the truth of the proposition follows on the real existence of the thing.<sup>223</sup> Yet, the reverse is not true. The intellect may treat a non-being such as a negation or a privation as 'a being' and speak of it accordingly. This is to speak of it as 'a being' in the second way; but it does not follow that it can be spoken of in the first way. Why is that? Because the second way follows on the first as effect from cause; the first does not follow on the second. Consequently, when we speak of a negation or a privation as 'a being' we do so only in a logical or intentional way; we do not signify something existent in reality.

### 3.2232 Answer to the Question put in Paragraph 3.223

It appears then that St Thomas has introduced the differentiation of the two meanings of the term 'a being' at the beginning of *De ente et essentia* for precisely this reason: to show that the term 'an essence' can be used only of those things which exist in nature, which have a positive existence in reality; therefore, the term 'an essence' is derived from 'a being' in the first meaning of the term, not the second. Yet the analysis also shows that our tendency to speak of privations and negations in terms of 'being' is nonetheless legitimate, because in that usage we predicate 'being' in the second way and not the first. This is because the negation or privation is said *to be* on the grounds that the proposition in which the negation or privation is spoken of is true.<sup>224</sup> Therefore, this structure shows that we can speak of negations and privations as if they were real, without supposing that they have essences and natures of their own and so exist in nature.<sup>225</sup> Furthermore, if negations and privations cannot be said to have being in the first way, then they cannot be said to have substantial being. This means that they cannot cause a substance to be, because every agent acts to the extent that it is in act and thereby causes something similar to itself, so that that which is effected by the agent must in

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<sup>223</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk V, Lect. 9, n. 896.

<sup>224</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk V, Lect. 9, n. 896.

<sup>225</sup> For an extended discussion of these issues see Jan Aertsen, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas's Way of Thought* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1988), 20-25.

some way exist in the agent.<sup>226</sup> Hence, “it belongs to a thing to have an efficient cause according as it has being”.<sup>227</sup>

### 3.2233 Ens: Substance

There is yet another aspect to the differentiation of the meanings of ‘a being’ worth emphasising: it indicates the sense in which ‘being’, *ens*, is to be treated in *De ente et essentia*, and that is in the sense of ‘being’ as composite, or ‘being’ as substance. Now, as we have seen above, when the term ‘being’ is used in this sense it includes *both* essence *and* its act of being.<sup>228</sup> In *De ente et essentia*, when St Thomas explains that the term ‘an essence’ is derived from the first meaning of the term ‘a being’, he says as follows:

sed sumitur essentia ab ente primo modo dicto. Unde Commentator, in eodem loco, dicit: “Ens primo modo dictum, est *quod significat substantiam rei*”.<sup>229</sup>

Here St Thomas regards his *essentia* as the equivalent of Averroes’ (the Commentator) *substantia rei*, to the extent that each is derived from *ens* said in the first way.<sup>230</sup>

One may ask: how else might St Thomas have regarded ‘being’ as the subject of a treatise on being and essence? Well, he could have treated ‘being’ as *always* accidental to a thing. However, it is precisely the sense of ‘being’ as necessarily accidental that St Thomas means to reject by differentiating the two senses of ‘a being’ in the first place, as he says that Avicenna was deceived by the equivocal use of the term ‘being’ into believing that ‘being’ was a nature added to a thing in the

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<sup>226</sup> “Sciendum est igitur, quod, cum omne agens agat in quantum est in actu, oportet quod in quod per agentum efficitur, aliquo modo sit in agente; et inde est quod omne agens agit sibi simile.” St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 3, c.

<sup>227</sup> “Unicuique autem competit habere causam agentem, secundum quod habet esse.” St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, q. 44, a. 1, ad 3.

<sup>228</sup> See St Thomas, *De Potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 1, already cited.

<sup>229</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, Marietti editio tertia, c. 1, n. 1, p. 9; italics in original.

<sup>230</sup> Indeed, that is precisely how Maurer translates *substantia* in his English edition that I have been using: “‘an essence’ is derived from ‘a being’ in the first meaning of the term. As the Commentator says, a being in the first sense of the term is that which signifies the essence of the thing.” *De ente et essentia*, c. 1, n. 3, Maurer p. 30. Deferrari et al. in their *A Lexicon of St Thomas Aquinas* also give *the essence of a thing* for *substantia rei*; sv *substantia*, 1063 at 1067. For St Thomas’s explanation of the two meanings of ‘substance’ as (a) a supposit in the genus of substance (‘first substance’), and (b) the quiddity or nature of a thing (‘second substance’), see his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk X, Lect. 3, n. 1979. I will discuss the two meanings of ‘substance’ according to St Thomas, and their bearing on the present discussion, in Section 3.3 below.

manner of an accident.<sup>231</sup> Therefore, the sense of ‘being’ which St Thomas intends to study in *De ente et essentia* is being in the sense of a composite thing existing in nature. “Composite” in what sense? St Thomas has yet to explain this, of course, but it will turn out to be essence composed with its act of being. It is St Thomas’s manipulation of the notion of essence/existence composition which enables him to limit the concept of matter to corruptible being while yet extending the Aristotelian couplet of act and potency beyond matter/form composition. As I have already argued, it is in here, in St Thomas’s notion of act and potency as such, that his notion of participation finds its genesis.

### 3.224 Sense of ‘ens’ Composed with Essence

St Thomas says that ‘an essence’ is found in both composite and simple substances. The question arises: in which of its senses does ‘being’ enter into composition with ‘an essence’? We have seen that ‘an essence’ is derived from the first meaning of the term ‘being’. It is tempting to add that ‘being’ in its second sense as the act of being predicated of the thing corresponds to the ‘act of being’ with which ‘an essence’ enters into composition. This, however, is clearly not the case. As St Thomas’s introduction of the issues in *De ente et essentia* shows, the intellect grasps ‘a being’ as composite, and that is substantial being, or the ‘act of being’ which each thing has in its own nature. Therefore, in *De ente et essentia*, St Thomas is concerned with the act of being not as it is predicated of a thing but the act of being as one of the constitutive principles of the being as ‘a being’. That is ‘act of being’ in the first sense (i.e., ‘being’ as it is divided by the categories) for, as has been shown, ‘act of being’ can be said in both senses of ‘being’.

There are a couple of further aspects to which one might refer in order to round out the discussion. First, I have already argued, following Joseph Owens, that St Thomas’s two meanings of ‘a being’ actually collapse into two Aristotle’s four senses of ‘being’. So, just as St Thomas’s first sense, being as it is in the categories, combines Aristotle’s being *per se* and being as act and potency, St Thomas’s second sense combines Aristotle’s being *per accidens* and being as signifying the truth of a proposition. Now, the second sense can extend to negations and privations and therefore to things which do not have a nature. In other words, the second sense can extend beyond the categories.

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<sup>231</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk X, Lect. 3, nn. 1981 and 1982. For discussion see Doig, *Aquinas on Metaphysics*, 164-167. I will pick up St Thomas’s response to Avicenna’s position on existence as an accident in an extended treatment in Section 6.1 of this thesis.

Clearly then, being in the second sense cannot enter into composition with an essence, as essences are defined insofar as they are located within a category.<sup>232</sup>

This leads to the second point: if we say that 'being' in the first sense signifies being as it is divided by the categories, how does this line up with St Thomas's oft-cited teaching that being is not a genus, as it has been argued that, in *De ente et essentia*, St Thomas locates essences or natures in a category in the sense that genera and species are located in a category? St Thomas offers more than one proof for the Aristotelian teaching that being is not a genus; a straightforward one relevant to the present point is as follows. Parmenides taught that besides being there is only non-being and non-being is nothing. Therefore, being is whatever is and being is one. St Thomas criticises this argument because it treats being as if it were one in intelligible structure and in nature, like a genus. But being is predicated of many things in many ways. Therefore being cannot have one nature like a genus or a species. Therefore being is not a genus.<sup>233</sup>

This response shows the answer to the question just posed concerning the non-generic character of 'being' and the location of 'an essence' within a category. When *ens* designates the composite thing that exists it is being used in the first sense. In this way *ens* designates all the 'being' that is divided into the categories. Thus, to say that 'being' is divided by the categories is not to say that 'being' is itself located in a category as if it were a genus or a species; it is rather to say that 'being' signifies the nature of the categories insofar as they are actual or potential. In that sense 'being' is in all the categories.<sup>234</sup> St Thomas can say this because he has rejected the Avicennian teaching that 'being' signifies a nature added to the thing of which it is predicated. On the contrary, a thing's own act of being is one of the constitutive principles of the thing as a being. On the other hand, when *ens* or *esse* is used in the second way, that is as an accidental predicate, it now reaches beyond the

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<sup>232</sup> Cf. Owens, "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being", 80-81.

<sup>233</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk I, Lect. 9, nn. 138 and 139.

<sup>234</sup> Recall the following passage from St Thomas's *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk V, Lect. 9, n. 896, already quoted: "Esse vero quod in sui natura unaquaeque res habet, est substantiale. Et ideo, cum dicitur, Socrates est, si ille Est primo modo accipiatur, est de praedicato substantiali. Nam ens est superius ad unumquodque entium, sicut animal hominem." "the act of being which each thing has in its own nature is substantial; and therefore when it is said that Socrates is, if the *is* is taken in the first way, it belongs to the class of substantial predicates; for being is a higher predicate with reference to any particular being, as animal with reference to man." In other words, 'being' is more general and more universal than 'nature', just as 'animal' is more general and more universal than 'man'. Therefore, 'being' is in all the categories.

categories, as was shown above. Therefore, being is not a genus because it transcends the categories.<sup>235</sup>

### 3.3 Substance, Essence and *Actus Essendi*

It is apparent, as I have already indicated, that in some passages in *De ente et essentia* St Thomas treats the terms *substantia* and *essentia* as equivalent.<sup>236</sup> Yet it is also apparent that in *De ente et essentia* St Thomas sets the terms ‘an essence’ and ‘a being’ in a sort of tension in order to set up the two meanings of ‘a being’. Thus, he suggests that ‘an essence’ is simple and ‘a being’ is composite. Now, when St Thomas says that ‘an essence’ is simple and ‘a being’ is composite, he means that each is so in the manner in which he is then speaking of them; i.e., in relation to the whole. It is because of this relation of composition to simplicity that, St Thomas says, we begin with the meaning of ‘a being’ and proceed to ‘an essence’.<sup>237</sup> I would argue then that this usage of ‘a being’ is equivalent to ‘a substance’ in the sense of a supposit in the category of ‘substance’; and, consequently, I would further argue that the terms ‘a substance’ and ‘an essence’ can be differentiated and placed in sort of tension in relation to the whole.

To understand these usages of the terms ‘substance’ and ‘essence’ we need to understand that St Thomas, following Aristotle, frequently distinguishes two meanings of the term ‘substance’. In his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* St Thomas says that, in its first sense, the term ‘substance’ signifies a supposit in the genus of substance; this is called *first substance* and *hypostasis*, and to ‘substance’ in this sense it properly belongs to subsist. In a second sense ‘substance’ means the quiddity or nature of a thing. This is called *second substance*; a second substance does not signify

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<sup>235</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk X, Lect. 3, nn. 1981 and 1982. See also Doig, *Aquinas on Metaphysics*, 222-223 and Owens, “The Accidental and Essential Character of Being”, 60-61.

<sup>236</sup> For example: “sed sumitur essentia ab ente primo modo dicto. Unde Commentator, in eodem loco (Averroes in 5 Metaphys., text. 14 – editor) dicit: <<Ens primo modo dictum, est quod significat substantiam rei>>. St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 1, n. 1; Marietti ed., p. 9.

<sup>237</sup> “Quia vero ex compositis cognitionem simplicium accipere debemus, et ex posterioribus devenire in priora, ut a facilioribus incipientibus convenientior fiat disciplina, ideo ex significatione *entis* ad significationem *essentiae* procedendum est.” St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, Marietti ed., Prooemium, n. 2, p. 9.

particular subsisting things but rather the quiddity of a thing; i.e., a nature in the genus of substance.<sup>238</sup>

In dealing with a question in *De potentia Dei*, St Thomas explains that the reason for the distinction of the two senses of 'substance' is that several subjects may have a common nature, so that it is necessary to distinguish that which is one from that which is multiple.<sup>239</sup> St Thomas continues that the common nature is called the essence or quiddity, for it is signified by the definition which indicates what a thing is. Therefore, whatever is included in the common nature is included in the signification of the essence. This, however, cannot be said of everything that is contained in the individual substance, simply because the individual substance is individuated.<sup>240</sup> St Thomas continues that an individual substance is individuated by individual matter and individual accidents. However, in simple substances (i.e., spiritual beings such as angels) there is no matter to individualise the nature. Consequently, in substances composed of matter and form, the subject is not identical with its essence, so that the essence is compared to the individual substance as a formal part thereof, while in simple substances there is no distinction between the essence and the subject, so that their very essence is subsistent.<sup>241</sup> Therefore says St Thomas, in material substances, essence and

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<sup>238</sup> "Sciendum est igitur quod substantia dicitur dupliciter. Uno modo suppositum in genere substantiae, quod dicitur substantia prima et hypostasis, cuius proprie est subsistere. Alio modo quod quid est, quod etiam dicitur natura rei. ... Propter quod dicitur in praedicamentis, quod secundae substantiae, quae sunt genera et species, non significant hoc aliquid quod est substantia subsistens, sed <<significant quale quid>> idest naturam quamdam in genere substantiae." St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk X, Lect. 3, n. 1979. St Thomas gives a rather fuller explanation of the two senses of 'substance' in *Idem*, Bk V, Lect. 10, nn. 903 and 904. In n. 903 and in n. 1979 just quoted St Thomas refers to 'first substance' as 'hoc aliquid'. Thus, in n. 903, speaking of 'substantia prima', St Thomas says: "Et hoc est, quod est hoc aliquid, quasi per se subsistens, et quod est separabile, quia est ab omnibus distinctum et non communicabile multis."

<sup>239</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 9, a. 1, c. In his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk X, Lect. 3, n. 1979, St Thomas observes that, if one agrees with Plato that universals are subsistent things, then they are substances in both senses. However, if one agrees with Aristotle as St Thomas does that universals are not subsistent things, then they are substances only in the second sense.

<sup>240</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 9, a. 1, c. As St Thomas says, if everything in the individual substance were to belong to the common nature, there would be no distinction between individual substances of the same nature.

<sup>241</sup> "Hoc autem quod est in substantia particulari praeter naturam communem, est materia individualis quae est singularitatis principium, et per consequens accidentia individualia quae materiam praedictam determinant. Comparatur ergo essentia ad substantiam particularem ut pars formalis ipsius, ut humanitas ad Socratem. Et ideo in rebus, ex materia et forma compositis, essentia non est omnino idem quod subiectum; unde non praedicatur de subiecto: non enim dicitur quod Socrates sit una humanitas. In substantiis vero simplicibus, nulla est differentia essentiae et subiecti, cum non sit in eis materia individualis naturam communem individuans, sed ipsa essentia in eis est subsistentia." St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 9, a. 1, c.



substance are really distinct but not altogether diverse, as essence is a formal part of the substance, while in immaterial substances, essence and substance are the same in reality but differ logically.<sup>242</sup> St Thomas concludes that two things are proper to the substance which is a subject: first, it subsists in itself, and second it is the foundation to accidents. It is for the latter reason that it is called *hypostasis* by the Greeks and *substantia prima* by the Latins, so that *hypostasis* and *substantia* differ in thought but not in reality.<sup>243</sup>

Thusfar St Thomas has established that, in the case of individual material substances, subject and essence may both be termed ‘a substance’, but are not identical, while in the case of immaterial individual substances (such as angels), subject and essence are identical but may be distinguished in thought. This situation occurs because St Thomas is treating matter as the principle of individuation. The picture alters however if we shift attention to *being*. In a question in *De potentia Dei* other than the question so far considered, St Thomas observes that in every creature there is a distinction between the creature and that which the creature has. In composite creatures this distinction is twofold, as the individual supposit has the nature of its species and also has being (*esse*). In simple substances however there is only one difference, namely that between essence and existence. Thus, in the case of angels, each angel is its own nature, but not its own being.<sup>244</sup> It can be seen in this response that, while St Thomas continues to affirm an identity of nature and supposit in created spiritual substances such as angels, the introduction of *being* (*esse*) leads him to say that an angel is not its own being; it follows that its essence and its existence are distinct. Consequently, when we begin to speak of ‘being’, we get a sort of breach in the simplicity of spiritual substances, such as angels: their existence is outside their essence – as indeed it must be; only in God does essence include *being*.

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<sup>242</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 9, a. 1, c.

<sup>243</sup> “Patet ergo quod hypostasis et substantia differunt ratione, sed sunt idem re.” St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 9, a. 1, c.

<sup>244</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 4, c.: “In qualibet autem creatura invenitur differentia habentis et habiti. In creaturis namque compositis invenitur duplex differentia, quia ipsum suppositum sive individuum habet naturam speciei, sicut homo humanitatem, et habet ulterius esse; ... In substantiis vero simplicibus est una tantum differentia, scilicet essentiae et esse. In Angelis enim quodlibet suppositum est sua natura: quidditas enim simplicis est ipsum simplex, ut dicit Avicenna [lib. V *Metaph.*, cap. V]; non est autem suum esse; unde ipsa quidditas est in suo esse subsistens.”

St Thomas takes up this issue in the later *Quodlibetal Questions II*. In question 2, St Thomas is asked, first, whether an angel is a composite of essence and being (*esse*) in the manner of a substance, and secondly, whether supposit and nature are diverse in an angel.<sup>245</sup> In response to the first question St Thomas answers that something is predicated of something in one of two ways: by essence or by participation. Now, 'being' (*ens*) is predicated in the manner of an essence of God alone, and is predicated of any creature in the manner of participation. However, when something is predicated of another in the manner of participation, there must be something in the latter besides that in which it participates. Consequently, in any creature, the creature itself which has being and its being are distinct. Furthermore, something is participated in two ways; in one way it is participated in as though belonging to the substance of the thing participating, as a genus is participated in by a species. However, a creature does not participate in being in this way, for that which belongs to the substance of a thing enters into its definition, and being (*ens*) is not included in the definition of a creature, for it is neither a genus nor a difference. So, 'being' is participated in as something not belonging to the thing's essence. Thus, St Thomas concludes, if there is composition in an angel of essence and being (*essentia et esse*), this is composition not from the parts of a substance, but from a substance and what adheres to a substance.<sup>246</sup>

St Thomas now addresses the second question: are supposit and nature the same in an angel? St Thomas observes that the term 'nature' may be used in many ways, one of which is to signify the essence or quiddity of a thing. Therefore, "as we use the term here" (*prout hic loquimur de natura*), 'nature' signifies what a definition signifies. St Thomas now turns to consider how essence (or nature) is related to supposit in material substances. In such substances says St Thomas following Aristotle (*Metaphysica* 7.6), essence includes not only form but also matter. Is then the natural supposit identical with its essence or nature? St Thomas finds Aristotle teaching that in cases of *per*

<sup>245</sup> St Thomas, *Quodlibetal Questions II*, q. 2, aa. 1 and 2 respectively. According to Weisheipl, the *Quaestiones Disputatae De potentia Dei* were disputed by St Thomas at Rome 1265-1266, while *Quodlibetal Questions II* belongs to St Thomas's second Parisian regency, Christmas 1269. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino*, 363 and 367.

<sup>246</sup> St Thomas, *Quodlibetal Questions II*, q. 2, a. 1, c. The important part of that which is summarised in the text is as follows: "Sed sciendum est, quod aliquid participatur *dupliciter*. *Uno modo* quasi existens de substantia participantis, sicut genus participatur a specie. Hoc autem modo esse non participatur a creatura. Id enim est de substantia rei quod cadit in eius definitione. Ens autem non ponitur in definitione creaturae, quia nec est genus nec differentia. Unde participatur sicut aliquid non existens de essentia rei; ... Si ergo in angelo est compositio sicut ex essentia et esse, non tamen est compositio sicut ex partibus substantiae, sed sicut ex substantia et eo quod adheret substantiae." The Latin and English editions in use are those already cited.

se predication they are the same, but this is not so where there is predication *per accidens*. Now, the signification of the nature includes only that which belongs to the intelligible structure of the species; the supposit, however, has this and also other characteristics which are accidental to it. Therefore, still speaking of material substances, the supposit is signified in the manner of a whole while the nature is signified as a formal part of the whole. St Thomas now applies this technique to created spiritual substances such as angels. Here again the supposit includes not only the intelligible structure of its species, but also that which is accidental to it, namely its very being and some other characteristics which belong to the supposit but not to its nature. Only in God is no accident found outside God's essence, and this is precisely because God's being is God's essence.<sup>247</sup>

Therefore, only in God are supposit and nature identical; in all created substances, material and spiritual, supposit and nature are distinct. They are not so in exactly the same way, however. St Thomas observes that something may be accidental in two ways; in both ways, that which is accidental is present in the thing without being included in the definition signifying its essence, yet in one way it determines some essential principle of the thing (as *rational* is accidental to *animal*) while in the other way it does not (as 'whiteness' is accidental to 'human being'). Both ways are found in relation to material substances, but only the second in relation to spiritual substances. The reason for this is precisely that material substances are individuated by matter. Thus, an individual human being is determined as composed of his/her body and his/her soul, yet that determination is accidental to 'human being' as such. On the other hand, spiritual substances are subsisting forms and thus individuated in themselves. Yet, while "being itself" (*ipsum esse*) is not part of the intelligible structure of a spiritual substance, it belongs to the supposit nonetheless.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> St Thomas, *Quodlibetal Questions II*, q. 2, a. 2, c. St Thomas's conclusion is as follows: "In solo autem Deo non invenitur aliquod accidens praeter eius essentiam, quia suum esse est sua essentia, ut dictum est; et ideo in Deo est *omnino idem* suppositum et natura. In angelo autem *non* est *omnino idem*; quia aliquid accidit ei praeter id quod est de ratione suae speciei: quia et ipsum esse angeli est praeter eius essentiam seu naturam; et alia quaedam ei accidunt quae omnino pertinent ad suppositum, non autem ad naturam."

<sup>248</sup> All this is in *Quodlibetal Questions II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1 and ad 2. For a very helpful discussion of this whole topic see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 238ff, esp. 238-246. Also very useful is Aertsen, *Nature and Creature*, 61-64.

### 3.31 What May be Drawn from This Analysis?

This analysis suggests some insights into St Thomas's metaphysics which, hopefully, will assist in building an understanding of St Thomas's notion of participation. The matter can be approached by considering the issue which now follows. In the *De potentia* questions referred to above St Thomas teaches that, in material substances composed of matter and form, supposit and nature are really distinct, while in created spiritual substances such as angels, supposit and nature are the same in reality. Yet, in *Quodlibetal Questions II* q. 2, St Thomas teaches that, in *all* created substances, both material and spiritual, supposit and nature are really distinct. There is a question then of whether in *Quodlibetal Questions II* q. 2 St Thomas has abandoned his earlier teaching from *De potentia*, or whether the texts can be reconciled. I shall not enter precisely this debate; rather, I shall seek some parallels between St Thomas's presentation of the issue and his introduction of the *actus essendi*.<sup>249</sup>

In the first of the *De potentia* questions considered above (q. 9, a. 1), St Thomas is actually inquiring about the divine Persons, and considering the relation of the term 'person' to the terms 'essence', 'subsistence' and 'hypostasis'. This leads St Thomas to consider the two meanings of 'substance', as (a) individual supposit and (b) form or nature of the subject. St Thomas continues that this distinction is necessary because material substances composed of matter and form are multiplied and individualised, so that all that is found in substance in the first sense (individual supposit) cannot be found in substance in the second sense (common nature). This leads St Thomas to say that in material substances, the essence is compared to the individual supposit as a formal part thereof. However, with simple substances this is not so, because their essence itself subsists. With this emphasis on essence and its relation to the subject, it is appropriate to say that, in composite material substances essence and subject are really distinct, whereas in simple substances they are really the same.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Wippel reviews some of the scholarly discussion in his *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 246-249. The approach that I am adopting, namely that of seeking parallels between the presentation of the issue and the concern of the text in which it appears, is broadly similar to that taken by Wippel himself. However, while, as always, I have found Wippel's approach to the issue very helpful and I am grateful to take a lead from him, I will not be following his argument exactly.

<sup>250</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 9, a. 1, c. Cf. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 250-251.

The second of the *De potentia* questions considered above is q. 7, a. 4. In this article St Thomas explains that there is no accident in God. He gives three reasons, the first of which is that God is God's own nature and God's own being and no nature can receive anything extraneous, although that which *has* a nature, form or essence can receive something extraneous. It is this which leads St Thomas into a comparison of created substances, composite and simple, and to affirm that, in simple substances, nature and supposit are identical.<sup>251</sup> However, the focus again is on quiddity, as can be seen. I have already mentioned how the introduction of *esse* leads St Thomas to observe in this response that, in all created substances, composite and simple, essence and existence are distinct. Notwithstanding this, the focus on essence, nature and form in the article enables St Thomas consistently to say that, in simple substances, nature and subject are identical.

I would argue that St Thomas has a different focus in *Quodlibetal Questions II*, q. 2, aa. 1 and 2. Addressing the question whether an angel is a composite of essence and being (*esse*), St Thomas says that a creature participates in being as something not belonging to the thing's essence, and continues: "*et ideo alia quaestio est an est et quid est.*"<sup>252</sup> I suggest that the differentiation of these questions means that participation in 'being' (*esse*) by an actually existing thing allows us to speak of the thing (i.e., the supposit) in different ways according to each question; consequently, when we answer the question *an est* 'Is it?' positively, then we include in the actually existing thing its act of being (*actus essendi*). This, indeed, is how St Thomas understands the supposit in q. 2, a. 2. In a. 1 St Thomas says that the 'being' which pertains to the question 'Is it?' is other than essence and therefore an accident,<sup>253</sup> while in a. 2 he says that a supposit has not only that which belongs to the intelligible structure of the species, but also characteristics, including being (*ipsum esse*) which belong to the supposit but are accidental to it. In this case the supposit is signified as a whole and the nature

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<sup>251</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 4, c.

<sup>252</sup> "And therefore, the question 'Is it?' is different from the question 'What is it?'" St Thomas, *Quodlibetal Questions II*, q. 2, a. 1, c.

<sup>253</sup> "Unde, cum omne quod est praeter essentiam rei, dicatur accidens; esse quod pertinet ad quaestionem *an est*, est accidens." St Thomas, *Quodlibetal Questions II*, q. 2, a. 1, c.

or quiddity as a formal part.<sup>254</sup> As this applies to all created supposita, material and spiritual, then in every case we can say that the supposit and its nature (or essence) are really distinct.<sup>255</sup>

**To sum up:** In the questions cited from *De potentia* St Thomas is speaking of ‘substance’ as ‘subsisting’ and ‘hypostasis’, which indicates a focus on quiddity. ‘Quiddity’ is another name for ‘essence’ and ‘being’ is outside ‘essence’, so that this inquiry corresponds to the ‘What is it?’ question. In this inquiry the individuated nature or essence is understood as formal part to the whole. In material substances the whole includes individuating characteristics in addition to the essence, but this is not so in immaterial or simple substances. Therefore, in this inquiry it is legitimate to say of simple substances that suppositum and nature are identical in reality. However, when we ask “Is it?” and answer positively, then the supposit *includes* its *actus essendi* as its actuality, although that *actus essendi* remains outside its essence or nature. So understood, the actually existing subject or supposit, whether material or spiritual, is really distinct from its nature or essence, for only in God are essence and being identical.<sup>256</sup> This structure I would argue is crucial for understanding St Thomas’s notion of participation, as a study of *De ente et essentia* will show.

### 3.32 What Does This Mean for Participation?

I suggest the following.

**First**, in the case of individual material substances composed of matter and form, as essence is compared to the substance as the formal part of it, the essence locates the substance in a species, in which the substance participates as particular to universal. This participation however, as already noted, is logical or intentional rather than real. However, we may also speak of matter participating in form and of substance (*substantia prima*) participating in accidents, and these are instances of real participation.

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<sup>254</sup> “Nam in significatione naturae includitur solum id quod est de ratione *speciei*; suppositum autem non solum habet haec quae ad rationem speciei pertinent, sed etiam *alia* quae ei *accidunt* ; et ideo suppositum signatur per totum, natura autem, sive quidditas, ut pars formalis.” St Thomas, *Quodlibetal Questions II*, q. 2, a. 2, c.

<sup>255</sup> Cf. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 249-251.

<sup>256</sup> Cf. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 250-251.

**Second,** St Thomas speaks of ‘being itself’ (*ipsum esse*) as the most perfect of all things, as it is compared to all things as that which is act. Indeed, ‘being’ is the actuality of all things, even of forms themselves. Therefore, being is not compared to other things as receiver to received, but as received to receiver.<sup>257</sup> This bears on the way in which all creatures participate in ‘being’. Furthermore, as all creatures, material and immaterial, participate in being, and being is participated in outside essence,<sup>258</sup> then this participation is according to St Thomas’s second mode of composition and a structure of act and potency as such. This issue is addressed in St Thomas’s opusculum *De ente et essentia*, to which I now return.

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<sup>257</sup> “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 Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3. See also Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 251.

<sup>258</sup> This is stated by St Thomas in *Quodlibetal Questions II*, q. 2, a. 1, c.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### De Ente et Essentia Chapter 2: Definition, Composition and Participation

So far I have been discussing issues raised by St Thomas's discussion in chapter 1 of *De ente et essentia*, in which he addresses the first of the three questions he set himself in the Prologue, namely what is meant by saying 'a being' and 'an essence'. In chapters 2, 3 and 4 St Thomas addresses the other two questions, namely how are 'a being' and 'an essence' found in things and how are they related to the logical notions of genus, species and difference. In chapter 2 St Thomas considers 'essence' as found in composite substances and in chapter 4 'essence' as found in simple substances. In this chapter of the thesis I will consider St Thomas's chapter 2 and in the following chapter his chapter 4. Matters concerning the relation of 'essence' to genus, species and difference (St Thomas's chapter 3) I will consider as they arise.

At the end of chapter 1 of *De ente et essentia* St Thomas sets out the order in which he will proceed to consider how 'essence' is found in things. The order is as follows: substances will be considered first, accidents second ('essence' as found in accidents is actually considered by St Thomas in his chapter 6); among substances, composed substances will be considered first, simple substances second. St Thomas gives a reason for each of these priorities, but not the same reason.

Substances come before accidents because the term 'a being' is used absolutely and primarily of substances, and secondarily and with qualification of accidents. It follows that essence is in substances truly and properly, but in a restricted and qualified way in accidents. This recalls the discussion of substance and accidents in *De principiis naturae*, where St Thomas observes that *being* is attributed first to substance and secondarily to accidents, and an accident is called *being* by reference to substance as its subject. This means that the term 'being' is used analogically, as it is not attributed to substance and accidents in the same sense. I have already discussed St Thomas's understanding of the term 'a substance' in Section 3.3. In *Summa contra gentiles* St Thomas defines a substance as "a thing to which it belongs to be not in a subject".<sup>259</sup> In other words, a substance is something which subsists independently of a subject in which to exist. This cannot be said of

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<sup>259</sup> *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 25, n. 10. See Maurer's editorial footnote in his translation of *De ente et essentia*, n. 15, p. 33. This is 'substance' in the sense of 'first substance' and 'hypostasis'.



accidents, as an accident is called *being* by reference to substance as its subject. It follows that *being* is predicated primarily of substance and secondarily of accidents, as St Thomas says; furthermore, the primary meaning includes the secondary. In other words, 'being' is said analogically, but substance is the prime referent, because substances have being in themselves. From this it follows, St Thomas says, that essence is in substance properly, but only in a qualified way in accidents. Therefore substances are prior both in reality and in our knowledge, as accidents depend on substance for their existence. Clearly, the process of inquiry must begin with substances and proceed to accidents.

St Thomas gives a different reason for treating composite substances before simple substances. Simple substances are prior in reality, as essence is in them more truly and more perfectly, as they have being more perfectly; yet, the essences of simple substances are to a greater degree hidden from us than they are with composite substances. In other words, simple substances are prior in reality, but composite substances are first in our knowledge. Therefore, St Thomas proposes to begin with the latter on the pedagogical principle that the learning process should begin with that which is easier.<sup>260</sup>

St Thomas says that form and matter are found in composite substances, as for example soul and body in man. We recognise this sort of composition from *De principiis naturae* as composition of prime matter and substantial form. St Thomas continues that neither matter nor form alone can be called the essence of a composite substance. The inquiry therefore is about essence in composite things. However, the question nominated by St Thomas in his Prologue as the question to be answered is: how 'being' and 'essence' are found in different things ("quid nomine essentiae et entis significetur, et quomodo in diversis inveniantur").<sup>261</sup> So, an inquiry into essence, it seems, is an inquiry into being and essence. Why is that? Well, we recall that 'an essence' is derived from the first sense of 'a being' and that sense points to something positive in reality. In other words, the treatise is concerned with 'a being' and 'an essence' as they are found in reality. Therefore, to inquire into the essences of diverse things is also to inquire into the being of diverse things.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 1, nn., 5 and 6; Maurer 32-33. Marietti ed., c. 2, nn. 1, 2, 3. The issues summarised above are analysed by Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence*, 40-41, 49-54.

<sup>261</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 1, nn. 2 and 3, c. 2, n. 1; Maurer pp. 30 and 34. Marietti ed., c. 1, nn. 1 and 2, c. 2, n. 3. The Latin phrase is taken from the Marietti ed., Prooemium.

<sup>262</sup> Cf. Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence*, 57 and 60.

## 4.1 Essence, Definition and Matter: Sensible, Intelligible, Designated and Non-Designated

St Thomas argues that the essence of natural substances, i.e., substances composed of matter and form, includes both matter and form. The central reason for this lies in the notion of definition: the definition of a real thing signifies that by which the thing is located in its genus or species, and therefore the definition of a thing signifies its essence. It is for this reason says St Thomas that 'essence' may be termed 'quiddity'.<sup>263</sup> Therefore, the essence of a natural substance must include not only form but also matter, because the definition of a real natural substance includes both matter and form. In this section I will examine the proposition that the essence of natural substances includes both matter and form, and the relation of this proposition to the notion of definition telling what a real thing is.

### 4.11 Natural Substance and Mathematical Quantities: Definition

St Thomas continues in *De ente et essentia* that neither matter alone nor form alone is the essence of a thing. It is clear enough that matter cannot be essence, as St Thomas has already explained that the essence of a thing is that by which the thing is located in its genus or species, and a thing is so located not through matter but through that by which it is actual, namely its form. Furthermore, says St Thomas, matter is not a principle of knowledge, and that will not do, as another of the meanings which St Thomas has given for 'essence' is that through which a thing is intelligible. It is through its essence that a thing is knowable and fixed in its species and genus.<sup>264</sup>

However, it is not so clear why the form alone of a composite substance cannot be called its essence. We recall from *De principiis naturae* that substantial form is indeed the actualising principle of a thing; also substantial form is the principle of intelligibility of a thing. Indeed, in *De ente et essentia* St Thomas gives 'form' as an alternative for 'essence' on the ground that it signifies the determination of a thing. The reason, however, that 'form' alone cannot be called 'essence' is that the essence is that which is signified through the definition of the thing and, with natural substances, the definition includes not only form but matter. If this were not so, says St Thomas, there would be no difference between definitions in physics and in mathematics.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 1, n. 4; Maurer 31. Marietti ed., c. 1, n. 2.

<sup>264</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 2, n. 1; Maurer 34-35. Marietti ed., c. 2, n. 3.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

One may ask: Why should that matter? If the definition is in terms of form alone, the forms of mathematics are in the category of quantity while the forms of natural substances are in the category of substance.<sup>266</sup> However, what St Thomas may well have in mind here is this: in the definitions of both physical substances and mathematical entities there is form and matter, but not in the same way; the difference is owing to the fact that in the definition of mathematical entities there is intelligible but not sensible matter.<sup>267</sup> St Thomas, following Aristotle, explains the difference between sensible and intelligible matter as follows. Sensible matter is that which pertains to the sensible, such as hot and cold, “and with this matter natural bodies are concreated” (“cum qua quidem materia concreta sunt naturalia”). Intelligible matter meanwhile is that which is understood without reference to the sensible, such as “what is continuous” (“quae accipitur sine sensibilibus qualitatibus vel differentiis, sicut ipsum continuum”). The importance of the distinction is this: both kinds of matter are found in sensible things, but only intelligible matter is found in mathematical entities, for the objects of mathematics abstract from sensible matter but not from intelligible matter.<sup>268</sup> The result is that (a) in the definition of *both* natural substances and mathematical entities, the definition must refer to *both* matter and form, and (b) that will occur only if the distinction between sensible and intelligible matter is observed and, (c) the position is held that mathematics does not abstract from every kind of matter but only from sensible matter, so that (d) consequently, the distinction between the two types of matter/form definition is observed. That is the position St Thomas is defending and, one might think, it is the reason that St Thomas does not want definitions in physics and in mathematics to collapse into each other.

#### 4.12 Composition and Participation

One may still ask: What is at stake here? My hypothesis is that what is at stake is the nature of composition, not only in regard to natural substances which have sensible matter, but also in regard to mathematical entities which have intelligible matter and, indeed, in regard to separate substances which are wholly separate from matter. At the stage that St Thomas distinguishes sensible and

<sup>266</sup> Cf. Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence*, 68-69.

<sup>267</sup> Maurer, editorial footnote 4, p. 34, in his translation of St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*.

<sup>268</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VIII, Lect. 5, n. 1760. St Thomas’s expression in that paragraph is as follows: “Solvit praedictam dubitationem in *mathematicis*: et dicit quod duplex est materia; scilicet sensibilis et intelligibilis. Sensibilis quidem est, quae concernit qualitates sensibiles, calidum et frigidum, rarum et densum, et alia hujusmodi, cum qua quidem materia concreta sunt naturalia, sed ab ea abstrahunt mathematica. Intelligibilis autem materia dicitur, quae accipitur sine sensibilibus qualitatibus vel differentiis, sicut ipsum continuum. Et ab hac materia non abstrahunt mathematica.” See also *idem*, Bk VII, Lect. 10, n. 1496. And see St Thomas, *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, q. 5, a. 3, ad 4.

intelligible matter in his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, he is defending the Aristotelian position that definition is of one thing, not only because it aggregates parts under one head, but absolutely, because it signifies one thing. This is so when definitions are made up of matter and form, where matter is the principle of potentiality and form the principle of actuality. In natural substances it is the agent which causes the matter to be actualised by the form which is the cause of the unity of the essence. In the case of mathematical entities, there is abstraction from sensible matter but not from all kinds of matter and there is no agent, but again there is matter actualised by a form to give one essence; as when we say that a circle is a plane figure, plane is matter and figure is form. St Thomas contrasts this situation with what he takes to be the position of the Platonists, where each part of a thing could be represented as participating in a separate Idea, so that a thing would be an aggregate rather than one essence.<sup>269</sup>

It can now be seen that the distinction between definitions of natural substances and definitions of mathematical entities, while yet recognising both as matter/form definitions, bears directly on the nature of composition and its relation to participation. Yet, there is more. St Thomas goes on to speak of separate substances; i.e., substances which are separate from all kinds of matter. These substances are simple substances and each is its own essence, because each is form alone. Therefore, each is at once one thing and a being, for it contains no matter awaiting form from which it will derive being and unity.<sup>270</sup>

#### 4.13 Intelligibility and Matter

The distinction between definitions of natural substances and the definitions of mathematical entities does, however, turn on the distinction between sensible and intelligible matter. One may ask: in what sense can matter be intelligible? And, if it is intelligible, can it still be called “matter”? The answer to these questions rests upon St Thomas’s understanding of the nature of abstraction, which St Thomas explains in detail in his *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, question 5 article 3. I will not examine St Thomas’s explanation, interesting though it is, as it turns on his distinction between abstraction strictly so-called and separation, and the method proper to metaphysics, matters beyond the scope of this thesis. However, I will outline the answer to the questions just posed, insofar as it appears in this article.

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<sup>269</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VIII, Lect. 5, nn. 1755-1761, 1765-1767.

<sup>270</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VIII, Lect. 5, nn. 1762-1764.

I have already stated that the forms of natural substances are in the category of substance, while the forms of mathematical entities are in the category of quantity. I have also stated that things in the categories following substance are dependent upon substance for their being. We should now observe that, in St Thomas's view, not only are the categories of accidents dependent upon substance for their being, they are so dependent in a definite order: quantity comes first, followed by quality and then the passions and the actions. It follows that *quantity* can be thought of in substance before the sensible qualities are considered; and it is because of these sensible qualities that matter is called "sensible". Consequently, *quantity* does not depend upon sensible matter but only upon intelligible matter.<sup>271</sup> Thus, as St Thomas says in response to an objection in this same article: "mathematica non abstrahuntur a qualibet materia, sed solum a materia sensibili." "Mathematics does not abstract from every kind of matter but only from sensible matter".<sup>272</sup> Therefore, the matter which is the subject of mathematics is "intelligible" because it is not perceived by the senses like sensible matter, but by the imagination.<sup>273</sup>

#### 4.131 Substance and Quantity

In his *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius* St Thomas speaks of "substance" as the "intelligible matter of quantity" ("Substantia ... quae est materia intelligibilis quantitatis") and elsewhere he observes that while "sensible matter is corporeal matter as subject to sensible qualities", "intelligible matter is substance as subject to quantity" ("Materia enim sensibilis dicitur materia corporalis secundum quod subiacet qualitatibus sensibilibus, ... Materia vero intelligibilis dicitur substantia secundum quod subiacet quantitati.").<sup>274</sup> These statements appear to mean that the substratum of mathematical quantities and therefore the intelligible matter is substance. That would seem to be correct, as quantity is, after all, an accidental form dependent upon substance for its being. Yet, in the passages from the *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* referred to above, St Thomas speaks of the mathematical quantities themselves or their properties or parts

<sup>271</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, q. 5, a. 3, c. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Armand Maurer, 4<sup>th</sup> revd. ed. (Toronto: PIMS, 1986), 37-38.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., ad. 4. The English comes from Maurer's translation just referred to; the Latin comes from the Corpus Thomisticum website already referred to.

<sup>273</sup> Maurer, editorial footnote, n. 15, p. 38, in his translation of St Thomas, *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius* already referred to.

<sup>274</sup> The quotation from the *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, comes from the corpus of q. 5, a. 3. The following quotations come from *Summa Theologiae*, q. 85, a. 1, ad 2.

thereof – surface, dimension and the like – as intelligible matter.<sup>275</sup> This difference in usage does not seem to be crucial, especially as in the very article from the *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius* just referred to, St Thomas speaks of the “parts of quantity” (“Partes ... quantitatis”) that may be the basis of a demonstration by way of material cause as themselves pertaining to intelligible matter.<sup>276</sup>

Either way the important point is the dependence of mathematical quantities on substance. All accidents relate to substance as form to matter and all accidents have being by reference to substance as their subject. Thus quantity, like every accident, cannot be considered without understanding the substance which is its subject. But, as quantity comes first to substance it can be thought about as inhering in the substance without thinking about the sensible accidents which presuppose quantity. However, St Thomas says, if sensible accidents are abstracted, substance is intelligible only to the intellect. Thus, quantity in its essence depends not on sensible matter but on intelligible matter. However, St Thomas insists, the intelligible matter on which quantity depends is individual intelligible matter only, not common intelligible matter. Why does St Thomas insist on this? Precisely in order to preserve the dependence of quantity on the substance which is subject to the quantity. Consequently, quantities and their properties can be considered only insofar as they are abstracted from the substance on which they depend as their intelligible matter. And such abstractions are the concern of mathematics.<sup>277</sup> I hope this answers the question of how ‘intelligible matter’ is at once “intelligible” and “matter”.<sup>278</sup>

#### 4.132 Matter and Essence

It is submitted therefore, that St Thomas needs to preserve the difference between the definition of natural substances and the definition of mathematical entities precisely in order to preserve each as

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<sup>275</sup> This variation in usage is noted by both Maurer and Elders without much comment. See Maurer’s Translation of St Thomas’s *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, q. 5, a. 3, p. 38, n. 15. Elders, *Faith and Science*, 99, text and n. 55.

<sup>276</sup> This is in the response to the fourth objection. St Thomas is following the language of the objection, which refers to demonstrating something about a whole by its parts: “sicut cum demonstratur aliquid de toto ex partibus.”

<sup>277</sup> This comes mainly from the corpus of q. 5, a. 3 in St Thomas’s *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*. The distinction between common and individual intelligible matter is in *Summa Theologiae*, q. 85, a. 1, ad 2.

<sup>278</sup> One may speak of “matter” because, as stated, all accidents including quantity relate to substance as form to matter. And one may speak of “intelligible matter” because quantity abstracts from sensible matter. For a succinct summary see Ralph McInerny, *Boethius and Aquinas* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 1990), 140.

a matter/form definition signifying one thing. This enables St Thomas to avoid the problem of composition of parts which the Platonists faced, along with the issue of substances separated from matter, which problems the Platonic notion of participation was designed to solve. Of course, St Thomas retains his own notions of composition, separated substances and participation, but we can expect these to be re-figured on the Aristotelian terrain of act and potency. That is why essence cannot be signified by form alone.

#### 4.14 Composition of Form and Matter and Substantial Unity

Returning to the text of *De ente et essentia*, one observes that St Thomas now begins to draw out the implications of 'essence' as that which is signified through a matter/form definition of one thing. In the case of natural substances, this 'one thing' is a composite substance, so that the term 'an essence' signifies the composition of matter and form as one composite substance. This stands in contrast to accidents which have imperfect essence, because their definition must include their subject, which is outside their genus. In similar fashion, essence of a natural substance does not signify something added to matter and form, or even the relation between them. The reason is that form actualises matter, so that matter becomes an actual being. This 'being' is not the 'being' of the matter alone nor of the form alone, but the 'being' of the composite substance. Anything added would pre-suppose this being and therefore be received *per accidens*.<sup>279</sup>

We can, then, say that a natural substance has a complete or perfect essence, which is to say that the substance exists in itself as a subject; it is not dependent on a subject for its existence. This is not, however, to say that a natural substance is its own existence. When a substance is defined by its essence, its essence signifies the composition of the substance through its intrinsic causes, matter and substantial form. Therefore, a definition of a natural substance by its intrinsic causes includes nothing which does not belong to its essence. Yet, a natural substance also has extrinsic causes, and a definition by extrinsic causes will include that which does not pertain to the essence of the substance. This observation foreshadows a further composition in natural substances which is outside essence.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> St Thomas *De ente et essentia*, c. 2, nn. 1, 2, 3. Maurer, 34-36. Marietti ed., c. 2, nn. 3, 4, 5.

<sup>280</sup> Cf. Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence*, 72.

#### 4.15 Individuation and Matter

St Thomas now introduces a problem. If the essence of a substance embraces both matter and form and matter is the principle of individuation, would it not follow that an essence is particular? Granted that an essence is that which is signified by the definition, would it not also follow that universals could not be defined? This, one might think, would be an impossible situation, as definitions are universal.

St Thomas deals with this problem by asserting that the matter which is the principle of individuation is designated matter. Designated matter he defines as “that which is considered under determined dimensions”.<sup>281</sup> This definition indicates that “designated matter” is not a kind of matter distinct from “non-designated matter”. There is only one kind of matter and it is that which is part of the intrinsic constitution of an individual composed substance, for, as has already been seen, it is substances alone which, in themselves (as distinct from *of* themselves), exist. In the *Summa contra gentiles* St Thomas rejects the opinion, which he identifies as heretical, that God first created all matter and then an angel diversified it by diverse forms. In the course of his argument St Thomas says:

Omne quod fit, ad hoc fit quod sit: est enim fieri via in esse. Sic igitur unicuique causato convenit fieri sicut sibi convenit esse. Esse autem non convenit formae tantum nec materiae tantum, sed composito: materia enim non est nisi in potentia; forma vero est qua aliquid est, est enim actus. Unde restat quod compositum proprie sit. Eius igitur solius est fieri, non materiae praeter formam. Non est igitur aliud agens creans materiam solam, et aliud inducens formam.

Again, everything is made in order that it may be, for making is the way to being. It befits every caused thing to be made, even as it befits it to be. The act of being, however, does not belong to the form only, nor to the matter only, but to the composite. For matter exists only in potency, while form is that by which something is, since it is act. It remains therefore, that it is the composite which, properly speaking, *is*. Hence, it belongs to the composite alone to be made, and not to matter without form. So, there is not one agent that creates the matter alone and another that introduces the form.<sup>282</sup>

Consequently, the distinction between designated matter and non-designated matter is owing not to matter as such but to the fact that matter is subject to dimensions; and the difference is that between greater and lesser universality. St Thomas teaches that matter is the principle of diversity in genus while form is the principle of diversity in species. Meanwhile, it is the quantitative dimensions

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<sup>281</sup> This statement is in *De ente et essentia*, c. 2, n. 4; Maurer 36-37. St Thomas's Latin is: “Et ideo sciendum est, quod materia non quomodolibet accepta est *principium individuationis*, sed solum *materia signata*. Et dico materiam signatam quae sub certis dimensionibus consideratur.” Marietti ed., c. 2, n. 6.

<sup>282</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 43, n. 4.



of matter which account for the existence of many individuals in one species. The reason is that form is individuated through being received in matter. Matter itself lacks differentiation; therefore, matter can individuate the form only insofar as the form itself bears some distinguishable mark. So form is individuated by being received in *this* matter *determined to this* place and *this* time. Matter is divisible in this way only through quantity. Therefore, the designation of matter to *this* substance is owing to the fact that matter is subject to dimensions.<sup>283</sup>

It follows that matter in itself is the principle of neither specific nor numerical diversity. However, matter is the principle of diversity in genus insofar as it underlies a common form; and matter is the principle of numerical diversity insofar as it underlies dimensions.<sup>284</sup> Therefore, in *De ente et essentia*, having observed that designated matter is that which is considered under determined dimensions, St Thomas continues:

Haec autem materia in definitione hominis, inquantum homo, non ponitur, sed poneretur in definitione Socratis, si Socrates definitionem haberet; in definitione autem hominis ponitur materia non signata;

This kind of matter is not part of the definition of man as man, but it would enter into the definition of Socrates if Socrates could be defined. The definition of man, on the contrary, does include undesigned matter.<sup>285</sup>

Socrates, of course, cannot be defined, as Socrates has a uniqueness rooted in designated matter and definitions are necessarily of something common. Non-designated matter, however, is that which is common to the matter of all individual members of a species, and so is not antithetical to definition. This recalls the understanding of ‘an essence’ put forward earlier in the treatise, as that which identifies things in their proper genus and species.

