

NATURAL PRIORITY IN THE METAPHYSICS OF THOMAS AQUINAS

by

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B.Phil., Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 1984
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ABSTRACT

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
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Aquinas uses the concept of “natural priority” in many aspects of his thought, especially in his metaphysics. This study defines the concept in its various usages, traces its philosophical heritage, and applies it to the principles of esse and form within Aquinas’ metaphysics. In particular, the study attempts to prove, against modern “existentialist” Thomists (especially Carlo, Gilson and Fabro), the absence of natural priority of esse to form. The thesis has three conclusions: First, that there is no natural priority of either form or esse as metaphysical principles; second, that God alone is naturally prior among all beings and principles of being, and third, that Aquinas’ principle of similitude between God and creature is not esse alone but the analogical sense of act as both form and esse. The study contains five chapters. The first chapter presents the views of three modern “existentialist” Thomists, and indicates the motivations and consequences of these views. The second chapter traces the notion of natural priority to Plato and Aristotle, and resolves

a metaphysical tension within their usages of the notion. The third chapter examines Aquinas' transformation of the Greek use of the concept in his theory of causal order and creation. Aquinas' use of five general types of natural priority, viz. as "separability", as "absolute", natural priority in "being", "in reference to a principle" and in "origin", are argued to coincide in the unique candidate for natural priority, namely, God. Chapter four applies the concept of natural priority to the realm of finite substance, and concludes to the lack of any type of natural priority of esse to form once again. Chapter five replies to the three aforementioned existentialist Thomist positions, and argues that their views misinterpret Aquinas' metaphysics of causes, in addition to implying a natural priority of esse to form on both the transcendental and finite levels. Finally, an examination of both the infinite and created orders reveals the positive and necessary role of form, and the combination of both transcendent and immanent elements of natural priority in God according to Aquinas.

VITA

Heather McAdam Erb (*née* Senn) was born on August 16, 1961, in Toronto, Ontario, the daughter of John Sloan Senn, M.D., F.R.C.P., and Jean McAdam Senn (*née* White), R.N., M.Div. After graduating in 1980 from York Mills Collegiate Institute, North York, Ontario, Mrs. Erb entered Saint Michael's College at the University of Toronto that same year. In 1984 she earned a Bachelor of Philosophy degree in Philosophy at Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, in Belgium. In 1985 she completed a Bachelor of Arts degree *with high distinction* in Philosophy and Religious Studies and was awarded the College Gold Medal in the Liberal Arts by Saint Michael's College; and in 1986 she received a Master of Arts degree in Philosophy from the University of Toronto.

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priest and pastor, scholar and professor, mentor and friend.

Requiescat in pace Christi.

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List of Abbreviations

<u>A.H.D.L.M.A.</u>	<u>Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge.</u>
<u>Fran. St.</u>	<u>Franciscan Studies.</u>
<u>Greg.</u>	<u>Gregorianum.</u>
<u>J. Hist. Phil.</u>	<u>Journal of the History of Philosophy.</u>
<u>I.P.Q.</u>	<u>International Philosophical Quarterly.</u>
<u>Laval phil. et théol.</u>	<u>Laval philosophique et théologique.</u>
<u>Mod. School.</u>	<u>Modern Schoolman.</u>
<u>Med. St.</u>	<u>Mediaeval Studies.</u>
<u>New Schol.</u>	<u>New Scholasticism.</u>
<u>P.L.</u>	<u>Patrologia cursus completus.</u> Series Latina. Ed. J.P. Migne. 221 vv. Paris, 1884-1864.
<u>P.A.C.P.A.</u>	<u>Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association.</u>
<u>Rev. de phil.</u>	<u>Revue de philosophie.</u>
<u>Rev. des sciences phil. et rél.</u>	<u>Revue des sciences philosophiques et religieuses.</u>
<u>Rev. thomiste</u>	<u>Revue thomiste.</u>
<u>Rev. of Meta.</u>	<u>Review of Metaphysics.</u>
<u>Rev. phil. de Louv.</u>	<u>Revue philosophique de Louvain.</u>
<u>Tijdschr. Filos.</u>	<u>Tijdschrift voor Filosofie.</u>

The Citation of Primary Sources

References to primary sources consist of an abbreviated reference to the following editions of the texts. Full information on the editions used is relegated to the bibliography. The most frequently cited authors are the following:

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Quaestiones de Anima. Ed. J.H. Robb. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1968. (Q. de An.)

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Tommaso, 1976. (De ente.)

INTRODUCTION

Thomists traditionally have accepted the ultimate explanation for the hierarchical order of beings to lie in the composition of essence and existence, as these related to their principal analogate and cause.¹ What became known as the “principle of limitation”,² which refers to the notion that the finitude and internal order in created being are explained by a composition of entitative principles, dominated discussions of metaphysics among Aquinas’ disciples. However, even the earliest major commentators of the Angelic Doctor disagreed on the interpretation of this principle, especially when considered in light of the subject of metaphysics. They often overemphasized either the existential or the essential aspects of his metaphysics, even as twentieth century Thomists have interpreted the order between essence and existence diversely.³

¹ On Thomas’ doctrine of God as the primary analogate and cause, see *C.G.* II 15. On the history of Thomism reflecting this basic principle, see C. Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione...* Pt. 1 s. 3 (although he views the history of Thomism more as an “obscuring” of *esse* than an elucidation of it); B. Montagnes, *La Doctrine de l’analogie de l’être chez S. Thomas d’Aquin* (Louvain: Publications universitaires, 1963), pp. 1-22. For a synopsis of major twentieth century views, see Sr. Helen James John, *The Thomist Spectrum* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1967).

² A plethora of secondary literature in this century has emerged concerning the topic of metaphysical participation in Aquinas, and the principle of limitation is a key concept within the discussions. See, for example: J. D. Robert, “Le principe: ‘Actus non limitatur nisi per potentiam subjectivam realiter distinctam’” (*Rev. phil. de Louvain* 47 [1949] 44-70); W. N. Clarke, “The Role of Essence within St. Thomas’ Essence-Existence Doctrine: Positive or Negative Principle?” (*Tommaso d’Aquino* [Symp. Roma] 6, 109-115); C. Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d’Aquino*, 2nd. ed. (Turin: 1950); L.B. Geiger, *La participation dans la philosophie de S. Thomas d’Aquin* (Paris, 1942); J. Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas and Participation” (in *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy* vol 17: *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. J. Wippel, pp. 117-158); “Essence and Existence in the *De Ente* ch. 4”; “Essence and Existence in Other Writings” (in *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy* Vol. 10: *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* ed. J. Wippel, pp. 107-161). For a detailed discussion of the principle of limitation in this thesis, see chapter four, section 4.2.2.2 below.

³ See the words of A. Krapiec, the founder of the “Lublin school” of Thomism: “[Cajetan] overemphasized the difference of essence and existence in being as a subject of metaphysics, and consequently he took into consideration only the essential aspect of being abstracted from its actual existence...Understanding the danger of Cajetan’s theory, Sylvester of Ferrara in opposition to it, stressed

Increasingly since the Second World War, competing interpretations of Aquinas' metaphysical thought have emerged. Some place emphasis on either the real distinction⁴ ("existentialist" Thomists), while others stress the Platonic hierarchical structure of reality⁵ and still others emphasize the more Aristotelian elements in Aquinas' metaphysics such as the centrality of form and substance.⁶ In fact, modern "existentialist" Thomists adopted the reduction of essence to esse in an attempt to avoid the error of Cajetan and others, who they viewed as deviating from Thomistic "realism".⁷

In reply to the two polarised concepts of the subject of metaphysics (essence or existence), this study attempts to show that it is impossible to separate or reduce form to esse in an explanation either of the internal order within a finite being, or of the external order to creatures' transcendental source. This study outlines the reciprocal relations among various entitative elements in concrete finite beings, through their subordination to the higher, transcendental order

the fact, that in real being it is impossible to abstract existence from essence. Essence is a subject of metaphysics but only as actually existent...The different concepts of being of those two commentators of St. Thomas Aquinas provided the foundation for two different theories of analogy." Krapiec, Theoria analogii bytu (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1959), p. 163, as quoted and translated by A. Woznicki (Being and Order: The Metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas in Historical Perspective (New York: Peter Lang, 1990, p. 88).

⁴ Those who place emphasis on the real distinction include Etienne Gilson (Le Thomisme, 5me ed. [Paris: Vrin, 1944]) and his followers, the most notable of which is J. Owens (e.g. An Interpretation of Existence [Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1968]; An Elementary Christian Metaphysics [Houston: Centre for Thomistic Studies, 1985 rpt.]; and many articles, e.g. "Aquinas - Existential Permanence and Flux" [Med. Studies 31 [1969] 71-92) As well, the Lublin Thomists, such as Krapiec (Teoria analogii bytu [Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1959; Metaphysica [Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, 1985]) and his followers such as A. Woznicki (Being and Order: The Metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas in Historical Perspective [New York: Peter Lang]) seem to hold this view to some extent, although the dual aspect of being as being, viz. essence and existence, is better presented by them than by Gilson's view. We shall be considering an extreme version of Thomist existentialism in chapter five of this thesis, viz. that of W. Carlo (The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics [The Hague: Nijhoff, 1966]). His view falls in with that of W. N. Clarke ("The Role of Essence within St. Thomas' Essence-Existence Doctrine: Positive or Negative Principle?" [Tommaso d'Aquino (Symp. Roma) 6, 109-115]). With reference to E. Gilson, see John Noonan, "The Existentialism of Etienne Gilson" New Scholasticism 24 (1950) 417-438.

⁵ Arthur Little, The Platonic Heritage of Thomism (Dublin: Golden Eagle Books, 1949). Cf. the view of L. B. Geiger, who explained Thomistic metaphysics without reference to the "real distinction" between being and essence: La participation dans la philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin (Paris, 1942).

⁶ Thinkers in this vein include Garrigou-Lagrange's interpretation (Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought, tr. P. Cummins [London: Herder, 1950]) as followed in its general outlines by L. Dewan, for instance: L. Dewan, "St. Thomas, Metaphysical Procedure and the Formal Cause" New Scholasticism 63 (1989) 173-82; "St. Thomas, Metaphysics and Formal Causality" Laval théol. et philos. 36 (1980) 285-316; "St. Thomas, Joseph Owens, and Existence" New Scholasticism 56 (1982) 399-441.

of being. In particular contrast to the strong existentialist interpretation of the predicamental and transcendental orders, this thesis asserts that Aquinas' delicate balance of Plato's hierarchical emphasis and Aristotle's focus on the principles of substance is comprehended within an analogical notion of act which requires a mutual interdependence and reciprocity of form and esse, wherein neither principle is realised independently or has "natural priority" with respect to the other. We shall abstract from the interesting question of the connection between the diverse notions of the starting point of metaphysics and the analysis of entitative principles, which could help illumine the existentialists' stress on the causal role of esse.⁸ It is apparent that the existentialist approach, often following Gilson's "theological order", views the starting point as an analysis of the dependence of finite contingent being upon infinite being,⁹ whereas the Aristotelian approach stresses the object of metaphysics as analogical being, which sometimes even includes possible being as a branch of potency and act as the primary division of being.¹⁰

Although the evolution of the concept of "natural priority" in the thought of Aquinas has never been documented as such, its influence has been felt throughout discussions of his theories of participation, the subject and starting point of metaphysics, the distinction between essence and esse and the relation between God and creature, and among diverse levels of causality. The notion of priority, and of "natural" priority in particular, arises first in discussions of the principles of being, and is evoked by considerations such as the fundamental, conditioning and containing role that certain modern Thomists attribute to esse within Aquinas' metaphysics.

⁷ In some senses this deviation could be argued to apply to certain "strict observance" Thomists such as Garrigou-Lagrange and Geiger, who view esse as a "factual realisation" of essence, or as "facticity". See Helen James John, The Thomist Spectrum, p. 117 on this point.

⁸ See, e.g. L. Dewan, "St. Thomas, Metaphysical Procedure and the Formal Cause" New Scholasticism 63 (1989) 173-82.

⁹ H. James John indicates the various Thomists' notions of the metaphysical concept of being but does not classify them as existentialist or Aristotelian, strictly speaking. However, it is clear that J. de Finance (Connaissance de l'être [Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1966]), L. de Raeymaeker (La philosophie de l'être selon s. Thomas d'Aquin [Paris: Vrin, 1946]), Hayen (L'Intentionnel selon s. Thomas d'Aquin [Bruxelles-Paris: Desclée, 1942]), Fabro (La nozione...) and Gilson, as well as Carlo, whom she does not treat, are all existentialist in their adoption of the starting point of metaphysics, although de Finance, like Marechal, locates the implicit and immediate relation of finite being to God in the intellect's self-reflection.

¹⁰ Here we can point to Garrigou-Lagrange, whose notion of being is an indistinctly grasped essence (real or possible), and where God's existence is the conclusion, not the starting point, of metaphysics (Reality: A Synthesis...). H. James John sees a similarity here with Jacques Maritain (Existence and the Existent tr. L. Galantière and G. Phelan [New York: Image Books, 1956], and A Preface to Metaphysics: Seven Lectures on Being [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1940]), where the universality and necessity of metaphysical being demands the inclusion of possible being (Thomist Spectrum pp. 20-21. Lawrence Dewan's emphasis on the Commentary on Aristotle's 'Metaphysics' makes being as substance the focus of metaphysical inquiry, which is similar to the approach of Garrigou-Lagrange.

In the years following World War II, a new movement arose to combat the “essentialist”¹¹ danger within Thomism and gained ground in the United States,¹² Canada,¹³ France,¹⁴ Belgium¹⁵ and Italy.¹⁶ Although best known to American students through the panorama of metaphysics given by Gilson,¹⁷ the diverse findings regarding the “existential” nature of Aquinas’ metaphysics were researched independently, and covered such topics as the primacy of existence in different types of participation,¹⁸ the relation of the divine name of “He Who Is” to existentialist ontology,¹⁹

¹¹ The “essentialist” interpretation of Aquinas was attributed to Suarez by Gilson, who saw it as impacting on the thought of Kant Descartes, Wolff and eventually on Thomists of the twentieth century. See: E. Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers (Toronto: P.I.M.S., 1949). “Essentialist” thinkers deny the real distinction between being and essence. On Scotus, see: A.J. O’Brien, “Duns Scotus’ Teaching on the Distinction between Essence and Existence” (New Scholasticism 38 [1964] 61-77). On Suarez, see Disp. Meta. XXXI 6, 1; 5, 3. See: H. Kainz, “The Suarezian Position on Being and the Real Distinction” (Thomist 34 [1970] 289-305).

¹² See C. Hart, Thomistic Metaphysics. An Enquiry into the Act of Existing (Englewood Cliffs, 1959).

¹³ See G.B. Phelan, in A.G. Kim (ed.), G.B. Phelan. Selected Papers (Toronto: P.I.M.S., 1967).

¹⁴ See especially, J. de Finance, Être et agir dans la philosophie de saint Thomas 2me ed. (Rome: Librairie Editrice de L’Universite Grégorienne, 1960); A. Hayen, L’Intentionnel selon saint Thomas 2me ed. (Brussels: Desclée de Brouwer, 1954).

¹⁵ L. de Raeymaeker, La Philosophie de l’être 2me ed. (Louvain: Editions de l’Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1947). See the translation by Ziegelmeyer: The Philosophy of Being (St. Louis, Missouri: Herder, 1954).

¹⁶ See C. Fabro, La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tomaso d’Aquino, 1st ed. (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 1939). Cf. the 3rd ed. (Turin: Societa editrice internazionale, 1963) and the translation: Participation et causalité selon S. Thomas d’Aquin (Louvain: Publications universitaires de Louvain, 1961). See also Fabro’s articles: “The Transcendentality of *ens -esse* and the Ground of Metaphysics” (International Philosophical Quarterly 6 [1966] 389-427); “Notes pour la fondation métaphysique de l’être” (Revue thomiste 66 [1966] 214-237); “The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation” (Review of Metaphysics 27 [1974] 449-491); “Un Itinéraire de S. Thomas: l’établissement de la distinction réelle entre essence et existence” (Revue de philosophie 39 [1939] 285-310); “Circa la divisione dell’essere in atto e potenza secondo S. Tommaso” (Divus Thomas [Piacenza] 42 [1939] 529-552).

¹⁷ Gilson’s various lectures portrayed this historical perspective. See especially Being and Some Philosophers (Toronto: P.I.M.S., 1949). Cf. The Unity of the Philosophical Experience (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1937); God and Philosophy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941). Cf. Le Thomisme. Introduction au système de saint Thomas (Strasbourg: Vix, 1919). The fifth edition was published in 1944 (Paris: Vrin), and translated as The Christian Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas tr. L. Shook (New York: Random House, 1956). Gilson is perhaps best known to American students through his book Elements of Christian Philosophy (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1960). Cf. The Philosopher and Theology tr. C. Gilson (New York: Random House, 1962); The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy Gifford Lectures 1931-32 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936). A complete bibliography of Gilson’s works is found in M. McGrath, Etienne Gilson: A Bibliography (Toronto: P.I.M.S., 1982).

¹⁸ L.B. Geiger, La Participation dans la philosophie de saint Thomas d’Aquin (Paris: Vrin, 1942); C. Fabro, La Nozione Metafisica di Partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d’Aquino (Milan, 1939).

¹⁹ E. Gilson, Le Thomisme, 5me ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1943).

and the act of being arrived at by reflection on the conditions of knowledge.²⁰ The emergence of “existentialist” Thomism in our century is in part a reaction to varieties of secular existentialism,²¹ but purports to derive its impetus from Aquinas’ dynamic metaphysics of act,²² taking the view that Aquinas transformed Aristotle either by his Christianity or by his NeoPlatonism. Gilson and his followers²³ correspond to the first interpretation, while Geiger,²⁴ Fabro,²⁵ Marc,²⁶ and de

²⁰ J. de Finance, Être et agir dans la philosophie de saint Thomas (Paris: Vrin, 1945); A. Hayen, L’Intentionnel selon saint Thomas (Paris: Vrin, 1942).

²¹ In particular, the problematic of Fabro’s work Participation et causalité... revolves around the view of Heidegger that the medievals illustrate the “forgetfulness of being”. Fabro’s theory of esse as “intensive act” reveals Aquinas as the sole exception to Heidegger’s claim: “Nous devons donc admettre que, dans la faillite de la pensée occidentale dénoncée par Heidegger, la position thomiste fait exception: tandis qu’on passe sans discontinuité du formalisme médiéval antithomiste au rationalisme moderne par le moyen de la perspective essentialiste commune de l’être en ses deux états de possibilité (essentia) et de réalité (existentia), dans la position thomiste la première et plus intime participation de l’être est a l’esse comme actus essendi qui est l’acte immanent a l’essence et peut donc opérer la médiation transcendentale entre le fini et l’Infini.” (Participation et causalité... p. 35). J. Maritain describes Thomism as an “existential” philosophy in his lectures of 1932 (Sept Leçons sur l’être et les premiers principes de la raison spéculative [Paris: Tequi et fils, 1934]). These lectures were published in English as Preface to Metaphysics: Seven Lectures on Being (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1940). See pp. 28-30 of the English version. Gilson first used the term “existentialism” in referring to the Christian doctrines of creation and the description of God as “He Who Is” in God and Philosophy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941). Gilson says that at the time of writing God and Philosophy, he had not read anything by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Jaspers or Sartre (See L. Geiger, “Bulletin de Métaphysique”, in Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques 35 [1950] 315ff., p. 321). Likewise, Maritain excludes any influence of existentialism on his own writings (see his Existence and the Existent, tr. Galantière and G. B. Phelan [New York: Doubleday and Co., 1957]) p.11.

²² Gilson, for example, states that the real distinction between existence and essence is a philosophical transposition of the doctrine of creation and the infinite being conveyed by the divine name “He Who Is” in Exodus 3.14: Le Thomisme 5me ed. pp. 49-50. Cf. the chapter in this edition of Le Thomisme entitled “Haec Sublimis Veritas”. A. Hayen sketches a metaphysics of the intentionality of being where the “dynamic relation of essences as known to the Absolute Esse...explains and guarantees the dynamic infinity of the notion of being” (See his book Être et agir... p. 322). Cf. L’intentionnel... p. 251, on the signification of finite esse as dependence on God.

²³ See Gilson’s emphasis on the “theological” method of Aquinas’ metaphysics: The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy, tr. A.H.C. Downes (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1936), pp.51; 54. On p. 74 of The Spirit..., Gilson says that “the five Thomist proofs [viz., the “five ways”] are hung expressly from the text of Exodus”. Cf. Gilson, Elements of Christian Philosophy, pp. 130, 34; 133. J. Owens (An Elementary Christian Metaphysics [Milwaukee: Bruce, 1963]; An Interpretation of Existence [Milwaukee: Bruce, 1968]; “Quiddity and Real Distinction in St. Thomas Aquinas” [Med. St. 27 (1965) 1-22]) and J. Knasas (The Preface to Thomistic Metaphysics: A Contribution to the Neo-Thomist Debate on the Start of Metaphysics American University Studies, Series V, Vol. 106 [New York: Peter Lang, 1990]) are followers of Gilson on this point.

²⁴ Geiger, La participation dans la Philosophie de S. Thomas d’Aquin.

²⁵ Fabro, Participation et causalité...

²⁶ A. Marc, “L’Idée de l’être chez saint Thomas et dans la scolastique postérieure” (Archives de philosophie 10 [1933] 157-189. Cf. F. Fontan, “Itinéraire intérieur du P. André Marc” (Archives de philosophie 28 [1965] 180-205).

Racymaeker²⁷ correspond to the second. In opposing an “actualist” conception of being to the “strict observance” Thomism,²⁸ De Finance says clearly that the originality of Aquinas’ position may well be expressed by saying that it shifts from form towards existence as the positive pole of the real.²⁹

The degree to which “existentialist” Thomists emphasize esse in contrast to form is illustrated by the interpretation of esse as the highest perfection in a finite substance;

Esse is the ultimate transcendental act...the immediate and proper object of the divine causality...³⁰

...the term “is” and its cognate “being” expresses what is maximal in the thing...³¹

as the principle of all intelligibility;

God is the metaphysical source of the intelligibility of things precisely as Ipsium Esse, not Summa Essentia...³²

as the source of a being’s operations;

...the esse of the intellectual nature is...an expanding and relational esse which, as finite and immaterial, has the power of becoming, as intelligere, an infinity of other beings...thus increasing its “density” as act...³³

as the object of metaphysics;

²⁷ de Racymaeker, La Philosophie de l’être 2me ed.

²⁸ The “strict observance” Thomism has been attributed to Garrigou-Lagrange, who takes Aristotle’s act/potency couplet as the starting point of Aquinas’ metaphysics, instead of the real distinction. In describing “strict observance” Thomism, Lindbeck said that it “tends to emphasize the continuity between Aristotle and St. Thomas, going so far as to find in Aristotle an anticipation of the Thomistic treatment of essence and existence.” (“Participation and Existence in the Interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas” [Franciscan Studies 17 (1957)] p. 10).

²⁹ J. de Finance, Être et agir... p. 116.

³⁰ C. Fabro, Participation et causalité... p. 79: “..saint Thomas poursuit jusqu’à la détermination de l’esse comme act ultime transcendental, qui est l’objet propre et immédiat de la causalité divine.” Cf. Fabro’s statements to the effect that according to Aquinas being is act, the first and ultimate act, most perfect and most intimate (“La problematica del”esse tomistico” [Aquinas 2 (1959) 194-225]).

³¹ Kenneth Schmitz, The Gift: Creation (The Aquinas Lecture, 1982, Marquette University Press), p. 101. Unlike Schmitz, Fabro distinguishes between the “is” attained by the judgment and fulness and plenitude of “intensive esse”. See Fabro, “The Transcendentality of ens-esse and the Ground of Metaphysics” (International Philosophical Quarterly 6 [1966] 389-427; 426).

³² W. Carlo, The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966). p. 101.

Esse constitutes itself as the last objectifiable level
 ...the point of convergence, of climax and of foundation
 of every other aspect of being in its relation to
 reality...the proper object of metaphysical consideration
 and the exclusive good of Thomist metaphysics...³⁴

and as the single principle constituting a thing's being:

...why does God give esse and nothing more, except
 because there is nothing more to give? Just as in God
 there is nothing but Esse writ large, so in things there
 is nothing but esse, writ small.³⁵

The precise meaning of "existence" that various existentialist Thomists assign to esse differs, but two central proponents distinguish between existence as a state of being ("existence") and being as fulness of perfection ("esse") which is the proper sense of being as existence.³⁶ This latter fulness of perfection is also called the "dynamism" of being by some,³⁷ which refers to the "highest" activity of self-transcendence, whereby a thing strives towards completion.³⁸

The eventual devaluation of essence to a mere "negative limit" principle or to a "mode" of esse by strict existentialist Thomists arose from a perspective which generated such questions as that posed by the reductive existentialist, William Carlo: "[T]he notion of essence was conceived

³³ R. Connor, "From Existence to Esse" (pro manuscripto) p. 10. Connor read his paper at Fordham University in the fall of 1992, and develops an existential interpretation of Aquinas which he opposes with the existentialism "of judgment".

³⁴ C. Fabro, Participation et causalité... p. 76: "L'esse comme acte de tout acte, qui constitue le dernier niveau objectivable...le point de convergence, d'aboutissement et de fondation de tout autre aspect de l'être dans son rapport à la réalité...l'objet propre de la considération métaphysique et le bien exclusif de la métaphysique thomiste." Cf. G. Phelan, "A Note on the Formal Object of Metaphysics" New Schol. 18 (1944) 197-201.

³⁵ G.B. Phelan, as quoted in F. Wilhelmson, The Paradoxical Structure of Existence (Albany, N.Y.: Preserving Christian Publications, 1989), p.126. Phelan's existentialist Thomism is developed in his article entitled "The Being of Creatures" (A.C.P.A. 31 [1957] 118ff.) and is expanded upon by Carlo ("The Role of Essence in Existential Metaphysics" [International Philosophical Quarterly 2 (1962) 571-590] and W.N. Clarke ("The Role of Essence Within St. Thomas' Essence-Existence Doctrine: Positive or Negative Principle? A Dispute Within Thomism" [Atti del Congresso Internazionale (Symp. Roma), n. 6 (109-115)].

³⁶ Gilson, Elements of Christian Philosophy (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960), p. 142; Fabro, Participation et causalité... p. 481.

³⁷ In 1946 this description of esse began to be employed by some Thomists, such as G. Phelan, "The Existentialism of St. Thomas" (P.A.C.P.A. 21 [1946]) 35ff. Cf. E. Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers (Toronto: P.I.M.S., 1949), p. 185. Cf. D. McCarthy, "Une doctrine en quête d'un auteur" Rev. phil. de Louvain 66 (1968) 630-660.

³⁸ On the relation between temporality and existence, see Aquinas' De pot. 5.1 ad 2; C.G. I 20 ("aliquid fixum et quietum in ente"). Cf. J. Owens, "Aquinas - Existential Permanence and Flux" (Med. St. 31 [1969] 71-92). Cf. De ver. 21.4 ad 7.

to explain the Greek eternal universe, and its ratio essendi was to function within such a universe. How, then, can it be translated to a Christian world?"³⁹ With this question as the starting point, the historical impetus for existential Thomism developed.⁴⁰ Aquinas would have agreed with Henry of Ghent's view that creation is not the constitution of a thing from preexistent principles.⁴¹ The reductive existentialists⁴² deduction of a modal theory of esse from the denial of preexistent essences however, is more questionable, and will be examined in the review of Gilson, Carlo and Fabro.

It is important to note that this thesis is directed against moderate existential Thomists such as Gilson and Fabro,⁴³ but primarily against the stricter existential Thomist position held by Carlo and his followers⁴⁴ to the effect that esse is the sole metaphysical principle, and which ends up interpreting the real distinction as the division between "nothing" (essence) and "God" (Ipsum

³⁹ W. Carlo, "The Role of Essence in Existential Metaphysics: A Reappraisal" (I.P.Q. 2 [1962] 559).

⁴⁰ The philosophical locus is the debate between Henry of Ghent and Giles of Rome on the status of created essences. While Giles reasoned that the doctrine of creation demanded the real distinction between essence and existence, Henry contended that the real distinction such as Giles saw it (between res and res) was incompatible with creation ex nihilo, for it presupposed a preexisting subject. Thus, Henry posited only an intentional distinction. On this debate, see Giles of Rome, Theoremata de Esse et Essentia, XIX, ed. Hocedez (Louvain, 1930); Henry of Ghent, Quodlibet II, 4, 56r (Paris, 1518). Cf. J. Paulus, "Les Disputes d'Henri de Gand et de Gilles de Rome sur la distinction de l'essence et de l'existence" (Archives d'hist. doctr. et litt. du moyen âge 25 [1940] 347-348).

⁴¹ See Aquinas, S.T. I 45.4 ad 2: "Ad secundum dicendum quod creatio non dicit constitutionem rei compositae ex principiis praexistentibus: sed compositum sic dicitur creati, quod simul cum omnibus suis principiis in esse producitur".

⁴² Carlo exhibits this in his book The Ultimate Reducibility... pp. 19-20: "Now if creation is the communicatio esse, and ipsum esse is the first effect, what about essence?...Instead of waiting from all eternity like the recipient essence of Avicenna...essence must arise out of the flood of esse. Esse gives rise to essence." He is followed by Clarke (see his Preface to Carlo's book, as well as his article: "The Role of Essence within St. Thomas' Essence-Existence Doctrine...") and Connor "From Existence to Esse" (pro manuscripto), as well as by W. Hoye (Actualitas Omnium Actuum: Man's Beatific Vision of God as Apprehended by Thomas Aquinas [Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1975] and John Jones ("The Ontological Difference for St. Thomas and Pseudo-Dionysius" [Dionysius 4 (1980) 119-132; 122]). The absorption of essence into esse as an intrinsic limit certainly developed from a focus on the "dynamism" of being as existence, seen in Phelan ("The Existentialism of St. Thomas") and Gilson (Being and Some Philosophers). A text of Aquinas which identifies striving for an end and resting in it, inspired this interpretation: "...eiusdem rationis sit tendere in finem, et in fine quodammodo quiescere; sicut per eandem naturam lapis movetur ad medium, et quiescit in medio. Haec autem duo inveniuntur competere ipsi esse. Quae enim nondum esse participant, in esse quodam naturali appetitu tendunt; unde et materia appetit formam...Omnia autem quae iam esse habent, illud esse suum naturaliter amant, et ipsum tota virtute conservant..." (De ver. 21.2 Resp.).

⁴³ The views of Gilson and Fabro are analysed in the context of existential Thomism, and are proven to be misleading in their accentuation on esse to the detriment of form in their interpretation of Aquinas' theories of finite substance and of God.

⁴⁴ Thinkers similar to Carlo or followers of him include A. Little, R. Connor, and to a certain extent, W.N. Clarke.

Esse). This view at first glance not only verges dangerously towards pantheism, but it also ignores the various causal perspectives in God, the terms of the real distinction, and jeopardizes the analogy of being and the meaning of existential participation in Aquinas. In order to refute this view, one must establish the lack of natural priority between esse and form, and establish the denial of esse's independent existence as a separate metaphysical principle on any level. Before presenting the argument against the strict existentialist view however, we must indicate the motivations and consequences of it.

There are several apparent motives involved in the view that all metaphysical principles are reducible to the divine existence, the most obvious being the structure of existential participation which Aquinas himself employs to explain the unity of being.⁴⁵ Beyond this, however, are the following five reasons: a) in limiting perfection to esse and limiting forms to creatures, they attempt to accentuate God's transcendence; b) by reducing all being to esse they obtain a single principle of similitude between God and creature; c) they guarantee the unity of the subject of metaphysics; d) they invest one principle with the communicability of being,⁴⁶ and e) by interpreting essence as a mere negative limit principle, they explain the axiom that nothing can be added to God.⁴⁷

This thesis will attempt to prove that each of these motives carries dangerous metaphysical consequences, however, which would refute the strict existentialist view. Regarding a), the identification of perfection with divine esse alone can lead to the misunderstanding of a being which can be approached by degrees, as infinite, which could undermine divine transcendence instead of guaranteeing it. Moreover, the univocal notion of form as a finite limit is a direct denial of Aquinas' insistence that form is an analogical term,⁴⁸ and ignores Aquinas' concept of God as subsistent esse as a form.⁴⁹ Regarding b), this approach also misses the conception of God's

⁴⁵ On the relation between participation in existence and God, and the various senses of participation in existence, see: J. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and Participation", in ed. J. Wippel, Studies in Philosophy and History of Philosophy Vol. 17: Studies in Medieval Philosophy (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1979) pp. 117-158.

⁴⁶ This view is held by W.N. Clarke in "Action as the Self-Revelation of Being: A Central Theme in the Thought of St. Thomas" in L. Thro, ed. History of Philosophy in the Making (Washington, D.C.: C.U.A. Press, 1982) pp. 63-80.

⁴⁷ While nothing can be added to God, something (God) can be added to esse commune. See S.T. I 3.4 ad 1.

⁴⁸ See De ente et essentia 1.5-11.

⁴⁹ On Aquinas' explicit acceptance of the Platonist concept of subsistent esse as an eidos or form, see Expositio de div.nom., Proemium.

essence as subsistent form⁵⁰ and the positive character of passive potency in the creature. Regarding c), the unity of metaphysics' subject is achieved only through a confusion of common and divine being, and the nuances of types of "participation in esse" are lost. Regarding d), this causal reduction to divine efficient causality ends up misconstruing the relation of creation as well as the notion of form as the origin of activity, which we shall call the "transcendental" sense of form.⁵¹ Finally, with respect to e), the axiom must be interpreted in such a way to avoid a pantheistic interpretation, and be secured through the analogy of being. However, only a positive sense of form as perfection and a theory of diverse types of "participation in esse" properly guarantees this analogy, which the strict existentialist view will not admit.

The purpose of this thesis is to show against certain Thomist existentialists that a proper expression of natural priority in Aquinas must explain *both* form *and* esse as positive principles involved in both the transcendent (infinite) and immanent (finite) levels of reality, and that the existentialist emphasis on esse detracts from form's perfection especially on the transcendental level.⁵² The principle of containment or virtual plenitude cements God's transcendent and immanent roles together, in that the containment of the lower in the higher and vice-versa guarantees both God's immanence in all creation as well as the origin of diversity in a separate Source. In the principle of containment as applied to God, Aquinas finds his five types of natural priority, it will be seen. Thus, an analysis of the concept of natural priority is an ideal perspective from which to unravel the problem of divine immanence and transcendence, and only in a binary principle of form and esse can this dual role be maintained.

The thesis thus involves a proof of the fact that although Aquinas' concept of natural priority has many senses established by a variety of criteria, it is understood by Aquinas to belong properly and strictly to God alone, and not to any particular metaphysical principle of similitude between God and creatures. Specifically, in His function as causal origin and knower of the universe, God is described adequately only as a combination of the qualities of "form" and "existence" as Aquinas understood these terms. The thesis is directed against an existentialist interpretation of Aquinas

⁵⁰ This approach also misses the elements of Platonic exemplarism in Aquinas.

⁵¹ The strict existentialist view misses, as we have said, the analogical notion of form which is found in God as well as in creatures. See, e.g. De ente 1.5-11. On the twofold mode of causing present in God, see: In de Caus. Prop. 26 (#109).

⁵² The study of the role of form and existence in Aquinas' theory of plurality as a condition for order in the universe is foundational to the material covered in this thesis, and is found in: Heather M. Senn (Erb) "Arguments for Plurality in Aquinas" Proceedings of the Patristic, Mediaeval and Renaissance Society [1993-94] 18: 205-16 (Augustinian Historical Institute, Villanova Univ., 1996).

which views esse as the preeminent metaphysical principle both within creatures and in God, which view in effect makes esse alone naturally prior among principles of being. The basic structure of our responding argument is that from the *types* of natural priority (chapters one and two) we understand its main *candidates* (chapters three and four) and thus understand its *application* within the relation of form and existence (chapter five). The inheritance of Plato and Aristotle as well as the NeoPlatonist tradition is discussed as the background of Aquinas' concept of natural priority, and it is argued that Aquinas solves the aporia of the criteria for natural priority as "nonseparate" qualities of what is naturally prior amongst beings in the primary candidate for natural priority, viz., God. The twofold description of God as subsistent ens per se and as the Creator and Conserver of all being allows God to be at once the transcendent ("separate") and immanent ("nonseparate") bearer of natural priority for Aquinas, over and against the views of Aristotle and Plato concerning natural priority.

The three conclusions of the thesis are, first, that there is no natural priority⁵³ of either form or esse as metaphysical principles, despite existentialist interpretations which describe both God and perfection primarily as esse in abstraction from essence. The second is that God alone is naturally prior among all beings and principles of being, and His perfection which qualifies Him as naturally prior to creatures is not reducible to either existence or essence in isolation. The third conclusion is that Aquinas' principle of similitude between God and creature is not reducible to esse alone, but is the analogical sense of act as both form and as esse. This third conclusion follows from the first two conclusions' proof that there is an equal perfection of form and esse in God, and that form is not merely a limit principle but also a positive metaphysical principle in the finite order.⁵⁴

The thesis begins the analysis of natural priority by focussing on the most immanent relation within things, and most debated aspect of Aquinas' metaphysics, viz., the role of esse and its

⁵³ Aquinas' sense of the term "natural priority" combines and transcends both Plato's and Aristotle's usages. We shall explain the concept of natural priority in its strict metaphysical sense as well as in its generality, as used by Aquinas in his theory of entitative principles.

⁵⁴ The argument of the thesis is explicitly found in the order of demonstration (*propter quid* demonstration, which moves from cause to effect), although the order among the chapters follows the order of discovery to a greater degree. I say "to a greater degree" because the order of discovery moves from sense observation of effects to causes and thus would not begin with general considerations concerning metaphysical principles, as this thesis does. The order of this thesis is from general to particular rather than that of sense particulars to concepts (order of discovery) or from cause to effect. In a sense, the thesis could be said to move along the lines of a *quia* demonstration, in that it begins from

relation to the metaphysical principle of form. Chapter one reviews the positions of three existentialist Thomists (Carlo, Gilson and Fabro) on the primacy of the metaphysical principle of existence. The implications of their individual viewpoints for Aquinas' theories of substance, form, causality and God are drawn from their existentialist emphasis, and the argument is made that they view esse as naturally prior in the interpretation of Aquinas. In an attempt to prove the nonreducibility of form to existence and the absence of any natural priority between these metaphysical principles within Aquinas' metaphysics, the remaining chapters investigate Aquinas' theory of natural priority. The types of natural priority in Plato and Aristotle are analysed (chapter two), the Aristotelian and NeoPlatonic influences on Aquinas through the theory of actuality as form are presented as a significant context of Aquinas' views on the primary candidate for natural priority (chapters three and four), and the reciprocal roles of form and esse are established through an analysis of representative texts on the transcendental and finite orders (chapter five).

Detailing the path of inquiry, the first step after introducing the problematic of natural priority in the context of twentieth century existentialist Thomism (chapter one) is an outline of the philosophical heritage of the concept of natural priority (chapter two). The second, third and fourth steps consist in examining the five types of natural priority for Aquinas and in isolating the possible candidates for natural priority (chapter three), investigating the relations of act and potency on the different levels of being (chapter four) and applying these to the relation of form and esse on the transcendental and finite levels (chapter five).

In chapter two of the thesis the Greek roots of the notion of natural priority are explained, and natural priority is defined as a function of order wherein something as prior does not depend upon subsequent ones, but the reverse. As a function of order, what is naturally prior must be in reference to a causal principle, Aquinas adds. This chapter, in combination with chapter three, shows how Aquinas resolves the aporia of natural priority introduced by Plato and Aristotle (viz., the problem of universals and particulars), by reconciling their respective positions of the natural priority of universals and substances, and by transferring natural priority to the transcendental causal realm of God's creative act. Although Aristotelian in his focus on substance, the truest application of natural priority is found not in the realm of substance, but in God. Aquinas effects this transformation and reconciliation of the Greeks through the assistance of NeoPlatonic motifs,

the effect of metaphysical principles, argues to the lack of order in the cause (God), and then draws out implications of the cause (notion of similitude).

and resolves an apparent contradiction within Aristotle's criteria for natural priority through his own theory of creation and conservation in being, as well as through the relation of truth.

In outlining the definition of natural priority in Aquinas' works, the "separable" quality of natural priority (introduced in the discussion of Plato and Aristotle in chapter two) and the new involvement of the concept of natural priority in creation are illuminated, and various types of essential causes are analysed in order to further determine whether they could be classified as either formal or existential (chapter three). The analysis of per se causes as naturally prior to their effects prepares for the inquiry into the mutual relations of act and potency in the order of creation. It is argued that per se causes in the case of subsistent forms, the primary causes in the universe, the primary diversity among things, and the essentially ordered causes of the "third way" in Aquinas' proof of God's existence, all act as forms and in no case is the naturally prior per se cause described as esse alone. These examples again show the alliance of form with perfection and the lack of natural priority of esse. Finally, Aquinas' advance over the Greeks and his choice of the primary candidate for natural priority are indicated through identifying his "analogy of relation" as indicative of God's natural priority as a causal principle.

Chapter four investigates the reciprocal relations of act and potency within the finite substance in order to analyse fully Aquinas' treatment of the various candidates for natural priority as set out in Aristotle's Metaphysics. The focus of this part of the study is the natural priority of substance to accident, the relation of act and potency within substances. Analysing the criteria for substance, these are seen to coincide only in the essence of immaterial substances. Since a complete account of substance in Aquinas requires an analysis of entitative principles within substance, and since the natural priority of substance falls under the priority of act to potency, In 9 Meta. is studied. Aquinas is seen to follow Aristotle's proof of the metaphysical independence of act to potency (which in turn establishes the natural priority of substance to accident) closely. Act's natural priority is proved through final causality where the formal and final causes converge in the perfection of a thing.

Aquinas develops Aristotle's theory in two senses. First, he adds the proof of the natural priority of act through the primary, infinite cause of things' being, which is contrasted to causes of change. Only subsistent forms and most properly, God, are naturally prior to their effects, while finite substances are not. Second, he explains substance's role as hypostasis through its quality of subsistence, which introduces the real distinction between being and essence in a thing. Although it introduces the idea of esse into the picture, subsistence does not signal a natural priority of esse

to form, but points to form equally, which is a condition of substance's proper operations. It is concluded that subsistence does not render finite substance naturally prior to accidents, but as qualified by the attribute of infinity, God's subsistence does qualify Him as naturally prior to creation.

By the end of chapter four, the first two conclusions of the thesis have been for the most part proven. There is no priority of either form or esse in the predicamental order, as was seen in the discussions of order and substance. Moreover, the primary application of natural priority was seen to be the relation of God to creatures. Chapter five continues the analysis of the reciprocal relation of form and esse on the predicamental level, and extends it to the transcendental level. Finally, the main conclusion of the thesis and the third conclusion is proven, in that a comprehensive picture of the transcendental and finite levels is seen to include the mutual relation of form and esse, where there is no natural priority between these principles, and the principle of similitude between God and creature is the analogous sense of act as both form and esse.

Chapter five begins with a review of the positions of three existentialist Thomists who to varying degrees diminish the role of form as a principle of similitude between God and creature, and whose arguments imply the natural priority of esse to form on both the transcendental and finite levels. W. Carlo's causal "reduction" of metaphysical principles to esse is refuted as a confusion of the subject of metaphysics with its cause, while Gilson's strict parallel of contingency with esse and necessity with form, as well as his interpretation of Aquinas' use of Aristotle's theory of substance, is analysed and refuted as denying form its role as principle of similitude. Finally, the argument is made that Fabro's analyses of universal efficient causality and the term of creation do not fully explain the role of instrumental causes or the importance of form, and that his version of existentialism which identifies contingency with esse is similar to Gilson's.

The second and third parts of chapter five explain the positive role of form, first in the predicamental and then in the transcendental order. In the predicamental order, three points are made. First, metaphysics' subject, viz. being as actually existent, is argued to include reference to the analysis of form and its per se accidents. Esse is included in this subject matter both as a per se accident of form and as an ad extra efficient cause, namely, God. Second, against some existentialist Thomists, form is argued to be a positive limit principle within composite substances. Third, in the order of causes, form and esse have reciprocal causality, and each have their own priority. The formal cause is seen to be first in being and inherence, and the efficient cause acts only according to its form. Thus, there is no natural priority of esse to form in the finite order.

Chapter five thus forms part of the proof of the first main conclusion in the thesis, viz. the lack of any natural priority between form and esse, at least in the finite order.

With respect to the transcendental order, the role of form is analysed from three perspectives. First, as the source of perfection, it is argued that God is not fully described as Ipsum Esse, since His goodness and infinity, required for the status of the most perfect entity, must include the function of form. Second, the existentialist tendency to deny the role of exemplar causality also betrays a misunderstanding of form on the divine level. Yet exemplar causality exhibits God's perfection through the display His goodness in the various proportions of creatures to His essence. Finally, the divine attributes of simplicity and infinity are proven through illustrating the qualities of subsistent form, while the attributes often connected with esse, viz., perfection and goodness⁵⁵ are also seen to rely on the activity of form, either as a completion of a thing or as its self-communication. Through the analysis of similitude and form, chapter five affirms the earlier conclusion that natural priority requires causal independence, and is attributed primarily to God. The reciprocal causality of form and esse on both the finite and infinite levels is demonstrated, and the principle of similitude is argued to be both formal and existential.

In sum, this study shows that the variety of senses of the concept of natural priority present in Aquinas' metaphysics combine to illumine both God's transcendence and immanence, and illumine the dual role of form and esse in this unique candidate for natural priority. This is true, it is shown, because Aquinas did not posit any natural priority of esse to form, despite some existentialist interpretations which imply such a priority. The positive role of form is embedded in Aquinas' analysis of metaphysical principles, as is shown in his explanation of diversity and order within the finite substance, between substances, between the finite and the infinite orders, and within the infinite Being itself. The proportional structure of being in its composition of essence and existence reflects the preeminent perfection of God and conditions a proper metaphysical understanding of being qua being which avoids reductionistic dangers.

⁵⁵ The attributes of perfection and goodness connote efficient causality.

THE VARIETIES OF THOMIST EXISTENTIALISM

1.1 "Existentialist" Characteristics of *Esse*

The implication that *esse* (the act of being) is in some sense "naturally prior" to form and all metaphysical principles is present in the various strict existentialist Thomists, whether they be "modalist" existentialists, or of the "theological" and "causality" varieties studied below. As indicated in the introduction to this thesis, twentieth century Thomist "existentialism" differs from the historical movement called "existentialism" in many respects. Modern existentialism can be defined as the historical movement initiated by Kierkegaard which was the reaction against the abstract rationalism of Hegel's philosophy. This existentialism focussed on the irreducibility of the subjective, personal dimension of life, and on the "ethical" primacy of existence, involving concepts such as freedom of the individual, authenticity, absurdity, dread and the denial of fixed essences.