#### 4.16 Summary

To sum up on this issue: For St Thomas, ‘an essence’ includes both matter and form. By the term ‘matter’ here St Thomas means sensible matter, for natural substances include sensible matter in their definition; if this were not so we could not distinguish natural substances from the objects of mathematics. Yet ‘an essence’ is that by which a thing is defined, and definition is of the species

<sup>283</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, q. 4, a. 2, c.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid. St Thomas distinguishes between determinate and indeterminate dimensions. It is only through the latter that matter is designated, although St Thomas adds that dimensions always have some determination.

<sup>285</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 2. The Latin comes from the Marietti ed., n. 6, p. 11. The English comes from Maurer’s translation, n. 4, p. 37.

rather than of the individual; it is *per definitionem* that a thing is located in its species. Therefore, the sensible matter which is included in an essence is not the designated matter which is proper to individual things but non-designated or common matter which is proper to species.

## 4.2 Why the Essence of Natural Substances includes Form and Matter: a Reprise

However, ‘form’ is one of the synonyms which St Thomas offers for ‘an essence’, and this would seem to exclude matter. St Thomas clarifies the point however, and adds that ‘an essence’ may be called ‘form’ *secundum quod per formam significatur perfectio vel certitudo uniuscuiusque rei, sicut dicit Avicenna in 2 Metaphysicae suae*.<sup>286</sup> In other words, ‘an essence’ may be called ‘form’ in Avicenna’s sense of ‘form’, as signifying the completion or determination of a thing. ‘Form’ in this sense St Thomas calls *forma totius*, and he distinguishes it from *forma partis*. The latter term refers to that substantial form which is individuated by being received in determined and individuated matter. The ‘whole’ and the ‘part’ are of the species, so that the *forma totius* is the quiddity of the species and, while it is composed of matter and form, it is not composed of individuated matter and form. The *forma totius* then differs from the *forma partis* as species to individual, as ‘man’ to Socrates.<sup>287</sup>

### 4.21 Essence, Averroes and Avicenna

This teaching is developed by St Thomas in his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*. At the time St Thomas is commenting on Aristotle’s explanation of essence or quiddity and his exposition of the principles of which a thing’s quiddity is composed.<sup>288</sup> In the course of his discussion St Thomas notes two opinions to do with the definitions of things and their essences. The first opinion takes the form as the whole essence of the species. When this occurs, the form of the part and the form of the whole “differ only in definition”; i.e., they may be distinguished logically but not really. For example, if one takes ‘soul’ as the whole essence of man, then *soul* signifies the form of the part and *humanity* signifies the form of the whole, but in reality the forms are the same. This is because the form of the

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<sup>286</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 1; n. 2 in the Latin Marietti edition; n. 4 in Maurer’s translation. Maurer’s translation is that ‘essence’ “is also called ‘form’, because form signifies the determination of each thing, as Avicenna says.”

<sup>287</sup> St Thomas gives this explanation of the terms ‘form of the whole’ and ‘form of the part’ in his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VII, Lect. 9, n. 1469.

<sup>288</sup> This is in St Thomas’s *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VII, Lect. 9. See n. 1460 for St Thomas’s summary of Aristotle’s teaching.

part actualises and perfects the matter, while the form of the whole is so designated inasmuch as through it the actualised matter is constituted whole and placed in its species. This, says St Thomas, was the opinion of Averroes and some of his followers.<sup>289</sup>

As opposed to this view St Thomas gives the opinion of Aristotle that natural substances include sensible matter in their definition, in which respect they differ from the objects of mathematics. From this St Thomas argues that, if Aristotle held this, then he must also have held that natural substances include matter in their essence, for natural substances are not defined by something external to their being and added; it is accidents which are defined with reference to something external, as their quiddity depends on their subject. It follows that sensible matter must be included in the essence of natural substances, and this applies not only to individual substances but to species. From this point St Thomas moves to the second opinion to do with definitions and essences and sets out the view which he attributes to Avicenna and which is set out above; viz., that the form of the whole is the quiddity of the species and it differs from the form of the part as whole to part, and the quiddity of the species includes both matter and form, 'matter' here being common sensible matter. St Thomas then identifies this view as consistent with the teaching of Aristotle in his rejection of Plato's teaching of subsistent forms separated from matter.<sup>290</sup>

Armand Maurer, in a discussion of the paragraphs from St Thomas's *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* above referred to (viz., Bk VII, Lect. 9, nn. 1467-1469) observes that the terms *forma totius* and *forma partis* are not used by Averroes in his *Commentary on the Metaphysics* of Aristotle and do not appear in the Latin translation of Avicenna's works available to St Thomas.<sup>291</sup> Maurer observes that Averroes knew as well as did St Thomas the Aristotelian teachings to do with definitions relied on by St Thomas, yet Averroes does not draw the same conclusion, namely that sensible matter is part of the essence of natural substances, both as to individuals and as to species. The reason, Maurer suggests, is that Aristotle himself never drew this conclusion in so many words.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VII, Lect. 9, n. 1467.

<sup>290</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VII, Lect. 9, nn. 1469 and 1470. For the difference in defining substance and accidents, see *idem*, Bk VII, Lect. 4, n. 1352.

<sup>291</sup> Armand Maurer, "Form and Essence in the Philosophy of St Thomas" *Mediaeval Studies* 13 (1951), 165, at 165 and 169. In his first footnote p. 165 Maurer identifies the subject of his study as *In VII Meta.* 9, nn. 1467-1469.

<sup>292</sup> Maurer, "Form and Essence in the Philosophy of St Thomas", 166-167. Maurer observes that St Thomas does not say that Averroes' opinion is contrary to the *ipissima verba* of Aristotle but rather that it is *contra intentionem Aristotelis*. Maurer says that when St Thomas uses this formula he means that the conclusion is

Maurer also observes that Averroes' interpretation was shared by some of St Thomas's contemporaries, as St Thomas himself recognises. Intriguingly, Maurer also develops an argument in defence of Averroes' identification of form with quiddity or essence, as authentically Aristotelian. Of course, one does not deny that Aristotle distinguishes between definitions in mathematics and definitions in natural philosophy, but one argues from Aristotle's teaching on being that essence is the form alone. It follows then that, for the natural philosopher an act of addition is required in order to grasp natural substance, as the forms of natural substances are not independent of matter, while for the mathematician there is a corresponding act of abstraction.<sup>293</sup> Interestingly, this act of addition is precisely what is denied by St Thomas when he joins the Aristotelian argument that natural substances include sensible matter in their definition to the Aristotelian argument that natural substances are not defined by something added that does not pertain to their being.<sup>294</sup>

Next, I will look briefly at what Maurer has to say of St Thomas's reliance on Avicenna. I have already mentioned Maurer's observation that the terms *forma totius* and *forma partis* do not appear in Avicenna's works available to St Thomas. Maurer continues that, in his *Metaphysics*, Avicenna does not call the quiddity a form but rather speaks of the form as always part of the quiddity and related to it as part to whole. The quiddity meanwhile is said to be the composition of form and matter.<sup>295</sup> This is the doctrine that St Thomas adopts: the essence of a thing is what the definition signifies, and the definition of a natural substance signifies not form alone but form and matter.<sup>296</sup>

In *De ente et essentia* St Thomas says that a definition telling what a thing is signifies that by which a thing is located in its genus or species, and for this reason the term 'quiddity' may be substituted for 'essence'. Thus, whatever is included in the definition of a thing is included in its quiddity or essence. As we have already observed, in the case of natural substances, the definition of the substance must

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not expressly stated by Aristotle but can be drawn from his principles. Maurer also says that Averroes and St Thomas had differing objectives in their respective commentaries on the *Metaphysics*. Averroes sought simply to state the authentic doctrine of Aristotle while St Thomas had a twofold objective: to read Aristotle correctly and to reach beyond him to philosophic truth. Maurer, op. cit., 166 and 167, text and n. 11.

<sup>293</sup> Maurer, "Form and Essence in the Philosophy of St Thomas", 167-169.

<sup>294</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VII, Lect. 9, n. 1468. Maurer does not make this point, but it would seem to be the case.

<sup>295</sup> Maurer, "Form and Essence in the Philosophy of St Thomas", 169.

<sup>296</sup> This formulation is St Thomas's own and comes from *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk IV, c. 81, n. 10, where St Thomas says: "essentia autem rei est quam significat definitio; definitio autem rei naturalis non significat tantum formam, sed formam et materiam;". This paragraph is cited by Maurer, "Form and Essence in the Philosophy of St Thomas", 170.

include not only form but matter; otherwise we could not distinguish definitions in natural philosophy from definitions in mathematics. St Thomas then proceeds to equate this teaching with Aristotle's formulation *quod quid erat esse*: what something was to be, so that this formulation is presented by St Thomas as equivalent to 'quiddity' and 'essence' in the sense just given.<sup>297</sup> Maurer, however, challenges this equation. Maurer says that the Aristotelian notion *quod quid erat esse* signifies the formal, intelligible perfection of a thing; i.e., its form. In the physical order it is contrasted with the matter and with the composite of matter and form. The notion does not include matter because matter is unintelligible in itself and the root of change and therefore cannot enter into that which the thing necessarily and intelligibly is. The point at which Maurer seems to be driving is this: the formula *quod quid erat esse* signifies what it is for a thing to be the very thing that it is, necessarily, immutably and intelligibly, what it is in itself. This cannot include matter because matter is potentiality; it is matter not intelligibly in itself but only by virtue of its relation to the form whose matter it is. Therefore, the notion of what a thing is, which is signified by the definition and which includes matter as well as form, is not identical with *quod quid erat esse*.<sup>298</sup>

It would seem then, if Maurer's argument is correct, that already in his early work *De ente et essentia* St Thomas is developing notions of 'quiddity' and 'essence' which are not on all fours with Aristotelian teaching.<sup>299</sup> As Maurer says, St Thomas consistently maintained his position throughout his career.<sup>300</sup> In his much later *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* St Thomas attributes not only to Avicenna but also to Aristotle the view that the quiddity of a species includes both form and matter, although the latter is included in the sense of common matter. However, St Thomas's attribution to Aristotle rests upon the *sententia Aristotelis* rather than the *ipissima verba Aristotelis*.<sup>301</sup> St Thomas nonetheless justifies his attribution as consistent with Aristotelian doctrine by marrying the Aristotelian teaching that there is a difference between the ways in which the natural philosopher and the mathematician define their objects to the Aristotelian teaching that natural substances are not defined with reference to anything external, because that mode of

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<sup>297</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 1, n. 4, Maurer 31. Marietti ed., c. 1, n. 2.

<sup>298</sup> Maurer, "Form and Essence in the Philosophy of St Thomas", 172. One may observe that, in his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VII, Lect. 9, n. 1470 St Thomas attributes to Aristotle the view that the intelligible expression of a species includes common matter.

<sup>299</sup> In *De ente et essentia* St Thomas says: The term 'quiddity' is derived from what is signified by the definition, while 'essence' is used because through it, and in it, that which is has being. C. 1, n. 4; Maurer, p32.

<sup>300</sup> Maurer, "Form and Essence in the Philosophy of St Thomas", 169-170.

<sup>301</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VII, Lect. 9, nn. 1468 and 1469.

definition is proper to accidents rather than to substances.<sup>302</sup> St Thomas's point, of course, is that sensible matter is necessarily included in the definition of a natural substance and this definition necessarily signifies quiddity and therefore essence, because otherwise we would have to say that matter is added to essence for the purposes of definition, and this mode of definition is proper to accidents rather than to substances. The issue then comes down to the nature of definition and whether it is, after all possible to insist that sensible matter is included in the definition of natural substances while yet holding that it is not part of their essence.<sup>303</sup>

#### 4.22 Essence, Form and Matter and Participation

I do not intend to pursue that issue now. It is enough to observe that, for St Thomas, essence includes both form and matter, and St Thomas insists firmly on that view against the opinion of Averroes the Commentator commenting on the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle, as well as against the opinion of some of his (St Thomas's) contemporaries. St Thomas does, however, have the support of Avicenna – a significant point, as we will see. The obvious question is this: why is St Thomas so insistent on his view, so that he adopts it unequivocally in his early work *De ente et essentia*, confirms it in his *Summa contra gentiles* and re-affirms it as strongly as ever in his much later *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*?<sup>304</sup> An answer to this question may illuminate the metaphysical structure St Thomas is developing in *De ente et essentia*. I suggest that there are at least three reasons.

##### 4.221 Aristotle's Criticism of Platonic Participation and St Thomas

First, St Thomas's view deals with the Platonic thesis that the forms and essences of natural things have being of themselves without sensible matter. In the part of his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* discussed above in which St Thomas attributes to Aristotle the view that the quiddity of a species is composed of matter and form, St Thomas sets out three grounds on which Aristotle rejects the Platonic theory of the Forms or Ideas. First is the ground that the essence of a thing does not exist apart from the thing to which it belongs. Second is the ground that forms existing apart from matter are not causes of generation, neither as generator nor as exemplar. And

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid., n. 1468.

<sup>303</sup> For a discussion see Maurer, "Form and Essence in the Philosophy of St Thomas", 171-173.

<sup>304</sup> Maurer says that St Thomas also states this view in another early work, viz., his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*: Maurer, "Form and Essence in the Philosophy of St Thomas", 169-170 and n. 34. The *Summa contra gentiles* reference is Bk IV, c. 81, n. 10.

third the ground now established, that the intelligible expression of a species includes sensible matter.<sup>305</sup>

It might be noted that it is because Aristotle rejects the Platonic theory of Forms on the grounds set out by St Thomas that he (Aristotle) has no use for the Platonic notion of participation. St Thomas endorses Aristotle's rejection on the grounds just set out; therefore, he has no use for Platonic participation either; but he does develop a notion of participation of his own. It would seem therefore, that St Thomas develops his notion of participation within the polemic of Aristotle's criticism of Plato's theory of the Forms. The relationship of St Thomas's notion of participation to Plato's, and the way in which St Thomas's notion grows out of his understanding of Aristotle's criticism of Plato's theory of Forms, are large issues that cannot be addressed systematically in this thesis. However, one may observe that St Thomas's understanding of the intelligible expression of a natural species as including sensible matter, and his equation of this with the essence of a natural substance, is linked to his notion of participation. The crucial element, I suggest, is the understanding of a natural substance as a composition of matter and form through a structure of act and potency.

The argument can be outlined this way. First, take the third ground set out above by St Thomas: the intelligible expression of a species includes sensible matter. St Thomas takes Plato's view to be that no common intelligible structure can include sensible matter. This is because sensible matter is inherently unstable and intelligibility demands immutability. Therefore, universal intelligible entities such as species must be quite separate from sensible things. Such entities enjoy a subsistent existence, and Plato calls them Ideas or Forms – Ideas (or exemplars) inasmuch as sensible things are made in likeness to them, and Forms inasmuch as sensible things have being by participating in them.<sup>306</sup> This model makes the Forms the formal cause of sensible things but, as Aristotle asks: what will be the efficient factor in regard to the Forms?<sup>307</sup> This is the point of the second ground set out above; the Platonic Forms are not causes of generation. The Platonic notion of participation has to do with form and exemplarity. However, as St Thomas observes, "even if the Forms exist, the particular or individual things which participate in the Forms will come into being only if there is some

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<sup>305</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VII, Lect. 9, n. 1470.

<sup>306</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk I, Lect. 10, n. 153.

<sup>307</sup> Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, Bk Alpha, c. 9, 991a; Penguin ed. 34

agent which moves them to acquire form”.<sup>308</sup> In other words, the Form may be the explanation of a natural substance’s coming to be with a certain nature, but only an efficient cause can cause the substance *to be*; and this it does through moving the thing to acquire the form; i.e., the natural substance is a composition of matter and form. Here we have the first ground set out above: the essence of a thing does not exist apart from the thing.

Therefore I argue, it is through St Thomas’s understanding of Aristotle’s criticism of the Platonic theory of Forms that St Thomas moves the notion of participation from its location in form and exemplarity into an Aristotelian view of reality. Here St Thomas makes participation part of the structure of his view of created reality, and locates it in a context of being and efficient cause.<sup>309</sup> This being so, Thomistic participation requires a relationship of potentiality to act.<sup>310</sup>

#### **4.222 Essence, Potentiality and Act: Participation**

I will now outline the second reason that, in my view, St Thomas is so insistent that the essence of natural substances includes both sensible matter and form. I have already stated that St Thomas attributes to Avicenna the view (which he shares) that the quiddity of a species is composed of matter and form. An Avicennan scholar in a recent paper explains that, for Avicenna, essences considered in themselves are the range of potentialities which characterise the various species and their activities. Potentiality however is not self-subsistent and requires a bearer in which it adheres. This bearer is matter. An essence must be actualised by some cause distinct from the essence itself,

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<sup>308</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk I, Lect. 15, n. 237. St Thomas’s Latin is: “sed existentibus speciebus non propter hoc fiunt entia particularia sive individua participantia species, nisi sit aliquid motivum quod moveat ad speciem.”

<sup>309</sup> It is worth recalling the following statements of St Thomas’s from *De principiis naturae*: “Quod enim est in potentia, non potest se reducere ad actum.”; “Forma etiam non extraheret se de potentia in actum.”; “Oportet ergo praeter materiam et formam esse aliquod principium quod agat, et hoc dicitur esse efficiens, vel movens, vel agens, vel unde est principium motus.”; “Sed causa solum dicitur de illo primo ex quo consequitur esse posterioris: unde dicitur quod causa est ex cuius esse sequitur aliud.” These statements come from c. 3. The first statement tells us that that which exists potentially cannot bring itself to actuality, while the second tells us that form also cannot draw itself out of potentiality into actuality. The third tells us that in addition to matter and form there must be some active principle, which we call efficient cause, mover or agent, from which the change originates. The fourth McDermott translates as follows: “A beginning is only called a cause, however, if it gives existence to what follows, for a cause, we say, is that from the existence of which another follows.” See his translation, p. 73.

<sup>310</sup> “Omne participans aliquid comparatur ad ipsum quod participatur ut potentia ad actum: per id enim quod participatur fit participans actu tale.” “whatever participates in a thing is compared to the thing participated in as act to potentiality, since by that which is participated the participator is actualized in such and such a way.” St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 53, n. 4.



so that the determination of the essence to a concrete particular or intelligible universal is a contingency dependent upon a cause outside the essence itself. Consequently, for Avicenna, the distinction between essence and existence is a real distinction akin to that between matter and form. Thus, says the author, “Avicenna would happily endorse Aquinas’s dictum: essence stands to existence as potentiality to actuality”. In fact, he continues, St Thomas’s understanding of the real distinction between essence and existence could be thought of as a commentary on Avicenna’s seminal work, making clear what is implicit or obscure in Avicenna. Even if St Thomas is proposing a new understanding of this distinction, his proposal can be viewed as a possible reading of Avicenna.<sup>311</sup>

This explanation, I believe, shows why St Thomas is insistent that the essence of natural substances is composed of both matter and form. St Thomas’s dictum, that essence stands to existence as potentiality to actuality, appears in the context of St Thomas’s explanation that in God there is no potentiality and, therefore, God’s essence is God’s being.<sup>312</sup> As there can be only one being with this existential simplicity, it follows that, for every created substance, material and immaterial, its essence stands to its existence as potentiality to actuality. Consequently, for material substances, their essence must include the principle of their potentiality, namely sensible matter.

In *De ente et essentia* St Thomas speaks of essence in terms of composition and of being:

quia esse substantiae compositae non est tantum formae, nec tantum materiae, sed ipsius compositi; essentia autem est secundum quam res dicitur esse. Unde oportet ut essentia, qua res denominatur ens, non tantum sit forma nec tantum materia, sed utrumque; quamvis huiusmodi esse suo modo sola forma sit causa.

the being that a composite substance has is not the being of the form alone nor of the matter alone but of the composite, and it is essence according to which a thing is said to be. So the essence, according to which a thing is called a being, cannot be either the form alone or the matter alone, but both, though form alone is in its own way the cause of this being.<sup>313</sup>

It is the composite of form and matter through which the thing exists and the composite of form and matter which is the essence. St Thomas has moved the notion of ‘an essence’ into his metaphysics of

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<sup>311</sup> Jon McGinnis, “The Avicennan Sources for Aquinas on Being: Supplemental Remarks to Brian Davies’ ‘Kenny on Being’”, *The Modern Schoolman* 82 (2005), 131, 135-137; the quotation is at 137. The reference to St Thomas comes from *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 4, c.

<sup>312</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 4, c.

<sup>313</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 2, n.3; Maurer p36. Marietti ed., c. 2, n. 5.

esse. Essence and intelligibility are now viewed from the perspective of *esse*, for everything is knowable to the extent it has being.<sup>314</sup> This existential shift explains why ‘an essence’ must include both form and matter, for intelligibility is now an issue not just of form but of that which exists, namely the subsistent substance composed of form and matter. Strictly speaking, both matter and form are transformed in this existential shift, because each is a necessary part of the composite which alone has being. Therefore, if essence is that according to which a thing has being, it must include both form and matter.<sup>315</sup>

Perhaps the existential shift can be brought out this way. In *De Veritate* St Thomas devotes an entire question, namely question three, to the divine ideas. In article five he asks: Is there in God an idea of first matter? St Thomas begins his answer observing that Plato did not see first matter as caused by an idea, but rather saw it as co-cause. However, St Thomas asserts that matter is caused by God and therefore its exemplar must in some way exist in God. But how is this so? St Thomas now distinguishes between two senses of *idea*. In its strict or proper sense *idea* “is related to a thing in so far as it can be brought into existence” (“quia idea proprie dicta respicit rem secundum quod est producibilis in esse”). Now, matter cannot come into existence without form and form of material substances cannot come into existence without matter. Therefore, there is no idea in the proper sense corresponding merely to matter and no idea in the proper sense corresponding merely to form. Rather, there is one idea corresponding to the composite thing, and that idea causes the composite thing, both its form and its matter. However, *idea* can also be taken in a broader sense, namely that of an intelligible character or likeness. In this sense each of matter and form can be said to have an idea of its own by which it can be known distinctly, although neither of the two can exist separately.<sup>316</sup>

It will be observed that the two senses of *idea* turn on the distinction between God’s practical knowledge (actual or virtual), which relates to a thing in so far as it can be brought into being, and God’s speculative knowledge, which extends to intelligible character or likeness.<sup>317</sup> In the former

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<sup>314</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VII, Lect. 2, n. 1304.

<sup>315</sup> Cf. Maurer, “Form and Essence in the Philosophy of St Thomas”, 175.

<sup>316</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 5. For a discussion of this issue, as St Thomas presents it in *De Veritate* and in his other works, see Gregory T. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes* (Washington DC: CUA Press, 2008), 133-135.

<sup>317</sup> The distinction between God’s practical knowledge and God’s speculative knowledge is drawn by St Thomas in article 3 of the same question. See also Doolan op. cit., 134.

sense, there is but one idea and it corresponds to the composite; therefore, in so far as they exist, matter and form can be known only as composite. It is in the latter sense that each of matter and form can be known distinctly, but then neither can *exist* separately. Therefore, as ‘an essence’ is signified by ‘a being’ as it is divided by the categories, that is to say “a thing in so far as it can be brought into existence”, ‘an essence’ must include both matter and form.<sup>318</sup>

The significance of the analysis is this. Granted that all essences other than God’s own essence are created by God, essences belong to God’s practical knowledge. This is because ‘an essence’ signifies something positive in reality, something that can be brought into existence. Now, in God’s practical knowledge, neither form nor matter is known in itself – only in God’s speculative knowledge are form and matter known in themselves. What is known in God’s practical knowledge is the composite of form and matter. Therefore, ‘an essence’ must include both form and matter as composite. This approach has several interesting implications. First, both form and matter are transformed; form, because it is no longer equated with essence and therefore is no longer the sole principle of intelligibility; and matter, because it is no longer utterly unintelligible; rather, matter is raised to be part of the essence of a material thing and therefore, at least in some sense, it is raised to a principle of intelligibility.<sup>319</sup> However, neither form nor matter is intelligible in itself as neither exists in itself; when we come to speak of existence there is only the composite. This signals the second interesting implication: with St Thomas ‘an essence’ is viewed not only from the perspective of form and intelligibility, but also from the perspective of actual existence. In St Thomas’s own words: “*essentia autem est secundum quam res dicitur esse*”; “it is essence according to which a thing is said to be”.<sup>320</sup> It is precisely for this reason that the essence of composite substances must include both form and matter. In what sense is a thing said ‘to be’ according to ‘essence’? Well, recalling that ‘being’ must be compared to ‘essence’ as actuality to potentiality,<sup>321</sup> the role of ‘essence’ is to receive and determine the ‘act of being’, so that what *exists* in the category of substance is the composite of matter and form.<sup>322</sup> Granted as stated above that all essences other than God’s own essence are created by God and, therefore, are not their own being, we see that St Thomas, in insisting that the

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<sup>318</sup> The phrase is that just quoted from *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 5, c. Immediately after this phrase St Thomas continues: “*materia autem non potest exire in esse sine forma, nec e converso.*”

<sup>319</sup> Cf. Maurer, “Form and Essence in the Philosophy of St Thomas”, 175.

<sup>320</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 2, n. 3; Maurer 36. Marietti ed., c. 2, n. 5.

<sup>321</sup> “*Oportet igitur quod ipsum esse comparetur ad essentiam quae est aliud ab ipso, sicut actus ad potentiam.*” St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 4, c. This dictum has already been referred to.

<sup>322</sup> Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 147-148.

essences of material substances include both matter and form, draws his notion of ‘an essence’ into his metaphysics of *esse*, and transforms both matter and form in the process.

In my opinion, this shift by St Thomas of *essence* into his metaphysics of *esse* is of fundamental importance. Not only does it explain why St Thomas must speak of ‘essence’ in terms of the composite of matter and form, it also brings in participation; and again participation comes in with the productive or efficient cause of the being of composite things, and the structure of act and potentiality. We have already observed St Thomas’s dictum that, for every being except God, being is compared to essence as actuality to potentiality. In God there is no potentiality and therefore God’s essence is God’s being. For every other being we say that it *has* being but *is not* being, and therefore is a being by participation.<sup>323</sup>

#### ***4.223 Actuality, Material and Separate Substance and Participation***

This leads to the third reason I propose as to why St Thomas insists that ‘an essence’ in composite substances includes both form and matter. A composite substance is composed of form and matter. However, St Thomas says, ‘essence’ does not merely signify a relation between the two, nor is it something superadded on both, which would be merely accidental to the thing. Rather says St Thomas, the form actualises the matter, so that the matter becomes an actual being and a particular being. Anything added after that would not give matter its actual being but rather a certain kind of being, as accidents do.<sup>324</sup> The contrast with accidents and qualified being shows that we are now speaking of the being of the composite substance. Therefore, the being that the composite substance has is not that of the form alone nor that of the matter alone but that of the composite; and it is essence according to which a thing is said to be.<sup>325</sup> Therefore, the essence, according to which a thing is called a being, must include both matter and form, even though the form alone, in its own way, is the cause of this being.<sup>326</sup> In other words, the form may be named the cause of being in the order of formal causality and, in this sense, a material substance may be said to have being

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<sup>323</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 4, c.

<sup>324</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 2, n. 2. Maurer 35. St Thomas’s Latin in the Marietti edition is (c. 2, n. 4): Per formam enim, quae est actus materiae, materia efficitur ens actu et hoc aliquid; unde illud quod superadvenit non dat esse actu tale, sicut accidentia faciunt;

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., n. 3. Also, Marietti edition n. 5: quia esse substantiae compositae non est tantum formae, nec tantum materiae, sed ipsius compositi; essentia autem est secundum quam res dicitur esse.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid. Marietti ed: Unde oportet ut essentia, qua res denominatur ens, non tantum sit forma nec tantum materia, sed utrumque; quamvis huiusmodi esse suo modo sola forma sit caussa.

through its form. Nonetheless, the form is still only a principle of the composite, and it is the composite substance which exists subsistently; as St Thomas says elsewhere: “being means something having existence, but it is substance alone that subsists”, and therefore it is substance alone which is called ‘being’ in an unqualified sense.<sup>327</sup> Now, the composite substance, says St Thomas in *De ente et essentia*, is said *to be* according to its *essence*. This is not because essence gives being, but because it is in and through essence that a thing has being.<sup>328</sup>

In my opinion, St Thomas’s emphasis on being as belonging to the composite substance which we see in chapter two of *De ente et essentia* involves a significant shift. While recognising the well-established causal role of form in being, St Thomas’s language concerning the *actual being* of the substance suggests a shift in emphasis, from actualising form to the act of existence.<sup>329</sup> Now, if it is through essence and in essence that a thing has being, then we must have another composition here, superadded on the matter-and-form composition, a composition in which essence is in potency to the act of being. Now, as argued earlier in this thesis, there is indeed another mode of composition recognised by St Thomas and it is the composition of essence with the *actus essendi*, the act of being. Furthermore, this mode of composition extends not only to material substances composed of matter and form, but also to immaterial substances of simple form. Therefore, St Thomas needs to include both matter and form within the essences of material substances in order to distinguish those essences from the essences of immaterial substances. This in turn is demanded by the need to accommodate and distinguish the two modes of composition for, while both modes apply to material substances, the second mode alone applies to immaterial substances. And this need is in turn demanded by St Thomas’s understanding of being, *esse*, as an *act*.

Again, we are meeting here the existential role of ‘an essence’. It is worth remembering that, as St Thomas says at the beginning of *De ente et essentia*, ‘a being’ and ‘an essence’ are the first conceptions of the intellect. There is a dimension for participation here also. St Thomas needs to isolate composition in immaterial substances so that he may isolate act and potentiality as such,

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<sup>327</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk XII, Lect. 1, n. 2419. St Thomas’s expression is: “quantitas et qualitatis et hujusmodi non sunt simpliciter entia ... Nam ens dicitur quasi esse habens, hoc autem solum est substantia, quae subsistit. Accidentia autem dicuntur entia, non quia sunt, sed quia magis ipsis aliquid est;”

<sup>328</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 1, n. 4; Maurer 32. Marietti ed., c. 1, n. 2.

<sup>329</sup> For example: Per formam enim, quae est actus materiae, materia efficitur ens actu et hoc aliquid; ... This passage from c. 2, n. 4 of the Marietti edition has already been cited. In the next phrase, cited earlier, the expression “esse actu” appears.

quite free of matter. In my opinion, this involves an extension by St Thomas of the Aristotelian notions of composition and of act and potentiality. As already adumbrated in this thesis, it is on the terrain of act and potentiality as such that St Thomas seeks to re-construct the notion of participation.

### 4.3 A Summary of the Argument in this Chapter and Its Bearing on Participation

This chapter of this thesis has been concerned with Chapter 2 of *De ente et essentia*, essence as it found in composite substances. Composite substances are composed of matter and form, and the main concern of the chapter has been St Thomas's view that essence in composite substances includes both matter and form. This occurs, first, because the essence of a thing is what the definition signifies, and the definition of a natural thing signifies not the form alone but the form and the matter. Furthermore, because 'essence' locates a thing in its species, it signifies the essential principles of a species, which do not necessarily exclude the individuating principles from its signification.<sup>330</sup> Thus, the univocal agent, which is the particular cause of an individual substance, places it under the species by way of participation.<sup>331</sup>

In this chapter I have also argued that 'essence' has an existential function, in that it is in and through essence that an actually existing substance has its being, as it is essence which receives and determines its 'act of being'. In this sense too, I have argued, 'essence' of a composite material substance must include both matter and form. In *De ente et essentia*, when discussing synonyms for 'essence', St Thomas concludes as follows:

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<sup>330</sup> In *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk IV, c. 81, n. 10 St Thomas says that the terms 'humanity' and 'man' each signifies something composite of matter and form, but not in the same way. 'Humanity' signifies the essential principles of the species, both formal and material, but prescinding from the individual principles. 'Man' meanwhile, also signifies the essential principles of the species, but without excluding the individuating principles. For these reasons, 'humanity' is signified in the manner of a part (remembering that we are speaking of signifying the individual substance composed of matter and form, 'humanity' signifies only the essential principles of the species), while 'man' is signified in the manner of a whole, for it signifies the essential principles actually and the individual principles potentially. It is in the term 'Socrates' that both essential principles and individual principles are actualised.

<sup>331</sup> St Thomas says in *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 13, a. 5, ad 1.

*Quidditatis* vero nomen sumitur ex hoc quod per definitionem significatur: sed essentia dicitur secundum quod per eam et in ea res habet esse.

The term 'quiddity' is derived from what is signified by the definition, while 'essence' is used because through it, and in it, that which is has being.<sup>332</sup>

St Thomas has already given the term 'quiddity' as a synonym for 'essence',<sup>333</sup> so, in effect, St Thomas is giving two meanings for essence here: (a) quiddity and (b) that through which 'that which is' has being. I suggest that these two meanings of 'essence' parallel the two questions which St Thomas differentiates and which can be asked of created substances: "What is it?" and "Is it?".<sup>334</sup> Furthermore, I have argued in Section 3.3 of this thesis that, when we move the focus of inquiry into created substances from quiddity to existence, we include *actus essendi* in our understanding of substance. Therefore, I suggest that the two meanings of 'essence' given above parallel the two modes of composition recognised by St Thomas: a focus on 'quiddity' corresponds to matter-and-form composition, while a focus on 'being' corresponds to essence-and-existence composition. Each of these compositions is structured through act and potency, the latter through act and potency as such. Furthermore, each of these compositions corresponds to a mode of participation: the first because an individual participates in its species, and the second because the substance participates in an 'act of being' outside its essence.<sup>335</sup>

At this point then it is prudent to move directly to Chapter Four of *De ente et essentia*, where St Thomas discusses essence as it is found in separate substances.

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<sup>332</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 1, n. 4; Maurer 32. Marietti ed., c. 1, n. 2.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> See St Thomas, *Quodlibetal Questions II*, q. 2, a. 1, c.

<sup>335</sup> "Ens autem non ponitur in definitione creaturae, quia nec est genus nec differentia. Unde participatur sicut aliquid non existens de essentia rei;" St Thomas, *Quodlibetal Questions II*, q. 2, a. 1, c.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### De Ente Et Essentia Chapter 4

Chapter Four of *De ente et essentia* in Maurer's translation is headed "Essence as Found in Separate Substances". In the Marietti edition the same material is in Caput V.<sup>336</sup> The separate substances St Thomas considers are (human) souls, intelligences (i.e., angels) and the first cause. St Thomas observes that, while all admit the simplicity of the first cause, some would introduce a composition of form and matter in intelligences and souls. St Thomas, however, aligns himself with the more general opinion that these substances are separated from matter so that they are quite immaterial. This he proves from their power of understanding: forms are intelligible only when separated from matter and its conditions, and they are made actually intelligible only through the power of an intelligent substance, receiving them into itself and acting upon them. Thus, every intellectual substance must be quite free of matter, neither having matter as part of itself nor being a form impressed on matter.<sup>337</sup>

This proof holds only on the view of 'understanding' given by St Thomas: forms are intelligible only when separated from matter and they are made actually intelligible only through the power of an intelligent substance receiving them and acting upon them. Thus, St Thomas elsewhere observes that "the ancients", failing to grasp fully the meaning of understanding and thereby failing to distinguish sense and intellect, thought that all that existed could be apprehended by sense and imagination. They therefore supposed that all beings were bodies and denied the separated existence of spirits.<sup>338</sup>

This same view of 'understanding' lies behind St Thomas's rejection of the proposition that intellectual substances need not be free of all matter but only of corporeal matter. This proposition rests upon the assumption that it is not all matter which impedes intelligibility but only corporeal matter. The proposition seems not unreasonable at first sight; after all, St Thomas does recognise a

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<sup>336</sup> The Marietti edition heads up c. 5 with the following concerns: "1) Essentia simplicium substantiarum haudquaquam est composita ex materia et forma, sed est forma tantum. 2) Confertur cum essentia compositarum. 3) Ostendit substantias simplices esse compositas ex *essentia et esse*. 4) Intelligentiae sunt effective a Deo, 5) et omnes compositae ex actus et reali potentia.

<sup>337</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 1; Maurer 51-52. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 1.

<sup>338</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, q. 50, a. 1, c. St Thomas here notices "the error of the Sadducees", who denied all of the following: resurrection, angels and spirits: Acts 23:8.



notion of ‘intelligible matter’, as we have seen. Could there not then be some sort of incorporeal matter to combine with form to make the essence of an intellectual substance without impeding its operation? St Thomas rejects the proposal by observing that if it were only *corporeal* matter that is unintelligible then its unintelligibility would arise from its corporeal form. Yet, this is impossible, as the corporeal form, like all forms, is actually intelligible when abstracted from matter. In other words, if it were the *corporeality* of matter which renders it unintelligible, then it would do so by virtue of the form which renders it corporeal – and that is impossible. Therefore, it is *matter* which is not found in the essence of an intellectual substance, and not just corporeal matter.<sup>339</sup>

In this way St Thomas rejects universal hylemorphism, the notion that all beings other than God, including purely spiritual beings, are composed of matter and form. St Thomas therefore teaches that intellectual substances in their essence are simple form; yet they cannot be absolutely simple because there can be only one being who is absolutely simple, and that is the being whose essence it is to be – namely God. St Thomas therefore proposes another kind of composition for intellectual substances, and that is a composition of essence (which in their case is form) and being: “Unde in anima intellectiva et in intelligentia nullo modo est compositio ex materia et forma, ... sed est compositio formae et esse.”<sup>340</sup> I will argue that this move enables St Thomas to recast the notion of participation in an Aristotelian framework.

## 5.1 Moving beyond Platonism: The Efficient Causal Order and Participation

But how can the essence or quiddity of any substance, intellectual or otherwise, be a simple form? St Thomas says that when things are so related that one is the cause of the other’s being, the one (i.e., the cause) can have being without the other. Form gives being to matter; therefore a form can exist without matter, but matter cannot exist without form. St Thomas teaches there is a gradation of forms according to their proximity to the first principle, the first principle being primary and pure act. It follows that those forms which are closest to the first principle can subsist without matter. The intelligences are forms of this kind; the intelligences indeed do not need matter in order to subsist. It is important to grasp nonetheless that the intelligences are not pure act – only the first principle can

<sup>339</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 2; Maurer 52. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 1.

<sup>340</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 1. See also John Wippel, “Essence and Existence”, in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism 1100-1600*, edited by Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), 385, 394.

be pure act. In the same way, those forms which are further removed from the first principle can exist only in matter.<sup>341</sup>

It is clear that important differences are beginning to appear between composite substances and simple substances. In the former case essence includes both form and matter while in the latter case essence is form alone. Two further differences follow. First, the essence of a composite substance can be signified as a whole or a part, but the essence of a simple substance can be signified only as a whole. The second difference is this: the essences of composite substances are divided and multiplied according as they are received in designated matter. As a result, composite substances, while united in species are diversified numerically. To put it another way, because the matter is designated to each substance, there are many individual substances in one species. It is important to grasp that it is division of matter according to quantity and its consequent designation which accounts for plurality in species. However, in the case of simple substances their form is not received in matter. Therefore, their essences are not divided and multiplied in the same way. Now, as it is matter and its quantitative dimension which accounts for the existence of many individuals in the one species, it follows that, in the case of simple substances, we do not find a plurality of individual substances in one species; rather each individual substance is its own species.<sup>342</sup>

### 5.11 The 'Intellectus Essentiae' Argument

Notwithstanding all that has been said, St Thomas observes that simple substances are not absolutely simple. Their essence may be simple form, but they are not pure act. Therefore they have a mixture of potentiality. St Thomas proves this as follows: everything that does not belong to the concept of an essence or quiddity comes to it from outside and enters into composition with it. Why is this? Because, St Thomas says, no essence can be understood without its parts. Now every essence or quiddity can be understood without knowing anything about its being. St Thomas's famous illustration is: "possum enim intelligere quid est homo vel phoenix, et tamen ignorare an esse

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<sup>341</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 3; Maurer 53. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 1. St Thomas does not say so at this point, but he also teaches that intellectual substances have their own gradation in which the human soul occupies the lowest rung. As a result, the human soul is in the unique position of being at once a substance and yet the form of a body. The human soul does actually require a union with a material body for its completion. St Thomas picks up this point later in the chapter.

<sup>342</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, nn. 4 and 5; Maurer 54. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 2. St Thomas often observes that each angel is its own species; see *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c.93; *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 50, a. 4, c.

habeant in rerum natura.”; “I can know, for instance, what a man or a phoenix is and still be ignorant whether it has being in reality.” It follows that being is other than essence or quiddity, “unless perhaps there is a reality whose quiddity is its being”. “Ergo patet quod esse est aliud ab essentia vel quidditate: nisi forte sit aliqua res cuius quidditas sit suum esse;”.<sup>343</sup> Such a reality must be unique and primary, because something can be multiplied only by adding a difference (as a generic nature is multiplied in species), by the reception of a form in different parts of matter (as a specific nature is multiplied in individuals), or by the distinction between that which is separate and that which is received in something (as, if there were a separated heat it would be distinct from heat which is not separated; “separated” here means “separated from matter”). Now, granted that there is a reality that is pure being, so that being itself is subsistent,<sup>344</sup> it would not receive the addition of a difference, because then it would not be pure being; and it would not receive the addition of matter, because then it would not be subsistent being but material being. St Thomas does not repeat his third proposed mode of multiplication but proceeds immediately to his conclusion: It follows that there can be only one reality that is identical with its being. In everything else, being must be other than its quiddity, nature or form. Thus, the intellectual substances receive their being in addition to their form and are composed of their form (essence, quiddity) and their being.<sup>345</sup>

There is a huge lot packed into this paragraph in *De ente et essentia*, and it has attracted a large amount of scholarly comment. It is not possible to review it all, but I will pick up some important elements. First, in this paragraph St Thomas seeks to establish a distinction between being and essence in every substance except that substance whose essence it is to be. One way of reading this argument is as follows.

- Everything that does not belong to the concept of an essence comes to it from outside and enters into composition with it.
- This is because no essence can be understood without its parts.

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<sup>343</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 6; Maurer 55. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 3.

<sup>344</sup> “Si autem ponatur aliqua res quae sit esse tantum, ita ut ipsum esse sit subsistens, ...”. St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 6; Maurer, 55-56. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 3. Note that this reality is posited hypothetically for the purposes of the argument. The actual existence of such a reality has not yet been proved.

<sup>345</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 6; Maurer 55-56. Marietti ed., c.5, n. 3. St Thomas expresses his conclusion as follows: “Unde relinquatur quod talis res quae sit suum esse, non potest esse nisi una; unde oportet quod, in qualibet alia re, praeter eam, sit aliud esse suum, et aliud quidditas vel natura seu forma sua. Unde in intelligentiis oportet quod sit esse praeter formam; et ideo dictum est quod intelligentia est forma et esse.”

- In other words, we are speaking of our concept or understanding of an essence, that which is spontaneously apprehended by the intellect. This understanding is not just in the mind; it also signifies the quiddity grasped by the concept. Therefore, this understanding requires knowledge of all intrinsic parts of an essence.
- Whatever is not known in this way is not an intrinsic part of an essence but is extrinsic to it, comes to it from outside and enters into composition with it.
- Now, every essence or quiddity can be understood without knowing anything about its being.
- Therefore, being is other than essence, comes to it from without and enters into composition with it.

### 5.111 Interpreting the Argument

Characterised in this way, the argument is known as the *intellectus essentiae* argument, or “understanding of an essence” argument, because it seeks to derive our awareness of the distinction between being and essence from our understanding of ‘an essence’.<sup>346</sup> Joseph Owens however questions the supposition of this characterisation, namely that a thing’s entire quiddative content can be apprehended without manifesting any existence at all. Owens prefers to say that the argument proceeds from the nature or quiddity of a thing, taken in abstraction from any sort of existence. The starting point then is not the nature as it is in the real order nor the nature as it exists in cognition, but the nature as it abstracts from both ways of existing. Absolutely considered in this way, a thing’s nature or quiddity is open to existence but does not contain existence. Owens would label the argument as “the argument from the simple inspection of a sensible thing’s quiddative content”.<sup>347</sup>

Scott MacDonald takes quite a different approach.<sup>348</sup> MacDonald argues that the so-called *intellectus essentiae* argument is not used by St Thomas as a stand-alone argument and would be unsound if it were. In MacDonald’s view, the so-called *intellectus essentiae* argument is not a stand-alone argument which seeks to derive the essence/existence distinction from an abstract concept or notion of ‘an essence’; rather, MacDonald locates the *intellectus essentiae* argument within the wider

<sup>346</sup> Leo Sweeney, “Essence/Existence in Thomas Aquinas’s Early Writings”, *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 37 (1963), 97, at 105-106. This article re-appears as Ch. 19 in Fr Sweeney’s book *Christian Philosophy: Greek, Medieval and Contemporary Reflections* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997).

<sup>347</sup> Joseph Owens, “Quiddity and Real Distinction in St Thomas Aquinas”, *Mediaeval Studies* 27 (1965), 1, 5-7.

<sup>348</sup> Scott MacDonald, “The *Esse/Essentia* Argument in Aquinas’s *De ente et essentia*”, in *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by Brian Davies (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 141.

argument of c. 4. This wider argument MacDonald labels the *Esse/Essentia* argument and analyses it as an argument built on the recognition that *esse* does in fact belong to things; i.e., that some things exist.<sup>349</sup>

In order to establish this interpretation MacDonald argues that there is a difference between the presentation of the argument by St Thomas in his text and its underlying logical structure. As the argument is presented, St Thomas opens with a general assertion that whatever belongs to a thing and is not part of its essence comes to it from without and effects a composition with it. The apparent conclusion is that *esse* is other than essence or quiddity, and this conclusion appears to flow from an abstract consideration of ‘an essence’. However, St Thomas immediately observes that this conclusion is too wide and must be qualified, as there may be a being whose essence is its *esse*. Thus, argues MacDonald, the argument in its underlying logical structure proposes three ways in which to account for a thing’s *esse*: *esse* may be (a) part of the essence (b) outside the essence and in composition with it, or (c) the essence itself. The first case is not so, but it is only when the third has been considered and found to be possible in one being only that St Thomas draws the conclusion that in everything else *esse* must be other than quiddity or essence.<sup>350</sup>

It seems to me that MacDonald’s interpretation has this advantage over the *intellectus essentiae* interpretation: it brings out the existential character of the argument, and it foreshadows the element of participation in St Thomas’s understanding of *esse*. My reasons are these: the *intellectus essentiae* interpretation, including Owens’ modification of it, suggests that the argument is grounded in our concept or understanding of ‘an essence’. Even allowing that this understanding includes the quiddity signified by the concept, the argument begins conceptually. On MacDonald’s interpretation however, the argument begins existentially, by asking how a thing’s *esse* can be related to its essence. The question then is this: how does the argument begin? Does it begin in our concept of ‘an essence’, or does it begin in asking how a thing’s *esse* can be related to its essence? One recalls that, for St Thomas, the term ‘an essence’ derives from ‘a being’ as it is found in the categories, not ‘a being’ as signifying the truth of a proposition. In other words, the distinguishing characteristic of ‘an essence’ for St Thomas is that it is found in actually existing substances. Would not the issue for St Thomas then be to ask how a thing’s *esse* can be related to its essence? Furthermore, on this

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<sup>349</sup> MacDonald, “The *Esse/Essentia* Argument in Aquinas’s *De ente et essentia*”, 147-148.

<sup>350</sup> MacDonald, “The *Esse/Essentia* Argument in Aquinas’s *De ente et essentia*”, 144-145. The relevant passages in St Thomas’s *De ente et essentia* will be found in c. 4, n. 6, Maurer pp. 55-56; Marietti ed., c.5, n. 3.

interpretation the real proof that essence and esse must be distinct in both simple and composite substances comes when St Thomas establishes, as he does in the following paragraph (scil. c. 4, n. 7 in Maurer's translation and c. 5, n. 4 in the Marietti ed.), that indeed there must be a being whose essence it is to be, and who thereby acts as the cause of being of all other beings. In this way, the argument points to a participation structure for esse; namely, that there is a unique and primary being whose essence is its esse and who acts as the cause of the being of all other beings, for whom esse is received in composition with their essence.<sup>351</sup>

### 5.12 Essence-Esse Composition in Simple and Composite Substances: Efficient Cause

I now return to the content of St Thomas's argument in this part of *De ente et essentia* (c. 4, n. 6 in Maurer's translation; c. 5, n. 3 in the Marietti ed.). The argument has already been summarised and the conclusion drawn: granted that there is a reality whose essence is its being, such a being must be subsistent being and both primary and unique. It follows that the proposition with which the paragraph began is proved: viz., that simple substances, though pure form without matter, are not absolutely simple; rather they are composed of their essence (quiddity, form) and their being, because their being is other than their quiddity, nature or form. At this point two observations must be made. First, the proposition just stated must extend not only to simple substances but also to composite substances. Why is this? Because St Thomas has established that, granted that there is a being whose essence it is to be, such a being must be unique. It follows that for every other substance, simple or composite, its existence must be other than its essence. The second observation is this: the proof rests upon an hypothesis, namely that there is a reality who is pure being and who must therefore be subsistent being, primary and unique. In the next paragraph St Thomas turns his attention to the proof of this hypothesis.

The proof runs this way: whatever belongs to a thing is either caused by the principles of its nature or comes to it from an extrinsic principle. As an example of the first St Thomas gives the capacity for laughter in a human being and as an example of the second he gives the light in the air coming from the sun. Now, being itself, St Thomas continues, cannot be caused by the form or quiddity of the thing (and by "caused" here, says St Thomas, he means "by an efficient cause"), for then the thing

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<sup>351</sup> Cf. MacDonald, "The *Esse/Essentia* Argument in Aquinas's *De ente et essentia*", 147-148. I should add that, while I have taken a lead from MacDonald, he does not put the matter quite as I have put it.

would be its own cause and bring itself into being, which is impossible.<sup>352</sup> At first sight this looks strange, as St Thomas has already said earlier in the same treatise that, in composite substances at least, the form is the cause of its being. However, in composite substances the form is only a principle of the essence, it is not itself the essence; and St Thomas also says that it is according to essence that a thing is said to be. Furthermore, St Thomas says that the form is the cause of the being of the composite substance “in its own way”; i.e., as formal cause.<sup>353</sup> Therefore, in the later context now being discussed, St Thomas makes plain that when he says that being itself cannot be caused by the form or quiddity of the thing, he is speaking of efficient cause. What does all this mean? Well, St Thomas will go on to explain that a thing is said to be according to its essence in the sense that its essence is in potency to its being. The function of essence then is to receive and determine being. Now, a composite substance can do this only through its form (a principle of its essence), while a simple substance will do it through its essence or quiddity which is its form. In each case, the form is cause in the order of formal causality only. However, form cannot move itself and therefore, in the order of efficient cause, form (in the case of composite substances) or quiddity (or form – in the case of simple substances) cannot be the cause of being.