Twentieth century Thomist existentialism, on the other hand, can be defined as an interpretation (or a set of interpretations) of Aquinas' thought which stresses the contingent existence of sensible things in relation to God (*Ipsium Esse*) and holds the radical priority of *esse* (the act of being in a thing) to essence (the form and matter, focussing on the form).¹ This radical

¹ In his work *God and Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), Gilson first employed the term "existential" in referring to the principal doctrines of Christian philosophy, that is, creation and the description of God as "He who Is" (p.41). In his work *Le Thomisme* [5me ed.] (Paris: Vrin, 1944), he distinguished "essentialist" from "existentialist" ontologies, saying that "only the latter affirms the radical primacy of existence over essence...the form of the substance is only such and only exists in virtue of the existential act which makes of the substance a real being. So understood, the act of existing takes its place at the heart, or if you prefer, at the very root of the real. It is thus the principle of the principles of reality." (pp. 49-50). One Thomist existentialist who addresses the philosophical issues involved in modern existentialism, and who proposes Aquinas' "authentic" existentialism as a reply to it, is Maritain. In his work *Existence and the Existent* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949), he distinguishes existentialisms:

"There are two fundamentally different ways of interpreting the word existentialism. One way is to affirm the primacy of existence, but as implying and preserving essences or natures and as manifesting the supreme victory of the intellect and intelligibility. This is what I consider to be authentic existentialism. The other way is to affirm the primacy of existence, but as destroying or abolishing

priority of esse to form in particular is the consequence of the reduction of all perfections to esse in God, and of the implications of creation, and is seen to preserve both the Christian doctrine of creation and the primacy of the real over the abstractions of the intellect, according to its adherents.² Some proponents of Thomist existentialism define essence as the finite act of being, in contrast to the plenitude of existence found in God.³

In order to develop Thomist existentialists' views in relation to the topic of natural priority, one can distill the variety of positions to ten characteristics of esse, each of which is found in at least one proponent of that school. Before detailing these ten characteristics, however, Aquinas' metaphysical vocabulary of esse, essence and form must be outlined briefly.

essences or natures and as manifesting the supreme defeat of the intellect and of intelligibility. This is what I consider to be apocryphal existentialism, the current kind which no longer signifies anything at all." (p. 3). Maritain includes Kierkegaard and Sartre in the group he calls "apocryphal" existentialists. He describes Kierkegaard's existentialism as springing "from a radically irrationalist thought which rejects and sacrifices essences and falls back upon the night of subjectivity" (Existence and the Existent pp. 130-131). Although we shall not be addressing Maritain's "authentic existentialism" in this thesis, mention of his distinction between "authentic" and "apocryphal" existentialism helps to clarify the historical context of twentieth century Thomists' existentialism.

G. Phelan is a good example of modern "Thomist existentialism", and he argues for the distinction between "existentialist" and "essentialist" outlooks in his article, "The Existentialism of St. Thomas" (in G. B. Phelan: Selected Papers, ed. A. Kirn [Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1967], pp. 67-82. Regarding "essentialist" philosophies, he notes that they can be ancient, medieval or modern, but are distinct from Aquinas' "existential" outlook, in that "St. Thomas would have none of the platonic theory which identified being with the intelligible, thus deexistentializing being..." ("The Existentialism..." p. 70). However, neither did Aquinas take the side of those who "disparaged the powers of human understanding in face of an existing world and had recourse to mysticism to solve the great problems of existence" (*ibid.*, p. 71).

² Gilson states that Aquinas' existentialism transcends "the Platonic ontology of essence" and goes beyond the "God Essentia of St. Augustine" (Le Thomisme, 5me ed., p. 135). His entire work Being and Some Philosophers [2nd ed.] (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952) is a warning against the dangers of "essentialism", a generic term for philosophies which ignore existence as a key to metaphysics. Describing the varieties of "essentialism", he states that "the rebellion of human reason against what of reality remains impervious to its abstract concepts has probably more to do with it [viz. "conceptual imperialism"] than any single philosopher we might quote. For reason has only one means to account for what does not come from itself, E. Meyerson says, and it is to reduce it to nothingness. This is what essentialism, at least, has done on an exceptionally large scale, by reducing to nothingness the very act in virtue of which being actually is." (pp. 106-107). Quoting Suarez, Gilson says that for the essentialist, "the real is not confused with what is actual or existing...When we conceive a being as real,...we leave existence out of consideration" (*ibid.*, p. 106). L. Sweeney has recently described the "radical essentialist" as one for whom "there is only essence and no existence, or in more easily intelligible terms, not change but only stability counts" (Authentic Metaphysics in an Age of Unreality [New York: Peter Lang, 1988] p. 26 #28).

³ For example, E. Gilson says that "the essence of a finite act-of-being consists in only being such or such an act of being (esse), not the pure, absolute and unique Esse...The finite act-of-being, then, is specified by what it lacks..." (The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, tr. L. K. Shook [New York: Random House, 1956], p. 36.

Esse, the perfection of being which existentialist Thomists favor, is described by Aquinas in various ways. Etymologically, it is the abstract form of ens (“being”), known as “to be”.⁴ In an early text,⁵ Aquinas presents three meanings of the term esse, indicating elsewhere⁶ that the second sense is his own innovation. Esse, he says, is said in three different ways: (1) the essence of a thing (a definition signifies the essence of the thing in this way); (2) the first act of an essence (actus essentiae); or (3) the truth of a propositional composition. Aquinas’ innovative use of the term esse, as the first act of an essence, is the sense of esse that pertains to the topic of natural priority. Regarding this sense of esse, Aquinas says that esse is the actuality received by a thing’s essence, and that essence stands in a relation of potency to esse, its act.⁷

Although act and potency cannot be defined, strictly speaking, these primary notions can be described when one views them in their proportional relation in composite things, or as a relation between things.⁸ Aquinas adopts Aristotle’s illustrations of the proportion between act and potency, such as the builder in relation to his ability to build, the actually visible in relation to what can be seen, the seed in relation to the grain, and the state of being awake in relation to being asleep.⁹ Aquinas develops Aristotle’s theory of act to include the relation between essence and esse in creatures, and constructs a theory of analogical participation in being, using analogies of his own.¹⁰ There are various priorities of act to potency and of potency to act, but the strong sense of

⁴ In de Hebd. l. 2 #22. Cf. In 3 Sent. d. 6, q. 2, a. 2: “esse est actus entis...sicut lucere est actus lucentis...”

⁵ In 1 Sent. d. 33 q. 1 a. 1: “Sed sciendum, quod esse dicitur tripliciter. Uno modo dicitur esse ipsa quidditas vel natura rei, sicut dicitur quod definitio est oratio significans quid est esse; definitio enim quidditatem rei significat. Alio modo dicitur esse ipse actus essentiae; sicut vivere, quod est esse viventibus, est animae actus; non actus secundus, quod est operatio, sed actus primus. Tertio modo dicitur esse quod significat veritatem compositionis in propositionibus, secundum quod ‘est’ dicitur copula: et secundum hoc est in intellectu componente et dividente quantum ad sui complementum; sed fundatur in esse rei quod est actus essentiae.”

⁶ De pot. 7.2 ad 9. Aquinas’ qualification there, “quod dico esse”, signals the introduction of his own viewpoint.

⁷ De pot. 7.2 ad 9; De ente 4 [6]-[7].

⁸ In 9 Meta. l. 5 #1827.

⁹ In 9 Meta. l. 7 (#1846-#1848). In 9 Meta. is devoted to the doctrine of act and potency, and to the establishment of the priorities of act in relation to potency.

¹⁰ The most famous analogy Aquinas uses here is that of sunlight and air as illustrative of the relationship of God (who has being by nature) to creatures (who receive being from God). See S.T. I 104.1: “Now every creature may be compared to God as the air is to the sun which illumines it. For as the sun possesses light by its nature, and as the air is illumined by participating light from the sun, though not participating it in the sun’s nature, so God alone is Being (ens) by virtue of His own essence (since His essence is His being (quia eius essentia est sum esse), whereas every creature has being (ens) by participation, so that its essence is not its being (esse).”

priority in “substance” is reserved to act.¹¹ The actual is the perfection of a thing, its very being (esse) as its formal act, its operation, and its end.¹² The relation of potency to act is a relation of that which is perfectible to the perfection itself, of the determinable to the determination, and of that which can be to that which is. Potency limits or determines act, since act is of itself unlimited, perfect and one.¹³ Aquinas uses the act/potency distinction in his discussions of the levels of being, from its home in created composites to its fulness as Esse Purum, or limitless act, in God.

Esse is that by virtue of which a thing has being, not that by virtue of which it is placed in a category.¹⁴ In God, esse is identical with His essence.¹⁵ Esse is the act of acts, and perfection of perfections,¹⁶ that which is innermost in each and every thing, and that which is deepest in them all, as most formal in respect of all that is in a thing.¹⁷ In itself, esse is infinite and not self-limiting,¹⁸ and the hierarchy within being is based on the limitation of esse,¹⁹ making esse a principle with qualitative degrees between beings.²⁰ Finally, esse is said to be superior to all

¹¹ In 9 Meta. lectiones 4, 8, 9.

¹² A thing’s actuality corresponds to its end in that the end, a thing’s goodness, perfects it, and actuality is the same as perfection. Aristotle defines perfection as “that which has nothing outside itself” (Phys. III, c. 6, 207a9 (cf. Aquinas l. 11 [#385]). What is “perfect” is complete, and lacking nothing according to its nature, according to this text (cf. In 5 Meta. l. 8 #871). On the final cause which is identical with a thing’s goodness, see In De div. nom. c. 1, l.3; S.T. I 49.1. In S.T. I 5.1, Aquinas links perfection with goodness, through desire (“all things desire their own perfection”). On the hierarchy of final ends in relation to degrees of efficient causality, see In I Ethic. l.9 (#108). Actuality and perfection are coextensive in that a reality is called a “perfection” if it completes another reality which is capable of receiving it (i.e. in potency to it). In God, ultimate perfection and actuality coincide, because in Him there is no potency. The more a thing approaches to the likeness of God, the more perfect and actual it is. See Q. D. De anima q. 1, a. 7: “...In substantiis vero immaterialibus ordo graduum diversarum specierum attenditur, non quidem secundum comparisonem ad materiam, sed secundum comparisonem ad primum agens, quod oportet esse perfectissimum.” Cf. C.G. IV, 1.

¹³ In 1 Sent. d. 8, q. 2, a. 1 (that the divine esse is not limited), for example. Cf. C.G. II, 52 (and De ente 4 [6]-[7]) for the argument for the real distinction of essence and esse, on the grounds that esse as such is not self-diversifying, and requires essence to diversify it.

¹⁴ De pot. 7. 2 ad 9; 7. 3; S.T. I 3, 4.

¹⁵ De ente 4 [6]-[7]; S.T. I 3.4.

¹⁶ De pot. 7.2 ad 9.

¹⁷ S.T. I 8.1.

¹⁸ This axiom appears in many places in Aquinas’ writings, such as In 1 Sent. d. 43, q. 1 a. 1; In 1 Sent. d. 8, q. 2 a. 1; C.G. I 43; S.T. I 7.1; Comp. Theol. ch. 18. On this topic, see J.-D. Robert, “Le principe: ‘Actus non limitatur nisi per potentiam subjectivam realiter distinctam’” (Revue philosophique de Louvain 47 [1949] 44-70).

¹⁹ In 3 Sent. d. 13, q. 1 a. 2. In this text, Aquinas builds up a hierarchy of the three degrees of realisation of esse. The first degree is esse absolutum, which contains no limitation. Next, there are the creatures whose esse is limited only by the form inasmuch as their essence is pure form. Finally, there are the creatures in which esse is limited by both matter and form, because their essence is constituted by both matter and form. Cf. De ente 5.

²⁰ One scholar has referred to this quality of esse as “virtual intensity”. See Fran O’Rourke, Pseudo-

subsequent perfections when taken absolutely (viz. as abstract, including in itself every perfection of being), but has “imperfect being” when considered as participated in any thing (viz. concretely).²¹

The second central term in Aquinas’ metaphysical vocabulary is “essence” (*essentia*). This principle of being is taken from the first sense of *ens* listed in *De ente et essentia* chapter one, viz. real being, as found in Aristotle’s ten categories of being.²² The essence of a thing is closely related to both the definition and the “form”. As something common to all the natures in a genus, and through which the various beings are placed in genera and categories, “essence” tells what the thing is. Since the definition tells what a thing signifies, “essence” can be substituted for “quiddity” in the sphere of logic. From the viewpoint of metaphysics, however, “essence” is more closely aligned to “form”, in the general sense of the whole nature of a thing. In this more central sense, “essence” signifies the matter and the substantial form of a thing, and the subject which has being.²³ Essence can signify the concrete supposit, viz. the “whole” (e.g. “man”) or it can signify the abstract quiddity, viz. the “part” (“e.g. “humanity”). For our purposes, essence will signify the composite of matter and form in the concrete individual.

The third metaphysical principle involved in Aquinas’ theory of natural priority is that of “form” (*forma*), not in the general sense of the composite, but in the specific sense of “substantial form”. The general sense of “form” (corresponding to the general sense of the term “essence”) signifies Avicenna’s notion of the “determination” (*certitudo*) of a thing in its specific notes. This Avicennian notion of form signifies the whole essence or nature of a thing.

More particular to the problem of the relation between form and *esse* is the second, less general meaning of form. As a specific immaterial metaphysical principle, the substantial form (as opposed to the accidental form) is what makes a substantially (independently) existing individual a particular type of being (a *hoc aliquid*).²⁴ Aquinas says that it is the “first act” of a being, while the

Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas (Leiden: Brill, 1992) pp. 167-174.

²¹ *S.T.* I-II 2.5 ad 2; *In 1 Sent.* d. 27 q. 1 a. 2 ad 3.

²² The second sense of being is the logical sense, where *ens* signifies the truth of the proposition. *De ente* 1 [2]-[3].

²³ *De ente* 1 [3]-[4].

²⁴ *De spir. creat.* 1 ad 9. In *S.T.* I 44.2, Aquinas traces a path of progression from the PreSocratics onwards in the notion of being. The recognition of form’s actualising role with respect to matter marks the second stage of development in the notion of being, which was effected by Aristotle in particular. The introduction of form explained the problem of change and continuity in bodies. The third and most advanced stage of development rises to the question of the (universal) causation of the being of beings, not just of particular forms.

“second act” is a thing’s operation. Form is at once the principle or source and the end of operation.²⁵ In addition, form is the instrument by which esse is caused, since esse is an effect of form, given an outside efficient cause (God).²⁶ For Aquinas, there is an intimacy between form and esse such that esse is one with the form (as the act of the essence) even more than a property is one with the essence.²⁷ Finally, as the cause of ens, form is a focus of metaphysics, since metaphysics studies the formal cause the most.²⁸

Having introduced some key terms (esse, essence, form, act and potency) in Aquinas’ metaphysical vocabulary, we can now turn to the Thomist existentialists’ ten characteristics of esse. First, esse is said to be “in flux” in creatures, and in a state of stability or permanence in God alone. Referring to C.G. I 20’s description of esse as “aliquid fixum et quietum in ente” (in contrast to motion), Phelan says that “subsistere confers the stability and relative permanence of the created ens to which the statement ‘esse est aliquid fixum et quietum in esse’ refers, but it is the permanence and stability of an ens which, in order to be, must tend (through its powers and operations) to its own self-realisation.”²⁹ According to this view, the act of being is a “consubstantial urge of nature, a restless, striving force, carrying each being (ens) onward”,³⁰ the “dynamism” springing from the perpetual becoming of esse as measured by time.³¹ As determining and limiting esse, form confers stability, and where esse is a nature, it acquires the permanent actuality of eternity, in contrast to the flux of motion.³²

²⁵ De pot. 1, 1c.

²⁶ C.G. II 43: “...Just as esse is the first among effects, so also it corresponds to the first cause, as the proper effect [of the first cause]. But esse is through form and not through matter. Therefore, the first causality of forms is to be attributed most of all to the first cause.”

²⁷ De pot. 5.4 ad 3: “...esse is not called an ‘accident’, as if it were in the genus of accident, speaking of the esse of the substance: for it is the act of the essence. Rather, [it is called an ‘accident’] by a certain similarity: because it is not part of the essence, as neither is an accident [part of the essence]...” As a nonpredicamental accident, esse has greater unity with essence than does a property.

²⁸ In 3 Meta. I. 4 (#384): “...every substance either is a being (ens) through itself, if it is form alone, or else, if it is composed out of matter and form, it is ens through its form; hence, inasmuch as this science undertakes to consider ens, it considers most of all the formal cause.” This statement does not deny the fact that form participates in esse, however, and stands in relation to it as potency to act. Form causes esse only under the influence of an external agent (De pot. 7.2 ad 10; C.G. II 43), and God is the source of both esse and form.

²⁹ G. Phelan, “The Being of Creatures” p. 125.

³⁰ Phelan, “The Existentialism of St. Thomas” p. 35. Joseph Owens is another example of this trend: “...existence is for him [Aquinas] something stable and changeable in its own nature, even though it is found as a nature only in God” (“Aquinas - Existential Permanence and Flux” [Med. St. 31 (1968)] 90).

³¹ Referring to In 2 Sent. d. 1, q. 1 a. 5 ad 6, Owens says that “in this continuous variation the ‘now’ that measures the existent is always flowing” (“Aquinas - Existential Permanence and Flux” p. 87).

³² Owens (“Aquinas - Existential...” p. 85) refers to In 1 Sent. d. 19 q. 2 a. 1 Solut. and quotes In 1 Sent.

Second, esse is said to be the most universal transcendental³³ perfection which contains every perfection in its divine supereminence, and occupies a fundamental nature in creatures as a condition for all perfections. The theme of virtual containment is often expressed through the notion of “intensive esse” where esse is the container of all perfections as supereminent, and is most general and universal as the foundation from which all perfection, even essence, springs.³⁴ The perfection of esse resides only in God, however, where it is unparticipated and considered in se. In creatures esse is most perfect analogically by virtue of essence’s and accidents’ participations in it.³⁵

Third, esse is the term of creation for esse is what designates a thing as contingent.³⁶ The justification in Aquinas’ texts for this characteristic of esse is esse’s role as container of all

d. 8 q. 2 a. 1 ad 6: “ad significandum quietem divini esse; illud enim dicimus possidere, quod quiete et plene habemus”.

³³ Esse is said to be the most universal transcendental perfection in that it is universal, and not limited to the categories; it pertains to every being.

³⁴ The theme of containment is emphasized by Fabro, in Participation et causalité...: “L’esse qui est au départ, l’acte le plus commun, se manifeste à la fin comme l’acte le plus intense, qui transcende tous les acts et doit les engendrer de l’éternelle et inépuisable profondeur de sa plénitude”; “l’actus essendi...comme l’Acte pur...grâce à sa nature propre d’acte intensif - rassemble en les dépassant et dépasse en les conservant toutes les perfections” (p. 252; p. 253). Cf. Fran O’Rourke, Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas (Leiden: Brill, 1992) p. 178: “Esse is the quiet leaven (‘aliquid fixum et quietum’) within the world of beings which, unobserved, perfects and harmonises each and every one...in its generality it forms the foundation of the pyramid, comprehending all things universally within its power. In its simplicity it is the apex, containing all in a virtual manner according to a higher, pre-eminent presence. Being, however, is not merely the sum of all perfections and forms, but is their total simplicity and plénitude.” The notion of esse as containing all perfections is found in In de Caus. Prop. XII, and gives rise to Aquinas’ texts on “participation” in esse (e.g. S.T. I 75.5 ad 4; C.G. I 28). See De pot. 7.2 ad 9 on the notion of esse as foundational for other perfections, and see Fabro’s treatment of this text (Participation et causalité... p. 229 and p. 508). On essence being a mode or aspect of esse, see Carlo, *passim*, and William Hoye (Actualitas Omnium Actuum... p. 78): “If esse is taken as intensive act, containing all acts and perfections whatsoever, then essence must be an aspect of being”. On p. 78 #3 of his book, Hoye cites other thinkers (e.g. de Raeymaeker, Lotz, Rahner) who agree with this interpretation.

³⁵ Fabro treats the notions of “predicamental” and “transcendental” participations (Participation et causalité... pp. 252-60; 381-409). Aquinas treats the relation of esse to other perfections on the finite and infinite levels in S.T. I-II 2.5 ad 2. Taken in se, nothing determines esse, so that it surpasses other perfections and contains them; taken as participated, other perfections determine it: “Esse simpliciter acceptum, secundum quod includit in se omnem perfectionem essendi, praeeminet vitae et omnibus subsequentibus: sic enim ipsum esse praehabet in se omnia subsequentia.” (Cf. S.T. I 4.2 ad 3; In 1 Sent. d.17 q.1 a.2 ad 3). We will return to the theme of containment in the analysis of Fabro.

³⁶ Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas tr. L. Shook (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 370: “...it is as Act-of-Being that He (viz., God) alone has the power to create; the act-of-being is His proper effect: ‘esse est eius proprius effectus’”. The association of contingency and esse is found in Aquinas’ analogy of the presence of esse and creatures and the presence of light in air (e.g. S.T. I 104.1), and is appealed to by Gilson: Being and Some Philosophers pp. 160-161.

perfections, in that everything in the creature is ordered to esse.³⁷ The existentialists identify the state of being caused with contingent esse, and do not focus on Aquinas' use of the contineri theme in their treatment of esse and creation's term.³⁸

Fourth, esse is the primary signification of the term ens, in contrast to the "Aristotelian" interpretation of Aquinas' ens by nonexistentialist Thomists.³⁹ Ens, "that which is", or "being", has four divisions according to Aquinas, which will be defined in section 5.2.1.1 below.⁴⁰ Esse, the "act of being", has a threefold division according to Aquinas (section 5.2.1.1 below). The fourth characteristic of esse according to existentialist Thomists stems from the notion that creation is what distinguishes Aquinas' thought from Aristotle's. Far from being Aristotle's entitas,⁴¹ Aquinas' esse is the root of his concept of ens, for esse's first signification is predicamental being. The precise relationship between Aquinas' own understanding of ens and Aristotle's concept of ousia is left unexplained,⁴² however, and the second sense of esse, as the composition present in the

³⁷ On the relation of accidents, substances and matter to esse, see: S.T. I 44.2.

³⁸ In S.T. I 44.1, for example, Aquinas does not identify "being caused" and "being created", nor does he identify "having esse" and "being caused". Rather, creatureliness follows on the possession of participated being. In S.T. I 44.2, he invokes the theme of containment in the context of the discussion of the object of creation (cf. S.T. I 45.4 ad 1). Existence "includes" the whole being of the creature, or the whole creature, in a very specific way. We shall return to this question in the analysis of Fabro.

³⁹ See Hoye, Actualitas Omnium Actuum... pp. 54-58.

⁴⁰ In addition to the divisions listed in section 5.2.1.1, we can note that ens is signified by an analogical concept, having different meanings when applied to different orders and kinds of beings. A being can be uncaused (God) or caused (creatures); a being can be either rational (intramental, such as privations, chimeras), logical (concepts) or real (existing independently of the created mind); a being can be either potential (what can be) or actual (what is, as the realisation of a capacity); and can be either finite (created) or infinite (God). Other texts on the divisions of being and its description are: De ente 1 [2]; In 4 Meta. l. 1; In 6 Meta. l. 2; In 9 Meta. l. 1; In 12 Meta. l. 1; In 5 Meta. l. 9; De ver. I, 1, for example.

⁴¹ An important feature of the existentialists' theory of the primacy of esse has its roots in their attribution of the concept of creation and its corollary, the real distinction between esse and essence, to Aquinas and not to Aristotle. J. Owens remarks that the real distinction was not of interest to Aristotle: The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics (Toronto: P.I.M.S., 1957), p. 296: "In a philosophy which is conditioned by this fundamental doctrine of Being (= Form), the absence of any treatment of existence is inevitable...The contingent and the infinite have no place in this contemplation. What is not form or reducible to form, has no interest for the Primary Philosophy. Accordingly, in the treatment of the principle of non-contradiction, in the study of efficient causality, in the relation of sensible to separate Entity, no mention is made of any existential problems. The highest instance of Being is Form and it is that Form that is studied by the Primary Philosophy in all the other instances. An act like that of existence which is irreducible to form has no place in the Primary Philosophy or in any science."

⁴² Gilson's theory on this point is that Aristotle's ousia entered Aquinas' Christian universe intact, with the accident of esse making it fully contingent. We shall discuss this in the treatment of Gilson below. Aristotle gives four basic meanings of the term ens: Substantial being, accidental being, logical being and real being (In 5 Meta. c.7).

judgment,⁴³ is denied. Aquinas' texts on the relation between the terms esse, ens and essentia must be considered to determine their claims in this regard.

While ens is the term of judgment in such a theory, esse is the more complex term of a process called "resolution".⁴⁴ The fifth characteristic of esse is its primacy as such a term. Fabro introduces the notion of a metaphysical resolutio to perform a reduction to an esse separated⁴⁵ from all the forms which specify and limit it, an esse in which conceptual extension and metaphysical intension or perfection, coincide. "Intensive esse" is distinct from the "existence" which terminates judgment⁴⁶ because it signifies more than mere "facticity".⁴⁷ The distinction between existence and esse by Fabro and his followers is intended to emphasize esse's metaphysical, and not merely logical, primacy.⁴⁸ Unlike more traditional existentialist Thomists who relate the real distinction to the two acts of the intellect (judgment and simple apprehension),⁴⁹ Fabro and his school make esse the "ground" of existence as grasped by the judgment. By making judgment the medium of reaching the act of existence (thus identifying

⁴³ On Aquinas' twofold signification of esse, see: In 1 Sent. d.19 q.5 a.1 ad 1; In 3 Sent. d.6 q.2 a.2; S.T. I 3.4 ad 2. Cf. De ver. 1.1 ad 3: "...nomen autem entis ab actu essendi sumitur, non ab eo cui convenit actus essendi" (cf. In 1 Sent. d.25 q.1 a.4: "Nomen entis sumitur ab esse rei"; cf. C.G. I 25). Existentialists fail to note texts which appear to contradict these preceding ones, which make ens the origin of esse. See, for example, In 1 Peri. l.5 #70: "Id quod est fons et origo ipsius esse, scilicet ipsum ens".

⁴⁴ Fabro introduces his theory of the cognitional process of "resolution" to the concept of "intensive esse" in Participation et causalité... pp. 79-83. First, there is a confused grasp of being which is the starting point of intellectual life. This is the being corresponding to Avicenna's first concept. De ver. I.1 is quoted here: "Illud quod primo intellectus concipit quasi notissimum et in quo omnes conceptiones resolvit est ens" (p. 79). This notion of being is that of the "id quod est, quod habet esse". Second, the mind turns from the "abstract" to the "real" and grasps proportional being, and the difference between essence or subject, on the one hand, and the act of being, on the other. Third, the "intensive" notion of esse arises through the final induction to the ground of all perfection. Through this "intensive" (vs. "extensive") abstraction, the modes of being are seen as limitations and partial negations of its fullness.

⁴⁵ Fabro identifies esse separatum and esse intensivus in his discussion of De pot. 7.2 (Participation et causalité... pp. 258-259). We shall return to this equivalence in our evaluation of Fabro's use of natural priority.

⁴⁶ (Fabro appears to group the existential judgment along with all judgments here).

⁴⁷ The distinction between "existence" as facticity and esse as the plenitude of perfection parallels Fabro's distinction between esse in actu and esse ut actus. See Participation et causalité... pp. 76-78; 625, for example.

⁴⁸ The logical primacy of esse as that which is grasped by judgment is a minimalist understanding of esse, they would say.

⁴⁹ Gilson and Owens define esse and essence in relation to the acts of the intellect. See F. Wilhelmsen, Being and Knowing (Albany, N.Y.: Preserving Christian Publications, 1991), p. 124-48: "two acts grasp two aspects of being...the act of simple understanding cognizes synthesized essences, whereas the act of judging cognizes their here and now being synthesized in existence." He makes clear that "this existence...is the very thomistic esse" (p. 124).

“existence” with esse) and by refusing to distinguish these two meanings of Aquinas’ actus essendi, the more conservative existentialists are accused of erring twice. First, they have “flattened the modalities of being and knowing into an identity”, or “logicized” esse, and second, they have impeded the metaphysical reduction to causes.⁵⁰ It is questionable how much justification such claims have, however, in light of Gilson’s careful reading of esse.⁵¹

The sixth characteristic of esse is its exclusive ability to guarantee metaphysical hierarchy. Although not stated specifically, Phelan and his followers⁵² locate this ability in the “intensive” nature of esse. It is esse’s constitutive expansiveness which grounds the relationality of being on its various levels (inanimate, sensory, appetitive and intellectual).⁵³ As Pieper says, “to have (or to be) an ‘intrinsic existence’ means ‘to be able to relate’...to be the sustaining subject at the center of a field of reference”.⁵⁴ Fabro would explain this new notion of act as a contribution of the Neoplatonic notion of energeia which expands the Aristotelian notion by connecting it with the hierarchical order.⁵⁵ Within a modal theory of esse, the sixth characteristic of esse follows necessarily, since essence is merely an intrinsic negative limit principle.

Esse’s seventh feature is that it alone “defines” God, for God has no essence.⁵⁶ Gilson places God “beyond essence, at the very core of being”, meaning that His perfection “is not a

⁵⁰ See R. Connor, “From Existence to Esse” pp. 6, 14.

⁵¹ Gilson expressly distinguishes existence as a state of actuality and as an act proper. The state of actual existence is the state in which a thing is placed by an efficient cause or by the Creating cause. It is this sense of existence which philosophers outside of Thomism use, he says. Aquinas alone understood the second sense of being as act or fulness of perfection. See: Elements of Christian Philosophy pp. 124ff.

⁵² Phelan’s article “The Being of Creatures” inspired Carlo, “The Role of Essence in Existential Metaphysics”) and Clarke (“The Role of Essence Within St. Thomas’ Essence-Existence Doctrine...”), for example. All three thinkers develop the theme of “modes of esse” and increasingly ignore the role of essence, labelling it as diminutive being or even as nonbeing.

⁵³ Fabro discusses the relational qualities that esse exemplifies in Participation et causalité... pp. 399-409, within the context of his assertion that transcendental causality grounds predicamental causality. In his article entitled “The Transcendentality of Ens-Esse and the Ground of Metaphysics”, Fabro discusses this in terms of the containment of truth and goodness in ens. The primary signification of ens for Fabro is intensive esse.

⁵⁴ J. Pieper, Living the Truth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), p. 81.

⁵⁵ Fabro, Participation et causalité... p. 222 (here, he explains how Aquinas’ “revolution” was indebted to Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus) and pp. 374-5 (where he distinguishes Plato’s “vertical” or “transcendental” causality, and Aristotle’s “horizontal” or “predicamental” causality). Cf. Fabro p. 397, on the connection between esse’s causality and predicamental and transcendental causality.

⁵⁶ Although Carlo says quite rightly that God cannot strictly be “defined”, for He is infinite and undetermined (The Ultimate Reducibility... pp. 46-47), he goes on to describe God as “Pure Being of Existence” (p. 57) and as “Ipsium Esse Purum” (p. 58). He gives esse the determinative role usually attributed to essence, as well: “The essence of the creature of itself is unformed but it is formed and perfected through esse” (p. 62). The precise role that Carlo gives to form as “intrinsic” limit of esse is

perfection received, but a perfection, so to speak, existed".⁵⁷ Although some existentialists posit this seventh feature largely to distinguish Aquinas from Greek metaphysics,⁵⁸ some posit it actually to link Aquinas to the NeoPlatonism of Pseudo-Dionysius. God is Pure Esse without essence not in the privative sense but by way of excess, containing all perfections supereminently.⁵⁹ This second interpretation which sees Aquinas as combining the Aristotelian immanent form and the Platonic principle of plenitude, illegitimately plays on the analogical sense of essence, in that it does not mean "beyond essence" as completely without essence, but rather infinite essence beyond finite essence. Thus, the seventh feature of esse is inconsistently portrayed.

Esse's eighth characteristic concerns Fabro's division of types of participation.

Participation in esse is transcendental, as stemming from divine causality, whereas participation in form is merely logical, he says. The "predicamental"/"transcendental" distinction in causality has been used by Fabro and others⁶⁰ to describe the distinction between the "horizontal" causality within the categories (between matter and form, and between substance and accident involving predicamental causality) and the more "vertical" divine causality which involves the composition of esse and essence (transcendental causality). Transcendental participation is thus distinct from

extremely unclear. Gilson also agreed that God has no proper definition. See: Gilson, "Quasi Definitio Substantiae", in Saint Thomas Aquinas 1274 - 1974: Commemorative Studies Vol. 1 (Toronto: P.I.M.S., 1974) pp. 116-121. The force of Gilson's argument stems from an implicit *a fortiori* claim that if substance is barely definable (Aquinas indicates this in De pot. 7.3 ad 4, calling substance "ens non in subjecto"), then God is less definable, since He is beyond all substance. To be defined, a thing must be really distinct from its esse. Cf. "Quasi Definitio Substantiae" p. 119 #19: "The conclusion that God is no substance can be directly reached from the principle that he has no essence other than his esse." He quotes De ente et essentia V among other texts in support of his claim.

⁵⁷ Gilson, Elements of Christian Philosophy p. 34; The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy p. 54.

⁵⁸ Gilson says that "it is just that [viz. the notion of God as "beyond essence"] which will always keep Christian philosophy distinct from Platonism, in spite of all the efforts that may be made to identify them" (The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy p.54).

⁵⁹ This is the view of Fabro (Participation et causalité, pp. 220-222), O'Rourke (Pseudo-Dionysius, pp. 66-76) and Jones ("The Ontological Difference..." pp. 121-122).

⁶⁰ The language of "predicamental"/"transcendental" is found throughout Participation et causalité (e.g. pp. 363-364) and is echoed by Aertsen in his discussions of causality in his work Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas' Way of Thought (Leiden: Brill, 1988). In this latter work, Aertsen derives the terminology from Aquinas' insight that being is "transcendental" as "beyond the categories" and universal (pp. 58-65; esp. p. 83). Predicamental causality is "categorical" causality, which is restricted to a category of being, such as accidents or substance (pp.199-200), whereas transcendental causality extends to the very esse of the thing itself, and so is more universal, presupposing nothing (pp. 200; 134, e.g.). Aertsen explains the distinction found in In de Causis l. 18 as follows: "Things have received being through an emanatio from the first principle. Because this coming forth is not a formation, but terminates in being, which transcends all categories, "the mode of causing" must be another one than in the case of generation...At issue here is not a cause which produces a specific (and therefore definable) effect, that is, a particular cause, but a transcendental one, the causa universalis totius esse." (Nature and

predicamental participation in that the latter is confined to the univocal communication of genera to species and of species to individuals.⁶¹ However, he also maintains that each type of participation concerns different principles of being:

Just as static or structural transcendental participation is the composition of act and potency in terms of esse, that is, the real distinction between essence and esse, so static predicamental participation is the composition of act and potency within the sphere of essence, that is, the real distinction between matter and form in the material world and between substance and accidents in the order of finite being in general.⁶²

Corresponding to this “static” order of participation is a “dynamic” causal order. On the transcendental level this is the production and conservation of the esse of creatures, and from this the subordination of essence to esse follows. On the predicamental level, the “dynamic” order is form’s causing esse in form’s role as the subject of the act of being.⁶³ Apart from the problem of relating the “static” and “dynamic” orders of participation, there is the problem of portraying the “static predicamental” order as the univocal immanence of logical species. Fabro’s aim was to salvage the “Aristotelian doctrine of immanence”, or the notion that substance resides in the concrete singular and not in genera or species. This relegation of essential participation to the logical order, and simultaneous stress on Aristotle’s immanent forms, although apparently contradictory, does serve as a contrast to “transcendental” participation, where “the ‘whole’ remains intact and undivided, while an aspect or form of the object is being participated”.⁶⁴ However, it confuses logic and metaphysics, and results in restricting metaphysical participation to the transcendental order of esse. In contrast to Fabro’s position, De Raeymaeker’s description of analogical participation in form leads one to conclude that essential participation in the finite order requires more attention.⁶⁵ Other existentialist Thomists join Fabro in relegating all essential participation to the the logical or “predicamental” realm.⁶⁶

Creature p.115).

⁶¹ Fabro, “The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Metaphysics: The Notion of Participation” (*Rev. of Meta.* 27 [1974]) 471: “The first and most fundamental division of participation is into transcendental and predicamental. The former is concerned with esse, with the pure perfections that are directly grounded in it; the latter is concerned with univocal formalities, such as genera with respect to species, and species with respect to individuals.”

⁶² Fabro, “The Intensive Hermeneutics...” pp. 472-473.

⁶³ Fabro, “The Intensive Hermeneutics...” pp. 473-475. On the principle “forma dat esse”, he quotes *C.G.* II 54. “Form is the true cause of esse”, Fabro says, “but only within its order” (p. 475).

⁶⁴ Fabro, “The Intensive Hermeneutics” p.453.

⁶⁵ De Raeymaeker, *The Philosophy of Being*, p. 70: “No one man is identified with the whole human species, for there are other men who possess human perfections which this man has not; and by this very

The ninth characteristic of esse according to existentialists is its primacy in relation to form, both in creatures and in God. Although some existentialists deny the presence of essence or form in God,⁶⁷ others acknowledge its presence but attribute all of its positive qualities to esse. Although Fabro admits divine exemplarity, for example, the infinity of God's being is derived from His identity as Ipsum Esse.⁶⁸ And, although he applies the formula "forma dat esse" to creatures, and admits the twofold causality of finite form (as the subject of esse and of operations),⁶⁹ form's negative limiting role overshadows its positive causality. Form gains a positive role only in the "dialectic" of esse (that is, only in relation to esse). Regarding this ninth feature of esse, the focus on form as content, determination and limitation shows ignorance of its pivotal role on the finite and infinite levels as a source of operations.

The tenth and final feature of esse is its central role in defining the subject and starting point of metaphysics. Several existentialists adopt esse as the starting point of metaphysics, if not as its subject. De Finance calls esse the point of departure of metaphysics, referring to the proof of God as the source of all esse.⁷⁰ Gilson and his school believe that the proof of God's existence is the starting point of metaphysics,⁷¹ which proof begins with an analysis of contingent esse.⁷² The per se properties of existence are then the subject of metaphysical demonstration. Klubertanz

fact every individual is limited in the species, but the ensemble of all possible men embraces all, unlimited, unbounded human perfection."

⁶⁶ C. Hart, Thomistic Metaphysics: An Enquiry into the Act of Existing (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1959), p. 92: "The Thomist participation is the participation in the perfection of existence rather than in the eternal Ideas" G. Lindbeck, "Participation and Existence in the Interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas II" (Franciscan Studies 17 [1957]) p. 112: "[Categorical participation] has a purely cognitive, almost logical, significance." Cf. J. Deck, "Metaphysics or Logic?" (New Schol. 63 [1989]) p. 233: "It might be said that essence limits existence. In most applications this formula merely disguises the limitation or restriction of a more universal to a less universal...a logical and not a metaphysical limitation..." Deck views all roles of essence as logical, not real, echoing the identity of logical with predicamental participation.

⁶⁷ (See the seventh characteristic of esse above)

⁶⁸ Yet in S.T. I.7, infinity is a function of form. We will analyse this problem in the section on Fabro.

⁶⁹ Fabro, "The Intensive Hermeneutics..." pp. 474-475.

⁷⁰ De Finance, Être et agir dans la philosophie de saint Thomas 2me ed. (Rome: Librairie Editrice de l'Université Grégorienne, 1960), p.

⁷¹ On this point, see: J. Knasas, The Preface to Thomistic Metaphysics: A Contribution to the Neo-Thomist Debate on the Start of Metaphysics [American University Studies, Series 5, Vol. 106] (New York: Peter Lang, 1990).

⁷² The Gilsonian school links this starting point of metaphysics with the belief that Aquinas "Christianised" Greek metaphysics. See Sr. H. John, The Thomist Spectrum (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), p. 151: "Father de Finance presents his work [viz., Être et agir...] as an exploration in depth of a single aspect of St. Thomas' 'adaptation of Aristotelianism to the requirements of Christianity,' with its paradoxical insistence upon both the irreplaceable value and the radical

says that the mind attains esse, the subject of metaphysics, through the negative judgment of separation.⁷³

What is the subject of metaphysics, however, in light of the negative judgment of separation (separatio)? Aquinas says that certain speculabilia⁷⁴ are separated from matter in existence as well as in being understood, and that these comprise two kinds: Either they never exist in matter (God and the angels), or they do not necessarily exist in matter (substance, quality, potency and act, the one and the many, etc.).⁷⁵ One existentialist interpretation of separatio is that the mind attains the subject of metaphysics through separating the act of existence from the essence of material things.⁷⁶ This agrees with the view that with the real distinction, metaphysics begins,⁷⁷ and with the view that esse is the subject of metaphysics. In the judgment of separation, however, is one judging that esse “exists” apart from the material essence? This could only mean that subsistent esse (God) is the subject of metaphysics, an Averroist view which Aquinas rejects.⁷⁸ If one is separating essence from material esse as the subject of metaphysics, this would be the human soul, another unacceptable conclusion. Rather, separatio attains “ens in quantum ens”, and this composite of essence and existence is the subject of metaphysics.⁷⁹

dependence of created beings.”

⁷³ G. Klubertanz, “The Teaching of Thomistic Metaphysics” Gregorianum 35 (1954), pp. 3-17; 187-205. Aquinas’ main text on the method of metaphysics and the judgment of separatio is In de Trin. V, 3. The various degrees of removal from matter and motion distinguish the speculative sciences. The object of the speculative faculty (the speculabile) possesses immateriality and necessity. From these two properties we derive differentiation from matter and motion. On the degrees of removal from matter, see In de sensu et sensato, l.1 #1; S.T. I 85.1 ad 2. On the existentialist view of the genesis of the subject of metaphysics, cf. Marie-Vincent Leroy, “Annexe to ‘Le savoir spéculatif’” Revue thomiste, Maritain Volume, p. 335.

⁷⁴ The speculabilia are the objects of the speculative faculty.

⁷⁵ In de Trin. V, 1.

⁷⁶ Marie-Vincent Leroy, “Annexe to ‘Le savoir spéculatif’”, p. 335.

⁷⁷ On the relationship between the real distinction and proofs for God’s existence, see the unpublished dissertation by Sr. Mary Keating, The Relation Between the Proofs for the Existence of God and the Real Distinction of Essence and Existence in St. Thomas Aquinas (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Fordham University [New York], 1962). One could ask in what sense the existentialists view the real distinction as the starting point of metaphysics. Are the terms of the distinction defined nominally, in which case a) the real distinction is between the questions an sit and quid sit; b) how can nominal definitions commence a science which immediately reasons to God’s existence? It would seem that a careful analysis of act as found in Aquinas’ commentary on Metaphysics 7 - 9 is required for a scientific understanding of the real distinction.

⁷⁸ In Meta. Proemium. Aquinas adopts Avicenna’s argument that since no science proves the existence of its subject matter (its subject is argued for in a higher science), if God were the subject of metaphysics, then there would be no proof of God within metaphysics. On the contrary, metaphysics proves God’s existence and takes ens commune as its subject matter.

⁷⁹ In de Trin. V, 3. Cf. In Meta. Pr.

Ten characteristics of esse according to existentialist Thomists have now been listed. These are: (1) the “in flux” character of esse; (2) its status as the most universal perfection; (3) as the term of creation; (4) as the primary signification of ens; (5) its metaphysical primacy; (6) its role in establishing the hierarchy in being; (7) its identity with God; (8) its primacy in participation; (9) its priority to form, and (10) its identity as the starting point of metaphysics. The primacy of esse to other metaphysical principles is the common element among these traits, and a review of the role of esse according to three representative existentialist Thomists (Carlo, Gilson and Fabro) will reveal their advocacy of the “natural priority” of esse to form. After a detailed discussion of the concept of natural priority in Aquinas (chapters two, three and four below), we shall reply to the arguments of these three thinkers and draw conclusions on the topic of natural priority in Aquinas (chapter five).

1.2 *Modalist Existentialism*

Aquinas inherited the concept of natural priority from Plato and Aristotle⁸⁰ and by the thirteenth century it had become associated with the distinction between God and creatures,⁸¹ and became closely linked to the real distinction in Aquinas’ thought.⁸² A distinction of natures presupposes the greatest ontological distance between what is prior and what is posterior, since it can occur where there is no shared genus.⁸³

⁸⁰ The influence of Plato and Aristotle on Aquinas’ concept of natural priority is documented in chapter two below.

⁸¹ The notion of essential order, for example, invokes the idea of natural priority, a priority specifically between natures. Scotus’ treatise De Primo Principio deals extensively with essential order, and in chapter 1.7 - 1.8 of his treatise he distinguishes priority in the order of eminence from that in the order of dependence. Only the latter is properly called “natural” priority, and Plato’s influence is acknowledged. See Scotus, A Treatise on God as First Principle, tr. A. B. Wolter (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1966). A cursory look at natural priority in late antiquity and the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries can be found in J. Fritsche, “Prius tempore/prius natura”, in J. Ritter, K. Grunder, eds., Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie 7 (Basel: Schwabe, 1971), pp. 1373 - 1378.

⁸² Gilson emphasizes that the real distinction between being and essence is due to revelation rather than to philosophical discovery. Creation and the identity of God as pure subsistence forced the real distinction on Christian philosophers, Gilson says. See: Gilson, God and Philosophy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), p. 64.

⁸³ Scotus says that essential order occurs between two beings which are by their essence unequal, because one has more being or perfection than another (order of eminence), or because one depends on the other for its being (order of dependence). See De Primo Principio c.1: “Dico ergo primo, quod ordo essentialis videtur primaria divisione dividi, sicut aequivocum in aequivocata, in ordinem eminentiae, et in ordinem dependentiae...Prius dicitur, a quo aliquid dependet, et posterius, quod dependet. Huius prioris hanc intelligo rationem, quam et Aristoteles 5 Metaphysicae testimonio Platonis ostendit: prius secundum naturam et essentiam est, quod contingit esse sine posteriori, non e converso...” The

The position which we will call “modalist existentialism” considers esse to be the sole positive metaphysical principle, and all other principles to be “modes” of it, as intrinsic limitations of its perfection. Strict existentialist Thomists such as Carlo, Connor, Phelan, Clarke and Hoye comprise this group. This position has a certain affinity⁸⁴ with certain thirteenth and fourteenth century thinkers’ view that there is either an intentional (virtual) or a modal distinction between essence and existence, for both reject Giles of Rome’s “res et res” interpretation of Aquinas.⁸⁵ Ockham denied the real distinction with the argument that if essence and existence were two things (Giles’ understanding), then no contradiction would ensue if God preserved a thing’s essence without its existence, or vice-versa, both of which are impossible.⁸⁶ Scotus also denied the real distinction as understood by Giles of Rome, for similar reasons. If one applies his “formal distinction” to the issue of essence and existence, one could say that neither the essence nor the fact of its existence can be separated, even by divine power, and thus there is no real distinction.⁸⁷

The modalist existentialist interpretation arose also from a rejection of the “essentialist” philosophies of Henry of Ghent, Albert the Great, William of Auvergne and Cajetan, for example, who viewed esse not as the act of form but only as the relation of an actual being to its efficient cause.⁸⁸ The concern that esse be interpreted in its peculiarly Thomistic sense, and not as

additional fact that Scotus groups priority and posteriority along with the transcendentals (they are disjunctive) also shows natural priority’s close relationship to his thought on God and creatures. See Scotus, Quodlibet 19.5. Unlike the case of the medievals, it is not obvious that Plato and Aristotle linked the notions of priority and posteriority to existence. There are many examples to show that Aquinas linked natural priority to the God/creature distinction and transgeneric differentiation in being. See, for example, In de causis prop. 1 #24 (on primary and secondary causes); C.G. I 24 (on analogical names of God); In 5 Meta. l. 13 (#950-#952, on natural priority in relation to substance and actuality); S.T. I 33.1 (on causality and dependence); De Ver. I.5 ad 16 (on the transcategorical relation of truth between God and creation); S.T. I 2.2 (on the causal priority of first principles); S.T. I 3.2 (on the relation between the essential and the participated “good”) and In 1 Peri. l. 8 #5 (natural priority is transgeneric, one can argue from this passage, since a genus is not predicated according to priority and posteriority of its species, but is predicated univocally).