I propose that a way to understand the matter is this: in any order of causality nothing can be both cause and effect in the one relation. Therefore, when we speak of form as formal cause of the being of a composite substance, we do so because it is the actualising principle of the essence; it is not itself the essence. Furthermore, in every case the being belongs to the composite. It is the composite which appears in the category of substance, and the composite is called a being according to its essence. This requires an efficient cause and, whether the substance be composite or simple, this efficient cause cannot be the form, essence or quiddity of the thing because the thing would then be its own cause.<sup>354</sup> It also helps to observe that St Thomas goes on to say in the next paragraph that the being to which the essence or quiddity is in potential is received from God.<sup>355</sup> God, then, is the first efficient cause of the being of created substances, be they composite or simple. However, this does not mean that the essence or quiddity is “made” first and then somehow waits to receive its

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<sup>352</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 7, Maurer 56. St Thomas’s expression on the point of ‘being’ and cause is: “Non autem potest esse quod ipsum esse sit causatum ab ipsa forma vel quidditate rei, dico sicut a causa efficiente: quia sic aliqua res esset causa suiipsius, et aliqua res seipsam in esse produceret, quod est impossibile.” Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 4.

<sup>353</sup> St Thomas’s remarks concerning ‘form’ as the cause of ‘being’ in composite substances will be found in *De ente et essentia* c. 2, n. 3, Maurer 35-36. Marietti ed., c. 2, n. 5.

<sup>354</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 7; Maurer 56. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 4.

<sup>355</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 8; Maurer 57. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 5.

being. In one of the *De Potentia Dei* disputations St Thomas answers precisely that proposition, saying that when God gives being, God at the same time produces that which receives being. If this were not so then we could not say that God creates things from nothing.<sup>356</sup>

St Thomas's insistence on an efficient cause of the 'being itself' (*ipsum esse*) of the substance, composite or simple, in addition to the formal cause, along with his location of this efficient causality in a structure of act and potency, is important in another way: we are not speaking of 'being' merely as *form*; rather, we are speaking of 'being' as *act*. In *De Veritate* q. 21, a. 4 St Thomas citing Aristotle says that the efficient cause and the material cause do not coincide as they have contrary characters; the characteristic of matter is to be in potency, while a thing is an agent inasmuch as it is in act; therefore every agent effects something similar to itself. In other words, as an efficient cause is itself in act, it moves into act that which is in potential to receive it. Therefore, while it is true that a created substance has 'being' as a formal principle, it is not its own *actuality*, nor is it its own *actus essendi*.<sup>357</sup> Rather, the substance, be it composite or simple, receives its *actus essendi* from an efficient cause and ultimately from God as first efficient cause, within a structure of act and potency. The structure of act and potency furthermore shows that there is an element of dependency in the order of being, as I will now seek to show. These points are of central importance in grasping St Thomas's notion of participation.

### 5.121 *Esse and Per Se Efficient Causal Order*

To return to St Thomas's argument: a thing cannot be the efficient cause of its own 'being itself' through its form, quiddity or essence. Therefore, in the case of every thing for which its being is distinct from its nature, it must have its being from another. We cannot go on to an infinity of causes, and therefore, every thing which exists through another is traced back to that which exists through itself, so that there must be pure being, subsistent being, which is the cause of the being of all other things. In this way St Thomas proves the existence of pure being, subsistent being, as first cause, which St Thomas now names as God. As it has already been proved that subsistent being must be unique, it can be said that all other substances, composite and simple, hold their being from this being, who is God. It can also be said that simple substances other than God are not absolutely simple but are composed of form and being. Furthermore, beings composed of matter and form also

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<sup>356</sup> St Thomas, *De Potentia Dei*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 17.

<sup>357</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 4, c. and ad 6.



receive their being from the first being and so manifest a further composition of essence and being.<sup>358</sup>

The argument rests on the proposition, familiar in St Thomas's writings, that we cannot go on to infinity in (efficient) causes, and therefore there must be a reality which is the cause of being for all other things because it is pure being. Now, St Thomas does not think that it is every series of efficient causes which must end in a first cause. He says that this is so only when the causes are in a *per se* sequence; it is not so when efficient causes in a series are related only accidentally. His example of a *per se* sequence is the case of a stone moved by a stick, the stick by the hand, and so on. His example of an accidental sequence is the case of an artificer who uses many hammers because one after the other is broken.<sup>359</sup> The point is this: in each of St Thomas's examples the causes all belong to the one order of causality (i.e., they are all efficient causes), but the relation among them differs. In the second case it is the relation among the causes that is accidental, because it is accidental that the artificer chooses this hammer after that one. However, in the first case, the causes are related *per se*, in the sense that each is dependent on the one before it: the stick moves the stone only if the hand moves the stick. The following three distinctive properties of a *per se* series of causes have been identified: all causes act at once, every cause other than the first cause is caused by another, and all causes act together to produce the final effect.<sup>360</sup>

Obviously, St Thomas, when discussing the cause of being of substances in *De ente et essentia*, has in mind a *per se* series of causes. But why is that? As St Thomas himself elsewhere recognises, if Abraham begets Isaac and Isaac begets Jacob and Jacob begets Joseph, this is not a *per se* series. The causes do not all act together; furthermore, as far as human generation is concerned, they are related only accidentally: Isaac begets Jacob as Isaac, not as the son of Abraham. Hence, St Thomas says, it is not impossible for man to be generated by man to infinity.<sup>361</sup> However, when speaking of

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<sup>358</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 7; Maurer 56-57. St Thomas does not speak explicitly of composite substances in this paragraph, being more concerned with simple substances. He does however say that "everything whose being is distinct from its nature must have being from another", which includes both composite and simple substances. St Thomas's Latin for the point just made is: "Ergo oportet omnis talis res, cuius esse est aliud a natura sua, habeat esse ab alio." Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 4.

<sup>359</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 46, a. 2, ad 7.

<sup>360</sup> Brian Leftow, Introduction to *Aquinas: Summa Theologiae, Questions on God*, edited by Brian Leftow and Brian Davies (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), xii-xiii.

<sup>361</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 46, a. 2, ad 7. See Leftow, op. cit., xii, text and n. 9. Note that St Thomas is here speaking of human generation, i.e., matter-form composition; this does not extend to the human

*per se* causes St Thomas is speaking of something else; he is speaking of causes so inter-related that each one is dependent on the one before it when producing its effect. This does not have to be confined to the immaterial sphere, as the stick and stone example shows: the stick moves the stone only because the stick is itself moved by the hand. St Thomas's point is that, for a series of causes of this type, there must be a first cause. Why is that? Well, if each cause is dependent on the one before it, unless we have a first cause we will have merely a series of dependent causes; i.e., ultimately, we will have nothing.

### 5.122 Efficient Cause Potentiality and Act

Therefore, St Thomas's insistence that a series of causes in a *per se* sequence must end in a first cause is a function of his understanding of motion and change. Motion and change are to be understood in terms of potentiality and act. The interesting point however is that St Thomas applies the potentiality-act structure to the receipt of being by substances whose essence or nature is other than their being. Thus, in *De ente et essentia*, speaking of the intelligences, St Thomas says:

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 forma vel quidditas, quae est intelligentia, sit in potentia respectu esse quod a Deo recipit; et illud esse receptum est per modum actus: et ita invenitur actus et potentia in intelligentiis, non tamen forma et materia, nisi aequivoce;

Everything that receives something from another is potential with regard to what it receives, and what is received in it is its actuality. The quiddity or form, therefore, which is the intelligence, must be potential with regard to the being it receives from God, and this being is received as an actuality. Thus potency and act are found in the intelligences, but not form and matter, except in an equivocal sense.<sup>362</sup>

From this extension of the potentiality-act structure three consequences immediately flow.<sup>363</sup> First, being itself cannot be caused by the form or quiddity of the thing, but it requires an extrinsic efficient cause. Secondly, because the substance receives this being as an actuality, the extrinsic efficient cause must be of a different order of reality from the dependent causes; i.e., it must be in act whereas they are in potential.<sup>364</sup> And thirdly, because everything that exists through another may be

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intellectual soul, which is an intellectual substance and ultimate form of the human person, which cannot be generated by the parent and is individually created by God. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 118, a. 2, c and ad 2.

<sup>362</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 8; Maurer 57. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 5.

<sup>363</sup> What follows is taken from St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 7; Maurer 56-57. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 4.

<sup>364</sup> This point is taken from Joseph Owens, "Aquinas on Infinite Regress", *MIND* 71, No 282 (1962), 244. Professor Owens is here responding to C.J.F. Williams at *MIND* 69, No 275 (1960), 403. Professor Owens gives the parallel example of a mathematical series which has to be thought by a mathematician who, as thinker, remains outside the order of mathematical entities.

traced back to that which exists through itself, there must be a first cause which is the cause of being for all other things because it is pure being. And why must there be such a first cause? Because if there were not an uncaused first cause which is pure act and pure being, quite outside the order of potentiality, all that we would have would be a series of potentialities, i.e., nothing at all. So, the very fact that we have something and not nothing shows that we must have a first cause, in itself and of itself in act.<sup>365</sup>

### 5.13 Observations on the Argument

I have spent some time bringing out the element of dependence in the order of being, because I believe it bears on the rhetorical force of St Thomas's argument here, and on the role of participation in St Thomas's metaphysics of *esse*. Before moving to that however I observe that St Thomas concludes that potency and act are found in intellectual substances, even though those substances are not composed of form and matter. Rather, the quiddity of an intelligence is the intelligence itself, while its being, which is received from God, is that by which it subsists in reality. That is why a substance of this kind may be said to be composed of 'that by which it is' (*quo est*) and 'that which is' (*quod est*), or, as Boethius would have it 'that which is' (*quod est*) and 'being' (*esse*).<sup>366</sup> St Thomas will pick up this Boethian distinction and make it his own in his *Exposition* of the *De Hebdomadibus* of Boethius.

#### 5.131 The Rhetorical Force of the Argument

I will now comment on the rhetorical force of the argument and the role of participation in it. It will be recalled that, in *De ente et essentia*, when St Thomas considers why it is that there can be only one reality whose quiddity is its being, he proposes three ways in which a thing may be multiplied. The third is that a thing may be multiplied if we distinguish between its being in an absolute or separated state and its being received in something; thus, if there were a separated heat, the separated heat would be distinct from heat that is received in things. Now, St Thomas considers and rejects the first two ways in which a thing may be multiplied as inapplicable to a reality whose quiddity is its being;

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<sup>365</sup> This sort of argument is found in a number of places in St Thomas's writings. Indeed, the relevant passage in *De ente et essentia* seems to me to draw on what would later appear as the second and third ways in St Thomas's *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3, c. The second way establishes that in a regime of efficient causes there must be a first efficient cause "to which everyone gives the name of God", while in the third way God first appears as the cause of being. The proof in the third way rests upon the impossibility of a series of potentialities without a self-subsistent cause, for then there would be nothing at all.

<sup>366</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 9; Maurer 57-58. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 5.

the third he does not mention again.<sup>367</sup> The usual response among scholars is that the third is not mentioned again because it need not be: it is quite plain that there can be only one member of the plurality whose existence is pure; received existences necessarily are existences in a subject.<sup>368</sup> Scott MacDonald however, while acknowledging the correctness of this point, nonetheless argues that there is a rhetorical strategy in St Thomas's not explicitly rejecting the third way of multiplying in the context of pure being, and that is because he intends to return to it in the context of received being; in other words, St Thomas does not reject the third way of multiplying because it will turn out to be the conclusion of the whole argument. MacDonald also claims that St Thomas uses the same argumentative strategy in his *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*.<sup>369</sup>

I agree with MacDonald that there appears to be a rhetorical strategy by St Thomas in play here. Indeed, in my opinion, the argument reveals an incomplete chiastic structure. A chiastic structure is one in which a principle or idea is expressed in two parallel constructions, yet the second is an inversion of the first. Such a structure is a rhetorical device, designed to bring balance and order to the argument, so that its point may be made with appropriate force. There are many examples in the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, as well as in classical and modern literature.<sup>370</sup> Here I will consider only St Thomas's third way in which something such as 'being' might be diversified and multiplied, as that is the way which St Thomas leaves open in *De ente et essentia*.<sup>371</sup> The third way is to propose a distinction between 'being' as separate and absolute on the one hand and 'being' as received in a subject or subjects on the other. The argument as presented in this way proposes to move from 'being' as separated and absolute to 'being' as received and qualified. St Thomas does not take this step. Next, St Thomas takes the proposal in reverse order. This time we start with a thing whose being is not its nature but is distinct from its nature – such a thing must receive its being from another. Now St Thomas is prepared to argue that everything which exists through another is

<sup>367</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 6; Maurer 55-56. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 3.

<sup>368</sup> Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence*, 171. John Wippel observes that the third proposed means is not mentioned again because it actually concedes the point. Wippel, "Aquinas's Route to the Real Distinction: A Note on *De ente et essentia*", *The Thomist* 43 (1979), 279, 288-289.

<sup>369</sup> MacDonald, "The *Esse/Essentia* Argument in *De ente et essentia*", 146 and n 14, p 156. For a comment by Wippel on the parallel drawn by MacDonald between St Thomas's strategy in *De ente* and that in the *De Hebdomadibus Exposition*, see Wippel's "Thomas Aquinas and Participation" in John F. Wippel (ed.), *Studies in Medieval Philosophy* (Washington DC: CUA Press, 1987), 117, p 135, n 43. See also Wippel's *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, p 110, n 43.

<sup>370</sup> A very good example is St Paul's hymn to Jesus in his Letter to the Philippians, 2:5-11. I should add that, even though I am taking a lead from MacDonald in finding a rhetorical strategy in play in c. 4 of *De ente et essentia*, MacDonald does not find a chiastic structure in this argument as I do.

<sup>371</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 6; Maurer 55-56. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 3.

traced back to that which exists through itself as first cause. Therefore there must be a reality that is the cause of 'being' for all other things, and it is so because it is 'pure being'.<sup>372</sup> In other words, St Thomas is prepared to argue from being as diversified in subjects to pure or absolute being, but he does not argue from pure or absolute being to being diversified in subjects.

Why does St Thomas argue in this way? I suggest the following. In *De Veritate* q. 21, a. 4 already referred to St Thomas is addressing the question whether all things are good by the First Goodness. He concludes that all things are good by a created goodness formally as by an inherent form, and by the uncreated goodness (i.e., God) by an extrinsic or exemplary form.<sup>373</sup> If we apply this structure to 'being itself', then we can conclude that each created being has its own *actus essendi*, not in formal identity with the divine essence, but in likeness to the divine essence as its exemplary form. Therefore we can reason from 'being' as diversified in created substances to 'absolute being' on the principle that an agent (in this case, God) is necessarily in act and causes something similar to itself; but we cannot reason from pure or absolute being to diversified being, because we cannot know God in God's essence.<sup>374</sup> Yet, St Thomas does not *dismiss* this way of arguing, because there is after all a *likeness* of God's being in the being of creatures, and it is the likeness of an exemplary or extrinsic form.

### 5.132 Participation, Receipt of Being and Efficient Cause: Moving Past Plato

What can one glean from this argument? First, one finds affirmed the familiar Thomistic axiom that being is not a genus, or indeed a species, as the multiplication of being cannot be explained in those ways. However, the multiplication of being can in fact be accounted for in the third way, so long as one starts with those substances in whom their being and their nature are distinct. From here the argument asserts that the being of such a substance cannot be caused by its form alone, as form is an intrinsic cause; rather, its being must be caused by an extrinsic efficient cause. In other words, these beings depend for their existence on a cause outside themselves. This chain of dependent causes cannot be infinite, because then we would have an infinity of dependencies or potentialities and no act – and hence no being. Therefore, the chain of dependencies and causes must terminate in a first cause who is pure being and pure act – and this is God. This is a participation structure to explain the

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<sup>372</sup> This is in the following paragraph in *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 7; Maurer 56-57. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 4.

<sup>373</sup> "Sic ergo dicimus secundum communem opinionem, quod omnia sunt bona bonitate *creata* formaliter sicut forma *inhaerente*, bonitate vero *increata* sicut forma *exemplari*." St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 4, c.

<sup>374</sup> This basic principle is stated by St Thomas at *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 1, c.

multiplication of being, whereby all those beings other than God which are not their own being are beings by participation.<sup>375</sup>

It was stated earlier that the purpose of a chiastic structure is to bring balance and order to an argument, so that its point may be made with appropriate force. In the argument summarised above, it is a participation structure which ultimately explains the relationship between God as pure being and the being of finite substances. One observes that St Thomas declines to argue from pure being, or from a separated subsistent form, to received being or form in subjects, in order to explain multiplication. Instead, St Thomas argues that the receipt of form alone cannot explain 'being' in finite substances, as 'being' must be conferred by an extrinsic efficient cause. St Thomas then moves from multiplicity of finite beings through a regressive and interlocking series of efficient causes and potentiality-act couplets. These relationships are such that they must terminate in a first efficient cause which is pure act and pure being. In other words, St Thomas has declined to begin the argument in absolute form or being and move to form or being as received, in order to establish a sharing or participation structure to explain multiplication of beings; rather he accepts the one-and-the many structure, but argues from it in reverse order. St Thomas argues that received being must be caused by an extrinsic efficient cause and therefore every being whose being is distinct from its nature must have it from another. In this way the argument begins with received being and returns to pure being. The point is: the participatory structure of being depends on God but does not apply to God. That is precisely why St Thomas does not argue from pure being to received being. Furthermore, the human mind cannot know the essence of that being whose essence it is to be, so how can we reason from it? However, if our reasoning begins in received being and returns to pure being, we know pure being not as it is in itself, but as cause. That is precisely how God as *ipsum esse subsistens* appears in metaphysics, according to St Thomas.<sup>376</sup>

In this way, in my opinion, the argument signals St Thomas's rejection of a Platonic model of participation, which moves from form through formal cause. Rather, St Thomas is sketching a model of participation mapped out on the terrain of potentiality and act and grounded in efficient cause.

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<sup>375</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 7; Maurer 56-57. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 4. The last sentence comes from *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 44, a. 1, c.

<sup>376</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, q. 5, a. 4, c. Fourth revised edition translated with an introduction and notes by Armand Maurer (Toronto: PIMS, 1986), at 52. Elders, *Faith and Science*, 112ff. See also St Thomas's *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk IV, Lect. 1, n. 533. And see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 122.

This model of participation through efficient cause applies to the second mode of composition; i.e., the composition of form or essence with being, and also the receipt of other perfections, such as goodness. In order to complete the picture however, it is necessary to examine precisely how ‘being’ is received by a being for whom being is other than its nature. This point is addressed in Section 6.2 of this thesis.

There are other important elements which are highlighted by the chiasmic structure of the argument. In my opinion, this structure suggests that the root of the argument is composition in all things other than God, especially as this composition is contrasted with the simplicity of God. Furthermore, the composition of which St Thomas is speaking here is the composition of form, or essence, and being, and also the receipt of other perfections, such as goodness. This is St Thomas’s second mode of composition, and it embraces both material and immaterial substances. Next, the argument emphasises form, or essence, as potentiality in relation to being as act. If a thing has being distinct from its nature, it must be related to that being as potentiality to act.<sup>377</sup> This potentiality to act structure is one that St Thomas refers to as potentiality and act as such.<sup>378</sup> Therefore, it is on this modified Aristotelian terrain that St Thomas constructs his notion of participation in being. It is precisely for this reason that participation is at the heart of St Thomas’s metaphysics for, if the metaphysician can know that being whose quiddity is its *esse* only as the First Principle of *esse*, then the only quiddities or essences, indeed the only beings (*entia*) which the metaphysician can know for their own sakes are those which participate in *esse*.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>377</sup> “Omne autem cui convenit actus aliquis diversum ab eo existens, se habet ad ipsum ut potentia ad actum: actus enim et potentia ad se invicem dicuntur.” “Everything, however, that has an act diverse from it is related to that act as potency to act; for potency and act are said relatively to one another.” St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 22, n. 7.

<sup>378</sup> “Et propter hoc quaecumque quidem consequuntur potentiam et actum in quantum huiusmodi, sunt communia substantiis materialibus et immaterialibus creatis: sicut *recipere* et *recipi*, *perficere* et *perfici*.” “Accordingly, whatever follows upon potentiality and act, as such, is common to both material and immaterial created substances, as *to receive* and *to be received*, *to perfect* and *to be perfected*.” St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 54, n. 10.

<sup>379</sup> Cf. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 124. As Wippel observes, the metaphysician can claim some analogical knowledge of God as being. The links between participation and analogy are recognised by many authors. See, for example, George Klubertanz, *St Thomas Aquinas on Analogy: A Textual Analysis and Systematic Synthesis* (Chicago: Loyola UP, 1960), 150-155. The link between participation and analogy is also stressed by Cornelio Fabro in his writing; see, for example, his survey of “Participation” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Vol. 10 (Washington DC: Thomson-Gale, 2003). 905 at 909-910. As Fabro observes, analogy is the language of participation, so that we may pass from finite to Infinite Being through analogical discourse: *Ibid.*, 909.

Therefore, when we come to speak of participation in *esse*, it is composition through a structure of potentiality and act which lies at its heart. This is an issue which St Thomas immediately picks up: “Omne autem quod recipit aliquid ab alio, est in potentia respectu illius; et hoc quod receptum est in eo, est actus eius.” “Everything that receives something from another is potential with regard to what it receives, and what is received in it is its actuality.”<sup>380</sup> The potentiality-act structure is extended from principles of generation. As St Thomas explains in *De principiis naturae*, there are three principles of generation, or matter-form composition: matter (potential of existence), its lack of actualisation (lack of being) and form (which actualises the matter).<sup>381</sup> It is significant that St Thomas extends the potentiality-act structure to essence (quiddity, form)-existence composition, as it means that it is not merely fortuitous that quiddity receives being. Rather, as St Thomas says elsewhere, potency is for the sake of act, just as matter is for the sake of form. Consequently, a potency would be purposeless unless there existed the active power of an agent able to actualise it.<sup>382</sup> Therefore, quiddity as potentiality is *ordered to* being as act, just as matter is ordered to form.

In my opinion, when St Thomas extends the potentiality-act structure to the receipt of being by essence, there is something very significant going on in his thought. One may have expected that an inquiry into essence as based on *ens* and as it is found in finite substances, material and immaterial, would lead St Thomas into a view that essence is a sufficient foundation for metaphysics. After all, St Thomas himself says that it is according to essence that a thing is called a being.<sup>383</sup> Do we need more? The answer is yes: we do need more. As St Thomas says, whatever belongs to a thing is either caused by the principles of its nature or comes to it from an extrinsic principle.<sup>384</sup> Now, St Thomas never denies the actualising role of form in composite substances, and he explicitly recognises that form, “in its own way”, is the cause of the being of such substances.<sup>385</sup> Yet, ‘being itself’ of any finite substance cannot be caused by an intrinsic principle such as form, because ‘being itself’ is not a

<sup>380</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 8; Maurer 57. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 5.

<sup>381</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, McDermott, op. cit., 68-69.

<sup>382</sup> “Omni potentia passivae respondet potentia activa. Potentia enim propter actum est, sicut materia propter formam. Non potest autem ens in potentia consequi quod sit actu nisi per virtutem alicuius existentis in actu. Otiosa igitur esset potentia nisi esset virtus activa agentis quae eam in actum reducere posset: cum tamen nihil sit otiosum in rebus naturae.” “Corresponding to every passive power, moreover, there is an active one; because potency is for the sake of act, as is matter for the sake of form. Now, it is only by the power of a thing existing actually that a potentially existent being can be made actual. A potency would thus be without purpose unless there existed the active power of an agent which could actualize it. And yet, in the real world, there is nothing purposeless.” St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 22, n. 5.

<sup>383</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 2, n. 3; Maurer 36. Marietti ed., c. 2, n. 5.

<sup>384</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 7; Maurer 56. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 4.

<sup>385</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 2, n. 3; Maurer 36. Marietti ed., c. 2, n. 5.



principle of any finite quiddity, composed or simple. Only in the case of the unique primary being can it be said that its quiddity is to be; and this being, which St Thomas recognises as God, must be the extrinsic efficient cause of 'being itself' of all other beings, because God alone is pure unparticipated being and therefore pure act.<sup>386</sup> Therefore, in the case of finite things, if the form or quiddity were the reason for 'being itself' of the thing, the thing would actually not be integrated into the order of being. Rather, as St Thomas himself says, the thing would be its own cause and bring itself into being, "which is impossible".<sup>387</sup>

Thus, in seeking the extrinsic efficient cause of 'being itself' of finite substances, material and immaterial, St Thomas is integrating those substances into the wider order of being. Form alone cannot do this, because form alone is an intrinsic principle of being. Rather, the essence or form is ordered to being as potentiality to act, and it seeks an extrinsic efficient cause itself in act.<sup>388</sup> As potentiality, the essence determines to itself the existential act. In this way, the existence of the substance is "established, as it were, by the principles of the essence".<sup>389</sup> What is emerging here is a teleological element in St Thomas's metaphysics of existence: it is not enough to say that it is through essence that a thing has being; it is also necessary to say that finite essence is positively ordered to

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<sup>386</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, nn. 6 and 7; Maurer 55-57. Marietti ed., c. 5, nn 3 and 4.

<sup>387</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 7, Maurer 56. St Thomas's Latin in this passage is: Non autem potest esse quod ipsum esse sit causatum ab ipsa forma vel quidditate rei, dico sicut a caussa efficiente: quia sic aliqua res esset caussa suipsius, et aliqua res seipsam in esse produceret, quod est impossibile. Ergo oportet quod omnis talis res, cuius esse est aliud a natura sua, habeat esse ab alio. Et quia omne quod est per aliud reducitur ad id quod est per se, sicut ad causam primam, ideo oportet quod sit aliqua res, quae sit caussa essendi omnibus rebus, eo quod ipsa est esse tantum; Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 4.

<sup>388</sup> Elsewhere, St Thomas writes: 'Unicuique autem competit habere causam agentem, secundum quod habet esse.' "it belongs to a thing to have an efficient cause according as it has being". *Summa Theologiae*, q. 44, a. 1, ad 3. And: "every agent acts to the extent that it is in act", so that "that which is effected by the agent must in some way exist in the agent." "Sciendum est igitur, quod, cum omne agens agat in quantum est in actu, oportet quod in quod per agentem efficitur, aliquo modo sit in agente;" *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 3, c. In other words, a thing must be brought into existence by an efficient cause itself in act. See also *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 22, nn. 4 and 5, already referred to.

<sup>389</sup> "Esse enim rei quamvis sit aliud ab ejus essentia, non tamen est intelligendum quod sit aliquod superadditum ad modum accidentis, sed quasi constituitur per principia essentiae." "for even though a thing's existence is other than its essence, it should not be understood to be something added to its essence after the manner of an accident, but something established, as it were, by the principles of the essence." St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk IV, Lect. 2, n. 558. Joseph Owens says that this is the sense in which a thing has being through its form. *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 147-148. Thus, we do not have two acts of being, but we do have two causes of being.

existence.<sup>390</sup> And within this teleological element there is emerging St Thomas's notion of participation in *esse*, and it is participation mediated through efficient cause, not formal cause.

The shift of participation in being from formal to efficient cause is significant. Mediation through efficient cause means that participation in being is not to be understood as sharing in form. In *De ente et essentia* St Thomas nominates God as the ultimate cause of being in finite things.<sup>391</sup> God's absolute simplicity means that God's being is God's essence and therefore God's being is distinct from all other being. St Thomas points out more than once that God's being is not to be confused with universal being or *ens commune*.<sup>392</sup> In the same way, participated being is not to be regarded as adding to or as changing the finite nature as a nature, as might be the case with formal cause. Rather, mediation through efficient cause means that the finite nature is made to exist, without any addition in the order of nature. As St Thomas says, being is the actuality of every form or nature.<sup>393</sup>

So far in this chapter of the thesis I have been considering Chapter Four of *De ente et essentia*, in which St Thomas considers 'essence' as it is found in simple substances. In Section 5.1 I have observed some differences between simple substances and composite substances; yet simple substances are not absolutely simple, but contain a mix of potentiality. This insight leads St Thomas to establish a distinction between 'essence' and 'being' in all finite substances, composite and simple. That 'being' which is outside 'essence' must be caused by an extrinsic efficient cause. In other words and as I have argued in Section 5.12, we are speaking of 'being' not as form but as *act*. From here I have gone on to adumbrate the implications for St Thomas's notion of participation, as it applies to that which is outside essence, moved from its traditional location in form onto the more Aristotelian terrain of efficient cause through a structure of act and potency. Now, in section 5.2, I will examine some implications of this shift.

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<sup>390</sup> Cf. Thomas O'Shaughnessy, "St Thomas's Changing Estimate of Avicenna's Teaching on Existence as an Accident", *The Modern Schoolman* 36 (1959), 245, 259-260.

<sup>391</sup> "Et quia omne quod est per aliud reducitur ad id quod est per se, sicut ad causam primam" "... everything that exists through another is reduced to that which exists through itself as to its first cause". Later in the same paragraph St Thomas calls this first cause "God". St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 7; Maurer 56-57. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 4. In *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 8, a. 1, c., St Thomas says: "Cum autem Deus sit ipsum esse per suam essentiam, oportet quod esse creatum sit proprius effectus eius;" "Now, since God is being itself by His own essence, created being must be His proper effect;"

<sup>392</sup> See for example, St Thomas, *De Potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 4. *Summa Theologiae*, q. 3, a. 4, ad 1. *De ente et essentia*, c. 5, n. 2; Maurer 60. Marietti ed., c. 6, (a).

<sup>393</sup> "quia esse est actualitas omnis formae vel naturae:". St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, q. 3, a. 4, c. See also Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 106-107.

## 5.2 Extending Aristotelian Potentiality and Act and Participation

In this section I will cover the following issues. First, in Section 5.21, I will examine the implications of St Thomas's containing essence-existence composition within a framework of efficient cause and act and potency, and argue that this is owing to St Thomas's metaphysics of *esse*, especially his conception of *esse* as *act*. To conceive of *esse* as act obviously requires some sort of distinction from *esse* as form. Therefore, in Section 5.22 I will examine quite how St Thomas conceives of *esse* as *act*, and how this conception is related to *esse* as form. This will lead to a discussion of primary and secondary efficient causes, and the distinction of *causae fiendi* and *causae essendi*, which I pick up in Sections 5.222 and 5.223. This distinction parallels that between univocal efficient causes and equivocal (or analogous) efficient causes already observed (this is in Section 2.1 above). Finally, I will conclude this section (5.2) and this chapter (5) by relating this structure of causation to participation.

### 5.21 Why does St Thomas explain Essence-Esse Composition in terms of Potentiality and Act?

St Thomas develops this analysis when considering the essence of substances separated from matter. It is clear, however, that the analysis applies equally to essences composed of matter and form. Indeed, when St Thomas is explaining that simple substances are not absolutely simple because their quiddity (or form) does not include their being, his supporting illustration is actually taken from composed material substances.<sup>394</sup> In his *De principiis naturae* St Thomas uses the potentiality-act structure to explain the composition of matter and form in the process of generation. Now, in *De ente et essentia* St Thomas extends the potentiality-act structure to explain the newly discovered composition of essence and existence in the order of being. In other words, St Thomas lifts the potentiality-act structure from its foundation in materiality and physicality to the level of metaphysics. This necessitates some extension of the meaning of the terms; in the context of 'act' St Thomas emphasises completion and fulfilment as well as activity, so that 'act' extends to include perfections - the foundation perfection being 'being' - while 'potentiality' extends correlatively to include the capacity to receive perfection.<sup>395</sup> St Thomas recognises the extensions in *De ente et*

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<sup>394</sup> "possum enim intelligere quid est homo vel phoenix, et tamen ignorare an esse habeant in rerum natura." "I can know, for instance, what a man or a phoenix is and still be ignorant whether it has being in reality." St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 6; Maurer 55. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 3.

<sup>395</sup> In *Summa contra gentiles* St Thomas says: "*Esse actum quendam nominat: non enim dicitur esse aliquid ex hoc quod est in potentia, sed ex eo quod est in actu. Omne autem cui convenit actus aliquis diversum ab eo*

*essentia* when he observes that potency and act are found in the intelligences but form and matter are not, except in an equivocal sense.<sup>396</sup>

Not only does St Thomas extend the potentiality-act structure from his own foundation in material generation, he extends that structure from its Aristotelian foundation in the explanation of motion and change. This extension is observed and analysed by a number of scholars, and they see it as facilitated by a notion of participation taken by St Thomas from the Neo-Platonic tradition, to be revised by him and adapted to his purposes.<sup>397</sup> I will not analyse the work of these scholars; rather, I wish to move to this question: why does St Thomas choose a potentiality-act structure to explain essence-existence composition, and how does that structure relate to his notion of participation?

### 5.211 The Existential Framework

To answer this question we start with the framework within which St Thomas develops the distinction in *De ente et essentia*. This framework is defined (a) by the necessity of an extrinsic efficient cause to explain the existence of each and every finite being, which leads us to (b) the absolute and necessarily unique simplicity of God as first cause. This framework dictates a participation structure for 'being' whereby God is pure being and must be unique, while all other beings have 'being' by participation. This 'being' must be received by way of efficient cause. If 'being' were received by formal cause then it would be received into finite natures, and that would

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exists, se habet ad ipsum ut potentia ad actum: actus enim et potentia ad se invicem dicuntur." "*Being*, furthermore, is the name of an act, for a thing is not said to be because it is in potency but because it is in act. Everything, however, that has an act diverse from it is related to that act as potency to act; for potency and act are said relatively to one another." Bk I, c. 22, n. 7.

<sup>396</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 8; Maurer 57. Note that the equivocation concerns not the terms 'act' and 'potency', but the terms 'form' and 'matter'. Thus, form in a separate substance can be compared with matter in a material substance, as it is a potential principle in the entitative order just as matter is a potential principle in the essential order. St Thomas adds that the equivocation extends to related terms such as 'to suffer', 'to receive' and 'to be a subject'. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 5.

<sup>397</sup> See, for example, Charles A. Hart in two related articles: "Twenty-five Years of Thomism", *The New Scholasticism* 25 (1951), 3, at 18-23, and "Participation and the Thomistic Five Ways", *The New Scholasticism* 26 (1952), 267. And see Cornelio Fabro, "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation", translated by B.M. Bonansea, *The Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1974), 449. Fr Fabro has other important articles in English, but the article cited is his best known and it covers the ground mentioned in the text. In citing Hart and Fabro I do not mean to imply that their analyses are entirely congruent with each other. Hart and Fabro agree that Thomistic participation is founded in *esse* understood as what Fabro calls "intensive act". They also agree that Thomistic participation rests upon the act-potency couplet understood metaphysically (i.e., as having to do with being and other perfections). However, Fabro would, I think criticise Hart for appearing to run together the *act* of *esse* and the "fact" of existence. See, for example, Hart in the second of his articles cited above, at 274-275, 278 and 281-282; and see Fabro in his article cited at 470.

compromise the uniqueness of God, in whom alone ‘being’ is a nature or essence. If ‘being’ is received by efficient cause however, then it is received extrinsically to the finite nature or essence. The finite essence is simply made to be. Therefore, in finite substances, material and immaterial, existence is other than essence. Furthermore, the hierarchy of inter-locking efficient causes demands a potentiality-act structure in order to express the dependency. The hierarchy of causes must terminate in a first cause which is ‘pure being’, so that we can say that finite essences are in potency to the act of being. In other words, the essence-existence composition of finite substances is developed by St Thomas within a framework erected on *being* as foundation act. This existential framework is structured around participation, so that the notion of participation at once guarantees the absolute uniqueness and simplicity of God, along with the finite being of finite substances, so that they too are woven into reality.

### 5.212 Why Form is not Enough

If we require a manifestation of this structure, there are many such in Chapter 4 of *De ente et essentia*. For example, the reason that St Thomas gives that the ‘being itself’ of a finite substance must be caused by an extrinsic efficient cause is that ‘being itself’ cannot be caused by the principles of the substance’s nature. Form is a principle of the substance’s nature, yet form is not enough to cause ‘being itself’. Why? Because being is an *act* and it complements the *potentiality* of the thing’s nature; it therefore requires an efficient cause itself in act. Furthermore, by ‘being itself’ St Thomas means to refer not to the actualisation of form but to the thing’s participation in the pure being which is God. In *Summa contra gentiles* St Thomas says:

Ipsium esse competit primo agenti secundum propriam naturam: esse enim Dei est eius substantia ... Quod autem competit alicui secundum propriam naturam suam, non convenit aliis nisi per modum participationis: sicut calor aliis corporibus ab igne. Ipsum igitur esse competit omnibus aliis a primo agente per participationem quandam. Quod autem competit alicui per participationem, non est substantia eius.

being itself belongs to the first agent according to His proper nature, for God’s being is His substance ... Now, that which belongs to a thing according to its proper nature does not belong to other things except by way of participation, as heat is in other bodies from fire. Therefore, being itself belongs to all other things from the first agent by a certain participation. That which belongs to a thing by participation, however, is not that thing’s substance.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 52, n. 8. I submit that by the term “substance” in this paragraph St Thomas means “nature”.

For a similar reason, when St Thomas climbs up the causal chain to ‘first cause’ in *De ente et essentia*, he immediately gives that cause the equivalent names of “pure being” and “God”. It seems to me that these equivalences can be made only because the hierarchy of efficient causes is constructed within ‘being itself’. It is not ‘first cause’ which points to God; after all, for Aristotle the unmoved mover could be many. Yet, one recalls that, within St Thomas’s metaphysics “God” is *Ipsum Esse Subsistens* and necessarily unique. This is the “pure being” which St Thomas equates with ‘first cause’.<sup>399</sup>

### 5.213 *Esse as Act*

A further manifestation that the dichotomy of essence and existence is dictated by the conception of being as act occurs later in the same chapter of *De ente et essentia*, when St Thomas observes that, as created intellectual substances are not pure act but have some potentiality, they are multiplied yet distinct from one another according to their degree of potency and act.<sup>400</sup> The intellectual substances then may be graded, yet their grading is according *not* to their form or nature, which after all is potency in this context, but to their *act*; scil. their act of being. Among the lowest in this hierarchy of forms we find the human soul, which has such an excess of potentiality that a material reality, namely the body, is induced to share its reality, so that there is one being in one composite.<sup>401</sup>

Perhaps the most significant manifestation of all occurs when St Thomas observes that, while the quiddity or essence of an intelligence is identical with that which it is, its being, which is received from God, is that by which it subsists in reality; i.e., it is by being and not by form that the intelligence is a substance; it cannot be by form, as form is the essence. St Thomas now continues that this is why “some say” that a substance of this kind is composed of ‘that by which it is’ (*quo est*) and ‘that which is’ (*quod est*), or, as Boethius would have it, of ‘that which is’ (*quod est*) and ‘being’ (*esse*).<sup>402</sup> In my opinion, the authorities to whom St Thomas refers actually intend a distinction between ‘that which

<sup>399</sup> Cf. Hart, “Twenty-five years of Thomism”, 20-21. And Hart, “Participation and the Thomistic Five Ways”, 269-276, 281-282.

<sup>400</sup> “Et quia in intelligentiis ponitur potentia et actus, non erit difficile invenire multitudinem intelligentiarum; quod esset impossibile, si nulla potentia in eis esset. ... Est ergo distinctio earum ad invicem, secundum gradum potentiae et actus;” St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 5.; c. 4, n. 10 in Maurer’s translation, p.58.

<sup>401</sup> “ita quod intelligentia superior, quae plus propinqua est primo, habet plus de actu et minus de potentia et sic de aliis; et hoc completur in anima humana, quae tenet ultimum gradum in intellectualibus substantiis.” St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, Mariette ed., c. 5, n. 5.; c. 4, n. 10 in Maurer’s translation, pp.58-59.

<sup>402</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 9; Maurer 57-58. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 5.

is' and the essence, nature or form by which it is.<sup>403</sup> If my opinion is correct, then St Thomas is actually moving beyond these authorities. It seems as if St Thomas has a fresh doctrine of substantial existence here which is somehow beyond form, although form remains a principle of the substance and, in that sense, a principle of its being. The reference to Boethius is particularly significant, as in his *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, St Thomas draws Boethius' distinction based on *esse* as form (*essendi forma*) into his own distinction based on *esse* as act (*actus essendi*). In this way, St Thomas draws participation into his own metaphysics of *esse*.<sup>404</sup>

## 5.22 The Kind of Act Esse is: *De Potentia Dei*

I have stated above that St Thomas seems to have in mind existence as an act which is somehow beyond form; and an act indeed to which form is in potential. What sort of act could that be? In question 7 article 2 of the *Quaestiones Disputatae De Potentia Dei* St Thomas asks: Is God's Essence or Substance the Same as his Existence? In answering this question, St Thomas begins with the assertion that essence and existence are not distinguished in God. In explaining this assertion, St Thomas immediately begins talking about causes, so that where several causes produce various effects and one effect in common, they must produce this common effect by virtue of some higher cause to which this effect properly belongs. Therefore, the common effect must be traced to a higher cause to whom the effect properly belongs. Now, the common effect which all created causes have is *being*. The cause which is higher and to whom *being* is a *proper* effect is God. Now, as the proper effect of any cause proceeds therefrom in likeness to its nature, being must be the essence or nature of God.<sup>405</sup> This is the structure of being and cause within a mutually complementary framework, leading to God as first cause to whom being is a proper nature, that we have observed in *De ente et essentia*.<sup>406</sup>

Among the objections it is argued that being should not be attributed to God's substance, as being is imperfect like primal matter. The parallel is drawn that, just as prime matter may be determined by

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<sup>403</sup> This is apparent from the expressions used. It is also the opinion of the editor, Armand Maurer, who says in a footnote: "For these scholastics (i.e., those to whom St Thomas refers) *quod est* is the concrete subject (e.g., man); *quo est* is the essence or nature by which it is what it is (e.g., humanity)." Commenting further on the reference to Boethius, Maurer says that, for Boethius, "*esse* is the form or nature by which a concrete substance, such as man, is what it is; for example, humanity." Notes 22 and 23, page 58

<sup>404</sup> I will pick up this issue later in the thesis, when discussing St Thomas's *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*; see Section 7.21, especially 7.211 and 7.212.

<sup>405</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 2, c.

<sup>406</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 7; Maurer 56-57. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 4.

any form, being may be determined by all the proper predicaments.<sup>407</sup> This objection would seem to be based on 'being' as 'form', as that which we find in the predicaments or categories are substantial and accidental forms.

In a famous reply, St Thomas says that *being*, "as we understand it here" ("quod hoc quod dico *esse*"), signifies the highest perfection of all. This is because act is always more perfect than potentiality, and no "signate form" ("forma signata") is understood to be in act unless it is supposed to have *being*. I suggest that by the term "forma signata" here St Thomas means to refer to form composed with designated matter. Thus, St Thomas continues that we may take human nature or fiery nature as existing potentially in matter, or as existing in the power of an agent, or even as existing in the mind; "but when it has being it becomes actually existent" ("sed hoc quod habet *esse*, efficitur actu existens"). Then follows the famous dictum that *being*, "as we understand it here" ("quod hoc quod dico *esse*"), "is the actuality of all acts, and therefore the perfection of all perfections" ("est actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum"). Nothing can be added to 'being' in this sense that is more formal and so is able to determine it as act determines potentiality. Therefore *being* in this sense is "essentially distinct from that to which it is added and whereby it is determined" ("est aliud secundum essentiam ab eo cui additur determinandum"). Hence "*being* is not determined by something else as potentiality by act but rather as act by potentiality" ("Unde non sic determinatur *esse* per aliud sicut potentia per actum, sed magis sicut actus per potentiam"). Furthermore, this *being* is distinct from the being of form, as the being of form is the being of this or that nature ("Et per hunc modum, hoc *esse* ab illo *esse* distinguitur, in quantum est talis vel talis naturae"). The significance of this last statement is apparent when we recall that the objection that St Thomas is addressing argues that existence should not be attributed to God by essence, because, argues the objector, 'being' shares the imperfection of prime matter inasmuch as 'being' may be determined by any one of the proper predicaments. St Thomas's response shows that he is moving beyond 'being' (*esse*) as *form* to a notion of 'being' (*esse*) as *act*; the actuality of all acts, indeed. This is 'being' which goes through all the categories and then

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<sup>407</sup> The objection is No. 9, and it is recorded as follows: "Deo, qui est perfectissimus, id quod est imperfectissimum non est attribuendum. Sed esse est imperfectissimum, sicut prima materia: sicut enim materia prima determinatur per omnes formas, ita esse, cum sit imperfectissimum, determinari habet per omnia propria praedicamenta. Ergo sicut materia prima non est in Deo, ita nec esse debet divinae substantiae attribui." *De potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 2, obj. 9. The objection does not mean that existence is not somehow found in God; just that God does not exist by God's essence.



beyond them to *actuality*, which transcends the categories. St Thomas closes his response with a Dionysian dictum that “being excels life, since living things have not only life but also being”.<sup>408</sup>

### 5.221 *De Potentia Dei and De Ente et Essentia*

Note that, in the response just summarised, St Thomas indicates that he is speaking of *being* “as we understand it here”.<sup>409</sup> This qualifying phrase suggests that St Thomas is consciously introducing a fresh and fairly precise notion of ‘being’ (*esse*) in order to meet the objection, which speaks of ‘being’ as imperfect, as it is open to determination by each of the predicaments.<sup>410</sup> St Thomas responds with a notion of ‘being’ according to which ‘being’ is essentially distinct from that to which it is added and by which it is determined; a notion of ‘being’ according to which ‘being’ is determined, *not* as potentiality by act, but as *act* by potentiality. It is also a notion of ‘being’ which is distinct from the

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<sup>408</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9. The Latin phrases are quoted from Editio VIII revisa, Marietti 1949, and the English from the translation by the English Dominican Fathers, 1934. The response is not short, but I will quote the important parts of it, from the Marietti ed.: “Ad nonum dicendum, 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. ... 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, ... Et per hunc modum, hoc esse ab illo esse distinguitur, in quantum est talis vel talis naturae. ...”

<sup>409</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9. This is the second occasion on which we have met a qualification translated with this phrase. The qualification occurs three times in this response, twice as “quod hoc quod dico esse” and once as “quod ei quod dico esse”. The other location in which we have met a phrase translated in this way is in *Quodlibetal Questions II*, q. 2, a. 2, c. – see Section 3.3 of this thesis. I do not believe that the qualification introduces a note of contingency or ambiguity into St Thomas’s reply. We must remember that the phrase is used in the context of a disputed question and disputations were part of scholastic method. For a very interesting analysis of the role of disputation in scholastic method, see A.W. Levi, “Medieval Philosophy: The Age of the Saint: *Aquinas*”, in his *Philosophy as Social Expression* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1974), 101-162, esp. 128-132. See also Anthony Kenny and Jan Pinborg, “Medieval Philosophical Literature” in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy; From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism 1100-1600*, edited by Norman Kretzman, Anthony Kenny and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), 11-42, esp. 27-29. For some very interesting philosophical perspectives on St Thomas’s choice of the life of a Dominican teacher and preacher rather than the life of a Benedictine contemplative, see Ronald Duska, “Aquinas’s Definition of Good: Ethical-Theoretical Notes on *De Veritate*, Q. 21”, *The Monist* 58 (1974), 151, esp. 160-162. For an insight into St Thomas’s view of the role of a scholar and teacher, such as himself, in the service of the Church see an anecdote recounted by James Weisheipl in his *Friar Thomas D’Aquino*, 324. Also interesting are St Thomas’s remarks in his “Sermon for the Feast of St Martin”, concerning St Martin’s elevation to the episcopacy, in *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*, edited by M.C. D’Arcy (London: Dent, 1964), 1-11, at 10-11. I.T. Eschmann lists this sermon as authentic: see his “A Catalogue of St Thomas’s Works”, being an appendix to Gilson, *The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 426, item 80.

<sup>410</sup> “sicut enim materia prima determinatur per omnes formas, ita esse, cum sit imperfectissimum, determinari habet per omnia propria praedicamenta.” *De potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 2, obj. 9

‘being’ of form, and indeed goes beyond the ‘being’ of form, as the ‘being’ of form is the ‘being’ of this or that nature. St Thomas is now speaking of ‘being’ (*esse*) as the actuality of all acts and the perfection of all perfections. Such a notion of ‘being’ accounts for a given being’s existence certainly; yet it is also “the ultimate intrinsic ontological principle of perfection in any existing entity”.<sup>411</sup>

I would argue that the understanding of *being* developed by St Thomas in his response to the ninth objection in q. 7, a. 2 of *De potentia Dei* clearly parallels that developed by him in *De ente et essentia*.<sup>412</sup> I suggest that this is the understanding of ‘being’ within which are contained the following: the understanding of God as *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*, the structure of participation in being, and the distinction of essence and existence in finite substances – in other words, St Thomas’s metaphysics of *esse*. This is the understanding of ‘being’ by which substances are integrated into the wider order of reality; and it is by the participation of essences in the act of being that created natures are ordered both to their own perfection and to the perfection of the universe.

#### 5.2211 One Cause of Being

It is for this reason, in my opinion, that St Thomas can adapt Aristotle’s argument from motion to a hierarchy of efficient causes conferring *being*, terminating in a cause which exists through itself and is at once first cause and pure being. It is precisely because of this equation that the first cause must be one. We could have several “firsts” if we consider things in discrete categories or distinct orders; but St Thomas has already established in *De ente et essentia* that *being* is neither a genus nor a species. Furthermore, in another question in *Dei potentia Dei* (scil., q. 3, a. 5) St Thomas establishes in an argument from participation that that which is ‘first being’ must be uniquely and most truly *being*. The proof runs this way: wherever something is found in diverse things positively but by differing degrees of participation, there must be one thing to whom that thing belongs properly and most perfectly. Thus fire, which is the extreme of heat, is the cause of heat in all hot things. There must therefore be one unique being “most perfect and most true”, “as philosophers have proved” “that there is a mover altogether immovable and absolutely perfect”. It follows that less perfect beings must derive being from this first mover. This argument St Thomas attributes to Aristotle.<sup>413</sup> Now, as

<sup>411</sup> Wippel, “Essence and Existence”, 395.