⁸⁴ However, this position does not have an affinity explicitly noted by any of these authors.

⁸⁵ Giles of Rome taught that for St. Thomas, essence and existence are distinct as “res et res”. See: Giles of Rome, Theoremata de Esse et Essentia, theoremata XIX; ed. E. Hocedez (Louvain, 1930), p. 34. Banez made similar statements. See his Scholastica Commentaria in Primam Partem Summae Theologicae S. Thomae Aquinatis, I, 3, 4, dub. 2 (Madrid-Valencia, 1934), p. 147.

⁸⁶ William of Ockham, Summa totius logicae, III, II, c. XXVII; in ed. P. Boehner, Ockham: Philosophical Writings (Toronto: 1957), p. 93.

⁸⁷ Scotus, Ordinatio I, d.2, p.2 q.1-4 (in Opera Omnia vol. II; ed. P. Carolo Balic. Vatican: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1950-1973); Reportata Parisiensis IA, d.33 l. 2-3 (in Opera Omnia vol. XI; Ed. Lucus Wadding. Paris: Laurentius Durand, 1639).

⁸⁸ Gilson is of this opinion. See his article “Cajetan et l’Existence” (Tijdschrift voor Philosophie 15 [1953] 267-86), his book History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (New York: Random

Aristotle's entitas also motivates their case,⁸⁹ as does the rejection of "idealist" ontologies which limit the real to the demands of "abstract" (conceptual) thought.⁹⁰ The irony present in the strict existentialists' rejection of Platonic idealism is that their reduction of metaphysical principles to a single principle, viz., esse, is said to be founded on Aristotle's hylomorphic composition which conditions judgment, the act by which esse is attained.⁹¹ How can esse and the judgment which attains it be at once simple (as the single metaphysical principle) and complex (in its origin and signification)?

Carlo⁹² is our first representative of modalist existentialism, and his view is closely related to the positions of Connor⁹³ and Clarke.⁹⁴ All three thinkers emphasize the primacy of esse (the act of being) over existentia (existence as "facticity", or in the "locative" sense⁹⁵) in Aquinas'

House, 1955) pp. 254 (on William of Auvergne), 291 (on Albert the Great). See also Carlo's book The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966) pp. 14-18. The fact that the language of esse essentiae/esse existentiae was used not only by Giles of Rome, Henry of Ghent and Scotus but also by Thomists such as Thomas Sutton (Quaestiones de Reali distinctione inter Essentiam et Esse, found in Opuscula et Textus, Series Scholastica, ed. M. Grabmann and Pelster), Capreolus (In 1 Sent. d.8 q.1 a.1) and Sylvester of Ferrara (In Summa contra Gentiles Comm., I, 24, iv) contributed to the modalist existentialists' concern over the role of esse in Aquinas' thought. Hervaeus Natalis located the issue of whether or not esse is in "flux" in the context of the relation of creatures to God, in his Quodlibet VIII q.7 (Ridgewood, N.J.: Gregg Press, 1966, fol. 150r,v). An interesting account of different types of becoming is given, and a specific sort of "flux" is attributed to creatures.

⁸⁹ Hoye echoes Carlo's concern to liberate the interpretation of Aquinas from "Greek essentialism". See Carlo, The Ultimate Reducibility... pp. 6-7; W. Hoye, Actualitas Omnium Actuum: Man's Beatific Vision of God as Apprehended by Thomas Aquinas (Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1975), p. 54. Gilson, we shall see, sharply distinguishes the realm of substance (focal for Aristotle) and that of existence (in Aquinas) on the grounds that only the latter accounts for the cause of ens qua ens. The order of substance, he adds, is subordinate to that of existence. See L'Être et l'essence (Paris, 1948), pp. 87-96.

⁹⁰ The history of essentialist philosophy is treated by Gilson in several works, such as The Unity of Philosophical Experience (New York: Scribners, 1937) and especially L'Être et l'essence. See pp. 316-319 of the latter for Gilson's comparison of idealist ontologies (of Descartes, Kant, Spinoza, Hegel) and "realist existentialism". It is his view that voluntarisms and skepticisms have only arisen as the final stage in the decomposition of essentialist ontology.

⁹¹ Gilson contrasts Aristotelian hylomorphism with Platonic idealism in this light in Réalisme thomiste et Critique de la Connaissance (Paris, 1939), pp. 186-189; 202-211; L'Être et l'essence pp. 245-246.

⁹² W. Carlo, The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966); "The Role of Essence in Existential Metaphysics: A Reappraisal" (International Philosophical Quarterly 2 [1962] 557-590).

⁹³ Robert Connor, "From Existence to Esse" (unpublished manuscript, 1992).

⁹⁴ W.N. Clarke, "The Role of Essence within St. Thomas' Essence-Existence Doctrine: Positive or Negative Principle? A Dispute Within Thomism" (Atti del Congresso Internazionale Tommaso d'Aquino...VI, 109-115). Cf. Clarke, "Action as the Self-Revelation of Being: A Central Theme in the Thought of St. Thomas" in L.J. Thro, ed. History of Philosophy in the Making (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982).

⁹⁵ The distinction between existence as actus essendi and as facticity is made by Fabro and Gilson, for

metaphysical vocabulary, limit the hierarchical conception of reality to the modalist existentialist interpretation of Aquinas, and virtually identify esse with divine efficient causality. A proper understanding of the first argument for modalist existentialism requires a sketch of the “thin essence”/“thick essence” debate. As the terminology suggests, “thick essence” Thomists are believed to stress essence to the degree that esse is reduced to being the mere actuality of the essence, in contrast to “thin essence” (modalist existentialist) Thomists who make esse the sole positive metaphysical principle, with all others as “modes” of it. “Thin essence” proponents speak of essence as “the ‘no-moreness’ of being”,⁹⁶ as the “negative limiting principle within esse”,⁹⁷ and as “the place where esse stops”.⁹⁸

example. The “locative” sense of existence corresponds to the phrase “to be somewhere” or “to be out there, in the world”. On the locative sense, see Milton Munitz, Existence and Logic (New York: New York University Press, 1974). While Gilson identified (and thereby confused) esse and existence in his earlier work (The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas [London: Victor Colanese, 1957], p. 38), he later reasoned that he should have explained Aquinas’ metaphysics in terms of “being” (esse) and much less in terms of “existence” (Le Thomisme, 6me ed. [Paris: Vrin, 1964], p. 8). Fabro, it will be seen, focusses on the distinction between existence as facticity and esse as “intensive act” (s. 1.4 below). “Facticity” is seen as the “weaker” sense of being which is derived from the “stronger” esse in actu. Fabro describes “existence” as presented by most scholastics as “le ‘fait’ (immédiat, expérimental) d’être, qu’on peut designer du doigt, non l’esse de saint Thomas qui est id quod profundius inest” (Participation et causalité p. 289). On this topic, see Fabro’s works Participation et causalité (pp. 55-83; 260-309) and “The Transcendentality of Ens-Esse and the Ground of Metaphysics” (International Philosophical Quarterly 6 [1966] 389-427). See also R. W. Schmidt, “The Evidence Grounding Judgments of Existence” in An Etienne Gilson Tribute, ed. C. J. O’Neil (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1959) 228-44; J. Wippel, Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas, ch. 5. Cf. F. Van Steenberghen, Le problème de l’existence de Dieu dans les écrits de s. Thomas d’Aquin (Louvain-la-Neuve: Editions de l’Institut supérieur de philosophie, 1980) 33-51. An argument against any textual support for the distinction can be found in J. Nijenhuis, “Ens’ Described as ‘Being or Existent’” (P.A.C.P.Q. 68 [1994] 1-14).

⁹⁶ Arthur Little, The Platonic Heritage of Thomism (Dublin: Golden Eagle Books, 1949) pp. 201-202. Little places all perfection on the side of esse and gives essence a positive role only as a (finite) mode of existence through God’s efficient causality. He understands essence in terms of passive potency: “Passive potency...is identified with the limit or no-more-being of a being. Therefore it is not a pure negation because it implicitly affirms as a possibility the measure of being that it is capable of determining by explicitly excluding this from its negation...” The real distinction is implicitly denied in this modalist existentialism, for existing things are composites of being and non-being, where “esse is shot through and through, as it were, by non-being” (ibid., p. 222).

⁹⁷ G. Phelan, “The Being of Creatures According to St. Thomas” (Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association 31 [1957] p. 124: “To call it ‘essence’ is all very well, provided essence is not regarded as some positive thing, but simply the ‘by which’ (quo) or the mode, measure or manner in which the act, esse, is exercised. To say, for example, ‘Crystals are solids’ means for the existential metaphysician ‘Crystals exercise the act of existence in a solid manner.’” W. N. Clarke concurs, rejecting the view that essence possesses “a certain density or perfection of its own”, and locating all positive perfection on the side of esse. In the same place, he says that all positive perfection is located on the side of esse, “with the essence playing the role not so much of subject as of intrinsic limit or, more accurately, of measure, or mode, or determination, molding the basic perfection of esse from within and not from

The “thin essence” school holds that creatures are contractions or limited modes of the infinite perfection of esse in God, and bases this claim on the texts of Aquinas which make esse self-limiting. In de Trinitate q.4 a.1 appeals to the principle that being cannot divide itself,⁹⁹ and De veritate q.2 a.3 ad 16 indicates that the formal hierarchy of being is constituted by descending degrees of being (esse).¹⁰⁰ “Thick essence” advocates, such as Gilson, Owens and Cajetan, are thought to maintain a world of necessary Aristotelian substances to which existence is added as mere facticity.¹⁰¹ Esse is sometimes said to be the “actuality of a form”¹⁰² but just as frequently it is limited to facticity or the term of a judgment.¹⁰³ The modalist existentialists find greater support

without.” See Clarke, “Commentary b)” (Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association 31 [1957]) p. 129.

⁹⁸ W. Carlo, The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics p. 103: “Essence is not something extrinsic to existence which limits and determines it in the way that a pitcher shapes its recipient liquid, but essence is rather the place where existence stops.” His view that essence and all metaphysical principles are reduced to esse is a stronger version of modalist existentialism than is the “primacy of esse” theory. The latter position is attributed to Gilson, and is for Carlo “a halfway house to the doctrine of the Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence.” (Carlo, p. 3). He goes on to say that existence “cannot stand self-sufficiently alongside the Platonic essence but must encompass and include it in the theory of essence as a Mode of Esse” (Carlo, p. 3).

⁹⁹ In de Trin. q.4 a.1: “...Non potest autem hoc esse, quod ens dividatur ab ente in quantum est ens; nihil autem dividitur ab ente nisi non ens. Unde et ab hoc ente non dividitur hoc ens nisi per hoc quod in hoc ente includitur negatio illius entis...”

¹⁰⁰ De ver. 2.3 ad 16: “...esse simpliciter et absolute dictum, de solo divino esse intelligitur, sicut et bonum...Unde quantum creatura accedit ad Deum, tantum habet de esse; quantum vero ab eo recedit, tantum habet de non esse. Et quia non accedit ad Deum nisi secundum quod esse finitum participat, distat autem in infinitum; ideo dicitur quod plus habet de non esse; et tamen illud esse quod habet, cum a Deo sit, a Deo cognoscitur.”

¹⁰¹ The identification of esse as something merely accidental to substantial form is noted as present in Aquinas’ texts by Carlo, and is a consonant with the “thick essence” notion of the reciprocal causality of form and esse in creation, which accepts the Aristotelian worldview within Aquinas’ metaphysics. See Carlo, “The Role of Essence in Existential Metaphysics: A Reappraisal” (International Philosophical Quarterly 2 [1962] 557-590). Phelan (“The Being of Creatures”) and Clarke (“The Role of Essence within St. Thomas’ Essence-Existence Doctrine: Positive or Negative Principle?”) also contribute to the “thin essence”/“thick essence” literature.

¹⁰² Connor credits Owens (and Gilson) with the interpretation that esse is the actuality of a form for Aquinas. He says in “From Existence to Esse” (Appendix, p. 9 #17) that the notion of esse as “thick” (that is, with the intelligibility usually ascribed to essence) contradicts the “orthodox” position of Owens: “...Following the vocabulary of St. Thomas himself, Fr. Owens always refers to esse as ‘actuality’. The intelligible density and operational power which I am attributing to esse, for him, seems to come from the form of which esse is the actuality. But esse itself is not ‘dense’. In this regard he (viz., Owens) says: ‘The positive character of the essence, however, is actually positive only through the being that actualizes the essence. Considered in priority to the actualization by being, the form can function only as potency...it is receiving its actuality.’ (Owens, “The Accidental and Essential Character of Being in the Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas” [Med. St. 20 (1958) p. 38].” Fabro’s distinction of esse ut actus and esse in actu (see the section on Fabro below) would also seem to figure here, in that the actuality of a form is contrasted to “intensive” esse.

¹⁰³ Gilson, Wilhelmson, and McInerney are charged as guilty in this regard by Connor. He quotes (pp. 2-

for their second complaint (the reduction of esse to facticity) than for their first (the definition of esse as the act of a form), for facts are mental states, and to assimilate existence with the term of judgment denies the distinction of types of composition in the intellect and in the thing, and the corresponding principle that “the likeness of the thing is received in the intellect according to the mode of the intellect and not according to the mode of the thing”.¹⁰⁴ Now, a reconstruction of Carlo’s, Clarke’s and Connor’s¹⁰⁵ arguments for modalist existentialism is in order.

1.2.1 *The “Reducibility” of Form to Esse (Carlo)*

The strongest claim of modalist existentialism, namely, the causal reductio to esse, is argued for vigorously by William Carlo,¹⁰⁶ whose aim throughout his work is to free what he sees as “Christian existentialism” from “Greek essentialism”. He attempts to prove that the

3) Wilhelmsen (whom he places in the tradition of Gilson) on the two acts of the intellect: “Two acts grasp two aspects of being...the act of simple understanding cognizes synthesized essences, whereas the act of judging cognizes their here and now being synthesized in existence”; “the existence...is the very thomistic esse...as known directly in judgment...precisely as the being of what is affirmed, the existent” (Wilhelmsen, Being and Knowing [Albany, N.Y.: Preserving Christian Publications, 1991], p. 48; pp. 124-125). The equation of existence as facticity, as term of judgment and as the being of things is expressed thus by Wilhelmsen: “Existence as the fact of being is not a follow-up on esse, not a consequence, but the being of things themselves. Thus is esse known in judgment” (Being and Knowing p. 125). Connor denounces this as “logicizing” existence (“From Existence to Esse” p. 6). In support of Connor’s distinction, it can be said that facts differ from existence as expressions differ from their subject matter. G. Frege defines a fact as a thought which is true, in his analysis of the status of existence as a concept. See G. Frege, Der Gedanke, in “Kleine Schriften”, in A. Llano, Metafisica y Lenguaje, EUNSA, Pamplona, 1984, p. 219. Connor (pp. 8-9) quotes Inciarte’s supportive statement that “while I can take a hard thing in my hands and throw it against a less hard thing, I cannot take a fact in my hands...and throw it against another fact...to destroy the second fact with the first”.

¹⁰⁴ These notions are treated in the context of the human (versus Platonic or angelic) mode of knowing, found in S.T. I 85.5 ad 3: “Dicendum quod similitudo rei recipitur in intellectu secundum modum intellectus, et non secundum modum rei”.

¹⁰⁵ In addition to these three representative thinkers, other proponents of modalist existentialism are Donald O’Grady (“Esse and Metaphysics” [New Schol. 39 (1965) 283-94], John Deck (“St. Thomas Aquinas and the Language of Total Dependence” [Dialogue 6 (1967) 74-88]), and William Hoye (Actualitas Omnium Actuum: Man’s Beatific Vision of God as Apprehended by Thomas Aquinas [Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1975]). Deck denies the real distinction, arguing that essence is only logical for Aquinas, and Hoye makes essence an intrinsic mode of esse on the grounds that esse contains all perfections (he quotes Carlo, de Raeymaeker, Lotz and Rahner in his defense). O’Grady bases his argument (which denies the real distinction and removes essence from metaphysics completely) on his view of God as the starting point of metaphysics. Although he fails to quote Carlo, his position closely resembles Carlo’s, and is perhaps even stronger, as can be gathered from such statements as “form is esse” (“O’Grady” p. 293); “esse in creatures is the total perfection and intelligibility in them, needing no other principle of perfection and intelligibility” (p. 286); “essential names are names of perfections, and are therefore names of esse” (p. 290).

¹⁰⁶ Carlo’s position is developed in his book The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence.

introduction of contingency into the universe through creation through the limitation of esse points to esse as the common source of all perfection and intelligibility, and to form and matter as “intrinsic modes” of esse.¹⁰⁷ Carlo’s view rests on three ideas: First, esse is the sum of all perfections, and form is introduced by Aquinas to explain inequality and imperfection.¹⁰⁸ Now the perfection of esse and the theme of containment is borne out clearly in Aquinas’ texts, as shown admirably by Fabro, for example.¹⁰⁹

The second notion, clearly Carlo’s invention, is the incompatibility between the essence and infinity.¹¹⁰ He derives his interpretation from the dictum that “esse is not self-diversifying” and concludes from the notion that essence is the principle of diversity, that it cannot be an appropriate index of similitude between God and creature. An examination of S.T. I.7, however, shows the error of disassociating essence as such from infinity.¹¹¹

The third view of Carlo which grounds his thesis that essence is but an intrinsic mode of esse is directly related to the attempt to locate a principle of similitude between God and creature, and to guarantee the unity of the subject matter of metaphysics. Only by a “reduction” of metaphysical principles to a unity can the two notions of metaphysics as ens qua ens and as knowledge of the First Cause of Being¹¹² be reconciled.¹¹³ Thus, the primacy of esse translates into the reducibility of the metaphysical principles of form and matter into esse.¹¹⁴

A reconstruction of the basic argument of Carlo (with the positions of Clarke, Connor, Hoye, and O’Grady closely related) runs as follows:

1. In itself, esse is infinite and perfect (an axiom).¹¹⁵ Since God is esse ipsum,¹¹⁶ God is infinite and perfect.¹¹⁷ Since God is perfectly simple, all perfections are identical in His essence, which is esse ipsum.¹¹⁸

¹⁰⁷ If they were extrinsic modes, or extrinsic [viz.] positive limit principles, Carlo says that the essence would be Giles of Rome’s eternal preexistent essence, which represents a denial of creation. See chapter one of his book, *passim*.

¹⁰⁸ Carlo, pp. 96-99, e.g.

¹⁰⁹ Fabro, *Participation et causalité selon S. Thomas d’Aquin* (Parice: Nauwelaerts, 1961) (tr. L. de Raeymaeker), pp. 252-260. A famous text on the perfection of esse is In I Sent. 8.1.1c. On the theme of containment in Aquinas’ philosophy, see: L. Elders, “Contineri as a Fundamental Structure of St. Thomas’ Ontology” *Aquinas* 17 (1974) 97-106.

¹¹⁰ Carlo, p. 140.

¹¹¹ We shall return to the relation between infinity and form in the last chapter of this thesis.

¹¹² The First Cause of Being is equivalent to the Aristotelian separate substances.

¹¹³ Carlo, p. 137.

¹¹⁴ On the question of “reducibility”, see Carlo pp. 99-105.

¹¹⁵ The infinite nature of esse is usually described by modalist existentialists in terms of the all-encompassing nature of esse, to which all additions are intrinsic. Carlo speaks of everything as rising

2. The esse of creatures is a participation in the infinite nature of esse.¹¹⁹ Since God's essence is reducible to esse ipsum, and all perfections in God are identical with His esse,¹²⁰ esse is

“out of the flood of esse” (Carlo p. 20), which “possesses within itself all perfection” (p. 100). For Carlo, the “finitizing” of esse occurs in the act of creation, wherein “essence is the intrinsic limitation of esse, the crystallization of existence, bordered by nothingness” (pp. 103-104). The infinite nature of esse taken in itself is axiomatic for Aquinas (and for the position under consideration): In 1 Sent. d.8 q.5 a.1. Here, Aquinas says that esse that is not received in something is not finite, but is unrestricted (absolutum). The limitation of esse occurs when it is received in something else, so that creatures are composed of esse and that which receives it. The axiom is also used to prove God's infinity (In 1 Sent. d.43 q.1 a.1; S.T. I 7.1; C. Th. 18).

¹¹⁶ Hoye distinguishes esse ipsum from mere “facticity” by indicating that the former implies actuality and causality, while the latter implies mere “content”. He is basing his interpretation of Aquinas on Fabro's “esse intensif”. See Hoye pp. 46; 52-54.

¹¹⁷ Carlo pp. 96-99. Cf. Clarke, on esse as “the thesaurus of all perfection” (“Clarke” p. 113); Hoye p. 28. Carlo builds his argument by starting with esse and then connecting it to ipsum esse. Quoting De pot. 7.2 ad 9 (“Hoc quod dico esse est inter omnia perfectissimum”), Carlo says “esse is the most perfect of all things...the perfection of every thing comes to it from its esse” (p. 97). He then identifies perfection exclusively with esse, such that “it is the amount of esse that decides the grade of perfection [in a thing]” (p. 98). He then makes an illicit switch to the language of the “fourth way”, where the analogy of being demands “a maxime ens as compared to those things which are magis et minus entia”, referring to God (p. 99). Carlo treats the infinite perfection or “indetermination” of divine esse several times throughout his book, for ultimately, it will be seen, he identifies esse commune and ipsum esse. He says of God: “...whatever does not have a special mode of being but possesses an infinite ocean of esse containing every esse and every perfection, is contracted to no predicament and is determined to no genus” (p. 47). Regarding the question of reality's hierarchical nature, Carlo is similar to other modalist existentialists in the confusion of esse and ens. However, some explicitly identify the two terms. See: R. Pannier, T. Sullivan, “Aquinas on ‘Exists’” (P.A.C.P.A. 67 [1993] 157-65); “Being, Existence and the Future of Thomistic Studies: A Reply to Professor Nijenhuis” (P.A.C.P.A. 69 [1995] 83-88). We will return to the modalist existentialists' interpretation of the terms esse and ens.

¹¹⁸ From the simplicity of God, and the consequent identity of all perfections in Him, modalist existentialists derive the identity of all perfections in the creature with esse: “Esse possesses within itself all perfection. It is the Thesaurus of the riches and intelligible values of actual essence. That is why esse is identified with perfection and perfection is ultimately reducible to esse by Thomas Aquinas” (Carlo p. 100). He goes on to explicitly reason from the identity of essence and esse in God to the “reducibility” of essence to esse in creatures (p. 100). In this light, the implications of adopting God as the starting point of metaphysics are far-reaching.

¹¹⁹ Carlo distinguishes God and creature on the basis that “Ipsum esse is the ultimate act that can be participated by all things...The creature then, is characterized by a certain deficiency in the degree and mode of being...” (Carlo p. 98). Hoye agrees that the limitation of act stems from participation in divine esse to a deficient degree (Hoye p. 80), and defines creation as “the creature's total dependence upon God, which results precisely from the positing of the differentiation between God and His effects”. (Hoye p. 93). He adds that the esse of creatures, as well as their accidents and operations “imply participation in the divinity”, such that “the realities of the universe represent limitations, or contractions, of the divine esse” (p. 94). Clarke concurs, making the central problematic in Thomistic metaphysics “the notion of limited participation...in the central perfection of the act of existence, which of itself and in itself contains all positive perfections...” (“Clarke” p. 113).

¹²⁰ This notion is taken from the simplicity of God.

the sole principle of perfection in creatures.¹²¹ Thus, all metaphysical principles (form, matter) are ontologically posterior to esse, as dependent on it and as less perfect.¹²²

3. All differences of being (ens) are found within it since being is not a genus¹²³ (from Aristotle¹²⁴). Ens and esse are synonymous terms.¹²⁵ Thus, the relation of essence to esse is one of a mode to an act, and not one of differences in relation to a genus.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Hoye, like Carlo reduces all perfections to esse as their source and intelligibility: "...all activity whatsoever takes place within the horizon of esse...it includes everything; everything else merely denotes modes of esse..." (Hoye p. 92). This is so, he says, because every perfection is a participation in esse (p. 93). The reduction of all perfections in the creature to esse illustrates Carlo's "reducibility" of essence to esse, that is, the resolution of all effects to a causal source which is esse. He says that "there is an analytic reducibility by the metaphysics of essence to esse from whence it flows, but not an identification...identification [occurs] between between intelligible, determined aspects of entities, namely their essences or essential determinations" (Carlo p. 114). Yet elsewhere Carlo gives esse, not essence, the complete perfection and intelligibility in a creature, thus exchanging his own "reducibility" for "identification". (Carlo p.99) The "reducibility" of all perfections to esse for the modalist existentialist stems from the containment of all perfections in esse and the need for a causally unified metaphysics. Essence is esse, as "knowable in its limitation...and grasped by a finite intellect" (Carlo pp. 101-102). Cf. "O'Grady" p. 292: "...since esse is the ultimate and sole perfection or act, that essential determining act of a creaturely essence is esse. Form is esse".

¹²² Carlo's view is that all beings and metaphysical principles flow from esse. See some statements by Carlo: Carlo p. 93: "act is ultimately reducible to esse"; p. 98: "actuality also flows from being (esse)"; p. 99: "essences...are intrinsic modifications of esse"; p. 116: "every metaphysical entity whatsoever, flows from esse" etc. In his discussion on the "ultimate reducibility" of essence to existence (Carlo pp. 99-105), the role of essence as intrinsic limitation or contraction of the "infinite ocean of being" (to use Damascene's metaphor), Carlo adopts Giles' analogy which likens existence to a liquid and essence to a pitcher which receives it according to its circumscription (p. 103). However, Giles' metaphor is said to rest on a faulty "extrinsic" notion of essence, and Carlo modifies the analogy to make essence the very shape and determination of existence as poured, with a sudden drop in temperature. In this way, essence is said to be dependent on and inferior to esse, as "the place where esse stops". How this "non-being" of essence (p. 104) can act as an intrinsic principle of determination to esse remains unclear. Hoye expresses the inferiority of essence to esse by insisting that it is not "an irreducible co-principle of reality concomitant with existence, or being" (Hoye p. 77). He quotes Carlo's statements regarding "the flood of esse" from which essence "flows" (p. 78) and interprets essence or form as "being as grasped by the act of formal knowledge" (p. 82) and as pure intelligibility (p. 83), without, however, providing a real ground for form beyond esse. Thus, the real distinction disappears in Hoye as well as in Carlo, Clarke and Connor.

¹²³ Hoye quotes Aquinas' De ver. I.1.c (Hoye p. 36) in his depiction of esse as the horizon containing all modes and degrees. Cf. De ver. I.1.c: "...Sed enti non potest addi aliquid quasi extranea natura, per modum quo differentia additur generi, vel accidens subjecto, quia quaelibet natura essentialiter est ens; unde etiam probat Philosophus in III Metaphysicae [com. 10], quod ens non potest esse genus, sed secundum hoc aliqua dicuntur addere supra ens, in quantum expriment ipsius modum, qui nomine ipsius entis non exprimitur." (cf. De ver. I.10 ad 2). Being and God are alike in not being in a genus, for in neither case is there anything that could serve to contract it to a species (C.G. I 25).

¹²⁴ The text of Aristotle is Meta. II.3 (993b23), and it is used by Aquinas in De ver. I.1.c to explain the modal additions to being which constitute the transcendentals.

¹²⁵ In all of his discussions of being and its divisions, Carlo substitutes esse for ens (e.g. p. 98), sometimes using the term ens to divide act from potency, in relation to form and matter (Carlo p. 135).

Each of the three basic parts of the existentialist argument for a modalist theory of esse commences with a premise, either from an authority or taken as axiomatic. It should also be noted at the outset that the existence of God is assumed in the premises for this position, and that strict modalist existentialism takes God to be the starting point of metaphysics.¹²⁷

1.3 The “Theological” Perspective (Gilson)

The second type of existentialist Thomism which stresses the role of esse at the expense of form is found in Gilson’s approach to the real distinction between esse and essence and his notions of God and “theological method”. The “real distinction” refers to the real (vs. merely conceptual) nonidentity of essence and esse in creatures, where esse stands in a relation of act to

Like Fabro and Hoye (Hoye p. 77), he prefers esse to ens to describe the “thesaurus of perfections” (p. 140) and to ground metaphysics in a causal unity (pp. 135-140). “Ens” seems to have the connotation of “existence” as “facticity”, whereas “esse” implies the causal efficacy and infinite plenitude of “ipsum esse”, or Fabro’s “esse intensif”. Other modalist existentialists go even further by explicitly stating that “ens” and “esse” are synonymous terms. See: R. Pannier and T. Sullivan, “Being, Existence, and the Future of Thomistic Studies...” p. 88. Pannier’s and Sullivan’s efforts to credit esse, and not ens, with the function of hierarchical ordering within Aquinas’ metaphysics, is effected through collapsing ens into esse.

¹²⁶ While a genus’ differences fall outside it and add onto its intelligibility, esse is the source and horizon of all perfection and intelligibility, according to Carlo (Carlo pp. 99-105). He sums up his position as follows: “Essence is the intrinsic principle of limitation...but due to its limitation, determination, its function of intrinsic specification, it becomes this ‘kind of being’ with the perfection of such and such a mode” (p. 139). In direct connection with a treatment of God as the “Thesaurus of Being”, and as Fabro’s “Intensive Act”, he states that “all essences are modes of esse” (p. 140). Hoye concurs in his discussion of the essence/existence relation (Hoye p. 78) and Clarke makes an even stronger statement to the effect that esse becomes a concretized subject in its modes: “Finite beings would thus be finitized-acts-of-existence, not essences which have existence. The act of existence in any of its modes, whether that of infinite plenitude or some finitized mode, since it is the ultimate radical principle of concretion, immediately becomes a concrete subject in its own right...” (“Clarke” p. 112). While the addition of modes to esse is a conceptual necessity for Carlo (Carlo pp. 102-103), it is a mere linguistic expression for Clarke: “...instead of saying ‘A horse (this horse, this essence) exists’, we could say: ‘Existence here is horsy, human, in the human mode’, or ‘There is an existent here in the human mode, etc.’” (“Clarke” p. 115). Connor stresses the role of esse in establishing hierarchy (“Connor” pp. 12; 17).

¹²⁷ Hoye states that God as Ipsum Esse is a notion with theological, not philosophical roots, following Gilson’s reading of Aquinas’ use of Exodus 3.14 (Hoye pp. 37; 41). O’Grady adopts God as the starting point of metaphysics. His arguments for the primacy of esse in Aquinas’ metaphysics flow from the prior identification of esse and divine infinite perfection (“O’Grady” p. 283 #1). Carlo adopts God and creation as the starting point of his “Christian metaphysics” (Carlo p. 18) and Clarke stresses the natural infinity of esse in God as the basis for understanding modal existentialism to such a degree that the real distinction between esse and essence becomes a “secondary technical device” for explaining the notion of limited participation in esse (“Clarke” 113).

essence, which is potency.¹²⁸ In Gilson's thought, all three of these ideas are logically connected, such that his interpretation of either the real distinction, the nature of God, or the method of philosophy in Aquinas, entails the existence of the others. In order to determine the type of "natural priority" that Gilson attributes to esse over form, it is necessary to describe his three notions in turn.

Gilson both resembles and differs from modalist existentialists. He resembles this school by agreeing with the principle that the unity of being is maintained by making all beings "within" esse and thus by making esse "self-limit",¹²⁹ and he downplays the importance of essence, especially in God.¹³⁰ Moreover, his interpretation of Aquinas is driven largely by his concerns over "essentialism", the view which, he says, equates substance and being.¹³¹ On the other hand, he

¹²⁸ De ente 4 [6]-[7], e.g. The terminology of "distinction" (which implies a distinction of concepts) is less accurate than is the term "composition" or "difference", which implies a nonidentity of real principles. Cf. Gilson, Le Thomisme, 5me ed., p. 177, #65. In fact, Aquinas used the term distinctio realis only five times in the Summa Theologiae: I 28.3 obj.2 and obj.3 (in the mouth of his adversary); 30.2; 39.1. The texts which teach an explicit real distinction between essence and esse (all use the language of composition or difference, however) are: In de Heb. l.2 (#334); In 1 Sent. d. 19 q.2 a.2; De ver. 27.1 ad 8. These texts, as well as several implicit ones, have been subject to various interpretations, some of which do not favor the "real distinction" reading. For a contrast in views, see: F. Cunningham, Essence and Existence in Thomism: A Mental vs. the "Real Distinction"? (New York: University Press of America) pp.227-259; L. Sweeney et al. Authentic Metaphysics in an Age of Unreality (New York: Peter Lang, 1988) pp.67-87.

¹²⁹ For Gilson's use of formulae which insist that esse limits itself, see Gilson, Le Thomisme, 5me ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1944), p. 54. Does not the limitation of esse arise in its very creation, however? Gilson's failure to refer to God's creative action in this context is difficult to comprehend. Cf. the translation of this edition of Gilson's Le Thomisme: Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas tr. L. Shook (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 36. Here, he explains that essence is a name given to the finite act of existing considered as self-limiting. How, precisely, this language relates to Gilson's belief in the real distinction between being and essence is extremely unclear.

¹³⁰ We will return to the issue of God's essence and the role of exemplar causality in Gilson. He states that God does have an essence for Aquinas, and yet also says that it is ultimately reducible to His esse, and seems to attribute essence to God as a requirement of human cognition, which diminishes its reality: "...St. Thomas never says that God has no essence. If we think of his many opportunities to say this, we must presume that he had good reasons for avoiding the expression. The simplest reason is probably that, since we only know beings whose essence is not their act-of-being, it is impossible for us to conceive of a being without essence...To grasp in one glance the extent of St. Thomas's reform on the plane of natural theology, we have only to measure the distance separating the God Essentia of St. Augustine from the God of St. Thomas whose essentia is, as it were, absorbed by its Esse." (Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, tr. L. Shook [New York: Random House, 1956], pp. 92-93).

¹³¹ "Convenons de nommer 'essentielle' toute ontologie, ou doctrine de l'être, pour qui la notion de substance et la notion d'être s'équivalent. On dira alors que, dans une 'ontologie essentielle', l'élément qui achève la completion de la substance est l'élément ultime du réel. Il ne peut plus en être ainsi dans une 'ontologie existentielle', ou l'être se définit en fonction de l'existence. De ce deuxième point de vue,

clearly denies the separability of esse from form, fearing the resultant Platonic dualism,¹³² and also clearly denies the notion that esse is a subject.¹³³ Thus, Gilson does not drive as thick a wedge between essence and esse as do the modalist existentialists. Although his positions on God's essence, the real distinction and on "theological method" display a more sophisticated grasp of Aquinas' texts than do the views of Carlo, for example, they too remain subject to question.

1.3.1 *God's Essence*

The first and most easily understood of Gilson's positions is his interpretation of Aquinas on God's essence. It is well known that Gilson ignores the connection between the divine essence and the divine ideas, because he chooses to place emphasis on the real distinction, and not on any "Platonic" influence, in his interpretation of Aquinas.¹³⁴ This was because he saw Aquinas as having transformed Aristotle through Christianity, and not through NeoPlatonism.¹³⁵

la forme substantielle n'apparaît plus que comme un quo est secondaire, subordonné à ce quo est premier qu'est l'acte même d'exister." (Gilson, *Le Thomisme* 6me ed. [Paris: Vrin, 1965], p. 174). In addition to the desire to combat essentialism, Gilson's existentialism is also influenced by his first master Henri Bergson, Gilson's work indicates (*L'Être et l'Essence* pp. 295-306). The real distinction, we shall see, is a result of the Christian revealed doctrine of God as He Who Is for Gilson. Finally, his existentialism is influenced by his desire to accept being in its fulness, as opposed to the "abstract thought" of idealism, on the one hand, and scepticism and irrational voluntarism, on the other. On Gilson's perception of these schools of thought and their relation to his interpretation of Aquinas, see Gilson, *L'Être et l'Essence* pp. 317-320.

¹³² Gilson, *L'Être et l'Essence* (Paris: Vrin, 1948), p. 288: "...l'être n'est pas objet d'une connaissance purement abstraite et ne saurait le devenir. Nous l'avons dit, il ya quelque chose de mortellement dangereux pour l'essence abstraite à la traiter comme si le lien vital qui l'unit à l'être réel pouvait être en effet rompu, mais il est plus artificiel et plus périlleux encore de manier abstraitement ce monstre métaphysique que serait l'essence abstraite de l'être. À vrai dire, cette essence n'existe pas, car ce que l'on peut concevoir est l'essence d'un être, mais non pas celle de l'être..." On the connection between this view and Gilson's view of the indissoluble unity of sensation and intellection, see G. Smith, "A Date in the History of Epistemology" *Thomist* 6 (1943) 246-253.

¹³³ This point is made clear in Gilson's definitions of substance, form and esse in his book *L'Être et l'Essence*, pp. 99-101. As well, he emphasizes this point in his critique of Maritain's intellectual "intuition of being". The latter involves, Gilson says, the grasp of esse as separate (for the presence of esse is what transcends materiality, for Maritain), and God's esse is the only esse that exists separately, for Aquinas. See Gilson, "Propos sur l'être et sa notion", in *San Tommaso e il pensiero moderno*, ed. Antonio Piolanti (Citta Nuova: Pontificia Academia Romana de S. Tommaso d'Aquino, 1974), p. 10: "Qu'est-ce que l'être de l'étant? Ce n'est pas lui même un être. En tant que tel, l'être de l'étant n'est pas; il n'a pas d'existence propre à part celle de la substance dont il fait un étant. Elle n'est que par lui, mais lui-même n'est qu'en et comme être de cet étant...Le seul esse perceptible en soi et comme tel est Dieu, parce que 'Deus est ipsum esse' (*C.G.* I, 22; I, 38)..." We will return to Gilson's critique of Maritain in the discussion of natural priority.

¹³⁴ See, for example, Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), chapter five. On Gilson's reluctance to admit Platonic participation in an explanation of

If Gilson agrees with Aquinas that God does have an essence, and yet identifies His essence with His esse, can we say that Gilson equivocates on the meaning of essence in God and creature, such that in creatures, it signifies determination and limitation, and in God, something else? In fact, essence possesses only the creaturely signification of limitation and contingency for Gilson, and in several places he reduces essence to existence in God.¹³⁶ For example, he states that “(w)here existence is alone, as is the case in God, Whose essence is one with His existence, there is no becoming. God is, and, because He is no particular essence, but the pure act of existence, there is nothing which He can become, and all that can be said about Him is, He Is...”¹³⁷ In other words, God must be existence alone, because otherwise He would be limited and contingent. Finally, Gilson identifies God with pure existence on account of his perception of the demands of divine simplicity, which excludes the complexity of essence.¹³⁸ In fact, this complexity stems from the fragmented human mode of conceptualising the infinite, and thus Gilson betrays a confusion of the real and conceptual orders.

Aquinas’ metaphysics, see, e.g. L. B. Geiger, “Les Idées Divines selon S. Thomas d’Aquin” in St. Thomas Aquinas: Commemorative Essays: 1274-1974, Vol. 1 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), pp. 178-179.

¹³⁵ Gilson fails to mention the term “participation” in The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas (tr L. Shook, [New York: Random House, 1956]), except in the final chapter, where he mentions the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius on Aquinas. However, he continues on to defend Aquinas against those who see him as “a Platonian or even a neo-Platonizer”, whom Gilson perceived as Aquinas’ enemies (pp. 361-362).

¹³⁶ Gilson, The Elements of Christian Philosophy (New York: New American Library, 1963), p. 123: “Of this esse we know very little at first, except that in God it is that to which entity or essence (essentia) or quiddity (quidditas) has to be reduced.” Cf. pp. 128 of the same work. Regarding Avicenna’s statement about God, “Quidditatem non habet”, in relation to Aquinas, he says the following: “In both doctrines, the notion of God without an essence, or whose essence is his very esse, is reached at the term of an induction which consists in removing all composition from the notion of God..after removing essence, only existence is left, and this is what God is...” (Elements... p. 139). He also says that “as soon as essence appears, there also appears some otherness, the very otherness which distinguishes it from its own possible existence and, with it, the possibility of becoming.” (Being and Some Philosophers p. 180). However, we should note that the possibility of otherness could be found in the divine ideas, and thus may not signal an equivocal use of the term “essence”.

¹³⁷ Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, p. 180.

¹³⁸ Gilson, Elements of Christian Philosophy p. 134: “When we reach the question, what is God?, the time has come for our intellect to cast off its moorings and to set sail on the infinite ocean of pure esse, or act, whereby that which is actually is...What is the very last thing a concrete substance would have to give up in order to achieve utter simplicity? Its essence, of course. In our attempt to describe God by removing from Him what is proper to the being of creatures, we must give up essence in order to reach the open sea of pure actual existence, but we must also keep the notion of essence present to the mind so as not to leave it without any object...”

1.3.2 *Substance vs. Esse*

The second issue in Gilson's thought that bears upon the issue of natural priority is his distinction between substance and *esse* as modes of being. A mainstay of his later career,¹³⁹ Gilson employed this distinction to differentiate Aristotle's metaphysics from that of Aquinas. Substance, Aquinas says, is a thing whose quiddity indicates it is not "in something", in opposition to accident, whose definition is, "a thing to which it is due to be in something else".¹⁴⁰ Aristotle's metaphysical order of substance is contrasted to Aquinas' particular order of being qua being, Gilson is fond of repeating.¹⁴¹ In *L'Être et l'Essence*, he distinguished Aristotle's order of substance, which attained *ens qua ens*, from Aquinas' order of existence, which attained the *cause of ens qua ens*.¹⁴² Aristotle's substance and eternal universe are preserved intact within Aquinas' metaphysics, he argues, because the question of corruptibility remains on the level of Aristotelian substance, not on the higher level of creation and *esse*.¹⁴³ This notion is repeated in the condensed translation of *L'Être et l'Essence* of 1952, entitled *Being and Some Philosophers*.¹⁴⁴ While Aristotle's substance exists in its own right, or necessarily, Aquinas' creatures are radically contingent, depending on the divine influx of *esse*.¹⁴⁵ In this connection, Gilson is fond of repeating Aquinas' analogy of *esse* in creatures as light in air:

¹³⁹ While Gilson stressed creation as the key to Aquinas' metaphysics in his earlier career (in works such as the first edition of *Le Thomisme* [1913], *L'Esprit de la Philosophie Médiévale* [1931], *The Unity of the Philosophical Experience* [1936], and *Réalisme Thomiste et Critique de la connaissance* [1939]), the substance/*esse* distinction was used more heavily in the second part of his career (*Le Thomisme*'s fourth [1942] fifth [1944] and sixth [1965] editions, *La Philosophie au Moyen Âge* (2nd ed) [1944], *God and Philosophy* [1941], and especially *L'Être et l'Essence* [1948 and 1962 eds.]).

¹⁴⁰ *De pot.* 7.3 ad 4; *C.G.* IV, 62 [12].

¹⁴¹ See *L'Être et l'Essence* pp. 96-108; *Le Thomisme* (6me ed.) pp. 168-169.

¹⁴² Gilson, *L'Être et l'Essence* p. 87: "...saint Thomas ordonne toute sa métaphysique au terme devant lequel celle d'Aristote s'arrete...toute sa doctrine de l'être [i.e. celui de saint Thomas] porte la marque de cette distinction fondamentale entre l'ordre de l'être en tant qu'être', qui est celui de la substance, et l'ordre de la cause de cet 'être en tant qu'être', qui est celui de l'existence et, si l'on poursuit le problème jusqu'à son terme, conduit la pensée jusqu'à Dieu..."

¹⁴³ *L'Être et l'Essence* pp. 96-97: "Voilà pourquoi l'on peut dire que l'univers éternel d'Aristote est comme inclus dans l'univers crée de saint Thomas d'Aquin. Il n'a pas toujours existé, mais il pourrait avoir toujours existé, et, de toute manière, maintenant qu'il existe, il existera toujours...Saint Thomas estime...au niveau de l'être-substance, les notions de création et de conservation du monde par Dieu n'ont pas à intervenir, parce que l'ordre des substances simples et tel, qu'il n'y a en elles aucune *potentia ad non esse*."

¹⁴⁴ For this material, see: Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), chapter five.

¹⁴⁵ See *Being and Some Philosophers* p. 160: "...this difference between these two worlds should be understood as both radical and total...Because the acme of reality is substance and, in substance itself, essence, Aristotelian being is one with its own necessity. Such as its philosopher has conceived it, it

Now, it is in such guise that God is cause of existence. Just as the sun is not cause of light in *feri*, but in *esse*, so God does not render things able to be, He makes them be... Thomas says, ... “All creatures are to God as air is to the sun which makes it bright: ‘sic autem se habet omnis creatura ad Deum, sicut aer ad solem illuminantem.’”¹⁴⁶

The mature Gilson thus considers *esse* to connote contingency or extrinsic causation, as well as origin.¹⁴⁷ “Substance” is the *id quod est*; “essence” is the *sine qua non* of the substance, or that which makes a substance capable of existing, and “*esse*” signifies a thing’s contingency, or its divine origin.¹⁴⁸ The question of corruptibility does not enter in because the issue concerns the origin of existence, not the reception of form by matter:

...a being whose essence is not its act of being has not of itself the wherewithal to exist... Since their lack of existential necessity is congenital, it is with them as long as they endure. So long as they exist, they remain beings whose existence finds no justification in the act-of-existing...¹⁴⁹

Gilson says that this influx occurs on the level of efficient, not formal causality,¹⁵⁰ and that formal causality remains on the level of Aristotelian substance.¹⁵¹

cannot possibly not exist. On the contrary, the created world of Thomistic substances is radically contingent in its very existence, because it might never have existed...”

¹⁴⁶ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* p. 161. The text of Aquinas is *S.T.* I 104.1 Resp. Cf. *In II de Anima*, l. 14 (#403-421). Cf. Gilson, *L’Être et l’Essence* p. 94. The ability of both water and air to receive light are introduced here.

¹⁴⁷ On Gilson’s association of *esse* with origin, see his article “Propos sur l’être et sa notion” in *San Tommaso e il pensiero moderno, Saggi* (Roma: Citta Nuova Editrice, 1975) [Studi Tomistici 3, Pontificia Accademia di S. Tommaso d’Aquino] p. 9: “...quant au concept d’existence, c’est simplement celui de l’étant avec connotation d’origine...”

¹⁴⁸ Gilson, *L’Être et l’Essence* p. 106. See also pp. 99-102. He says on p. 99 that *S.T.* I 104.1’s reference to the influx of God shows that the Aristotelian substantial order is in itself incomplete, and requires supplementation by *esse*. Yet, if a) Aristotle’s substance is transported intact, and not transformed by Aquinas, and if b) the connotation of origin through *esse* is discovered after the knowledge of substance, then c) only from a theological vantage point can one reason that Aristotle’s substantial order is in itself incomplete (Gilson’s “theological order”), and d) Gilson contradicts, or at least shows confusion regarding a) above, i.e. his own position that Aristotle’s substance is found intact within Aquinas’ metaphysics, since a thing cannot be found intact and yet incomplete in one and the same place. Gilson introduces a dualism by claiming that Aristotelian substance is intact in the formal order, while being incomplete existentially.

¹⁴⁹ Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* tr. L. K. Shook (New York: Random House) p. 36.

¹⁵⁰ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* p. 169. Cf. p. 165: “All that we now have to do is to bring both aspects of created being together, that of its efficient cause, which is God, and that of its formal or material causes, which are matter and form. To do so will be nothing else than to bring together the two orders of existence and of substance. Existence is not what makes things to be either corruptible or incorruptible; it is what makes them to be corruptible or incorruptible existents...the efficient cause for

We have indicated that Gilson distinguished between substance and esse as modes of being in order to distinguish between Aristotle and Aquinas. Aquinas introduced esse to signal contingency and origin on the side of creatures. In addition to the substance/esse distinction, however, Gilson gave two meanings to esse; viz. a “wide” and a “narrow” meaning. The occasion of his distinction was an attempt to reconcile Aquinas’ contradictory statements to the effect that Plato and Aristotle did and did not possess a concept of creation ex nihilo:

...the Summa and the Commentary on the Physics...can be brought into agreement, if we remember that esse has both a limited meaning and a broad one. Its strict and properly Thomistic meaning is “to exist”. Its broader, and more Aristotelian meaning, is to indicate substantial being. Now St. Thomas always gave Aristotle (and Plato) credit for recognising a cause totius esse, understood in the sense of total substantial being, that is, of complete composite including matter and form...But St. Thomas never admitted that the cause in virtue of which a substance exists as substance was ipso facto a causa essendi simpliciter (C.G. II 21)...Thus he could say, without contradicting himself, both that Aristotle came to acknowledge a first causa totius esse, in the sense of substantial being, and also that he never came to accept the notion of a God who was a creator, that is, cause of existential being.¹⁵²

Gilson repeats this concept in his notion of “two modes of causing”, viz. existential and substantial, in his denial of creation ex nihilo to Plato and Aristotle: “...St. Thomas never credits the Philosopher with the notion of creation...because the first principle of all being, as Plato and Aristotle conceived it, integrally explains indeed why the universe is what it is, but does not explain why it exists.”¹⁵³ Summing up S.T. I 44.2 on the advance in the knowledge of causes, Gilson says that “St. Thomas grants that Plato and Aristotle knew the universal cause of the substantiality of beings, but refuses to credit them with knowledge of the cause of the existence of these substances.”¹⁵⁴ Thus Gilson interprets Aquinas as introducing an “existential” meaning to esse in order to distinguish his position from Aristotle’s, which does not accommodate creation ex nihilo.

actual existence is and always remains outside actually existing substances, either corruptible or incorruptible; but the formal cause whereby this substance exists in an incorruptible way while that substance exists in a corruptible way rests with the substance itself...”

¹⁵¹ Being and Some Philosophers pp. 168-169.

¹⁵² Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas tr. L. Shook (New York: Random House, 1956) pp. 461-462 #6. The texts that Gilson is discussing are S.T. I 45.1, where creation is described as a “emanationem totius entis a causa universalis” and In VIII Phys. l. 1, 2, 5, where Aquinas asserts that Plato and Aristotle “pervenerunt ad cognoscendum principium totius esse”. Gilson interprets the Summa text as denying creation to the Greeks, and the Physics text as attributing it to them.

¹⁵³ Gilson, The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy tr. A. H. C. Downes (New York: Scribners, 1936) p. 69.

¹⁵⁴ Gilson, The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy p. 440 #4.

In addition to the distinction of Aristotelian substance and Aquinas' creature along the lines of contingency, and to his distinction among "wide" ("substantial") and "narrow" ("existential") meanings of esse, Gilson distinguishes Aquinas' metaphysics through the concept of esse as an immanent "act", in contrast to positing existence as a mere "fact" or "state". While other Christian theologies posit esse as a "state",¹⁵⁵ Aquinas conceives esse as an interior "act" in virtue of which essence is a being.¹⁵⁶ Presumably Gilson is intending esse to signify metaphysical plenitude in this latter sense, in contrast to the existence signified by judgment. While form and essence are the static objects of the concept, esse is grasped in the dynamic act of judgment, he says elsewhere.¹⁵⁷ The Aristotelian substance is juxtaposed to Aquinas' thing because, Gilson says, the consideration of form remains on the level of logic, not metaphysics.¹⁵⁸

1.3.3 "Theological Order"

The final issue which relates to natural priority in Gilson's thought is his claim that one should present Aquinas' philosophy according to the "theological order".¹⁵⁹ "Theological" order proceeds from God to creatures, whereas "philosophical" order proceeds in the opposite direction.¹⁶⁰ This issue stems from Gilson's notion of "Christian philosophy" and comprises three topics. First, there is the relationship between the real distinction and the proof for God's

¹⁵⁵ A "state" here is the way in which a thing is posited by the efficacy of an efficient cause.

¹⁵⁶ Elements of Christian Philosophy pp. 130-131: "...we can form the two abstract notions of essence (question, quid sit) and of existence (question, an sit), but this is the point where most of the philosophers stop while Thomas Aquinas insists on going on. Existence may mean either a state or an act. In the first sense, it means the state in which a thing is posited by the efficacy of an efficient or of a creative cause...In a second sense, existence (esse, to be) points out the interior act, included in the composition of substance, in virtue of which the essence is a 'being', and this is the properly Thomistic meaning of the word."

¹⁵⁷ Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers p. 204: "First, the knowing subject apprehends what the given object is, next it judges that the object is, and this instantaneous recomposition of the existence of given objects with their essences merely acknowledges the actual structure of these objects. The only difference is that, instead of being simply experienced, such objects now are intellectually known."

¹⁵⁸ In describing the transition from Aristotle's "order of essence" to Aquinas' "order of actual existence", Gilson says: "Aristotle had no doubt as to the fact that to demonstrate the truth of an essential definition was, by the same token, to demonstrate its reality, its being...There was no reason for Aristotle to go beyond the domain of logic to that of metaphysics..." (Elements... p. 126).

¹⁵⁹ Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas p. 8: "...it becomes natural to set forth the philosophy of St. Thomas according to the order of his theology..."

¹⁶⁰ This distinction is drawn in Gilson's attempt to define esse as an act, versus as a fact, in Aquinas' metaphysics. See: Gilson, Elements of Christian Philosophy p. 131.

existence.¹⁶¹ Second, there is the “propædeutic” order which Gilson sets out as present in Aquinas’ texts; and third, there is the role of theology as “guide” in relation to philosophy.

Gilson’s motivation in claiming that a theological order in Aquinas’ metaphysics is to be followed stems from his notion of “Christian philosophy”, which he claims is a historically undeniable fact common to the patristics and scholastics alike.¹⁶² He calls Christian philosophy “...every philosophy which, although keeping the two orders formally distinct, nevertheless considers the Christian revelation as an indispensable auxiliary to reason.”¹⁶³ The Greek definition of philosophy, as the science of all things from the viewpoint of ultimate causes by the light of unaided reason, does not suffice for the Christian philosopher, according to Gilson. The Christian philosopher cannot ignore the truths of faith and revelation, and according to Gilson, he derives the real distinction between essence and existence from the revealed truth that God is subsistent being, in the Qui est of Sacred Scripture.¹⁶⁴ The Qui est of Exodus is the principle which underlies

¹⁶¹ This topic which would comprise a thesis unto itself, and will be dealt with only cursorily here.

¹⁶² Gilson refers to his work Christianity and Philosophy as follows: “The basic idea in this book is that the phrase ‘Christian philosophy’ expresses a theological notion of a reality observable in history.” (The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, tr. L. Shook [New York: Random House, 1956] p. 441 #20). Cf. Gilson, “La possibilité philosophique de la philosophie chrétienne”, Revue des sciences religieuses 32 (1958) p. 168.

¹⁶³ Gilson, The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy, Gifford Lectures 1931-32, tr. A. H. C. Downes (New York: Scribners, 1950) p. 37. Cf. Gilson, Christianity and Philosophy tr. R. MacDonald (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1939) pp. 100-101.

¹⁶⁴ See E. Gilson, “What is Christian Philosophy?” in A. Pegis, ed. A Gilson Reader (New York: Hanover House, 1957) p. 177. Cf. Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas p. 93: “...for St. Thomas this revelation of the distinction between essence and existence in God was the equivalent of a revelation of the distinction between essence and existence in creatures. Who Is signifies: He Whose essence is to exist; Who Is is the proper name of God; consequently, the essence of anything that is not God is not to exist.” (Gilson is referring to Exodus 3.14). Yet, on the very same page, Gilson claims that the “pure act-of-being” is discovered by Aquinas philosophically at the end of metaphysics! The problem of the the order of discovery is not broached by Gilson here. Joseph Owens follows Gilson in the belief that any interpretation of Aquinas’ metaphysics from the viewpoint of esse “would seem to prohibit any science of being in general which is not thereby the science of the real being, God.” (Owens, “Theodicy, Natural Theology, and Metaphysics” [Modern Schoolman 28 (1950-51) 136]. Cf. Owens, “Stages and Distinction in De ente: A Rejoinder” (Thomist 45 [1981] p. 110: “To know that existence is a nature, then, is to have proved metaphysically that God exists...This should indicate emphatically that a real distinction between a thing and its being cannot be shown until after completion of the demonstration that God exists. Only then is one in a position to see that existence cannot coalesce in reality with any finite thing...” Here, Owens is commenting on De ente chapter four. For a reply to this view, see John Wippel, “Essence and Existence in the De ente, chapter four” in J. Wippel, Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas (Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy, Vol. 10, ed. J. Dougherty) (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1984) pp. 107-132.

all metaphysical concepts, including creation, the real distinction and Aquinas' five ways, or proofs of God's existence, for Gilson.¹⁶⁵

In discussing chapter four of *De ente et essentia*, Gilson denies that Aquinas intends to posit the real distinction prior to the proof for God's existence there, saying that "...one goes rather from the identity of essence and existence in God to their distinction in other beings, rather than from their distinction in other beings to their identity in God."¹⁶⁶ The priority of existence to essence for Gilson is illustrated in his claim that any attempt to show an act of existence distinct from its essence implies the knowledge of an existential act which cannot be "reduced" to essence.¹⁶⁷ Although the order of investigation starting with God is said to be adopted by Aquinas the theologian, and not by Aquinas the philosopher,¹⁶⁸ Gilson's further statements¹⁶⁹ on the role of theology in Christian philosophy, make the theology/philosophy distinction superfluous. The priority which Gilson assigns to esse in the real distinction reflects his position on the influence of Christian revelation on Aquinas' transformation of Aristotle's metaphysics.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* p. 51: "...St. Thomas Aquinas, referring expressly to this text of Exodus, will declare that among all divine names there is one that is eminently proper to God, namely Qui est, precisely because this Qui est signifies nothing other than being itself: non significat formam aliquam sed ipsum esse. In this principle lies an inexhaustible metaphysical fecundity; all the studies that here follow will be merely studies of its results. There is but one God and this God is Being, that is the cornerstone of all Christian philosophy, and it was not Plato, it was not even Aristotle, it was Moses who put it in position." Cf. p. 74: "...the five Thomist proofs are hung expressly from the text of Exodus."

¹⁶⁶ Gilson, "La Preuve du Ente et Essentia" *Doctor Communis* 3-4 (1950-51) 258: "On va plutôt de l'identité de l'esse et de l'essentia prouvée en Dieu à leur distinction dans le reste, qu'on ne va de leur distinction dans le reste à leur identité en Dieu." Gilson bases this view on the fact that Aquinas fails to use this proof again, either in the *Summa Theologica*, in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, or in the *Compendium Theologiae*. For a similar statement to the effect that knowledge of the real distinction depends on the knowledge of God as Ipsum Esse subsistens per se, which is divinely revealed in Exodus 3.13-14, see Gilson's *Elements of Christian Philosophy* (1963 ed.), p. 143.

¹⁶⁷ Gilson, "La Preuve du Ente et Essentia" p. 260. Cf. *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 82: "The distinction of essence and existence presupposes the very notion of the pure act of being which its alleged demonstrations are supposed to justify. What here is at stake is the metaphysical level, it is not a question of proof, but of sight." Here, Gilson is referring to the text of *De ente* chapter four.

¹⁶⁸ Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* p. 93: "...this pure act-of-being which St. Thomas the philosopher met at the end of metaphysics, St. Thomas the theologian had met too in Holy Scripture...for St. Thomas this revelation of the identity of essence and existence in God was the equivalent of a revelation of the distinction between essence and existence in creatures..." He also asserts that the knowledge of God by philosophy originates in a hylemorphic unity of soul and body, which commences in sense data. See *ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

¹⁶⁹ See the final issue in this third topic of "theological method" in Gilson, below.

¹⁷⁰ A prior recognition of esse as "the act of being" is required for any argument for the real distinction,

The second topic in Gilson's notion of "theological order" in Aquinas' metaphysics is the idea of a "propadeutic order" in approaching the study of being. Gilson appeals to Summa Contra Gentiles I, 4, where Aquinas introduces the notion of revealed truths within philosophy, i.e. the truths which are fittingly revealed although accessible to human reason.¹⁷¹ Truths of this type pertain to salvation and are propadeutic, or preliminary to, Christian philosophy, for if unaided by revelation, human reason stumbles into error and lacks interest, time and ability to reach necessary truths.¹⁷² The final end in view of the Christian philosopher is the study of Sacred Scripture, which differs from the final end of the pagan philosopher, even if it also is God.¹⁷³ Gilson parallels the relationship between the truths of faith and reason with a natural event and its supernatural cause, and in this sense envisions a discontinuity between Aristotle's and Aquinas' metaphysics.¹⁷⁴

The third and final topic in Gilson's notion of "theological method" is the role of theology as "guide" in Christian philosophy. However, Christian philosophy is not merely influenced, but rather transfigured by theology for Gilson. While maintaining its rational integrity, philosophy is said to be subsumed under the formal object of theology when in its service.¹⁷⁵ Theology's role in reference to human reason is to guide it towards its supernatural end, by showing Christian

Gilson says. See Elements of Christian Philosophy p. 130.

¹⁷¹ Presumably the truths in question here refer to the nature of God and origin and destiny of man.

¹⁷² Gilson is correct in ascribing this position to Aquinas. See C.G. I, 4 as well as S.T. I.1.1. See Gilson, The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy pp. 37-40; "What Is Christian Philosophy?" (in A Gilson Reader pp. 179-82); Christianity and Philosophy pp. 60-61; Elements of Christian Philosophy pp. 24-25.

¹⁷³ Gilson, Elements of Christian Philosophy pp. 19-20. Gilson notes that for Aquinas, the "highest peak at which human investigation can arrive" (C.G. I,4) is God, such that there is essential agreement between the doctor of Christian truth and the philosopher at the level of natural knowledge. Citing S.T. II-II 188.5 ad 3, the distinction between the two types of knowledge is made, according to their ends. The Christian thinker, Aquinas says, takes secular education or letters only as it serves God and is made subservient to sacred doctrine. Gilson says that "Thomas can be said to have kept faith with his religious vocation: Aut de Deo, aut cum Deo; when he was not talking about God, he was with God" (Elements p. 20).

¹⁷⁴ This is how Gilson interprets S.T. II-II 188.5 ad 3. See Elements p. 283 #11: "...There always is continuity at the level of nature, for indeed all that which happens to nature is bound to be natural, but the cause of a natural event can be supernatural..." It is the Incarnation which effects this discontinuity between Greek episteme and Christian wisdom, for Gilson.

¹⁷⁵ See Gilson, Elements of Christian Philosophy p. 42: "...the nature of the doctrine in the Summa Theologiae should be clear. Since its aim is to introduce its readers, especially beginners, to the teaching of theology, everything in it is theological. This does not mean that the Summa contains no philosophy; on the contrary, it is full of philosophy. Since the philosophy that is in the Summa is there in view of a theological end, and since it figures in it as integrated with that which is the proper work of the theologian, it finds itself included within the formal object of theology and becomes theological in its own right." Aquinas says that there is no "mixture" between the water of philosophy and the wine of theology, for there is no third substance. Rather, water is changed into wine under the influence of faith (In de Trin. 2.3 ad 5).

philosophy's origin, end and nature. The origin of this philosophy is the meditation on the scriptural notion of God;¹⁷⁶ its end is the same as its true object, viz. God,¹⁷⁷ and its nature is to isolate issues and develop answers under the influence of the guidance of revelation.¹⁷⁸

Philosophy's integrity within theology is said to be maintained through the procedure of deriving conclusions without the assistance of an act of faith.¹⁷⁹ Despite this independence of operation, Gilson says that without knowledge of its origin, end and nature, Christian philosophy loses its very meaning as an integral part of sacred science.¹⁸⁰

Gilson's adoption of the theological order in Christian philosophy is relevant to the problem of natural priority of esse to form for the following reasons. First, the starting point of metaphysics for Gilson is God, Who is identified as pure esse. Second, the metaphysical principle

¹⁷⁶ Gilson, Elements of Christian Philosophy pp. 131-132: "The problem under discussion now is: how did Thomas Aquinas achieve the awareness of the very possibility of this notion [viz., esse]?...This impasse is an invitation to us to give up the philosophical way - from creatures to God - and try the theological way - from God to creatures. Thomas Aquinas may well have first conceived the notion of an act of being (esse) in connection with God and them, starting from God, made use of it in his analysis of the metaphysical structure of composite substances...In order to reach the new metaphysical notion of being, which identifies it with its very act, one has only to accept the words of Scripture at their face value." J. Owens surmises how Gilson linked revelation and Aquinas' conception of existence, implicitly invoking Christian philosophy's origin: "...St. Thomas was led to his metaphysical starting point by meditating on a scriptural notion of God, interpreted against a Neoplatonic background. It may be the case, likewise, that to appreciate the philosophical force and understand the full metaphysical significance of this tenet, the easiest way - perhaps, one might insist, the psychologically indicated way - is to retrace the steps by which it emerged out of its original historic setting at a definite epoch of Christian theology..."

¹⁷⁷ Gilson, The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy (New York: Scribners Sons, 1940) p.80: "...for in raising our thoughts to the consideration of Him Who Is, Christianity revealed to metaphysics the true nature of its proper object. When, with Aristotle, a Christian defines metaphysics as the science of being as being, we may rest assured that he understands it always as the science of Being as Being, id cuius actus est esse, that is to say, God." Cf. The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas p. 16: "In a word, the real object of metaphysics is God."

¹⁷⁸ Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas p. 19: "...[Aquinas] affirms that, by passing along the road of revelation, reason sees truths which it might otherwise have overlooked. The traveller whom a guide has conducted to a mountain peak sees no less of the view because another has opened it up for him. The panorama is no less real because the helping hand of another has brought him to it." Owens notes that the most important object of philosophy which revelation uncovers is being. (See: J. Owens, "Aquinas - 'Darkness of Ignorance' in the Most Refined Notion of God" (Southwestern Journal of Philosophy 5 [1974] 109).

¹⁷⁹ The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas p. 9.

¹⁸⁰ The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas pp. 8-10. See pp. 8-9: "Could we then release Thomistic philosophy from its theological moorings without running the risk of not knowing its origin or its end, of altering its nature, and even of no longer grasping its meaning?..." Gilson expresses his opinion that all of the important topics in Aquinas' philosophical thought (e.g. the nature of being, God's existence and attributes, creation, man and morality) are treated exclusively in his theological works, while the commentaries on Aristotle contain less personal and profound insights. (*ibid.* p. 8)

of esse then becomes the subject of metaphysics, for being as being is the vantage point from which Being as Being is reached.¹⁸¹

In conclusion, Gilson's insistence on the theological order in Aquinas' metaphysics echoes the priority he assigns to esse over form in the first two issues above. Gilson perceived the priority of esse to form on both the finite and infinite levels. First, in God's nature, Gilson perceived the absorption of essence into pure esse in the attempt to avoid Platonism. Second, in his interpretation of finite esse as a dynamic "act" connoting a divine origin, in opposition to an Aristotelian "state" of facticity, Gilson made finite esse prior to form. Third, Gilson's concept of "theological method" or order in Aquinas' metaphysics points to the priority of esse in metaphysics' divine origin, nature and goal.

1.4 *Divine Causality and Similitude (Fabro)*

The third type of existentialist Thomism which stresses esse at the expense of form is found in Cornelio Fabro's presentation of Aquinas' theory of participation and causality.¹⁸²

"Participation", according to Aquinas, is the possession of an attribute in a partial, as opposed to a full, way.¹⁸³ While that which is participated in possesses the quality in a universal manner, that which participates possesses it in a particular way. While the theory of participation embraces both logical and categorical (subject/accident; matter/form) modes, it most often refers to the sharing of esse by the creature's essence, and to the creatures' sharing in God's esse by imitation and

¹⁸¹ Gilson, The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy p. 80: "...even his [viz. Aquinas'] general interpretation of Aristotle's metaphysics transcends the authentic Aristotelianism, for in raising our thoughts to the consideration of Him Who Is, Christianity revealed to metaphysics the true nature of its proper object. When, with Aristotle, a Christian defines metaphysics as the science of being as being, we may rest assured that he understands it always as the science of Being as Being: id cuius actus est esse, that is to say, God." Cf. The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas p. 16.

¹⁸² Fabro's main work in this area is La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tomaso d'Aquino (Milan: Vita et pensiero, 1939). Cf. the third edition (Turin: Societa editrice internazionale, 1960) and the French version, Participation et causalité selon S. Thomas d'Aquin (Louvain: Publications universitaires de Louvain, 1961). Fabro's articles in the area also include "Un Itinéraire de S. Thomas: l'établissement de la distinction réelle entre essence et existence" (Revue de philosophie 39 [1939] 285-319); "The Transcendentality of Ens-Esse and the Ground of Metaphysics" (International Philosophical Quarterly 6 [1966] 389-427); "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation" (Review of Metaphysics 27 [1974] 449-491). William Hoye's work Actualitas Omnium Actuum: Man's Beatific Vision of God as Apprehended by Thomas Aquinas (Anton Hain: Meisenheim am Glan, 1975) shows close affinity to Fabro (passim).

¹⁸³ In II De Caelo l. 18 #463; S.T. I 108.5.

causality.¹⁸⁴ Aquinas' theory of participation in esse delineates the God/creature distinction, and entails the real distinction of essence and existence in creatures.¹⁸⁵ In perhaps the most systematic, historical and doctrinal treatment of the ancestry of Aquinas' metaphysics available, Fabro traces the terminological and philosophical confusion over the meaning of esse in metaphysics in the followers and interpreters of Aquinas.¹⁸⁶ He strongly objects to the identification of esse as metaphysical act with the more modern "existence" terminology,¹⁸⁷ and rests Aquinas' theory of participation on the "intensive" act of esse which embraces and contains all perfection.

The priority that Fabro assigns to esse is found in three broad considerations: a) his reduction of all types of causality to divine efficient causality;¹⁸⁸ b) his discussion of esse as the term of creation, and c) his view on the starting point and subject matter of metaphysics. The first issue (divine causality) also includes the following issues: i) Fabro's notion of "metaphysical hierarchy" and the role of esse in establishing order; ii) the relation between what he calls "predicamental" and "transcendental" hierarchy,¹⁸⁹ and iii) the status of esse as the divine name. The second issue (esse as the term of creation) in turn includes the following issues: i) the distinction between facticity or "existence", on the one hand, and intensive actuality ("esse intensif"), on the other, and ii) the relation between ens and esse for Fabro. The third issue (the starting point and subject of metaphysics) concerns the relationship of form and esse in the metaphysical knowledge of being.

¹⁸⁴ In de Hebd. l.2. In S.T., the question of participation is closely linked to that of analogical predication and the names of God.

¹⁸⁵ On the God/creature distinction and the participation of esse, and the real distinction as related to participation, see Quodl. II, 2, 1; II, 2, 3; De spirit. creat. I, 1; In De div. nom. IV, l. 14 (#476); De ente V. In In De Hebdomabidus l. 2, Aquinas interprets Boethius' axiom "esse et id quod est diversum sunt" in light of his own esse/essence distinction. Since it is abstract, esse cannot participate, while the concrete subject id quod est can participate. On this topic, see John Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and Participation" in J. Wippel, Studies in Medieval Philosophy [Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy] Vol. 17 (C.U.A. Press, 1988), 117-58.

¹⁸⁶ Fabro, Participation et causalité pp. 179-315. In the same work, Fabro details the influences on Aquinas (especially Plato's theory of participation, Aristotle's immanence of act and form, and Avicenna's real distinction of existence and essence [pp. 87-177]) and analyses the various types of causality at work in his metaphysics (pp. 319-640).

¹⁸⁷ Participation et causalité... pp. 62-63; 286, for example.

¹⁸⁸ This reduction is also the emphasis of one of Fabro's students, W. Hoye, in his book Actualitas Omnium Actuum: Man's Beatific Vision of God as Apprehended by Thomas Aquinas (Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1975), p. 107, e.g.

¹⁸⁹ Fabro, Participation et causalité... Pt. II, sections 1-3.

1.4.1 *Divine Efficient Causality*

Regarding Fabro's reduction of all types of causality to divine efficient causality, the first issue involved is the role of esse in establishing metaphysical hierarchy. In his attempt to isolate a principle of similitude between God and creatures, Fabro cites esse as the index of perfection and agent of metaphysical hierarchy. The basis of Fabro's position on esse as the ordering agent stems from the fact that only in analogy (versus univocity) is there an order of prior and posterior.¹⁹⁰

Univocal causality points to specific identity or equality in being between cause and effect, whereas analogical causality occurs where the cause is superior to the effect, as causal of its species.¹⁹¹ Now, whereas univocal causality is formal, that is, of particular individuals within a species, analogical causality is existential, in that the cause gives being to the species as a whole.¹⁹² Universal efficient causality is thus prior to particular formal causality. Although this is not the way in which analogical and univocal causality differ in the texts of Aquinas, since analogical causality is both formal and efficient, as is univocal causality, there are points in Fabro's presentation which could lead one to this erroneous interpretation. Predicamental participation involves inequality only on the level of esse, for there is a perfect community of nature.¹⁹³ Since esse is the main principle on the transcendental level, and analogy refers primarily to the vertical causation of being, Fabro reasons that all being "is" only "in relation to esse".¹⁹⁴

According to Fabro, the only metaphysical hierarchy in the universe is attained by the "diremption" of esse and the return of all beings to esse's plenitude, of which the being as id quod est is esse's first "fall".¹⁹⁵ Esse is seen as the ordering agent in the universe by virtue of its

¹⁹⁰ On the other hand, univocal participation refers to the actualisation of the genus in the species by means of the specific difference, where the participated genus belongs wholly to each of its participating species (and individuals), analogical participation refers to the "more or less" actualisation of a perfection by the participants. See C.G. I, 32; S.T. I-II 88.1 ad 1.

¹⁹¹ On the superiority of the analogical cause, as containing the perfection of the effect to a greater degree than its presence in the effect, see: S.T. I 4.2.

¹⁹² Fabro links universal analogical causality with efficient causality of esse, and contrasts this with formal causality on the finite level. While there is evidence for this, in Aquinas' many texts which link the "universal cause" with the "most universal effect", namely, esse (e.g. De pot. 7.2; C.G. II 15; S.T. I 45.4; 44.2), we will argue that universal analogical causality is also exemplar, and not just efficient, if the term of creation is to be the totum ens subsistens, as Aquinas says it is (S.T. I 3.1c).

¹⁹³ In 1 Sent. d. 35, q.1 a.4.

¹⁹⁴ "Intensive Hermeneutics..." p. 485.

¹⁹⁵ Participation et causalité p. 243ff. See p. 243: "Le cheminement de la vérité est donc le développement de l'esse dans les entia, l'expansion de son unité formelle dans la multiplicité réelle des diverses formes d'être; c'est ce que nous pouvons appeler la sortie de soi de l'esse, dans les étants précisément; c'est la division de l'esse ou ce que Hegel appelle dans une formule admirable la

foundational nature as more profound than accidents or substance.¹⁹⁶ It is esse's identity as esse per essentiam in God (the “transcendental” order) that establishes its function as ordering agent,¹⁹⁷ and this role will be seen to exhibit an important sense of esse's natural priority.

The second issue involved in divine causality is Fabro's view of the primacy of the “transcendental” in opposition to the “predicamental” order,¹⁹⁸ a distinction which is closely related to Aquinas' theory of creation.¹⁹⁹ Predicamental causality corresponds to the composition of matter and form and of substance and accident, while transcendental causality refers to the composition of esse and essence, which involves the total dependence in being and in acting, of the creature upon the Creator.²⁰⁰ Because the transcendental causation of esse extends to conservation and action, Fabro sees the relation between transcendental and predicamental levels as one of intensive infinite actuality to its determined particularised instances, where esse's plenitude contains and actualises every other act.²⁰¹ In short, the priority of the transcendental to the predicamental order lies in esse's containment and grounding of all particular perfections, according to Fabro.²⁰²

'Diremption' de l'être en lui-même. Et le cheminement de la vérité c'est encore le développement de l'esse comme 'intensification' de soi dans les êtres, comme montée, progrès et achèvement vers cette plenitude que l'esse est en soi et pour soi depuis le commencement mais qui ne se manifeste qu'à la fin, dans le 'retour' des étants à l'être...L'ens est le concret, l'esse l'abstrait. L'ens est l'id quod est, ou mieux l'id quod habet esse, ou mieux encore id quod finite participat esse. L'étant au sens propre indique la première et fondamentale 'chute' de l'esse...”

¹⁹⁶ “The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation” Review of Metaphysics 27 (1974) p. 486: “The metaphysical determination of esse as actus essendi in the sense of act of all acts, is proper to Aquinas and constitutes the transcendental foundation of the metaphysics of participation. This has been discovered by the strictly metaphysical method of resolution or reduction (per resolutionem or per reductionem), as Aquinas often calls it, of accidental predicamental acts to substantial form and of both accidental and substantial acts to the more profound substantial act which is esse.”

¹⁹⁷ “The transition from the predicamental to the transcendental order is made solely through the intensive emergent esse, which is the only transcendental medium” (“Intensive Hermeneutics...” p. 486).

¹⁹⁸ See Fabro, Participation et causalité... Pt. II, S. 1-3.

¹⁹⁹ The relation between transcendental and predicamental causality and creation will be detailed in the discussion below, on Fabro's theory of esse as the term of creation.

²⁰⁰ Participation et causalité pp. 363-364.

²⁰¹ Participation et causalité p. 508: “...l'esse cause par Dieu signifie l'indetermination de plenitude et d'actualité; c'est l'acte qui actualise tout autre acte substantiel et accidentel, et qui est presuppose afin que que toute autre chose soit en acte et puisse agir...la naissance des actes particuliers...jaillissant de l'énergie de l'acte fondamental commun de l'esse. Cette détermination est à la fois effet et limitation de la plenitude originaire de l'esse commune...l'esse est l'acte premier intensif qui embrasse et contient tout.”

²⁰² Participation et causalité p. 508. Fabro attributes this central notion of thomist metaphysics to Pseudo-Dionysius: “La source principale de la notion thomiste d'esse intensif est donc avant tout le mystérieux Auteur des Areopagita” (*ibid.* p. 229). Cf. A. Solignac, “La doctrine de l'esse chez saint Thomas: est-elle d'origine néoplatonicienne?” Archives de Philosophie 30 (1967) p. 448.

Thus, Fabro argues that transcendental causality, or divine causality of esse, is prior to predicamental causality, or the causality of esse by finite form. The priority is guaranteed for two reasons: i) the higher cause has the greater universality (a Neoplatonic axiom) in the sense of having a greater number of effects;²⁰³ ii) God is the “intrinsic” cause of things as giving them their power of acting.²⁰⁴ The causal priority of God is expressed by Fabro as a “*resolutio*” to “*la causalité universelle et totale de Dieu*”,²⁰⁵ or to the intensive, emergent act of Being. All perfections are found in the first instance of being (God), from whom springs created esse and created causality. In his section on transcendental causality, Fabro limits his discussion to God’s efficient causality on the level of creation and conservation, and neglects exemplar causality.²⁰⁶ The intimacy of form and esse appear only on the predicamental level, even though he admits that divine causality is the immediate origin of both essence and esse.²⁰⁷

²⁰³ Found in Quodlibet III 3,6, for example: “...Secundum Platonicos, [quia] quanto aliqua causa est altior, tanto eius causalitas ad plura se extendit. Unde ut in effectibus id quod ad plura se habet ad superiorem causam referatur...Formae posteriores sunt ab inferioribus agentibus, priores vero et communiore a superioribus.” See Participation et causalité pp. 366-367. On the universal extension of a cause being the justification for the priority of the transcendental to the predicamental order, see Participation et causalité pp. 397-409.

²⁰⁴ Participation et causalité p. 400.

²⁰⁵ Participation et causalité p. 406. On the difference between finite esse and “*esse intensif*”, which is God’s efficient causality and presence in creatures, according to Fabro, see R. McNemy, “Esse ut Actus Intensivus”, in R. McNemy, ed. Being and Predication, Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy Vol. 16 (Washington D.C.: C.U.A. Press, 1986), pp. 229-236. McNemy studies the stages of conceptualisation of ens according to Fabro, and criticizes the latter’s view that Ipsum Esse is known in an all-inclusive concept containing all perfection. For a more general analysis of Fabro’s deduction of the concept of “*esse intensif*”, see: Helen James John, “The Emergence of the Act of Existing in Recent Thomism” International Philosophical Quarterly 2 (1962). pp. 604-605.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Fabro, “Un itinéraire de S. Thomas” Revue de philosophie 34 (1939), p. 302: “...the forms from which it [viz. esse] is really distinct and to which it is only lent, set a limit upon its capacity for indefinite expansion, compelling it to adapt itself to their formal status, and to insert its perfecting only in the line of their perfection.” (Tr. H. James John, “The Act of Existing...” p. 605. While this phrase only refers to being as found in the concrete, and not the abstract, there is evidence that Fabro limits essence as found in the transcendental order to its logical significance, as the “fullness of intelligibility” (Fabro, Participation et causalité Pt. II S. 3. Cf. H. James John, “The Act of Existing...” pp. 604-605. Even in the predicamental order, where essence is given a positive metaphysical content, as “that which has esse” (See De ente et essentia c. 1), Fabro also makes it designate an idea devoid of formal content, - “the idea of minimum comprehension and maximum extension” (“John” p. 605). Essence gains positive intelligible content only in the “causal dialectic” as a concrete realisation of esse’s perfection. Essence is thus a positing of a particular perfection, dependent both metaphysically and intelligibly on transcendent esse. We will see that Geiger presents a view of essence as a positive metaphysical principle not only in the predicamental order (Fabro) but also in the transcendental order of real perfection.

²⁰⁷ Participation et causalité p. 375. However, he says in the same breath that esse is the exclusive effect of God, “*parce que précisément terme propre de création*” (p. 375), quoting In de Causis, Prop. V: “*Prima rerum creaturarum est esse*”.

By virtue of its association with transcendental or creative causality, esse alone is the mediator between the transcendental and predicamental orders, Fabro adds.²⁰⁸ The causality of form in relation to esse (expressed in the phrase “forma dat esse”) occurs only on the predicamental level, presumably because Fabro sees form only “in relation to esse”, whereas he sees esse as ens per se.

The third issue involved in Fabro’s concept of divine causality is the status of esse as a divine name. The name “esse” applied to God refers to esse as esse ut actus, perfectio separata, or Ipsium Esse Subsistens, and not to esse commune or esse in actu,²⁰⁹ which commences metaphysics. The act which is known first as “most common” becomes, through a dialectical ascent through the various types of esse, the most intensive act exhibiting both the greatest extension (plenitude) and intension (perfection and causality).²¹⁰ Echoing esse as the similitude linking the predicamental and transcendental orders is the concept of esse used here which covers both the common predicamental act and the intensive separate subsistent plenitude. Unfortunately, Fabro fails to explain how the identity between the two senses of esse (esse in actu [predicamental] and esse ut actus [transcendental])²¹¹ coincide,²¹² but says only that they are linked by a process called “resolution”.²¹³

²⁰⁸ “Intensive Hermeneutics” pp. 485-486.

²⁰⁹ The distinction between esse in actu and esse ut actus is explained in the analysis which follows.

²¹⁰ Participation et causalité p. 252: “La perspective propre à l’analyse métaphysique, c’est que le point de départ et le point d’arrivée coïncident effectivement: le départ est l’esse comme acte de l’ens et l’arrivée est l’esse comme acte des actes et perfection de toutes les perfections. L’esse qui est au départ, l’acte le plus commune, se manifeste à la fin comme acte le plus intense, qui transcende tous les actes et doit les engendrer de l’éternelle et inépuisable profondeur de sa plenitude.”

²¹¹ Fabro distinguishes esse in actu from “esse intensif” or esse ut actus [intensivus] by saying that while judgment grasps the factual existence of things (esse in actu), only resolution transcends the predicamental act and reaches divine causality, or the unlimited plenitude of being. See Participation et causalité p. 79: “...entre la première notion de l’ens, à l’aube de la pensée, et la notion technique d’esse de la ‘résolutio’ métaphysique, il y a au moins un double passage. En premier lieu: de la notion initiale confuse d’ens en général à la notion méthodologique de l’ens comme ‘id quod habet esse’ selon une dualité explicite de sujet (essentia) et d’acte (esse). Aristote s’en tient là, tandis que saint Thomas poursuit jusqu’à la détermination de l’esse comme acte ultime transcendantal, qui est l’objet propre et immédiat de la causalité divine.”

²¹² We will return to this and other problems implied in this position in our analysis of Fabro in chapter five below.

²¹³ Participation et causalité p. 79. Cf. p. 80: “...la méthode métaphysique thomiste n’est ni intuitive, ni démonstrative, mais ‘résolutive’; ce qui veut dire qu’elle procède des déterminations plus vagues aux déterminations plus propres, d’acte à acte, de puissance à puissance, des actes multiples et superficiels aux actes plus constants et profonds, et ainsi jusqu’au dernier ou premier qui est l’esse. Cette forme de ‘passage’...pourrait être appelée ‘fondation’...”

Esse is seen by Fabro as the most appropriate divine name because of its identity as infinite plenitude of perfection which precontains all determinations of being eminently.²¹⁴ Esse gains this status, however, only if the least determinate and restricted mode of perfection signified by esse is in fact also the highest mode of being. An inquiry into whether this is in fact the case demands an analysis of the relation between the notion of God as He Who Is and that of esse as the first of all created perfections, as well as of the relation between esse as a divine name and our imperfect power of cognition.²¹⁵

1.4.2 *Esse as the Term of Creation*

The second main issue in Fabro's theory of divine causality is his notion of esse as the term of creation. While Fabro does admit that created essences stem from the divine essence through exemplarity,²¹⁶ he insists that esse alone is the proper terminus of transcendent causality (creation, conservation) because as the most universal effect, esse requires a universal cause,²¹⁷ because God operates immediately in created agents through their esse²¹⁸ and because esse is the basis of all other perfections.²¹⁹ After a preliminary discussion of Fabro's notion of esse ut actus intensivus we will return to these three considerations.

Fabro and his followers²²⁰ identify esse as the term of creation as part of an effort to associate esse with degrees of perfection in contrast to "existence" or mere facticity. According to Fabro, "...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."²²¹ Fabro describes his introduction of "esse intensif" as Aquinas' joining of Platonic separatism (connoting transcendence) and

²¹⁴ Participation et causalité p. 252.

²¹⁵ This question will be taken up in our analysis of Fabro in the final chapter below.

²¹⁶ "Intensive Hermeneutics" p. 473: "...the transcendental aspect of creation affects the whole finite being in its actual reality, its essence as well as its esse..." He goes on to say that the metaphysical status of essence is subordinated to esse, because of the identity of God's essence with the divine ideas.

²¹⁷ Participation et causalité... p. 365; cf. pp. 370-74.

²¹⁸ Fabro, "Intensive Hermeneutics..." p. 474.

²¹⁹ Participation et causalité p. 373. The notion of esse as the "transcendental mediator", or link between God and creature, is entailed by Fabro's theory of creation, since the notion of a mediating cause stems from God being the most intimate cause, as cause of a thing's esse. See Participation et causalité... pp. 406-9, e.g.

²²⁰ For example, William Hoye (Actualitas Omnium Actuum...) and Connor ("From Existence to Esse").

²²¹ "Intensive Hermeneutics..." p. 470.

Aristotle's formal act (connoting immanentism) and transcending them in his (Aquinas') theory of participation in esse, the separate and infinite plenitude of perfection in God which has metaphysical priority.²²²

While "esse intensif" is reached through a metaphysical process called "resolution",²²³ existence is said to be the term of judgment. While esse signifies degrees of being in relation to

²²² Participation et causalité... p. 252: "L'esse qui est au départ, l'acte le plus commun, se manifeste à la fin comme l'acte le plus intense, qui transcende tous les actes et doit les engendrer de l'éternelle et inépuisable profondeur de sa plenitude. La conquête thomiste de l'esse intensif naît d'une heureuse convergence de platonisme et d'aristotélisme qui comporte, en la forme la plus paradoxale, le renversement du front de combat des deux orientations: le séparatisme platonicien produit précisément l'esse intensif, qui est l'unique forme séparée subsistante parce qu'elle constitue l'essence et la définition de Dieu, lequel n'a ni essence ni définition; l'immanentisme aristotélicien de l'acte dans la puissance permet d'abord la conception de l'esse comme acte participé, et ensuite l'émergence absolue de l'esse comme Acte pur, qui est la 'qualité métaphysique' incommunicable de l'esse par essence." Cf. p. 222, where Fabro indicates that Aquinas' "revolution" of esse into esse ut actus intensivus, occurred through Pseudo-Dionysius' and Proclus' notion of esse as the most simple and effusive act which contains all perfections. Other references to esse ut actus intensivus in Participation et Causalité include his notation of De ver. 29.3 (p. 253 #18), his explanation of "esse intensif"'s relation to the subject of metaphysics (p. 268) and his distinction of "esse intensif" and the facticity of existence (p. 405, e.g.), for instance. Fabro's tracing of the notion of esse as plenitude of perfection to Pseudo-Dionysius is echoed by Fran O'Rourke (Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas [Brill: Leiden, 1992], pp. 133-187).

²²³ Fabro describes the process as a movement from the most impoverished concept of being to the richest. The first concept of being is a confused grasp of being through formal abstraction; the second concept is the proportional notion of being, which is the subject of metaphysics. The final notion of being is a grasp of the fulness of actuality and intelligibility, known through "intensive" abstraction (where conceptual universality and real plenitude of perfection coincide). The process is also called reductio, as opposed to analysis or synthesis:

...the method proper to metaphysics is affirmed... The term reductio appears to be proper to St. Thomas and does not indicate so much a merely logical process of clarification of explicative resolution (resolvit) as rather the "return to the fundament" and therefore a process of intensive and comprehensive foundation that the rationalistic tradition in the West has completely forgotten.

(Fabro, "The Transcendentality of Ens-Esse and the Ground of Metaphysics" [International Philosophical Quarterly 6 (1966) 407-408]). The apparent contradiction in Fabro's description of metaphysics' method lies in his terminology. Sometimes he calls the method resolutio, and at other times, he calls it reductio, as in the passage above. In his article "Intensive Hermeneutics...", Fabro says that the "metaphysical determination of esse as actus essendi in the sense of act of all acts...has been discovered by the strictly metaphysical method of resolution or reduction" ("Intensive Hermeneutics..." p. 486). The "resolution" consists in the attainment of more profound acts, from accidental predicamental acts to substantial form and eventually to esse; the "reduction" is "an absolute reduction of the act of being by participation to the esse per essentiam" ("Intensive Hermeneutics" p. 486). Perhaps his use of resolutio also signifies the concrete, versus the abstract, use of "esse intensif", and in this way can be said to complement, not contradict, the sense of reductio above. Fabro's concrete sense of "esse intensif" is described by St. John as follows:

Considered in the abstract (that is, apart from the essences which specify it and so limit it), this act of being coincides with the esse maximum formale, the plenitude of formal and transcendental perfection, reached in the intensive abstraction...On the other hand, considered in

God, “existence” signifies Aquinas’ esse in rerum natura, or existence in the world, answering to a “yes or no” description.²²⁴ Esse ut actus intensivus carries the quantitative NeoPlatonic connotation for Aquinas, according to Fabro. “To the degree that a creature approaches God, to that extent does it possess being (quantum - tantum habet de esse); but to the degree that it is removed from God, to that extent is it affected with nonbeing (habet de non esse).”²²⁵ The fact that Aquinas also uses this description of esse in his treatment of the good,²²⁶ of perfection,²²⁷ and that De ente et essentia consists in a long description of the grades of essences in relation to their proximity to infinite esse²²⁸ indicates that the “quantitative” sense of esse is distant from the “locative” sense of existence as facticity.

Having detailed the concept of esse ut actus intensivus, we can now return to Fabro’s three reasons for stating that esse is the term of creation. His first reason was that esse requires a universal cause, as that cause’s “first effect”.²²⁹ This occurred partly through Fabro’s adoption of

the concrete, it is the act proper to a particular formality, and so that which is most perfect in each finite being, “its share of the divine splendor”...

(St. H. John, “The Emergence of the Act of Existing in Recent Thomism” [International Philosophical Quarterly 2 (1962) 605]. The term resolutio is translated as “analysis” by Wippel, and his discussion of it in terms of Aquinas’ In de Trin. 6.1 is found in his article “First Philosophy According to Thomas Aquinas” in his book Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas, Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy, Vol. 10 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1984) pp. 55-67.

²²⁴ J. Nijenhuis attempts to defend the view of Fabro by aligning the term “existence” its usage in contemporary English, where “to exist” takes on a locative, factual connotation. This meaning was adopted in the centuries following Aquinas and consisted in a “flattening” of the metaphysical richness of Aquinas’ original meaning of esse: “In classical Latin, the verb esse, incompletely rendered by today’s ‘to be’, was the word expressing what today is divided over the verbs ‘be’ and ‘exist’...When, by some mysterious process, the verb existere began to be used as the participle of esse, the inevitable apparently happened: the fuller meaning of esse, was gradually - and uncritically - transferred to existere. The etymology of ex(s)istere yields a simple sense, namely, ‘come out of’, ‘appear’ and ‘be there’, indicating yes-or-no situations; consequently, the richer meaning of Aquinas’s esse (the verb) was fated to become flattened to indicate the new late-Latin noun existentia...” (J. Nijenhuis, “Existence vs. Being: An All-Important Matter of Terminology” [P.A.C.P.Q. 69 (1995)] 94).