<sup>412</sup> See St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, nn. 6, 7, 8, 9; Maurer 55-58. Marietti ed., c. 5, nn. 3, 4, 5.

<sup>413</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia dei*, q. 3, a. 5, c. St Thomas’s expression for the part of the argument given in quotes (quoting the translator) in the text is as follows: “Est autem ponere unum ens, quod est perfectissimum et verissimum ens: quod ex hoc probatur, quia est aliquid movens omnino immobile et perfectissimum, ut a

*being* is the actuality of all acts and the perfection of all perfections, it follows that the ‘first cause’ must be not only ‘pure being’ but also one. Thus does St Thomas call this being “God”.

#### 5.2212 Secondary Causes and Participation in Esse

We should note however, that creatures do not receive *being* with the same power that *being* belongs to God, nor do they hold it in the same manner. God’s being is God’s essence, while creatures receive being from outside their essences and hold it by participation. Indeed, creatures do not even share a common being with God.<sup>414</sup> Therefore, as the *being* of creatures is received ultimately from God, we should say that it is received through *analogous* efficient cause. Now, as the *esse* of each creature is determined by its essence, there is analogy of being, both of each creature to God and among creatures themselves. The structure of analogy tells us that *being* is not just a commonality shared among diverse things, but rather *being* weaves diverse things into a wider reality and orders them to perfection, as already stated. I will now say a little on the relationship between primary and secondary efficient causes in bringing *being* to creatures.

It is a well known teaching of St Thomas’s that the act of creation is proper to God alone. After some hesitation in his early *Writings on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, St Thomas came firmly to the conclusion that no creature can share in God’s act of creation, not even instrumentally.<sup>415</sup> However, it does not follow from this that causal agents inferior to God have no causal efficacy of their own in the production of material substances. As far as immaterial substances are concerned, that is substances of simple essences separate from matter, God alone is the efficient cause of their acts of being. However, in *De ente et essentia* St Thomas explicitly acknowledges that form can be called a cause of being of a composite material substance. This must mean that substantial form plays some role in the communication of *esse* to a material substance. However, form is an intrinsic cause and therefore, while it is a principle of the substance’s being, it cannot account for the substance’s act of being. At the same time, St Thomas’s observation that “omne quod est per aliud reducitur ad id quod

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philosophis est probatum. Oportet ergo quod omnia alia minus perfecta ab ipso esse recipiant. Et haec est probatio *Philosophi* [in II *Metaph.*, text, comm. 4].

<sup>414</sup> I have already referred to St Thomas’s warnings against confusing God’s being with *ens commune*. See, for example, *Summa Theologiae*, q. 3, a. 4, ad 1.

<sup>415</sup> See Steven Baldner and William Carroll, Introduction to their *Aquinas on Creation: Writings on the “Sentences” of Peter Lombard, Book 2, Distinction 1, Question 1* (Toronto: PIMS, 1997), 46-47. St Thomas’s statement of the teaching may be found in several places, e.g., *De potentia Dei*, q. 3, a. 4, c. For St Thomas’s understanding of natural causes as instrumental causes see *De potentia Dei*, q. 3, a. 7, c.

est per se, sicut ad causam primam” “everything which exists through another is reduced to that which exists through itself as to its first cause” suggests that there may be agents inferior to God engaged in some way in the efficient causation of acts of being, at least in the case of material substances naturally generated.<sup>416</sup>

It will be observed that, in the quotation just given, St Thomas distinguishes “omne quod est per aliud” (“everything which exists through another”) and “quod est per se” (“that which exists through itself”) in the order of efficient cause. This distinction is paralleled in St Thomas’s discussion in *De potentia Dei*, question 5 article 1.<sup>417</sup> The question at issue in this article is whether things are preserved in their being by God. St Thomas answers that there is no doubt that things are preserved in existence by God, and he concludes that all things would instantly fall into nothingness were God to withdraw God’s support. In proving this conclusion St Thomas explains how natural causes complement the creative activity of God, including in the communication of *esse* to creatures. In considering St Thomas’s argument, one learns more about the analogy of being and also one is enabled to propose some hypotheses to do with the type of efficient causes which are necessarily associated with participation and with the structure of creaturely participation in *esse*.

#### ***5.222 De Potentia Dei q. 5, a. 1: Introducing causae fiendi and causae essendi***

In his response to the question asked in this article - viz. whether things are preserved in their being by God, or do they continue to exist of themselves, independently of divine action - St Thomas begins by observing that an effect necessarily depends on its cause, as is apparent in the case of formal and material causes. Why is this apparent? Because matter and form are principles of essence and, without them, a thing would cease to exist. The same observation, St Thomas continues, can be made of efficient and final causes – efficient causes because an efficient cause produces a thing by inducing the form or disposing the matter (to receive a form), and final causes because an end is a cause only insofar as it moves the efficient cause to act. Therefore, just as a thing necessarily

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<sup>416</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 2, nn. 2 and 3, and c. 4, n. 7; Maurer 35-36 and 56-57. Marietti ed., c. 2, nn. 4 and 5; c. 5, n. 4. The quotation comes from the Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 4, and Maurer’s translation c. 4, n. 7. John Wippel isolates the issue in a way similar to that adumbrated in the text in his “Thomas Aquinas on Creatures as Causes of *Esse*”, *International Philosophical Quarterly* 40 (2000), 197, 197-202.

<sup>417</sup> James Weisheipl states that the questions *De potentia Dei* were disputed by St Thomas in Rome, most probably in his first year of teaching in the studium of Santa Sabina. Weisheipl therefore dates these questions at 1265-66; i.e. about ten years after *De ente et essentia* was written. Weisheipl, “A Brief Catalogue of Authentic Works”, in his *Friar Thomas D’Aquino*, 363; see also 198-199 of the text.

depends upon its form and its matter, it necessarily depends upon its efficient and final causes. Now, as efficient cause induces the form or disposes matter to receive a form, it follows that the existence of a thing made depends upon its efficient cause to the extent that the form of the thing made depends upon the efficient cause.<sup>418</sup> From this point St Thomas proceeds to develop a structure of two complementary efficient causes or principles, on one of which the form depends only indirectly and not according to its nature as form, and on the other of which the form depends directly and according to its nature as form. The argument proceeds as follows.

St Thomas first observes that there can be an efficient cause on which the form of the thing made does not depend directly and according to its nature as a form, but only indirectly. He gives the example of a generated fire, which does not depend directly upon its generating fire, because the two occupy the same degree in the order of things and the form is in the same way in each; i.e., the generated fire is simply another fire. As St Thomas puts it, the two fires are distinguished only materially, being seated in different matter. However, as the generated fire has its form from some cause, that form must depend upon some higher principle that is the cause of the form directly and in respect of its very species.<sup>419</sup>

What that means is this: the relation between this fire which is generated and that fire which generates, considered simply in themselves, is not “indirect” or *per accidens*; it is direct, of course:

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<sup>418</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 5, a. 1, c. What I have written in the text is based on the translation by the English Dominican Fathers, this volume being dated 1933. St Thomas’s expression, from the Marietti ed., 1949, is: “Effectum enim a sua causa dependere oportet. Hoc enim est de ratione effectus et causae; quod quidem in causis *formalibus* et *materialibus* manifeste apparet. Quocumque enim materiali vel formali principio subtracto, res statim esse desinet, cum huiusmodi principia intrent essentiam rei. Idem autem iudicium oportet esse de causis *efficientibus*, et *formalibus* vel *materialibus*. Nam efficiens est causa rei secundum quod formam inducit, vel materiam disponit. Unde eadem dependentia rei est ad efficiens, et ad materiam et formam, cum per unum eorum ab altero dependeat. De *finalibus* autem causis oportet etiam idem esse iudicium quod de causa efficiente. Nam finis non est causa, nisi secundum quod movet efficientem ad agendum; non enim est primum in esse, sed in intentione solum. Unde et ubi non est actio, non est causa finalis, ut patet in III *Metaph.* [com. 12]. Secundum hoc ergo esse rei factae dependet a causa efficiente secundum quod dependet ab ipsa forma rei factae.”

<sup>419</sup> St Thomas’s expression is: “Est autem aliquod efficiens a quo forma rei factae non dependet per se et secundum rationem formae, sed solum per accidens: sicut forma ignis generati ab igne generante, per se quidem, et secundum rationem suae speciei non dependet, cum in ordine rerum eundem gradum teneat, nec forma ignis aliter sit in generato quam in generante; sed distinguitur ab ea solum divisione materiali, prout scilicet est in alia materia. Unde cum igni generato sua forma sit ab aliqua causa, oportet ipsam formam dependere ab altiori principio, quod sit causa ipsius formae per se et secundum propriam speciei rationem.” *De potentia Dei*, q. 5, a. 1, c. The English and the Latin come from the same editions as in the previous footnote.

this individual fire causes that individual fire. However, St Thomas is speaking of the principle on which the *form* depends “directly and by reason of its species” (“per se quidem, et secundum rationem suae speciei”). The form of the species does not depend on any of its individual members; rather the individual members participate in the species as particular to universal. Therefore, when we are speaking of form, the fire that generates a new fire is the principle of the form of the new fire, not directly or *per se*, but only indirectly or *per accidens*. The *per se* cause of the form of the generated fire “must depend on some higher principle, that is the cause of the form directly and in respect of its very species” (“oportet ipsam formam dependere ab altiori principio, quod sit causa ipsius formae per se et secundum propriam speciei rationem”).<sup>420</sup>

St Thomas says: “properly speaking the existence of a form in matter implies no movement or change except accidentally”. In other words, the form which exists in matter does not of itself imply movement and change; rather, form which exists in matter implies movement or change accidentally, and it does so for the precise reason it is in matter. St Thomas adds that no body acts except insofar as it is moved; a “body” is corporeal, of course, and so its materiality and potency necessitates that it acts only insofar as it is moved. The generating substance then is the cause of the form of the effect to the extent that it draws the form from the potentiality of matter and thereby actualises the matter. But, in doing so it cannot be the cause of the form as such, or “in respect of its very species”. Therefore, if we are to account for the existence of form as form, as distinct from matter, another kind of causality is necessary. This kind of causality necessarily will be that of an incorporeal principle, upon which the form of the effect depends directly and for its nature as form, “for the effect depends on its active cause through the action of a principle”.<sup>421</sup>

At this stage then, St Thomas has identified two types of principle or cause which are active in the production of material things; there is a corporeal principle and an incorporeal principle. St Thomas continues that if a corporeal principle is in some way the cause of form, this is owing to its acting by virtue of an incorporeal principle and as its instrument. Indeed, this must be so, as a form cannot begin to exist except in matter, and matter cannot be the subject of a form unless it be disposed to

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<sup>420</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 5, a. 1, c. The English and the Latin are taken from the editions already cited.

<sup>421</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 5, a. 1, c. Here is St Thomas’s expression: “Cum autem esse formae in materia, per se loquendo, nullum motum vel mutationem implicet, nisi forte per accidens; omne autem corpus non agat nisi motum, ut Philosophus probat, necesse est quod principium ex quo per se dependet forma, sit aliquod principium incorporeum; per actionem enim alicuius principii dependet effectus a causa agente.” English and Latin are quoted from the editions already cited.

that form; the proper act should be in its proper matter. When matter is unsuitably disposed to a particular form, it cannot receive that form directly from an incorporeal principle upon which the form depends; it needs something to “transmute” the matter. This is the function of the corporeal agent, because its action consists in moving something. The corporeal agent acts by virtue of the incorporeal principle, and its action terminates in this or that form. This form will be in the corporeal agent, just as the form of fire is in the generating fire. Therefore, the corporeal agent is not the cause of the form in the thing made, except to the extent of transmuting matter; i.e., to the extent that it educes the form from the potentiality of matter. Consequently, the form of the thing generated depends on the generator insofar as it is educed from matter, but not as to its absolute existence.<sup>422</sup> St Thomas comments that if one holds (with Aristotle) that substantial forms are educed from the potentiality of matter, then natural agents will dispose not only matter but also the substantial form, but only in regard to its eduction from the potentiality of matter into actual existence. As St Thomas puts it, they are “principles of existence as considered in its inchoation but not as considered absolutely”.<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> “Et si aliquod principium corporeum est per aliquem modum causa formae, hoc habet in quantum agit virtute principii incorporei, quasi eius instrumentum; quod quidem necessarium est ad quod forma esse incipiat, in quantum forma non incipit esse nisi in materia; non enim materia quocumque modo se habens potest subesse formae, quia proprium actum in propria materia oportet esse. Cum ergo est materia in dispositione quae non competit formae alicui, non potest a principio incorporeo, a quo forma dependet per se, eam consequi immediate; unde oportet quod sit aliquid transmutans materiam; et hoc est aliquod agens corporeum, cuius est agere movendo. Et hoc quidem agit in virtute principii incorporei, et eius actio determinatur ad hanc formam, secundum quod talis forma est in eo, *actu* (sicut in agentibus univocis) vel *virtute* (sicut in agentibus aequivocis). Sic igitur huiusmodi inferiora agentia corporalia, non sunt formarum principia in rebus factis, nihi quantum potest se extendere causalitas transmutationis, cum non agant nisi transmutando, ut dictum est, [q. 3, a. 7 et 8]; hoc autem est in quantum disponunt materiam, et educunt formam de potentia materiae. Quantum igitur ad hoc, formae generatorum dependent a generantibus naturaliter, quod educuntur de potentia materiae, non autem quantum ad esse absolutum.” St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 5, a. 1, c. The English verb “to educe” comes from the Latin verb “educō, educere, eduxi, eductum”, meaning “to lead out”.

<sup>423</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 5. The contrary view St Thomas attributes to the Platonists and Avicenna who, according to St Thomas, though denying the eduction of forms from matter, were obliged to hold that natural agents merely dispose matter, and that the form is induced by a principle that is separate from matter. St Thomas says: “Et quia Platonici et Avicenna non ponebant formas de potentia materiae educi, ideo cogeantur dicere quod agentia naturalia disponebant tantum materiam; inductio autem formae erat a principio separato. Si autem ponamus formas substantiales educi de potentia materiae, secundum sententiam Aristotelis, agentia naturalia non solum erunt casuae dispositionum materiae, sed etiam formarum substantialium; quantum ad hoc dumtaxat quod de potentia educuntur in actum, ut dictum est, [quaest. 3, art. 9 et 11], et per consequens sunt essendi principia quantum ad inchoationem ad esse, et non quantum ad ipsum esse absolute.” *De potentia Dei*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 5. In *De potentia Dei*, q. 3, a. 8, c St Thomas says: “it is not correct to say that form is made in matter, rather we should say that it is educed from matter. And from this principle that the composite and not the form is made the Philosopher proves that forms result from natural agents.”

It follows that the two types of principle or cause which are active in the production of material things are as follows: corporeal principles, which are principles of being with respect to the coming-to-be of forms including substantial forms, and incorporeal principles, which are principles of being with respect to the substance's act of being considered absolutely. These two types are known as *causae fiendi* and *causae essendi* respectively. It will be observed that both terms are plural. One could say that we have here two distinct modes of causality, one in the order of causation and change (*causae fiendi*) and one in the order of being which is proper to God alone. It would then follow that *causa essendi* must be singular. However, St Thomas's distinction in *De potentia Dei* q. 5, a. 1, is between causes of becoming which educe form from the potentiality of matter through motion, and causes upon which *being* depends directly. In fact, St Thomas recognises both types of cause among natural agents. Thus, according to St Thomas, some natural causes proceed without motion and succession; as examples he gives "the flash of the fire or the sun, because the flash of light proceeds from the body of light suddenly and not gradually, for illumination is not a movement but the term of a movement".<sup>424</sup> Furthermore, in his *Exposition on the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, St Thomas explicitly recognises that the light in the air is received directly from the sun.<sup>425</sup> Therefore plurals of both terms are justified.<sup>426</sup>

From what has been said it is apparent that the form of the thing generated depends on the generator for its coming-to-be or its *becoming*, but not for its absolute existence. Therefore, St Thomas observes, when the form is educed from the potentiality of matter into actual being, the becoming ceases, but the form itself, whereby the thing generated has its existence, does not cease.

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<sup>424</sup> "necesse est ut causa movens ad aliquid producendum praecedat duratione id quod ab ea producit. Unde quod ab aliquo sine motu procedit, simul est duratione cum eo a quo procedit, sicut splendor in igne vel in sole: nam splendor subito et non successive a corpore lucido procedit, cum illuminatio non sit motus, sed terminus motus." St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 3, a. 13. c.

<sup>425</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, c. 2, lines 80-90; translated with an Introduction by Janice L. Schultz and Edward A. Synan (Washington DC: CUA Press, 2001), 19.

<sup>426</sup> Cf. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on Creatures as Causes of *Esse*", 202. At the end of this article Wippel addresses the interesting question of whether there is a sense in which a natural agent can be called the cause of the act of being of a new substance. He concludes that there is such a sense. A natural agent proceeding by its own power educes a particular determination of a form from the potentiality of designated matter. St Thomas frequently recognises that being follows form. Therefore, causation of the act of being of the new substance can be assigned to the natural agent as instrumental cause acting with the power of God. This does not offend the principle that the act of creation from nothing belongs to God alone, as we are speaking of the natural agent educing form from matter. See Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on Creatures as Causes of *Esse*", 212-213. See also, St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae I*, q. 45, a. 5, ad 1.



Meanwhile, forms which do not exist in matter (such as intellectual substances), and forms that exist in matter nowise indisposed to the form (such as the heavenly bodies), proceed from an incorporeal agent which acts otherwise than by movement; hence they do not depend on something for their *becoming* without depending on it also for their *being*.

The result of that analysis is this: for those material substances which have an efficient cause which acts by movement, when the action of that cause ceases, their becoming ceases but their existence does not cease. However, in the case of all substances, material and immaterial, except for the ultimate incorporeal agent, if that incorporeal agent were to cease its action, the existence of all other substances would instantly cease. St Thomas now identifies this incorporeal agent, which is the reason for existence of all other things, corporeal and incorporeal, with God; and from God all things derive their form and, where they have it, their matter. And so St Thomas concludes that, if the action of God were to cease, all things would instantly fall into nothingness.<sup>427</sup>

### 5.223 *Causae Fiendi, Causae Essendi and Participation*

For present purposes, the distinction between *causae fiendi* and *causae essendi* is significant because it bears upon St Thomas's notion of participation. To pursue this connection, I turn to the *Summa Theologiae, Prima Pars*, composed by St Thomas between 1266 and 1268.<sup>428</sup> In question 104 article 1 St Thomas again addresses the question whether creatures need to be kept in being by God. He answers that both reason and faith require us to say that creatures are kept in being by God. In order to clarify the issue, St Thomas begins by distinguishing two types of conservation. First, there is conservation indirectly and accidentally, as when a thing is protected from corruption. God conserves some things in this way, but not all. Then there is conservation essentially and directly, which occurs when that which is conserved depends upon its conserver in such a way that it cannot exist without it. It is in this way that all creatures are conserved by God.

To explain this position, St Thomas introduces his distinction between *causae fiendi* and *causae essendi*. Every effect depends upon its cause, but an agent may be the cause of the *becoming* of the effect but not directly of its *being*. St Thomas illustrates this first in relation to artificial things (building a house, cooking a meal). He then says that the same principle applies to natural things.

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<sup>427</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia dei*, q. 5, a. 1, c.

<sup>428</sup> The date comes from Weisheipl's Catalogue, in his *Friar Thomas D'Aquino*, 361.

Turning to natural things, St Thomas continues that when we consider two things in the same species, one cannot be the cause of the other's form as such, because then it would be the cause of its own form. It is evident that he is now speaking of efficient cause. But one member of the species can be the cause of the form of another insofar as the form of the other is in matter; in other words, it can be the cause that *this matter has this form*. This is to be the cause of *becoming*, as when fire causes fire. What is happening here, says St Thomas, is that the natural effect has an aptitude to receive from its active cause an impression specifically the same as in the active cause. Sometimes, however, the effect does not have this aptitude. This occurs when an agent produces an effect not of the same species as itself. St Thomas illustrates with the heavenly bodies, which cause the generation of inferior bodies which differ from them in species. Such an agent can be the cause of the form as such, and consequently is not merely the cause of *becoming* but also the cause of *being*.<sup>429</sup> The result of the analysis is that if the cause of the *becoming* is withdrawn, the *becoming* cannot continue, while if the cause of the *becoming* and the *being* is withdrawn, the thing itself will cease. This is why hot water retains heat for a time after the cessation of the fire's action, while the air does not continue to be lit after the sun ceases to act upon it.<sup>430</sup>

To depart from St Thomas's text for a moment, one may observe that the importance of this discussion is that it offers a criterion for distinguishing *causae fiendi* and *causae essendi* in relation to natural things. If a natural effect receives an impression from its efficient cause specifically the same as in the efficient cause, the effect depends upon the cause for its becoming only, not its being. The cause then will be *causa fiendi* and cause and effect will be the same in species. We can call this relation one of univocal efficient cause, as cause and effect are the same in species. However, if the agent and the effect differ in species, then the agent can be a cause of the form as such, and not merely as it is received in designated matter. In this case the agent is both *causa fiendi* and *causa*

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<sup>429</sup> Again, St Thomas's response is fairly lengthy, but here is the heart of it: "Et ideo quandocumque naturalis effectus est natus impressionem agentis recipere secundum eandem rationem secundum quam est in agente, tunc fieri effectus dependet ab agente, non autem esse ipsius. – 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 fiendi, sed essendi." St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 104, a. 1, c.

<sup>430</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 104, a. 1, c. St Thomas says that water is matter susceptible of the fire's heat in the same way that it exists in the fire, so that it has an imperfect participation in the principle of heat and retains heat for a time if the fire is withdrawn. However, air is not of such a nature as to receive light in the same way that it exists in the sun, and therefore the light ceases if the action of the sun ceases.

*essendi*. We can call this relation one of equivocal efficient cause, because cause and effect differ in species.<sup>431</sup>

The importance of this distinction for understanding participation is that it provides a structure within which to speak of participation through efficient cause: we can speak of such participation in the context of equivocal efficient cause but not in the context of univocal efficient cause. Of course, in the context of univocal efficient cause we may speak of the effect participating in another way; thus an individual participates in its species, for example. But a univocal effect does not participate in its efficient cause, as the efficient cause merely reproduces itself, producing another individual in the same species. Furthermore, as the structure is erected on sameness and difference in species or nature, it elucidates just what it is in its efficient cause that an equivocal effect participates, and that in turn helps us understand the character of participation in being.

To return to St Thomas's text, he continues that every creature may be compared to God as the air is to the sun which illumines it. The point of the comparison is this: the sun possesses light by its nature or essence. The air receives light from the sun and thereby participates in the light of the sun without sharing in the sun's nature. The light in the air then is not part of the nature or essence of the air. Now, in God, God's being is God's nature and God's essence. God is also first cause of being, as St Thomas shows in *De ente et essentia*. Therefore, every creature receives being and holds it by participation, so that the creature's being is not its essence.<sup>432</sup>

Therefore, that which is received by the effect by participation from an equivocal efficient cause, is that which the efficient cause holds by nature or essence. Thus, in a famous passage elsewhere in the *Summa Theologiae* St Thomas says: "whatever is found in anything by participation must be caused in it by that to which it belongs essentially, as iron becomes heated by fire". St Thomas continues that, as God is *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*, it follows that "all beings other than God are not

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<sup>431</sup> Cf. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on Creatures as Causes of *Esse*", 210-211.

<sup>432</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 104, a. 1, c. Here are St Thomas's words on this important point: "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."

their own being, but are beings by participation”.<sup>433</sup> Furthermore, creatures share in God’s being without sharing in God’s nature.<sup>434</sup> Thus, while we can speak analogically of God’s being, we cannot speak of God’s being as it is in God.<sup>435</sup> Furthermore, to repeat something already said, St Thomas warns more than once that we are not to confuse God’s *being* with *ens commune*. We remember that in our natural knowledge we can know the *being* of God not as God is in God’s essence but only as *first cause* of all things.<sup>436</sup>

### 5.23 God alone Creates: *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 45, a. 5

These conclusions are borne out by what St Thomas says in the fifth article of question 45 in the *Prima Pars*. The question in this article is whether it belongs to God alone to create. St Thomas answers that the act of creation is proper to God alone, for universal effects must be reduced to universal causes. Being itself is the most universal effect and it must be proper to the most universal cause, God. To produce being absolutely belongs to creation, and hence creation is the proper act of God alone. However, as one thing can participate in the proper act of another, St Thomas goes on to ask whether God can communicate to a creature the power of creating. He answers negatively, as a secondary instrumental cause can share in the action of a superior cause only inasmuch as, by something proper to itself, it acts dispositively in relation to the effect of the principal agent. Thus, a saw in cutting wood does so according to its own form and yet produces the form of a bench, which is the proper effect of the principal agent, the carpenter. However, the proper effect of God’s creating is *being* taken absolutely, which is presupposed to all other effects. Hence nothing else can act dispositively towards this effect. It is therefore impossible for any creature to create, either of its own power or instrumentally.<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 44, a. 1, c. The passages are quoted from Anton Pegis’s translation (1945). St Thomas’s Latin is: “Si enim aliquid invenitur in aliquo per participationem, necesse est quod causetur in ipso ab eo cui essentialiter convenit;” And: “omnia alia a Deo non sint suum esse, sed participant esse.”

<sup>434</sup> This is not to say that creatures are unlike God exactly; it is rather to say that “creatures are not so perfect as to be specifically like God in nature, after the manner in which a man begotten is like to the man begetting, still they do attain to likeness to Him, according to the representation in the exemplar known by God;”. St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 44, a. 3, ad 1. In other words, the question of likeness of creatures to God is a matter for the exemplary forms or *ideas* in the mind of God.

<sup>435</sup> “For we can name God only from creatures. Hence, whatever is said of God and creatures is said according as there is some relation of the creature to God as to its principle and cause, wherein all the perfections of things pre-exist excellently.” St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 13, a. 5, c.

<sup>436</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 12, a. 12, c; emphasis added.

<sup>437</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 45, a. 5, c.

One will observe that in this discussion there is an implicit assertion that the mode of an agent's power in acting accords with its mode of act.<sup>438</sup> Hence, God alone can create, for nothing else can act dispositively in relation to God's proper effect in creating, for creation does not depend on anything pre-supposed.<sup>439</sup> Now, in this article an objection runs that it does not belong to God alone to create, for Aristotle teaches that that which is perfect can make something like itself. Immaterial creatures are more perfect than material creatures, yet the latter can produce their like. Thus, an immaterial substance must be able to make a substance like itself. Therefore, concludes the objection, as immaterial substances can be made only by creation as they have no matter, it must be so that a creature can create.<sup>440</sup>

In reply, St Thomas begins that a perfect thing participating in any nature makes a likeness to itself, not by producing that nature absolutely but by applying it to something else. Thus, a human being cannot cause human nature as such, because then the begetter could be the cause of himself; rather, the begetter causes human nature to be realised in the person begotten. In doing this, the begetting parent pre-supposes determinate matter in which human nature is to be individualised.<sup>441</sup> From this point St Thomas declares: "just as an individual man participates in human nature, so every created being participates, so to speak, in the nature of being; for God alone is his own being". St Thomas continues that no created being can cause being absolutely, although it can cause *being* to be realised in some particular subject. However, in order to do this, the created being needs to pre-suppose "that whereby a thing is this particular thing" as prior to the action producing its own like. However, in the case of an immaterial substance, one cannot pre-suppose anything whereby it is "this thing", because it is *this* by its form; i.e., an immaterial substance is what it is by its form, and

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<sup>438</sup> This principle is stated expressly by St Thomas in *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 22, n. 4: "Omne agens agit in quantum actu est. Secundum igitur modum actus uniuscuiusque agentis est modus suae virtutis in agendo: homo enim generat hominem, et ignis ignem."

<sup>439</sup> "Unde non potest aliquid operari dispositive et instrumentaliter ad hunc effectum, cum creatio non sit ex aliquo praesupposito, quod possit disponi per actionem instrumentaliter agentis. — Sic igitur impossibile est quod alicui creaturae conveniat creare, neque virtute propria, neque instrumentaliter sive per ministerium." St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 45, a. 5, c.

<sup>440</sup> *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 45, a. 5, obj. 1.

<sup>441</sup> One has to understand that, in St Thomas's view of human generation, the active principle was transmitted in the semen of the male parent while the passive principle was in the foetal matter provided by the female parent. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 118, a. 1, ad 4. This, however, did not apply to the human intellectual soul. Indeed, St Thomas declared it to be heretical to say that the intellectual soul is transmitted with the semen. *Idem*, q. 118, a. 2, c.

through its form it has being, so that it is a subsisting form. Therefore, an immaterial substance cannot produce its like as regards its being, but only as regards some added perfection.<sup>442</sup>

So here we have the unexpected situation that a created being composed of matter and form can cause being as such to be realised in a particular individual which is its like, while a created immaterial substance cannot do so, and this is owing precisely to the active power proper to each.<sup>443</sup> This is interesting because the objection is based on the idea that immaterial creatures are more perfect than material creatures, precisely because they lack matter, which is the passive principle; therefore immaterial creatures must be “more perfect” and stronger in act. Hence, whatever is within the power of a material creature must be within the power of an immaterial creature *a fortiori*. This would seem to be a reasonable argument but, ironically, it is precisely *matter* which enables the material creature to produce its like. The reason for this lies in the principle of the corpus of the article: being in the absolute sense is the proper cause of God alone for God alone is God’s own being.

In this way the article confirms the above conclusions as follows: when a created material being causes its like, it does not cause the form as such in the new being, although it does cause the form to be realised in the new being. To this extent, the agent reproduces itself. This is a *causa fiendi* and a case of univocal efficient cause, and we do not speak of participation by way of cause. However, the form or nature is now realised in the new being, and this form or nature, inasmuch as it is form or nature, must be caused by a higher cause which is able to cause form or nature as such.<sup>444</sup> That cause necessarily must be incorporeal, and indeed is God. This then is a case of equivocal efficient

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<sup>442</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 45, a. 5, ad 1; emphasis in original. The quoted phrases are taken from Anton Pegis’s translation (1945). Here is St Thomas’s Latin covering the points made in the text, quoted from the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition *Cura Fratrum eiusdem Ordinis* (1961): “Sed sicut hic homo participat humanum naturam, ita quodcumque ens creatum participat, ut ita dixerim, naturam essendi: quia solus Deus est suum esse ... Nullum igitur ens creatum potest producere aliquod ens absolute, nisi in quantum esse causat *in hoc*: et sic oportet quod praeintelligatur id per quod aliquid est *hoc*, actioni qua facit sibi simile. In substantia autem immateriali non potest praeintelligi aliquid per quod sit *haec*: quia est haec per suam formam, per quam habet esse, cum sint formae subsistentes. Igitur substantia immaterialis non potest producere aliam substantiam immaterialem sibi similem, quantum ad esse eius; sed quantum ad perfectionem aliquam superadditam;”

<sup>443</sup> See however Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas on Creatures as Causes of *Esse*”, 207-209.

<sup>444</sup> This does not mean of course that the form of a material substance is created and exists separately from matter, a position which St Thomas never allowed. Rather, says St Thomas “the form of a natural body is not itself subsisting, but is that by which a thing is”. And therefore, because it belongs properly to a subsisting thing to be made and to be created, it does not belong to forms to be made or created but to be *concreated*. St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 45, a. 8, c; see also ad 1.

cause and we do speak of participation; the new being participates in its nature or form in the sense that every individual person participates in human nature. Furthermore, because it participates in *humanam naturam* in this way, every individual being participates in *naturam essendi*; for God alone is God's own being. This form and attendant being are received from God as *causa essendi*.<sup>445</sup>

### 5.3 Brief Overview

It is a major thesis of this work that St Thomas's notion of participation articulates the two modes of composition identified by him in created substances, namely matter-and-form composition for material substances and essence-and-existence composition for all created substances, material and immaterial. In this chapter, these two modes of composition have been explored and compared. Clearly, the second mode of composition rests upon a real distinction between essence and existence, which I have also examined. This distinction itself demands a new conception of *esse* as *act*, conferred by an extrinsic efficient cause, granted that St Thomas also recognises *form*, both as a principle of essence (or as essence itself in simple substances) and as an intrinsic cause of the being of the substance. As I have sought to explain, each created substance is in potency to its 'act of being', which it receives as *act* and limits to the principles of its essence.

It is important to remember that each mode of composition rests upon a structure of act and potency through efficient cause. Therefore, when St Thomas comes to explain that each created substance is not its own being but participates in 'being', he is moving participation from its traditional foundation in *form*, to be re-figured on an Aristotelian terrain characterised by efficient cause and an extended notion of act and potency. Furthermore, as each created substance has 'being' ultimately from God who is God's Being by essence, I have sought to explain this structure through the differentiation of *causae fiendi* and *causae essendi* and their parallel to univocal and analogous efficient causes. Finally, I have sought to relate this causal structure to participation.

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<sup>445</sup> Many of the scholarly authors whom I have read discuss and analyse St Thomas's distinction between *causae fiendi* and *causae essendi*. In developing this section of the thesis I have relied especially on the following: Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on Creatures as Causes of *Esse*"; Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 171-177; Meehan, *Efficient Causality in Aristotle and St Thomas*, 317-323; Oliva Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, 161-173. The conclusions that I have put forward are, however, my own. I do not wish to imply that any of the above authors would necessarily support them.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Two Further Issues

At this stage only two questions remain: first, if all finite substances are composed of essence and existence, is existence an accident? And secondly, exactly how is it that the act of being is received by essence.

These questions need to be addressed in order to round out the picture drawn in the thesis thusfar. The first question arises because, if a finite substance receives its existence outside its essence, as it does and as it must, then is not its existence an accident? St Thomas himself says “omne quod est praeter essentiam rei, dicatur accidens” “all that is outside a thing’s essence may be called an accident”.<sup>446</sup> Yet, I have shown in Chapter 5 of this thesis that St Thomas also says that nothing is more formal than ‘being’ and that its ‘being’ is received by a subject essence as *act* to which the essence is in potency, which would seem to mean that its ‘act of existence’ is profoundly *intrinsic* to the substance. Indeed, in the *Prima Pars* St Thomas says: “Esse autem est illud quod est magis intimum cuilibet, et quod profundius omnibus inest; cum sit formale respectu omnium quae in re sunt” “being is innermost in each thing and most fundamentally present within all things, since it is formal in respect of everything found in a thing”.<sup>447</sup> Furthermore, as a finite substance receives its ‘being’ from God, who is ‘being itself’ by God’s own essence, unless ‘being’ is intimate to the finite substance the substance will not be fully woven into the wider structure of reality, nor will God be fully present to it. God is in all God’s creatures, not as their essence or form and not as an accident, but as an agent is present in its effects.<sup>448</sup> Clearly then we need to understand what it means to say that a substance receives its ‘being’ outside its essence, and exactly how it is received. I would argue that it is through his structure of participation that St Thomas is able to explain these things. In other words, I would argue that it is through his structure of participation that St Thomas is able to explain why it is that its ‘being’ is at once accidental to a finite substance in the sense that it is outside essence, and yet its ‘act of being’ is that which is most intimate to the substance.

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<sup>446</sup> St Thomas, *Quodlibetal Questions II*, q. 2, a. 1, c.

<sup>447</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 8, a. 1, c. See also *idem*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3. In Sections 5.22 and 5.221 above I discuss the kind of ‘act’ that *esse* is.

<sup>448</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 8, a. 1, c. See also *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 22, n. 4. *De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 4, c.



## 6.1 Is Existence an Accident?

This question poses another difficulty which attends St Thomas's distinction between essence and existence found in all substances other than God, material and immaterial, which he develops in *De ente et essentia*. I have already stated the view that St Thomas's development of the distinction could be thought of as a commentary on Avicenna's work.<sup>449</sup> As far as the distinction between essence (or quiddity) and existence in finite beings is concerned, St Thomas's argument in *De ente* runs this way. First, he notes the distinction between the essence of composite substances and the essence of simple substances, the crucial point being that the former embraces both form and matter whereas the second is form alone. The result is this: the essence of a composite substance can be signified as whole or part, and only as a whole can it be attributed to the composite. However, the essence of a simple substance can be signified only as a whole, because the essence is simple form. Therefore, the essence of a simple substance, "no matter how we conceive it", can always be attributed to the substance. At this point in *De ente et essentia* St Thomas quotes with approval the Avicennan dictum that the quiddity of a simple substance is the simple entity itself.<sup>450</sup>

This difference bears upon our knowledge and how we speak of things. As far as composite substances are concerned, St Thomas has spoken earlier in *De ente* of the essence signified as a whole and signified as a part. This occurs when St Thomas considers how 'an essence' in composite substances is related to the notion of genus, species and difference. St Thomas says that that to which the notion of genus, species and difference belongs is attributed to an individual determinate thing; or, as it was put above, only as a whole is the essence attributed to the composite. This means that the logical intentions genus, species and difference belong to an essence signified as a whole. From this it follows that the terms "animality", "rationality" and "humanity" cannot signify a genus, difference and species respectively, as each signifies as a part. On the other hand, the terms "animal", "rational" and "human" do signify a genus, difference and species respectively, as each signifies as a whole. Why is that? Well, it has already been stated that essence to which genus, difference and species belong must be capable of attribution to an individual determinate thing, and designated matter is the principle of individuation. The terms "animality", "rationality" and

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<sup>449</sup> Jon McGinnis, "The Avicennan Sources for Aquinas on Being", already cited. The discussion and the reference are in Section 4.222 above.

<sup>450</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 4; Maurer 54. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 2.

“humanity” however, signify with precision from designated matter; that is why they signify as a part. To illustrate, the term “humanity” is not predicated of Socrates. Therefore, these terms do not signify genus, difference and species. This does not mean however that animality, rationality and humanity are irrelevant to genus, species and difference; rather, as St Thomas quotes Avicenna to say, although they are not themselves genus, difference and species, they are the principles of the same, respectively.<sup>451</sup>

For the same reason St Thomas continues, the notions of genus and species cannot belong to a reality existing outside individual things “as the Platonists held”, because then genus and species would not be attributed to the individual: “we cannot say that Socrates is something separated from himself”.<sup>452</sup> However, to return to the original point, the essence of a simple substance can always be attributed to the substance, “no matter how we conceive it”. Thus, we can say that the Archangel Gabriel is “Gabrieliety”, and this is precisely because the simple essence is simple form alone.<sup>453</sup>

Along the same line of argument St Thomas proceeds to draw a further conclusion. This is that the essences of composite substances, by being received in designated matter, are multiplied according as the matter in which they are received is divided. It can happen then that there are things the same in species yet different in number. However, the essence of a simple substance cannot be multiplied in this way. What St Thomas means by this is that the essence of composite substances, being received in matter, is multiplied according to the designation of matter. The things so multiplied are then common in species. The species itself, however, is divided into its individual substances because, as has been shown earlier in this thesis, matter in its quantitative dimension is the principle of individuation in species. It follows then that both the multiplication and the division of composite substances are owing to the fact that their essence is a composition of form and matter. However, as the essence of a simple substance is form alone and is not received in matter, it follows that that essence is neither multiplied nor divided. Consequently, each such simple substance is its own species. St Thomas then attributes to Avicenna the observation that, among simple substances there are as many species as there are substances.<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 3, n. 1, and c. 2, n. 11;; Maurer 45-46 and 42-43 respectively. Marietti ed., c. 4, n. 1 and c. 3, n. 3.

<sup>452</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 3, n. 1; Maurer 45. Marietti ed., c. 4, n. 1.

<sup>453</sup> Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence*, 121, 158-159. The example is Bobik's, at 159.

<sup>454</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 5; Maurer 54. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 2.

### 6.11 Avicenna's Influence on *de Ente et Essentia*

It will be observed that St Thomas has cited Avicenna in support of two propositions, each of which rests upon a contrasting analysis of composite and simple substances according to what makes up their essences: the essences of composite substances are made up of matter and form while the essences of simple substances are form alone. St Thomas now proceeds to the argument that essence is distinct from existence. He begins by saying that simple substances are not absolutely simple for, even though they are forms without matter, they are not pure act but have some potentiality. We observe that this must be potentiality independent of matter. However, St Thomas moves on to establish his point and his proof is this:

Quidquid enim non est de intellectu essentiae vel quidditatis, hoc est adveniens extra, et faciens compositionem cum essentia; quia nulla essentia sine his quae sunt partes essentiae intelligi potest. Omnis autem essentia vel quidditas intelligi potest sine hoc quod aliquid intelligatur de esse suo facto:

Everything that does not belong to the concept of an essence or quiddity comes to it from outside and enters into composition with the essence, because no essence can be understood without its parts. Now every essence or quiddity can be understood without knowing anything about its being.<sup>455</sup>

Does not this conclusion follow precisely what St Thomas has just established? The parts of a composite essence include matter and form while a simple essence is form alone with no parts. Working with these propositions, we can understand an essence; we can determine how an essence can be predicated of its substances and we can determine when an essence can be multiplied and divided. In each case our understanding has a lot to do with the fact that one part of a composed essence is matter while a simple essence is form alone. In each case a dictum of Avicenna is cited in support of the conclusion. However, in neither case do we need to know anything about the being of an essence in order to understand the essence. From here St Thomas continues that if essence does not include being, essence must be other than being, unless there may be a reality whose essence is its being. St Thomas then establishes that of only one unique and primary being could it be said that its essence is to be. In everything else then, its being must be other than its quiddity, nature or form.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>455</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*. The Latin is from the Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 3; the English from Maurer's translation, c. 4, n. 6, p. 55.

<sup>456</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 6, Maurer 55-56. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 3.

This principle, that essence is other than being in finite substances, St Thomas applies “to every essence or quiddity”, composed or simple. St Thomas does not attribute the principle to Avicenna by name, but it is apparent that he finds it consistent with Avicennan principles to which he does refer. These principles have to do with the contrast of composite essences and simple essences. It is clear that we are speaking here of ‘being’ not in the sense of form, a principle of essence or the essence itself, but in the sense of *act*, to which the essence is potential. In St Thomas’s words: “Everything that receives something from another is potential with regard to what it receives, and what is received in it is its actuality” (“Omne autem quod recipit aliquid ab alio, est in potentia respectu illius; et hoc quod receptum est in eo, est actus eius”).<sup>457</sup> Indeed, in case we should miss the Avicennan provenance of this principle, St Thomas proceeds to say:

Et quia, ut dictum est, intelligentiae quidditas est ipsamet intelligentia, ideo quidditas vel essential eius est ipsum est *quod* ipsa, et esse suum receptum a Deo est id *quo* subsistit in rerum natura; et propter hoc a quibusdam huiusmodi substantiae dicuntur componi ex *quo* est *quod* est, vel ex *quod est* et *esse*, ut Boetius dicit (de hebdom. cap. 1).

Because, as we have said, the quiddity of an intelligence is the intelligence itself, its quiddity or essence is identical with that which it is, while its being, which is received from God, is that by which it subsists in reality. That is why some say that a substance of this kind is composed of ‘that by which it is’ (*quo est*) and ‘that which is’ (*quod est*), or, according to Boethius, of ‘that which is’ (*quod est*) and ‘being’ (*esse*).<sup>458</sup>

The Avicennan principle to which St Thomas has already referred is that the quiddity of an intelligence is the simple entity itself. It is interesting to observe furthermore that, implicit in this dictum just quoted is a definition of a substance: a substance is that which subsists in reality, but in such a way that its being is other than its essence and is received from God. Therefore, it is proper to the essence of a substance that it is not its own being but receives being by participation, within a structure of act and potency. It is in this sense that a substance has its being according to its essence.<sup>459</sup> While St Thomas is speaking of intellectual substances in the dictum quoted, I believe that the implicit definition would apply to all substances, as the distinction between essence and existence is proper to all substances.

<sup>457</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 8; Maurer 57. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 5.

<sup>458</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*. The Latin is quoted from the Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 5; the English from Maurer’s translation, c. 4, n. 9, pp. 57-58.

<sup>459</sup> For this reason, God is not properly referred to as a substance. St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 3, a, 5, ad 1.

St Thomas in *De ente et essentia* does not attribute his understanding of the distinction between the essence and being of substances to Avicenna in so many words, despite recognising implicitly its Avicennan provenance. St Thomas develops his own understanding of the distinction in the context of, first, the necessarily unique simplicity of God, of whom alone can we say God's essence is to be, and secondly, the need for an extrinsic efficient cause to explain the act of being in all other beings. This focus emphasises that 'being itself' brings actuality to a substance by being received in and through its essence.<sup>460</sup> This raises the question of precisely how being relates to the substance. In St Thomas's day it was believed that Avicenna held being to be accidental to a substance, an interpretation of Avicenna recognised by St Thomas himself.

### 6.12 The Argument of *De Potentia* q. 5 a. 4

In *De potentia Dei* question 5, article 4 St Thomas is asked whether any creature is to be annihilated or is actually annihilated. The apparent answer is that all corruptible creatures will finally be reduced to nothing. Among the arguments put to St Thomas in support of that answer is the following:

Praeterea, nihil quod est per accidens, est infinitum. Sed esse est cuilibet creaturae per accidens, ut Avicenna dicit [in libro VIII *Metaphysicorum*, capit. IV]; unde et Hilarius [in libro VII *de Trinitate*] Deum a creatura distinguens, dicit; *Esse non est accidens Deo*. Ergo nulla creatura in infinitum durabit; et sic omnes creaturae quandoque deficient.

Nothing accidental is infinite. Now existence is accidental to the creature according to Avicenna (*Metaph.* viii, 4); wherefore Hilary (*De Trin.* vii) distinguishes God from his creatures by stating that *there is no accident in God*. Therefore no creature will last forever, and all creatures will at some time be reduced to nothing.<sup>461</sup>

St Thomas's answer to the question asked, however, is that the created universe will never be annihilated and that corporeal creatures will last forever as to their substance, even though they have not always existed. In response to the objection just stated St Thomas says:

Ad tertium dicendum, quod *esse* non dicitur accidens quod sit in genere in accidentis, si loquamur de esse substantiae (est enim actus substantiae), sed per quamdam similitudinem; quia non est pars essentiae, sicut nec accidens. Si tamen esset in genere accidentis, nihil prohiberet quin in infinitum duraret: per se enim

<sup>460</sup> In *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3 St Thomas says that "being is the actuality of all things, even of forms themselves". He also says that being is compared to other things "as the received to the receiver". See also *De ente et essentia*, c. 2, n. 3; Maurer 36 and editorial footnote 9. Marietti ed., c. 2, n. 5.

<sup>461</sup> *De potentia Dei*, q. 5, a. 4, obj. 3. The Latin is quoted from S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones Disputatae*, Vol. II, Cura et studio P. Bazzi et al., Editio VIII revisa, Marietti, 1949. The English is quoted from the translation by the English Dominican Fathers, 1933.

accidentia ex necessitate suis substantiis insunt; unde et nihil prohibet ea in perpetuum inesse. Sed accidentia quae per accidens insunt subiectis, nullo modo in perpetuum durant secundum naturam. Huiusmodi autem esse non potest ipsum esse rei substantiale, cum sit essentiae actus.

If we speak of substantial existence, then existence is not described as an accident as though it were in the genus of accident (for it is the act of an essence) but by a kind of similitude, inasmuch as like an accident it is not part of the essence. And yet even if it were in the genus of accident nothing prevents it from lasting forever, seeing that proper accidents are of necessity in their respective substances, so that nothing hinders them from being in them forever. On the other hand, accidents that adhere to their subjects accidentally are nowise everlasting by nature: but the substantial existence of a thing cannot be an accident of this kind, because it is the act of its essence.<sup>462</sup>

It will be observed that the objection draws on the contrast between the absolute simplicity of God on the one hand and the existential composition of creatures on the other, precisely the context in which St Thomas develops his own understanding of the distinction between essence and existence in creatures in *De ente et essentia*. Yet, St Thomas does not accept that existence is an accident in the sense attributed to Avicenna; but nor does St Thomas comprehensively reject the Avicennan view; rather he nuances it, arguing that existence is not an accident in the genus of accident, and even if it were it would not be corruptible because accidents which are proper to their subjects are necessarily in their substances.

This observation follows St Thomas's main argument in the corpus of the article. This argument proceeds on a consideration of the nature of free will. One's will can be absolutely free, yet, once exercised it necessarily excludes its opposite. For example, one can choose to sit or stand, but if one chooses to sit, one necessarily must sit until one chooses to stand. Furthermore, argues St Thomas, when one wills a thing for its own sake one wills it to last forever; for if one wills something to be for a time and afterwards wills it not to be, one wills that thing for the sake of something else, so that when that latter is perfected, one no longer wills the thing which was willed for its sake. Applying these principles to God, one can say that God's will is absolutely free, yet its exercise necessarily excludes its opposite. Furthermore, God wills the created universe for its own sake. God also wills the creatures to exist for the sake of God's own goodness, namely that they may imitate and reflect it, which they do inasmuch as they derive their being from God's goodness and subsist in their respective natures. On both grounds St Thomas is led to the conclusion that, from the very fact God made creatures, it may be inferred that God wills them to last forever.<sup>463</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 5, a. 4, ad. 3. The editions quoted are those just cited.

<sup>463</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 5, a. 4, c.

I believe that it is this argument which lies behind St Thomas's conclusion that the substantial existence of a thing is not an accident in the corruptible sense, because it is the act of the essence and not an accident which adheres to the subject accidentally. One might add the observation that St Thomas says elsewhere in *De potentia* that when God gives being God at the same time produces that which receives being; it is not as if essence somehow subsists, waiting to receive being.<sup>464</sup> One might say then, that 'being' is an accident because it is outside essence, but it is not an accident in the strict sense because it is prior to substance; and, precisely because it is prior to substance, it is not corruptible in the manner of an accident strictly so-called.<sup>465</sup>

### 6.13 Praedicamental Accidents

Accidents which adhere to the subject accidentally, those which we might call accidents in the strict sense, are, of course, well recognised by St Thomas. In *De ente et essentia* St Thomas examines essence as it is found in accidents. Now, because essence is that which the definition signifies, accidents must have an essence in the same way that they have a definition. However, accidents cannot be defined without including a subject in their definition, because they do not have being in themselves but only by virtue of their relation to a substance as their subject. A substantial form also does not have a complete essence and it also must include its subject in its definition. There is a difference between substantial and accidental forms nonetheless. A substantial form composes itself with matter and from their union results the being which subsists and which is essentially one. Thus, although a substantial form does not have a complete essence in itself, it is part of a complete essence. An accidental form however is added to that which is already a subsisting substance and whose being is by nature prior to the accident. The supervening accident then does not cause the subsisting being; rather it causes a secondary being. The union of accident and subject then does not result in an essence, nor does it produce something essentially one; rather it produces something accidentally one. An accidental form then is not part of a complete essence; rather it is a being in a qualified sense and it has an essence in a qualified sense. Indeed, it is substance which has essence most truly and it therefore is the cause of the being of accidents, which share being secondarily and in a qualified sense.<sup>466</sup>

<sup>464</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 17

<sup>465</sup> "Existence is for St Thomas an accident that is prior to substance." Joseph Owens, "Unity and Essence in St Thomas Aquinas", *Mediaeval Studies* 23 (1961), 240 at 258.