²²⁵ De ver. 2, 3 ad 16.

²²⁶ S.T. I 20.2: “Omnia existentia, in quantum sunt, bona sunt.”

²²⁷ S.T. I 5.3: “Omne enim ens, in quantum est ens, est in actu, et ‘quodammodo’ perfectum”. Aquinas’ treatment of perfection in relation to God occurs at S.T. I 4, but his discussion on goodness in question 5 also refers to perfection.

²²⁸ Cf. S.T. I 48.2: “Gradus in ipso esse inveniuntur”. For De ente et essentia’s reference to grades of potency and act, see, e.g. De ente c. 4 #29.

²²⁹ This reason is expressed in several texts, such as De pot. 3.5’s first argument for creation, and De subst. sep. 9’s argument against the Arab view that angels are not created. For the objector, causality is limited to hylemorphism, i.e. to the giving of form to matter, or to generation. Cf. S.T. I 61.1. The classic distinction of a two types of causality is found in In de Caus. l. 18, where causality is first per informationem, which is limited to the world of change, and second, is transcendental, or the causa universalis totius esse, where no preexistent subject is presupposed. Only in the latter type of causation,

the NeoPlatonic correspondence of “ontological emergence” and causal universality,²³⁰ which says that the most common effect (esse) must correspond to the primary cause (God), and second, through the De causis dictum that “esse is the first effect”.²³¹ This leads Fabro to the conclusion that the term of creation is, properly speaking, esse.

The second main reason Fabro advanced for his view that esse is the term of creation is that God operates immediately in creatures through their esse. This claim is directly connected to his discussion of the priority of transcendental to predicamental causality above, and can be explained in terms of the nature of divine presence.

Fabro lists the four modes of divine presence as found in De pot. 3.7, and stresses the principal causality of esse on the side of God.²³² In establishing the role of esse in relation to divine (or transcendental) causality, he discusses the priority of “principal” to “secondary” causality. Aquinas defines the principal cause as one which works by the power of its own form to produce an effect like itself, presupposing nothing and controlling the instrumental or secondary causes to its own purpose, while the secondary cause works dependently with the first cause, and can specify only the form, not the being, of the effect.²³³ The dominance of principal over secondary causality is justified, he says, by two points. First, there is the necessary correspondence of the universality of the extension of the effect and the universality of efficacy of the cause. Second, the first proposition of Liber de Causis states the primacy of esse to which all acts refer and attributes its cause to God.²³⁴ The paradox of universal divine presence to beings is that it

on the level of being, is the authentic meaning of “cause” displayed, as the giving of being to an effect. It should be noted that Aquinas does not always refer to the need for a common cause for a universal effect, in order to prove creation ex nihilo: S.T. I 44.1, a central text on creation, uses arguments from unity and simplicity as well.

²³⁰ ibid. pp. 366-67. The text quoted is Quodl. III, q. 3 a. 6: “...secundum Platonicos, quia quanto aliqua causa est altior, tanto eius causalitas ad plura se extendit...” Aquinas uses similar descriptions of esse in his arguments for creation, e.g. S.T. I 45.5: “esse est effectus universalissimus”; cf. In 2 Sent. 1.1.4: “esse est id quod est magis intimum”; S.T. I 8.1: “...et profundius inest”.

²³¹ ibid. pp. 387-88. The text cited is C.Th. c. 68: “Primus autem effectus Dei in rebus est ipsum esse, quod omnes alii effectus praesupponunt et supra fundantur.” The argument is as follows: “...Necesse est autem quod aliquo modo est, a Deo esse. In omnibus autem ordinatis hoc communiter invenitur, quod id quod est primum et perfectissimum in aliquo ordine, est causa eorum quae sunt post in ordine illo...Deus est primum et perfectissimum ens: unde oportet quod sit causa essendi omnibus quae esse habent.”

²³² Participation et causalité... pp. 400-402.

²³³ This distinction between causes is also described as the difference between the cause of “being” (esse) and the cause of “becoming” (fieri): S.T. I 104.1c. Cf. C.G. III 10 [15]; II 21; III 66, on the causation of being by God in conjunction with instrumental causes. Cf. In de causis l. 18. In S.T. III 62 and C.G. II 21, the secondary or instrumental cause is called a “moved mover”.

²³⁴ ibid., p. 401. Proposition one of Liber de Causis is: “Unde quarto modo unum est causa actionis alterius, sicut principale agens est causa actionis instrumenti: et hoc modo etiam oportet dicere quod

represents the largest metaphysical distance (finite vs. infinite) yet is most intimate, in the creature's dependence on it for being.²³⁵ Fabro's reading of *De pot.* 3.7 leads to his claim of a "resolutio" or reduction to *esse* as the transcendental ground for predicamental causality, this emergent "*esse intensif*" which is the divine efficient causality in creatures, this "mediateur transcendental".²³⁶ Four reasons can be found for this claim:²³⁷ a) God's causality of *esse* is the foundation of acting; b) finite causes limit or determine the *esse* which arises from God; c) there is an immediate interiority of divine causality in all creaturely causality; d) God's conservation of all powers and effects shows the totality of divine causality. These reasons parallel *De pot.* 3.7's four divine modes applied to creatures, viz., giving them powers, applying those powers to action, elevating the creature's action to attain *esse*, and conserving the powers.

The third main reason Fabro advances for the view that *esse* is the term of creation is the fact that *esse* is the basis of all other perfections. Fabro bases this idea on Aquinas' adoption of the NeoPlatonic principle of containment, which states that all perfections stem from divine causality. It is in virtue of *esse*'s commonness in the predicamental order, as the most basic of all perfections, that it is "the first effect". For, the meaning of *esse*'s primacy here is not temporal (since the principles of being are created together) but rather ontological, in that it serves as a "foundation" for all perfections.²³⁸ In Fabro's language, *esse* contains all perfections, and in this

Deus est causa omnis actionis rei naturalis", and Fabro notes (p. 401 #86) that it is used in the *De potentia* text.

²³⁵ *ibid.* p. 403. On divine presence, see *S.T.* I 105.5. The argument there definitely hinges on the notion that *esse* is divinely caused and so most intimate. But instead of relying exclusively on divine causality of *esse*, the article stresses the close alliance of the finite form and God's operation in the thing through *esse*, which becomes most formal. A similar text is found in *In Ep. ad Hebr.* c. IV, l. 2: "In ordine enim causarum videmus quod causa prior intimius operatur quam causa posterior. Unde illud quod natura producit, est intimius quam illud quod producit per artem. Quia ergo Deus est prima causa simpliciter, ideo eius operatione producit illud quod est intimius ipsi rei, scilicet esse eius."

²³⁶ *ibid.* p. 409. Fabro is careful here to note that this "pénétration de la causalité divine dans la créature" is not a mediator in the sense of existing in some way beyond Creator and creature, or of being a mediating efficient cause. If there is a mediator beyond God, it is the finite form, Aquinas insists. Participated *esse* is the term of creation, not a mediator between God and creature (*De ver.* 27.1 ad 3; ad 10).

²³⁷ *ibid.* pp. 406-407. Fabro's interpretation of Aquinas rests largely on the first proposition of *Liber de Causis*. God is seen as the "total" cause of *esse* as both intensively and extensively: *ibid.* pp. 500-504.

²³⁸ Aquinas' notion that the "interiority" or foundational aspect of *esse* is what makes it most universal, is a result of the causality of God as both an "agens intrinsecum et extrinsecum": *In 1 Sent.* d. 37 q. 3 a. 3 ad 3 and ad 4. God is presented here as giving creatures their *esse* and operations, whereas angels act on things only exteriorly. God alone acts as an interior agent, "quia agit creando". On *esse* as a causal foundation for all other perfections, see, e.g. *C.Th.* c. 68, where the first and most perfect in any order is said to be the cause of the rest in it. Cf. *C.G.* III 66. In her book *The Thomist Spectrum* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), Helen James John describes the role of *esse* as "foundation" in Fabro

way is the ground of all of them. Esse's status as foundation of all perfections also implies esse's containment of all perfections in the predicamental order, Fabro thinks, in that the term of creation includes the whole being of the creature, not only its existence but all which is ordered to existence, namely, matter, form, properties and other accidents.²³⁹

Fabro's distinction between existence and esse has already been illustrated, but his distinction between ens and esse is also involved in establishing esse as the term of creation. Fabro defines ens in terms of the combination of essence and esse, but credits esse alone with the intensive plenitude of being, while designating essence in terms of content.²⁴⁰

1.4.3 *The Subject of Metaphysics*

The final issue in Fabro's variety of existentialism concerns his description of the subject matter of metaphysics. Fabro's gradual development of the existence/esse distinction led him to change his opinion on the subject matter of metaphysics, from a more Aristotelian concept of the "proportional notion of being" (in the 1938 and 1950 editions of La Nozione Metafisica di Partecipazione) to his own uniquely "Thomistic" concept of esse ut actus intensivus, which was seen as less based on judgment (in the 1960 French edition of the same work, Participation et causalité).

In his earlier thought, Fabro conceived of a three stage development of the concept of being. The first step was a confused grasp of being through formal abstraction; the second step was the proportional notion of being which embraced essence and esse, which formed the subject matter of metaphysics. Finally, the third stage culminated in the grasp of esse ut actus intensivus by way of "intensive abstraction".²⁴¹ In the later version of his book, In de Trinitate 5.3 was

in its epistemological sense as the search for causes: "...the process described in Partecipazione as "intensive reflection" is seen as a process of "foundation". It leads at length to the emergence in the mind of the ultimate act of being, but only in a kind of "implicit intuition" - an awareness of the "co-presence" of esse in every presence" (p. 99). She ultimately links Fabro's understanding of esse to Heidegger's notion of "Sein" in the same work.

²³⁹ See, for example S.T. I 44.2.

²⁴⁰ "...ens is not simply essentia or esse; rather it is the self-givenness in act of their synthesis..." (Fabro, "The Transcendentality of Ens-Esse and the Ground of Metaphysics" [International Philosophical Quarterly 6 (1966) 404]. The transcendentals are said to be "contained" in ens because of ens's order to the act of being (p. 411), yet in the text quoted (De ver. I, 1), the term res signifies the quiddity or essence, in contrast to ens, which follows on the actus essendi. Also, he says that it is esse which "transcends...every content and form, in order to establish it [viz. esse] as the 'universal container'" (p. 417). Essence signifies content in contrast to actuality (p. 411), he adds.

²⁴¹ See La Nozione Metafisica di Partecipazione (2nd ed., 1950) pp. 129-140.

abandoned due its emphasis on judgment's grasp of things' factual existence, which Fabro came to view as nonmetaphysical.²⁴² Instead, metaphysics is said to be governed by a process of "resolution" which extends beyond esse in actu to the unlimited plenitude of being, esse ut actus, which is its subject. Esse appears here as the term of a process of "foundation", as "the act grounding every presence"²⁴³ which transcends the levels of perception and judgment, the "climax and...foundation of every other aspect of being in its relation to reality...the proper object of metaphysical consideration and the exclusive good of Thomist metaphysics."²⁴⁴

Fabro's theory of the subject of metaphysics resulted from the following implicit argument: Ens includes both content (form) and act (esse). Although form can be abstracted, esse cannot. Thus, ens is not abstracted. Since ens also includes form, however, ens cannot be simply the term of judgment, even of the negative judgment of separatio. Thus, the subject matter of metaphysics, (ens) is known through a third act, called "conjoint apprehension".

1.5 *The Case for Esse's "Natural Priority" to Form in Thomist Existentialism*

In this chapter, we analysed ten characteristics of existentialist Thomists' conception of esse, and presented the arguments of "modalist" existentialism, "theological" existentialism and "divine causality" centred existentialism. Now we must examine the way in which these varieties of Thomism maintain that esse is prior to other metaphysical principles, and briefly explain the way in which they utilize a notion of "natural" priority.

The introduction of this thesis²⁴⁵ indicated that the historical impetus for existentialist Thomism developed within a creationist framework where essence denoted limitation of infinite esse. Not suprisingly, all varieties of existentialist Thomism adopt the view, albeit implicitly, that finite esse (as well as infinite esse) is "naturally prior" to form and other metaphysical principles. In chapters two and three below the concept of "natural priority" will be analysed in detail, but it is

²⁴² Participation et causalité pp. 75-79. See p. 79: "...entre la première notion de l'ens, à l'aube de la métaphysique, il y a au moins un double passage. En premier lieu: de la notion initiale confuse d'ens en général à la notion méthodologique de l'ens comme 'id quod est, quod habet esse' selon une dualité explicite de sujet (essentia) et d'acte (esse). Aristote s'en tient la, tandis que saint Thomas poursuit jusqu'à la détermination de l'esse comme acte ultime transcendantal, qui est l'objet propre et immédiat de la causalité divine."

²⁴³ Participation et causalité p. 80.

²⁴⁴ Participation et causalité p. 76: "...le point de convergence, d'aboutissement et de fondation de tout autre aspect de l'être dans son rapport à la réalité...l'objet propre de la considération métaphysique et le bien exclusif de la métaphysique thomiste".

²⁴⁵ Also, see chapter one, section 1.1.

first necessary to present a general explanation to determine how the concept functions in Carlo's, Gilson's and Fabro's theories.

For Aquinas, the concept of natural priority encompasses five different notes, which can be summarised as follows. First, there is the note of "separability", which means that the thing which is naturally prior in relation to another is separable in being from it. Second, there is the note of "absoluteness", which means that the thing which is naturally prior to another is more universal, more intelligible in itself and more actual than the other. Third, there is the note of "perfection", which means that the naturally prior thing is more perfect and actual, although not first in generation and time, in relation to the other. Fourth, there is the note of "proximity in relation to a principle", which means that the naturally prior thing must be closer to an independent principle than that which follows it. Fifth, there is the note of "origin", which means that the naturally prior thing stands in a relation of causal origin to the other. Aquinas combines these notes in various ways, and existentialist Thomists adopt different notes in their discussions of the role of esse in creatures.

Modalist existentialists such as Carlo use the third ("perfection") and fourth ("proximity to a principle") senses of natural priority in particular, but also invoke the first ("separability") and fifth ("origin") senses. The basic ideas present in Carlo's argument are esse's identity as the sum of perfections, as infinite being in contrast to essence, and finally, the similitude between God and creatures and the unity of metaphysics.

Esse's identity as the sum of perfections illustrates natural priority as perfection and actuality, as does the exclusive alliance of esse and infinity. The insistence that all esse is infinite led Carlo to adopt God as the starting point of metaphysics, and Carlo argues from the identity of infinity of esse in God to the perfection of esse in creatures. Essence is a sign neither of perfection nor of intelligibility, and esse is the origin and principle approximated by form and matter. Esse is adopted as the principle both of similitude between God and creature, and of the unity of metaphysics. The relation of "natural priority" between esse and form is more one of "reducibility" or collapse of all metaphysical principles into esse, for Carlo.

Finally, Carlo invokes natural priority as "proximity to a principle" and as "origin". The view that all beings and principles of being are "modes" of esse means that being consists in various degrees of perfection in relation to Ipsum Esse, where "modes" are said to be forms and other "limits" of esse. The confusion of esse commune and Ipsum Esse not only reverberates

through the discussion of the subject of metaphysics, but also through a panentheistic vision of creative origin and metaphysical hierarchy.

The second variety of existentialist Thomism discussed was Gilson's "theological" existentialism. The first component of this theory consisted in an analysis of God's essence. God's identity as perfect and subsistent esse combined natural priority as "perfection" and as "separability", and essence's status as mere creaturely limitation revealed a use of natural priority "in relation to a principle". Gilson's view of the priority of God's existence to the real distinction, and his view that esse is actual and "separate" as attained by judgment, while "form" relates to the concept, are also involved in his existentialism.

The second element of Gilson's theory is his distinction between Aristotelian substance and Aquinas' esse. Here, natural priority as "origin" is involved in the statement that esse connotes divine influx and origin, in contrast to Aristotle's ousia, which is imported in an intact manner into Aquinas' metaphysics. Natural priority as "absolute" and as "perfection" is involved in his esse/existence distinction, where esse connoted metaphysical plenitude, in contrast to existence, which signified static "facticity".

Finally, Gilson's view of "theological order" in metaphysics revealed all five senses of natural priority. The natural priority of Ipsium Esse to creation revealed natural priority as "origin", and as "separability", and the real distinction following the analysis of God invoked the natural priority of esse to form as "perfection". The propaedeutic order revealed that Christian revelation ought to precede Greek revelation, such that natural priority in terms of God's "separability" was in order. Finally, the role of theology as "guide" in relation to philosophy meant that the revelation of God as naturally prior ("separate esse") established the starting point of metaphysics as esse. Esse has priority in metaphysics' divine origin, nature and goal, according to Gilson, and the natural priority of esse to form is established through a deduction from the nature of infinite being to the relation of esse and form in creatures.

The final variety of existentialist Thomism is developed by Fabro. His theory covers three areas, namely, divine efficient causality, the term of creation, and the subject of metaphysics. His discussions of divine efficient causality included treatments of metaphysical hierarchy, the relation of the predicamental and transcendental orders, and esse as a divine name. In discussing metaphysical hierarchy, Fabro uses the concept of natural priority as "proximity to a principle", for all being "is" only in relation to esse. Further, esse has a natural priority as the source and "origin" of all being, and as the sole metaphysical principle of perfection, esse is the principle of similitude

between God and creature. His theory of esse as intensive plenitude reflects esse's natural priority as full actuality and perfection, and natural priority as "origin", in contrast to the mere "facticity" of (Aristotelian) existence.

Fabro's discussion of the priority of the transcendental to the predicamental order involved natural priority as "origin", in that creation is seen as prior to all other types of causality. Also, the separability criterion is used in his discussion of esse as perfectio separata,²⁴⁶ in contrast to participation in form, which is merely logical.²⁴⁷ Esse's intensive plenitude which grounds all acts possesses the sense of natural priority as "absolute", for the greater universality must have a higher cause, he says, and universal efficient causality is seen as prior to particular formal causality.

Finally, Fabro's discussion of esse as a divine name involves all five senses of natural priority. Esse as applied to God signifies perfectio separata, universal perfection, primacy in being, the first principle of being and knowledge, and unique causal origin. In particular, esse is the most appropriate divine name due to its natural priority in the second sense, viz., as absolute and universal, and in the third sense, viz. as the plenitude of perfections. Whereas the NeoPlatonists gave the first principle of being a priority of universality, Aquinas gives it both a priority of universality and of causality, as Creator.

The second main issue in Fabro's theory of esse is his position on esse as the term of creation. Here, natural priority as "separability", "perfection" and "origin" are at work, since transcendent esse, in contrast to existence, establishes degrees of perfection in the universe. Esse as intensive act also signifies natural priority as "proximity to a principle", since it carries a NeoPlatonic quantitative connotation in establishing metaphysical hierarchy. "Absolute" natural priority is also at work, since the most common effect (esse) requires the most universal cause (Ipsium Esse).

The final main issue in Fabro's theory of esse is his view on the subject matter of metaphysics. Natural priority as "perfection" is operative in this discussion, where Fabro abandons "Aristotelian" ens commune as the subject matter and adopts esse ut actus intensivus instead. Natural priority as "origin" is illustrated in his blending of the finite and infinite realms here, where he describes this esse as the "act grounding every presence", and as the "climax and foundation of being".

²⁴⁶ See Fabro, "Intensive Hermeneutics..." pp. 467-468; Participation et Causalité p. 258.

²⁴⁷ Although Fabro's article "Intensive Hermeneutics" attempts to explain the real participation of forms in esse and analogy, we have seen that Fabro often "logicizes" the transcendental/predicamental

In conclusion, all varieties of existentialist Thomism use all the notes of the concept of natural priority as found in Aquinas, but neither explicitly appeal to the concept nor determine the connections between the various notes. The commonality between the three theories presented by Carlo, Gilson and Fabro is the deduction of creaturely perfections and priorities from an analysis of divine being, and the effort to relate the finite and infinite orders through a principle of similitude. Now it is necessary to turn to an analysis of the concept of natural priority in Aquinas and his predecessors.

relationship, and minimizes the role of form in his discussions of causality and hierarchy.

Chapter 2

THE PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND TO AQUINAS' THEORY OF NATURAL PRIORITY

Chapter one analysed three types of arguments for the primacy of existence within Aquinas' metaphysics, and drew out the implications of this position for his theories of God, causality and substance. Now it is necessary to discover the basis of the relation of priority within being, and to determine whether the root meaning of perfection for Aquinas lies more in the metaphysical principle of form or existence, or in their combination. The discussion of the various senses of natural priority within Aquinas, as he built on the thought of Plato and Aristotle, is the basis for understanding Aquinas' analogous senses of "act", in its role as both the source of distinction and order in the universe, as well as a sign of the plenitude and perfection of infinite being. The argument of this chapter will prove that taken in itself, form cannot be subordinated to existence as a metaphysical principle. Thus, the metaphysical relation of priority is examined more closely in order to further define the roles of form and esse in creatures.

This chapter presents the view that Aquinas reconciles Plato's sense of natural priority with that of Aristotle, and defines it in relation to a causal principle. In a way analogous to Aristotle's transformation of Plato's theory of natural priority into a doctrine of substance, Aquinas extended Aristotle's theory of natural priority into a theory of causal principles, in relation to God and creatures. Thus, the relationships of causality within the created order and between God and creation, are more clearly exhibited in Aquinas' metaphysics than in that of the Greeks. Aquinas is seen to overcome certain contradictions within Aristotle's presentation of natural priority and to argue against Plato's concept of natural priority which became known to Aquinas as the "via Platonica". Within Aquinas' own theory, we conclude that God is the primary application of natural priority, and that "proper" or essential causes are not always identified with naturally prior principles, although still closely related to them. Finally, the naturally prior principles are found in substantial being, which he identifies primarily with form, in the Commentary on Aristotle's "Metaphysics".

2.1 The concept “prior” as a function of that of “order”

The general notion of order as Aquinas understood it is central to his theory of natural priority. There are two main reasons for this: First, priority is a condition of order. Second, the second type of order which Aquinas posits in the universe, namely, causal order in relation to God, illustrates the most important type of natural priority, which involves causal dependence. It is within the context of creation, conservation and God’s relation to creatures that Aquinas understands Aristotle’s theory of relation and priority and posteriority.¹

Aristotle defines “order” as the disposition of a thing having parts, which occurs according to place, power and species.² Order is understood in terms of relation, both within a thing or among things. Aristotle defines relation as follows: “Those things are called relative, which, being either said to be of something else or related to something else, are explained by reference to that other thing.”³ In fact, “relation” is a generic term for order according to Aquinas.⁴ His notion of order builds on Cicero⁵ and on a similar definition of St. Augustine which states that order is “an arrangement of like and unlike things whereby each of them is disposed in its proper place.”⁶ In determining the reference of natural priority it is central to recall that for Aquinas, order is both within the categories and also transcendental, for it

¹ Aquinas defines creation and conservation in terms of relation: De pot. 3.3 ad 3; S.T. I 45.3; ad 3; Comp. Th. I, 99; Quodl. VII, 10 ad 4; In 2 Sent. 1.1.2 ad 4; C.G. II, 18, for example. Aquinas distinguishes “active” from “passive” creation in terms of relation: De pot. 3.3 ad 2; S.T. I 45.3 ad 1; In 2 Sent. 1.1.2 ad 4. Relation is the only “category” other than substance which he attributes to God: De pot. 10.5; S.T. I 28.2 ad 1; In 1 Sent. 2.1.3; 22.1.3 ad 2 ; 33.1.1 ad 5. On relation and the divine Persons of the Trinity: S.T. I 29.4; 36.2; De pot. 9.5 ad 3; In 1 Sent. 33.1.2 ad 1; ad 5; 26.2.1; 8.4.1 ad 4.

² Metaphysics V, 19 (1022b1).

³ Aristotle, Categories 7. 6a36.

⁴ De potentia 7.9, where he is considering the relation of creatures to God: “Oportet ergo in ipsis rebus ordinem quemdam esse; hic autem ordo relatio quaedam est. Unde oportet in rebus ipsis relationes quasdam esse, secundum quas unum ad alterum ordinatur.” Or, order is seen as a species of relation: De pot. 7.9 ad 7: “...ipsa relatio quae nihil est aliud quam ordo unius creaturae ad aliam...”

⁵ Cicero’s famous definition of order as found in his De Officiis I, 40 (see Aquinas’ discussions of the moral virtues: S.T. I-II for multiple references to Cicero) is as follows: “Ordinem sic definiunt; compositionem rerum aptis et accomodatis locis” (tr.: “Order is a composition of things which are agreeable and suitable with place”). Cicero, De Officiis I, 40, in M. Tullii Ciceronis opera, ex recensione Christ Godofr. Schutzii additis comentariis. vol. 15 (Augustae Taurinorum ex typis Josephi Pomba et soc., 1835), 141.

⁶ St. Augustine, De Civitate Dei XIX, 13, PL 41, 640: “Ordo est parium dispariumque rerum sua cuique loca tribuens dispositio.” For the reference in Aquinas, see S.T. I 96.3.

transcends the category of relation as an accident, pertaining to all of being.⁷ For Aquinas, the most central type of natural priority will be on the transcendental⁸ level.

Aquinas uses the concept of order throughout all parts of his philosophy, including his discussions of nature,⁹ of the universe's structure,¹⁰ the soul and its powers,¹¹ the moral sphere,¹² the social and legal structure,¹³ as well as religion.¹⁴ For Aquinas, order is the arrangement of many things into some unity according to some principle.¹⁵ Priority, in turn, is the relation of proximity a thing has to a principle, where there is an order between the principle and itself:¹⁶ "...[T]he meaning of the term 'prior' depends on that of the term 'principle' (or starting point); for the principle in each class of things is what is first in that class, and the term prior means what is nearer to some determinate principle..."¹⁷ In analysing natural priority through Aquinas'

⁷ *De pot.* 7.9 ad 7 distinguishes between relation considered as an accident and being considered as mere "towardness".

⁸ The transcendental level refers to the level of the relationship between God and creature.

⁹ *In 8 Phys.* l. 3 #993: "Manifestum est quod nulla res naturalis nec aliquid eorum quae naturaliter rebus conveniunt, potest esse absque ordine; quia natura est causa ordinationis..."

¹⁰ *In 1 Sent.* 44.1.2: "Bonum universi consistit in duplici ordine, scilicet in ordine partium universi ad invicem et in ordine totius universi ad finem, qui est ipse Deus." Cf. *C.G.* II.39.

¹¹ *S.T.* I 77.4: "Cum anima sit una, potentiae vero plures, ordine autem quodam ab uno in multitudinem procedatur, necesse est inter potentias animae ordinem esse."

¹² *C.G.* III 9: "Malum et bonum in moralibus specificae differentiae ponuntur...quia igitur bonum et malum dicuntur secundum ordinem ad finem, vel privationem ordinis, oportet quod in moralibus primae differentiae sint bonum et malum."

¹³ *S.T.* I-II 104.4.

¹⁴ *S.T.* II-II 81.1: "Religio importat ordinem ad Deum."

¹⁵ *S.T.* I 42.3c: "Dicendum quod ordo semper dicitur per comparisonem ad aliquod principium". The notion that many things are required is taken from the three conditions of order as found in *In 1 Sent.* 44.1.2, for example.

¹⁶ *S.T.* I 33.1 explains that unlike the term "cause", the term "principle" indicates only a certain order between the principle and what proceeds from it. Causes imply a distance of perfection or power between cause and effect: "Dicendum quod hoc nomen principium nihil aliud significat quam id a quo aliquid procedit" (*S.T.* I 33.1c); "...hoc nomen causa videtur importare diversitatem substantiae, et dependentiam alicuius ab altero, quam non importat nomen principii. In omnibus enim causae generibus, semper invenitur distantia inter causam et id cuius est causa, secundum aliquam perfectionem aut virtutem. Sed nomine principii utimur etiam in his quae nullam huiusmodi differentiam habent, sed solum secundum quendam ordinem..." (*S.T.* I 33.1 ad 1).

¹⁷ *In 5 Meta.* l. 13 #936: "...significatio prioris dependet a significatione principii. Nam principium in unoquoque genere est id quod est primum in genere. Prius autem dicitur, quod est propinquius alicui determinato principio." Cf. *Quodl.* 5.10c: "...secundum Philosophum in *V Meta.* [text. comment. 16], prius et posterius dicuntur in quolibet ordine per comparisonem ad principium illius ordinis..." In this text, the principle is identified with any of Aristotle's four causes. Thus, the "ordo naturae" can be according to the ratio of the material cause, where the imperfect is prior to the perfect. The situation is reversed when one considers the other three causes, however. The formal, final and efficient can be reduced to the formal, and here, act is prior to potency. Cf. *C.G.* I 26 [4] for the association of priority with principles. Aquinas uses the definition of priority in several texts, such as that on the passion of

treatment of substance, form and existence on both the finite and infinite levels of being,¹⁸ we shall see how the mutual relation and order of things displays the analogical structure of being in its various grades, and how the degrees of being exhibit a proportional order of greater or less perfection in relation to the principle of the order of being.

Two main texts where Aquinas indicates the requirements, conditions or elements of order are In 1 Sent. 20.1.3, and In de divinis nominibus IV l. 1. In 1 Sent. 20.1.3 states that order is said to contain three elements: priority and posteriority, distinction, and a principle of order.¹⁹

Taking each element in turn, priority and posteriority are in relation to a principle, so that priority refers to a unity.²⁰ The terms “principle” and “prior” are so close in meaning that the former’s meaning is derived from the latter, for a principle signifies an origin of plurality.²¹ Turning to the three elements of order, priority and posteriority are said to be spatial, or temporal, or of any other sort, and are always in reference to a principle. Wherever there is a principle, there is also some order.²² From this condition we see that order consists in the mutual reference of things, or in the relation of things ad aliquid, as well as a reference to a particular principle.

The different types of principles determine the types of order, and these principles are listed by Aquinas in several texts. As a point of origin²³ but not necessarily a cause of being,²⁴ a principle can be first in the order of motion, generation or cognition.²⁵ That is, the principle is that which is first in a thing over which motion passes,²⁶ first in something in the process of

hope. There, he indicates that the passion of hope is prior to other irascible passions because it is closer to love, the principle of all the passions: S.T. I-II 25.3.

¹⁸ We will take up this topic in chapters three, four and five.

¹⁹ In 1 Sent. 20.1.3: “...ordo in ratione sua includit tria, scilicet: rationem prioris et posterioris...Includit etiam distinctionem, quia non est ordo aliquorum nisi distinctorum. Includit etiam tertio rationem ordinis, ex qua etiam ordo in speciem contrahitur...”

²⁰ For the relation between priority and principle, see S.T. II-II 26.2c; Quodl. 5.10; C.G. I 26.

²¹ S.T. I 33.1 ad 1; II-II 26.6, e.g.

²² S.T. II-II 26.2c.

²³ The notion of origin consists in being a source from which related things proceed: “...ad originem autem pertinet, a quo alius et qui ab alio” (S.T. I 32.3).

²⁴ See, e.g. In 1 Phys. l. 10, as well as In 5 Meta. l. 1, S.T. I 33.1c. On the relation between the concept of priority and those of cause and principle, see, for example: E. Gilson, “Les principes et les causes” Revue Thomiste 52 (1952) 39-63, esp. pp. 42-43.

²⁵ In 5 Meta. l. 1.

²⁶ In 5 Meta. l. 1 #751-#753.

becoming (either intrinsic or extrinsic),²⁷ or first in something's coming to be known (again, either intrinsic or extrinsic).²⁸ A partial explanation of the classes of relations, (i.e. real and logical relations) can be found in the basic division of types of principles, whether the principle is actually existing and perhaps causal, or just rational.²⁹

The second element of order is distinction.³⁰ Distinction involves a twofold negation: each of the distinct items is one (i.e. undivided) and is not any other.³¹ Distinction is a presupposition of order rather than a constituent part of its meaning, however.³² Distinctness does not entail absolute diversity, for there must be some agreement between members of an order for the relation to exist. This agreement or "convenientia" is closely related to the notion of cooperation with view to an end, which appears in the second text on order, In de divin. nomin. IV l.1. There, cooperation is the second element of order, while distinction is the first.³³ The foundation of distinction is either added differences (for difference in species) or different natures, and since nothing can be added to being, Aquinas states that it is ultimately a principle within being, namely, nature, which grounds distinctions within being.³⁴

The third and final condition of order is the "ratio ordinis".³⁵ This is the principle of classification within any given order, and the source or foundation of any related set of things. For example, paintings can be arranged according to artist, chronology, size, etc. As an origin,

²⁷ This refers either to that part of a thing which is first generated (e.g. the foundation of a house) or to that from which a thing's process of generation begins (e.g. in the case of natural things and artifacts, it is human acts). See In 5 Meta. l. 1 #755-#756.

²⁸ The intrinsic principle of knowing is what is first in understanding: the principles of demonstration. The extrinsic principle of knowing is in the order of being, and is what is first known to the senses. See In 5 Meta. l.1 #759.

²⁹ Aquinas states that "sicut realis relatio consistit in ordine rei ad rem, ita relatio rationis consistit in ordine intellectuum": De pot. 7.11.

³⁰ In 1 Sent. 20.1.3.

³¹ C.G. I.7: "Unum quod convertitur cum ente ponit quidem ipsum ens, sed nihil superaddit nisi negationem divisionis. Multitudo autem ei correspondens addit supra res quae dicuntur multae quod unaquaque earum sit una et quod una earum non sit altera, in quo consistit ratio distinctionis." Cf. De pot. 9.7.

³² In 1 Sent. 20.1.3: "...ordo...includit etiam distinctionem quia non est ordo aliquorum nisi distinctorum. Sed hoc magis praesupponit nomen ordinis quam significet..."

³³ In de divin. nomin. IV l. 1 #283: "Considerandum est quod ad ordinem tria concurrunt. Primo quidem distinctio cum convenientia; secundo, cooperatio; tertio, finis. Dico autem distinctionem cum convenientia, quia ubi non est distinctio, ordo locum non habet. Si autem quae distinguuntur in nullo convenirent, unius ordinis non essent."

³⁴ C.G. I 26 [3]. Cf. S.T. I 47.2c; 59.2 ad 2; 80.1 ad 2; II-II 24.5c; I 30.3c. C.G. I 54 specifies the exact sense in which this is true. It is the divine intellect as exemplar which causes natures to receive being differently.

³⁵ In 1 Sent. 20.1.3; In de divin. nomin. IV l.1.

the “ratio ordinis” is the source from which the related things proceed,³⁶ and this principle of relation is founded either on quantity or on passion and action.³⁷ This third characteristic of order is central to natural priority, we will see, in that the most important type of natural priority for Aquinas involves a nonmutual relation, which is determined by the type of foundation in each of the relata.³⁸ Through analysing the senses of priority and natural priority within Aquinas’ thought, it will become clear that the most important locus of natural priority lies in the nonmutual mixed relation of truth that exists between God and creature.

The particular type of order which is related to natural priority, we will see, is causal order, where one term is prior to another,³⁹ and gives being to the other in some way.⁴⁰ This relation of dependence, where the effect is related to the cause as its likeness,⁴¹ involves the teleological element of goodness. The action of all agents towards goodness⁴² indicates the prominence of Pseudo-Dionysius’ third element of order, namely, end or purpose.⁴³ It is the end or purpose which in fact determines the “ratio ordinis”, since things are arranged according to a certain principle of classification according to the purpose of the relation. The cause of things’ mutual ordering is their order to the end (God), for the order of the universe’s parts to the whole (a *per se* order among forms) is prior to the order among the parts themselves.⁴⁴ The priority of this second type of order in the universe (i.e. of the whole to the end, versus the

³⁶ *S.T.* I 32.3c.

³⁷ *C.G.* IV 24 [7]. More precisely, the ratio or ground in a *real* relation is either quantity (when the ground is the same in both the terms) or action and passion (when the ground is different in them). See *De pot.* 7.10. The logical order is constituted from logical relations in regard to first and second intentions. On the various divisions of logical relations, see *S.T.* I 13.7c; *De pot.* 7.11; *De ver.* I 5 ad 16, e.g.

³⁸ See *De Pot.* 7.10c. The theory of relation is detailed in such works as A. Krempel, *La doctrine de la relation chez s. Thomas* (Paris: Vrin, 1952), and more recently, M. Henninger, *Relations: Medieval Theories 1250-1325* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

³⁹ *S.T.* I 33.1c. e.g.

⁴⁰ *In 5 Meta.* l. 2, e.g.

⁴¹ As Jan Aertsen puts it: “The end of the agent is tied to its inner essence; the efficient cause intends the imparting of its own perfection, the communication of the form whereby it is in act.” Aertsen, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas’ Way of Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), p. 266. Aquinas says in *S.T.* II-II 123.7: “The proximate end of every agent is that it induces in something else the likeness of its form.” Cf. *De pot.* 2.1: “Natura cuiuslibet actus est, quod seipsum communicet quantum possibile est.”

⁴² *C.G.* III 3.

⁴³ This element of Dionysius’ thought is treated by Aquinas in *In de divinis nominibus* IV l. 1 #283.

⁴⁴ *In 1 Sent.* 44.1.2 is a comprehensive text on the different orders within the universe, of the parts among themselves, and of the universe to God.

mutual ordering of the parts) stems from the causal nature of the order, and from the fact that the universe as a unity is nearer its principle than are any of its individual parts to each other.⁴⁵

This brief analysis of order has provided some background for the claim that natural priority in Aquinas' metaphysics refers to the first causal principle of being,⁴⁶ and focusses on the relation of creation and conservation. In the language of relations, this is the nonmutual mixed relation in which there is no similar foundation for the relation in either term,⁴⁷ where God is the measure of a things' being and truth.⁴⁸

In the section that follows,⁴⁹ the criteria of priority and specifically natural priority, and the connections between these criteria, will be discussed. The concept of priority is found in many contexts in Aquinas' thought. In metaphysics, the most important discussions concern substance and the principles of composites, the divisions of being, and the relation of creation. Priority is part of the subject matter of metaphysics, under the division of unity.⁵⁰ Within metaphysics, the causal character of a principle is accidental yet gives the principle a special priority.⁵¹ Besides the senses of priority in metaphysics, such as priority in perfection, in

⁴⁵ See *De ver.* 5.1 ad 9: "...in rebus potest considerari duplex ordo: unus secundum quod egrediuntur a principio; alius secundum quod ordinantur ad finem...providentia importat illum ordinem qui est ad finem... ordo autem ad finem est fini propinquior quam ordo partium ad invicem, et quodammodo causa eius..." Cf. *De ver.* 5.3; *In 12 Meta.* l. 12.

⁴⁶ Aquinas states that a principle is naturally prior to what follows it (*C.G.* I 26 [4]) and applies Aristotle's insight that "the greatest in a genus is the cause of all else in it" (*Metaphysics* II, 1 [993b24-31]) to the realm of being. God is seen as the measure and cause of all being (*C.G.* I 28; I 42). This is true even though God is not, strictly speaking, in a genus: *C.G.* I 25. On the theory of order in general in Aquinas' thought, see J. Wright, *The Order of the Universe in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* *Analecta Gregoriana* Vol. 84. (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1957).

⁴⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V.15 (1029b25-1031b11) discusses in detail the different types of relation as based on the terms' or relata's different foundations. The types are numerical (quantitative), causal and psychological. The third type is that of measure and measured, and stands between knower and known. See Aquinas, *In 5 Meta.* l. 17.

⁴⁸ The notions of measure and priority in the sense of natural and causal priority, are linked closely in the text where God is described as first in the order of perfection, since "whatever is first in a genus is the measure of all in it": *C.G.* I.13, e.g.

⁴⁹ See section 2.2 below.

⁵⁰ See *In 5 Meta.* l. 13, and R. McInerny, "The Nature of Book Delta of the *Metaphysics* According to the Commentary of St. Thomas Aquinas", in L. P. Gerson, ed. *Graceful Reason: Essays in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy Presented to Joseph Owens, CSSR* (P.I.M.S.: Toronto, 1983), pp. 331-44. On the relation between the concept of priority and those of cause and principle, see, for example: E. Gilson, "Les principes et les causes" *Rev. Thomiste* 52 (1952) 39-63, esp. pp. 42-43. On the Thomistic context for the priority of unity in metaphysical demonstrations, see: *In 5 Meta.* l. 8, where the transcendental one is said to be prior to the numerical one.

⁵¹ See, e.g. *In 5 Meta.* l. 1 (#751), where a cause is said to give being, while a principle founds a relation of an antecedent to a consequent. The notion of a principle is broader than that of a cause, while that of a cause is in turn more inclusive than that of an element. See *S.T.* I 33.1 ad 1 for an application of this

substance, and of origin⁵², there are other senses of the term. There is epistemological priority,⁵³ which refers to the order between premises and conclusions derived from them, which is distinct from the psychogenesis of our concepts, which is more psychological than logical. Epistemological priority refers not to the order of discovery, which ascends from sense particulars to universals,⁵⁴ but to that of demonstration, which begins with first principles endowed with their own universality. He calls these principles “first in commonness”⁵⁵ to distinguish them from that principle which is “first in causality”, viz. God. There is a parallel between epistemological and ontological (metaphysical) priority of principles, since in both cases, the cause virtually contains the effect: All being exists virtually and originally in its First Cause, and all sciences are somehow naturally implanted in us by virtue of the agent intellect.⁵⁶ The relation between epistemological and metaphysical priority will be taken up again in section two below, in reference to Plato’s and Aristotle’s use of natural priority. At this point it suffices to note that for Aquinas, both epistemological and metaphysical priority are in reference to causal principles. The notion of “natural” priority must now be taken up.

general doctrine of Aquinas which was used originally in discussing the Godhead. For an explanation of the background of the question, see E. Gilson, “Les principes...”, pp. 42-43.

⁵² All of which are discussed by Aquinas. We will focus on *In 5 Meta.* l. 11 where four types of priority are discussed. Priority of “origin” is a term we use to discuss the causal character of God, and is not to be confused with Aquinas’ discussion of order within the Trinity, where the “order of nature” permits order but not priority: *S.T.* I 42.3c: “In divinis autem dicitur principium secundum originem, absque prioritate...Unde oportet ibi esse ordinem secundum originem, absque prioritate. Et hic vocatur ordo naturae...” Cf. *S.T.* I 33.1 ad 3. Origin includes the idea “that from which another thing comes” he indicates in *S.T.* I 32.3c.

⁵³ What we call “epistemological” priority Aquinas refers to as “prius in cognitione”, which he then goes on to explain is that which is first in knowledge in an absolute sense (“simpliciter”) in that it is a knowledge of something through its principles: *In 5 Meta.* l. 13 #946ff. He distinguishes this sense of epistemological priority from the priority involved in sense knowledge (#946) and contrasts sensory and intellectual priorities as complex from simple, and singular from universal. It seems that for Aquinas, epistemological priority is distinct from the priority of sense data which is involved in the process of psychogenesis.

⁵⁴ Since our knowledge is based on sense: *S.T.* I 84, in general. See a. 6, esp. Cf. *In 1 Phys.* l. 1 (#8): “Ipsa individua sensibilia...sunt magis nota quoad nos, quia sensus cognitio, quae est singularium, praecedit cognitionem intellectus in nobis, quae est universalium.” (Cf. *In 1 Post. An.* l. 4 (43); *In 10 Meta.* l. 4 (#1990). The many arguments against Plato’s innate ideas are all based on the use of sense organs and objects in the process of attaining ideas. On the derivation of universals from particulars, or the movement from sense to intellectual knowledge, see *S.T.* I 85.1 ad 1 (cf. *De ver.* 8.9; *C.G.* II 75).

⁵⁵ See, e.g. *De ver.* 10.11 and ad 11). They are called “more universal by predication” in *In 1 Meta.* l. 2 (#46), where their commonness or universality parallels principles in the natural order. In both, the process of “becoming” involves an advance from potency to act.

⁵⁶ *De ver.* 10.6; 11.1; *S.T.* I 79.2.

2.2 *Background to Aquinas: The Platonic and Aristotelian Account of “Natural Priority”*

2.2.1 *Plato: The natural priority of universal to particular*

Plato’s theory of Ideas or Forms forms an important part of the background for Aquinas’ theory of natural priority in metaphysics in that it furnishes one of five central criteria for natural priority for Aquinas.⁵⁷ This criterion can be called the “separability” criterion, by which Aquinas understood Plato to have posited “separate” Ideas existing independently from the sensible particulars which participate in them.⁵⁸ The characteristic of separability, independence or subsistence describes, we shall see,⁵⁹ one of Aquinas’ candidates for natural priority.

Plato discusses several types of priority,⁶⁰ and his theory of participation in the Ideas points to the priority in being and knowing of universals in relation to their sensible counterparts. There are several texts in which epistemological and ontological priority are discussed. Universals or ideas can be seen to possess ontological priority for Plato in that they are separate in reality and are causal unities with respect to manifold sensible things which participate in them. The separate quality of an idea stems from the fact that it is the feature taken in itself, regardless of any contingent additions,⁶¹ and it is encountered wherever a number of individuals have the same common name.⁶² The idea has its own privileged mode of being

⁵⁷ Although it is well known that only a few of Plato’s dialogues were available to Aquinas, namely, the *Meno*, the *Phaedo* and part of the *Timaeus*. See R. Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition during the Middle Ages* (London, 1939, pp. 26-28; 51).

⁵⁸ *De subst. sep.* I #4: “Plato...posuit naturas quasdam a materia fluxibillum rerum separatas in quibus esset veritas fixa et sic eis inhaerendo anima nostra veritatem cognosceret....sic existimavit esse aliqua a sensibilibus separata...” Cf. *In II Phys.* l. 3 #162: “...non solum posuit mathematica abstracta, propter hoc quod mathematicus abstrahit a materia sensibili; sed etiam posuit ipsas res naturales abstractas, propter hoc quod naturalis scientia est de universalibus et non de singularibus. Unde posuit hominem esse separatum...quae quidem separata dicebat esse ideas...” Cf. *S.T.* I 84.1c: “Plato...posuit praeter ista corporalia aliud genus entium a materia et motu separatum, quod nominabat species sive ideas, per quarum participationem unumquodque istorum singularium et sensibillum dicitur vel homo vel equus...” On the separate Form of the Good, see *De ver.* 21.4c. For explicit references to Plato, an analysis of his texts will follow.

⁵⁹ See chapter three, section 3.2.1 below.

⁶⁰ Some types of priority involve the principles of motion, such as the soul (*Phaedrus* 245c), God and the forms in relation to the world (*Timaeus* 29b-30a). There are priorities of time (*Phaed.* 82b; *Rep.* 516c-d), in the order of inquiry (*Rep.* 485b; *Theat.* 200c-d; *Phil.* 33c; *Tim.* 48e), and priority in generation and in excellence (*Parm.* 155a-b; *Tim.* 34c).

⁶¹ Examples of such ideas include the holy or the beautiful in itself: *Euthphr.* 6D; *Hp. Ma.* 286D-304D.