<sup>466</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 6, nn. 1, 2 and 3; Maurer 66-68. Marietti ed., c. 7, nn. 1 and 2. St Thomas says that substance is the cause of accidents because substance is first in the genus of being, having essence

In my opinion, what St Thomas is describing here is predicamental accidents or accidents in the sense of quantity, quality and the rest of the predicaments in Aristotle's nine categories of accidents. Far from being prior to substance, accidents in this sense are posterior to substance and depend upon substance for their being. Indeed, predicamental accidents have *being* only by reason of the fact that they inhere in a subject, and therefore their quiddity depends on their subject.<sup>467</sup> Clearly this is quite different from speaking of 'existence' as an accident. Far from being added to essence in the manner of a predicamental accident, 'existence', *esse*, actualises essence with no quiddative content of its own. Far from being a predicamental accident dependent upon substance for its being, 'existence', *esse*, is the actuality of all acts and the perfections of all perfections.<sup>468</sup>

This being so, one wonders why St Thomas did not distance himself further and more explicitly from the Avicennan notion of existence as an accident in his early work, *De ente et essentia*. St Thomas begins to open up space in question 5, article 4 of *De potentia Dei*, already discussed, when he observes in response to an objection that the substantial existence of a thing cannot be an accident in the sense of adhering accidentally to a subject because it is the act of its essence.<sup>469</sup> It is, however, in his much later *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* that St Thomas distances his

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most truly and fully, and therefore the cause of everything posterior in the genus. Ibid., n. 3. However, he is here using the term "genus" loosely or analogically. St Thomas's Latin reads: Sed quia illud quod dicitur maxime et verissime in quolibet genere, est causa eorum quae sunt post in illo genere ... Marietti ed., c. 7, n. 2. Compare *De principiis naturae* where St Thomas says that an accident is called a being because of its relation to substance as its subject, so that being is attributed first to substance and only secondarily to accidents, and for that precise reason being is *not* a genus comprising substance and accidents. St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 6, McDermott 79. In my opinion, one can say that substance is the cause of being in accidents because substance is prior and accidents are posterior in completeness of being. See St Thomas in *De principiis naturae*, c. 4, McDermott 75.

<sup>467</sup> I have taken this phraseology from St Thomas's *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VII, Lect. 4, n. 1352. St Thomas's expression in the relevant part of this paragraph is: "Accidentia vero non habent esse nisi per hoc quod insunt subjecto: et ideo eorum quidditas est dependens a subjecto:". However, St Thomas says something like this in many places. When St Thomas says that the quiddity of an accident depends upon its subject he means that the subject's essence must be included in the accident's definition. Thus, in the paragraph just quoted St Thomas continues: "et propter hoc oportet quod subjectum in accidentis definitione ponatur, quandoque quidem in recto, quandoque vero in obliquo."

<sup>468</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9. Wippel, "Essence and Existence", 395.

<sup>469</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 5, a. 4, ad 3. Beatrice H. Zedler in her "The Inner Unity of the *De Potentia*", *The Modern Schoolman* 25 (1948), 91, argues that, in *De potentia Dei*, St Thomas takes issue with what he sees as a metaphysics of essentialism in Avicenna, wishing to replace it with his own metaphysics of *esse*. In support of this argument Zedler refers, at 102-103, to the same dictum as that I have referred to in the text; viz. that the substantial existence of a thing cannot be an accident because it is the act of its essence. I have found this article very helpful.



own teaching more clearly from that of Avicenna, first by making his criticism of Avicenna's teaching on the point explicit, and secondly by developing his own position from the distinction drawn in *De potentia Dei*, just referred to.<sup>470</sup>

#### 6.14 The Developments in the Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics

In his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* St Thomas teaches that the terms 'being' and 'one' are predicated of a substance essentially and not accidentally. If it were otherwise, the issue would be involved in an infinite regress.<sup>471</sup> However, St Thomas continues, Avicenna taught that the terms 'being' and 'one' signify not substance but something added to it (i.e., an accident). Avicenna taught this doctrine of 'being', says St Thomas, because, in the case of anything which derives its existence from something else, its existence must differ from its substance or essence. Yet, the term 'being' signifies existence itself; thus, it seems that 'being', or existence, is something added to the thing's essence.<sup>472</sup>

St Thomas finds Avicenna's teaching that 'being' and 'one' are accidental to substance to be incorrect in each case. He diagnoses the source of Avicenna's error as that, in each case, he was deceived by the equivocal use of the crucial term, 'being' or 'one'. In respect of 'being', the equivocal use passed over by Avicenna is that between the use of *ens* as signifying the truth of a proposition and *ens* as signifying 'being' as it is divided by the ten categories. 'Being' in the first sense is accidental to the substance while 'being' in the second sense is not; and it is *ens* in the second sense which interests the metaphysician. In relation to the term 'one', St Thomas explains that Avicenna confused the 'one' that is convertible with 'being' with the 'one' that is a principle of number. If 'one' as a principle

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<sup>470</sup> For a very helpful analysis of this process see Thomas O'Shaughnessy, "St Thomas's Changing Estimate of Avicenna's Teaching on Existence as an Accident", *The Modern Schoolman* 36 (1959), 245. O'Shaughnessy's thesis is St Thomas's growing rejection of Avicenna's views parallels the growing polemic within the Church against heterodox Aristotelianism in general and Averroes and Avicenna in particular. See 259-260.

<sup>471</sup> The reason St Thomas gives for this situation is that if 'being' and 'one' were predicated of a substance by reason of something added to it (i.e., an accident), 'being' would also have to be predicated of the thing added; the question would then arise whether 'being' is predicated of this thing essentially or by accident and, if the latter, the question arises again, and so on to infinity. Of this infinite regress St Thomas says: "Hoc autem est impossibile: ergo necesse est stare in primo, scilicet quod substantia rei sit una et ens per seipsam, et non per aliquid additum." St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk IV, Lect. 2, n. 555.

<sup>472</sup> "Sciendum est autem quod circa hoc Avicenna aliud sensit. Dixit enim quod unum et ens non significant substantiam rei, sed significant aliquid additum. Et de ente quidem hoc dicebat, quia in qualibet re quae habet esse ab alio, aliud est esse rei, et substantia sive essentia ejus: hoc autem nomen ens, significat ipsum esse. Significat igitur (ut videtur) aliquid additum essentiae." St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk IV, Lect. 2, n. 556.

of number is taken as a univocal term, then it will be limited to a particular mode of being, namely quantity. 'One' in this sense will indeed add accidental being to the substance, and it will be caused by the principles of that substance as its subject. This is simply not the same as 'one' which is convertible with being, for 'one' in that sense signifies being itself rather than a mode of being, and it adds nothing to being but rather brings a negation, namely the negation of division. Again, it is unity in only one of these senses which interests the metaphysician and that is unity as convertible with being; 'one' as a principle of number belongs to the study of mathematics, for reasons seen earlier in this thesis.<sup>473</sup>

How, then, does St Thomas develop his own notion of the relation between a thing and its existence? We know that St Thomas adopted the Avicennan teaching that a thing's existence is other than its essence from the very beginning of his career, while rejecting the idea that existence is added to essence in the manner of an accident. In a quodlibet question dating from late in his career, St Thomas addresses the issue of whether an angel is a composite of essence and being (*esse*), and answers that indeed it is.<sup>474</sup> To an objection that an angel's being is an accident, as 'being' is proper to God alone, St Thomas responds that 'being' is an accident, not as though related accidentally to a substance, but as the actuality of any substance. Thus, just as God is God's own actuality, God is God's own being.<sup>475</sup> In the *Prima Pars* St Thomas says that 'being itself' is the most perfect of all things, for it is compared to all things as that which is act; for nothing has actuality except so far as it is. Hence being is the actuality of all things, even of forms themselves. Therefore, being is compared to other things not as receiver to received, but as received to receiver. Thus, says St Thomas, if he speaks of the 'being' of a man or of a horse, he speaks of 'being' as a formal principle and as something received, not as that to which 'being' belongs.<sup>476</sup> And quite how is being (*esse*) received?

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<sup>473</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk IV, Lect. 2, nn. 559 and 560. See also, *idem*, Bk X, Lect. 3, nn. 1981 and 1982. St Thomas also distinguishes the two senses of 'being' and of 'one' in other places. In *De potentia Dei*, q. 9, a. 7, c., St Thomas attributes to Avicenna the view that unity always adds an accidental being to substance, and finds this view owing to Avicenna's failure to distinguish unity convertible with being from unity as a principle of number.

<sup>474</sup> St Thomas, *Quodlibetal Questions II*, q. 2, a. 1, c.

<sup>475</sup> "quod esse est accidens, non quasi per accidens se habens, sed quasi actualitas cuiuslibet substantiae; unde ipse Deus, qui est sua actualitas, est suum esse." St Thomas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales II*, q. 2, a. 1, ad 2. Quoted from Editio VIII revisa by P. Fr. Raymundi Spiazzi, Marietti, 1949. The English edition that I am using is that translated with an Introduction and Notes by Sandra Edwards (Toronto: PIMS, 1983). This question is dated by Weisheipl at Christmas 1269, during St Thomas's second Parisian regency. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino*, 367.

<sup>476</sup> The importance of this response to the argument warrants my quoting it again and in full: "ipsum esse est perfectissimum omnium: comparatur enim ad omnia ut actus. Nihil enim habet actualitatem, nisi in quantum

In his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* St Thomas, as we have seen, rejects the Avicennan view that the existence of a thing should be understood as something added to its essence after the manner of an accident. Rather, says St Thomas, existence should be understood as something established, “as it were”, by the principles of the essence. Hence the term ‘being’ (*ens*), which is applied to a thing by reason of its very existence (*ipso esse*), designates the same thing which is applied to it by reason of its essence.<sup>477</sup>

I will comment on the significant issues raised by these passages in Section 6.2 below and its sub-sections. For the moment I wish to observe that in St Thomas’s diagnosis of Avicenna’s error and in St Thomas’s nuanced understanding of the relation of existence to essence, one can see St Thomas’s metaphysics of *esse* coming through. When St Thomas criticises Avicenna for confusing the two senses of ‘being’, he is criticising him for introducing into metaphysics the study of substances from the point of view of their ‘being’. This ‘being’ actually signifies the truth of our judgements that such-and-such things exist, and it is not the concern of metaphysics.<sup>478</sup> In St Thomas’s judgement, Avicenna was deceived by the equivocity of the term ‘being’, so that he confused the existential act with the subject possessing the existential act.<sup>479</sup> Furthermore, when St Thomas criticises Avicenna for confusing the two senses of ‘one’, he is criticising him for confusing ontological unity with numerical unity. As stated earlier, it is only in its former sense that ‘unity’ interests the metaphysician. Yet, despite these criticisms, St Thomas adopts Avicenna’s distinction of essence and *esse*. This combination of responses to Avicenna, I believe, shows that St Thomas moves beyond

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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 Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3. Weisheipl says that St Thomas began work on the *Summa* in 1266 and completed the *Prima Pars* at Viterbo in 1268, before he returned to Paris. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D’Aquino*, 361.

<sup>477</sup> “Esse enim rei quamvis sit aliud ab ejus essentia, non tamen est intelligendum quod sit aliquod superadditum ad modum accidentis, sed quasi constituitur per principia essentiae. Et ideo hoc nomen *Ens* quod imponitur ab ipso esse, significat idem cum nomine quod imponitur ab ipsa essentia.” St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk IV, Lect. 2, n. 558. According to Weisheipl, all of St Thomas’s Aristotelian commentaries come from late in his career; indeed, all, with the possible exception of the commentary on the *De Anima*, seem to have been written between 1269 and 1273. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D’Aquino*, 282, 379.

<sup>478</sup> Cf. Doig, *Aquinas on Metaphysics*, 166-167. St Thomas makes this plain in *De ente et essentia* when he excludes from his study the meaning of ‘a being’ as signifying the truth of a proposition: c. 1, nn 2 and 3; Maurer 29-30. Marietti ed., c. 1, n. 1. See Section 3.223 of this thesis.

<sup>479</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk IV, Lect. 2, n. 556 and Bk X, Lect. 3, n. 1982. Cf. Owens, “Unity and Essence in St Thomas Aquinas”, 251.

Avicenna in the following way. What seems to lie behind Avicenna's conception of 'being' is that a thing is constituted *as a being* by its *form* or essence. However, in St Thomas's view, *being* is the name of an *act*; and everything that has an act diverse from it is related to that act as potency to act.<sup>480</sup> Being then is the actuality of every form or essence. It follows that being as actuality cannot be caused by the form or essence, because then the thing would be its own cause. Being as actuality requires an extrinsic efficient cause.<sup>481</sup> This is how St Thomas has moved beyond Avicenna – from *forma essendi* to *actus essendi*; and the subject matter of metaphysics is *ens commune*, or being inasmuch as it is being.

### 6.15 Accidentality of Esse and Participation

I will now attempt to summarise this section and draw out some implications for the notion of participation. At the beginning of *De ente et essentia* St Thomas distinguishes the two senses of 'a being' and excludes from the discussion 'a being' as signifying the truth of propositions. He then tells us that the term 'an essence' is derived from 'a being' as that term is divided by the ten categories. St Thomas then quotes Averroes with approval to the effect that 'a being' in that sense of the term signifies the essence of a thing.<sup>482</sup> Later in the treatise St Thomas teaches that the essence of a composite substance embraces both form and matter whereas the essence of a simple substance is form alone.<sup>483</sup> Also, St Thomas speaks of 'essence' as that "according to which a thing is said to be", and that "according to which a thing is called a being", and adds that form "is in its own way the cause of this being".<sup>484</sup> St Thomas is here speaking of composite substances, but I do not see why these remarks should not apply also to simple substances. In these ways St Thomas signals his allegiance to the traditional Aristotelian teachings that it is form which is the reason for being of a substance and it is through essence that a thing has being.<sup>485</sup>

<sup>480</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 22, n. 7.

<sup>481</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 7; Maurer 56. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 4. See also *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 4, c.

<sup>482</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 1, nn. 2 and 3; Maurer 30. Marietti ed., c. 1, n. 1.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid., c. 2, n. 3 and c. 4, n. 4; Maurer 35 and 54. Marietti ed., c. 2, n. 5 and c. 5, n. 2.

<sup>484</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 2, n. 3; Maurer 36. Marietti ed., c. 2, n. 5. The English in the text is quoted from Maurer's translation. St Thomas's Latin for the phrases quoted, as it appears in the Marietti edition, is: "essentia autem est secundum quam res dicitur esse", "essentia qua res denominatur ens" and "quamvis huiusmodi esse suo modo sola forma sit caussa".

<sup>485</sup> See, for example, Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, Bk Zeta, c. 4, 1029b-1030a; Penguin ed., 177-181.

Yet, St Thomas adopts the Avicennan position that the being of a substance is other than its essence, while rejecting the Avicennan position that being is added to the substance or the essence after the manner of an accident. St Thomas is able to do this because he reads Avicenna as having run together the two senses of 'being' while he, St Thomas, is taking 'being' to mean 'actual being'. In this context, form is the cause of being, but it presupposes the action of an efficient cause. In *De principiis naturae* St Thomas identifies three principles of natural generation: matter, form and lack of form. But, observes St Thomas, the form cannot draw itself out of potentiality into actuality, for the form will not even exist until the thing is made.<sup>486</sup> And in *De ente et essentia*, speaking of simple substances, St Thomas observes that 'being itself' cannot be caused by the form or quiddity of a thing, because the thing would then be its own cause and would bring itself into being, "which is impossible".<sup>487</sup> Later, in the *Prima Pars*, St Thomas would say: "*Being* necessarily results from the form of a creature, given the influence of the divine action".<sup>488</sup> Not only does this remark show that formal cause presupposes efficient cause, it shows that the being of creatures is founded in God as first cause and pure being.<sup>489</sup>

I believe that what is happening here is that St Thomas is drawing his allegiance to Aristotelian teaching on form and being into his own metaphysics of *esse*. Remembering that St Thomas takes 'an essence' from 'a being' as it is in the categories, he takes the teaching that a thing has being through its essence to refer to essences that have being within the order of formal cause actualised as their act of existence within the order of efficient cause. This structure is grounded in God as *ipsum esse per se subsistens* and *ipsum esse per suam essentiam*. In God alone essence and being are one, while all other beings are not their own being but are beings by participation.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 3; McDermott, 71-72.

<sup>487</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 7; Maurer 56. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 4.

<sup>488</sup> "esse per se consequitur formam creaturae, supposito tamen influxu Dei:". St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 104, a. 1, ad 1.

<sup>489</sup> St Thomas says: "Unicuique autem competit habere causam agentem, secundum quod habet esse" "it belongs to a thing to have an efficient cause according as it has being." *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 44, a. 1, ad 3. And: "Cum autem Deus sit ipsum esse per suam essentiam, oportet quod esse creatum sit proprius effectus eius;" "since God is being itself by His own essence, created being must be His proper effect;" *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 8, a. 1, c. Furthermore, "Quandiu igitur res habet esse, tandiu oportet quod Deus adsit ei, secundum modum quo esse habet." "Therefore, as long as a thing has being, so long must God be present to it, according to its mode of being." *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 8, a. 1, c.

<sup>490</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 44, a. 1, c.

### 6.151 One by Essence: *De Veritate* q. 21

The picture deepens if we compare being with unity. In *De Veritate* St Thomas says that, while a thing is a being and good by participation, it is one through essence only. This is because “the essence of a thing is one of itself, not because of its act of existing”.<sup>491</sup> To determine what this means, we begin with St Thomas’s *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*. Here St Thomas says that the terms ‘being’ and ‘one’ are predicated essentially and not accidentally of the substance. The reason for this is that it is predicamental accidents which are predicated accidentally of the substance, i.e., as something added to the substance; if ‘being’ and ‘one’ were predicated in this way an infinite regress would follow, as ‘being’ and ‘one’ would have to be predicated also of the thing added, whereupon the question would arise whether ‘being’ is predicated of the thing added essentially or accidentally, and so on. St Thomas proceeds to say that Avicenna nonetheless thought otherwise and believed that ‘being’ and ‘one’ do not signify a thing’s substance but something added to it. We have seen that, in the case of ‘one’, St Thomas traces the source of this error to Avicenna’s failure to distinguish ‘one’ as convertible with ‘being’ from ‘one’ as the principle of number. Now, if a person takes ‘one’ as convertible with being, then ‘one’ signifies ‘being itself’, adding only the notion of undivideness which, as a negation, does not add any reality to ‘being’.<sup>492</sup> Therefore, a substance is ‘one’ through its essence, just as it is ‘a being’ through its essence. If this is so, why is it not also ‘one’ through participation? For an answer we return to question 21 article 5 in *De Veritate*.

The question is concerned to establish that creatures have goodness through participation, not essence. However, in his reply to the 8<sup>th</sup> objection, St Thomas addresses the issue of why ‘being’ and goodness are had by participation while unity is had through essence only. He says that the existence of a thing is called ‘a being’, not because it has some existence other than itself, but because *by* that existence the *thing* is said to be. In the same way, goodness is called good because *by* it a *thing* is said to be good. However, it does not follow that the substance of the thing is not said to be by an existence which is distinct from it – similarly for goodness. What this means it seems to me is that existence is the *act* which is proper to essence, “because *by* that existence the *thing* is said to be”. As an act, existence is a positive perfection, the act of all acts indeed. Therefore, when the thing has

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<sup>491</sup> “essentia rei est una per seipsam, non propter esse suum;” St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 5, ad 8. The English in the text is quoted from the translation by Robert W. Schmidt (1954), already cited.

<sup>492</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk IV, Lect. 2, nn. 555, 556, 557, 559, 560. According to St Thomas, Avicenna treated ‘one’ as a principle with number as an accident added to every being, not within the species of quantity, but rather in the manner that the ability to laugh belongs to every human being. Ibid., 557.

being through its essence, it is at the same time participating in a positive perfection. Now, when we come to speak of the being of the substance as St Thomas does, we must recall that a substance subsists in itself, but in such a way that ‘being’ is not of its essence; its essence is in potency to existence indeed. Consequently, the ‘being’ of the substance must be referred to the act of existence of its essence. Something similar can be said of goodness. Goodness, as a positive act and perfection, adds something to being, and therefore must be referred directly to the existential act of the essence, because the act of being is the act of all acts and the perfection of all perfections. This, however, is not so with unity. As St Thomas has shown, unity as convertible with being adds nothing to being but rather brings a negation, namely the notion of undivideness. A negation, we recall from *De ente et essentia*, is not actualised. Therefore, unity can be referred indifferently to essence or to existence. As St Thomas says, “it makes no difference to the one whether it be referred to essence or to existence”. It is for this reason that St Thomas concludes that the essence of a thing is one of itself and not because of its act of existing, and therefore, not by participation.<sup>493</sup>

#### 6.152 Being and Good by Participation and Efficient Cause

I believe that this discussion tells us a great deal about participation through efficient cause. We learn that a substance has existence through participation, and we learn that this participation extends to properties such as goodness which add to being, so long as they add a positive act and perfection. Actuality is required for such properties and they derive it from the act of being, which is the act of all acts and the perfection of all perfections. For this actuality, such properties look to the existential act proper to the essence of their subject. This is the structure of participation because when the subject has being through its essence it is at the same time participating in a positive perfection. However, while it is so that the thing has existence through essence and by participation, it has goodness by participation only. Unity meanwhile is not actualised in this way as it adds nothing positive to being. Consequently, the essence of a thing is one of itself and not in any way by participation.

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<sup>493</sup> Here is St Thomas’s conclusion in his own words: “quia unum indifferenter se habet ad hoc quod respiciat essentiam vel esse; unde essentia rei est una per seipsam, non propter esse suum; et ita non est una per aliquam participationem, sicut accidit de ente et bono.” St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 5, ad 8. The reference to negation and *De ente et essentia* is from c. 1, nn. 2 and 3; Maurer 29-30. Marietti ed., c. 1, n. 1. In developing this argument I have derived great assistance from the following articles of Joseph Owens, both already cited: “The Accidental and Essential Character of Being in the Doctrine of St Thomas Aquinas” and “Unity and Essence in St Thomas Aquinas”. However, I should observe that Professor Owens’ argument and mine are only broadly parallel. I do not want to suggest that Owens would necessarily support what I have written.

It may seem strange to say that a thing has existence both through essence and by participation, but this is the picture that St Thomas presents in *De ente et essentia*.<sup>494</sup> What we have here is the inter-relationship of formal cause and efficient cause. As already stated, form implies efficient cause, just as matter implies form, while finality is the cause of the causality of all other causes.<sup>495</sup> The crucial point to grasp is the interaction of the causes. In *De ente et essentia* St Thomas teaches that ‘an essence’ considered as such does not include actual being, but it is not hostile to it or incompatible with it either: “it is clear that the nature of man, considered absolutely, abstracts from every being, but in such a way that it prescind from no one of them; and it is the nature considered in this way that we attribute to all individuals.”<sup>496</sup> In natural generation the form is the active principle determining and specifying the matter. However, in relation to existential act, form determines as potency, determining and limiting the active principle to the essence. The agent of efficient causality then has to function through the formal causality of the essence to which it gives existence. That is the sense, I would argue, in which a thing has existence both through essence and by participation.<sup>497</sup>

## 6.2 How does Essence receive the Act of Being?

This leads into the second question posed above: Exactly how is it that the act of being is received by the essence?

In *De ente et essentia* chapter 5 St Thomas identifies three ways in which substances have essence. First is God, whose essence is God’s very being.<sup>498</sup> From this it follows that God is not in a genus, for

<sup>494</sup> See c. 2, n. 3 and c. 4, n. 7; Maurer 36 and 56. Marietti ed., c. 2, n. 5 and c. 5, n. 4.

<sup>495</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 4; McDermott 74-75.

<sup>496</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 3, n. 4; Maurer 47. Marietti ed., c. 4, n. 1. St Thomas’s expression in the Marietti edition is as follows: “Patet ergo quod natura hominis absolute considerata abstrahit a quolibet esse, ita quod non fiat praecisio alicuius eorum. Et haec natura sic considerata est quae praedicatur de omnibus individuus.” This is at the end of a long paragraph 1 in Chapter IV.

<sup>497</sup> Cf. Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 136-138. “The Accidental and Essential Character of Being”, 95-96. “Unity and Essence in St Thomas Aquinas”, 249-252.

<sup>498</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 5, n. 1; Maurer 60. Marietti ed., c. 6, beginning. Note that St Thomas is here including God within the term “substance”. St Thomas’s Latin is: “His visis, patet quomodo essentia invenitur in diversis. Invenitur autem triplex modus habendi essentiam in substantiis. (a) Aliquid enim est, sicut Deus, cuius essentia est ipsum suum esse,” Marietti ed., c. 6, beginning; the Marietti edition does not number the paragraphs in this chapter. As I have explained in Section 3.3 of this thesis, St Thomas does recognise equivocal use of the term “substance”, so that it may mean the quiddity or essence of a thing, or it may mean a subject or suppositum which subsists in the genus of substance. See *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 29, a. 2, c., for example. I do not believe that either of these meanings can apply to God: see *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c.



everything in a genus must have a quiddity in addition to its being. God is pure being and God's essence is God's being. Through this insight we avoid the error of those who claim that God is that universal being by which everything formally exists, and we understand that God's being is distinct from all other being. In other words, we are not to confuse God with universal being or *esse commune*, yet it is by *esse commune* that all created substances exist formally. God's being, meanwhile, is distinct from all other being because it is pure being. Furthermore, God as pure being possesses all the perfections of every kind, so that God is called absolutely perfect. Indeed, these perfections are in God in a most excellent way, because in God they are one, whereas in other things they are diversified. God therefore possesses all perfections "in ipso esse suo".<sup>499</sup> These characteristics of God as the source of all perfections are definitive of St Thomas's notion of participation, as I will seek to show in the following sub-sections of this section.

Next, essence is found in a second way in created intellectual substances; their being is other than their essence, although their essence is without matter. Their nature or quiddity then is "separate" in the sense it is not received in matter. Their being however, is not separate but received. We observe then that created intellectual substances are simple essences but they are not absolutely simple. This is because their being is received, so that these substances contrast with God who is absolutely simple. Created intellectual substances exhibit the second mode of composition (essence-existence) but not the first (matter-form). Furthermore says St Thomas, because their being is received it is limited and restricted to the capacity of the recipient nature. Consequently says St Thomas, the intelligences are unlimited from below yet limited from above: they are limited as to their being, which they receive from a higher reality, but they are not limited from below, as their forms are not limited to the capacity of a matter which receives them.<sup>500</sup>

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25, n. 10. Therefore, the term "substance" can be used of God only in a general way. See also the reply to the second objection in q. 29, a. 2 of the *Prima Pars* just cited, as well as Ralph B. Gehring, "The Knowledge of Material Essences According to St Thomas Aquinas", *The Modern Schoolman* 33 (1956), 153, esp. 164-166.

<sup>499</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 5, nn. 1,2,3; Maurer 60-62. The reason that everything in a genus must have a quiddity in addition to its being is that quiddity or nature is common to things in a genus or species while being is diverse among those same things. *Ibid.*, n. 1. Marietti ed., c. 6, (a). The Latin phrase comes at the end of this section in the Marietti edition. To say that God is pure being is to say that no addition can be made to God's being. For more explanation of this and of the distinction of God's being from *esse commune*, see St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 4, obj. 1 and ad 1. As one can see there, if this distinction is not drawn we will be led to pantheism. The reason that God contains all perfections as one is that God, as pure being, is not limited to any mode of being. See also St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 1, a. 2, c.

<sup>500</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 5, n. 4; Maurer 62. Marietti ed., c. 6 (b). St Thomas's Latin, from the Marietti edition, on the principle of limitation in created intellectual substances is: "in quibus est aliud esse quam essentia ipsarum, quamvis essentia sit sine materia; unde esse earum non est absolutum, sed receptum,

St Thomas continues that because simple essences are not individuated in matter, we do not find a multitude of individuals in the one species, except in the case of the human soul, which is united to a body.<sup>501</sup> This does not mean that these substances cannot be classified by genus, species and difference; actually they can, as their quiddity is not identical with their being. It is rather that their specific differences are hidden from us.<sup>502</sup> St Thomas continues that, in the case of material substances, their genus is taken from the material principle of the essence while their specific difference is taken from the formal principle. However, as immaterial substances are simple quiddities, each of their genus and their specific difference is taken from their whole essence, but not in the same way. Their genus is derived from what follows upon their immateriality (e.g., intellectuality), while their specific difference is derived from what follows upon their degree of perfection (i.e., their distance from potentiality and their closeness to pure act).<sup>503</sup>

The third way in which essence is found is in substances composed of matter and form. In these substances too being is received and limited, because they have being from another. So, as with immaterial substances, these substances too are limited from above. But they are also limited from below, as their nature or quiddity is received in designated matter. Furthermore, a multitude of individuals in the same species is possible, as designated matter is the principle of division in species.<sup>504</sup>

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et ideo limitatum et finitum ad capacitatem naturae recipientis; sed natura vel quidditas earum est absoluta, non recepta in aliqua materia.” Marietti ed., c. 6, (b).

<sup>501</sup> *De ente et essentia*, c. 5, n. 5; Maurer 63-64. Marietti ed., c. 6 (b). St Thomas has already established that among the angels there are as many species as there are individual angels (c. 4, n. 5, Marietti, c. 5, n. 2), and that the human soul holds the lowest place in the hierarchy of created intellectual substances, as it has more potentiality than other created intellectual substances owing to its proximity to matter (c. 4, n. 10, Marietti, c. 5, n. 5).

<sup>502</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 5, n. 6; Maurer 63. Marietti ed., c. 6 (b). St Thomas observes that even in the case of sensible things we do not know their essential differences, but rather indicate them through the accidental differences that flow from the essential differences. In the case of immaterial substances however, we are ignorant of their proper accidents. See also St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VII, Lect. 12, n. 1552. On the difficulty of defining essence see Gehring, “The Knowledge of Material Essences According to St Thomas Aquinas”, already cited, and Gilbert B. Arbuckle, “St Thomas Aquinas and the Doctrine of Essence”, in *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 2, edited by J.K. Ryan, 104 (Washington DC: CUA Press, 1963).

<sup>503</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 5, nn. 7 and 8; Maurer 63-64. Marietti ed., c. 6 (b).

<sup>504</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 5, n. 10; Maurer 65. Marietti ed., c. 6 (c). St Thomas expresses the principle of limitation for material substances as follows: “Tertio modo essentia invenitur in substantiis compositis ex materia et forma, in quibus et esse est receptum et finitum, propter quod et ab alio esse habent:

## 6.21 Reception of Being and Limitation of Being

The question being addressed in this part of the thesis is: exactly how is the act of being of a finite substance received by its essence? This is a question that may be asked of both simple substances and composite substances. The important thing to observe in both cases is the principle of limitation. In both types of substance, they are limited from above, because their being is received in a manner that is restricted to the capacity of the recipient nature. In his much later *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* St Thomas would explain this as follows:

Esse enim rei quamavis sit aliud ab ejus essentia, non tamen est intelligendum quod sit aliquod superadditum ad modum accidentis, sed quasi constituitur per principia essentiae. Et ideo hoc nomen Ens quod imponitur ab ipso esse, significat idem cum nomine quod imponitur ab ipsa essentia.

even though a thing's existence is other than its essence, it should not be understood to be something added to its essence after the manner of an accident, but something established, as it were, by the principles of the essence. Hence the term being, which is applied to a thing by reason of its very existence, designates the same thing as the term which is applied to it by reason of its essence.<sup>505</sup>

The existence of the substance then is established by the principles of the essence. These principles are matter and form in the case of composite or material essences, and form in the case of simple or immaterial essences. The *esse* which is received then is not received willy-nilly; it is received in a way that is proportioned to the recipient form, and matter where the essence includes matter. The situation is as stated above: the agent of efficient causality has to act through the form to which it gives existence, so that the agent is the extrinsic efficient cause and the essence is the intrinsic formal cause of the being of the substance.<sup>506</sup>

How are we to understand this process? Within what metaphysical framework should we grasp it? It is usual to understand it in terms of act and potency. Thus, Ernan McMullin refers to "the well-known medieval dictum": "actuality can be limited only by potency". In other words, continues McMullin, "no actuality can be found in a limited degree in any being unless it is conjoined with a

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et iterum natura vel quidditas earum recepta est in materia signata, et ideo sunt finitae et superius et inferius;" Mariette ed., c. 6 (c).

<sup>505</sup> St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk IV, Lect. 2, n. 558. This passage has already been quoted but its importance warrants its being quoted again. The Latin is quoted from the edition by P. Fr. M.-R. Cathala (1915) and the English from the translation by John P. Rowan (1961).

<sup>506</sup> Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 137.

really distinct limiting principle whose nature is to be a potency for that actuality".<sup>507</sup> That dictum involves a strictly non-Aristotelian extension of the act and potency couplet on which I will comment in Section 6.3 below. For the moment the issue is whether this structure is apparent in *De ente et essentia*.

The dictum just quoted from McMullin refers to actuality being "limited" by potency. Now, in *De ente et essentia*, speaking of essence in created intellectual substances, St Thomas says that their being is other than their essence even though their essence is without matter, and continues: "Hence their being is not separate but received, and therefore it is limited and restricted to the capacity of the recipient nature."<sup>508</sup> In other words, the limitation of being follows the reception of being which itself follows the circumstance that the being of the substance is other than its essence. Now, while the limitation of being follows the reception of being, the two are not exactly the same thing. St Thomas makes crystal clear in *De ente* that the *reception* of 'being itself' in every substance "whose being is distinct from its nature" is owing to an extrinsic efficient cause. However, the *limitation* of being in both created intellectual substances and in material substances is a matter of intrinsic cause, namely form, because the received *being* is limited and restricted to the capacity of the recipient nature.<sup>509</sup>

Now, it is in the context of the reception of being that St Thomas uses the language of act and potency. It is not difficult to see why the language of act and potency is appropriate in this context. At the relevant point in *De ente*, St Thomas is specifically *not* speaking of being through formal cause and he *is* speaking of *being* received by the substance as *act* through the agency of an extrinsic efficient cause. It seems not entirely inappropriate for this situation to be explained in the language of act and potency: "Everything that receives something from another is potential with regard to what it receives, and what is received is its actuality."<sup>510</sup> In other words, while this application involves an extension of the act-potency structure, that structure would seem nonetheless to capture what is going on, in the sense that the passive principle receives the active principle as its actuality.

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<sup>507</sup> Ernan McMullin, "Four Senses of 'Potency'", in *The Concept of Matter in Greek and Medieval Philosophy*, edited by Ernan McMullin (Notre Dame, IA: UNDP, 1963), 299 at 302.

<sup>508</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 5, n. 4; Maurer 62. Marietti ed., c. 6 (b): "unde esse earum non est absolutum, sed receptum, et ideo limitatum et finitum ad capacitatem naturae recipientis:".

<sup>509</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 7 for reception and efficient cause, and c. 5, nn. 4 and 10 for limitation and formal cause; Maurer 56, 62, 65. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 4; c. 6, (b) and (c).

<sup>510</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 8; Maurer 57. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 5: "Omne autem quod recipit aliquid ab alio, est in potentia respectu illius; et hoc quod receptum est in eo, est actus eius."

Be that as it may, this application of the act and potency structure goes beyond orthodox Aristotelianism in that it extends that structure beyond matter and form composition to immaterial substances composed of form and their act of existence. Thus, from this point St Thomas concludes that in created intellectual substances we find potency and act, but not form and matter.<sup>511</sup>

## 6.22 Limitation of Being and Act and Potency

However, it is less apparent that the language of act and potency can reasonably be extended to the context of the limitation of being. Furthermore, in *De ente et essentia*, St Thomas does not in fact speak of the limitation of being in terms of act and potency. There could, I suggest, be two reasons for this. I will take each reason in turn.

First, in *De ente* St Thomas says clearly that the limitation of being follows on its reception, but he does not say clearly that the received being is limited *by* the nature or essence that receives it. The statement that being is received and therefore limited could mean that it is limited by the nature or essence, or it could mean that the received being is created by God to a finite extent, already tailored to the nature which will receive it. If that were so then the tailored act of being would be communicated by God as efficient cause and the essence would be in potency to receive it, in the manner already seen.

Issues such as this are addressed by John Wippel in his article “Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom that Unreceived Act is Unlimited”. Wippel adds that this axiom includes as its second part: “Act is not limited except by a distinct potency which receives it.” And he recognises that this axiom involves a special but non-Aristotelian application of the structure of act and potency. Wippel then examines a range of St Thomas’s texts, looking for textual evidence that St Thomas accepted the principle that unreceived act is unlimited and that, where one finds limited instances of act, especially the act of being, one must account for this by appealing to a distinct principle that receives and limits it. Beginning with *De ente et essentia*, Wippel says that one does not find the axiom that unreceived act

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<sup>511</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, nn. 7 and 8; Maurer 56-57. Marietti ed., c. 5, nn. 4 and 5. St Thomas does say that in intellectual substances ‘form’ and ‘matter’ are found “in an equivocal sense”: “et ita invenitur actus et potentia in intelligentiis, non tamen forma et materia, nisi aequivoce”. I take this to mean that ‘form’ in intellectual substances can be compared with ‘matter’ in material substances, as it is a potential principle in the order of ‘being’ just as matter is a potential principle in the entitative order. For an analysis of the whole argument of St Thomas at this point, see John Wippel “Essence and Existence in the *De ente*, Ch. 4”, in his *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 1984), 107, esp. 118-120.

is unlimited expressed in so many words, but it is arguably implicit in the reasoning. Among such indications Wippel instances St Thomas's recognition of a composition of essence and act of being in finite separate substances, and his characterisation of it as an act-potency composition. However, on the crucial point of what St Thomas means when he says that because the act of being is received it is limited to the nature which receives it, Wippel says that, while the text is not opposed to the interpretation that the act of being is limited *by* the nature or essence, it does not actually say so.<sup>512</sup>

This leads to the second reason foreshadowed at the beginning of this sub-section as to why St Thomas does not express the limitation principle in terms of act and potency. I suggest that St Thomas simply saw that language as inappropriate in this context. Why is that? Because the limiting principle of the essence is form, and form is traditionally an active principle, not a passive principle. Now, St Thomas has already recognised that form, as a principle of the essence or as the essence itself, is in potency to the act of being received through efficient cause, but it is a significant further step to hold that that act of being is itself *limited* by the passive principle. I suggest that, at the time St Thomas was preparing *De ente et essentia*, this was for him a step too far. St Thomas then pulled back from expressing the *limitation* of received being in terms of act and potency.

W. Norris Clarke has an interesting perspective on this issue. Clarke observes that, in all of St Thomas's early work up to but not including the *Summa contra gentiles*, when St Thomas introduces the principle of limitation as he does in chapter 5 of *De ente et essentia*, he does not express it in terms of act and potency. He rather expresses it, says Clarke, in Neo-Platonic terms. Clarke continues that "the standard practice" is then to deduce the real distinction of essence and existence in terms of participation. Only at this later stage does St Thomas say that wherever there is a relation of received and recipient there must be a composition of act and potency. Consequently, says Clarke, act and potency take on the aspect of limitation only as a kind of *post factum* consequence, not as a first principle. Clarke continues that it is only in his work from the *Summa contra gentiles* onwards that St Thomas fuses the limitation principle (with its attendant notion of participation) and the structure of act and potency into a single synthetic principle.<sup>513</sup> Thus, in *Summa contra gentiles*

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<sup>512</sup> John Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom that Unreceived Act is Unlimited", *The Review of Metaphysics* 51 (1998), 533, 533-538.

<sup>513</sup> W. Norris Clarke, "The Limitation of Act by Potency" and "The Meaning of Participation in St Thomas". Both essays appear in Clarke's collection *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being-God-Person* (Notre Dame, IA: UNDP, 1994). The first essay is at 65-88 and the second is at 89-101. The relevant pages are 80-81 and 96. The

St Thomas says: “whatever participates in a thing is compared to the thing participated in as act to potentiality, since by that which is participated the participator is actualized in such and such a way.”<sup>514</sup>

The desideratum of Clarke’s argument is this: for St Thomas, participation does not grow out of the receipt of perfections within a structure of act and potency. Rather, St Thomas actually adopts participation quite independently of act-potency, within the principle of limitation, understood against a Neo-Platonic background. Why is this? Because within the Neo-Platonic tradition St Thomas found a new notion of infinity, not as privation of end where end should be, but as the simple negation of end, boundless. Infinity in this sense St Thomas ascribes to God and to all the perfections that are in God: God is infinite in the sense that there is no terminus or limit to God’s perfection.<sup>515</sup> It is against this background that limitation of perfection in created substances actually makes sense, along with its attendant notion of participation; we have an unlimited unparticipated perfection and its limitation by being received in a participant.<sup>516</sup>

I find the essential thrust of Clarke’s argument persuasive. It is true that in *De ente et essentia* St Thomas treats separately the receipt of *esse* and the limitation of *esse*, and it is true that St Thomas speaks of the former and not the latter in terms of act and potency.<sup>517</sup> However, I suggest a couple of caveats, both of which caution that we should not seek to make this separation of treatment carry more than it can bear. In the first place, one could attribute the organisation in *De ente et essentia* just mentioned to the fact that, for St Thomas, the receipt of *esse* is a matter of efficient cause, while the limitation of *esse* is a matter of form, as it is form which restricts and limits *esse* or other perfection to the capacity of the recipient nature. In other words, in separating his treatment of the receipt of the *act* of being from his treatment of the limitation of being in *De ente et essentia*, St

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passages in the *Summa contra gentiles* which Clarke has in mind are in Bk I which, it is thought, St Thomas began writing at Paris towards the end of his third year of teaching as master; i.e., 1258-59. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D’Aquino*, 359-360.

<sup>514</sup> “Omne participans aliquid comparatur ad ipsum quod participatur ut potentia ad actum: per id enim quod participatur fit participans actu tale.” St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 53, n. 4. This chapter is one of a number cited by Clarke as illustrating the Thomistic synthesis of participation with act and potency.

<sup>515</sup> See, for example, *De potentia Dei*, q. 1, a. 2, c; *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 43, n. 3.

<sup>516</sup> Clarke, “The Meaning of Participation in St Thomas”, 90-91.

<sup>517</sup> See *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, nn. 7 and 8, Maurer 56-57, Marietti ed., c. 5, nn. 4 and 5, for the receipt of *esse* and the language of act and potency, and c. 5, n. 4, Maurer 62, Marietti ed. c. 6 (b), for the limitation of *esse* to the capacity of the recipient nature. However, once again I would like to say that, while I have found Clarke’s argument very stimulating, I would not seek to claim that he would necessarily support any argument that I seek to develop from it.

Thomas may merely be making the point that the former is decisively a matter of efficient cause while the second is not. If we do not adhere to this distinction then we will fall into the trap against which St Thomas warns, namely that of confusing God with that universal being by which everything *formally* exists.<sup>518</sup>

The second caveat is this: We should not think of limitation and reception as two distinct processes; it is fairly clear that St Thomas has in mind here one grand sweeping movement. In chapter 5 of *De ente et essentia* (chapter 6 in the Marietti edition), where St Thomas explains this, he first explains that God is pure being, which means that no addition can be made to the being that is God. It is in this way, St Thomas says, that the ‘pure being’ that is God is distinguished from all other ‘being’, for, even though *esse commune* does not include any addition, it does not prescind from an addition either (i.e., *esse commune* allows for the addition of generic and specific concepts).<sup>519</sup> St Thomas does not explain in *De ente* precisely why pure being cannot be added to, although he does in other places, and the reason comes down to this: if pure being could be added to, it could be added to only by other being; it would then no longer be ‘pure being’, but being differentiated from other being.<sup>520</sup> In this pattern we can say that the ‘pure being’ which is God is *ipsum esse subsistens*, that which we might call the “intensive act of *esse*”, signifying the power, fullness and purity of *esse* unlimited by essence, which can be found only in God whose essence is to be.<sup>521</sup> *Esse commune* however, which does not prescind from addition and which is that by which everything else formally exists, subsists

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<sup>518</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 5, n. 2; Maurer 60-61; Marietti ed., 6 (a); emphasis added. Here are St Thomas’s words warning against confusing the ‘pure being’ which is God with that universal ‘being’ by which everything else formally exists; the quotation comes from the Marietti edition: “Nec oportet, sic dicimus quod Deus est esse tantum, ut in errorem eorum incidamus, qui Deum dixerunt esse illud esse universale quo quaelibet res formaliter est. Hoc enim esse quod Deus est, huius conditionis est ut nulla sibi additio fieri possit: unde per ipsam suam puritatem est esse distinctum ab omni esse;”.

<sup>519</sup> “Esse autem commune, sicut in intellectu suo non includit, aliquam additionem, ita nec includit in intellectu suo aliquam praecisionem additionis; quia, si hoc esset, nihil posset intelligi esse in quo super esse aliquid adderetur.” St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, Marietti ed., c. 6 (a); c. 5, n. 2, pp. 60-61 in Maurer’s translation; note also editorial footnote 6, p. 61. St Thomas makes this point also at *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 4, ad 1, and *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 26, n. 11.

<sup>520</sup> See, for example, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 24. Furthermore, when discussing analogy, I observed that one of the reasons that names said of God and creatures are not predicated in many-to-one mode is that nothing, including ‘being itself’ one assumes, can be prior to God: see Section 2.313 of this thesis. For St Thomas’s teaching that names said of God and creatures are predicated analogically, but not in many-to-one mode, for then we would have to posit something prior to God, see *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 34, nn. 1, 2, 3 and 4.

<sup>521</sup> Clarke refers to God as “infinitely intensive act” in his book *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame IA: UNDP, 2001), 83. Cornelio Fabro refers to *esse* as intensive act in his article “The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation”, trans. By B.M. Bonansea *The Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1974), 449.



only insofar as it is found in actually existing substances. This pattern enables St Thomas to maintain a structure of participation in 'being' without resorting to a Platonic model of subsisting form.<sup>522</sup> Therefore, when then we speak of created substances, immaterial and material, whose being is other than their essence, the being of these substances is clearly not pure being and nor can it add to pure being. Consequently, their essences must serve as limiting, diversifying principles, limiting the fullness of being to the capacity of the recipient nature. The limiting principle then is to be understood not negatively, but as a receptive determining capacity, which determines not quantitatively but qualitatively, so that the substance participates in the fullness of intensive *esse*.<sup>523</sup> Consequently, the participation of substances in *esse* and other perfections always involves composition and limitation, because it is received from God to whom it belongs by essence and therefore as intensive act.<sup>524</sup> It is for this very reason that the essence of creatures is related to *esse* as potency to act.<sup>525</sup>

### 6.23 Limitation of Being, Participation and Act and Potency

In my opinion, all of the above argument makes it reasonable to hypothesise that the notion of participation came to St Thomas through the Neo-Platonic tradition; and that the notion of participation in the perfections and especially *esse* was re-constituted by St Thomas on the Aristotelian terrain of act and potency. If Clarke is correct that St Thomas merged the notion of participation with act and potency not initially but slightly later in his career, the question arises of why he found it necessary to do that. I suggest two reasons, the first given by Clarke himself. In *Summa contra gentiles* St Thomas says: "In every composite there must be act and potency. For several things cannot become absolutely one unless among them something is act and something potency."<sup>526</sup> In other words, unless the essence as form limits as *potency* the *act* of *esse*, the result will not be a subsisting substance.

<sup>522</sup> Cf. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 122.

<sup>523</sup> Cf. Clarke, *The One and the Many*, 83-87. See also Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom that Unreceived Act is Unlimited", 562-564. See also St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 1, a. 2, c.

<sup>524</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, q. 44, a. 1, c.

<sup>525</sup> Fabro, "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy", 467.

<sup>526</sup> "Nam in omni composito oportet esse actum et potentiam. Non enim plura possunt simpliciter unum fieri nisi aliquid sit ibi actus, et aliud potentia." St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 18, n. 2. Clarke, "The Limitation of Act by Potency in St Thomas", 81 and "The Meaning of Participation in St Thomas", 96. In footnotes Clarke gives further references where St Thomas upholds this principle.

The second reason is this: unless the form which is the essence or a principle of the essence functions as potency to the act of *esse*, we may fall into the very trap against which St Thomas warns: that of confusing God as pure being with that *esse commune* by which everything else formally exists. The situation then is this: in natural philosophy, form determines and specifies matter as an active principle; but in metaphysics, form, as a principle of the essence or as the essence itself, determines and limits only as potency. That way God, as first cause and pure being, merely causes something to be; there is no question of sharing God's being. And there is a further very significant consequence. If we speak only of essence receiving and limiting being we are speaking only of formal cause, as form is the determining element of essence or the essence itself. However, if we speak of essence as *potency* receiving and limiting the *act* of being, then we are speaking of efficient cause. Consequently, for St Thomas, *esse* as *act* is participated not by formal causality but by efficient causality.<sup>527</sup> Furthermore, precisely because the act of *esse* is received in limited fashion and not with the full power of intensive *esse*, the efficient cause is an equivocal or analogous efficient cause.

#### 6.24 De Potentia Dei q. 7 a. 2 again

I now turn to a classic statement by St Thomas of the limitation and determination of being expressed in terms of act and potency. In *De potentia Dei* question 7 article 2 St Thomas addresses the perennial issue of whether God's essence "or substance" is the same as God's existence.<sup>528</sup> In the corpus of the article St Thomas answers, of course, that in God existence and essence are not distinguished. His explanation in this instance turns on the distinction between *ens commune* and pure being: precisely because created causes share a common effect which is *being*, and yet this effect is differentiated in distinct particular effects, there must be a higher cause by virtue of which the lower causes all cause *being*. Furthermore, the *proper* effect of that higher cause must be *being* and, as a proper effect proceeds from an agent in likeness to its nature, *being* must be its essence or nature. This higher cause, of course, is God.