⁶² *Rep.* X 596A-B. The Form or Idea is the content of a thing’s definition, or what it is *per se*. Plato was aware of the necessity for an idea to be at once transcendent and immanent, and struggled to explain its dual role (*Parm.* 131B-C; *Phaed.* 100B-102B; *Phil.* 15B-16E). For Aquinas, the separate existence that this entailed is featured in the proof of the soul’s subsistence. Something is subsistent if it is a “hoc

consequent on its universality, necessity, immobility and immateriality and unity. Aquinas perceives the reason for Plato's conception of ontological priority in the fact that universals are understood separately from material existents.⁶³ Thus, Forms are naturally prior⁶⁴ since they are the ground for certainty and science.

Since Plato's doctrine is drawn by Aquinas chiefly from Aristotle, as well as from the Neoplatonist tradition,⁶⁵ exact texts are rarely cited by Aquinas, and only passages of approximately the same sense can be indicated. What warrant is there for the association of the theory of ideas with natural priority and in particular, with the "separability" criterion? There are frequent parallels in the dialogues between epistemological (definitional) primacy and ontological reality, such that the objects of the intellect are eternal and unchanging, while the sensible particulars which correspond to them and participate in them have no proper being.⁶⁶ The objects of knowledge are said to belong to the world of being, in contrast to the "objects" of

aliquid" (S.T. I 75.2 obj.1) and has an operation in itself (S.T. I 75.2c). Further, what belongs to a thing by virtue of the thing itself is inseparable from it, and so subsistent forms do not lose their being (S.T. I 75.6c). On subsistence as a determinate mode of being, see In I sent. 23.1.1. On subsistence as it features in Aquinas' theory of natural priority, see chapter three, s. 3.3.3.2 below.

⁶³ De ver. 21.4c; S.T. I 84.1c; In II Phys. l. 3 #162; De subst. sep. 1 #4, etc.

⁶⁴ The term "naturally prior" is not found explicitly in these texts of Plato, but for the sake of argument, we use this term interchangeably with "ontologically prior". For further explication of the term "naturally prior", the texts of Aristotle and Aquinas will be examined later in this chapter (section 2.2.2) and in chapter three, section 3.2 below.

⁶⁵ Aquinas draws Plato's doctrine mainly from his familiarity with St. Augustine (he refers to him throughout the Summae, and in many places in the context of Neoplatonic psychology, especially on cognition: e.g. S.T. I 84.6; 61.2 obj. 3; In II Sent. 14.1.2) and Pseudo-Dionysius (In de divinis nominibus), but also some other Platonic streams of thought. For instance, Aquinas was the first thinker in the Middle Ages to have recognized the true author of the Liber de causis, a work on which he commented. This work was an excerpt from the Elementatio theologica of Proclus, he indicated (In lib. de causis Proem. #9 [ed. Saffrey, p. 3]). Aquinas was also of course familiar with the doctrines of Boethius (De trinitate; De hebdomadibus), on which he commented, and found much material for reflection on the theme of participation. Much of De substantiis separatis is devoted to an analysis of Platonic and Neoplatonic positions. On Aquinas' use of Plato and the Platonists, see, for example: C. Fabro, La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino. Milan: Societa Editrice 'Vita e Pensiero', 1939. 3rd ed., Turin: Societa Editrice Internazionale, 1960. Cf. Fabro, Participation et causalité selon S. Thomas d'Aquin. Louvain: Publications Universitaires et Paris: Beatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1961. Cf. R. Henle, St. Thomas and Platonism: A Study of the Plato and Platonic Texts in the Writings of Saint Thomas (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956). On the relation of Thomas Aquinas to the Platonism of Augustine, see, for example: E. Gilson, "Pourquoi saint Thomas a critique saint Augustin" (Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge 1 [1926] 5-127).

⁶⁶ Priority in knowledge involves ontological priority, since the objects of the intellect are eternal, while those of sense are mutable: Timaeus 27d.

opinion, which belong to the realm of becoming.⁶⁷ Reason or intellect grasps the true and certain foundations of knowledge (the Ideas) whereas conjecture and fallibility lie on the side of sense.⁶⁸ A thing has more reality, it follows, if it is more knowable, and thus, that which is epistemologically prior is also ontologically prior.

The ontologically prior things are then separate (as the source of participation by many), more intelligible and possess a superior mode of being⁶⁹ than their sensible counterparts. Aquinas' understanding of Plato comes to him largely through Aristotle, it was stated. In the Commentaries, the ideas' separate existence is critiqued as a false view of substance,⁷⁰ as a contradictory perception of sensible things as eternal,⁷¹ as a denial of the analogy of being and goodness,⁷² and as a condition for science in Plato's epistemology.⁷³

Aquinas' chief criticism of the theory of ideas is that it confuses the modes of being and knowing and gives subsistence (separate being) to accidental beings (of the intellect).⁷⁴ Aquinas adopted Boethius' axiom, "what is received is received according to the mode of the receiver", in his theory of abstraction which made knowledge an act of the man, not of a disengaged intellect.⁷⁵ The fact that the object of knowledge is proportionate to the power of knowledge⁷⁶ ought not lead one to think that that object is merely an idea (as Plato supposed). The idea is the medium quo, not the medium quod of knowledge, that Aquinas is fond of repeating.⁷⁷ Thus, Aquinas accepted one of the central criteria for natural priority from Plato, but modified it

⁶⁷ Republic 477a: "That which entirely is is entirely knowable, and that which in no way is is in every way unknowable..." Tr. Paul Shorey, in E. Hamilton, Dialogues of Plato Bollingen Series LXXI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 716.

⁶⁸ Tim. 51b-52a; 27d; Rep. VI.8, 507b, for instance.

⁶⁹ The ideas are so sharply distinguished from human intellection that their relationship to the human mind is presented as extremely difficult to explain: Parm. 132B; 134A-B.

⁷⁰ In 7 Meta. l. 13 (#1570-#1571).

⁷¹ In 3 Meta. l. 2 #407.

⁷² In I Eth. Nic. l.6 #79-#80 (1096a34-b2; 1095a26-28).

⁷³ In II Phys. l. 3 #162.

⁷⁴ In II Phys. l. 3 #161-#162; In I Meta. L. 10 #158; S.T. I 84.1c. The necessity of a similitude for knowledge requires a similarity between known and knower, and yet Aquinas distinguished along with Aristotle the conditions of real and mental existence. In re, a thing has the conditions of particularity, materiality and contingency. Only in mente does it possess universality, immateriality and necessity (S.T. I 84.1c).

⁷⁵ S.T. I 84, especially article one.

⁷⁶ S.T. I 85.1, 84.7.

⁷⁷ E.g. S.T. I 85.2.

within his own theory of subsistence, and rejected subsistent ideas as candidates for natural priority.⁷⁸

2.2.2 Aristotle: *The priority of particular to universal*

The concept of natural priority has many terms, descriptions and references within Aristotle's work, and is used by him in diverse contexts, such as natural philosophy, metaphysics,⁷⁹ logic, epistemology, and ethics.⁸⁰ What is prior and better known "by nature" (τῆ φύσει),⁸¹ for example, is said to be distinct from what is prior and better known "to us" (πρὸς ἡμᾶς).⁸² Principles which govern types of priority can be established "by nature" (τῆ φύσει),⁸³ making the thing naturally prior as proximate to the principle. Universals are called prior in an absolute sense (ἀπλως) in reference to scientific knowledge,⁸⁴ which is a type of natural priority, it will be discovered. The Platonic criterion of separability is invoked to describe things which are prior with respect to substance or nature (κατὰ φύσιν).⁸⁵ A causal mutual implication in being between two things indicates a priority by nature (τῆ φύσει)⁸⁶ he says. Further, the close relationship of priority by substance (τῆ οὐσία) and form in Aristotle's thought results in the natural priority of act to potency.⁸⁷

In delineating the various types of natural priority, we will find a development of Plato's notion of separability and a parallel between Aristotle's concept of metaphysics and his focal sense of natural priority. As well, the foundations for Aquinas' central senses of natural priority are found within Aristotle's thought, and are developed and transformed by Aquinas' focus on efficient causality. Before analysing Aristotle's argument for the natural priority of form within substance,⁸⁸ it is necessary to detail the types of natural priority he lists, and describe their mutual relationships and significance within Aristotle's metaphysics. In particular, we will analyse the

⁷⁸ In chapter three s. 3.2.1 below, we will examine Aquinas' theory of the common nature, which served a similar metaphysical role to Plato's idea, with important exceptions.

⁷⁹ Metaphysics is also called first philosophy, since for Aristotle, the study of being is an analysis of *pros hen* equivocals. *Metaphysics* IV. 1; VI.1. Cf. J. Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian "Metaphysics"* 3rd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), Part 1, ch. 1.

⁸⁰ Precise references will be given in the divisions of natural priority given below in this section.

⁸¹ The terms which follow the English terms for natural priority are Greek expressions.

⁸² *Post An.* I.2 (71b33-72a5).

⁸³ *Meta.* V.11 (1018b11).

⁸⁴ *Meta.* V.11 (1018b31).

⁸⁵ *Meta.* V.11 (1019a2).

⁸⁶ *Categ.* 14b12-13.

⁸⁷ *Meta.* IX.8 (1049b12-13).

reversal Aristotle introduces with respect to Plato's teaching on the natural priority of universals, as well as an apparent contradiction within Aristotle's own definition of natural priority.

Although the multitude of references to natural priority appears to escape classification, there seem to be five basic types of natural priority within Aristotle's thought. It will be found that these basic divisions exhibit certain common traits which make them classifiable as instances of natural priority, especially by their literal use of the terminology of "naturally prior".⁸⁹ From this array of instances of natural priority, it is evident that it is a complex concept applicable in many areas. These types of natural priority can be called, a) priority by separability, b) "absolute" (versus "relative") priority, c) priority by nature (versus by generation), d) priority as proximity to a principle, and e) priority as mutual implication in being. There are other senses of natural priority listed by Aristotle (such as natural priority in honor and perfection, and in substance) but these will be grouped under one of the above categories. While Aristotle's strict use of the term "natural priority" (πρòτερον τῆ φύσει) can be found in several texts, there will be a select few which illustrate the central features of the concept. These are Post. An I.2 (71b33-72a5),⁹⁰ In Meta. V.11 (1018b7-12 and 1019a1-5),⁹¹ and Categories 12 (14b10-14).⁹² An analysis of the basic senses of natural priority in Aristotle, using these texts as a rough guide, will reveal four conclusions: First, the primacy of the "whatness" (τò τί ἐστὶ) which is substance, is prior by nature and more intelligible absolutely than the other categories, although it is no longer identified with the Platonic ideas.⁹³ Second, this natural priority of substance relates closely to

⁸⁸ We will analyse this in chapter four below.

⁸⁹ That is to say, all five divisions use the term "natural priority", "naturally prior" or some such term, even though they seem to differ vastly in conceptual content in this very usage. We shall have to discover the common traits linking these apparently irreconcilable senses of the term "natural priority".

⁹⁰ This text has a parallel at Topics VI.4 (141b3-14) which conveys the same meaning but substitutes "absolutely" (ἀπλως) prior for "naturally" prior.

⁹¹ This text echoes Aristotle's treatment of substance in general in Meta. VI.1 and VII.1, where the Platonic criterion of independence is transferred to substance.

⁹² This text appears to be an anomaly in Aristotle's treatment of natural priority, we will discover. It apparently contradicts the Meta. V.11 texts which invoke the Platonic "separability" criterion. Although the Cat. 12 text was not commented on by Aquinas, it gains a new significance within mediaeval creationist metaphysics, it will be seen. See chapter three, section 3.2.5 below.

⁹³ The analysis of the many senses of being and the primacy of substance will show this (Meta. VI.1; VII.1) in combination with an analysis of the Post. An. text. My interpretation has similarities with the view of John Cleary, in his book Aristotle on the Many Senses of Priority (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), although his interpretation fails to take account of the last type of natural priority found in Cat. 12 (called "mutual implication in being") and makes too close an association of the Platonic priority of universals and the Aristotelian priority of substances (Cleary p. 29). As well, he fails to distinguish universals and genera, or different types of intentions, viz. first and second (e.g. "man" versus "humanity"). Aquinas notes the distinction between a universal taken alone (first

Aristotle's concept of metaphysics. Third, the notion of natural priority as "what is proximate to a principle" is essential to Aristotle's understanding of the relationship between epistemological and ontological priority. Fourth, the contradiction between Aristotle's use of Plato's separability criterion and the *Categories* 12 text's sense of natural priority is only apparent, due to the Aristotelian theory of substance present in *Categories* 5, as well as his notion of truth.

In order to assemble the parts of Aristotle's concept of "natural priority", it is now necessary to analyse these types of natural priority in turn.

2.2.2.1 "Separability"

The first type of natural priority refers to Plato's "separability" criterion, originally applied to the ideas or Forms. When Aristotle refers this criterion to Plato, it applies to substance, and thus, there is a coincidence between ontological and epistemological priority for Aristotle, which will be explained.⁹⁴ Aristotle conceives of three types of separation in *Meta.* VIII.1 (1042a28-31): A form that is separate in notion, a composite that is separate without qualification, and a form that is separate without qualification.⁹⁵ Both absolute or supersensible forms,⁹⁶ as well as immanent forms (dwelling in matter) are "separate", then, in contrast to the mathematical, which are separate only in "notion".⁹⁷ What Aristotle means is that something is separate only as "actual", whereas Plato's forms are only potential, as intelligible objects.⁹⁸ The

intention) and one taken with the intention of universality (second intention) at *S.T.* I 85.3 ad 1. This should not be confused with Aquinas' twofold understanding of the nature (*in mente* versus *in re*), however. This latter distinction is found at *De ente et essentia* III [2]-[7] (cf. *S.T.* I 85.2 ad 2).

⁹⁴ This coincidence of priorities is explained in the present section on separability, as well as in chapter two, section 2.2.3 below. In fact, Joseph Owens interprets the third type of priority in *Meta.* V.11, which explicitly invokes Plato's separability criterion, as definitional or epistemological priority, thus making ontological and epistemological priorities coincide: J. Owens, *Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian "Metaphysics"* 3rd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), p. 320.

⁹⁵ For an analysis of this text, see J. Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian "Metaphysics"* pp. 381-385. The two characteristics of form viz., that it is the ultimate substrate, which is no longer predicated of anything else, and is a "this" and is separate, are listed at *Meta.* V.8 (1017b23-26).

⁹⁶ The existence of these forms is taken for granted at this point in *Meta.* VIII.

⁹⁷ As Owens rightly notes (*The Doctrine of Being...* p. 381 #20), the mathematical are not in themselves separate, but are treated as if they were separate by the mathematician. See *Phys.* II.2 (193b34) and *Meta.* I.1 (1052b17). On the mathematical, see *Meta.* XIII.3. On the distinction between separation in being and notion as found in *Meta.* VI.1 and in the thought of Boethius, Avicenna, Albert the Great and Aquinas, see: J. Owens, "Metaphysical Separation in Aquinas" (*Mediaeval Studies* 34 [1972] 287-306).

⁹⁸ *Meta.* VIII.8 (1050b34-1051a2). Cf. *De Part. An.* I.1 (640b30-641a9). Aristotle views the Platonic form as something passive, as something known, whereas the Aristotelian form acts and is thus able to impart knowability to the composite sensible thing. Cf. J. Owens, *The Doctrine of Being...* p. 457. Act is

celestial movers⁹⁹ are separate insofar as they are actual (unmoved) and unassociated with the passivity of matter.¹⁰⁰ They are impassive in that all changes are posterior to their eternal motion.¹⁰¹ Thus, the natural priority of Aristotle's separate substances which is associated with the separability criterion stems from the independence of eternal circular motion and self-knowledge which exemplifies pure act.

The ontological priority of form as act coincides with its epistemological priority as most knowable, since when it is found separate from matter, the Aristotelian form is most actual and an act of knowing, and most scientifically knowable as the highest cause.¹⁰²

In some texts, Aristotle explicitly states that one of the ways in which something is naturally prior is if it can stand separately from those things related to it, while the dependent things rely on it for their existence: "Some things then are called prior and posterior in this sense, others in respect of nature and substance, i.e. those which can be without other things, while the others can be without them—a distinction which Plato used..."¹⁰³ The text then goes on to attribute this type of natural priority to substance as a subject, and to all things with "complete reality". The capacity of something to exist independently is its actuality, Aristotle states, for a thing is separate from matter insofar as it is actual. Thus, natural priority is attributed to substance, since separability and "thisness" belong chiefly to it,¹⁰⁴ while its separateness also qualifies it as first in time.¹⁰⁵ However, in his discussion of motion, locomotion is said to possess independent existence with respect to other types of motion, *in*

prior to potency since potency is not form but has form only through its act. As well, the purpose of potency is act, for the act is the end. See *Meta.* VIII.8 (1050a4-23).

⁹⁹ That is, the eternal, immobile substances, in contrast to both the eternal and perishable sensible substances. See *Meta.* XII.1.

¹⁰⁰ The same term "separate" is applied to Immortal Mind in Aristotle's *De Anima* III.5 (430a10-25). In this text, the active mind is described in the same terms as the immobile movers of *Meta.* XII.7 (1072b23-1073a5).

¹⁰¹ *Meta.* XII.7 (1073a10-13).

¹⁰² Metaphysics or first philosophy is the science of separate entity for Aristotle. It is equally the science of the highest causes (*Meta.* VI.1), of being qua being (*Meta.* IV.1), of primary entity (*Meta.* IV.2), form (*Meta.* VII) and truth (*Meta.* II.1). The coincidence of ontological and epistemological priorities differs from Plato's conception of ideas in that the forms are in act. Later in this chapter (sections 2.2.3 and 2.2.4 below), we will examine another sense in which the two priorities coincide for Aristotle.

¹⁰³ *Meta.* V.11 (1019a1-5).

¹⁰⁴ *Meta.* VII.3 (1029a27-29).

¹⁰⁵ *Meta.* VII.1 (1028a31-35). The separability of substance from accidents in the order of time is obviously a difficulty in Aristotle's thought, as W.D. Ross notes (*Aristotle's "Metaphysics": A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary* Vol. II [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924], p. 160).

contrast to locomotion's natural priority as first in perfection of existence.¹⁰⁶ Thus, Aristotle is not entirely consistent in his identification of natural priority with the separability criterion.

To summarize thus far, Aristotle's attribution of separate or independent existence to substance transfers the referent of Plato's separability criterion to the realm of primary substance. In the Platonic language of the *Categories*,¹⁰⁷ secondary substances depend on primary substances for their accidental being. Only primary substance is neither said of nor present in any subject, and without primary substance, nothing else would exist.¹⁰⁸ The important reversal of Plato's position that Aristotle introduces in his concept of natural priority is the independent existence of primary substances and the dependence of universals on them. This position of the ontological dependence of secondary on primary substances¹⁰⁹ can be justified on two counts: First, universals are dependent as accidental beings in the mind of a primary substance, and second, they are concepts of first substances and bear likeness to them.¹¹⁰

In addition to being related to the issue of universals, the separability criterion is related to the subject of metaphysics for Aristotle. That subject is described at once as being in general,¹¹¹ as the immovable separate things,¹¹² and as substance as the primary meaning of

¹⁰⁶ *Phys.* VIII.7 (260b16-19; 261a13-26). The separability criterion is at work in that the continuous motion provided by the first movent is the condition of all other types of motion (alteration, generation). At 260b18-19, priority in time is contrasted to the separability criterion, which confirms the view that Aristotle's attribution of priority in time to substance is problematic.

¹⁰⁷ *Categories* 5 distinguishes primary and secondary substances. In this chapter of the *Categories*, Aristotle appears to be justifying calling anything other than first substances "substances". He says at 2b31 that the secondary substances "identify" the first substances. Calling universals "secondary substances", however, still bears strong similarities to Plato's theory of subsistent ideas.

¹⁰⁸ *Categ.* 5 (2b5-6): "Thus everything except primary substances is either predicated of primary substances, or is present in them, and if these last did not exist, it would be impossible for anything else to exist."

¹⁰⁹ Many scholars agree that Aristotle is arguing for this in *Cat.* 5: Ackrill, *Aristotle's "Categories" and "De Interpretatione"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 83; J. Moravcsik, "Aristotle on Predication" (*Philosophical Review* 76 [1967]), p. 95; C. Stough, "Language and Ontology in Aristotle's *Categories*" (*Journal of the History of Philosophy* 10 [1972]), p. 263.

¹¹⁰ John Rist (*The Mind of Aristotle: A Study in Philosophical Growth* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press], pp. 255-256) has produced this interpretation of reasons for Aristotle's position of the dependence of secondary on primary substances, and also notes the fact that there is a distinction between universals as concepts of first substances on the one hand, and of all other beings and concepts, on the other (Rist, p. 257). Universals are dependent on first substances as concepts of them, and it is these universals which are designated "secondary substances" (at *Cat.* 5 [2b29f.]). The universals corresponding to accidents and to other concepts are not properly speaking, secondary substances.

¹¹¹ That is, being in its qualities as accidental, true, the categories and as act and potency: *Meta.* VI.2 (1026a33-1026b2). Cf. *Meta.* IV.1.

¹¹² *Meta.* VI.1 (1026a15-17). In this way, metaphysics studies the principles and causes of all things insofar as they are beings (*Meta.* VI.1 [1025b1-2]).

being.¹¹³ The universal and common nature of being is a consequence of divine, separate being for Aristotle,¹¹⁴ and first philosophy deals with separate substance and all else only *πρὸς ἕν*.¹¹⁵ The separability criterion specifies the subject of metaphysics in that only absolutely immaterial¹¹⁶ substances are treated, and all other things only insofar as they are related to the primary instance, that is, *πρὸς ἕν*.¹¹⁷ To conclude, then, the sense of natural priority as exhibited by the separability criterion substitutes form as found in supersensible substances for Plato's ideas, and maintains the identification of ontological and epistemological priority within a theory of act.

2.2.2.2 "Absolute" (versus "Relative")

The second sense in which Aristotle describes natural priority is in reference to universals, at Posterior Analytics I.2 (71b33-72a5):

There are two senses in which things are prior and more knowable. That which is prior in nature (*τῇ φύσει*) is not the same as that which is prior in relation to us, and that which is more knowable by us. By "prior" or "more knowable" in relation to us I mean that which is nearer our perception, and by "prior" or "more knowable" in the absolute sense (*ἄπλως*) I mean that which is furthest from our perception, and particulars are nearest to it; and these are opposite to one another.

Here, what is prior and better known by nature (*τῇ φύσει*) is distinguished from what is prior and better known to us (*πρὸς ἡμᾶς*).¹¹⁸ Universals are said to be prior by nature or "absolutely" prior. The position that universals are more intelligible than sense particulars is understood within the context of a theory of definitions, which is discussed at Topics VI.4 (141a26-32). The absurdity of several definitions for one thing is postulated unless the definition starts with prior and more intelligible things (i.e. genera). The priority of universals as opposed to particulars is again expressed at Meta. V.11 (1018b31-36), in terms of definition. There, universals are prior

¹¹³ Meta. VII.1 (1028a13-15; 1028a29-30); IV.2.

¹¹⁴ Meta. VI.1 (1026a30-31).

¹¹⁵ Aquinas, on the other hand, makes *ens commune* alone the subject of the science of metaphysics, and separate substances and first causes only the principles and causes of that subject. See In Meta. Proem. Cf. In de Trin. V.4, Resp.

¹¹⁶ That is, things *never* found in matter; not those which *sometimes* are found in matter, such as Aquinas views metaphysics. See Aquinas, In Meta. Proem.

¹¹⁷ See Meta. VI.1 (1026a29-32); XI.7 (1064b11-14). The setting of focal meaning through reference (*πρὸς ἕν*) is established in IV.1-2 (cf. XI.3).

to particulars in definition, while the reverse is true in the order of perception. Universals are contrasted to particulars in terms of being prior “absolutely” to particular causes, which latter are first in the order of learning.¹¹⁹ Interestingly, the advancement in learning from confused wholes to particular causes (the process of analysis) starts with universals, but not cognitional ones but rather confused generalities grasped by sense.¹²⁰

In addition to the greater intelligibility of universals, there appears to be a parallel to the natural priority of universals in terms of greater intelligibility in Aristotle’s use of the separability criterion. While the separate substances confer universality on the subject of metaphysics by their causal primacy, universals are the primary instance of intelligibility in the order of intellectual cognition. Perhaps it is for this reason that J. Owens groups the natural priority of the Platonic separability criterion (Meta. V.11 [1019a1-5]) with the priority in definition which substance assumes in Meta. VII.1 (1028a31-b2).

Is there sufficient justification for the link Aristotle makes between natural priority and the “absolute” priority of universals, however, considering his focus on particular forms? Such a justification lies in the meaning of “absolutely” or “without qualification” ($\acute{\alpha}\pi\lambda\omega\varsigma$) in the above text. If universals have a similar primacy as being when determined to the primary sense, then the link is verified. However, if the term “without qualification” simply means “simpliciter”, or “in general”, then it is not, for universals’ priority would remain on the level of cognition only.¹²¹ Meta. XIII.2 (1077b1-8) distinguishes natural priority, which is here characterised by the separability criterion, and those things which are prior in definition. Only those things separable and prior in substantiality surpass others related to them “in power of independent existence”. Meta. V.11 (1018b8-14) suggests that the term $\acute{\alpha}\pi\lambda\omega\varsigma$ means only “in general” (as opposed to “in a particular sense”): “The words “prior” and “posterior” are applied 1) to some things ...because they are nearer some beginning determined either absolutely and by nature, or by reference to something or in some place or by certain people...”

¹¹⁸ This distinction is found in several texts. Cf. Meta. VII.3 (1029b3-12); N.E. I.4 (1095b2-4); Phys. I.1 (184a21-b10), etc.

¹¹⁹ Topics 141b9-10.

¹²⁰ Phys. I.1 (184a21-b10). On the objects of knowledge as distinguished by nature and according to us, see Meta. VII.3 (1029b3-12); Topics 141b9-10; Nic. Eth. I.4 (1095b2-4); Meta. V.11 (1018b32-34).

¹²¹ Being has both connotations, i.e. as common being on the one hand, and as substance and divine being, on the other. On the general sense of $\acute{\alpha}\pi\lambda\omega\varsigma$ see Meta. VI.2 (1026a33). On the second sense, see Meta. VII.1 (1028a29-31). The fact that being can either be expressed in its common nature (Book Eta) or in its primary instance (Book Zeta) probably influenced J. Owens’ identification of natural priority in substance (Meta. V.11) with Plato’s definitional sense. See J. Owens, The Doctrine of Being... p. 320.

As yet, therefore, the natural priority of universals in terms of the separability criterion is undetermined. Despite texts which deny any natural priority to universals, there is some evidence that Aristotle held a coincidence between epistemological and ontological priorities in that forms are most intelligible when separate from matter (or ontologically prior).¹²² This is true because the Aristotelian separate forms, we indicated, are pure knowings or intelligences, as well as pure intelligibles.¹²³ This issue will be taken up again in section 2.2.4 below. The conclusion of that section is that ontological and epistemological priority converge in that both separate substances and universals are primary causes within their specific orders.

2.2.2.3 “Being” (versus “Generation”)

The third type of natural priority Aristotle uses is priority in nature or being, as opposed to that of generation. This is the distinction between the order of becoming (generation), which moves from potency to act, and that of being (nature), which signifies actuality, completion and perfection. It is closely related to priority as “absolute” in that this latter signifies the order of being, while that which is first “to us” is usually also first in generation. Aristotle also calls priority in being and nature priority in perfection of existence,¹²⁴ and the formula generally employed is “that which is posterior in becoming is prior in substance, form or nature.”¹²⁵

The most central instance of this type of natural priority concerns the relation between act and potency, outlined in *Meta.* IX.8. Act is prior in nature to potency since it is most perfect, while potency is prior in time and generation, for it commences the order of becoming.¹²⁶ At *Phys.* VIII.7 (261a13-27), the natural priority of locomotion to other types of motion is explained in terms of its priority in existence, as the last and most perfect stage of natural development. The most perfect and actual thing is also nearer to the first principle (in this case,

¹²² This interpretation makes ἀπλῶς or “absolutely” refer to the primary sense as opposed to the general sense of the term.

¹²³ The Aristotelian form is contrasted with the Platonic form as something actual as well as knowable: *Meta.* VIII.8 (1050b34-1051a2); cf. *De part. an.* I.1 (640b30-641a9). Joseph Owens (*The Doctrine of Being...* p. 458) says “...form and knowledge, despite the priority of form from the viewpoint of human science, turn out in their highest instances to be absolutely identical.”

¹²⁴ *Phys.* VIII.7 (261a13-27), where that which is posterior in the order of becoming is prior in the order of nature, and where the latter is nearer a first principle. He is referring to locomotion. That which is prior in existence is the last stage of realisation in a thing’s natural development (261a19-20).

¹²⁵ *Meta.* IX.8 (1050a3-5); *Phys.* VIII.7 (261a13-14); *Meta.* I.8 (989a15-16), for example.

¹²⁶ The natural priority of act to potency is the subject of chapter four of this thesis.

the First Mover),¹²⁷ which is absolute in a particular order.¹²⁸ Natural priority is contrasted to priority in generation as applied to the elements¹²⁹ as well as to the mathematical.¹³⁰

2.2.2.4 “Proximity to a Principle”

This fourth type of natural priority is less a distinct type of natural priority than an overarching instrument of classification for all types. It is introduced in *Meta.* V.11 as follows: “The words “prior” and “posterior” are applied (1) to some things (on the assumption that there is a first, i.e. a beginning, in each class) because they are nearer some beginning determined either absolutely and by nature, or by reference to something or in some place or by some people...”¹³¹ Thus, something is naturally prior to another in relation to it if it is closer to a principle which is itself first by nature, or determined absolutely. It seems that if a principle is determined only relatively then natural priority would not apply to any of that order’s members. This is not to say that the categories of place, time, motion etc. do not have principles determined absolutely, for Aristotle. Rather, in these orders, a naturally prior principle or a relatively determined one may be adopted. The types of principles, then, determine the types of natural priority, and in each order, we must identify the first principle in order to identify priority relations within the order. The three types of orders in which the principles are found are that of being, becoming and knowledge, for a principle is “the first point from which a thing either is or comes to be or is known”.¹³²

Taking each of these types of order in turn, the order of becoming includes motion, time and place, arrangement or order.¹³³ The order of knowledge includes intellectual and sensory knowledge,¹³⁴ and that of being refers to the categories and actuality in general.¹³⁵ In the order of becoming, the first division is that of motion. The naturally prior principle here is the first

¹²⁷ cf. *Meta.* V.11 (1018b8-12; 1018b19-22).

¹²⁸ This is true assuming, as Aristotle says (*Meta.* V.11 [1018b8-10]) that there is a first or a beginning in each class.

¹²⁹ *Meta.* I.8 (989a15).

¹³⁰ *Meta.* XIII.2 (1077a19). Mathematical are not naturally prior to first substances (here, sensory entities) although as incomplete spatial magnitudes, they are prior in the order of generation.

¹³¹ *Meta.* V.11 (1018b8-12).

¹³² *Meta.* V.1 (1013a18-19).

¹³³ *Meta.* V.11 (1018b12-29).

¹³⁴ *Meta.* V.11 (1018b30-36).

¹³⁵ *Meta.* V.11 (1019a1-14).

mover,¹³⁶ since it is first in reference to all types of motion. The realm of the voluntary is part of the order of motion, and the will is naturally prior¹³⁷ as first in power.¹³⁸ In the order of place, the naturally prior principle is the middle of the universe,¹³⁹ in time it is the present moment,¹⁴⁰ and in arrangement the naturally prior principle is determined by the order in quantity, whether continuous or discrete.¹⁴¹ However, the fourth sense of natural priority in Categ. 12 (14b3-7) would appear to be grouped under this sense of arrangement or order, as that which is “better and more honorable” according to men’s wills. Aristotle indicates there that this is the most far-fetched sense of the word “prior”. The naturally determined principles within motion, time, place, and arrangement all fall within the order of becoming since they involve the measurement of material quantity and its transition towards perfection.

The second division is that of knowledge. As indicated above, the type of natural priority presently being considered (namely, priority as “proximity in reference to a principle”) is more a general tool of classification for all types of priority than it is a specific type. Thus, that which is naturally prior in knowledge is that which is proximate to a principle itself determined absolutely, and echoes the “absolute” (vs. “relative”) sense of priority listed above.¹⁴² He adds to the natural priority of universals presented in Post. An. I.2 the division of types of knowledge, viz., sensory and intellectual. In intellectual cognition, universals are naturally prior; in sensory cognition, particulars are.¹⁴³ As indicated in section above, the precise sense in which epistemological and ontological orders coincide for Aristotle will be examined in section 2.2.4 below.

The final type of principle is that in the order of being, and this marks Metaphysics V.11’s fourth type of priority, “in respect of nature and substance” (πρῶτερον κατὰ φύσιν).¹⁴⁴ This involves the “separability criterion”, which is attributed explicitly to Plato¹⁴⁵ and is applied

¹³⁶ Meta. V.11 (1018b19-21).

¹³⁷ Aquinas refers this order of power as the order of dignity, implying that perfection is involved. See In 5 Meta. l. 13 #942.

¹³⁸ And Aristotle indicates the role of the separability criterion in the position of the will as naturally prior, saying that if the will does not act, then what is intended does not occur (1018b23-25).

¹³⁹ See Aquinas’ commentary: In V Meta. l. 13 #939.

¹⁴⁰ Meta. V.11 (1018b15-16).

¹⁴¹ The examples he offers are the priority of a second man to the third in a chorus and the middle string in a lyre (1018b25-29).

¹⁴² Aristotle’s sense under our division of 2.2.2.2 above.

¹⁴³ Meta. V.11 (1018b30-35). Intellectual cognition is illustrated by definition, he says.

¹⁴⁴ Aristotle indicates that this type of natural priority involves Plato’s separability criterion (1019a2-5).

¹⁴⁵ Meta. V.11 (1019a4-5).

to substance and to act and potency. Aristotle's emphasis in Categories 5 (2a10-14) on the primacy and independence of primary substances in relation to secondary ones leads one to believe that he is exchanging Plato's separate Ideas for his own particular primary substances in Meta. V.11's fourth sense of priority.

When viewed within the context of other texts which use the Platonic separability criterion, it is clear that this fourth sense of priority in Meta. V.11 is referring to Plato's method of division and the priority of universals to particulars, in addition to the Aristotelian innovation of the natural priority of act to potency.¹⁴⁶ Although the Post. An. I.2 text did not explicitly invoke Plato for the priority of universals, that which is prior by nature or prior *simpliciter* is explained by Aristotle at Topics Z 4(141b29-34) in terms of Plato's theory of division and definition, where the genus is more familiar and prior than the species. This priority is explained there in terms of the separability criterion, since the cognition of the genus does not entail the cognition of the species but the reverse does not hold. Generality, familiarity by nature and priority are tied together in the following way: If a thing is more general than another, it is more intelligible in itself and separate at least in cognition, by lack of entailment.¹⁴⁷

In addition to Topics Z.4, Categories 13 (15a4-6) identifies genera as prior to species in that the sequence of their being cannot be reversed. This indicates natural priority, since things that are simultaneous by nature (e.g. species within a genus) do reciprocate in being (15a6-13). Thus, nonreversible sequence in being and separability are signs of natural priority in the fourth sense in the Meta. V.11 text. Aristotle is quick to relate priority in nature or substance to priority in act and potency, however (1019a5ff.). It is unclear from the text under consideration whether Aristotle thinks that natural priority involves causality.¹⁴⁸

2.2.2.5 "Mutual Implication in Being"

The fifth sense of priority which can be classified as "natural" priority for Aristotle is found in Categories 12:

¹⁴⁶ The topic of the priority of act to potency in Aristotle will be taken up in Meta. 9 and will be detailed in chapter four of this thesis, as it relates to the natural priority of form within substance.

¹⁴⁷ For other references than Post. An. I.2 for the distinction between what is more familiar in itself and to us, see Phys. A.1; An. Prior. 23 (68b35-37); Meta. Z.3 (1029b3-12); Nic. Eth. A.4 (1095b2-4).

¹⁴⁸ At Cat. 13 (15a5-9) "simultaneity in nature" is contrasted to natural priority on the basis of reciprocity in being (things simultaneous in nature do involve reciprocity in being), but no causal relationship is indicated for natural priority. However, he says (15a8-9) that simultaneity in nature does not involve causality.

Yet it would seem that besides those mentioned there is yet another [sense of “prior”]. For in those things, the being of each of which implies that of the other, that which is any way the cause may reasonably be said to be by nature “prior” to the effect. It is plain that there are instances of this. The fact of the being of a man carries with it the truth of the proposition that he is, and the implication is reciprocal: for if a man is, the proposition wherein we allege that he is is true, and conversely, if the proposition wherein we allege that he is true, then he is. The true proposition, however, is in no way the cause of the being of the man, but the fact of the man’s being does seem somehow to be the cause of the truth of the proposition, for the truth or falsity of the proposition depends on the fact of the man’s being or not being.¹⁴⁹

This text has been quoted in full because it appears to contradict a major type of natural priority already introduced by Aristotle, namely, that of separability (s.2.2.2.1 above) which was applied clearly to substance and actuality (s.2.2.2.4 above). In the text just quoted, Aristotle indicates that there is a mutual implication in being between a real entity or fact and the true proposition about it, with one-way causality from the thing to the true proposition.

There are three considerations which explain the lack of a real contradiction between the separability criterion and the present criterion of mutual implication in being. First, Aristotle minimizes the importance of mutual implication in being at 14b10 in being unclear as to whether it is really an example of the term “prior”,¹⁵⁰ almost making it an exception to the normal sense of natural priority. In his own attempt to explain the problem, J. Cleary goes too far in his mistaken identification of natural simultaneity with mutual reciprocation in being, which he finds in Categories 13.¹⁵¹ Rather, natural priority and mutual reciprocation in being are compatible as long as one realises that natural priority is a division of the mutual reciprocation in being, and different from natural simultaneity in having one-way causality (natural simultaneity has no causality).¹⁵²

The second reason why Categories 12’s fifth sense of priority does not contradict the separability criterion stems from Aristotle’s conception of the relation between primary and secondary substance in Categories 5. The separability criterion is used in Cat. 5 (2b5ff.) to

¹⁴⁹ Categories 12 (14b10-22).

¹⁵⁰ “Yet it would seem [my emphasis] that besides those mentioned there is yet another...” (Cat. 12 [14b10]).

¹⁵¹ J. Cleary, Aristotle on the Many Senses of Priority p. 27.

¹⁵² Categ. 12 (14b18-21) clearly says that there is a one-way causality from thing to true proposition, making mutual implication in being compatible with natural priority. Categ. 13 (14b26-29) states the opposite for natural simultaneity: “Those things, again, are ‘simultaneous’ in point of nature, the being of

identify primary substance as independent of secondary substance as well as of accidents, since only primary substance is always a subject and never a predicate. Since there is no causality from concepts to things,¹⁵³ if secondary substance can be linked to true propositions, then the mutual implication in being from true statements to the things they concern (Cat. 12) clearly does not involve causality. What, then, does the mutual implication signify? Cat. 13's implicit link between natural priority and causality¹⁵⁴ leads one to limit the sense given to mutual implication in Cat. 12. Given the fact of a being, plus an intellect which perceives it, there is a mutual implication, but the only causality is from reality to thought. A brief description of Aristotle's notion of truth supports this view.

Besides the apparent incompatibility of mutual implication with the separability criterion, there is the problem of how a proposition can imply a real being. At Cat. 12 (14b14-17) above, Aristotle states that it is the truth of the proposition which implies the being of the man, not the proposition in itself. For Aristotle, truth is in the judgment and intellect,¹⁵⁵ in combining or separating concepts as they correspond to complex reality.¹⁵⁶ Simply put, we speak of the true when "what is is said to be or what is not is said not to be".¹⁵⁷ Aquinas adopts this intellectual definition of truth in defining it as a relation which a being has in relation to an intellect, which could either be created or divine.¹⁵⁸ For Aristotle, the truth of the proposition implies the being of the thing in that the perfection of the intellect which it assumes necessarily has a real

each of which involves that of the other, while at the same time neither is the cause of the other's being..." He is referring to species within a genus primarily (14b32-15a4).

¹⁵³ The dependence of secondary on primary substances in Cat. 5 defends this view.

¹⁵⁴ The link is not clearly stated but his view that things simultaneous in nature involve mutual implication without causality leads one to deduce that things prior in nature do exercise causality with respect to those things which follow from them. The clear link between natural priority and one-way causality is found in Cat. 12 (14b18-21).

¹⁵⁵ Meta. VI.4 (1027b25-27).

¹⁵⁶ Meta. IX.10 (1051a34-1051b5): "The terms 'being' and 'non-being' are employed firstly with reference to the categories, and secondly with reference to the potency or actuality of these or their non-potency or non-actuality, and thirdly in the sense of true and false. This depends, on the side of the objects, on their being combined or separated, so that he who thinks the separated to be separated and the combined to be combined has the truth, while he whose thought is in a state contrary to that of the objects is in error."

¹⁵⁷ Meta. IV.7 (1011b25-28).

¹⁵⁸ De Ver. I.1 on the transcendentals: "...convenientiam vero entis ad intellectum exprimit hoc nomen verum." The focus on the divine intellect as the primary referent of truth in De veritate establishes Aquinas' theory of truth as quite different from Aristotle's. We will examine the implications of this addition in chapter three, section 3.2.5 below.

foundation.¹⁵⁹ Without the perfection of the intellect, the judgment would be false and there would be no mutual implication between thing and judgment. Given the fact that the mutual implication is thus hypothetical (depending in known, knower and a true judgment) and requires the prior perfection of an intellect, introduces a limit on the meaning of mutual implication in being as presented in Cat. 12.

The three points examined above (viz., Aristotle's hesitancy with regard to mutual implication as an instance of natural priority, and his theories of primary substance and truth) establish the lack of any strong contradiction in Aristotle's notion of natural priority, for the latter must be defined in terms of causality as well as hypothetical mutual implication.¹⁶⁰ Now we must examine the relation between ontological and epistemological priorities for him.

2.2.3 "Priority as Proximity to a Principle"

In section 2.2.2 above, the relationship between ontological and epistemological priorities was mentioned in terms of principles in the real and logical orders. Plato's identification of the more universal and immaterial Ideas with the more real was adopted by Aristotle with modifications in Post. An. I.2,¹⁶¹ for Aristotle's referent for natural priority had to be actual and not merely subsistent, unlike Plato's Ideas. The natural priority of forms was mentioned as an instance of the coincidence of ontological and epistemological priorities, in that the separate substances are both most intelligible and most separate from matter. This interpretation made the "absolute" priority of universals discussed in Post. An. I.2 text refer to the primary instance of something "furthest from our perception" as opposed to being a more general reference to universals' knowability. This interpretation not only showed a coincidence of ontological and epistemological natural priorities but also reflected the primacy of the subject of metaphysics for Aristotle in the explanation.

¹⁵⁹ For the notion of truth as a perfection of an intellect, see Aquinas, De ver. I.1, where knowledge is the product of the true judgment: "Hoc est ergo quod addit verum super ens, scilicet conformitatem sive adaequationem rei et intellectus, ad quam conformitatem, ut dictum est, sequitur cognitio rei: sic ergo entitas rei praecedit rationem veritatis sed cognitio est quidam veritatis effectus." Aristotle agrees that truth is similar to (and grouped with) potency in that it is not being in the "full" sense (Meta. VI.4 [1027b29-35]; VI.2 [1026a33-1026b4]).

¹⁶⁰ That is, once the real thing is and is known, there is a mutual correspondence or implication between knower and known in the true judgment. It is hypothetical because both the knower and the known, as well as the true judgment must be present.

¹⁶¹ See section 2.2.2.1 above.

The coincidence of natural priority on the ontological and epistemological level is possible only through separate form for Aristotle. Since the basic definition of natural priority is in being in “proximity to a principle”,¹⁶² an analysis of the role of principles in these orders, and of the Meta. 5.11 text, is in order.

Meta. 5.11 is the most complete treatment of the types of priority in Aristotle’s writings, short of his complex analysis of substance and the role of actuality in the central books (Zeta through Theta) of the Metaphysics. In this text, there are three general senses of priority: First, priority as “proximity to a principle” (priority “A”). This principle is something determined either i) absolutely or by nature, ii) with reference to something, iii) or somewhere, iv) or by some people.¹⁶³ Second, there is priority in knowledge (“B”), and third, there is priority in nature (“C”). In the first division (A) we find five types: Priority according to place, time, motion, power and order, these being determined by a principle in one of the ways stated above.¹⁶⁴

Priority in knowledge (B) is priority without qualification, either with respect to account¹⁶⁵ or with respect to sensation. Accidents are prior to substances here, from both viewpoints. Sensation is of accidents first, and account requires a complete description. Priority with respect to nature or substance (C) describes something which can be without related others, whereas the others depend on it (Platonic criterion of separability¹⁶⁶). Type C is subdivided into priority by subject (substance) and actuality and potentiality. The claim that A and B are somehow reducible to C follows, making “natural” priority the main sense of priority.

This review of Meta. 5.11 reveals similarities both among types A, B and C, and among these types and earlier accounts. In particular, type A’s priority with respect to a principle as determined by nature (“PN” priority) is repeated in type B’s overall “absolute” priority, and type

¹⁶² Meta. V.11 (1018b8-14).

¹⁶³ Meta. 5.11, 1918b9-12.

¹⁶⁴ Priority in place precedes that in time in this list because our knowledge of time arises from magnitudes in motion: Phys. 4.11 (219a14-19), where prior and posterior are said to be primarily attributes of place. There is no absolute principle in time (rather, the principle is arbitrary along the continuum, and the present moment is always changing). With respect to motion, the absolute principle is the first mover (Meta. 1018b20-21). On the difficulties of interpretation here, see Clery, p. 39. The principle in priority of power is the fourth type of proximity to a principle, i.e. that established by convention (here, the principle is the decision of the one in power to move inferiors: Cf. Meta. 5.1), and the principle in priority of order not natural either. “Principle” here is the third or fourth sense: A principle established by relation or by convention.

¹⁶⁵ “Account” here seems to imply both priority in definition and in formula, which is looser than definition. It includes definition, I claim, since Aristotle immediately goes on to include per se attributes in account.

¹⁶⁶ However, it is obviously not applied to universals, but to particular substances.

C priority is called “natural”. With respect to the complicated divisions of the various texts, we can make the following observations. Type A priority (“PN”) includes an instance of the priority of primary substance in Cat. 5, and the examples given include the First Mover¹⁶⁷ and the will,¹⁶⁸ both naturally prior principles, and causal with respect to that which follows from them. Type C is equivalent to Cat. 5’s substantial priority. Even though Aristotle cites Plato as the source for Meta. 5.11’s fourth type of priority (“substantial”), a new application of his criteria for natural priority is evidently at work, for both Cat. 5 and Meta. 5.11 both identify primary substance as independent and prior, which position is not Platonic. On the other hand, Type B priority seems equivalent to Post. An.’s more Platonic variety. Now we must determine why Aristotle thinks that all the senses of priority are reducible to Type C.