The ninth objection runs that that which is most imperfect should not be ascribed to God who is most perfect. Existence, the objector continues, is most imperfect, like primal matter; for, just as primal matter may be determined by any form, being may be determined by all the proper predicaments. Now, this objection, it will be observed, draws on the actualisation of matter by form and identifies

<sup>527</sup> Cf. Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 106-107.

<sup>528</sup> Discussion of this article will also be found in sections 5.22 and 5.221 of this thesis.

*being* as the formal principle of the essence. St Thomas's answer is in terms of *being* as *act*, so that *being*, "as we understand it here" ("hoc quod dico *esse*"), is the actuality of all acts and the perfection of all perfections. St Thomas now adds that *being* in this sense cannot have anything added to it, because any addition would seek to determine *being* in the manner that act determines potentiality. That would assume that *being* would be essentially distinct from that which is added; yet nothing can be outside *being* but *non-being*, which can be neither form nor matter. Now, St Thomas does not mention it here, but we recall that, in the corpus of the article, he has already recognised that *being* is diversified nonetheless, namely among created substances. Therefore, if *being* is the actuality of all acts, then we need an explanation of how it is diversified, presumably to less than its full intensive actuality, in each instance. Here is St Thomas's answer: as *being* as the actuality of all acts cannot be added to, then it is determined by something else *not* as potentiality by act, but as act by potentiality. This solves the problem because in defining a form we include its proper matter rather than its difference; so, we define a soul as the act of an organic physical body. Therefore, this *being* is distinct from that *being*, inasmuch as it is the *being* of this or that nature.<sup>529</sup> I suggest that the meaning of that statement is as follows: form is the act of a subject and so in defining it we include its proper matter, yet it is *actual* only insofar as it *exists*. Therefore, the *esse* of each substance is determined to each substance and is present only in that substance, so that 'being' is predicated analogically, even among members of the same species.<sup>530</sup>

#### 6.241 *Actus Essendi and Forma Essendi*

If we bring together St Thomas's argument in the corpus and in the response to the ninth objection just summarised, we can learn some valuable lessons. We observe again that God is not to be confused with *ens commune*, and we gain further insight into what it means to say that God is 'pure being': if God's *being* is God's essence, then God's *being* is not limited or determined by God's essence. Consequently *being* is realised in God in its purity and fullness. In this sense, *being* is pure actuality – *actus purus essendi*. We are now on the way to understanding what it means to say that *being* is to be understood as *act* – *actus essendi* – rather than as form – *forma essendi*. In his response to the ninth objection St Thomas says that we might consider form as existing potentially in

<sup>529</sup> "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." St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9.

<sup>530</sup> Cf. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 91-93. As Wippel comments, if this were not so, the individuating characteristics of substances would have to be added to being from without. See also St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk I, Lect. 9, nn. 138-139.

matter, or as existing in the power of an agent, or even as existing in the mind; but when it has *being* it becomes *actually existent*. It is most important to see that actual existence is distinguished from and is not to be confused with the other modes of existence. This actual existence is more perfect than potential existence, so that no form is understood to be in *act* unless it has *being*. *Being* then must be an *act*, and it is by reason of its *actus essendi* that the form enjoys *actual existence*. Furthermore, *being* as act transcends the predicaments or categories - this is implicit in the response to the ninth objection. *Being* transcends all of its diverse determinations and yet it is their actuality. This is what it means to say that *being* is the actuality of all acts and the perfection of all perfections: it is *esse* which makes the *forms* to be *actual*.<sup>531</sup>

When we come to explain the determination and diversification of *being*, we cannot say that it is determined as a potency by act. Nor can we say that it is self-limiting. Therefore, we say that *being* as act is determined by potentiality. And why is this justified? Well, says St Thomas, in defining a form we include its proper matter instead of the difference. In other words, *being* as act is determined by potentiality just as form is determined by matter proper to itself. This parallel suggests that, because the determining principle of the essence is form, when the essence is actualised it is actualised according to its formal perfection; i.e., its nature.<sup>532</sup> From this we can conclude as follows: in ch. 4 of *De ente et essentia* (ch. 5 in the Marietti edition) St Thomas shows that the 'actual being' of a substance demands an extrinsic efficient cause. We now see that this same 'actual being' also demands an intrinsic limiting principle, and that principle is form.<sup>533</sup>

There are fairly obvious implications for participation here; simply put, they are as follows. *Esse* as *actus purus essendi* is unlimited by essence and self-subsisting. Yet, as the actuality of all acts, *esse* is determined within each finite substance according to the potentiality and capacity of the substance's recipient nature. This participation is structured by cause, for whatever is found in a thing by participation must be caused in it by that to which it belongs essentially. There is thus an extrinsic efficient cause and an intrinsic limiting and determining principle, which functions as potentiality to *esse* as act.<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>531</sup> See also sections 5.22 and 5.221 of this thesis.

<sup>532</sup> See also St Thomas's response to the fifth objection in the same article on this point.

<sup>533</sup> Cf. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom that Unreceived Act is Unlimited", 564.

<sup>534</sup> Cf. St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 44, a. 1, c. Also *idem*, q. 61, a. 1, c.

### 6.3 St Thomas's Extension of the Aristotelian Couplet of Act and Potency, and Participation

Several writers comment on the profound originality of St Thomas's metaphysics of participation in *esse*, while at the same time recognising his drawing respectfully on the philosophical heritage available to him.<sup>535</sup> Therefore, because St Thomas's metaphysics of *esse* is so deeply implicated with act and potency, it is instructive to look briefly at the extent to which St Thomas has extended the Aristotelian couplet of act and potency. For Aristotle, the couplet of act and potency was designed to explain the process of motion and change in natural generation. In this context, the act-potency couplet has a certain dynamism, capturing motion and succession oriented to an end. St Thomas, of course, also uses the couplet in the context of natural generation, as may be seen in *De principiis naturae*. This does not mean however that St Thomas's use of the couplet in that context exactly parallels Aristotelian usage or that it is only in relation to metaphysical composition of essence and existence that differences appear. Nonetheless, St Thomas's extension of the Aristotelian couplet of act and potency becomes more apparent if one begins with his use of it in the context of essence-existence composition.

In the Aristotelian understanding the limiting principle is *act*, for unlimited for Aristotle connotes imperfection. Therefore, when St Thomas presents the act of being as unlimited in itself and limited by essence functioning as potency, as he does when applying the couplet to essence-existence composition, he is inverting the use of the terms 'act' and 'potency'. Thus, in *Summa contra gentiles* St Thomas says: "being as being cannot be diverse; but it can be diversified by something beside itself; thus, the being of a stone is other than that of a man."<sup>536</sup> In other words, *being* in itself has no limits, it cannot be finite; the diversifying principle is actually the nature which is in potency to receive *being*.<sup>537</sup> Furthermore, in essence-existence composition the element of dynamism, motion and succession reaching for an end, is missing. In *De potentia Dei* St Thomas says that when God gives being, God at the same time produces that which receives being. In terms of act and potency

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<sup>535</sup> See, for example, Clarke in "The Limitation of Act by Potency in St Thomas", 80, and "The Meaning of Participation in St Thomas", 96-97.

<sup>536</sup> *Esse autem, inquantum est esse, non potest esse diversum: potest autem diversificari per aliquid quod est praeter esse; sicut esse lapidis est aliud ab esse hominis.*" St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 52, n. 2.

<sup>537</sup> St Thomas continues that this is why subsisting being can be one only, so that God alone, whose essence it is to be, can be God's own being. Necessarily then, in every other substance, the substance is other than its being. St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 52, n. 2.

this means that the actuality and the potentiality come into existence together; there is no motion and succession.<sup>538</sup>

The crucial factor in the change, one expects, is the shift in the understanding of ‘limit’ and ‘unlimit’. I have already mentioned how St Thomas adopts the Neo-Platonic understanding of ‘unlimit’ as a negation rather than a privation, which suggests that the idea of unlimited perfection and its limitation by participation came to St Thomas first, and was later expressed by him in terms of act and potency in order to provide a framework within which to present *esse* as unlimited and intensive *act*, while still accounting for its diversification in created substances. I have already suggested reasons to explain St Thomas’s drawing the principle of limitation into the act-potency structure, but we should remember that even in *De ente et essentia* St Thomas speaks of the *reception* of existence by essence in terms of act and potency, and the attraction of that structure apparently is that it captures the element of actualisation. “Everything that receives something from another is potential with regard to what it receives, and what is received is its actuality.”<sup>539</sup>

This then suggests that the crucial factor drawing St Thomas to the explanatory power of the act-potency structure is its ability to capture the bringing of something to actuality. The idea of something being brought to actuality by an active principle to which it is in potential is at root Aristotelian, but it is re-conceived and re-modelled by St Thomas. For Aristotle, things were made actual through their form, and no philosophical inquiry was necessary focusing on the existence of things as an actuality distinct from their nature: “The question whether something exists requires the same mode of thinking as the demonstration of an essence.”<sup>540</sup> However, for St Thomas, knowing the essence or quiddity of a thing does not give knowledge of its existence: “every essence or quiddity can be understood without knowing anything about its being”.<sup>541</sup> Indeed, and as St Thomas explains in *De ente et essentia*, this is precisely because existence is not included in the definition of essence. Therefore, in every substance, being is other than essence, unless there is some reality whose essence it is to be. Every other substance, material and immaterial, has to receive ‘actual

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<sup>538</sup> Cf. McMullin, “Four Senses of Potency”, 302-303. St Thomas’s statement in *De potentia Dei* referred to is at q. 3, a. 1, ad 17.

<sup>539</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 8; Maurer 57. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 5: “Omne autem quod recipit aliquid ab alio, est in potentia respectu illius; et hoc quod receptum est in eo, est actus eius.”

<sup>540</sup> Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, Bk Epsilon, c. 1, 1025b; Penguin ed., 154.

<sup>541</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 6; Maurer 55. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 3: “Omnis autem essentia vel quidditas intelligi potest sine hoc quod aliquid intelligatur de esse suo facto.”

being' from outside and by way of efficient cause.<sup>542</sup> Thus, whereas for Aristotle things are made actual through their form, for St Thomas essence, which includes form or is itself form, is made actual through an act of existence, ultimately received from God, acting as 'pure being'.

This is the root of the matter: St Thomas extends the Aristotelian couplet of act and potency because he extends the Aristotelian notion of actuality. For St Thomas, actuality is the act of all acts and is itself an item of philosophical interest. St Thomas's focus on actuality characterises act and potency and efficient cause even in the context of natural generation. Thus, in *De principiis naturae* St Thomas says that three things are needed for natural generation: something potential of existence (i.e., matter), its lack of actualisation (i.e., a lack of being), and something to give it actualisation (i.e., form).<sup>543</sup> We know from *De ente et essentia* that the matter so actualised by form actually becomes a principle of the essence, and this essence is then in potency to the act of existence it must receive from outside itself by efficient cause. Thus, even in natural generation matter is now said to be in potency not because it will be actualised by a specific form, but because it is itself a principle of limitation and determination of an unbounded act of existence.<sup>544</sup> Again in *De principiis naturae* St Thomas distinguishes a principle from a cause on the basis that a beginning is called a cause only if it gives existence to that which follows.<sup>545</sup> Meanwhile in *De ente et essentia*, while St Thomas continues to recognise form as a cause of being "in its own way", efficient cause is made necessary to the actuality of all finite substances, so that form now plays the role of a potentiality to the actuality thus received.<sup>546</sup>

St Thomas's focus on actuality through the structure of act and potency means that both terms now take on new meaning. 'Act' is the act of existence or other perfection, while 'potency' is the capacity to receive the act of existence or other perfection.<sup>547</sup> This being so, act and potency can be extended

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<sup>542</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, nn. 6 and 7; Maurer 55-57. Marietti ed., c. 5, nn. 3 and 4.

<sup>543</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 2, McDermott 68-69.

<sup>544</sup> For excellent discussion on these matters see: McMullin, "Four Senses of Potency", 302-305; Clarke, "The Limitation of Act by Potency in St Thomas", 72ff; Joseph Owens, "Aristotle and Aquinas", in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* edited by Norman Kretzmann and Eleanore Stump (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 38, at 45-49. Owens' writings are voluminous of course, and always very helpful. Other essays helpful in the present context will be found in the collection *St Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: Collected Papers of Joseph Owens, C.Ss.R.*, edited by John R. Catan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980).

<sup>545</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 3, McDermott, 73.

<sup>546</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 2, n. 3 and c. 4, nn. 7 and 8; Maurer, 36 and 56-57. Marietti ed., c. 2, n. 5 and c. 5, nn. 4 and 5.

<sup>547</sup> Fabro, "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy", 464.

to composition without matter, i.e., composition of simple essences of form alone with the act of existence, an extension which St Thomas conducts in *De ente et essentia* c. 4. (c. 5 in the Marietti edition). Of course, composition of essence and existence is also found in material substances, which therefore experience two modes of composition by act and potentiality. The latter mode, says St Thomas, divides common being rather than natural substance, and he refers to it as potentiality and act as such; St Thomas continues that that which follows on potentiality and act as such, common to both material and immaterial created substances, is *to receive* and *to be received*, *to perfect* and *to be perfected*.<sup>548</sup>

It is here that participation comes in, because we are speaking of the act of existence or other perfection, having no limit in itself and belonging by essence to a supreme and unique being, which is nonetheless diversified by reception and limitation in lesser substances, which are thereby dependent upon the supreme being. This One-and-Many structure is traditionally explained in terms of participation, and St Thomas's analysis contains it within a framework of potentiality and act as such, and efficient cause. Therefore, when we speak of existence and the other perfections held by created substances we must remember that, in St Thomas's understanding, they are held by participation; and they are participated by way of an analogous efficient cause, not formal cause, and within a structure of potentiality and act as such.<sup>549</sup>

I suggest that this structure is germane to understanding how St Thomas responds to the complex philosophical heritage to which he was heir. Here, he has taken a notion from the Neo-Platonists – namely, participation – and redefined it on Aristotelian terrain. This he has done in two ways; first, he has reconceived the relation of the First Uncaused Cause to the world as one of creation achieved through efficient cause, rather than as one of emanation achieved through formal cause.<sup>550</sup>

Secondly, St Thomas insists that the First Cause of 'being', namely God, is 'pure being' by essence, so that God's being precludes both multiplication and addition. Consequently, God's 'pure being' is not

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<sup>548</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 54, esp. n. 10.

<sup>549</sup> Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 117.

<sup>550</sup> This is not to say that *form* is irrelevant to creation in St Thomas's view. On the contrary, St Thomas teaches that, because creation is an act of will, God necessarily acts for an end and created things necessarily resemble *ideas* in the mind of God. Thus, St Thomas speaks of God as the efficient, exemplar and final cause of all things; this phrase will be found in *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 44, a. 4, ad 4. I will take up the issue of divine exemplarity and participation in the next chapter.



the same as that *esse commune* by which everything else formally exists.<sup>551</sup> Furthermore, God is self-subsisting *esse*, while *esse commune* subsists only insofar as it is found in actual substances. This enables St Thomas to maintain a structure of participation in *esse*, without resorting to a Platonic model of subsisting form.<sup>552</sup> This structure of participation is necessarily expressed within an extended Aristotelian framework of analogous efficient cause and composition through act and potency.

## 6.4 Overview

I opened this chapter posing two questions: first, if all finite substances are composed of essence and existence, is existence an accident. I have answered that, for St Thomas, existence is an accident in the sense it is outside essence, but it is not a predicamental accident; a predicamental accident depends on a substance which is its subject, as St Thomas makes clear in *De principiis naturae*, whereas existence is an accident prior to substance.<sup>553</sup> Furthermore, a predicamental accident is called ‘being’ by virtue of its relation to substance as its subject, whereas St Thomas says that ‘being’ is an accident, not as though related accidentally to a substance, but as the actuality of any substance.<sup>554</sup> The meaning of this remark is to be found in *De ente et essentia*, where St Thomas says that it is according to essence that a thing is called ‘a being’, and that form, which is part of the essence or the essence itself, is “in its own way” the cause of this ‘being’.<sup>555</sup> Thus, ‘existence’ does not come to the essence as a mere accident, for it is through its essence that the substance has existence. This answers the second question with which this chapter began: exactly how is the act of being received by essence? The answer is: as act to potency. The essence considered in itself is potential to ‘being’; it receives the ‘act of being’ and determines and limits it to itself. Such an ‘act of being’ must be received from an efficient cause, which itself is in act. Because ‘being’ is received as act into a potency, it nonetheless remains really distinct from it. In this way, the subsisting substance is composed of essence and existence.

<sup>551</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 6 and c. 5, n. 2; Maurer 55-56 and 60-61. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 3 and c. 6 (a). See also *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 4, ad 1.

<sup>552</sup> Cf. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 122.

<sup>553</sup> For the dependence of a predicamental accident upon substance, see St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 6, McDermott, op. cit., 79. For ‘existence’ described as an accident prior to substance, see Owens, “The Accidental and Essential Character of Being in the Doctrine of St Thomas Aquinas”. Owens says this several times in the article; see esp. pp 90ff.

<sup>554</sup> “esse est accidens, non quasi per accidens se habens, sed quasi actualitas cuiuslibet substantiae;”. St Thomas, *Quodlibetal Questions* II, q. 2, a. 1, ad 2.

<sup>555</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 2, n. 3; Maurer 36. Marietti ed., c. 2, n. 5.

St Thomas also says in *De ente et essentia* that the 'being' to which essence is potential is received from God as the actuality of the essence.<sup>556</sup> This explains why its *actus essendi* is at once accidental to the essence and yet that which is most intimate to it. This is to say that 'being' is the actuality of the essence and yet is compared to the essence as received to receiver in the manner of a formal principle; this is why we can speak of the essence participating in *esse*.<sup>557</sup>

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<sup>556</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 8; Maurer 57. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 5.

<sup>557</sup> Cf. St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### St. Thomas' Exposition of Boethius' *De Hebdomadibus*

#### 7.1 Some transitional remarks and Important Further Issues

It is my intention now to move on to St Thomas's *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*. However, before doing so and by way of transition I want to draw together some threads that are apparent following our study of *De principiis naturae* and *De ente et essentia*. Here we have been speaking of two modes of composition found in created substances and especially of the second mode: composition of essence and existence. It follows that in terms of participation we have been speaking especially of participation by a creature in *esse* or in some other perfection. I would summarise what has been said so far by proposing that, when we speak of participation by a creature in *esse* or in some other perfection, the participation is structured as follows.

First, whatever is found in anything by participation is caused in it by that to which it belongs essentially. It is in this context that St Thomas often gives the example of iron heated by fire or of the air participating in the light of the sun. Consequently, such participation always involves limitation: the subject receives the perfection and limits it to the capacity of its nature. Therefore, the perfection which is received and participated necessarily is not included in the nature or essence of the subject and it necessarily involves composition in the subject. The participation structure then expresses the relation of priority and posteriority in terms of priority and essentiality of the perfection in the source, and its posteriority, limitation and composition in the participating subject.<sup>558</sup>

Secondly, the participated perfection cannot be predicated univocally of the subject and the source; nor can it be predicated univocally of the subjects themselves. This is because the essence of the subject receives and limits the perfection according to the capacity of its nature; in the case of *esse* the principles of the essence establish the kind of thing which exists. Therefore, both between the subject and the source and among the subjects themselves the perfection can be predicated only analogically. I suggest that this marks a major distinction between participation as St Thomas understands it and participation in Platonic metaphysics. In the latter case, participation comes about through form, and therefore, the participated perfection can be predicated univocally of the

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<sup>558</sup> Cf. Clarke, "The Meaning of Participation in St Thomas", 93-95.

subject and the source and among the subjects. However, in St Thomas understanding, *esse* is received through efficient cause and in a structure of act and potency, so that the principles of the essence receive and limit *esse* as potency to act. As St Thomas says, the participating subject is *actualised* by that which is received.<sup>559</sup> The result is a composed substance which is not accidentally one but essentially one. The causality then is not univocal but equivocal or analogical efficient causality, as the *esse* or other perfection is not received with the full power that it has in the cause; nor is it held in the same way.<sup>560</sup>

The connection among composition, act, potency, efficient cause and unity is explained by St Thomas in this way. In every composite there must be act and potency; their parts are brought together to the extent they are in potency with respect to the union, so that they are united in act after being potentially unitable. Yet, this unity requires a composer, for no plurality can make itself into a unity, and that is for the reason given in *De ente et essentia*: nothing can be its own cause, for then it would be prior to itself. The composer, St Thomas says, is the efficient cause of the composite. Consequently, the essence or formal principle alone cannot explain the *being* of the composite. St Thomas adds that, in composite substances, the good belongs to the whole, for parts are imperfect in comparison with the whole.<sup>561</sup> At this point we recall that, while the good of the composite substance cannot be referred to the essence alone, unity can. Therefore, while the substance is ‘a being’ and ‘good’ by participation, it is ‘one’ by essence.<sup>562</sup>

To appreciate the depth of St Thomas’s explanation to do with composite substances and cause, it is useful to recall some lessons from *De principiis naturae*; viz.: in composition, because it is the potential which becomes actual, the cause of the unity of the thing is the cause which moves the potentiality to actuality; next, a cause is so-called insofar as it gives existence, so that the thing is ‘one’ to the extent that it is ‘a being’; and next, while the efficient cause precedes the composite in time, the active principle precedes it in being.<sup>563</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 53, n. 4; emphasis added.

<sup>560</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 29, n. 2.

<sup>561</sup> All this is in St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 18. The purpose of the chapter is to establish that none of these things applies to God and, therefore, there is no composition in God.

<sup>562</sup> St Thomas, *de Veritate*, q. 21, a. 5, ad 8.

<sup>563</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 3; McDermott, 71-74. See also St Thomas’s *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VIII, Lect. 5, n. 1767. Also very helpful is Meehan, *Efficient Causality in Aristotle and St Thomas*, 347-358. Note that Meehan agrees with Fabro on the relative priority in St Thomas’s thought of the

There are nonetheless important issues still outstanding. First, when we speak of finite substances participating in *esse*, what do we mean by *esse*? Do we mean *esse commune* or *ipsum esse subsistens*? Or the substance's own *actus essendi*? Or maybe all three? Furthermore, if we mean *esse commune*, are we proposing that *esse commune* exists of itself? Yet, has not St Thomas established in *De ente et essentia* that only in God is *esse* self-subsisting? If then we mean to say that creatures participate in *ipsum esse subsistens*, how can that be? Has not St Thomas argued in *De ente et essentia* that God, whom he identifies with *ipsum esse subsistens*, is 'pure being' distinct from all other being, and warned against confusing God's being with that universal being by which everything else formally exists? Questions such as these are raised and addressed by John Wippel in his seminal and masterly treatment of the notion of participation in the thought of St Thomas, which treatment includes an analysis of St Thomas's presentation of participation in his *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*. Therefore, I now turn to St Thomas's *Exposition of De Hebdomadibus*.<sup>564</sup>

## 7.2 *Expositio libri Boetii De hebdomadibus*

James Weisheipl says that this work is essential if we seek to understand St Thomas's notion of participation and the real distinction between *esse* and *quod est*.<sup>565</sup> Weisheipl and other authorities date the work to the period 1256-59, the period of St Thomas's first Mastership at the University of Paris.<sup>566</sup> This work thus comes from the same period as *De principiis naturae* and *De ente et essentia*. Also dating from this period is question 21 of *De Veritate*, in which St Thomas completes the argument of the *Exposition of De Hebdomadibus* concerning participation and good.<sup>567</sup> The edition of

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real distinction of essence and existence in finite substances on the one hand, and the concept of being by participation on the other. Ibid., 356. This relative priority is a disputed point in participation scholarship.

<sup>564</sup> Wippel's treatment first appeared in *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, edited by John F. Wippel (Washington DC: CUA Press, 1987), under the title "Thomas Aquinas and Participation", 117-158. A later version appears as Ch. IV, "Participation and the Problem of the One and the Many" in Professor Wippel's book, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 94-131.

<sup>565</sup> Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino*, 138. A similar sentiment is expressed by I.T. Eschmann, in his "A Catalogue of St Thomas's Works", 406.

<sup>566</sup> Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino*, 138 and 382.

<sup>567</sup> Also coming from this period is St Thomas's *Exposition of the De Trinitate of Boethius*, in which we find St Thomas's only extensive discussion of the division and methods of the sciences, including the method proper to metaphysics. Weisheipl observes that St Thomas was the only significant figure in the thirteenth century to comment on these works of Boethius, although there were many such commentaries in the preceding century. *Friar Thomas D'Aquino*, 134. In his Introduction to his *Exposition of the De Trinitate of Boethius* St Thomas says that Boethius sets out his theological doctrine in three parts. First is *De Trinitate*, concerning the Divine Trinity, "from whose procession every other birth or procession originates". The second part concerns the procession

the *Exposition of De Hebdomadibus* which I am using has recently appeared, and it presents the work in parallel text on facing pages of Latin and English. I will follow the method of citation recommended by the editors.<sup>568</sup>

Boethius lived c.480-524AD. The work commented on by St Thomas is a theological tract, known to St Thomas and his contemporaries as *De Hebdomadibus*, the word “hebdomadibus” being taken from Boethius’ opening sentence.<sup>569</sup> The word “hebdomad” as it is used by Boethius in this tract is understood to mean “axiom”, in the sense of a principle worthy of acceptance as true, and was so understood in St Thomas’s day.<sup>570</sup> Boethius proposes to address from his hebdomads the “obscure question” addressed to him. The “obscure question”, as it is given by St Thomas quoting Boethius’ tract, is: “the way in which substances are good insofar as they are, although they are not substantial goods”.<sup>571</sup> The difficulty of the question, as St Thomas notes, is that it involves an apparent contradiction: the statement asserts that substances are good insofar as they are, from which it

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of good creatures from the good God, and it is here that we find *De hebdomadibus*. The third part has to do with the restoration of creatures by God, and here we find *De fide catholica*. St Thomas, *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, Trans. with an Introduction and Notes by Armand Maurer (Toronto: PIMS, 1987), St Thomas’s Introduction, 5. The fact that Boethius’ tracts are theological tracts does not mean that they are unscientific and unsuitable for philosophical analysis. Rather, says St Thomas, the theologian places the science of God before that of creatures, while the philosopher places natural science before metaphysics. Furthermore observes St Thomas, St Augustine taught that, in treating of the Trinity, one can follow the path of authority or the path of reason. Boethius, says St Thomas, chose the latter path, taking for granted what others had investigated by authority. Ibid., 4 and 6.

<sup>568</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *An Exposition of the “On the Hebdomads” of Boethius (Expositio libri Boetii De hebdomadibus)*, Translated with an Introduction by Janice L. Schultz and Edward A. Synan (Washington DC: CUA Press, 2001). The method of citation is as follows: L indicates Leonine text; an Arabic numeral following indicates chapter number; B or A following indicates a reference to the text of Boethius or the commentary of St Thomas; numerals which follow indicate line numbers within which the reference will be found.

<sup>569</sup> For an explanation of this title see Schultz and Synan’s Introduction, xxiii-xxv.

<sup>570</sup> Schultz and Synan, Introduction, xxiv. St Thomas himself interprets the phrase “de ebdomatibus” as concerning Boethius’ own “conceptions” or “editions”, through which he (Boethius) “grasps the knowledge of truth”. St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.1.A.50-60; see also 60-70 and 90-100. For comment, see Schultz and Synan, Introduction, xxvii-xxviii.

<sup>571</sup> “Postulas ut ex ebdomadibus nostris eius questionis obscuritatem que continet modum quo substantiae in eo quod sint bone sint cum non sint subatantalia bona digeram et paulo euidentiust monstrem.” St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.1.B.1-10. Boethius does not establish the hebdomads in his tract; he rather presents them as principles established by him elsewhere. The obscurity is deliberate: Boethius wishes that his axioms be shared only with those who are sufficiently learned and worthy to understand them. Ibid., L.1.B.10-20. Boethius’ exclusivity is not out of elitism; it is rather designed to protect the integrity of the knowledge.

would seem to follow that they are substantial goods. Yet the statement denies this consequence, presumably because to be good by substance (i.e. essence) is reserved for God alone.<sup>572</sup>

### 7.21 Boethius' Approach to the Problem and the First Axiom

From what has been said above, one might think that St Thomas could offer the following solution to this dilemma. We have seen that, in composite substances, goodness belongs to the substance as such, and this is precisely because the whole is more perfect than the parts. Furthermore, St Thomas says that *being* is the actuality of all acts and therefore the perfection of all perfections. St Thomas also says that 'goodness' and 'being' are the same really, but that 'goodness' expresses the aspect of desirableness which 'being' does not.<sup>573</sup> Therefore, we can say that substances are good insofar as they are. Yet goodness, like being, is received in a relation of potency to act, so that neither goodness nor being belongs to the substance substantially (i.e., essentially), but by participation. The key is the act-potency structure, which ensures that the substance is actualised as good, yet it has its goodness as it has its being; i.e., not by essence but by participation.<sup>574</sup>

This suggested solution, it will be noted, depends on St Thomas's distinction between essence and existence in composite substances, and on fitting that distinction into an act-potency structure. Boethius, however, proposes to answer the "obscure question" from his hebdomads – a method which, as St Thomas observes, is consistent with *via resolutionis*, the method proper to metaphysics<sup>575</sup> – and his hebdomads reveal a difficulty to do with participation in this context. It is this circumstance which leads St Thomas to reflect on the notion of participation.

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<sup>572</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.1.A.70-80. In *De Hebdomadibus* Boethius usually uses the terms "substance" and "*id quod est*" for "essence". Yet, towards the end of the tract the term "essence" appears: "bonum esse essenciam, iustum uero esse actum respicit. Idem autem est in eo esse quod agere. Idem igitur bonum esse quod iustum." "to be good pertains to essence, whereas to be just pertains to an act. In Him (i.e., God), however, to be is identical with to act; hence [in Him], to be Good is identical with to be Just." L.5.B.30-40. See also the editors' comments in their Introduction, pp xxxvii, xli, li and lx.

<sup>573</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 5, a. 1, c. In the response to the first objection in this article St Thomas shows that 'goodness', because it expresses desirability and perfection, looks to finality and therefore requires further actualisation. This point is also made by St Thomas in *De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 5. I will pick up the point later. The statement in the previous sentence in the text comes from *De potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9.

<sup>574</sup> Cf. Schultz and Synan, Introduction, xxxix and xlix.

<sup>575</sup> "Dicit ergo primo quod ipse intendit primo proponere quedam principia per se nota que uocat *terminos et regulas*, terminos quidem quia in huiusmodi principiis stat omnium demonstrationum resolutio, regulas autem quia per ea dirigitur aliquis in cognitione sequencium conclusionum." St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.1.A.120-130. For Boethius' axioms see *Ibid.*, L.2.B.1-20. See also Schultz and Synan, Introduction, xxix-xxxii.

Boethius' first axiom is:

Diuersum est esse et id quod est. Ipsum enim esse nondum est. At uero quod est accepta essendi forma est atque consistit.

Being and that-which-is are diverse. For being itself as yet is not. That-which-is however, once the form of being has been taken on, is and stands together.<sup>576</sup>

This axiom and St Thomas's interpretation of it are very important when one seeks to grasp the significance of St Thomas's analysis in his *Exposition* of Boethius' tract. Before examining St Thomas's interpretation however, it is necessary to ask what Boethius means by this axiom.

In this axiom Boethius distinguishes *esse* and *id quod est*, evidently as the components of an existing thing, and proposes a relation between them. He proceeds to give three ways in which *esse* and *id quod est* may be differentiated. The first way is in the second and third sentences of this axiom, and it is this: *ipsum esse* – being itself – does not exist in itself as if it were a separated form (*Ipsum ... esse nondum est*); *id quod est*, however, does exist, and it is established when it has “taken on” *essendi forma*, the form of being. So here is the differentiation and the relation between the two components: *esse* as such does not exist, *id quod est* does; and the reason that *id quod est* exists is that it has “taken on” *essendi forma*; i.e., it has instantiated the form of being. *Esse* and *id quod est* now “stand together” as one, subsistent being. In this understanding, *esse* is “embodied form” or “immanent form” or even essence – the intrinsic principle of the being of the particular composite entity.<sup>577</sup> This understanding of *esse* as *essendi forma*, one will observe, is not the same as St Thomas's understanding of *esse* as *actus essendi*.

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<sup>576</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.B.2.1-10. The translation is that of the editors, of course. They explain in their Introduction (at lxvii) that, owing to their understanding of Boethius' metaphysical views, when he uses *esse* as a substantive, they translate it as “being”. For the numbering of the axioms see Schultz and Synan, Introduction, xxix-xxxii.

<sup>577</sup> The expression “embodied form” comes from Schultz and Synan, Introduction, xlv. The expression “immanent form” comes from Scott MacDonald, “Boethius' Claim that all Substances are Good”, *Archiv Fur Geschichte Der Philosophie* 70 (1988), 245, 247. Both sources also interpret Boethius' *esse* in this tract as “essence”. I have found both of these sources very helpful; see Schultz and Synan xliii-xlv and MacDonald 247-250 for the full analysis in each case.



### 7.211 *St Thomas's Interpretation of the First Axiom*

The above being so, it is interesting to observe St Thomas's interpretation of this axiom. St Thomas reads the axiom as differentiating *esse* against *id quod est*, and then says that this diversity is at this point to be referred only to the notions themselves, as Boethius has not yet spoken of the realities. I take St Thomas to mean by this that Boethius at this point is merely signalling a diversity in meaning between the two terms; he is not yet asserting that the diversity signalled by these terms may be found as a reality within one thing. Be that as it may, the point enables St Thomas to distinguish between a notional diversity and a real diversity in real things in accord with those very notions, as he does at the appropriate point; in other words, it enables St Thomas to say in due course that, just as *esse* and *id quod est* differ in intention, so do they differ in reality in composite things. This is important, because composite things for St Thomas include not only matter-and-form compositions, but subsistent forms, which are composed with their act of being; and, of course, matter-and-form compositions also undergo further composition with their act of being. In this mode of composition *esse* is decisively *not* form; rather form is either the essence or the principle of the essence which composes with the *esse* that is received and limited by form. Therefore, in observing that Boethius at this stage is asserting a merely notional diversity and suggesting that precisely this diversity can be extended to the realities, St Thomas is already signalling his own notion of *esse* as *actus essendi*.<sup>578</sup>

The significant dimensions of this become apparent as we read on. Having observed that, when saying that *esse* and *id quod est* are diverse Boethius is speaking only of the notions or intentions, St Thomas continues thus:

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 currens, significatur in concreto uelud album.

For we signify one thing by saying 'to be', and something else by saying 'that-which-is', just as we also signify one thing when we say 'to run', and something else by saying 'one running'. For 'to run' and 'to be'

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<sup>578</sup> For St Thomas's statement that Boethius' axiom is concerned only with the notions themselves, see *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.30-40. For his extension of the diversity to real things see *idem*, L.2.A.200-210. For editorial comment, see Schultz and Synan, lxii. Interesting comment on this point will also be found in Kevin J. Caster, "The Distinction between Being and Essence According to Boethius, Avicenna, and William of Auvergne", *The Modern Schoolman* 73 (1996), 309, at 313-315. I will come to the point in Section 7.2412 below.

are signified in the abstract, just as ‘whiteness’ is; but ‘what-is’, that is ‘a being’, and ‘one running’ are signified in the concrete, as is ‘a white item’.<sup>579</sup>

This then is the diversity in the order of intentions: *esse* is signified abstractly, while *id quod est* is signified concretely. St Thomas now moves to explain the first of the ways in which Boethius seeks to show the diversity of *esse* and *id quod est*. The first of the ways builds on a point already made by St Thomas in his *Exposition* and to which I will refer more fully in a moment: ‘being itself’ is “common and indeterminate”, but it can be determined by the subject or by the predicate.<sup>580</sup>

Quorum primus est quia ipsum esse non significatur sicut subiectum essendi, sicut nec currere significatur sicut subiectum cursus. Vnde sicut non possumus dicere quod ipsum currere currat, ita non possumus dicere quod ipsum esse sit; set *id quod est* significatur sicut subiectum essendi, uelud *id quod currit* significatur sicut subiectum currendi; et ideo sicut possumus dicere de eo quod currit siue de corrente quod currat in quantum subicitur cursui et participat ipsum, ita possumus dicere quod ens siue *id quod est* sit in quantum participat actum essendi. Et hoc est quod dicit quod *ipsum esse nondum est* quia non attribuitur sibi esse sicut subiecto essendi, set *id quod est, accepta essendi forma*, scilicet suscipiendo ipsum actum essendi, *est atque consistit*, id est in se ipso subsistit. Non enim dicitur ens proprie et per se nisi de substantia cuius est subsistere; accidentia enim non dicuntur encia quasi ipsa sint, set in quantum eis substantia est aliquid ut post dicitur.

Of these the first is that ‘to be’ itself is not signified as the subject of ‘being’, just as ‘to run’ is not signified as the subject of ‘running’. Hence, just as we cannot say that ‘to run itself runs’, so we cannot say ‘to be itself is’; rather ‘that-which-is’ is signified as the subject of ‘being’, just as ‘that which runs’ is signified as the subject of ‘running’. Therefore, just as we can say of that which runs or of one running that ‘he runs’ inasmuch as he is the subject of running and participates in it, so we can say that a being, or that-which-is, ‘is’ inasmuch as it participates in an act of being. And this is what he says: That *being itself as yet is not*, because to be is not attributed to ‘to be’ itself as to the subject of being, but that *which is ... the form of being ... taken on*, namely, by receiving the very act of being, *is and stands together*, that is, it subsists in itself. For being is not stated properly and through itself except in the case of substance, whose property it is to subsist; for accidents are not called beings as if they themselves were, but inasmuch as by them a substance is something, as will be said later.<sup>581</sup>

In my opinion, this passage is very important if one seeks to understand what St Thomas has to say about participation in this *Exposition*. One first observes that the parallel of *esse* and *currere* picks up depth and momentum: just as *currere* (‘to run’) is not signified as the subject of running, *esse* (‘to be’) is not signified as the subject of being. Rather, ‘that which runs’ is signified as the subject of running, just as ‘that-which-is’ is signified as the subject of ‘being’. And just as we can say of ‘one who runs’

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<sup>579</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.40-50. It will be noted that the editors have here translated *esse* as ‘to be’. In their Introduction the editors say that, when translating St Thomas’s own words, *esse* will be rendered as ‘to be’ or ‘being’, depending on context; *ens* meanwhile, will be translated as ‘a being’ or ‘being’, again depending on context. See Schultz and Synan, Introduction, lxvii.

<sup>580</sup> For this point see St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.20-30.

<sup>581</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.50-70.

that he does so as the subject of running and participates in it, so we can say that ‘that-which-is’ ‘is’ inasmuch as it participates in an act of being. In other words, the parallel of *esse* with *currere* shows that St Thomas is speaking of an *act* here, so that *esse* refers to ‘act of being’. Consequently, when St Thomas returns to Boethius’ axiom, he equates Boethius’ *essendi forma* with his own *actus essendi*. This tells us that St Thomas is equating Boethius’ diversity of *esse* and *id quod est* with his own distinction between essence (*id quod est*) and the act of existence (*actus essendi*), so that the analysis applies to St Thomas’s second mode of composition in real things. Furthermore, when St Thomas says that ‘that-which-is’ ‘is’ inasmuch as it participates in an act of being, we recall from *De principiis naturae* that the hallmark of a cause is that it brings about existence in that which follows. Therefore, the “very act of being” is received and participated within a framework of cause, and the effect is a subsisting substance.

### 7.212 *The Significance of St Thomas’s Interpretation of the First Axiom*

The result is as follows: in the first place, St Thomas has drawn this structure of participation in being by a subject into his own metaphysics of *esse*. Thus, the ‘act of being’ is *received* by participation. It will be recalled that, in *De ente et essentia*, while St Thomas speaks of the *limitation* of the act of being in the language of participation, he speaks of the *receipt* of the act of being in terms of act and potency. The above passage from the *De Hebdomadibus Exposition* suggests that we can bring all that language together, and speak of the receipt and limitation of being in terms of participation and of act and potency, as indeed St Thomas does in his slightly later work, as already stated.<sup>582</sup>

In the second place, St Thomas has drawn this structure of the receipt of the ‘act of being’ into a relation of cause. And we know, again from *De ente et essentia*, that the cause in question here is efficient cause. Therefore, when we speak of that-which-is participating in *esse*, we are not speaking of a mere imitation, and we are certainly not speaking of the receipt of a form or nature, so that the ‘being’ of the substance is of the same nature as the ‘being’ of the efficient cause; rather, we are speaking of the being of the substance as the effect of the causal action of the efficient cause. Furthermore, we know, again from *De ente et essentia*, that the *esse* which is received from the efficient cause is limited by the principles of the essence. It is in this way that the substance is established as a subsistent being. Therefore, far from the “form of being” being received, it is the

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<sup>582</sup> See Sections 6.21, 6.22 and 6.23 above.

form of the subject, as the principle of the essence, which limits the 'act of being' to the nature of the subject and thereby establishes the subject as a subsistent substance.<sup>583</sup>

Indeed, in his *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus* St Thomas observes that 'being itself' (*ipsum esse*) "is considered as something common and indeterminate".<sup>584</sup> Boethius and St Thomas share this view; "common and indeterminate" 'being' is precisely that which is signified by the infinitive *esse*. St Thomas continues that 'being itself' is determined in two ways: by the subject and by the predicate. It is determined by the subject when the subject possesses being ("ex parte subiecti quod esse habet"), and it is determined by the predicate when we say of a human being or of any reality not simply that 'it is' but that 'it is something' (e.g., white or black) ("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.").<sup>585</sup> I suggest that in this passage one may see both the sameness and the difference between Boethius and St Thomas. They agree that *esse* and *id quod est* are diverse and that they are diverse in composite things. Yet there is this difference: for St Thomas, when 'being' is determined by the subject it becomes the actuality of the subject, including the form.<sup>586</sup> Furthermore, says St Thomas, 'being itself' cannot be caused by the form or quiddity of a thing, so that its actualisation must come from an extrinsic efficient cause.<sup>587</sup> For Boethius however, *esse* exists only as embodied form, the principle of being of the composite entity.<sup>588</sup>

Now, it will be observed that, at the point in *De ente et essentia* where St Thomas argues that the actualisation of an essence requires an extrinsic efficient cause, he is speaking primarily of essences which are simply form. He does, however, say that "everything whose being is distinct from its

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<sup>583</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 5, n. 6; Maurer 62. Marietti ed., c. 6 (b). For the receipt of being within a structure of act and potency see *idem*, c. 4, n. 8; Maurer 57. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 5.

<sup>584</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.20.

<sup>585</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.20-30.

<sup>586</sup> "esse est actualitas omnis formae vel naturae: ... Oportet igitur quod ipsum esse comparetur ad essentiam quae est aliud ab ipso, sicut actus ad potentiam." "being is the actuality of every form or nature; ... Therefore, being must be compared to essence, if the latter is distinct from it, as actuality to potentiality." St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 4, c.

<sup>587</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 7; Maurer 56-57. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 4. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 44, a. 1, ad 3.

<sup>588</sup> "Diuersum est esse et id quod est. Ipsum enim esse nondum est. At uero quod est accepta essendi forma est atque consistit." Boethius' first axiom, as quoted by St Thomas in his *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.B.1-10.

nature must have being from another.”<sup>589</sup> In other words, if one is to grasp the idea of *esse* as *actus essendi*, one needs to grasp that there is diversity and composition of *esse* and *id quod est* not only in material substances but in immaterial substances of simple form.<sup>590</sup> I do not see that that step is taken in Boethius’ axioms. Boethius recognises that every finite substance is composed of *essendi forma* and receiving subject, yet, unless one recognises that the receiving subject can be simple form, this principle points to universal hylemorphism. However, it seems to me that Boethius does not recognise simple form as a sort of middle case between ‘being itself’ and matter-form composition. His sixth axiom, as quoted by St Thomas, is as follows:

Omni composito aliud est esse, aliud ipsum est. Omne simplex esse suum et id quod est unum habet.

In every composite, being is other than the item itself. Every simple item possesses its being and that-which-is as one.<sup>591</sup>

Therefore, in my opinion, St Thomas’s equation of Boethius’ *essendi forma* with his own *actus essendi*, while conducted without fanfare, is actually quite profound, especially in its ramifications for participation. Like Boethius, St Thomas conceives of participation in being in terms of ‘being itself’ and a limiting, participating subject.<sup>592</sup> Yet, for St Thomas, *esse* cannot be form because, if it were, we might confuse God as ‘pure being’ with the ‘being’ of finite substances. The ‘being’ of finite substances cannot be received univocally but must be received equivocally; that means that ‘being’ must be received and limited by the *nature* or *essence* of the participating subject, and that nature or essence must either include the form or itself be the form of the subject. That in turn requires efficient cause, and efficient cause means that *esse* is communicated as *act*.<sup>593</sup> It is this recognition

<sup>589</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 7; Maurer 56. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 4: “Ergo oportet quod omnis talis res, cuius esse est aliud a natura sua, habeat esse ab alio.”

<sup>590</sup> Cf. Schultz and Synan, Introduction, xlvi–xlix.

<sup>591</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.B.10–20. On the argument in the text see Clarke, “The Limitation of Act by Potency in St Thomas”, 78–79. Schultz and Synan argue that, because Boethius recognises *esse* as form, he has no metaphysical basis on which to recognise spiritual substances such as angels between God as ‘simple *esse*’ and material composite substances. See their Introduction, xlv–xlviii, lii–liii and lxiii.

<sup>592</sup> Boethius’ fifth axiom, as given by St Thomas, is: “Omne quod est participat eo quod est esse ut sit.” “Everything that is participates in that which is being with the result that it be.” St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.B.10–20.

<sup>593</sup> “Quod inest alicui ab agente, oportet esse actum: agentis enim est facere aliquid actu.” “whatever is present in a thing from an agent must be act, for it belongs to an agent to make something in act.” St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 53, n. 3. “unicuique autem competit habere causam agentem, secundum quod habet esse.” “Now, it belongs to a thing to have an efficient cause according as it has being.” St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 44, a. 1, ad 3.

of nature as form which leads St Thomas to grasp *esse* beyond form as the fundamental *act* of existence: the actuality of all acts.<sup>594</sup> In this way and once again we observe St Thomas taking the notion of participation from its traditional home within formal cause and re-constituting it within his own metaphysics of *esse*, on the terrain of (equivocal or analogous) efficient cause and act and potency.<sup>595</sup>

Finally and in the third place, we know that the efficient cause which brings about the ‘act of being’ of the substance is ultimately pure and simple being, being by essence, namely God. We know this because St Thomas says so in *De ente et essentia*. We also know it from the nature of efficient cause: a chain of dependent causes must regress to an ultimate cause, itself uncaused, who holds by essence that which is caused. And we know that God must be the ultimate cause from St Thomas’s metaphysics of *esse* itself, according to which the *actus essendi* belongs to God by essence and is held by everything else by participation.<sup>596</sup>

## 7.22 Initial View of Participated Being

We can now offer a tentative answer to one of the questions posed above: when St Thomas speaks of created substances participating in *esse*, what does he mean by *esse*? I suggest that he may mean *ens commune* or, more likely, *esse commune*. He may mean *ens commune* because *ens commune* is abstract and universal, and in his *Exposition of De Hebdomadibus* St Thomas speaks of *ens, unum et bonum* as terms which are “most common”; however, *esse commune* looks more likely for, as already observed and again in his *Exposition of De Hebdomadibus*, St Thomas speaks of ‘being itself’ as “something common”, yet determined by the subject which possesses being.<sup>597</sup> Furthermore and in addition to this mode of participation, a created substance would also seem to participate in the simple and pure act of being, for St Thomas says that ‘a being’ ‘is’ inasmuch as it participates in an ‘act of being’, and I have argued that this is a relation of efficient cause which must lead back to pure being, whose act of being is its very essence, namely God. I will return to this question in sections

<sup>594</sup> Clarke, “The Limitation of Act by Potency in St Thomas”, 80. See also Cornelio Fabro, “The Transcendentality of *Ens-Esse* and the Ground of Metaphysics”, *International Philosophical Quarterly* 6 (1966), 389, 412.

<sup>595</sup> Cf. Meehan, *Efficient Causality in Aristotle and St Thomas*, 359-360. Thomas A. Fay, “Participation: the Transformation of Platonic and Neoplatonic Thought in the Metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas”, *Divus Thomas* 76 (1973), 50, esp. 61-63. Fabro, “The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy”, 450-451, 457-469.

<sup>596</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, q. 44, a. 1, c. The references to *De ente et essentia* in this paragraph will be found in c. 4, nn. 7 and 8; Maurer 56-57. Marietti ed., c. 5, nn. 4 and 5. The reference to the receipt of actuality in a structure of act and potency is in n.8 in Maurer’s translation and in n. 5 in the Marietti ed.

<sup>597</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.10-20 and 40-50.

7.243 and 7.244 below, after I have examined further what St Thomas has to say on participation in this *Exposition*.

### 7.23 Is St Thomas Justified in Identifying His Own *Actus Essendi* with Boethius' *Forma Essendi*?

At this stage I want to address this question: I have explained that St Thomas equates Boethius' understanding of *esse* with his own understanding of *esse*, Boethius' *essendi forma* with his own *actus essendi*. As I have also sought to explain, this move has significant ramifications for St Thomas's understanding of participation. St Thomas does not signal this move or offer any explanation for it; he just does it. The question then is: is this move justified? Ralph McInerny argues strongly that "Boethius taught what Thomas said he taught", while most other scholars argue that by *esse* Boethius meant immanent form or essence, or secondary substance.<sup>598</sup>

The editors of the English edition of St Thomas's *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus* argue that St Thomas did not actually believe that by *esse* Boethius meant *actus essendi*, but that he regarded this as a justified extension of Boethius' thought. The editors suggest that this is a case of "pious interpretation". This is to offer a solution to an important philosophical problem in the context of another's work and, moreover, to attribute that solution to the previous author, if one believes the solution to be incipient in the author's work and one which the author's language will bear. The idea is actually to credit the teacher who has inspired this development of knowledge; and the practice is, one might think, quite consistent with scholastic practice.<sup>599</sup> On this understanding, St Thomas is consciously drawing Boethius' teaching on *esse* into his own metaphysics of *esse*, yet he is doing this out of respect for Boethius and in honest pursuit of better and deeper understanding.<sup>600</sup>

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<sup>598</sup> For McInerny's defence of his interpretation, see his *Boethius and Aquinas*, 249-253. For a review of the literature and further analysis see Siobhan Nash-Marshall, *Participation and the Good: A Study in Boethian Metaphysics* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2000), 232ff. Scott MacDonald supports the view that, for Boethius, 'being itself' can be understood as secondary substance while 'that-which-is' can be understood as primary substance. See his "Boethius' Claim that all Substances are Good", 249.