2.2.4 *The Reducibility Claim*

At the end of Meta. 5.11 Aristotle claims that the various senses of priority are all reduced “according to these last senses”.¹⁶⁹ Apparently he means the types of priority in Type C, natural priority.¹⁷⁰ In chapter three below, we will find that natural priority for Aquinas is just the very combination present here: The priority of substance as defined by actuality. Here, however, our main concern is to find justification for the “reducibility claim”. This inquiry will conclude that a) the reducibility of all types of priority to natural priority is possible when the analogous character of principles is understood, and b) the attribution of this sense of priority to Plato in Meta. 5.11 is not accidental, but rather a shift of the referent of natural priority to individual substance, without loss of the criteria for that which is naturally prior.¹⁷¹ Now, if natural priority can somehow be found to encompass both individual substances and universals, then Meta. 5.11’s reducibility claim would seem to work, thereby unravelling some of the

¹⁶⁷ This refers to priority by motion, where the First Mover is the principle of motion.

¹⁶⁸ The will is the principle of the order of power.

¹⁶⁹ Meta. 5.11 1019a11-14.

¹⁷⁰ Although J. Cleary limits the identification to priority by actuality and potency, on the basis of the explanatory power of act and potency in all other priority contexts, also basing his view on the example of wholes and parts which follows. See Cleary, p. 51. He takes his reading from Aristotle’s own view in the latter’s translation. Surprisingly, J. Owens fails to analyse the reducibility claim in The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian “Metaphysics” in the section discussing natural priority (3rd ed., pp. 319-22). The view that Book Delta is not merely a lexicon is found in G. Reale, Il Concetto di Filosofia Prima e l’Unità della Metafisica di Aristotele (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1961). Cf. the English translation of the third edition: The Concept of First Philosophy and the Unity of the Metaphysics of Aristotle, ch. 8 (Tr. J. Catan. New York: SUNY, 1980).

¹⁷¹ Chapter three below attributes to Aquinas an analogous transformation of the doctrine of Aristotle.

complexity of reconciling the types of priority. One could account for Type B priority (in knowledge), and explain Type A priority (“PN” priority) on the condition that the independently existing subject which is naturally prior is itself a principle, so that Type A’s subtypes would be accommodated.

The reducibility claim turns on what some scholars identify as the fundamental question of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, namely, the relationship between the one and the many, the particular and the universal.¹⁷² The coincidence of epistemological and ontological priority under the title “natural” priority is the heart of the issue, and the primary context for this coincidence is not in Aristotle’s logical works but rather in his description of scientific method in the *Physics*.¹⁷³ As in *Meta. I, 1*, science is described as the search for principles or causes (*archai*). *Meta. 1, 2* specifies these as explanatory or definitional items, namely, the four causes, but Aristotle’s metaphysical realism demands that the *archai* be real as well.¹⁷⁴ Something is prior both in knowledge and in reality if it explains something else¹⁷⁵ and is “the first basis from which a thing is known.”¹⁷⁶ Principles have the common feature of being “the first point from which a thing either is or comes to be or is known.”¹⁷⁷ The natural epistemological priority here is that of demonstration and explanation (and not that of the generation of concepts).

¹⁷² Certainly Halper takes this view, as the title of his work suggests: *The One and the Many in Aristotle’s Metaphysics: The Central Books* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1989). Joseph Owens indicates that the solution to the problem of relating universals and particulars is the key to Aristotle’s metaphysics, and has been the mainstay of debate in modern scholarship. See: *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian “Metaphysics”* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 3rd ed., revised), ch. 1, esp. p. 68. Owens focusses his study on the role of the form as it relates to the individual and universal.

¹⁷³ *Phys. I, 1, 184a10ff*: “In every systematic enquiry where there are first principles, or causes, or elements, knowledge and science result from acquiring knowledge of these; for we think we know something just in case we acquire knowledge of the primary causes, the primary first principles, all the way to the elements.”

¹⁷⁴ In particular, Aristotle’s initial exposition of the subject of metaphysics (not the detailed one found in *Meta. E*) points to God as the primary cause and *archē*: *Meta. I, 2 983a6-11*, where the demands of divine science are indicated.

¹⁷⁵ On the explanatory power of naturally prior principles in the epistemological sense, see *Post An. I, 2 71b29-33*: “They [viz. the premises of a demonstrative syllogism] must be explanatory, better known and prior. They must be explanatory, because we know just when we know the explanation; they must be prior if they are indeed explanatory; and they must be previously known not only in the sense that we comprehend them, but also by our knowing that they are true.” The priority in knowledge here is natural, i.e. *in se*; the premises *become* better known to us after the explanation has been given. for a brief account of the issue, see; T. Irwin, *Aristotle’s First Principles*, ch. 6, s. 66: “Natural Priority in Demonstration” (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1988), pp. 122-24.

¹⁷⁶ *Meta. 5.1, 1013a14-15*, on one central meaning of the term *archē* or principle.

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 1013a17-19.

From these statements, we learn that it is the analogical nature of a principle which gives it both ontological and epistemological priority. If something explains another thing it is both a cause and an explanation, “causes” being real things or elements in things. The relativity of explanation stems from the question posed, not from the ontological principle sought. Rather, it is the real archē which is naturally prior, as the cause of explanation, for the fact explains the truth of the statement, not the reverse.¹⁷⁸

We have seen that Type A priority can, if specified, turn out to be a particular description of Type C priority. Is type B priority similarly included as a particular description of Type C? Natural epistemological priority is limited to priority in demonstration.¹⁷⁹ The premises which explain a conclusion and are themselves unexplained are naturally prior to the conclusion. So, in a limited fashion, Type B priority is also reducible to Type C. The reducibility claim is justified to some extent.

However, there is still the problem of how Meta. 5.11’s fourth sense of priority which is that of nature or substance, can be reconciled with his explicit attribution of this type to Plato. Plato’s “removal criterion” is attached to substances, which can apparently exist without accidents,¹⁸⁰ and in this way Aristotle can be seen to shift the referent of “naturally prior” into the realm of individual substance, and away from universals. I presume this shift to have occurred through a focus on the priority of actuality (culminating in Meta. 9) to potency, which was determined through a teleological approach which began in the theatre of generation in the biological substance (Meta. 7 - 8). The progress of Aristotle’s argumentation about substance is from the phenomenon of motion to that of act, where the transitive status of motion is

¹⁷⁸ Cat. 5, 14b11-23. It is Aristotle’s metaphysical realism which supports this view. A propositional first principle is caused by an extramental state of affairs “because of the facts external to our beliefs...Let us say that in so far as we [have the correct beliefs in the correct connexions]...we grasp ‘objective’ (propositional) first principles describing the (nonpropositional) first principles of an objective reality.” This is the description of T. Irwin in his book Aristotle’s First Principles, p. 4.

¹⁷⁹ Indeed, if it were extended to include knowledge in the sense of generation of concepts, then it would be possible to know universals as confused singulars, without the prior knowledge of any singulars. The issue becomes more complex in the case of Aquinas’ epistemology, where ens is the first concept and conditional for all other knowledge. But Aquinas notes that being is first known through an id quod est. On ens as the first concept, see, e.g. De ver. 10.11; In 1 Meta. l. 2 (#46); S.T. I 5.2. The background to the issue is Avicenna’s phrase that ens est primum quod cadit in intellectu. The generation of the first concept is treated in almost all major secondary works on Aquinas’ metaphysics (of which epistemology is a branch). For an interesting historical reflection, see J. de Finance, Connaissance de l’être (Desclée de Brouwer: Paris, 1966), ch. 1.

contrasted with the immanent status of act, the more properly metaphysical notion.¹⁸⁰ The natural priority of substance is defensible through the priority of act over potency. Aristotle's account of natural priority differs from that of Plato in its referent, therefore, even though the removal criterion and nonreciprocal dependence are still applied.

The above analysis of natural priority in Aristotle's metaphysics has examined the relationship between the diverse senses, the apparent contradiction between the Platonic separability criterion and the mutual implication in being, and the reducibility criterion of Meta. V.11. Proximity to a principle was found to be a common element in all types of natural priority, making the types of principles generate the various orders in which natural priority is found. The coincidence of ontological and epistemological natural priorities was examined and explained as a transformation of Plato's Ideas into Aristotelian separate forms. The limited sense in which mutual implication in being is understood eliminated the contradiction between two main senses of natural priority for Aristotle, and the reducibility claim was justified within a theory of the analogous and causal nature of principles. In the texts of Aquinas, the causal character of the naturally prior real principle of Meta. 5.11 is even more evident, we shall now see.

¹⁸⁰ This example applies logically only to the First Substance, although Aristotle does not indicate this to be the case. Only after the argument for the primacy of substance through an analysis of the notion of act (Meta. 7 - 9) can this conclusion be seen to be true.

¹⁸¹ See Aristotle's example of vision at Meta. 9.8, 1050a9-10, and his general distinction in that context of acts which contain their own goal and those with extrinsic goals. The example given in Meta. 9.8 is that of vision (activity having an intrinsic end) versus housebuilding (activity with an extrinsic end). On immanent versus transitive activities, cf. Nic. Eth. I.1. The distinction can be correlated with that one made in Meta. 9.6 between movement and action, in terms of whether or not the goal is self-contained (cf. Meta. 1048b18ff).

AQUINAS' DEVELOPMENT OF
THE CONCEPT OF NATURAL PRIORITY

3.1 *The Transformation of the Greek Notion Of Natural Priority*

We have already indicated the way in which Platonic natural priority can be reconciled with Aristotelian natural priority, through showing the analogous character of principles, which are causal with respect to their effects. This is less a reconciliation than a transformation however, of the Platonic identification of ontological and natural priorities, into a basically Aristotelian theory of substance, by using the criterion of nonreciprocal dependence. And, there remains the problem of how substance is naturally prior (using the removal criterion) to accidents in the finite realm. While the nonreciprocal dependence idea clearly applies, there is no case of a separately existing substance for Aristotle or for Aquinas, except in the case of God.¹ The case for substance's separate existence is much less intelligible² than is the case for substance not being an effect of accidents, and thus dependent on them.³

Aquinas' reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle lay in two facts: First, his acceptance of some versions of the coincidence of the natural priorities of knowledge and being, and second, his acceptance of the idea that natural priority belongs to principles and those things that are in proximity to them. His transformation of these thinkers' notions of natural priority lay in his

¹ God cannot properly be called a substance, for He is outside all genera. See, e.g. *C.G.* I 25. This does not preclude God from being naturally prior to creation, however. On the contrary, the suprageneric character of infinite being guarantees its transcendence and removal from creation.

² Also, applying the removal criterion results in this presumed independence of substance. Aquinas uses this criterion in his references to substance, but rarely is there an explicit discussion of substance itself. Rather, the priority of substance is appealed to in other contexts: *S.T.* III 75.5 (1); *In 1 Eth.* I. 6 (#7); *S.T.* III 84.6; *De mal.* 4.4, e.g. The natural priority is often linked to substance's causal status, as in the case of most uses of "natural priority" in Aquinas.

³ Also, Aquinas' agreement with Aristotle on the natural priority of substance to accidents in *Meta.* V. lectio 13 is inconsistent with his development of the notion of natural priority in the divine sphere in other texts, such as *De ver.* I.5; *C.G.* II 16 [11]; *S.T.* I.46.1; *c.G.* I.34; *De pot.* 7.7. These texts indicate that God alone is naturally prior to matter and all creation, implying that finite substance does not have natural priority in the strong sense.

stress on the causal character of the naturally prior principle of being (in his theory of creation and proofs for God's existence). His applications of the priority/posteriority relation are wide-ranging, and usually include reference to the role of esse. He uses natural priority, for example, to demonstrate the existence of pure intellects,⁴ the mediatory character of powers of the soul,⁵ to describe divisions of being,⁶ and to show the priority of esse to accidental forms.⁷ Natural priority also applies particularly to substance for Aquinas.⁸

Other than the multitudinous references to "natural priority"⁹ in the corpus of Aquinas, there are a few direct discussions of it, in his analysis of man's knowledge of God,¹⁰ in his discussion of the relative priorities of the causes which is located in his discussion of counsels and precepts,¹¹ and in his commentary on Aristotle's notion of natural priority in Metaphysics Book Delta.¹² Before discussing the detailed divisions of natural priority in Aquinas' works, however, his evaluation of Plato and Aristotle must be further indicated.

We have seen the way in which the analogous character of principles indicates the coincidence of ontological and epistemological natural priorities for Aristotle. For Aquinas, the causal character of principles extends to the notion of virtual containment. All being exists virtually and originally in its First Cause, and all sciences are somehow naturally implanted in us by virtue of the agent intellect.¹³ However, the first principles of demonstration¹⁴ are called "first

⁴ C.G. II 91, for example. The most mature treatment of this issue is found in De subst. sep., passim.

⁵ S.T. I 77.7; In 1 Sent. d. 3 q. 4 a. 3 arg. 1 ad 1.

⁶ De princ. nat. ch. 1, on the absolute priority of actuality, in abstraction from the mode in which it is given. On the fulness of being which is found in the "common nature" of being, prior to all instances of being, see, e.g. De mal. VII, q.1 a.1 ad 1. Of course Aquinas also treats, along with Aristotle, the predication of being according to priority and posteriority in the categories: In 7 Meta. l. 4 #1331; #1338.

⁷ The accidental form, he maintains, is both ontologically and temporally posterior to the esse it limits (this is most evident in change): In Boeth. de Heb. l. 2 #24, e.g.

⁸ Substance will be seen to be prior to accident both in nature (in re) and in knowledge or definition: C.G. I 34, e.g. In this text, the coincidence of ontological and epistemological priority is clearly outlined. But in the next chapter we will study the various priorities of substance.

⁹ "prior ordine naturae", "naturaliter prior" and "prius natura" are the usual ways Aquinas expresses the notion. See the references in R. Busa's Index Thomisticus: Sancti Thomae Aquinatis operum omnium indices et concordantiae (48 vos.) (Stuttgart, 1974-1980), entry #65541 [prior], pp. 291-304, which contains most of the references.

¹⁰ C.G. I 34, e.g.

¹¹ Quodlibet 5.10.19.

¹² In 5 Meta. l. 13.

¹³ De ver. X.6; XI.11; S.T. I 79.2.

¹⁴ Epistemological natural priority refers not to the order of discovery but primarily to that of demonstration, which begins with first principles endowed with their own universality. The order of

in commonness”¹⁵ to distinguish them from that principle which is “first in causality”, viz. God. In Aquinas’ treatment of Aristotle’s notion of “absolute” natural priority below, we shall return to the relation between universality or commonness and causality.

Before analysing the texts in which natural priority is used by Aquinas, it is helpful to delineate the ways in which he accepted and rejected both Plato’s and Aristotle’s notions of natural priority. Regarding Plato, Aquinas accepted the doctrine of a subsistent first principle and the notion of participation, but rejected Plato’s imposing the mode of knowledge on that of being, as well as his interpretation of the supreme idea of the Good. De substantiis separatis chapters 1 - 4 is the most mature and lengthy treatment of what some scholars¹⁶ have referred to as the “via Platonica”, since it details the development of Plato’s (and the Platonists’) theory of the forms as separate substances. In that text, Aquinas praises Plato’s theory of the highest immaterial principle in which material beings participate, as an advance over the naturalist philosophers’ materialism.¹⁷ In the Prologue to his commentary on De divinis nominibus he again accepts Plato’s view. In other texts,¹⁸ Aquinas praises the NeoPlatonist motif of virtual containment or the plenitude of being in its source, which is consonant with Plato’s principle of

discovery ascends from sense particulars to universals, and our knowledge is based on sense: S.T. I 84, in general. See S.T. I 84.6 especially. Cf. In 1 Phys. l. 1 (#8): “Ipsa individua sensibilia...sunt magis nota quoad nos, quia sensus cognitio, quae est singularium, praecedit cognitionem intellectus in nobis, quae est universalium.” (Cf. In 1 Post. An. l. 4 (#43); In 10 Meta. l. 4 (#1990). The many arguments against Plato’s innate ideas are all based on the use of sense organs and objects in the process of attaining ideas. On the derivation of universals from particulars, or the movement from sensory to intellectual knowledge, see S.T. I 85.1 ad 1 (cf. De ver. VIII.9; C.G. II 75).

¹⁵ De ver. X.11 and ad 11. They are called more universal “by predication” at In 1 Meta. l. 2 (#46), where their commonness or universality parallels principles in the natural order. In both, the process of “becoming” involves an advance from potency to act.

¹⁶ I am referring here especially to R. Henle in his book St. Thomas and Platonism (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1956) *passim*. See esp pp. 297, 303, 347-51. Henle does not attribute the phrase “via Platonica” to St. Thomas but indicates that there are grounds for its usage in several texts, such as De subst. sep. 1 (#4): “Unde Plato sufficientiori via processit ad opinionem priorum Naturalium evacuandam...”

¹⁷ De subst. sep. 1 (#4-#7).

¹⁸ Other texts include In 1 Sent. 22.1, expositio textus: “Semper autem principalior praedicatio est quae est per essentiam, quam quae est per participationem...Non enim quid est in causato, oportet esse in causa eodem modo, sed eminentiori; et sic exponit Dionysius sic dicens: ‘vivere si quis dicat vitam, aut illuminare lumen, non recte secundum meam rationem dicit; sed secundum alium modum ista dicuntur: quia abundanter et substantialiter ea quae sunt causatorum, prius insunt causis’...” S.T. I 4.2 explains divine preeminence in terms of Pseudo-Dionysius’ theory of divine causality. De ver. 29.3 treats grace in terms of the intensive quantity of being, and the Platonic principle of plenitude is used without explicit reference to Neoplatonists or Plato.

participation.¹⁹ Finally, divine preeminent perfection follows on the separate and subsistent nature of infinite being.²⁰

While he accepted the Platonic notion of an immaterial first principle and source of participated perfection, Aquinas rejected Plato's confusion of the modes of knowledge and being, as well as his separate idea of the Good. Plato's confusion of the separate way in which things are understood (through abstraction) with their actual being is referred to in several texts.²¹ Aquinas explains the error of positing separate natures in terms of Plato's ignorance of the nature of similitude, and the resulting confusion of the modes of cognition and being. Plato thought

that the form of the thing known must of necessity be in the knower in the same manner as in the thing known itself...it was his opinion that the form of the thing understood is in the intellect under conditions of universality, immateriality, and immobility... Therefore [Plato] concluded that the things which we understand must subsist in themselves under the same conditions of immateriality and immobility.²²

The Platonist method of projecting our abstract mode of knowing onto the mode of being of things is also rejected in the Prologue to De divinibus nominibus. The reduction to abstract principles is justified only in the case of the transcendentals, which are "separate" as the source of participation. Plato's confusion of the modes of knowledge and being also led to a misunderstanding of the idea of the Good according to Aquinas. At De veritate 21.4, Plato is said to separate in reality what can be separated only mentally, in the "homo separatus" example used in Aristotle's Metaphysics²³. Particular forms as well as forms of goodness and unity are

¹⁹ The notion of separate subsistent forms with causality towards sensible realities, and of an order in causality according to degrees of simplicity and removal from matter, is accepted as Platonic by Aquinas at In de causis prop. 3.

²⁰ S.T. I 4.2, e.g. Cf. C.G. I.28. The NeoPlatonic authority of Pseudo-Dionysius is cited in both texts.

²¹ One such text is De subst. sep. 1 (#4 - #5), where the separate natures are said to be posited by Plato as a foundation for certainty, where simplicity in the intellect meant priority in being. Cf. S.T. I 84.1.

²² S.T. I 84.1c. The mode of action corresponds to the mode of the agent's form, he also says at S.T. I 84.1c, thus distinguishing the modes of understanding (immateriality, necessity, universality) and being.

²³ In 1 Meta. 1. 10 (#155), for example. Aquinas says at De ver. 21.4: "...Et ideo Platonici dixerunt, quod omnia sunt bona formaliter bonitate prima non sicut forma coniuncta, sed sicut forma separata. Ad cuius intellectum sciendum est, quod Plato [apud Arist., Meta. text. 6] ea quae possunt separari secundum intellectum, ponebat etiam secundum esse separata; et ideo sicut homo potest intelligi praeter Socratem et Platonem, ita ponebat hominem esse praeter Socratem et Platonem, quem dicebat per se hominem, et ideam hominis, cuius participatione Socrates et Plato homines dicebantur. Sicut autem inveniebat hominem communem Socrati et Platoni, et huiusmodi hominibus; ita inveniebat bonum esse commune omnibus bonis, et posse intelligi bonum non intelligendo hoc vel illud bonum; unde ponebat ipsum esse

capable of being understood independently of any cognition of a particular instance, and hence Plato assumed the existence of separate forms in which the particulars participate. This error is doubled when applied to the notion of goodness, however, since as a transcendental it has universal extension, even to other ideas. And Aristotle proved²⁴ that the predication of goodness is not univocal, but has many gradated senses, like the other transcendentals. Aquinas agrees in Aristotle's refutation of Plato's separate idea of the Good and echoes Aristotle's affirmation of a separate existing Good. For Plato, there are no ideas of classes involving priority and posteriority,²⁵ and since goodness does have such an order, it is not a Platonic idea.²⁶

As regards Aristotle on the topic of natural priority, Aquinas accepts Aristotle's association of natural priority with separate, complete and actual being, but shifts the subject matter of metaphysics from separate substance to ens commune along the lines of Avicenna. In addition, he treats the causality of the separate substances as a key characteristic of natural priority in his theory of subsistence.

In his theory of the separated soul, Aquinas acknowledges Aristotle's view that the separateness of soul stems from its imparting of motion, as a completed being in itself.²⁷ Just as for Aristotle, eternal Mind is separate from sensible things insofar as it is actual,²⁸ so for Aquinas, a form is "absolute" as freed from matter insofar as it is actual in relation to God.²⁹

Regarding the subject matter of metaphysics, Aquinas' conception of ens commune (common or universal being) differs from Aristotle's separate movers, and reflects an Avicennian notion of immateriality. Aristotle discusses the subject of metaphysics in

separatum praeter omnia bona particularia: et hoc ponebat esse per se bonum, sive ideam, cuius participatione omnia bona dicerentur; ut patet per Philosophum in 1 Ethic...." The reference to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics is E.N. I.6 (1096a34-b2). Plato treats the Idea of the Good at Republic VI. 18 (507B) and VI. 19 (508B-C), as well as at Parm. 130B.

²⁴ E.N. I.6 (1096a11-b25). See Aquinas, De ver. 21.4.

²⁵ And Aquinas notes that the Platonists consistently deny that there is an idea of number for this very reason (In 1 Eth. l. 6 #80).

²⁶ In 1 Eth. l. 6 (#79-#80).

²⁷ In 1 Sent. d. 8 q. 5 a. 2 arg. 5: "Sed illud quod non habet esse nisi per hoc quod est in altero, non potest remanere post illud, nec etiam potest esse motor, quamvis possit esse principium motus, quia movens est ens perfectum in se; forma ignis non est motor, ut dicitur VIII Physic. Anima autem manet post corpus, et est motor corporis." Cf. De Unit. Intell., I, 37 (#198). See Aristotle, Phys. V (257b12-13). Aristotle is indebted to Plato for his notion of the soul as the self-movant: Phdr. 245C-E; Lg. X, 894B-897C.

²⁸ See Aquinas' commentaries on Aristotle: In 12 Meta. l. 8 (#2547); In III De Anima l. 10 (#732).

²⁹ In 1 Sent. 8.5.2 ad 5. See Aristotle, Meta. 12.7 (1072a23-26; 1073a4), for the alliance of "separate" and "actual". The scale of independence culminates in Pure Act: De ente et essentia c. 4 [10].

Metaphysics VI.1 in relation to the division among the theoretical sciences. Since natural science defines things according to their sensible matter, its subject matter is inseparable from matter both in notion and being.³⁰ Mathematics, on the other hand, considers things as immobile and separate from the matter in which the mathematical forms are found, even though the mathematical forms have no claim to separate existence.³¹ Only first philosophy studies things as eternal and immovable and separable in being as well as in notion.³² In Metaphysics VIII.1, Aristotle indicates in more detail the requirements of being separate: Neither the form nor the matter but only the composite can be called separate, as capable of separate existence.³³ Ultimately the quality of separateness pertains to the suprasensible substances for Aristotle, which alone possess complete actuality.³⁴ For Aristotle, separateness is a characteristic of substance,³⁵ and thus cannot properly apply to mathematics, which are accidents.

Aquinas' conception of separateness in relation to the subject of metaphysics and the divisions of the sciences is less restrictive than Aristotle's, since it includes what can be called neutral immateriality as well as negative immateriality. That is, the subject of metaphysics includes things which while immaterial in themselves, can sometimes be found in matter. This is a broader notion of immateriality than is Aristotle's necessarily immaterial separate forms. Being, potency and act and the transcendentals fit Aquinas' description, which is more Avicennian than Aristotelian, such that ens commune and not divine being, is the subject of metaphysics.³⁶

³⁰ Meta. VI.1 (1025b20-1026a7). Aquinas notes that physics thus considers what is not separate insofar as it is not separate (In 6 Meta. l. 1 #1161).

³¹ Meta. VI.1 (1026a7-10). Even though the mathematical forms are considered separately from matter, they are not separate: (Meta. IV.1 [1026a15]; IX.7 [1064a33]).

³² Meta. VI.1 (1026a10-17).

³³ Meta. VIII.1 (1042a29-31). However, the form may be separately formulated (i.e. separate in notion).

³⁴ Indeed, the Meta. VI.1 text applies "separate" only to immaterial realities, as the first causes of all being.

³⁵ Meta. VII.1 (1028a18-34).

³⁶ See Aquinas, In Meta. Proem. In 6 Meta. l. 1 (#1165) attributes this extension of Aristotle's subject matter of metaphysics to Avicenna, and #1163 interprets Aristotle as saying that first philosophy studies things which are separable (not separate) from matter in being. At Meta. VI.1 (1026a12-20), Aristotle does say that the eternal causes are separable from matter, but the emphasis in distinction from physics and mathematics is that these causes exist separately, and must in order to exercise causality in relation to being in general.

3.2 *Aquinas' Divisions of Natural Priority*

Aquinas' explicit discussions of natural priority are few, but his use of the concept is manifold, spanning issues proper to his own philosophical thought as well as those proper to Aristotle. His own philosophical use of natural priority includes the existence of pure intellects, the mediatory character of the soul's powers, the divisions of being, the relation of *esse* to accidental forms, and to substance.³⁷ As well, it is involved in his analysis of the common nature,³⁸ creation,³⁹ the *via Platonica*⁴⁰ and of precepts and counsels.⁴¹ For the sake of simplicity, the following divisions of types of natural priority in Aquinas are arranged according to Aristotle's divisions, which Aquinas adapts and develops.

3.2.1 *The "Separability" Criterion*

As indicated in section 3.1 above, Aquinas' new notion of separability applied to the common properties of being as the subject of metaphysics, which were adopted from Avicenna in lieu of Aristotle's subject matter of divine being. Aquinas' notion of the "judgment of separation" bases his derivation of the subject matter of metaphysics as inclusive of neutrally immaterial objects such as common being, act, potency and the transcendentals, in contrast to Aristotle's position.

Just as in the *Proemium* to the Commentary on Aristotle's "Metaphysics", In de Trinitate V.1 indicates that separation from matter and motion pertains to theoretical sciences, and first philosophy includes two types of beings which do not depend on matter or motion for their being or for their being understood, viz., those that are never found in matter (God and angels),

³⁷ For these examples of his use of the concept of natural priority, see chapter three, s.3.1.

³⁸ In 1 Eth. l. 6 discusses Plato's separate idea of the Good, and texts such as S.T. II-II 182.4 discuss the nature taken absolutely, as contrasted to in generation or time. This distinction is involved in Aquinas' notion of natural priority. See section 3.2.2 below.

³⁹ Texts such as De pot. 3.14 ad 8, as well as the analysis of creation in De aeternitate mundi and S.T. I 44.2 all link natural priority to ontological dependence, in contrast to generation. As well, the concept of a *per se* series, used in the S.T. I.2.3 and S.T. I 46.2 [ad 7] are also involved in the theory of natural priority as causal. See section 3.3.1.1 below.

⁴⁰ The "via Platonica" is described at De ver. 21.4 and De subst. sep. 1, as well as In de div. nom. Prol., where Plato's subsistent forms are rejected.

⁴¹ Quodl. V.10.1 [19]. The distinction here is between priority in nature or perfection on the one hand, and priority in generation, on the other. Many examples of natural priority utilize this distinction, such as in the discussions of angels' illumination, the order among the soul's powers, and the relation of God to the world. See section 3.2.3 below.

and those that are sometimes found in matter (substance, quality, being, potency, act, the one and the many, and things of this sort).⁴²

The judgment of separation is the mind's operation of division by which it distinguishes one thing from another by understanding that the one does not exist in the other.⁴³ This judgment is often called the "negative" judgment of separation in contrast to the "positive" such judgment, and in contrast to abstraction, which understands a thing without reference to whether the objects in question are really united or not.⁴⁴ Unlike the mind's first operation, which can abstract things which are not separated in reality, judgment involves reference to existence. The truth in judgment is preserved when that which is united (or separated) by the intellect is united (or separated) in reality.

The negative judgment of separation is necessary in the process of detaching being (*ens*) from a concept which includes the material and changing, on the one hand, or excludes individual differences, on the other. The former concept pertains to physics, the latter is proper to a univocal concept, and neither is suitable for the subject matter of *ens commune*. According to *In de Trin.* V.1, substance and being are instances of neutrally immaterial things, and these define the subject matter of metaphysics as something inclusive of diverse types of being. That by reason of which something is described as being does not limit it to a certain kind, whether that be material, changing, or spiritual. Rather, *separatio* affirms the neutral and inclusive character of being, as found in its diverse instances.⁴⁵ All differences are present within being in a confused way, making *ens* transcendental and analogical both in concept and in reality.⁴⁶

⁴² J. Wippel calls these two types of immateriality "positive" or "strong" immateriality (God and angels) versus "neutral" immateriality (substance, being, act, potency, etc.) in his article "Metaphysics and *Separatio*" in his book *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* [Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy Vol. 10] (Washington, D.C.: C.U.A. Press, 1984) pp. 72-73.

⁴³ *In de Trinitate* V.3c: "Sic ergo intellectus distinguit unum ab altero aliter et aliter secundum diversas operationes; quia secundum operationem, qua componit et dividit, distinguit unum ab alio per hoc quod intelligit unum alii non inesse. In operatione vero qua intelligit, quid est unumquodque, distinguit unum ab alio, dum intelligit, quid est hoc, nihil intelligendo de alio, neque quod sit cum eo, neque quod sit ab eo separatum. Unde ista distinctio non proprie habet nomen separationis, sed prima tantum. Haec autem distinctio recte dicitur abstractio, sed tunc tantum quando ea, quorum unum sine altero intelligitur, sunt simul secundum rem."

⁴⁴ Abstraction of the form from sensible matter results in mathematics, and abstraction of a universal from a particular belongs to physics or natural philosophy, Aquinas goes on to explain in *In de Trin.* V.3. ⁴⁵ Aquinas attributes the limited and univocal conception of being to Parmenides in *In 1 Meta.* l. 9 (#138-#139).

⁴⁶ See, e.g. *De ver.* I.1.

Aquinas distinguishes himself from Aristotle, then, in making ens commune (as grasped by separatio) and not a particular type of being, the subject of metaphysics.⁴⁷

The judgment of separation procures the subject matter of metaphysics for Aquinas without identifying that subject with God, it has been shown. This conclusion is also supported by two facts: God *cannot* be the subject of metaphysics for Aquinas, and a proof of God is not required to obtain separatio's term. God cannot qualify as the subject matter because only quia knowledge (knowledge *that* something exists), and not quidditative knowledge (knowledge of the essence) of Him is possible.⁴⁸ Further, a proof of positive (vs. neutral) immateriality is not required to obtain the subject of metaphysics because divine being is the cause of ens commune and not identical to it,⁴⁹ and the restriction of being to a certain type is a denial of its transcendental and analogical nature.⁵⁰

In addition to being closely tied to the subject of metaphysics, the separability criterion has other applications for Aquinas. It was established that Plato's subsistent ideas were a mistaken interpretation of separability.⁵¹ In De ente et essentia⁵² the separability criterion is used to establish a metaphysical hierarchy based on removal from matter, and the causal character of naturally prior first principles is established:

Whenever things are so related to each other that one is the cause of the other's being, the one that is the cause can have being without the other, but not vice versa...If we can find some forms that can exist only in matter, this happens to

⁴⁷ See In III Sent. d. 27 q. 2 a. 4 sol. 2: "...sicut philosophia prima est specialis scientia, quamvis consideret ens secundum quod est omnibus commune, quia specialem rationem entis considerat secundum quod non dependet a materia et motu." Cf. In 4 Meta. l. 1 (#530); In 6 Meta. l. 1 (#1147).

⁴⁸ In de Trin. I.2; VI.6; C.G. I 30; De pot. 7.5 ad 6; S.T. I.13. See J. Wippel, "Quidditative Knowledge of God" in his book Metaphysical Themes... pp. 215-241.

⁴⁹ In de div. nom. c. V. l. 2 (#660): "...omnia existentia continentur sub ipso esse communi, non autem Deus, sed magis esse commune continetur sub eius virtute." Cf. In de Trin. V.4; S.T. I-II 66.5 ad 4: "Cognoscere autem rationem entis et non entis, et totius et partis, et aliorum quae consequuntur ad ens, ex quibus sicut ex terminis constituuntur principia indemonstrabilia, pertinet ad sapientiam: quia ens commune est proprius effectus causae altissimae, scilicet Dei."

⁵⁰ I am in agreement with Wippel's view expressed in "Metaphysics and Separatio in Thomas Aquinas" p. 103: "...that by reason of which something is recognized as being need not be identified with or restricted to that by reason of which it is recognized as being of a given kind. (In fact, to deny this would be to deny that there can be different kinds of being, a conclusion that runs counter to our experience of canine being, human beings, etc.)..."

⁵¹ In chapter two, section 2.2.2.1 above.

⁵² De ente et essentia c. 4 [3].

them because they are far removed from the first principle...forms closest to the first principle are forms subsisting in themselves without matter...⁵³

A form's degree of immateriality depends on its removal from matter.⁵⁴ Combined with its proximity to Pure Act, it is this immateriality which qualifies any given form as subsistent and separate.⁵⁵ Further, its subsistence permits its causality with respect to those things related to it. It is the higher "absolute" mode of being of the pure intelligences which transcends the traditional fourfold division of causes, and which bases their unique mode of causation.⁵⁶ Further analysis of subsistence in Aquinas' thought⁵⁷ will provide detail on the precise sense of being which subsistence involves in relation to metaphysical principles.

Aquinas' final use of the separability criterion occurs in his discussions of truth as a mixed relation between God and creature. Truth taken strictly (proprie) is found in the intellect, and only secondarily and broadly (improprie) in things.⁵⁸ A thing is true only insofar as it is naturally apt to produce a true awareness of itself in an intellect and insofar as it imitates its

⁵³ De ente et essentia c. 4 [3]: "...Quaecumque enim ita se habent ad invicem quod unum est causa esse alterius, illud quod habet rationem causae potest habere esse sine altero, sed non convertitur...si inveniantur aliquae formae quae non possunt esse nisi in materia, hoc accidit eis secundum quod sunt distantes a primo principio quod est actus primus et purus. Unde illae formae quae sunt propinquissime primo principio sunt formae per se sine materia subsistentes, non enim forma secundum totum genus suum materia indiget, ut dictum est..."

⁵⁴ Aquinas points this out also in relation to the human soul, which has esse absolutum in the sense of being freed from matter: "...omnis forma est aliqua similitudo primi principii, qui est actus purus: unde quanto forma magis accedit ad similitudinem ipsius, plures participat de perfectionibus eius. Inter formas autem corporum magis appropinquat ad similitudinem Dei, anima rationalis; et ideo participat de nobilitatibus Dei, scilicet quod intelligit, et quod potest movere, et quod habet esse per se...dico igitur, quod animae non convenit movere, vel habere esse absolutum, inquantum est forma; sed inquantum est similitudo Dei..." (In 1 Sent. d.8 q.5 a.2 ad 5). The connection between being removed from matter and existing per se recurs in Aquinas' analysis of Aristotle's theory of happiness: Happiness concerns acts which are per se or self-sufficient, viz. involve operations which are separate from matter. See In 10 Eth. l. 9 #2069. Immanent (per se) activities are contrasted to those which are transcendent (per aliud) here.

⁵⁵ In In 1 Sent. d. 23 q.1 a.1, Aquinas notes that the definition of subsistence involves separate and independent existence. To subsist means to exist per se, that is, through itself and not in a substance as in a subject. To exist per se and to exist simpliciter ("absolutely") are the same, in that both involve being able to exist by itself, separately in the real world. See In 8 Meta. l. 1 #1687, on the composite: "...Compositum vero ex his dicitur esse substantia quasi 'separabile simpliciter', id est separatim per se existere potens in rerum natura; et eius solius est generatio et corruptio..."

⁵⁶ We shall detail the relation between the separate substances' mode of causing being and natural priority in chapter five below, in the analysis of Fabro's views.

⁵⁷ See chapter four, section 4.2.4.2 below.

⁵⁸ C.G. I 60. Cf. S.T. I 16.1. Here, things are true in a secondary fashion insofar as they are ordered to the divine mind.

proper idea in the divine mind.⁵⁹ A thing is related per se to the intellect on which it depends for its being, and only per accidens to an intellect by which it can be known. Things are true in an unqualified or absolute sense by reason of their order to the divine intellect from which they get their being.⁶⁰ Natural priority is involved in two senses here. First, something (here, truth) is predicated in prior fashion of that in which its complete nature is realised.⁶¹ Truth is found in an intellect in a prior fashion because the motion of a cognitive power finds its perfection in its term, which is in the soul. In this way, natural priority in the case of God's mind does not signify His causal relation to creatures, but rather the most perfect state of things' being.

The second sense in which natural priority is present in Aquinas' discussions of truth lies in his use of Plato's formulation of the separability criterion, found in De veritate q. 21 a. 1. Here, he discusses the nonmutual relation of truth between God and creature, and the question of whether truth is an extrinsic or intrinsic relation. The relation added either by truth or by goodness to being is only one of reason, he says. In such a relation, the related thing does not depend on that to which it is related, but the converse does not hold. A being is only conceptually related to the intellect which knows it, while the intellect is really related to it.⁶² Since the measured and perfected are really related to that which measures and perfects, the true and good add the relation of perfecting to being.⁶³ And, since things are related to God's intellect as measured to measure, God's intellect is independent of and causal with respect to, creatures.

In sum, representative examples of Aquinas' use of the notion of separability are found in his establishment of metaphysics' subject matter, in his discussions of the via Platonica, in his construction of metaphysical hierarchy and in his discussions of truth.

⁵⁹ C.G. I 60: "...res tamen interdum vera dicitur, secundum quod proprie actum propriae naturae consequitur...inquantum talis res nata est de se facere veram aestimationem, et inquantum propriam sui rationem quae est in mente divina, imitatur."

⁶⁰ S.T. I 16.1c.

⁶¹ For instance, he goes on to say, "healthy" is predicated of an animal in a prior way because it is in an animal that the complete and perfect nature is first realized; medicine is called healthy in a secondary way as causing or producing health.

⁶² Thus, the relation of science to the known object is real, while that of the known to science is rational.

⁶³ De ver. q. 21 a. 1: "...scientia enim dependet a scibili sed non e converso. Unde relatio qua scientia refertur ad scibile est realis, relatio vero qua scibile refertur ad scientiam est rationis tantum...Et ita est in omnibus aliis quae se habent ut mensura et mensuratum, vel perfectivum et perfectibile. Oportet igitur quod verum et bonum super intellectum entis addant respectum perfectivi."

3.2.2 The “*In Se/Quoad Nos*” Distinction

Aquinas’ second use of natural priority refers to the realm of cognition, where a thing is prior and better known either in itself and by nature, (*in se*) or to us (*quoad nos*). This distinction is introduced in *In 1 Post. An.* l. 4, *In 1 Phys.* l.1, and is often invoked in his natural theology.⁶⁴ It has been shown above⁶⁵ how Aquinas rejected Platonic subsistent universals, and thus, his introduction of universals as naturally prior to sensible singulars is puzzling. An analysis of the relevant texts will establish the connection between the specific type of natural priority which Aquinas gave to universals, with his notions of absolute consideration and the real distinction between essence and existence.

We saw in chapter two above that Aristotle interpreted the natural priority of universals to particulars in terms of the requirements of definition. Also, we saw that he concluded to the coincidence of ontological and epistemological orders through the separate forms, which were instances of pure actuality⁶⁶ and pure knowability.⁶⁷ The term “absolutely”⁶⁸ as applied to universals in contrast to particulars⁶⁹ is not taken in the general but rather in the primary sense, since it exhibited the pure intelligibility of the separate substances. It was proved in chapter two, section 2.2.4 above that the analogous causal nature of principles as ontological and epistemological verified Aristotle’s identity of the two types of priority.

Aquinas introduces the *in se/quoad nos* distinction in the context of natural priority in commenting on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, *Posterior Analytics* and *Physics* as well as in his own discussions of precepts and counsels (*Quodlibet* V.10.1). As well, we include *Quodlibet* VIII.1.1, even though it does not mention the distinction explicitly. That text, with the complementary text of *De ente et essentia* c. 3, both discuss the relationship between the universal and the common nature (that is, the nature common to all members of a species). It should finally be noted that the “absolute” type of natural priority is in some instances related to

⁶⁴ Specifically, in his discussions of human knowledge of God and predication (*C.G.* I 34; *S.T.* I 13, for example) and in his distinction between *quia* and *propter quid* proofs in *S.T.* I 2.2.

⁶⁵ In this chapter, s.3.2.1.

⁶⁶ Pure actuality exhibits ontological natural priority, it will be seen.

⁶⁷ Pure knowability exhibits epistemological natural priority in terms of the requirements of definitional knowledge, it will be seen.

⁶⁸ In the Greek this is rendered as *ἄπλως*.

⁶⁹ Particulars were said to possess only “relative” priority: *Post. An.* I.2 (71b33-72a5).

the third type examined below, namely, that which is first in “being” or “perfection” as opposed to being first in “generation” or “time”.⁷⁰

When Aquinas speaks of something as naturally prior in the sense of being prior “in itself” as opposed to being prior “according to us”, several interrelated issues are in fact involved. A review of his discussions of this type of natural priority indicates use of the notion of intelligibility in terms of definition, psychogenesis, divine knowledge, absolute consideration of the nature, and analogical predication of the names of God. A comparison of the texts will reveal that this use of natural priority involves the Platonic removal criterion as well as a causal sense of natural priority which features the naturally prior as fully actual and perfect.⁷¹

The In 1 Post. An. text will be echoed in Quodlibet VIII.1.1’s discussion of the nature’s various modes of consideration and being, in that both make the universal naturally prior in the sense of a separate cause. We argue that Quodlibet VIII.1.1 combines the Platonic removal criterion and a causal sense of natural priority, when read in light of Aquinas’ treatment of the common nature in De ente et essentia c. 3. In this text, one can gather the role of the real distinction between being and essence in the discussion of natural priority.

The text which apparently contradicts In 1 Post. An. namely, Aquinas’ commentary on Phys. 1.1, will be seen to parallel C.G. I.34’s discussion of natural priority in taking up the issue of psychogenesis of concepts. The senses of intelligibility discussed in the Posterior Analytics and the Physics differ, thus resolving any apparent contradiction. Finally, Quodlibet V.10.1’s use of the in se/quoad nos distinction is argued to be similar to Physics I.1’s use of the same distinction, this time focusing on the priority of the universal to particular as one of potency to act. We argue that Aquinas’ use of natural priority involving this type of intelligibility is a less adequate portrayal of his ultimate intention than is the Post. An. usage. Finally, the In 5 Meta. 1. 13 use of the in se/quoad nos distinction in the second main type of priority parallels the use of the same distinction in Post. An. When understood in light of the Aristotelian causal sense of priority as actuality, we hold that the Meta. text should be treated as a significant example of the primary (as opposed to the general) reading of “absolutely” (ἀπλως).

Using the analogous concept of intelligibility to decipher the various meanings Aquinas gives to in se priority, we now turn to an analysis of the texts. The first and most important

⁷⁰ Chapter three, section 3.2.3.

⁷¹ This issue anticipates an overlap with the third type of natural priority, viz. natural priority as perfection (versus priority in generation or time): See chapter three, s. 3.2.3 below.

sense of intelligibility Aquinas uses in invoking the in se/quoad nos distinction is originally found in Post. An. I.2, quoted in full above.⁷² The sense of intelligibility used here is the knowledge of definition and principles of demonstration, and ultimately of causes. That which is prior in nature, or in itself, is contrasted to that which is prior relative to us, in that it is more knowable in the absolute sense, and is furthest from perception. By contrast, things closer to perception are prior and more knowable to us. It will be recalled that Aristotle gave universals “absolute” priority, or priority by nature, and that his justification for this was found in his theory of demonstration elaborated in the Posterior Analytics.⁷³ Universals are first definitionally due to their greater intelligibility than particulars and due to their role as causes.⁷⁴ Aristotle is ultimately referring to the universal causes furthest from sense in Post. An. I.2, knowledge of which constitutes scientific certainty, as Aquinas explains.⁷⁵

Aquinas understands Aristotle’s text to be an instance of the order of absolute intelligibility, since he is speaking “of the order of singular to universal absolutely; and this order must be taken according to the order of sensitive and intellectual knowledge in us”.⁷⁶ At In 1 Phys. l. 1, the reason assigned for the greater intelligibility of the universal cause in contrast to the particular is its greater being,⁷⁷ and Aquinas, it will be shown, assigns greater being to separate substances as universal causes than to particular causes.⁷⁸ At In 2 Meta. l. 1 #282, he

⁷² See chapter two, section 2.2.2 above. The text is Post. An. I.2 (71b33-72a5).

⁷³ Cf. Topics (141b9-10).

⁷⁴ Post. An. I.2 (71b28-35): “The premises must be the causes of the conclusion, better known than it, and prior to it; its causes, since we possess scientific knowledge of a thing only when we know its cause; prior, in order to be causes; antecedently known, this antecedent knowledge being not our mere understanding of the meaning, but knowledge of the fact as well.”

⁷⁵ In 1 Post. An. l. 4 #42: “Tertio, ibi [71b29]: ‘Causas quoque’ etc., probat quod demonstrationis propositiones sint causae conclusionis, quia tunc scimus, cum causas cognoscimus. Et ex hoc concludit ulterius quod sint priores et notiores, quia omnis causa est naturaliter prior et notior suo effectu.”

⁷⁶ In 1 Post. An. I.2 #43: “...dicendum est quod hic loquitur de ordine singularis ad universale simpliciter, quorum ordinem oportet accipere secundum ordinem cognitione sensitivae et intellectivae in nobis...”

⁷⁷ In 1 Phys. l. 1 #7: “...Simpliciter autem notiora sunt, quae secundum se sunt notiora. Sunt autem secundum se notiora, quae plus habent de entitate: quia unumquodque cognoscibile est in quantum est ens. Magis autem entia sunt, quae sunt magis in actu: unde ista maxime sunt cognoscibilia naturae.” Cf. In 6 Meta. l. 3.