<sup>599</sup> Schultz and Synan, Introduction, lii-liv, lxii-lxiii, lxiv-lxv. In similar fashion, Armand Maurer says that, in interpreting Aristotle, St Thomas will say that a conclusion is according to Aristotle's intention if he believes that it can be deduced from Aristotle's principles, even though that conclusion is not to be found in so many words in Aristotle's writings. It is in this way, says Maurer, that St Thomas was able to attribute a doctrine of creation to Aristotle, even though he knew that Aristotle never taught such a doctrine explicitly. Maurer, "Form and Essence in the Philosophy of St Thomas", 166.

<sup>600</sup> The editors refer more than once to the respect with which St Thomas treats Boethius' work. See, for example, Schultz and Synan, Introduction, lxii-lxiii.

It seems to me that this is a reasonable hypothesis. I have already stated that there is both sameness and difference in Boethius' and St Thomas's notions of *esse*. An important sameness is that both recognise that, as an infinitive, *esse* signifies 'being itself', beyond composition, and that participation expresses the relation of composite beings to 'being itself'.<sup>601</sup> An important difference is that St Thomas recognises two distinct modes of composition, so that even simple forms may enter into composition with *esse*.<sup>602</sup> This means that St Thomas's understanding of participation emerges within his metaphysics of *esse*. I suggest that this is how we should read what St Thomas says of participation in his *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*.<sup>603</sup>

#### 7.24 St Thomas on Participation in the *Expositio*

We now come to St Thomas's discussion of participation. This discussion is prompted by Boethius' second illustration of the diversity between that-which-is and 'being itself', given by St Thomas as follows:

Quod est participare aliquo potest, set ipsum esse nullo modo aliquo participat.

What-is can participate in something, but being itself in no way participates in anything.<sup>604</sup>

As the difference is taken in terms of participation, St Thomas initiates a discussion of the notion. He begins with an etymology: "Est autem participare quasi partem capere."; "For 'to participate' is, as it were, 'to grasp a part'."<sup>605</sup> Now, St Thomas often gives etymologies, indeed he gives at least one other in this very *Exposition*; and in his later work St Thomas explains more than once that the derivation of a word does not necessarily correspond to its meaning, and it is the latter which points to the reality signified by the word.<sup>606</sup> While that is so, it seems to me that St Thomas does often use

<sup>601</sup> Cf. Wayne Hankey, "Aquinas' First Principle: Being or Unity", *Dionysius* 4 (1980), 133, 141-144.

<sup>602</sup> "Non est autem opinandum quod, quamvis substantiae intellectuales non sint corporae, nec ex materia et forma compositae, nec in materia existentes sicut formae materiales, quod quentur. Invenitur enim in eis aliqua compositio ex eo quod non est idem in eis esse et quod est." St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 52, n. 1.

<sup>603</sup> Cf. Schultz and Synan, Introduction, xxxviii-xxxix.

<sup>604</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.B.1-10.

<sup>605</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.70.

<sup>606</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 13, a. 2, ad 2; *idem* II-II, q. 92, a. 1, ad 2. The former reference is the place where St Thomas offers the celebrated etymology of *laedit pedem* (it hurts the foot) for *lapis* (stone). His point is that the etymology is not the same as the meaning; if it were, everything that hurts the foot would have to be called a stone. The other etymology offered by St Thomas in his *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius* has already been noted: 'on editions' for 'de ekdomatibus', "quia in greco 'ekdidomi' idem est quod edere;". L.1.A.50-60. St Thomas's liking for etymologies may have been owing to the solid grounding he



etymology rhetorically; i.e. to suggest something about the reality signified by the word that he wants the reader to observe. In this case that “something” is that participation necessarily involves limitation. Thus, St Thomas continues, when something receives in a particular way that which belongs to another in a universal way, it is said ‘to participate’ in that which the other has.<sup>607</sup> St Thomas proceeds to set out three modes in which this may occur.

### 7.241 *Three Modes of Participation*

The first mode is given simply in two examples: human being is said to participate in animal and Socrates is said to participate in human; in other words, a species may be said to participate in its genus and an individual in its species. We may ask however, where is the limitation, for an individual has the entire content of the species and the species of the genus. St Thomas’s answer is that the human being does not possess the intelligible structure of animal according to its total commonality; similarly for Socrates participating in human. Consequently, this mode of participation is traditionally interpreted by scholars as logical or intentional rather than real or ontological.<sup>608</sup>

The second mode of participation occurs when a subject participates in accident and matter in form, because the form, be it accidental or substantial, which is common according to its own intelligible structure is determined to this or that subject. Here we do have real or ontological participation, because the form which is common in itself (“que de sui ratione communis est”) is received by its appropriate matter or subject and thereby determined to it (“determinatur ad hoc uel illud subiectum”).<sup>609</sup> It is in the receipt and determination of the form by the receiving subject that we find the limitation which is the hallmark of participation. The result is real composition of receiving

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received in grammar and in rhetoric in his early education: Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D’Aquino*, 11-19. For some interesting observations on the matter see Armand Maurer, “St Thomas on the Sacred Name ‘Tetragrammaton’”, *Mediaeval Studies*, 34 (1972), 274, esp. 278-279.

<sup>607</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.70.

<sup>608</sup> St Thomas also puts forward this mode of participation in other places; e.g., *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 32, n. 6, quoted by Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 97, n. 9. Wippel says that this mode of participation is logical or intentional because it occurs inasmuch as a less extended intelligibility may be said to share in a common or universal intelligibility: Wippel, op. cit., 97. One may add that, as St Thomas teaches elsewhere, in the order of reality a genus is not predicated of its species by participation, but essentially. St Thomas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk VII, Lect. 3, n. 1328. See also *idem* Bk I, Lect. 10, n. 154. See Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 196-198. And Leo J. Elders, *The Metaphysics of Being of St Thomas Aquinas in a Historical Perspective* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 225-227. For a comment by Wippel on the texts just cited from St Thomas’s *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, see op. cit. n. 9, pp. 97-98, and n. 30, p. 105.

<sup>609</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.80.

subject and that which is received .<sup>610</sup> This mode differs from the first in that we can speak of reality in terms of participation, whereas to do that in the first mode would be to take the Platonic approach that genus and species are ontological realities, which St Thomas, following Aristotle, rejects.<sup>611</sup> The significance of this difference in the two modes will become apparent shortly. For the moment we may observe that in the second mode we have expressed in the language of participation the Aristotelian notions of composition of matter and form, and of priority and posteriority (substance and accidents).<sup>612</sup>

The third mode of participation recognised by St Thomas is this:

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.

And, similarly, too, an effect is said ‘to participate’ in its own cause, and especially when it is not equal to the power of its cause, as for example, if we should say that ‘air participates in the light of the sun’ because it does not receive that light with the brilliance it has in the sun.<sup>613</sup>

#### 7.2411 Modes of Participation, the Abstractly Said and the Concretely Said

Having introduced the third mode, St Thomas immediately sets it aside in order to examine Boethius’ second manifestation of the diversity between ‘being’ and that-which-is, namely, that ‘what-is’ can participate in something but ‘to be’ itself (*ipsum esse*) cannot. St Thomas explains that ‘to be’ itself cannot participate in anything in either of the first two modes. *Esse* cannot participate in the second mode, in which matter or a subject participates in a form or an accident, because *ipsum esse* is signified abstractly while matter and subject are signified concretely. Furthermore, *esse* cannot participate in the first mode in which a particular participates in a universal for, even though things said abstractly can participate in something, as ‘white’ can participate in colour, *ipsum esse* is most common, so that it is itself participated in by other things, but does not itself participate in anything else; as ‘to be’ itself (*ipsum esse*) is ‘most common’ there is nothing more general in which it could participate. However, turning to ‘that-which-is or being’ (*id quod est siue ens*), St Thomas observes that it also is “most common” yet nevertheless is said concretely. Therefore, ‘that-which-is or being’

<sup>610</sup> Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 98. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 198.

<sup>611</sup> Joseph W. Koterski, “The Doctrine of Participation in Thomistic Metaphysics”, in *The Future of Thomism*, edited by Deal W. Hudson and Dennis Wm. Moran (Notre Dame, IA: UNDP, 1992), 185 at 189-190.

<sup>612</sup> Elders, *The Metaphysics of Being of St Thomas Aquinas in a Historical Perspective*, 227.

<sup>613</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.80-90.

participates in ‘to be’ itself, not in the way the less common participates in the more common, but in the way the concrete participates in the abstract. This then illustrates Boethius’ point: that ‘what-is’, namely ‘being’ (*id quod est, scilicet ens*) can participate in something while ‘being itself’ (*ipsum esse*) in no way participates in anything.<sup>614</sup>

In this passage, St Thomas’s recognition that things said abstractly can nonetheless participate in something, as ‘white’ participates in colour, is interesting, as ‘white’ is a form and a predicamental accident. ‘Being itself’ however is “most common”, which suggests that it is beyond form and the predicaments. St Thomas recalls Boethius’ axiom that *ipsum esse nondum est*, so that *id quod non est non potest aliquo participare*, from which it follows that participation belongs to something when it already is; but something is when it receives being itself, “as has been said”. I suggest that St Thomas is here recalling the ‘running’ parallel, so that, just as a runner runs by participating in an act of running, the concrete being (*ens*) is, by participating in the act of being. If this is so, then St Thomas is interpreting Boethius’ point that ‘that-which-is’ can participate in something while ‘to be’ itself cannot, within his own metaphysics of *esse*.<sup>615</sup>

#### 7.2412 Participation, Admixture of the Extraneous and the Real and Intentional Orders

This becomes more apparent as we read on. St Thomas turns to the third difference nominated by Boethius to illustrate the diversity, which difference has to do with the admixture of something extraneous: that which is signified abstractly has nothing extraneous, i.e. outside its own essence adds St Thomas (*quod scilicet sit preter essenciam suam*), while that which is signified concretely may possess something extraneous which does not pertain to its intelligible structure. Hence, St Thomas endorses Boethius’ axiom that that-which-is can possess something other than what it itself is – “that is, something outside its own essence” St Thomas again adds (*id est preter suam essenciam*) - while ‘being itself’ admits nothing outside its own essence. Here we can see the elements of St Thomas’s metaphysics of *esse*: ‘being itself’ is being by essence and is not composed, which would seem to mean that a composed entity is not identical with its *esse*.<sup>616</sup>

<sup>614</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.90-110. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 99-100.

<sup>615</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.100-110. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 101. Schultz and Synan, Introduction, lxi. Schultz and Synan translate the Latin phrases as follows: “‘to be’ itself as yet is not” and “That-which-is-not cannot participate in anything”.

<sup>616</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.110-150. The Latin phrases are at line 120 and between lines 140 and 150 respectively. Cf. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 101.

I have already referred to the Boethian axiom that, in every composite, being (*esse*) is other than the thing itself, and every simple thing possesses its being (*esse*) and that-which-is as one.<sup>617</sup> In commenting on this axiom, St Thomas says that here Boethius is setting down conceptions on the composite and the simple which pertain to oneness and that, therefore, the diversity that Boethius finds between ‘to be’ itself and what-is in the order of intentions is now applied to realities. Thus, just as ‘to be’ and ‘what is’ (*esse et quod est*) differ in intention, so in composite things they differ in reality. St Thomas continues that, because it has been shown that ‘to be’ itself (*ipsum esse*) does not participate in anything and nor does it have anything extrinsic admixed, ‘to be’ itself is not composite. It follows that a composite reality is not its own ‘to be’ (*res ergo composita non est suum esse*). St Thomas therefore endorses Boethius’ axiom that in every composite it is one thing to be a being (*esse ens*) and another to be the composite itself, adding that the composite IS by participating in ‘being itself’ (*ipsum esse*).<sup>618</sup>

All this bears further examination. It is necessary to quote Boethius’ sixth axiom again. As given by St Thomas, it is:

Omni composito aliud est esse, aliud ipsum est. Omne simplex esse suum et id quod est unum habet.

In every composite, being is other than the item itself. Every simple item possesses its being and that-which-is as one.<sup>619</sup>

Now, we recall Boethius’ first axiom, that ‘being’ and ‘that-which-is’ are diverse. When Boethius introduces that diversity he does so in relation to ‘being’; it is in this context that St Thomas says that the diversity here is to be referred only to the notions or intentions themselves, for Boethius has not

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The reason that the consequence suggested in the last sentence seems to follow will become more clear in a moment, when the contrast between simple and composite entities is more sharply drawn. If the hallmark of a simple entity is that *esse* and *essence* are identical, then the hallmark of a composite entity, one would think, is that *esse* and *essence* are distinct. However, St Thomas has not yet established this position in this commentary.

<sup>617</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.B.10-20. This is Boethius’ sixth axiom. See Schultz and Synan, Introduction, xxxi.

<sup>618</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.200-220. I am following Schultz and Synan’s translation. See their note 10, p.60, where the translators note that Boethius does not use the formula ‘to be a being’ (*esse ens*), although St Thomas does, according to the Leonine edition. The translators say that not all editions add *ens* to *esse* at this point in St Thomas’s commentary. This phrase and the Latin phrase quoted in the sentence preceding will be found between lines 210 and 220.

<sup>619</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.B.10-20.

yet spoken of the realities.<sup>620</sup> However St Thomas observes, in the sixth axiom just quoted Boethius is now referring the very same diversity to the character of oneness.<sup>621</sup> What has the character of oneness? Actually existing things, one might think, be they composed or simple. Consequently St Thomas continues, Boethius has shifted his attention from diversity in the order of intentions to diversity in the order of reality, yet diversity in accord with those very intentions. Therefore, St Thomas says, just as ‘to be’ and ‘what is’ differ in intention, in composite things they differ in reality; according to St Thomas, this is what Boethius means in the sixth axiom just quoted.<sup>622</sup> We now see the point of saying that if ‘being itself’ is not composed because it admits of nothing extrinsic as an admixture, a composite entity cannot be identified with its own act of being: a composite entity by the very fact it is composite cannot be its own *esse*.<sup>623</sup>

#### 7.242 *The Significance of the Intentional/Real Distinction*

I suggest that St Thomas’s clear differentiation of the intentional and real orders in this context, enables two significant points to be made. The first point is this: St Thomas has clearly distinguished the diversity noted by Boethius between ‘being’ (*esse*) and ‘that-which-is’ (*id quod est*) as it is in the order of intentions and as it is in the order of reality. This means that we can speak of this diversity both in relation to composite things and in relation to simple things, so long as we recognise that we are doing so in the order of intentions. Indeed we do precisely that when we speak of God as existing (God being absolutely simple in reality). However, if we speak in the order of reality, then we can speak of the diversity between *esse* and *id quod est* only in relation to composite things. St Thomas clearly contrasts the diversity spoken of in the order of intentions with precisely the same diversity spoken of in the order of reality in order to make the point that the two are not the same. It is this movement of the diversity into the order of reality which enables us to differentiate composite and simple things. Note St Thomas’s peremptory language when he comments on Boethius’ axiom that every simple item possesses its being and that-which-is as one, language dictated by reality rather than intention; we are no longer speaking of an intentional diversity set up by the human intellect to

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<sup>620</sup> Boethius’ first axiom is quoted by St Thomas in his *Exposition* at L.2.B.1-10. Boethius continues, as given by St Thomas, as follows: “Ipsum enim nondum est. At uero quod est accepta essendi forma est atque consistit.” Ibid., L.2.B.1-10. St Thomas’s own remark is at L.2.A.30-40.

<sup>621</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.190-200.

<sup>622</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.190-220.

<sup>623</sup> Cf. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 101. Wippel remarks that this argumentation amounts to an argument for the real distinction between essence and *esse* in composite entities, “although not one of Thomas’s more usual arguments for that conclusion”. Ibid.

help us understand, but of a real diversity in composite things, the very diversity which distinguishes composite things from simple things, quite independently of the human intellect.

Deinde cum dicit: *Omne simplex* etc., ostendit qualiter se habeat in simplicibus in quibus necesse est quod *ipsum esse et id quod est* sit *unum* et idem realiter. Si enim esset aliud realiter id quod est et ipsum esse, iam non esset simplex set compositum.

Then when he says: *Every simple*, etc., he shows how things stand in simple items, in which it is necessary that *being itself and that-which-is* must be really *one* and the same. For if <an item's> that-which-is and its very 'to be' were really other, it would not be simple but composite.<sup>624</sup>

The second point flowing from St Thomas's differentiation of the intentional and real orders in this context is this: it is precisely the circumstance just adumbrated which enables St Thomas to follow Boethius' understanding of simplicity, while yet drawing it out in a way Boethius himself has not done. St Thomas's insistence that, in any simple entity it is necessary that 'being itself' and 'that-which-is' must be really one and the same, is of a piece with his insistence that a composite entity cannot be its own *esse*. St Thomas is speaking of the realities here; therefore, just as 'being itself' and 'that-which-is' must be either really one or really distinct within an entity, composition and simplicity themselves also must be really distinct, so that where we have one we cannot have the other: "Si enim esset aliud realiter id quod est et ipsum esse, iam non esset simplex set compositum."<sup>625</sup> It is from this perspective that St Thomas is able to say that "something is said to be 'simple' because it lacks composition". This sharp contrast of simplicity and composition is of first importance because, as St Thomas continues, something may lack composition in a certain respect

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<sup>624</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Heptadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.210-220. The argument in this paragraph is based on that of Joseph Owens, in his "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being in the Doctrine of St Thomas Aquinas", note 46, pp. 247-248 (the notes are at the end of the volume). Owens says that, in his *Exposition of the De Heptadibus of Boethius* St Thomas explicitly contrasts the diversity between *esse* and *quod est* according to intention in simple things with the same diversity as a real diversity in composite things. Quoting from the Mandonnet edition, Owens gives St Thomas's words as follows: "... sicut esse et quod est differunt in simplicibus secundum intentiones, ita in compositis differunt realiter;". Schultz and Synan give this passage in the Leonine edition as follows: "... sicut esse et quod est differunt secundum intentiones, ita in compositis differunt realiter." In other words, in the Leonine edition the words "in simplicibus" following the first use of the word "differunt" in the Mandonnet edition, are missing. Therefore, it cannot be said that in the Leonine edition St Thomas *explicitly* contrasts the diversity according to intention in simple things with the same diversity as a real diversity in composite things. Nonetheless, St Thomas clearly contrasts the diversity in the order of intentions with the same diversity in the order of reality, so that, I believe, the assertions that I have made in the text are justified. Owens also quotes the passage that I have quoted at this footnote from the Leonine edition edited by Schultz and Synan, without significant difference.

<sup>625</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Heptadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.220

without lacking all composition, whereupon it may be said to be simple, not absolutely, but according to some aspect.<sup>626</sup>

Therefore, I suggest that, while St Thomas endorses Boethius' dictum "Omne simplex esse suum et id quod est unum habet", he also nuances it by stressing its necessity in the order of reality: "in simplicibus ... necesse est quod *ipsum esse et id quod est* sit unum et idem realiter".<sup>627</sup> Boethius' understanding of simplicity can apply only to God; as St Thomas shows in *De ente et essentia*, of only one unique and primary being may it be said that its being and its essence are one.<sup>628</sup> However, St Thomas's nuance of Boethius' dictum enables him to distinguish between that entity which is absolutely simple, and an entity which may be called 'simple', but only in a qualified sense or according to some aspect. As St Thomas himself says, if a thing is said to be 'simple' because it lacks composition, then we may say that an entity is simple according to some aspect inasmuch as it lacks a certain composition, although it is not absolutely simple. He gives the example of fire and water, elements in medieval physics, which are said to be 'simple' inasmuch as each lacks the composition which results from contraries found in mixed items, although each is actually a composite, both of its own quantitative parts and, indeed, of matter and form.<sup>629</sup>

Thus, St Thomas explains, if one finds forms not in matter, each one is simple in that sense; but none is absolutely simple, because each such form must determine its own *esse*. Therefore, no such form is *ipsum esse*; rather it has *esse*. In other words, finite separate substances, while simple form, are nonetheless composed with *esse*; they are not their own *esse*; rather they have *esse*. The reason is that, as each simple form must determine its own being, this determination is according to the specification of its own nature.<sup>630</sup>

Indeed, St Thomas continues, if we join with Plato in supposing that certain immaterial forms subsist, such as one form for the intelligible structure of humans and another for horses, it will be clear that

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<sup>626</sup> "Est tamen considerandum quod, cum simplex dicatur aliquid ex eo quod caret compositione, nichil prohibet aliquid esse secundum quid simplex, in quantum caret aliqua compositione, quod tamen non est omnino simplex;" St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.220-230.

<sup>627</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.220.

<sup>628</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 6; Maurer 55-56. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 3. St Thomas identifies this unique and primary being with God in the following paragraph in each edition.

<sup>629</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.220-230.

<sup>630</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.230-240. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 102.

the immaterial subsisting form, as it is determined to a species, is not common ‘to be’ itself, but participates in it (“non est ipsum esse commune, set participat illud”). Furthermore, says St Thomas, if with Aristotle we posit other immaterial forms of a grade higher than the intelligible structures of sensible things, the same position holds. Each of these “higher forms”, inasmuch as it is distinguished from the others, must be a certain special form and therefore participating in ‘to be’ itself; not one would be truly simple. There can be but one truly simple being concludes St Thomas, and that must be a being which does not participate in *esse* but is subsisting *esse*. This being, Simple, One and Sublime, is God Himself.<sup>631</sup>

John Wippel remarks that in this passage St Thomas has closely linked participation in *esse* with his theory of the real distinction between essence and act of being, so closely indeed that he (St Thomas) immediately moves from the fact that such entities merely participate in *esse* to the conclusion that no such entity is truly simple (which is to say that it is composed).<sup>632</sup> This then is a suitable point at which to explain what I mean when I say that, in his *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, St Thomas moves participation into his metaphysics of *esse*.

#### **7.243 The Importance of St Thomas’s Moving Participation into His Metaphysics of Esse in His Exposition of Boethius**

In the **first** place it means that St Thomas differentiates *esse* from form. In this *Exposition* St Thomas recognises that form is a principle of being: “quia enim forma est principium essendi, necesse est quod secundum quamlibet formam habitam habens aliquantulum esse dicatur.” That is to say, as form is a principle of being, something is said in some way to possess *esse* according as it possesses any form. Thus, St Thomas observes that, to the extent that ‘that-which-is’ can possess something outside its essence, there is in it a double ‘to be’, owing to substantial and accidental form.<sup>633</sup> Yet, it is also clear from what is said above that even simple form is not *esse commune* itself, but participates in it. This is because the form determines, according to its species, the being received: “manifestum erit quod ipsa forma immaterialis subsistens, cum sit quiddam determinatum ad

<sup>631</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.230-260. St Thomas gives the final sentence as: “Hoc autem simplex, unum et sublime est ipse Deus.” At 260. He also notes that ‘to be’ itself (*ipsum esse*), has nothing admixed and cannot be multiplied.

<sup>632</sup> Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 103.

<sup>633</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.150-170. The Latin quotation is at about lines 158-159.



speciem, non est ipsum esse commune, set participat illud.”<sup>634</sup> As St Thomas says in *De potentia Dei*, ‘being’ is determined as act by potentiality, so that the form determines its being as potency to act, whereby it is made actual. It necessarily follows then that while the form is a principle of being, it functions as actuality only through its participation in *esse*, whereupon “this *being* is distinct from that *being* inasmuch as it is the *being* of that nature”.<sup>635</sup>

I suggest that in here is the significance of St Thomas’s observation that Boethius speaks of the diversity between *ipsum esse* and *quod est*, first in the context of ‘being’ (“pertinentes ad ens”), where the diversity refers to the notions themselves, while later, when he (Boethius) sets down some conceptions on the composite and the simple which pertain to the character of oneness, the diversity is referred to the realities; viz., composite and simple things.<sup>636</sup> Why should oneness make this difference? As St Thomas says more than once elsewhere, ‘one’ does not add any reality to ‘being’ and is, indeed convertible with ‘being’. But the very reason that ‘one’ is convertible with ‘being’ is that ‘one’ is the negation of division; i.e., ‘one’ adds to ‘being’ the notion of undivideness, so that every being considered absolutely is ‘one’.<sup>637</sup> Now, if the ‘being’ of a thing consists in indivision, then it is apparent that something composite, including simple forms which specify their *esse*, have not ‘being’ until they are composed and ‘one’; this in turn requires that form function as potency to *esse* as act. It is clear then that when St Thomas speaks of the diversity of *ipsum esse* and *quod est* as applied to the realities, he is speaking of *esse* as actuality, not as form, while the realities spoken of are simple and composite things. Therefore, when St Thomas proceeds to speak of form participating in *esse*, he is speaking of participation within his metaphysics of *esse*.

In the **second** place, St Thomas’s movement of participation into his metaphysics of *esse* reminds us of the important connection, already observed, between participation and the structure of act and potency: in real or ontological participation, the participating principle is related to the participated perfection as potency to act. It is precisely the act-potency structure which ensures that the participating being, though a composite, is indivisibly one.<sup>638</sup>

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<sup>634</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.240

<sup>635</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia dei*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9. See Section 6.24 above for a discussion of this phrase. See also Owens, “The Accidental and Essential Character of Being”, 92-93.

<sup>636</sup> See St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A. 10-20; 40; 190-210.

<sup>637</sup> See St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 1. c. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 11, a. 1, c.

<sup>638</sup> If two principles confront each other as act they cannot make a composite because, as has just been shown, it is precisely through its act of being that one thing is distinguished from another. See the reference to *De*

In the **third** place, St Thomas recognises two modes of composition: there is natural composition of matter and form and there is the metaphysical notion of composition of essence and existence. I suggest that natural composition corresponds to St Thomas's second mode of participation while metaphysical composition corresponds to his third. What that means is this: when matter participates in form, the resulting composite is the essence of the material thing, which, as has been seen, includes both the matter and the form. However, if the essence is to exist, it must participate in *esse* according to the third mode. Meanwhile, if the essence is simple form, as with an intellectual substance, then it also must participate in *esse* if it is to exist, and again this is according to the third mode.

This contrast of the two modes of composition yields three important differences. First, the participation of matter and form results in a third thing, namely the material essence, while the participation of essence in *esse* does not occur in this way. Secondly, the participation of matter in form according to the second mode is univocal, while the participation of essence in *esse* according to the third mode is equivocal or, to be more correct, analogous. Consequently, *esse* cannot be predicated univocally of the subjects which participate in it but only analogically, as indeed *esse* can be predicated only analogically of each subject and of *esse* itself. The third difference is this: in matter-form composition, the substantial form functions as an active principle, determining and actualising the passive principle, matter, so as to specify the being of the composite essence. However, if the essence is actually to exist it must participate in *esse*, and in that participation the form now functions as a potency principle which determines and specifies the active principle – *esse*. What that means is this: form is an active principle within the order of essence, yet that same form, either in itself or in composition with matter, is in potency with respect to its act of being.<sup>639</sup>

#### 7.244 *The Nature of Participated Being*

This leads to the fourth observation following on St Thomas's movement of participation into his metaphysics of *esse*: in what sense of *esse* does the essence participate: *ipsum esse subsistens, esse*

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*potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9 above. See also *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 56, n.14. For a discussion of the connection of ontological participation and the act-potency structure see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 107-108.

<sup>639</sup> This paragraph and the one preceding are based on Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 103-109.

*commune*, or its own *actus essendi*? I believe that one can say: all three. Certainly in his *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius* St Thomas speaks of simple form participating in *esse* both as *esse commune* and as *ipsum esse*.<sup>640</sup> We need to recall here the truth which ties together St Thomas's metaphysics of *esse*: God alone is absolutely simple and God alone is essentially being, while every created substance participates in being as potentiality to act. And we recall that God is not to be confused with universal being or *esse commune*. Therefore, while every created substance is compared to its own act of being as potentiality to act, being itself is compared to all created substances as their act.<sup>641</sup>

The crucial step is St Thomas's recognition of *esse* as act rather than as form, and this step is facilitated by his refreshed awareness of simplicity as lacking composition. This insight enables St Thomas to locate simple forms midway between matter-form composition and *ipsum esse*. This in turn points to a further mode of composition, whereby essence or simple form participates in *esse* as potency to act. This, I would argue, occurs within St Thomas's third mode of participation, and that mode covers participation in *esse*, whether *ipsum esse subsistens*, *esse commune* or *actus essendi*. I will first discuss this mode from the point of view of participation in *ipsum esse subsistens*, and then explain briefly why the analysis extends to *esse commune* and to *actus essendi*.<sup>642</sup>

#### 7.2441 Participation in *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*

I have already quoted St Thomas's third mode: an effect is said to participate in its own cause, especially when it is not equal to the power of its cause, as for example, if we should say that 'air

<sup>640</sup> See St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.240-260. For an extended and learned discussion on this issue see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 110-124.

<sup>641</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk II, c. 53, nn. 4 and 5. In the *Summa Theologiae Prima Pars*, q. 75, a. 5, ad 1, St Thomas says: "Now as potentiality is receptive of act, it must be proportionate to act. But the acts received which proceed from the First Infinite Act, and are participations thereof, are diverse, so that there cannot be one potentiality which receives all acts, in the same way that there is one act from which all participated acts are derived; for then the receptive potentiality would equal the active potentiality of the First Act." St Thomas's warning against confusing God with universal being is in several places; see, for example, *De ente et essentia*, c. 5, n. 2; Maurer 60-61. Marietti ed., c. 6 (a).

<sup>642</sup> I agree with Professor Wippel that the participation of beings in *esse* cannot be reduced to either of the first two modes of participation. However, as Wippel observes, St Thomas speaks of being (*ens*) participating in *esse* in the way that the concrete participates in the abstract. As Wippel says, this is unlikely to be intended by St Thomas as a fourth mode, and yet he has not fitted it into any of the other three. Therefore, the participation of beings in *esse* is properly understood within the third mode. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 109. I will pick up the issue of why this mode extends to *esse commune* and *actus essendi* in Section 7.2442 below.

participates in the light of the sun' because it does not receive that light with the brilliance it has in the sun.<sup>643</sup> St Thomas offers no explanation of this mode, but some insight can be gained from the parallel of the air participating in the light of the sun.

#### 7.24411 *The Parallel with the Air's Participation in the Light of the Sun*

In considering this parallel we should observe that the effect is the illumination of the air, and it occurs only when the air receives the light of the sun. At this stage we recall that, in relation to cause and effect, while it is essential that a cause be prior in nature to its effect, it is not essential that it be prior in time; this is because what is essential to cause is not that it produce change through time (although it may do that), but that it give existence to that which follows.<sup>644</sup> Now, in a question in *De potentia Dei*, St Thomas explains how the Son of God proceeds from the Father. Of course, there is no movement in God, and St Thomas explains that one thing can proceed from another without movement in time, whereupon it actually will be co-existent with that from which it proceeds. To illustrate the point St Thomas chooses illumination, which "is not a movement but the term of a movement", by which he means that it proceeds from its source instantaneously, without succession or duration in time.<sup>645</sup> In this model, the potential principle and the actuality co-exist, and the potential principle, far from being determined and specified by the active principle in a process of change, emerges as the principle receiving and limiting the active principle. This is the extended model of the act-potency structure, whereby the potential principle is oriented to perfection through participation in unlimited actuality.<sup>646</sup> In other words, the sun-lighting-the-air parallel points to the model of participation in *esse* by a receiving and limiting essence.

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<sup>643</sup> "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." St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Heptadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.80-90.

<sup>644</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, cc. 3 and 4, McDermott, 73 and 75. This is important because, while St Thomas was aware that the sun radiates its rays, what we are talking about is its giving illumination to the air.

<sup>645</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 3, a. 13, c. I have taken the reference from Thomas Harper, *The Metaphysics of the School*, Vol. II, (London: Macmillan & Co., 1881)160, where it is part of his argument that there is no intrinsic necessity that a cause be prior in time to its effect.

<sup>646</sup> Cf. McMullin, "Four Senses of Potency", 303-304. As a matter of interest, in a sermon attributed to St Thomas and given on the Feast of All Saints, St Thomas preached that a thing is perfected when it is subject to that which perfects it, so that "the atmosphere is not beautiful save when it is transfigured by sunlight". The sermon will be found in *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*, edited by M.C. D'Arcy, Rev'd ed., (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1964), 12 at 17.

There is more that can be said on this parallel. In *De Veritate* question 5 article 2 St Thomas asks: “Is the world ruled by Providence?”. An objection runs that the celestial bodies and spiritual substances have no potency to generation and hence none to corruption and therefore have no need of providence to keep them in being. In his reply St Thomas says that celestial bodies and spiritual substances have potency to generation and corruption in the sense that they are produced from nothing and may be returned to nothing. However, he recognises that they have no potency in the sense that matter may be in potency to contrary forms. Now, if the sun has no potency in that sense, then it must be complete in its own act and, as every agent acts insofar as it is in act, the air must receive and limit this complete act, just as the essence of a finite entity receives and limits unlimited *esse*.<sup>647</sup>

In the *De Veritate* question being discussed (q. 5, a. 2), St Thomas does not draw precisely the parallel just given between lighting-the-air and *esse*, but he does draw another, as follows. The subsistence of creatures, says St Thomas, depends on God’s constant work in them. He continues that God’s action in this respect should not be compared to that of a craftsman building a house but rather to that of the sun lighting the air. Why is this? Well, when the craftsman ceases his activity the house remains, whereas when the sun withdraws its light the air goes dark. Therefore, just as the air depends on the sun for its light, the creature depends on the will of God for its very existence.<sup>648</sup> This observation is important because, as already argued in this thesis, when the very continued existence of the effect depends on the continued activity of the cause, the cause, to that extent, is a *causa essendi* (cause of being) as well as a *causa fiendi* (cause of becoming). The significance of the distinction is as already explained in this thesis: If an agent is a *causa fiendi* alone, then it is a univocal efficient cause, as cause and effect are the same in species, while *causae essendi* are equivocal efficient causes, as cause and effect differ in species. The reason for this is that when cause and effect are the same in species, the cause cannot be the cause of the form as such in the effect, but

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<sup>647</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 2, obj. 6 and reply. The principle that an agent acts insofar as it is in act is stated by St Thomas many times; see, for example, *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 3, c.

<sup>648</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 2. c. In *idem* q. 5, a. 3, ad 4 St Thomas says: “Darkness is brought about by the sun, not because of any action of the sun, but because the sun does not send out light. Similarly, corruption comes from God, not because of any positive action by Him, but because He does not give the thing permanency.”

only of its *becoming*. However, when cause and effect are not the same in species, the cause can be the cause of the form as such, and hence the cause of the being of the effect.<sup>649</sup>

I have already observed that every agent acts insofar as it is in act; St Thomas continues that what is in another is in it according to the manner of the recipient.<sup>650</sup> Now, the sun possesses light by its nature or essence, its form, as we have already seen. The air, however, is not of such a nature that it can receive the light in the same way as it is in the sun. The air therefore is illumined by participating in the light from the sun, although not participating in the sun's nature. In the same way continues St Thomas, God is Being by God's nature or essence, while every creature has being by participation, so that, in every creature, its essence is not its being.<sup>651</sup> St Thomas explains the parallel this way:

esse per se consequitur formam creaturae, supposito tamen influxu Dei: sicut lumen sequitur diaphanum aeris, supposito influxu solis.

*Being* necessarily results from the form of a creature, given the influence of the divine action; just as light results from the diaphanous nature of the air, given the action of the sun.<sup>652</sup>

In other words, the "diaphanous nature" of the air is understood as an accidental form of the air and a potency to light, which receives the light from the sun and limits it to itself. It is thus the formal cause of light in the air, but presupposes the influx of the sun as efficient cause. In the same way, the essence of a creature is understood as form and, of its nature, a potency to *esse*. It receives and determines *esse* to itself and so becomes the formal cause of existence of the entity, but always pre-

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<sup>649</sup> This is explained by St Thomas in *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 104, a. 1, c. The discussion of this matter at an earlier stage in this thesis will be found at sections 5.222 and 5.223. The reason that the cause cannot be the cause of the form as such in the effect when cause and effect are the same in species, is that the cause could then be the cause of its own form, which is impossible. St Thomas's point is that a univocal efficient cause can be the cause of the effect's coming-to-be in the sense that it can cause the form to come-to-be in designated matter; it is in this sense that fire causes fire, for example. But the univocal cause cannot cause the form as such, and therefore it cannot be the cause of the effect's *being*. If it were otherwise, the cause could be the cause of its own being, which is impossible. St Thomas often makes this point; see, for example, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 7; Maurer 56. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 4. See also, Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 171-172. Shanley, *The Treatise on the Divine Nature*, 224 and 268-269.

<sup>650</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 3, c.

<sup>651</sup> "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." St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 104, a. 1, c. See also Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 175-176.

<sup>652</sup> St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 104, a. 1, ad 1.

supposing the efficient causality of that being whose essence it is to be.<sup>653</sup> In his *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus* St Thomas says:

Quia tamen quolibet forma est determinatiua ipsius esse, nulla earum est ipsum esse, set est habens esse;

Nevertheless, because every <such> form you like is determinative of 'to be' itself, not one of them is 'to be' itself, but rather is what possesses 'to be'.<sup>654</sup>

Thus, one can learn a great deal from the parallel of the sun; the parallel has its limits nonetheless. In *De Veritate* question 5 article 2, St Thomas argues in the corpus that the world is ruled by the providence of that intellect which directs all things to an end and gives order to nature, which is the providence of God. The first objection however claims that the world is not ruled by the providence of God. The objector argues that no agent which acts through natural necessity acts through providence, and continues that God acts through natural necessity, quoting Dionysius to the effect that the divine goodness communicates itself to us like the sun which, without choice or knowledge, pours out its rays on all bodies. St Thomas answers the objection by observing that the Dionysian metaphor means only that, just as the sun excludes no body from sharing its light, the divine goodness excludes no creature from participating in that goodness. The metaphor does not mean, adds St Thomas, that providence acts without choice or knowledge.<sup>655</sup> In other words, the parallel has nothing to say about the end which the efficient activity seeks and how that end is chosen.

#### *7.24412 Participation in Ipsum Esse Subsistens and the Divine Exemplars*

Implicit in St Thomas's answer to the objection just mentioned is a distinction between the way in which natural agents and intellectual agents act. In another question in *De Veritate*, namely question 3 article 1, St Thomas, while addressing the question "Are there Ideas in God?", explains the distinction as follows: in the case of all intellectual agents, the agent determines his/her own end; however, in the case of natural agents, the end is determined by another principal agent. St Thomas's favourite illustration of an agent whose activity is directed to an end determined by a principal agent is of an arrow aimed by the archer. An arrow is not precisely a *natural* agent of course, but St Thomas's point is that, just as the end of the arrow's flight is determined by the archer, so too the

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<sup>653</sup> See Owens, "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being", 92-93.

<sup>654</sup> St Thomas *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.230-240. This passage is also quoted by Owens at this point in his article just cited.

<sup>655</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 2, c., obj. 1 and ad 1.

operation of a natural agent for a definite end presupposes an intellect which has pre-established the end and ordered the nature of the agent to that end.<sup>656</sup> It follows that, to return to the question concerning providence (q.5, a. 2), the world is ruled by the providence of God's intellect which has given order to nature.<sup>657</sup>

This distinction between natural agents and intellectual agents is very important in the present context. If intellectual agents always choose their own ends, then intellectual agents act not by necessity of nature but by will. Choice implies knowledge, and St Thomas explains that knowledge as such is not an active cause; rather, an effect does not arise from knowledge except through mediation of the will. This applies to God, although in God knowledge and will are identical. Thus, between God's knowledge and the things caused there is a twofold medium: on the part of God, the divine will, and on the part of the things themselves in regard to some effects, the medium of secondary causes.<sup>658</sup> Therefore, God's knowledge is a cause of things only insofar as it is mediated through God's will.<sup>659</sup>

St Thomas teaches that, in all things not generated by chance, the form must be the end of any generation whatever, and this is so whether the agent is a natural agent or an intellectual agent. As the agent acts for the sake of the form, then the likeness of the form must be in the agent. In the case of natural agents the form of the thing to be made pre-exists according to its natural being (as in fire generates fire), whereas in the case of intellectual agents the form pre-exists according to intelligible being.<sup>660</sup> Thus, in the case of intellectual agents, action moves from knowledge to will, for the agent acts for the sake of a form which pre-exists in the mind of the agent; it is in imitation of this form that the thing is made. St Thomas says that a form imitated in this way is termed an "idea" or an "exemplar". St Thomas emphasises that this terminology is used not simply because a form is imitated, but only where the agent has determined the end and the form is imitated because of the

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<sup>656</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 1, c.

<sup>657</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 2, c. St Thomas remarks that, if there were not such a principal agent determining the ends of natural agents, we could not explain why natural occurrences happen in a good and orderly way.

<sup>658</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 14, c.

<sup>659</sup> Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 157 and 227.

<sup>660</sup> This is in *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 15, a. 1, c. See Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas", in *The Gilson Lectures on Thomas Aquinas*, with an introduction by James P. Reilly (Toronto: PIMS, 2008), 150-151.



agent's intention that it should be.<sup>661</sup> In *De principiis naturae* St Thomas recognises form as an intrinsic cause which causes by inherence, but because an exemplar exists in the mind of the agent and causes by imitation, it may be termed an extrinsic formal cause.<sup>662</sup> However, the hallmark of an exemplar is not its extrinsicism, but rather that it is "a form which something imitates because of the intention of an agent who antecedently determines the end himself".<sup>663</sup>

St Thomas proceeds to apply these principles to God. If the contrast is between those agents who act by will and determine their ends for themselves, and those who act by nature and do not determine their own ends, God has to be in the first category. St Thomas quotes Dionysius to the effect that exemplars in God are the intelligible characters of things that come to be. St Thomas has already recognised that the form imitated may be within or outside the agent; however, in the case of God, St Thomas notes, the divine ideas can be only within the divine mind. God's ends then are in God's mind and are moved by God's will. St Thomas presents these positions as essentially bound up in the philosophical notion of God, rather than resting on faith exactly: "since all those who speak of God understand Him to be the first cause of things."<sup>664</sup>

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<sup>661</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 1, c. St Thomas distinguishes this process from the following cases: cases of generation where the form of the effect proceeds univocally from the form of the agent, as when human begets human; cases where the form is the intrinsic form by which a thing is informed, as when we say that the soul is the form of a human being; cases of causation by natural agents which do not choose their ends, as when the sun lights the air; cases of causation by intellectual agents where the agent does not intend the imitation, as when an artist paints a likeness of a person unintentionally. See John Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas", 125, 136-137.

<sup>662</sup> For form as an intrinsic cause, see St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 3, McDermott 72. For exemplary form distinguished from intrinsic form, see St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 1, c. For an examination of exemplars as extrinsic formal causes see Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 33-43. See also, Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas", 137. In *De principiis naturae*, one might recall, St Thomas also teaches that finality is the cause of the causality of the other causes: c. 4, McDermott 75. This might lead one to argue that exemplar causality should be reduced to final causality, especially as, again in *De principiis naturae*, St Thomas recognises finality as an extrinsic cause (c. 3, McDermott 72). This issue is examined by Doolan in his *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 37-41. While recognising the teleological function of an exemplar cause, Doolan concludes that it is only formality which captures St Thomas's understanding of exemplarity.

<sup>663</sup> "Haec ergo videtur esse ratio ideae, quod idea sit forma quam aliquid imitatur ex intentione agentis, qui determinat sibi finem." St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 1, c. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 42-43.

<sup>664</sup> "quia omnes loquentes de Deo intelligunt eum esse causam primam entium." St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 1, c. St Thomas says that those who claim that God acts by necessity of God's nature cannot admit the existence of divine ideas. As an example of an agent who receives an exemplary form from outside him or herself, St Thomas gives an artist who, presumably, may receive the form from a model or a landscape or a biblical story, and so on.

In *De Veritate* question 3 article 2 St Thomas establishes that there are many ideas in the mind of God, and that this plurality does not compromise the simplicity of God. St Thomas begins with the opinion of those philosophers who claim that God has only one idea, namely that of “creature in general”, so that the distinction among creatures is brought about by secondary causes.<sup>665</sup> St Thomas rejects this opinion, as it would mean that the distinction between creatures would be related essentially to secondary causes and only accidentally to God as first cause. This is impossible, as that which is essential is prior to that which is accidental, so that the relation of creatures to God as first cause must be essential. We must say then that the distinction among things is predefined by God and that the intelligible character proper to each individual thing must exist in God. Consequently, there are many ideas in God.<sup>666</sup>

St Thomas continues that a form can exist in the intellect either as a principle of the act of understanding or as the terminus of the act of understanding. St Thomas offers some complex illustration of this distinction which, I suggest, comes down to the following. With respect to the speculative intellect, the species by which the intellect is informed is the first means by which understanding takes place. However, once the intellect is actualised by the form in this way it can operate and form quiddities of things, as well as positive and negative propositions. These are products of the intellect, that is, understandings in the second sense. Yet, it is through these understandings that the intellect comes to an understanding of exterior things. Now consider an architect building a house. The architect starts with the form of a house which is in his/her mind according to the first mode of understanding. However, it is according to the second mode that the architect “thinks out” the form, so that the form is not the principle of understanding but *the understood* by which the architect builds the house. St Thomas adds that if an artist’s intellect were to produce a work that resembled itself, then the artist’s very intellect would be an idea, although not insofar as it is an intellect but insofar as it is understood.<sup>667</sup>

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<sup>665</sup> St Thomas does not name those who hold this opinion, but an editorial note to the translation I am using identifies Avicenna, Averroes, Algazel and the author of the *Liber de causis*. The translation is that of Robert W. Mulligan (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952). Doolan also identifies this position as held by “certain Islamic philosophers”. See his *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 88.

<sup>666</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 2, c. In *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 15, a. 2, c, St Thomas recognises that, as each created substance is essentially related to God, the order of the universe is properly intended by God. See Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas”, 151.

<sup>667</sup> Ibid. Italics in original. As Doolan remarks, the “aside” expressed hypothetically in the final sentence actually foreshadows St Thomas’s account of the way in which God’s intellect is the idea of the things God makes. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 89, n. 15.

St Thomas continues that when a thing is made in imitation of something else, it does not always imitate the archetype perfectly. When it does not, the operative intellect does not take the form of the archetype absolutely as an idea or exemplar of the thing to be made; rather, it takes it with a definite proportion, according to the degree of closeness with which the copy imitates the original.<sup>668</sup>

St Thomas now applies this structure to the divine intellect. God produces all things in the likeness of God's own essence, so that God's essence is the idea of things. However, this is not God's essence considered as an essence but God's essence considered as it is known. While St Thomas does not say so precisely, we can see that when God understands God's essence as an exemplar for a creature in this way, God understands God's essence as the terminus rather than the principle of understanding. However, created things, St Thomas points out, do not perfectly imitate the divine essence. Consequently, God's essence is not understood by God as the idea of things without qualification, but with the proportion to the divine essence the creature to be produced has. The divine idea for a created thing then is the divine essence understood with the thing's proportion to it; that is, understood according to the degree the creature falls short of perfectly imitating the divine essence. Now, different things imitate the divine essence in different ways, as each has its own distinct act of existence. So, there are different proportions to the divine essence among created things and, necessarily, many ideas. Consequently, we may say that there is but one idea for all if we consider the divine essence alone, but if we consider the proportions of creatures to the divine essence, there is a plurality of ideas.<sup>669</sup>

Thus, God's essence acts as the idea for everything God makes; but, as diverse things imitate the divine essence in diverse ways owing to their diverse acts of being, the term 'idea' strictly speaking signals the divine essence together with the proportion that a created thing has to the divine essence. This latter element, says St Thomas, completes the formal notion of an idea, and explains why there are many ideas although there is only one essence. The additional element also distinguishes the ideas from God's essential attributes, such as goodness and wisdom. God's essential attributes, says St Thomas, do not signify anything more than God's essence, even though

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<sup>668</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 2, c. Cf. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas", 137-139. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 88-89.

<sup>669</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 2, c. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas", 139. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 89-90.

God is compared to creatures with reference to them (as when we say creatures are good).<sup>670</sup> This distinction between the divine ideas and the divine attributes is very important and I will return to it.

An objection runs that, as God is the highest unity, God is one not only in reality but in concept. Consequently, there cannot be many ideas in God. St Thomas answers that a plurality of concepts may be reduced to diversity in the thing, such as substance and accident or form and matter. Such a conceptual difference is repugnant to the highest unity or simplicity. However, a conceptual difference may be reduced not to diversity in the thing but to its truth, which can be understood in different ways. It is in this sense that we say there is a plurality of intelligible ideas in God; hence, this plurality does not compromise God's simplicity.<sup>671</sup> From this we may say that, while the divine ideas are conceptually distinct from one another, from the point of view of God's essence, they are identical with that essence.

Another objection runs that there can be only one idea in God as formal causes reduce to one first form. In response St Thomas acknowledges that the one first form to which all things reduce is the divine essence. However continues St Thomas, in reflecting on this essence, the divine intellect "discovers" different ways in which it may be imitated, and it is in these different ways that the plurality of divine ideas consists.<sup>672</sup> Furthermore, in response to the eighth objection, St Thomas says that the relation between God and creature is not a real relation in God, but it is in God according to our manner of understanding God. Similarly, it can be in God according to God's own manner of

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<sup>670</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 2, ad 2. St Thomas adds that the ideas may be called essential attributes inasmuch as they are related to the essence.

<sup>671</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 2, ad 3.

<sup>672</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 2, ad 6. The translation that I am using actually gives "devises" where I have used "discovers". The verb "discovers" is given by both Wippel and Doolan; see Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas", 140 and Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 91. St Thomas's Latin verb is "adinvenit", and he immediately adds: "ut ita dicam". I believe that "discovers" is a better rendition of the Latin verb than "devises". Here are St Thomas's words: "Ad sextum dicendum, quod una prima forma, ad quam omnia reducuntur, est ipsa essentia divina secundum se considerata; ex cuius consideratione divinus intellectus advenit, ut ita dicam, diversos modos imitationis ipsius, in quibus pluralitas idearum consistit." On St Thomas's choice of the verb "adinvenit", Wippel says: "To me this does not mean that God 'thinks up' or invents out of thin air the various ways in which his essence can be imitated, or the various divine ideas. It means that he eternally contemplates all the ways in which his essence can be imitated and freely chooses to produce creatures which imitate him in some of these ways, though not in others. On this point Thomas is not a voluntarist." Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas", 140. Whether St Thomas is a voluntarist is nonetheless a disputed point in the scholarship. I agree with Wippel on this point and I am not able, at this point in the thesis, to enter this debate. For the references, see Doolan, op. cit., 91, n. 21.

understanding Godself, that is, insofar as God understands the relation things have to God's essence.<sup>673</sup>

In light of these statements, one can agree with Wippel that a divine idea is nothing other than a given way in which God understands God's essence as capable of being imitated by a creature.<sup>674</sup>

Both Wippel and Doolan stress that the divine ideas have both cognitive and ontological functions.<sup>675</sup>

In *De Veritate* question 2 article 8, response to the third objection, St Thomas says that if, the term 'idea' is taken according to common usage as meaning the form of practical knowledge, then there is an idea only of those things which have been, are or will be. However, if the term be taken as also meaning the form of speculative knowledge, then there can be ideas of those things that are not, have not been and will not be (pure possibles).<sup>676</sup> This dichotomy I suggest reflects the distinction between the strict and broad sense of 'idea' that Doolan sees St Thomas as developing over time, as well as the dual ontological and cognitive functions. As for the term 'exemplar', in *De Veritate* question 3, article 3, response to the third objection, St Thomas says that this term belongs to practical knowledge, but need not be restricted to that which is actually practical; i.e., something can be termed 'an exemplar' if something can be made in imitation of it, even if that other thing is never made.<sup>677</sup> However, in his later work, as Doolan shows, St Thomas restricts the term 'exemplar' to divine ideas of individual things which exist at some point in time. The divine ideas of all other things are merely *rationes*, "notions".<sup>678</sup>

Professor Wippel has an interesting perspective on this state of affairs. Recalling that a divine idea is nothing other than a given way in which God views God's essence as capable of being imitated by a creature, Wippel observes that, prior to its actual creation, there is a divine idea to which a given creature will correspond if ever it is brought into being. So, simply viewed as a principle whereby God knows creatures, a divine idea is termed a divine *ratio*. However, if a creature is brought into actual existence, the divine idea to which it corresponds will also serve as a principle of divine production, whereupon it may be termed 'an exemplar'. Therefore, before the actual creation of a

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<sup>673</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 2, ad 8.

<sup>674</sup> Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 130.

<sup>675</sup> See, for example, Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas", 153-155. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 131.

<sup>676</sup> St Thomas, q. 2, a. 8, ad 3.

<sup>677</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 3, ad 3.

<sup>678</sup> Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 139-147. The distinction quoted between exemplars and notions is at 145. See also, Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas", 161-162.

given entity, its divine idea is the maximum degree of reality it can enjoy. However, ontologically speaking, a divine idea is identical with the divine essence.<sup>679</sup> Furthermore, the analysis shows that there may be divine *rationes* even for “pure possibles”; i.e., “possibles” that will never be realised in fact; and that their “possibility” is not merely linguistic or logical, but ontological; it is grounded in being, namely God’s being.<sup>680</sup>

I believe that these insights throw some light on the role of participation within the order of extrinsic causality. St Thomas says that a divine idea may be termed ‘an exemplar’ insofar as it is a principle of the making of things; but it is still a divine idea, and thus really identical with the divine essence which is the divine *esse*.<sup>681</sup> Now, actually existing creatures, we recall, are *composed* of their essence and their act of being and, St Thomas teaches, when God actually creates something, God at the same time gives being and produces that which receives being – neither pre-exists as such.<sup>682</sup> A divine idea is termed ‘an exemplar’ insofar as it is the principle of making of things, yet, as a divine idea it is ontologically distinct from the creature’s own act of being. Therefore, when we consider participation by creatures in *esse* within the order of extrinsic causality, we need to consider participation not only within the order of efficient causality, but participation within the order of extrinsic formal or exemplar causality.<sup>683</sup> Indeed, the two are inextricably connected. Not only does

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<sup>679</sup> “Similiter nec in deo cum agat per suam essentiam, effectus eius in eo non est distinctus ab essentia sua, sed omnino unum; et ideo hoc quo cognoscit creaturam, non est aliud quam essentia sua.” “Similarly, as God acts through His essence, His effect is not in Him as something distinct from His essence; but it is entirely one with it. Therefore, His knowledge of an effect is not distinct from His own essence.” St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 3 (cited by Wippel, n. 9, p. 167, in his article “Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, and Godfrey of Fontaines on the Reality of Nonexisting Possibles”, publication details in the next following footnote).

<sup>680</sup> John Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, and Godfrey of Fontaines on the Reality of Nonexisting Possibles”, in his *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington DC: CUA Press, 1984, 163, at 166-168. At this point in the essay Professor Wippel is addressing the question whether nonexistent or not-yet-existent possibles enjoy any reality, any real being, in themselves, prior to their realisation as actually existing entities. His answer is that there is no place within St Thomas’s metaphysics for any eternally pre-existing possible that would enjoy some kind of being distinct from that of the divine essence itself.

<sup>681</sup> In *Summa Theologiae*, q. 15, a. 3, c, St Thomas says: “So far as the idea is the principle of the making of things, it may be called an *exemplar*, and belongs to practical knowledge. But so far as it is a principle of knowledge, it is properly called a *likeness*, and may belong to speculative knowledge also. As an exemplar, therefore, it is related to everything made by God in any period of time; whereas as a principle of knowledge it is related to all things known by God, even though they never come to be in time; and to all things that He knows according to their proper likeness, insofar as they are known by Him in a speculative manner.”

<sup>682</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia dei*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 17. Wippel cites *De potentia dei*, q. 3, a. 5, ad 2 in this context. See his “Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent and Godfrey of Fontaines on the Reality of Nonexisting Possibles”, 167, n. 10.

<sup>683</sup> Cf. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 130.

an agent act for the sake of the form, ideas, for the very reason that they have intentional existence only, are productive only through the agent's will.<sup>684</sup>

I have already written a good deal on participation within the order of efficient causality.

Participation within the order of extrinsic formal or exemplar causality is a topic comprehensively covered by Gregory Doolan in his stimulating study *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*.<sup>685</sup> At this stage in this thesis I restrict myself to a truncated treatment of this matter, taking a lead from Doolan.<sup>686</sup>

In his book, Doolan distinguishes two modes of divine exemplarism: the exemplarism of the divine ideas and the exemplarism of the divine nature.<sup>687</sup> I suggest that this distinction follows the distinction already mentioned that St Thomas draws between the divine ideas and God's essential attributes. As St Thomas explains, the divine ideas are plural because each idea signifies the proportion that a creature has to God's essence, while the divine attributes are nothing other than God's essence and strictly speaking are not plural; yet, both act as exemplars nonetheless, the attributes in the sense that God is compared to creatures with reference to them, as when we say that creatures are good.<sup>688</sup> As Doolan observes, in this analysis, St Thomas distinguishes the divine ideas and the divine attributes on the basis that the ideas signify a multiplicity of things (the different proportions that things have to the divine essence), while the divine attributes signify only one thing, namely the divine essence. Therefore, concludes Doolan, the exemplarism of the divine attributes is the exemplarism of the divine essence acting as a "natural exemplar".<sup>689</sup>

In *De potentia Dei* question 3 article 4 St Thomas defends the position that the creative power of God cannot be communicated to a creature. In answer to an objection based on the principle that an agent always effects something similar to itself, St Thomas says that, while between God and

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<sup>684</sup> Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Efficient Causes*, 32-33, 216. As Doolan observes, the fact that, for Aquinas, ideas have intentional existence only and therefore presuppose efficient cause, marks a major point of difference with Plato's theory of ideas. For a summary of St Thomas's response to Plato's theory of ideas, see Doolan, op. cit., 192-195.

<sup>685</sup> I will repeat the publication details of this book, to which I have now referred several times: Washington DC: CUA Press, 2008. See Ch 6, 191-243, esp. from 213.

<sup>686</sup> Doolan himself summarises his argument and conclusions at pp 242-243, op. cit.

<sup>687</sup> See, for example, Doolan, op. cit., 76-77.

<sup>688</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 2, ad 2.

<sup>689</sup> Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 78.

creature there can be no generic or specific likeness, there can be a likeness of analogy. Creatures, continues St Thomas, are likened to the very nature of God: they derive their being from the first being, their goodness from the sovereign good, and so on.<sup>690</sup> From this Doolan concludes that, through the exemplarism of the divine nature the finite being receives its total entity as a being, both its essence and its *esse*, for in imitating the divine nature as exemplar, the finite being imitates the perfection that is being itself. By contrast, through the exemplarism of the divine ideas, the finite being receives only its essence, for in imitating the divine idea as exemplar, the finite being imitates but one limited mode of being. In this way, the distinction in modes of divine exemplarity is the very foundation of the real distinction between essence and *esse* in finite creatures.<sup>691</sup> These conclusions of Doolan's, and the key connection that he draws with the real distinction of essence and *esse* in finite beings, seem correct to me, and I am very happy to adopt them.

From this structure, some conclusions can be offered. First, the two modes of exemplarism differ in formality; the exemplarism of the divine ideas is according to the same formality, while the exemplarism of the divine nature is according to a higher formality. Consequently, the former mode concerns the very essence of the creature received in the likeness of its corresponding divine idea, while the latter mode concerns the transcendental perfections that a creature receives through its act of being. Yet, while they may be distinguished in these ways, each mode is dependent on the other for its causality: created essence cannot be created without an act of being, and a created act of being must be limited by a created essence.<sup>692</sup>

It is now time to fit this structure of exemplarity into the structure of participation. In the first place and in my opinion, Doolan is clearly correct when he argues that finite beings do not participate in their corresponding divine ideas. Doolan gives three reasons for this view, the first of which is as follows. We have seen that divine ideas which are exemplars are the principles of production of actually existing things, and that each idea signifies the proportion that a creature has to God's essence; in other words, the essence of a finite being is exemplified by its corresponding divine

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<sup>690</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 3, a. 4, ad 9. Cited by Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 222. In reaching these conclusions Doolan engages with other authors, namely Louis Geiger, Rudi te Velde and Cornelio Fabro on the distinction of the two modes of divine exemplarism. I have not set out the terms of this engagement, nor have I summarised Doolan's argument.

<sup>691</sup> Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 222.

<sup>692</sup> Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 227.



idea.<sup>693</sup> St Thomas says more than once that that which a thing is essentially cannot be held by participation.<sup>694</sup>

Of course, a finite being is made in the *likeness* of its exemplar idea, but as Doolan points out, this likeness is according to the same formality. Therefore, there cannot be participation by similitude based on this likeness, because participation by similitude rests on a formal hierarchy, whereby participants are similar to a perfection according to a greater or lesser degree, and no participant is identical with the perfection.<sup>695</sup> That means that participation through exemplary cause is concerned with a creature's participation in a likeness of those attributes or perfections which are identical with God's essence: being, good, and so on. As a result, although the created essence does not participate in its exemplar idea, the finite being (*ens*) of which it is a principle does participate in a likeness of the exemplar which is the divine nature.<sup>696</sup>

This does not mean that the divine ideas in themselves are irrelevant to participation. We know from *De ente et essentia* that the pure being which is God is not multipliable in itself, nor can it be added to.<sup>697</sup> God's nature is multipliable only according to similitude, because God's nature is able to be participated in certain ways. As St Thomas says in *De Veritate* question 3 article 2, God produces all things in likeness of God's own essence, but this means God's essence as it is known; and God understands God's essence with the proportion to that essence had by the creature to be produced, which is according to the creature's own act of existence. The multiplication then is not in God; it is rather owing to God's understanding of God's own nature as participable by similitude; and it occurs because things participate according to the diverse proportions founded in their own natures and their own acts of existence. Hence the ideas, rather than themselves being participated, are the

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<sup>693</sup> Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 228-231. The argument mentioned is at 228.

<sup>694</sup> In his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, St Thomas says: "if heat were a self-subsistent heat, it would not be said to participate in heat, because it would contain nothing but heat. But since fire is something other than heat, it is said to participate in heat." Bk I, Lect. 10, n. 154.

<sup>695</sup> This is actually Doolan's second argument why a created thing does not participate in its corresponding idea. See Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 229-230, 232-233. Of course, to say that a finite thing and its corresponding idea are "like" according to the same formality, does not mean that the finite thing and God have the same form. The divine idea is the proportion that each created thing has to the divine essence, not the divine essence itself. See Doolan, *op. cit.*, 230. Doolan's third argument incidentally is that St Thomas himself does not use the language of participation when speaking of the exemplarity of the divine ideas: *op. cit.*, 231.

<sup>696</sup> Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 242.

<sup>697</sup> For God's being as not multipliable, see St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 4, n. 6; Maurer 55-56. Marietti ed., c. 5, n. 3. For God's being as not able to added to, see *idem*, c. 5, n. 2; Maurer, 60-61. Marietti ed., c. 6 (a).

ways in which God knows God's essence as participable by creatures according to some kind of likeness. This is why the plurality of the ideas does not compromise God's simplicity: the ideas are in God's mind as that which is understood, not the likeness whereby God understands.<sup>698</sup>

#### 7.2442 Participation in *Esse Commune* and *Actus Essendi*

I now turn to the question reserved at the end of Section 7.244 above, namely whether the structure of participation in *esse* can be extended to *esse commune* and *actus essendi*. Thusfar I have been considering participation by creatures in the divine *esse* and I have argued that this is achieved through God acting as analogous efficient cause and as extrinsic formal or exemplary cause. Expressed from the point of view of analogous efficient causality, creatures have 'being' from God by participation but without participating in God's nature, while expressed from the point of view of exemplary causality, creatures participate in a likeness of God's being, communicated to them and multiplied in them. This structure means that, while God's essence is 'to be', in creatures being and essence are distinct. Therefore, this structure enables St Thomas to retain a view that God is most intimate to creatures without slipping into pantheism.<sup>699</sup>

I would argue that this participation structure is able to be extended to participation in *esse commune* precisely because the structure means that the divine essence itself is not communicated to creatures. I recall again St Thomas's injunction that we must not confuse *esse tantum* which is God with that *esse universale* by which everything else formally exists.<sup>700</sup> Therefore, each creature participates in *esse commune*, not in the sense that *esse commune* has some reality apart from the individual substances wherein it is found, but in the sense that each individual substance shares in *esse commune* without exhausting it. Indeed, I would further argue this mode of participation is recognised by St Thomas in his *Exposition of De Hebdomadibus*, when he says that a being (*ens*) may

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<sup>698</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 2, c and ad 7. The argument in this paragraph is based on Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 232. Doolan cites the following passage from *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 15, a. 2, c, in support of the proposition that the divine ideas, rather than being themselves participated, "are what we might term the 'participabilities' of the divine nature, that is, the known ways in which the likeness of God's essence can be participated": 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.

<sup>699</sup> Cf. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 120. See also St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 8, a. 1, c.

<sup>700</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 5, n. 2; Maurer 61. Marietti ed., c. 6 (a).

participate in *ipsum esse* in the manner that the concrete participates in the abstract.<sup>701</sup> In a similar way, a substance may be said to participate in the *esse* which is realised within it as its own *actus essendi*, as it is by that *actus essendi* that the substance is actualised.<sup>702</sup>

#### 7.245 St Thomas's Answer to Boethius

I now wish to return to the question asked by Boethius in *De Hebdomadibus*: how is it that finite substances are good insofar as they are, although they are not substantial goods. Boethius' answer, as quoted by St Thomas, is as follows.

quoniam esse eorum a boni uoluntate defluxit bona esse dicuntur. Primum enim bonum quoniam est in eo quod est bonum est. ... Set ipsum esse omnium rerum ex eo fluxit quod est primum bonum ... Ipsum igitur eorum esse bonum est.

since their being has flowed down from the Will of the Good, they are said to be good. For the First Good, because It is, is Good in this, that It is. ... But the very being of all things has flowed from That Which is the First Good ... Therefore, their very being is good.<sup>703</sup>

In other words, because the being of substances has flowed from the Will of the First Good which is good in that It is, substances are good insofar as they are, yet they are not substantial goods. When St Thomas comments on this solution he emphasises that it is "because the *being* of created things flows out *from the will* of Him Who is essentially Good" that "created things *are said to be good*".<sup>704</sup> It is not surprising to see St Thomas's emphasis on God's will when speaking of the divine goodness. We may recall that, when speaking of God's providence, St Thomas declines to interpret a Dionysian image to mean that the divine goodness communicates itself without God's choice or knowledge, just as the sun pours out its rays.<sup>705</sup> For St Thomas as for Boethius, God's perfections are one with God's essence, and their diffusion is grounded in God's will. There is a significant difference nonetheless.

In order to appreciate this difference, we need to recall Boethius' axioms. In his first axiom Boethius says: "At uero quod est accepta essendi forma est atque consistit" ("That-which-is however, once the

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<sup>701</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.100-110.

<sup>702</sup> Cf. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 116-121, 130-131.

<sup>703</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.4.B.30-40.

<sup>704</sup> "quia esse rerum creaturarum effluxit a uoluntate illius qui est esencialiter bonum, ideo res create *bone esse dicuntur*." St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.4.A.120. The italics are in the original and indicate St Thomas quoting the words of Boethius.

<sup>705</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 2, ad 1.

form of being has been taken on, is and stands together”). To this, St Thomas responds: “*id quod est, accepta essendi forma, scilicet suscipiendo ipsum actum essendi, est atque consistit, id est in se ipso subsistit*” (“that which is ... the form of being ... taken on, namely, by receiving the very act of being, is and stands together, that is, it subsists in itself”).<sup>706</sup> I have already discussed in this thesis St Thomas’s treating his own “*actus essendi*” as the equivalent of Boethius’ “*essendi forma*”; we might note now the subtle changes in wording that this occasions.

Now I wish to return to Boethius’ answer to the question posed by him in *De Hebdomadibus*, which answer is adumbrated above. Boethius’ answer is consistent with his view of *esse* as *form* and, despite Boethius’ emphasis on the Will of the Good, has distinct overtones of emanation. For St Thomas however, *esse* is *act* rather than form, and the answer must be in terms of participation, not of emanation. As we recall from *De ente et essentia*, the ‘pure being’ of God is not to be confused with “that universal being by which everything formally exists”.<sup>707</sup> Therefore, we would expect St Thomas’s answer in terms of participation to be facilitated by his substitution of his own *actus essendi* for Boethius’ *forma essendi*. This answer actually appears in St Thomas’s *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*, which St Thomas disputed at about the same time that he wrote his *De Hebdomadibus Exposition*.<sup>708</sup> In question 5 article 8 response to the second objection St Thomas says that the ordination of a thing to an end presupposes its act of existing, but its act of existing presupposes nothing else.<sup>709</sup> Thus, a substance’s *actus essendi* serves as an ontological foundation for its goodness, or ordination to its end. Yet we know that God’s act of creation extends at once to the entire finite substance in its actual reality.<sup>710</sup> Therefore, the participation model for the substance’s *actus essendi* must also explain a substance’s participation in the divine goodness. Therefore, and as St Thomas confirms in response to a later question in *De Veritate*, a finite substance has goodness by participation, just as it has existence by participation.<sup>711</sup>

<sup>706</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*. Boethius’ axiom is at L.2.B.1-10. St Thomas’s response is at L.2.A.60-70. The translations are those of Schultz and Synan, of course.

<sup>707</sup> St Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 5, n. 2; Maurer 60. Marietti ed., c. 6 (a).

<sup>708</sup> Weisheipl says that the *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate* were disputed by St Thomas during his first Parisian regency, 1256-1259. St Thomas’s *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius* comes from the same period. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D’Aquino*, 362-363.

<sup>709</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 8, ad 2.

<sup>710</sup> St Thomas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 17.

<sup>711</sup> See St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 5, c and ad 6. See also, Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, 130-133. Fabro, “The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy”, 473-474.

It follows that every finite being, to the extent it participates in *esse* also participates in goodness and, to that extent, being and goodness are convertible.<sup>712</sup> However, one should note that goodness, like being, may be both substantial and accidental. St Thomas says that, viewed in its substantial being, a thing is said ‘to be’ absolutely, but viewed in its complete actuality (i.e., when perfected by accidents), it is said ‘to be’ only relatively. With goodness the opposite is the case. Thus, while a thing is good relatively insofar as it has substantial being (i.e., it is ‘good’ relative to being), it is good absolutely only when perfected through proper operation.<sup>713</sup>

With this in mind, we are equipped to compare Boethius’ and St Thomas’s understandings of participation, as this is apparent in St Thomas’s *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus*. I have already stated that, in his tract *De Hebdomadibus*, Boethius uncovers a problem to do with participation and goodness. The problem is this: Boethius takes as given that substances are good insofar as they are; he seeks only to explain *how* this is so.<sup>714</sup> Having set out his axioms, Boethius says that there are two ways in which finite things might be good: they might be good by substance or they might be good by participation. He argues that if they were good by substance in the sense that “in them being itself is good”, they would be “the Good Itself”, which is impossible. More interesting for this thesis, however, is Boethius’ reason that finite substances cannot be good by participation. Boethius says:

Si participatione, per se ipsa nullo modo bona sunt; nam quod participatione album est, per se in eo quod ipsum est album non est; et de ceteris qualitatibus eodem modo.

If by participation, they are in no manner good through themselves; for what is white by participation is not white through itself, that is, insofar as it itself is. The same holds concerning other qualities.<sup>715</sup>

St Thomas responds that this way of putting the issue supposes that for something ‘to be through essence’ and ‘to be through participation’ are opposites, by which he means, mutually exclusive.<sup>716</sup>

<sup>712</sup> The convertibility of being with goodness is explained by St Thomas in *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 1, and in *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 5, a. 1. In *De Veritate* q. 1, a. 1 St Thomas also explains the convertibility of being with oneness and truth. For the convertibility of oneness with being see also *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 11, a. 1. However, as already noted in this thesis, unity is not participated.

<sup>713</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 5, c. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 5, a. 1, ad 1. Thus, an unjust man may be called ‘good’ insofar as he is a man; but only a just man may be called ‘good’ without qualification. St Thomas gives this example in the *De Veritate* article.

<sup>714</sup> See Boethius’ statement of the issue, as given by St Thomas in his *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.1.B.1. As St Thomas observes, this way of stating the problem highlights the apparent contradiction: *Ibid.*, L.1.A.70-80.

<sup>715</sup> The quotation and the argument summarised in the preceding paragraph come from the extract from Boethius given by St Thomas at the head of Ch. 3 of his *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*. The quotation is at line 10.

He adds that they so opposed according to the second mode of participation, for an accident is not included in the substance of a subject and form is not included in the substance of matter; but they are not opposed in the first mode, according to which species participates in genus, at least not if one agrees with Aristotle (as St Thomas does) “quod homo uere est id quod est animal”; i.e., “that a human is truly that which is animal”, so that the essence of ‘animal’ is included within the difference ‘man’. In this case, nothing prohibits that that which is said through participation may also be predicated substantially.<sup>717</sup> This does not mean that St Thomas believes that *esse* or indeed goodness can be predicated of any creature substantially or essentially.<sup>718</sup> His point rather, I would argue, is that Boethius has unnecessarily confined participation to the participation of a substance in its accidents, and it is precisely this view which causes the difficulties.<sup>719</sup>

St Thomas proceeds to examine Boethius’ view more closely. Boethius maintains that, if all things were good through participation then, in no manner would they be good “through themselves” (*per se ipsa*). St Thomas responds that this is indeed so if ‘through itself’ be taken for that which is posited in the definition of the subject, for that which is included in the definition of the subject pertains to its essence and thus is not predicated by participation; but it is not so if ‘through itself’ be taken for the way a subject is posited in the definition of a predicate.<sup>720</sup> This distinction relates to the way in which an accident is predicated of a subject *per se*, or is necessarily attributed to the subject. In the first mode, the notion of the predicate pertains to the form of the subject; i.e., the definition or something belonging to the definition is predicated of the thing defined, as when ‘rational’ is predicated of ‘human being’. In the second mode, rather than the predicate being included in the definition of the subject, the subject is included in the definition of the predicate, as when evenness or unevenness is predicated of numbers, or the capacity to laugh is attributed to a human being.

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<sup>716</sup> “Ad intellectum autem huius questionis considerandum est quod in ista questione supponitur quod aliquid esse per esenciam et per participationem sunt opposita.” St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.3.A.40-50.

<sup>717</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.3.A.50-70. The quotation is at line 60.

<sup>718</sup> Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 105. As Wippel points out, for St Thomas, being (*ens*) is predicated of God alone essentially and of every creature only by participation, for no creature is its *esse*, but merely has *esse*.

<sup>719</sup> Cf. Elders, *The Metaphysics of Being of St Thomas Aquinas in a Historical Perspective*, 225. See also Rudi Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1995), 11-15, esp. 14-15.

<sup>720</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.3.A.70-90.

Thus it is in the second mode, says St Thomas, that a proper accident is in a subject ‘through itself’, and yet it is predicated of the subject by way of participation.<sup>721</sup>

Thus, says St Thomas, Boethius takes ‘participation’ for the way in which a subject participates in an accident, but he takes ‘through itself’ for the way in which something is posited in the definition of a subject. It necessarily follows that if things are said to be ‘through participation’, they cannot be good ‘through themselves’, as Boethius’ own examples show.<sup>722</sup>

Therefore, Boethius, having dismissed both substance and participation as that through which finite substances may be said to be good insofar as they are, is driven to seek another solution, which I have already summarised. When St Thomas comes to analyse Boethius’ solution, he proceeds as follows. First he notes that the Being of the First Good is good according to its own intelligible structure, while the being of a secondary good is good not according to its intelligible structure but owing to a relation to the First Good, “which is its Cause, to which it is related as to First Principle and Last End” (“quod est eius causa, ad quod quidem comparatur sicut ad primum principium et ad ultimum finem”).<sup>723</sup> Next, St Thomas notes that it is in this way that something is said to be ‘healthy’, because by it a thing is ordered to the end of health (“per modum quo aliquid dicitur sanum quo aliquid ordinatur ad finem sanitatis”).<sup>724</sup> Finally, St Thomas observes that, in accordance with what has been said, it must be considered that there is a twofold goodness in created goods. First, such things are good through a relation to the First Good, according to which their being and whatever is in them from the First Good is good. Second, there is in them goodness considered absolutely, inasmuch as each one is termed ‘good’ insofar as it is complete in being and in operating (“prout scilicet unumquodque dicitur bonum in quantum est perfectum in esse et in operari”).<sup>725</sup> This completion is owing not to the thing’s essential ‘to be’ itself (“ipsum esse essenziale eorum”), but to their virtue, which is superadded. Therefore, according to this goodness considered absolutely, the being itself of the finite substance is not good (“ipsum esse eorum non est bonum”), whereas the

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<sup>721</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.3.A.70-90. For a very clear explanation of the two modes of “perseity” or predication *per se*, see Meehan, *Efficient Causality in Aristotle and St Thomas*, Ch. XII, esp. 333-335.

<sup>722</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.3.A.80-100.

<sup>723</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.4.A.130-140. The quotation is at line 140.

<sup>724</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.4.A.following line 140.

<sup>725</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.4.A. following line 150.

First Good has every completion in Its own Being Itself (“habet omnimodam perfectionem in ipso suo esse”).<sup>726</sup>

There are four things to be noticed in this analysis: first, the reference to the First Good as Cause; secondly, the use of the health analogy; thirdly, the reference to twofold goodness in created goods; and fourthly, the contrast of secondary (created) goods with the First Good (God). The first two of these can be taken together. Earlier in this thesis when discussing St Thomas’s use of analogy, I distinguish two modes, many-to-one analogy and one-to-another analogy, and I argue that when names such as ‘being’ and ‘good’ are predicated of God and creatures, this is always within one-to-another mode. St Thomas says that names cannot be said of God and creatures within many-to-one mode, as then we would have to posit something prior to God by which the perfection is measured.<sup>727</sup> When speaking of perfections shared between God and creatures, the one-to-another mode must be used, as it builds in two crucial elements: first, the priority of God and posteriority of creatures, and secondly, that the perfection is intrinsic and not extrinsic to both God and creatures, each in its own way.

Yet, St Thomas in the passage just referred to from the *De Hebdomadibus Exposition* parallels Boethius’ explanation of how created substances are good with the health analogy, which is the standard example of many-to-one mode. This surely indicates that St Thomas could not accept Boethius’ explanation, at least not without some modification. That modification, I suggest, occurs when St Thomas speaks of the creature’s relating to the First Good as its Cause. Admittedly Boethius speaks of the being of creatures as having flowed down from the *will* of the Good, but this is after an *a priori* process of reasoning, as is shown by his mathematical parallel.<sup>728</sup> As St Thomas shows in his commentary, he prefers to think of creatures’ relation to God in *a posteriori* fashion, and he interprets Boethius accordingly.<sup>729</sup> Therefore, when St Thomas, in the passage now under consideration, regards creatures’ relation to God as First Good as one of Cause according to First Principle and Last End, he has in mind his own understanding of cause. St Thomas says in *De*

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<sup>726</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.4.A. 155-160.

<sup>727</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 34, nn. 1,2,3 and 4. The earlier discussion is in Section 2.313.

<sup>728</sup> All this is apparent in the extract from Boethius given by St Thomas at the head of Ch. 4 of his *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*. See L.4.B, esp. lines 30-40 and 1-10.

<sup>729</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.4.A.40-50.



*principiis naturae* that a cause is always prior in nature to its effect.<sup>730</sup> Therefore, and as I have already argued in this thesis, when many-to-one analogy is moved into cause, it necessarily operates in one-to-another mode.<sup>731</sup>

The way in which this facilitates for St Thomas his own view is apparent not so much in the *De Hebdomadibus Exposition* itself as in *De Veritate* question 21, wherein, in my view, the argument of the *Exposition* is completed. In article 4 St Thomas asks: “Is Everything Good by the First Goodness?” Two of the difficulties refer to Boethius, but I will mention only one (No. 2). The heart of this objection is that because a creature is called ‘good’ by reference to the First Good as Boethius says, then it is called ‘good’ by extrinsic denomination and not by any intrinsic formal goodness of its own. The health analogy is given as an illustration. St Thomas responds that a thing is denominated with reference to something else in two ways: first, when the very reference itself is the meaning of the denomination, as in the health analogy, which is extrinsic denomination; and second, when the reference is not the meaning of the denomination but its cause. St Thomas illustrates the latter case with the instance of the sun lighting the air, and adds that it is in this way that the creature is called ‘good’ with reference to God.<sup>732</sup> St Thomas is therefore able to conclude in the corpus of the article that, because the First Cause is the effective cause of all goods, it must imprint its likeness upon the things produced. Therefore, each thing is called ‘good’ by reason of its inherent form owing to this likeness, of which the First Good is exemplar and effective cause.<sup>733</sup> This, clearly, is the participation model, which we have been discussing. One might add that, because we are speaking of ontological good or good relative to being, the predication is according to the second mode of per seity, in which it is legitimate to speak of a creature being good both by participation and *per se*.<sup>734</sup>

This discussion shows how St Thomas is able to overcome the limits in Boethius’ view of participation and explain how creatures participate in a likeness of the transcendent perfections, being and good, so that that likeness is intrinsic to creatures as their own inherent form. To complete the picture it is necessary to look at the third and fourth aspects already identified in St Thomas’s analysis of

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<sup>730</sup> St Thomas, *De principiis naturae*, c. 4, McDermott 75.

<sup>731</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 34, n. 5. Again, the earlier discussion is in Section 2.313.

<sup>732</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 4, obj. 2 and ad 2.

<sup>733</sup> St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 4, c.

<sup>734</sup> For an interesting discussion of all these issues see Ralph McNerny, “Saint Thomas on De hebdomadibus”, in *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, edited by Scott MacDonald (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991), 74.

Boethius' solution; namely, St Thomas's reference to the twofold goodness in created goods, and the consequent contrast of created goods with the First Good.<sup>735</sup>

For both Boethius and St Thomas, the issues of 'being' and 'good' are deeply involved with the categorial division of substance and accidents, but not in the same way.<sup>736</sup> Boethius, in addressing the question of *how* substances are good insofar as they are, poses the alternatives 'good by participation' and 'good by substance'; good by participation is treated as the equivalent of good *per accidens*. Boethius then reduces each alternative to impossibility, whereupon he is faced with incoherence, as a premise of his analysis is that substances are good insofar as they are.<sup>737</sup> Boethius' eventual solution is that, as substances could not be at all unless they had been willed to be by that Being Whose Being Itself is Good, their very being is good.<sup>738</sup>

For St Thomas however, the relation of 'being' and 'goodness' to the categorial division of substance and accidents is not the same. For St Thomas, a substance has both being and goodness through participation in a likeness of the First Good. This substantial being is absolute, but the goodness is relative, namely relative to being. However, it is through ensuing accidental acts that the substance is brought to completion, whereupon its being is relative as accidental being is relative, but its goodness is absolute.<sup>739</sup> The structure can be expressed chiasmatically as follows: *ens simpliciter/bonum secundum quid* and *ens secundum quid/bonum simpliciter*.<sup>740</sup>

There are two major differences between Boethius and St Thomas revealed in this comparison. First, for Boethius, 'to be through essence' and 'to be through participation' are opposed and,

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<sup>735</sup> In developing the argument which follows I have drawn very heavily on the stimulating article by Jan Aertsen, "Good as Transcendental and the Transcendence of the Good", in *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991), 56. See also Aertsen, "The Convertibility of Being and Good in St Thomas Aquinas", *The New Scholasticism* 59 (1985), 449. While I am very grateful for this lead and inspiration from Professor Aertsen, I would not want to attribute everything which follows to him.

<sup>736</sup> For a very interesting discussion of this matter see Aertsen, "Good as Transcendental and the Transcendence of the Good", 64-73, esp. 67 and 71.

<sup>737</sup> All this is in that part of Boethius' tract which St Thomas places at the head of Ch. 3 of his *Exposition*.

<sup>738</sup> From St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.4.B.30-40+.

<sup>739</sup> See St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 2, c, ad 6 and ad 8. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 5, a. 1, c, and ad 1.

<sup>740</sup> This comes from McNerny, "Saint Thomas on De Hebdomadibus", 86, although Professor McNerny does not identify it as a chiasm.

consequently, the good of substance and the good of accidents are opposed.<sup>741</sup> This is owing to his restricted understanding of *perseity*, whereby *per se* is equated with essence. For St Thomas however, the good of substance and the good of accidents are complementary, in that the latter complete the former. In his *De Hebdomadibus Exposition* St Thomas, commenting on one of Boethius' axioms, says: "unumquodque primo et per se appetit suam perfectionem que est bonum uniuscuiusque et est semper proportionata perfectibili"; "everything primarily and of itself seeks its own completion, which is 'the good' of each one and is always proportioned to what can be completed".<sup>742</sup> The second major difference follows on the first: for Boethius, the good of a substance is in no category, substance or accident, for a substance can be good neither by substance nor by participation (which is the equivalent of *per accidens* for Boethius). Yet, for St Thomas, 'good' is in every category, substantial and accidental. This, as Aertsen remarks, stamps 'good' as transcendental for, like being, it goes through all the categories.<sup>743</sup>

These comparisons, I believe, enable us to understand why it is that St Thomas introduces the twofold good in created substances at the stage that he does in his *Exposition*: it enables us to understand that in created substances their substantial being can in itself be good without challenging God, for this goodness is not absolute. And even if their goodness becomes absolute, this is not owing to their essential 'to be' itself (*ipsum esse essenciale eorum*) but to their 'virtue', i.e., to their activity which seeks the completion of their natures; for each creature, the activity which seeks its entelechy.<sup>744</sup> This also explains our fourth point: the contrast of created goods with God: God has every completion in God's own Being, and therefore God's Being is Good, both according to Itself and absolutely.<sup>745</sup> It is precisely in that contrast that we find participation of created substances in a likeness of the divine perfections of being and good.

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<sup>741</sup> In his *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, at L.3.A.40-50, St Thomas attributes to Boethius the view that 'to be through essence' and 'to be through participation' are opposed. It necessarily follows that the good of substance and the good of accidents are opposed because, for Boethius, "the very being" of substances is good, because it has flowed from the will of the First Good. Ibid., L.4.B.40.

<sup>742</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.2.A.280. Towards the end of his *Exposition* St Thomas says: "*unaqueque res secundum perfectionem proprie nature dicitur bona*"; "each reality is termed 'good' in accord with the completion of its own nature". L.5.A.90. At this stage in his *Exposition* St Thomas is agreeing with Boethius that "to be good pertains to essence, whereas to be just pertains to an act" (L.5.B.30-40), but the element of 'good' as the completion of a created nature is not in Boethius' explanation.

<sup>743</sup> Aertsen, "Good as Transcendental and the Transcendence of the Good", 67.

<sup>744</sup> The teleology inherent in each thing is stressed by Aertsen; see his "Good as Transcendental and the Transcendence of the Good", 66-67. See also his book *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas's Way of Thought* (Leiden; EJ Brill, 1988), Chapter Eight, esp. 337-346.

<sup>745</sup> St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.4.A.150-160.

I have argued in this part of the thesis that, in his tract known as *De Hebdomadibus*, Boethius equates *esse* with form, so that it is by *forma essendi* that a substance subsists, and equates perseity with essence, so that participation is confined to accidents. This means, in effect, that Boethius recognises participation only in St Thomas's second mode. St Thomas, however, recognises *esse* as act, so that it is by *actus essendi* that a substance subsists, and also recognises two modes of perseity. In such ways, St Thomas draws participation into his metaphysics of *esse*, and also is able to recognise a role for participation in both substance (as distinct from essence) and accidents. Especially significant is St Thomas's recognition of participation through cause, namely analogous efficient cause, and exemplary cause, through which created substances participate in a likeness of the divine perfections, being and goodness. This conclusion and its supporting analysis are not in St Thomas's *De Hebdomadibus Exposition* itself, but rather in *De Veritate* question 21. Here St Thomas' participation model establishes that things are good through a goodness that is formally their own, without excluding their causal dependence on God. In St Thomas's own words:

omnia sunt bona bonitate *creata* formaliter sicut forma *inhaerente*, bonitate vero *increata* sicut forma *exemplari*.

all things are good by a created goodness formally as by an inherent form, but by the uncreated goodness as by an exemplary form.<sup>746</sup>

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<sup>746</sup> See St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 4, c.

## CONCLUSION

Jan Aertsen argues that through the distinction between predication ‘essentially’ and predication ‘by participation’ St Thomas articulates both the distinction and the relationship between God and creatures. Central to Aertsen’s argument is the transcendental of the participated perfections, being and goodness. Transcendentals are predicated not univocally, but according to priority and posteriority. Only God is ‘being’ and ‘good’ by essence, so God must be the origin of being and goodness in all other things. Yet, transcendentals are common, so that the transcendental perfections of ‘being’ and ‘goodness’ must be intrinsic to each thing. Participation then makes it possible to conceive transcendence and transcendental together, so that the transcendental of ‘being’ and ‘good’ is not incompatible with the transcendence of God.<sup>747</sup>

This is an attractive thesis and, to an extent it is vindicated in St Thomas’s Quodlibetal Question II, q. 2, a. 1. In this question St Thomas is addressing the issue whether an angel is a composite of essence and being in the manner of a substance. He answers that something may be predicated of something either by essence or by participation. ‘Being’ (*ens*) is predicated of God by essence and of any creature by participation. The same may be said for ‘good’. However, continues St Thomas, when something is predicated of another by participation, there must be something in that other besides that in which it participates. Therefore, in any creature, the creature itself which has being and its very being are other. Thus, says St Thomas, something is participated in two ways. In one way it is participated in as though belonging to the substance of the thing, as a genus is participated in by a species. However, a creature does not participate in being in this way, for that belongs to the substance of a thing which enters into its definition, and being (*ens*) is not included in the definition of a creature, for it is neither a genus nor a difference. So being is participated in as something not belonging to the thing’s essence. Therefore St Thomas concludes in answer to the question asked, if there is composition in an angel of essence and being, this is composition not from the parts of a substance but as from a substance and what adheres to the substance.<sup>748</sup>

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<sup>747</sup> Aertsen, “Good as Transcendental and the Transcendence of the Good”, 67, 71-73. See also Professor Aertsen’s book *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1996), esp. 400-407. For another very interesting study of the relation between participation and the transcendentals in the thought of St Thomas see Mark D. Jordan, “The Grammar of *Esse*: Re-Reading Thomas on the Transcendentals”, *The Thomist* 44 (1980), 1.

<sup>748</sup> I have summarised this from St Thomas, *Quodlibetal Questions* II, q. 2, a. 1, c, in the translation by Sandra Edwards of *Quodlibetal Questions 1 and 2* (Toronto: PIMS, 1983), 77-80. According to Weisheipl, this

St Thomas says in answer to the same question that, because the being of a creature is participated in as something not belonging to the thing's essence, the question 'Is it?' is distinct from the question 'What is it?'; and, since all that is outside a thing's essence may be termed an accident, the being which pertains to the question 'Is it?' is an accident. However, in response to an objection, St Thomas says that being is an accident, not as though related accidentally to a substance, but as the actuality of a substance.<sup>749</sup> What this means is that 'being' is not a predicamental accident of a substance, yet it may be predicated of a substance by participation. I would argue that this must be predication according to the second mode of perseity identified by St Thomas, according to which a subject is posited in the definition of a predicate, rather than the first mode, according to which something is posited in the definition of a subject.<sup>750</sup> And why is 'being' predicated according to the second mode? Because when God gives 'being' God at the same time produces that which receives 'being', which then determines and limits 'being' to its essence. Therefore, when a subject is created it necessarily exists through its own act of being, and yet that act of being is outside its essence; the subject's goodness meanwhile, necessarily follows on its being.<sup>751</sup> It follows that 'being' and 'good' can be predicated of a substance by participation, even though they are held by the substance *per se*, while that which belongs to essence cannot be predicated by participation.

In my opinion, this is how to see participation, or at least participation in the perfections of being and good. St Thomas has drawn participation into his metaphysics of *esse*, where it facilitates some transformations in some key principles, namely:

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quodlibetal question comes from rather late in St Thomas's career, namely Christmas 1269. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino*, 367. Edwards dates it Advent 1269. See her Introduction, op. cit., 6.

<sup>749</sup> St Thomas, *Quodlibetal Question II*, q. 2, a. 1, c and ad 2. Edwards, op. cit., 79 and 80. It is important to note that St Thomas is speaking of the being which pertains to the question 'Is it?', not the question 'What is it?' One might recall that, in his *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, St Thomas says that "id quod est siue ens" "that-which-is or being" is said concretely, and it participates in 'to be' itself (*ipsum esse*) in the manner that the concrete participates in the abstract. See L.2.A.90-110. I suggest that this is the 'being' which pertains to the question 'What is it?'. For some discussion of this point, see Elders, *The Metaphysics of Being of St Thomas Aquinas in a Historical Perspective*, 228.

<sup>750</sup> For the two modes of perseity or predication *per se*, see St Thomas, *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, L.3.A.70-90.

<sup>751</sup> The otherness of essence and being is shown in *Quodlibetal Question II*, q. 2, a. 1., just referred to, and in many other places of course. The point that God gives being at the same time that God produces that which receives being is stated by St Thomas at *De potentia dei*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 17. The position that a subject receives being and determines it to its own essence is also stated by St Thomas in many places. See, for example, *De ente et essentia*, c. 5, n. 4 (concerning created intellectual substances) and n. 10 (concerning substances composed of matter and form); Maurer 62 and 65. Marietti ed., c. 6 (b) and 6 (c).

- The idea of ‘being’, so that there is a sharp contrast between the one simple being and complex beings, the latter of whom are both created and finite and may be material or immaterial.
- The structure of composition, which is extended to the real composition of essence and existence in created, finite beings.
- The structure of act and potency, extended to explain the receipt and limitation of perfections in finite beings.
- The structure of cause, so that priority and posteriority refer not so much to motion and succession as to priority and posteriority in nature and in being. As St Thomas says, everything which exists by participation can be traced back to that where it exists essentially, as its cause; as iron is heated by fire.<sup>752</sup>

These matters are linked in the following way. When we speak of priority and posteriority in nature and in being, rather than in motion and succession, and of the extension of the act-potency couplet to the receipt and limitation of perfections, it follows that act and potency may co-exist, so that they qualify each other – act actualises potency and potency determines and limits act.<sup>753</sup> This model is particularly appropriate to St Thomas’s second mode of composition, i.e., essence-existence composition.<sup>754</sup> Now, that which is predicated of things according to priority and posteriority is predicated not univocally but analogously.<sup>755</sup> When perfections such as being and goodness are predicated both of God and of creatures, this necessarily is according to priority and posteriority, as the perfections are held by God *per essentiam*. The perfection is received by the creature and determined by it to its nature. In other words, the creature “takes a part” by holding the perfection in a determined mode, and therefore holds the perfection by participation. As God holds the perfection in every mode, then the perfection must be predicated by analogy, both between God and creatures and among creatures themselves.<sup>756</sup>

<sup>752</sup> For this point, see St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.44, a. 1, c.

<sup>753</sup> McMullin, “Four Senses of Potency”, 303.

<sup>754</sup> In the case of natural causation St Thomas recognises the possibility of antecedent causation, and of a time lapse between cause and effect. See William A. Wallace, “Aquinas on the Temporal Relation between Cause and Effect”, *The Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1974), 569.

<sup>755</sup> We know this from *De principiis naturae*, c. 6; McDermott 79. St Thomas also says this in *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 32, n. 7.

<sup>756</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, c. 32, nn. 6 and 7. See also *idem*, cc. 33 and 34. For the relation between priority and posteriority, analogy and participation, see Klubertanz, *St Thomas Aquinas on Analogy*, 64-69.

This structure also necessitates a causal relationship between God and creatures, for God has the perfection *per essentiam* and according to every mode, while the creature receives it *per participationem* and according to a determined mode. This causation must be by analogous efficient cause.<sup>757</sup> There is also a formal cause. We recall that, in *De principiis naturae* St Thomas speaks of ‘form’ as an intrinsic cause, while in *De Veritate* he speaks of an exemplar for a thing to be produced existing in the mind of the agent and operating causally as an extrinsic formal cause.<sup>758</sup> When we combine this total picture with the principle that an agent acts insofar as it is in act and therefore necessarily causes something similar to itself, and with the principle that a *causa essendi* is the cause of the form in the effect, it follows that God is in creatures as their cause but not as their form or essence. Herein we have the architecture for participation by creatures in a likeness of the divine esse and of the divine goodness, through analogous efficient cause and exemplary form.<sup>759</sup>

I conclude then that the participation by finite substances in the perfections of esse and good is a participation in the likeness of the divine essence rather than a participation in the divine essence itself, and that such participation entails composition structured by potency and act, similitude, and a formal hierarchy according to mode of being.<sup>760</sup>

Furthermore, we have seen that St Thomas’s notion of participation leads him to re-assess the relation between ‘being’ and ‘good’ on the one hand and the categorial division of substance and accidents on the other. As a result, St Thomas draws ‘being’ and ‘good’ into a complementary chiasmic structure, within which each created substance which participates in ‘being’ and ‘good’ may realise its complete actuality. In his *De Hebdomadibus Exposition* St Thomas refers to God as each thing’s First Principle and Last End. It follows then that the *telos* or end of a creature has the status of

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<sup>757</sup> Klubertanz, *St Thomas Aquinas on Analogy*, 70-76.

<sup>758</sup> *De principiis naturae*, c. 3, McDermott 72. *De Veritate*, q. 3, aa, 1 and 3. See also Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 25ff.

<sup>759</sup> St Thomas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Bk I, cc. 29 and 51-52. See also Cornelia J. de Vogel, “Deus Creator Omnium: Plato and Aristotle in Aquinas’ Doctrine of God”, in *Graceful Reason: Essays in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy Presented to Joseph Owens, CSSR*, edited by Lloyd P. Gerson (Toronto: PIMS, 1983), 203, at 216ff, esp. 219-221. If God were in creatures as their intrinsic form, then we would equate God’s essence with *ens commune*, a position which St Thomas rejects. Rather, says St Thomas, every form is a certain likeness of God, as every agent effects something similar to itself. It is because of this likeness to God as exemplar and effective cause that each created thing can be called ‘good’ by an inherent form. St Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 4, c.

<sup>760</sup> Cf. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 130-131. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, 211-212.



‘end’ only in relation to God.<sup>761</sup> Now, in the *Prima Pars* St Thomas compares the order of the universe to the order and discipline of an army; just as the order of the army is the proper intention of the commander, so the order of the universe is properly intended by God; and in each case, the idea of the whole incorporates ideas of each of the parts.<sup>762</sup> It is in this way, I would argue, that participation is the foundation of the natural law.<sup>763</sup>

My aim in this thesis has been to examine closely some early texts of St Thomas’s in which he sets out his understanding of composition, both natural and metaphysical, through the structure of act and potency, and then to study St Thomas’s *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius* in light of that examination, in the belief that this would throw into relief St Thomas’s understanding of participation. I hope that this study can make some modest contribution towards developing a truly systematic understanding of the role of participation in the thought of St Thomas.

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<sup>761</sup> For St Thomas’s reference to God as First Principle and Last End in his *Exposition of the De Hebdomadibus of Boethius*, see L.4.A.140. For the consequence that the creature’s *telos* presupposes God as First Principle and Last End, see *De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 5, c.

<sup>762</sup> This is in *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 15, a. 2, c. It is in his *Compendium of Theology*, c. 123, that St Thomas brings together in most telling fashion efficient cause, exemplary cause and similitude, through the analogy with an army. See the translation by Cyril Vollert, 1947, re-issued under the title *Light of Faith* and published by Sophia Institute Press, Manchester NH, 1993, 135-136. See also Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, 131-132. Meehan, *Efficient Causality in Aristotle and St Thomas*, 363, 373-374. Steven A. Long, “Divine Providence and John 15:5”, in *Reading John with St Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, edited by Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington DC: CUA Press, 2005), 140-150.

<sup>763</sup> See also the argument in John Rziha, *Perfecting Human Actions: St Thomas Aquinas on Human Participation in Eternal Law* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2009), Ch 2, esp. 43-54, and 54-78.

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