⁷⁸ See chapter five, s.5.2.1.3 (on Fabro) below. Aquinas creates a threefold division of types of causes: First, there is the lowest or third grade of causes, which are particular, since they are determined to proper effects of a single species. Second, there are the celestial bodies, which have universal causality which extends to everything that is generable and corruptible (which is a broader causality than to a single species). The first and highest grade of cause is God, whose causality is fully universal, for His proper effect is esse, and extends as well to all being. See In 6 Meta. l.3 (#1207-#1209).

states clearly that the immaterial and separate substances are most knowable in se due to their greater actuality than sensory particulars, such that the embodied intellect is related to them as the eye of an owl to the light of the sun.⁷⁹

It would seem that a comparison of In 5 Meta. l. 13 and In I Post. An. l. 2 leads to a reading of universals' "absolute" natural priority in the primary, not the general, sense of "absolute" priority. That is, the intelligibility of universals in definitions stems from their primacy in reference to the reality of causal principles of being, viz. the separate substances.

The In 5 Meta. l. 13 text parallels this Post. An. sense of natural priority in knowledge. The similarity in the notion of intelligibility in these two texts shows that the "absolute" priority given to universals is taken in the primary sense, and not the general sense, in that universals ultimately refer to first causes.

Priority in knowledge is the second main type of priority listed at In 5 Meta. l. 13. It was noted⁸⁰ that Aristotle made universals prior there as an instance of intellectual cognition (cf. Aquinas' reference to the order of absolute intelligibility, above), echoing the definitional priority of universals in Post. An. I.2. Read in light of the various senses of priority in In 5 Meta. l. 13, and in light of the hierarchy of being developed in De ente et essentia,⁸¹ the meaning of the priority under discussion can be interpreted as encompassing both the full actuality that the known objects possess and their proximity to a nonrelative principle, namely, Pure Act.

In both In 5 Meta. l. 13 and De ente et essentia, a hierarchy of being is introduced which culminates in a first and fully actual principle.⁸² One being is said to be prior to another in

⁷⁹ Aquinas describes the rational consideration proper to divine science in In de Trin. VI.1. He distinguishes the mode of considering things in the order of reality and in the mental order. In the order of reality, the progress of knowledge in extrinsic causes or effects can either be by synthesis (causes to effects) or by analysis (effects to causes). The separate substances (God and angels) terminate the analysis here, as the highest, simplest causes. In the order of the intellect, knowledge proceeds through intrinsic causes: By synthesis, we proceed from universal to particular forms; by analysis, when we proceed from particular to universal forms, since the latter are more simple. Divine science terminates in the consideration of being qua being here, and its properties. These are said to coincide with the separate substances (stated in In de Trin. VI.1 but explained in In de Trin. V.4). The first principles of being and knowledge (considered in se as the terms of analysis) thus coincide in the process of resolution.

⁸⁰ See chapter two, section 2.2.2.2 above.

⁸¹ Most of this small treatise is devoted to developing the meaning of essence as it is found on the different levels of reality: Essence is found in substances composed of form and matter (c. 2), in spiritual substances (i.e. human souls, angels and God: c. 4), and in accidents (c. 6). Chapter five summarizes the findings of the rest of the work, and chapter three studies the relation of essence to logical terms.

⁸² This is not to deny, of course, the distinction between a concept of being Aquinas adopts in a commentary on Aristotle, and a concept proper to his own metaphysics found in other treatises.

proportion to its proximity to the first principle,⁸³ such that two different types of priority coincide, viz. that in relation to a principle which is determined absolutely⁸⁴ and that of nature or substance, which is understood in respect of actuality.⁸⁵ From these texts, one can interpret the universal causal quality of the first principle which signifies the “absolute” priority of universals in In 1 Post. An. as the primary sense of “absolutely”. (As well, it is this relationship to absolute being which ties this sense of natural priority to that of perfection, dealt with below.)

Quodlibet VIII.1.1 includes a lengthy discussion of the priority that exists between the nature’s various states: in God’s mind, as absolutely considered, in things, and in human and angelic intellects. Regarding natural priority, two conclusions can be made from this quodlibet. First, the nature in itself, taken absolutely, is naturally prior to that nature as it exists either in things or in finite intellects. Second, the removal or separability criterion as well as a causal sense of natural priority are exhibited in the relation between God and creature.

The parallel between the In I Post. An. text and Quodlibet VIII.1.1 is found in their common treatment of the “absolute” mode of intelligibility that is found in intellection. Neither text purports to explain the psychogenesis of concepts, which would give priority to sensible particulars. In I Post. An. found the universal *archē* or principles of demonstration as naturally prior, and Quodlibet VIII.1.1 credits the nature taken *in se* with the explanation (“ratio quare”) of its presence in singulars or in intellects, as universal. Specifically, it is the nature considered in its essential properties, or taken absolutely, that is the measure of its being considered as singular or universal.

Aquinas applies Plato’s removal criterion to the effect that this absolute consideration does not require the other considerations, but rather, these latter depend on the nature’s absolute consideration for their intelligibility. Insofar as the nature *exists*, however, a new, causal

⁸³ Meta. V l. 13 #936, following Aristotle’s text at Meta. V.11 (1018b8-11). The bulk of De ente et essentia is devoted to explaining the role of essence in establishing a hierarchy of beings in the universe, but important references to the type of priority in reference to a principle discuss separable and separate forms: De ente c. 4 [3]: “...si inveniuntur aliquae formae quae non possunt esse nisi in materia, hoc accidit eis secundum quod sunt distantes a primo principio quod est actus primus et purus. Unde illae formae quae sunt propinquissime primo principio sunt formae per se sine materia subsistentes...huiusmodi formae sunt intelligentiae...” and in c. 4 [10], in discussing separate substances, he says “...est ergo distinctio earum ad invicem secundum gradum potentiae et actus, ita quod intelligentia superior quae magis propinqua est primo habet plus de actu et minus de potentia, et sic de aliis.”

⁸⁴ Meta. V l. 13’s first type of natural priority, following Aristotle’s text at Meta. V.11 (1018b8-11).

sense of natural priority is introduced: Preceding the nature's "absolute" consideration is the consideration of it in God's mind, for the form exists virtually (causally) in the mind of the artificer. In the order of considerations, therefore, the nature is found first in God's mind, second, as absolutely considered (in se), third, in singulars or in angelic minds, and fourth, in human minds.⁸⁶

De ente et essentia c. 3 also considers the priority of the nature's absolute consideration to its consideration as singular or universal, while including the role of the real distinction. The reason given for the nature's in se priority is its status in relation to the accidents of unity and community, and even to being. The type of absolute consideration in question is the grasp of a nature according to its essential properties, without prescindendo from its being, i.e. its number (oneness or plurality) and qualities (colour, etc.).⁸⁷ Aquinas identifies the common nature with the nature as abstracted without precision (from its existence in individuals) to ensure the identity of nature and individuals in essential predication.⁸⁸ Since relation is an accident, universality, or the relation of a nature to many individuals,⁸⁹ is accidental and subsequent to the nature taken in se.

⁸⁵ The priority of nature or substance is the fourth type of priority in Meta. V.1. 13, and as an example of Plato's separability criterion, it is also an example of natural priority. See Meta. V.11 (1019a1-14).

⁸⁶ Quodlibet VIII.1.1c: "...Sicut autem se habet intellectus artificis ad artificata, ita se habet intellectus divinus ad omnes creaturas. Unde uniuscuiusque naturae causatae prima consideratio est secundum quod est in intellectu divino; secunda vero consideratio est ipsius naturae absolute; tertia secundum quod habet esse in rebus ipsis, vel in mente angelica; quarta secundum esse quod habet in intellectu nostro..." He continues on to use the Platonic separability criterion of natural priority: "...In his ergo illud quod est prius, semper est ratio posterioris; et remoto posteriori remanet prius, non autem e converso; et inde est quod hoc quod competit naturae secundum absolutam considerationem, est ratio quare competat naturae alicui secundum esse quod habet in singulari, et non e converso. Ideo enim Socrates est rationalis, quia homo est rationalis, et non e converso; unde dato quod Socrates et Plato non essent, adhuc humanae naturae rationalitas, competeret. Similiter etiam intellectus divinus est ratio naturae absolute consideratae, et in singularibus, et ipsa natura absolute considerata in in singularibus est ratio intellectus humani, et quodammodo mensura ipsius."

⁸⁷ Cf. In 1 Sent. d. 23 q. 1 a. 1; De ente c. 2.

⁸⁸ That is, the nature must be attributed to all individuals in a species for it to be truly predicated. See De ente c. 3 [4], [7], [8]. In [8], he says: "Praedicatio enim est quiddam quod completur per actionem intellectus componentis et dividens, habens fundamentum in re ipsa unitatem eorum quorum unum de altero dicitur".

⁸⁹ It is interesting that Aquinas sees universality not as a mode of being imposed on things by an intellect, but rather as the relation of one over many that the nature has as a likeness: De ente c. 3 [7]: "Ipsa enim natura humana in intellectu habet esse abstractum ab omnibus individuantibus; et ideo habet rationem uniformem ad omnia individua quae sunt extra animam, prout equaliter est similitudo omnium et ducens in omnium cognitionem in quantum sunt homines...non est universalitas illius formae secundum hoc esse quod habet in intellectu, sed secundum quod refertur ad res ut similitudo rerum; sicut

In positing the real distinction between a nature and its existence,⁹⁰ Aquinas limits the nature's natural priority in relation to singulars and universals, and makes it causal only as an exemplary form in the divine mind and prior only in the order of absolute consideration. While the common nature is prior to individuals and the universal is subsequent, the essence as an exemplar cause in God's intellect is the only true sense in which the nature possesses natural priority. In all other instances, it must abstract from all being, or deny its status as a creature.⁹¹

C.G. I 34 echoes In I Post. An. in the discussion of psychogenesis, in its discussion of analogical predication. With respect to our concepts about God, priority in nature or perfection is contrasted with priority in generation and time. God is prior in nature but not in our knowledge, for He is known only through His effects, Aquinas says. Since signification or the meaning of the name follows on knowledge, in the case of God, there is a different order of analogicals according to reality and according to the meaning of the name. Finite effects are prior in signification although their cause is prior naturally.⁹²

In se natural priority has thus far included treatments of intelligibility from the perspective of definitions, divine knowledge, and absolute consideration of the nature.

etiam si esset una statua corporalis representans multos homines, constat quod illa imago vel species statuae haberet esse singulare et proprium secundum quod esset in haec materia, sed haberet rationem communitatis secundum quod esset commune representativum plurium”.

⁹⁰ This is argued for in De ente c. 4, for example.

⁹¹ See Quodlibet VIII.1.1 ad 1: “...non dicitur quod perfectio remaneat in senario numero, quasi senarius numerus aliquod esse habeat in rerum natura, nulla creatura existente; remoto omni esse creato, remanet absoluta consideratio naturae senarii, prout abstrahit a quolibet esse et sic attribuitur sibi perfectio; sicut remotis omnibus singularibus hominibus, adhuc remaneret rationalitas attribuibilis humanae naturae.” On the role of predication in Aquinas' disagreement with Platonism on this point, see: R. Henle, Saint Thomas and Platonism (The Hague, 1956), p. 337. On the question of the common nature and Plato's thought, see J. Owens, “Thomistic Common Nature and Platonic Idea” Med. St. 21 (1959) 211-223.

⁹² C.G. I 34 [5]-[6]: “In huiusmodi autem analogica praedicatione ordo attenditur idem secundum nomen et secundum rem quandoque, quandoque vero non idem. Nam ordo nominis sequitur ordinem cognitionis: quia est signum intelligibilis conceptionis. Quando igitur id quod est prius secundum rem invenitur etiam cognitione prius, idem invenitur prius et secundum nominis rationem et secundum rei naturam...Quando vero id quod est prius secundum naturam, est posterius secundum cognitionem, tunc in analogicis non est idem ordo secundum rem et secundum nominis rationem...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.” The distinction between priority in being and in knowledge is also used in a discussion on counsel, in S.T. I-II 14.5, where the end is said to be the principle in counsel. The end is first in being but last in knowledge, as the term of analysis from effects to causes. The in se/quoad nos distinction is also used in the context of natural priority as “perfect” in the next section. Examples such as S.T. II-II 182.4 on the contemplative and active lives introduce the distinction in terms of the end as the principle of action.

Quodlibet V.10.1 takes up the senses of psychogenesis and analogical predication. These texts, it seems, are closer to the third general type natural priority⁹³ but are treated here because they use the in se/quoad nos distinction. Ultimately, they exhibit a less central use of this distinction in Aquinas' concept of natural priority.

Quodlibet V.10.1 [19] is a discussion of the relative priority of precepts and counsels, and is grouped with In I Physics l.1 as an example of the role of psychogenesis in Aquinas' theory of natural priority. We will deal with In I Phys. first. In both In I Post. An. l.4 and In I Phys. l.1, Aquinas indicates that Aristotle seemingly contradicts himself between texts. In In I Post. An., universals are prior in se in relation to singulars as more intelligible, whereas in In I Phys., singulars are taken to be naturally prior, as better known.

Aquinas explains, however, that the texts do not contradict each other, but rather have different referents taken from different types of intelligibility. In In I Post. An., universals are prior in se as intelligibles in act, whereas individual sensible things are better known quoad nos through sensation. In In I Phys. l.1, on the other hand, the absolute priority of singulars refers not to the individuals themselves, but rather to the species. These are better known by nature because they have more perfect existence, and are known distinctly. The universals prior quoad nos in the Physics are the initially grasped confused wholes present to sense. The intellect moves from potency to act, until it has complete science in act, after having arrived through resolution at a distinct knowledge of principles and elements.⁹⁴ Universals are confused as containing their species in potency. A universal such as "animal" is known before "man", which it contains in potency. Thus, In I Phys. l.1 considers priority in terms of the generation of distinct scientific knowledge, whereas In I Post. An. contrasts sensible singulars themselves (prior quoad nos) with scientific principles as universal causes (prior in se). Although one text deals with psychogenesis and the other with the absolute order of intelligibility, both assign natural priority to universals commensurate with their degree of existence as real causes.

Quodlibet V.10.1 [19] parallels In I Phys. l.1 in specifying natural priority in terms of psychogenesis, such that particulars are prior to universals in terms of actuality. C.G. I 34's distinction between that which is "first in commonness or universality" and that which is "first

⁹³ The third type of natural priority is that of perfection in contrast to generation and time. See chapter two, s.2.2.2.3 above.

⁹⁴ See In I Phys. l.1 #7-8. That the text concerns psychogenesis is clear from the contrast given between the order of nature and the order of generation and time within a single knower.

in actuality”⁹⁵ exposes the distinction between priority in being and knowledge, which is latent in the process of psychogenesis at work in Quodlibet V.10.1 [19]. In this quodlibet, the order of predication is called the absolute order of consideration in which the general is prior to the specific. However, this priority is described as a feature of psychogenesis, where the species is included in the genus, which is related to the species as the potential to the actual.

The sense of natural priority invoked in this Quodlibet is distinctly Aristotelian in its appeal to the four causes, although the division of types of natural priority are Aquinas’ own. Aquinas says that precepts are prior naturally to counsels since they are prior in *perfection*, as ends are to means. Counsels, on the other hand, are prior naturally in the order of *generation and time*, as means are to ends, for it is through counsels that we reach purity of heart. The Platonic view of natural priority, which is that of the priority of genus to species, is explicitly said to be that of the priority of potency to act.⁹⁶ This order of potency to act pertains when the counsels are necessarily contained in the precepts, so that the counsels *necessarily* follow from them. His example is that of the precept of virginity or matrimony in relation to the counsel of not committing adultery (for chastity is common to both forms of the precept).⁹⁷ The precept is more perfect as an end but is potential as *more general* than the counsel. Aquinas is able to logically connect potentiality with perfection *not* in the Platonic sense of the primacy of ideas, but rather in the sense that the naturally prior item has a “commonness of predication”. Thus, the Platonic criteria of nonreciprocal dependence and the removal criterion are applied along the lines of analogical predication, not causality. C.G. I 34 also introduced the distinction between primacy in commonness or universality and primacy in actuality,⁹⁸ which is analogous to this text.

⁹⁵ This distinction is found in several other texts, such as De ver. 10.11 and ad 11; In 1 Meta. l. 2 #46; S.T. I 5.2. This distinction is similar to the distinction between “commonness in predication and “commonness in causality” (De ver. 7.6 ad 7; 3.7 obj. 4 and ad 4).

⁹⁶ The precepts are said to be naturally prior to the counsels according to this sense only as they are “absolutely considered”, not as they are in reality: “Si autem comparemus consilia ad alia praecepta quae ordinantur ex necessitate in praedictos fines, sic erit duplex consideratio: Nam in consiliis necesse est ut includantur praecepta...Erit ergo una comparatio consiliorum ad praecepta absolute considerata; et sic hoc modo praecepta erunt ordine naturae priora consiliis, sicut genus est naturaliter prius specie..”

⁹⁷ The other example he gives is that of travelling (a precept) and going by foot or by horse (a counsel): The precept is more general than the counsel, and so is potential in relation to it.

⁹⁸ Cf. De ver. 10.11 and ad 11; In 1 Meta. l. 2 (#46); S.T. I 5.2. The distinction between that which is first in actuality and that which is first in commonness or universality is similar to the distinction made elsewhere between “commonness in predication” and “commonness in causality”: De ver. 7.6 ad 7; 3.7 obj. 4 and ad 4.

We have just seen the way in which precepts are naturally prior to counsels. The counsels can be naturally prior to the precepts, on the other hand, when one chooses to abstract from the necessity to observe the counsels. In this way, the counsels are naturally prior to the precepts as perfect things are to imperfect ones. It doesn't matter whether the precept (e.g. to marry, or to live in secular poverty) is temporally prior to the counsel (e.g. of virginity or religious poverty) or not. Either way, the counsel has superiority over the precept, and it should be given greater attention. To sum up Quodlibet 5.10.1 [19]: That which is naturally prior is most perfect and actual, whichever way we construe the relationship between "counsel" and "precept". The Platonic example of the priority of genus to species taken by Aquinas as the priority of perfection to imperfection makes sense only when we know the counsels as necessarily contained in the prior precepts. As such, the precepts are perfect as actual and necessarily obeyed. They are potential in their community of predication with counsels.⁹⁹

Three conclusions can be drawn in the treatment of absolute or in se natural priority for Aquinas. First, this type of natural priority invokes the primary (versus the "general") meaning of "absolute" and refers to the priority of universal causes in knowledge and being. In this sense, In 1 Post. An. l.1 and In 1 Phys. l.1 are not contradictory but similar and resemble Aristotle's reducibility claim for natural priority defended above.¹⁰⁰ Second, the doctrine of the real distinction between being and essence and the hierarchy of being both given in De ente et essentia, and the role of the common nature as subordinate to divine exemplarity (Quodlibet VIII.1.1) delimit the causal role of in se natural priority as belonging to the separate substances and to God. Plato's separability criterion (Quodlibet VIII.1.1) and Aristotle's priority of substance as fully actual (Meta. V.11) formed the backdrop of this part of Aquinas' theory of natural priority.

The third and final conclusion is that the references to universals as naturally prior within psychogenesis (C.G. I.34; Quodlibet V.10.1 [19]) are not, ultimately, an adequate representation of Aquinas' understanding of in se natural priority, and are more closely related to natural priority in generation (versus perfection). The distinction between priority in predication and actuality presented there points to the natural priority of fully perfect causes as primary and independent, and the Platonic view of natural priority is described as limited.

⁹⁹ For the language of "community and independence", see Meta. 5 lectio #13 (#950), as discussed above.

¹⁰⁰ See chapter two, s.2.2.4.

3.2.3 Priority in “Being” versus “Generation”

This third type of natural priority is introduced in In 5 Meta. l.13 and Quodlibet V.10.1 [19] in the course of outlining types of priority. This type of natural priority is invoked to explain the meaning of precepts, angelic illumination, the order of the soul’s powers and God’s relation to creatures, and is related to every other type of natural priority (separability, in se, in reference to a principle and as origin) in some fashion. Aquinas accepts Aristotle’s examples of this type of natural priority and develops it in his own theories of subsistence and divine causality.

Quodlibet V.10.1 [19] begins by outlining three types of natural priority: The imperfect is prior to the perfect; the cause as temporally prior to its effects; and the priority of origin in relation to what follows.¹⁰¹ Metaphysics V.11 is then introduced to explain that priority expresses order in relation to a specific principle, such that in the order of nature, priority obtains in relation to the four causes. These are reduced to two causal orders: that of the material cause and that of the formal, final and efficient causes. In the former order, the imperfect is prior to the perfect, as potency is prior to act. In the latter order, the opposite holds, since act is prior in substance to potency.¹⁰² The quodlibet then goes on to explain the way in which precepts and counsels are related in an order of priority and posteriority. Precepts are prior to counsels in the order of perfection (that is, by a natural priority) because they are related to counsels as what is perfect (viz., an end) is related to what is imperfect (viz., a means).

The natural priority of act to potency is also introduced in In 5 Meta. l.13 under the third type of priority, which is that of nature or substance.¹⁰³ At Meta. V.11 (1019a1), Aristotle attributes the Platonic separability criterion to this type of priority. Substance and actuality and potency are given as examples of the senses of being. That which is actual is prior to the potential as complete reality, so that the whole is prior to the parts as a complete actuality. Because the examples given include that of the substance/accident relation, and not that of the Platonic ideas, it follows that the dependence here refers not to Plato’s community of ideas and things, but rather to the Aristotelian community of substance and accidents.

¹⁰¹ Quodl. V.10.1 [19]: “...Sed contra, est quia prius natura dicitur aliquid esse tripliciter. Uno modo sicut imperfectum est prius perfecto...Secundo per modum causae tempore praecedentis effectum...Tertio per modum originis, quando principium est simul tempore, sicut lux solis et radius...”

¹⁰² Aristotle proves this fact elsewhere, in Meta. IX. See chapter four below.

Aquinas accepts Aristotle's explanation of this type of natural priority as what is perfect and fully actual in his commentary on the *Physics*' treatment of motion. Local motion is naturally prior to other types of motion as nearer to a first principle. As prior in existence, it is the last and most perfect stage of a nature's development, and is posterior in the order of becoming. Aquinas explains this as follows: "Everything which comes to be, while it is becoming, is imperfect and tends toward its principle, that is, tends to become like the principle of its own origin, which is naturally first. From this it is clear that that which is posterior in generation is prior with respect to nature."¹⁰⁴ The same principle of natural priority applies with respect to the elements, such that earth is naturally prior to water, and water to air.¹⁰⁵ The final stage in a thing's development signifies its full actuality, and actuality is thus naturally prior (and temporally posterior) to potency within the same thing.¹⁰⁶

This notion of natural priority as first in perfection is closely related to Aquinas' theory of subsistence, for a thing is perfect in existence only as subsistent. In his discussion of the hypostatic union, Aquinas argues for the assumption of the human nature into the divine person of Christ due to the human nature's lack of subsistence. Only persons exist independently, for they alone are supposita.¹⁰⁷

The relation between the soul's powers also reflects natural priority as perfection. The orders of perfection and generation/time are found in the spiritual powers such that the intellect directs the dependent powers of sense,¹⁰⁸ and the latter are generatively prior, as preparing the soul for higher acts.¹⁰⁹ In the same text, the naturally prior objects of spiritual powers are said to be more common than lower objects. The remaining examples of this type of natural priority

¹⁰³ See Aristotle's text, *Meta*. V.11 (1019a1-14).

¹⁰⁴ *In 8 Phys*. I.14 #1094: "...omne quod fit, dum fit, est imperfectum, et tendit ad principium, idest ut assimiletur principio suae factionis, quod est primum naturaliter. Ex quo patet quod id quod est posterius in generatione, est prius secundum naturam..."

¹⁰⁵ *In 1 Meta*. I.12 #185-#188.

¹⁰⁶ See Aristotle's *Meta*. IX.8 and Aquinas' commentary on this, *In 9 Meta*. I.8. A full discussion of this will be found in chapter four of this thesis.

¹⁰⁷ And, the nature and supposit are really distinct. *S.T.* III 2.2.

¹⁰⁸ And the sensitive powers hold a similar relation with respect to nutritive powers, he says.

¹⁰⁹ *S.T.* I 77.4c.

are God's relation to creatures,¹¹⁰ the relation between will and nature,¹¹¹ and the issue of angelic illumination.¹¹²

In *De veritate* q. 9 a. 3, Aquinas argues that the illumination and cleansing of an angel can be related either in the order of generation or in the order of nature, depending on whether the material or formal perspective is taken. Two premises are necessary for understanding the distinction of priority by generation and nature. First, illumination is to the perfection of the angel as reception of a species is to knowledge of what the species signifies. Second, the cleansing of an angel takes place through the simple removal of ignorance,¹¹³ that is, through the removal of a privation. The reply to the sixth objection then formulates the distinction on the basis of the preceding premises. Since privation is related to matter, and matter to generation, the illumination precedes cleansing in the order of generation. But in the order of perfection, cleansing is prior to illumination by natural priority in the same way as form is naturally prior to matter.¹¹⁴

Another use of the generation/perfection distinction that also stresses the interdependence of both sides of the distinction is found in Aquinas' discussions of the superiority of will to nature in God. *C.G.* II 23 [8]-[10] agrees with *De ver.* IX.3's basic notion, by holding that the will's action is naturally prior to nature's¹¹⁵ as more perfect, but adds that natural priority comes also from perfection as a pure end, and from commonness of causality.¹¹⁶ Within a given agent, he argues, that which is more perfect is prior in nature, albeit temporally posterior. Voluntary action is thus naturally prior to natural action, and uses the latter as an instrument,¹¹⁷ and also attains goodness as such, in its universal aspect, whereas nature attains only particular goods. Further, particular agents are instruments of universal ones, and thus, the

¹¹⁰ *S.T.* III 1.5 ad 3, for example.

¹¹¹ *C.G.* II 23 [8].

¹¹² *De ver.* 9.3 ad 16.

¹¹³ The cleansing does not take place through the removal of an error or contrary disposition, he says: *De ver.* IX.3c.

¹¹⁴ *De ver.* IX.3 ad 6.

¹¹⁵ By "nature" here, Aquinas does not mean "most perfect" in the sense of a fully complete nature in the final stage of its development, but rather a thing acting by natural necessity, not endowed with the universality of reason. See *C.G.* II 23 [9].

¹¹⁶ That is, the will's more universal extension with respect to objects, as compared to the realm of nature.

¹¹⁷ Thus, God uses natural agents and rational agents use vegetative souls in accomplishing their ends: *C.G.* II 23 [9].

natural priority of will to nature¹¹⁸ has both wider causality or intension, and broader extension (in reference to its objects).

The final example of the “perfection” type of natural priority is the relation of God and creatures. The mixed relation of truth that exists here specifies God as independent of and naturally prior to creatures as their cause by knowledge.¹¹⁹ The mixed relation of knowledge is framed then, in terms of the separability criterion.¹²⁰ God’s natural priority to creatures as separate from them is expressed in several contexts, such as creation,¹²¹ where Aquinas surpasses the Greeks¹²² and Arabs¹²³ in presupposing no substratum or essence in the creative act. The separateness of the first principle is connected closely to its perfection as a universal causal principle, as well as to the human possibility of considering being as being.¹²⁴

Two final texts exhibit the relation of natural priority in terms of perfection. The first is S.T. III 1.5 ad 3. It is fitting, Aquinas argues, that God did not become incarnate at the

¹¹⁸ C.G. II 23 [10].

¹¹⁹ De ver. I.5 ad 16 and ad 17.

¹²⁰ De ver. I.5 ad 16 indicates that according to Aristotle (Meta. 5.15 [1021a27f.]) there are four types of rational relation: When there is self-reference or identity, when the relation itself is referred (e.g. the paternity of John), a mixed relation (when x depends on y, but not vice-versa), and that between being and nonbeing (i.e. the relation between present and future generations). The third type expresses the relation of knowledge, where the cause (God, as knower) does not depend on the effect (creatures, as known). The relation is reversed in the case of finite knowledge, where the knower depends on the scientific object for truth, not vice-versa.

¹²¹ God’s universal causality of creation whereby the entire creature is related to its source shows His true separateness from all beings: See S.T. I 45.2c; I 45.3c. The total dependence of all being on God, and not temporal beginning, is what characterises creation in Aquinas’ view: De aeternitate mundi; De pot. 3.14 ad 8; S.T. I 44.2 on the progress of philosophers in their knowledge of the concept of creation as Aquinas sees it.

¹²² In S.T. I 44.2, Aquinas raises the question “Is prime matter created by God?” From this question, he goes on to analyse the Greek teaching “ex nihilo nihil fit”, and traces the progress of thinkers in extricating the source of being from substrata such as matter, forms and accidents in the act of creating. Only through the separateness of the first principle of being from its effects is an adequate concept of origination possible.

¹²³ Aristotle did not consider the possibility of a source for the existence of beings through efficient causality, and posited the eternity of matter, while Avicenna maintained the eternity of a possible essence prior to the conditions of universality and particularity

¹²⁴ The progression towards a grasp of being as such, as opposed to being as limited materially or formally, is outlined in S.T. I 44.2. He implies here that an understanding of universal being is possible only if there exists a separate cause of being as such, beyond the cause of matter, forms and accidents. The “certain thinkers” (“quidam philosophi”) whose understanding had reached this level probably included Avicenna. See In III Sent. d. 25 q.1 a.2 obj.2. That Aquinas included existence within his concept of being as such, and saw it as central in his understanding of creation is clear from such texts as S.T. I 45.3, where the esse received from God (cf. De ente IV [8]) signifies a relation to the Creator as origin of existence.

beginning of the human race, for His perfection is not temporally but naturally prior. The second text is a discussion of the contemplative and active lives at S.T. II-II 182.4. The contemplative life is deemed naturally prior to the active life not in generation or quoad nos, but in se, because its higher object qualifies it as more perfect, and enables the contemplative life to move the active life.

To summarize this type of natural priority, it can be said that it is closely related to separability, to absolute priority, as well as to those of reference to a principle and origin, but these affinities are particular to specific examples. Natural priority as perfection is as overarching a notion as is the next type of natural priority, it seems.

3.2.4 Priority as “Reference to a Principle”

This fourth type of natural priority is a way of describing natural priority in terms of perfection, and in Meta. V.11 the first type of priority is that in reference to a principle, determined either by nature or relatively.¹²⁵ Something is naturally prior in this way if it is closer to a principle within an order naturally determined. The three orders of principles, Aquinas indicates, are that of being, becoming and knowledge. The order of being includes substance and accident, as well as the dependence of potency on act;¹²⁶ that of becoming includes motion, place, arrangement and order;¹²⁷ that of knowledge includes definition and psychogenesis.¹²⁸

In Aquinas’ metaphysics, substance and Pure Act, or God, are first in the order of being, as causes.¹²⁹ Beings and principles of being are naturally prior if they qualify as causal and independent in relation to their relata, and are “more” naturally prior to the degree they approximate the first principle in the order under consideration. In the order of becoming, the “natural” determination of a principle means the order caused by nature, and not by chance.¹³⁰ In place, for example, water is naturally prior with respect to the middle of the universe than air

¹²⁵ Meta. V.11 (1018b8-12). See Aquinas’ commentary: In 5 Meta. l. 13 #937-#938.

¹²⁶ In 5 Meta. l. 13 (#950-#953).

¹²⁷ In 5 Meta. l. 13 (#937-#945).

¹²⁸ In 5 Meta. l. 13 (#945-#949).

¹²⁹ In In 5 Meta. l. 13 #950, Aquinas accepts Aristotle’s natural priority of substance to accident in terms of dependence. In #952, actuality is prior naturally to potency. Since God is Pure Act (De ente et essentia c.IV; S.T. I 3.4, on God as subsistent being, e.g.), God is the principle of all actuality, and thus naturally prior as such.

¹³⁰ In 5 Meta. l. 13 (#939).

(for the world's center is the naturally determined principle¹³¹). In time, it is the present, as the middle point between an infinite past and infinite future.¹³² In motion, the first mover is the naturally determined principle, and in voluntary action (a type of motion), the most powerful will is naturally prior.¹³³ God qualifies as naturally prior in this sense, as the first principle of love in the order of charity.¹³⁴ At times, matter is taken as the naturally prior principle in the order of becoming, although this is more as potentiality for receiving perfections, than as act.¹³⁵ Priority in knowledge, the third type of order, has already been discussed above.¹³⁶

3.2.5 Priority as "Origin"

The fifth type of natural priority roughly corresponds to Aristotle's fifth type, which was called "mutual implication in being",¹³⁷ although Aquinas' theory of creation places far more emphasis on origin than Aristotle's theories of substance and truth. The apparent contradiction between natural priority in terms of "separability" and as "mutual implication in being", however, also emerges in Aquinas' discussions of creation. It will be recalled that Aristotle's theory of the primacy of substance and his theory of truth mitigated the statement in Categories 12 that there is a mutual implication in being between facts and true propositions. Aquinas avoids the contradiction through his theory of truth as a mixed relation and through his theories of creation and conservation.

A tripartite division of natural priority is introduced in a discussion on the relation between precepts and counsels, in Quodlibet V.10 1 [19], where the third type is that of origin:

...A thing is said to be naturally prior in three ways. In one way, as the imperfect is prior to the perfect... Second, in the way in which the cause temporally

¹³¹ In 5 Meta. 1. 13 (#938).

¹³² In 5 Meta. 1. 13 (#941).

¹³³ The last type of order in becoming is that of arrangement, which is a type of becoming through matter, as the order among discrete things. His examples of persons standing next to one another, and of strings in a lyre, do not admit of principles which are naturally determined. Only relatively determined principles are used here (the person who is chief; the middle string). See In 5 Meta. 1. 13 (#944).

¹³⁴ S.T. II-II 26.1c.

¹³⁵ S.T. I 76.4 obj. 3 and ad 3. The order of forms depends on their relation to matter, as a beginning in nature. However, this is first only in generation, for what is added (form), Aquinas says (ad 3) is always more perfect. Nevertheless, the more perfect additions all inhere immediately in matter. This example of natural priority combines "reference to a principle" with "generation" as opposed to "perfection".

¹³⁶ This is analysed in section 3.2.2 of this chapter.

¹³⁷ See chapter two, section 2.2.2.5 above.

precedes its effect... Third, by way of origin, when the principle is temporally simultaneous [with the effect], as the light of the sun and its ray.¹³⁸

Thus, natural priority in origin signifies causality as well as mutual implication in time (though perhaps not in being). “Origin” (*origo*) connotes relation in that it “does not designate anything intrinsic, but means the way from something, or to something”.¹³⁹ “Principle”, or “that from which something proceeds”, signifies origin, he says.¹⁴⁰

The causality involved in origin implies an ontological dependence and substantial diversity of cause and effect.¹⁴¹ Natural priority as origin has an obvious connection with the causality of nature. Nature has the character of origin, and what a thing possesses by nature is the foundation of all else it does or has,¹⁴² even of higher acts of intellect and choice.¹⁴³ A study of creation will further reveal three basic points: First, the alliance between natural priority and *per se* causality. Second, the temporal simultaneity of cause and effect depicted in *Quodlibet* V.10.1 will be shown to be less central than the idea of causal procession in Aquinas’ notion of origin.¹⁴⁴ Third, creation reveals origin to be the most central type of natural priority, for in its emphasis on transcendental causality, it combines important facets of separability, “absolute” priority, priority as perfection and priority in reference to the most universal metaphysical principle.

¹³⁸ *Quodlibet* V.10.1 [19]: “...prius natura dicitur aliquid esse tripliciter. Uno modo sicut imperfectum est prius perfecto...Secundo per modum causae tempore praecedentis effectum...Tertio per modum originis, quando principium est simul tempore, sicut lux solis et radius...”

¹³⁹ *S.T.* I 40.2c.

¹⁴⁰ *S.T.* I 33.1 ad 3. See *S.T.* I 33.1c on the definition of “principle”.

¹⁴¹ The term “cause” implies an influence on the thing being caused: “...influxum quemdam ad esse causati...” (*In 5 Metaph.* l. 1 #751). On the notion of ontological dependence involved in causality, see *In 1 Phys.* l.1 #5. The obvious exception to the causality of origin is the Trinitarian processions, where there is an order of origin without priority. See *S.T.* I 42.3; 27-28, e.g. Cf. *In 1 Sent.* d. 12 q.1 a.1.

¹⁴² *De pot.* 10.5: “Nam semper processio naturae est principium et origo cuiuslibet alterius processionis; omnia enim quae per artem et voluntatem vel intellectum fiunt, procedunt ab his quae secundum naturam sunt.”

¹⁴³ *S.T.* I 82.1: “Oportet enim quod id quod naturaliter alicui convenit et immobiliter, sit fundamentum et principium omnium aliorum: quia natura rei est primum in unoquoque”. Cf. *S.T.* I 60.2 on the love of angels by nature and by choice.

¹⁴⁴ One reason for this is that philosophy can prove the *origin* of the world (its metaphysical dependence on an origin of being) but not its temporal beginning. See *De pot.* 3.14: “De ratione vero creationis est habere principium originis, non autem durationis; nisi accipiendo creationem ut accipit fides”. Cf. *S.T.* I 46.2. The discussion in *De aeternitate mundi* attempts to prove that there is no *incompatibility* between the concepts of the world’s creation and its eternity.

Natural priority in terms of origin usually refers to the divine causal influx of being, and is found in texts on per se series, such as the five ways, creation and the world's eternity, divine conservation, and the relation of truth that exists between God and creature. Although every type of per se causality does not involve natural priority,¹⁴⁵ per se causality is a condition of natural priority of origin, and so must be defined. For something to be naturally prior with respect to another thing, it must be per se ordered to that other, it will be seen, and this condition applies to all types of natural priority except "absolute" priority, as cognitional. While philosophers such as Scotus¹⁴⁶ analysed the concept of per se causality in detail, Aquinas did not give it exhaustive analysis, but used it in proofs of a denial of infinite regress in efficient causes,¹⁴⁷ the denial of actually infinite multitudes,¹⁴⁸ etc. From the connection between the natural priority involved in per se causal series and the temporal simultaneity of cause and effect, one could easily interpret natural priority by way of origin in terms of Aristotle's "mutual implication in being" type of natural priority. Avicenna¹⁴⁹ saw the conflict here between the simultaneity and "reciprocity in the implication of existence" and the ontological priority of cause to effect. The cause's existential superiority maintained its priority, and the necessitation of the effect in per se series explained the mutual implication in existence. We must discern the way in which Aquinas explains the apparent contradiction between "separability" and "mutual implication of cause and effect".

A review of a few of Aquinas' texts will illumine five central features of per se causal series in contrast to per accidens series: a) a per se cause or set of causes has the order and

¹⁴⁵ This claim is proven in section 3.1.1 below, in this chapter.

¹⁴⁶ The distinction between per se and per accidens causal series is used in arguments against infinite causal regress, and Scotus' discussion of the distinction is often found in commentators' works. See, e.g. P. Brown, "Infinite Causal Regression" (*Philosophical Review* 75 [1966], 510-525); R. Wengert, "The Logic of Essentially Ordered Causes" (*Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* 12 [1971], 406-422); W. Rowe, *The Cosmological Argument* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 23-29.

¹⁴⁷ *S.T.* I 2.3, e.g.

¹⁴⁸ *S.T.* I 7.4, e.g.

¹⁴⁹ Avicenna, *al-Shifa': al-Ilahiyat (Metaphysics)* (ed. G. Anawati et al.) (Cairo: Organisation Générale des Imprimeries Gouvernementales, 1960) Vol. I, p. 167. Avicenna distinguished between two types of ontological priority. First, the prior is a necessary condition for the existence of the posterior, but does not necessitate it; second, the prior is both a necessary condition and necessitates the effect. The second kind of cause is a per se efficient cause. Aquinas' doctrine of divine freedom precludes the second type of ontological priority with respect God and creatures. For the following notion, I am indebted to M. Marmura, "The Metaphysics of Efficient Causality in Avicenna (Ibn Sina), in ed. M Marmura, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1984), pp. 172-187. Cf. B.

causal level of one cause in relation to its effects; b) a per se cause's causality is a necessary condition of the causal action of its effects, such that if the per se cause were removed, the effect would cease to operate;¹⁵⁰ c) a per se cause is temporally simultaneous with its effects such that a per se cause and its effect form a union on the level of causal action;¹⁵¹ d) the per se cause stands to the per accidens one as the universal to the particular cause;¹⁵² and e) the condition of being a naturally prior per se cause is to possess the quality in question essentially.¹⁵³

Aquinas' examples of per se causal series include the following: The relation between the hand, stick, and stone¹⁵⁴ in the action of motion, that of fire heating wood¹⁵⁵, the relation of art in the soul, the hand, the hammer and the artifact,¹⁵⁶ the relation between sun, an elementary body, the man and his progeny,¹⁵⁷ and the relation between the sun, its light, and air.¹⁵⁸ Examples of per accidens series, on the other hand, are a series of hammers in making an artifact¹⁵⁹ and a man generating a man.¹⁶⁰ The examples given illustrate Aquinas' claim that a per se cause has its own unique level of causality with respect to its effects such that it has the order of one cause, regardless of how many agents are involved.¹⁶¹ In addition to scattered uses of per se causality in arguments concerning God, Aquinas presents three characteristics of a per se cause in De malo I.3: A per se cause intends¹⁶² its effect, such that the effect is its end; a per se cause produces an effect which is its own likeness, either univocally or analogically; and a per se

Kogan, Averroes and the Metaphysics of Causation (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1985), pp. 100-135, on Averroes and Avicenna.

¹⁵⁰ This characteristic of per se causality uses the Platonic separability criterion.

¹⁵¹ Aquinas' "illumination" analogy, we will see, reveals this fact.

¹⁵² And this fact, it will be seen, also supports the separability criterion's connection with per se causality.

¹⁵³ Ironically, it is this fact which gives the creature a type of natural priority (though not of origin) in relation to God in the act of creation, for the creature "possesses" non ens to a greater degree than it possesses ens in being a subject of creation. We will return to this paradox in the course of the analysis.

¹⁵⁴ S.T. I.2.3; 46.2 ad 7.

¹⁵⁵ Both examples are found in S.T. I.2.3.

¹⁵⁶ S.T. I 7.4.

¹⁵⁷ S.T. I 46.2 ad 7.

¹⁵⁸ S.T. I 104.1.

¹⁵⁹ S.T. I 7.4; 46.2 ad 7.

¹⁶⁰ S.T. I 46.2 ad 7.

¹⁶¹ The irreplaceability of a causal level in a per se ordered series signals the presence of the separability criterion.

¹⁶² Aquinas' notion of intention here does not seem to involve intellectual concepts, but rather the generic idea of relationship to a final cause.

cause has a certain and determined order in relation to its effect.¹⁶³ According to these criteria, Aquinas lists the per se causes in In 7 Meta. 1.6 as intellect, art and nature,¹⁶⁴ and the per accidens causes as chance and fortune.¹⁶⁵

A brief review of a few of Aquinas' per se causal series texts will illustrate their distinguishing features listed above (in particular, a) through e)). The first text is S.T. I 46.2 ad 7, on the eternity of the world and creation:

In efficient causes it is impossible to proceed to infinity per se. Thus, there cannot be an infinite number of causes that are per se required for a certain effect; for instance, that a stone be moved by a stick, the stick by the hand, and so on to infinity. But it is not impossible to proceed to infinity accidentally as regards efficient causes; for instance, if all the causes thus infinitely multiplied should have the order of only one cause, while their multiplication is accidental: e.g., as an artificer acts by means of many hammers accidentally, because one after the other is broken. It is accidental, therefore, that one particular hammer should act after the action of another, and it is likewise accidental to this particular man as generator to be generated by another man...For all men generating hold one grade in the order of efficient causes, viz., the grade of a particular generator. Hence it is not impossible for a man to be generated by man to infinity, but such a thing would be impossible if the generation of this man depended upon this man, and on an elementary body, and on the sun, and so on to infinity.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ The discussion here concerns the cause of evil. De malo 1.3c: "...malum causam per se habere non potest. Quod quidem tripliciter apparet. Primo quidem, quia illud quod per se causam habet, est intentum a sua causa; quod enim provenit praeter intentionem agentis, non est effectus per se, sed per accidens; sicut effossio sepulcri per accidens est causa inventionis thesauri, cum provenit praeter intentionem fodientis sepulcrum...Secundo idem apparet, quia omnis effectus per se habet aliquam similitudinem suae causae, vel secundum eandem rationem, sicut in agentibus univocis vel secundum deficientem rationem, sicut in agentibus aequivocis; omnis enim causa agens agit secundum quod actu est...Tertio idem apparet ex hoc quod omnis causa per se, habet certum et determinatum ordinem ad suum effectum..." The determinate and certain relation to an effect distinguishes a per se from a per accidens cause in the way in which nature is distinct from chance. Aquinas does not seem to be interested in per accidens series here such as generation, or the infinity of hammers used in S.T.'s discussions on God, creation and the world's eternity. Rather, he is dealing with chance as "praeter intentionem", and the lack of unity that such a cause has.

¹⁶⁴ Intellect, as involved in art either in thinking or in producing, is either intrinsic or extrinsic, it seems, depending on whether it terminates in art or not. In 7 Meta. 1.6 #1408.

¹⁶⁵ In 7 Meta. 1.6 #1381-#1382: "...eorum quae fiunt, quaedam fiunt a natura, quaedam ab arte, et quaedam a casu sive 'automato', idest per se vano. Cuius divisionis ratio est, quia causa generationis, aut est causa per se, aut est causa per accidens. Si enim est causa per se: vel est principium motus in quo est, et sic est natura; vel est extra ipsum, et sic est ars...Si vero est causa per accidens, sic est casus et fortuna. Fortuna quidem in his quae aguntur ab intellectu. Casus autem etiam in aliis. Utrumque vero sub 'automato', idest sub per se vano comprehenditur, quia vanum est quod est ordinatum ad finem, et non attingit ad illum."

¹⁶⁶ S.T. I 46.2 ad 7: "Dicendum quod in causis efficientibus impossibile est procedere in infinitum per se; ut puta si causae quae per se requiruntur ad aliquem effectum, multiplicarentur in infinitum; sicut si lapis

This text clearly indicates points a) and b) above, viz. that a per se cause or set of causes acts as one cause with respect to its effects ([a]), as well as the separability criterion as applied to the per se cause in relation to its effects ([b]). One reason why the per se cause holds the level of one cause is that the prior cause is ordered to all of the posterior causes and effects: The hand which moves the stick, in turn moves the stone, and so has causal efficacy with respect to the entire series. The per accidens causal series, on the other hand, has no single independent cause extending its power through the entire series. In a genealogical series, for example, each cause extends only so far as its immediate effect. The grandfather is not the cause either of the being or becoming of his grandson. The movers in a per accidens causal order such as a genealogical series or in an infinite series of hammers constructing an artifact, lack the causal unity of a single cause because they act independently, and are not related as instruments to each other.¹⁶⁷ In a per se causal series, on the other hand, causes other than the first act only as instruments of the first cause.¹⁶⁸ Instrumental causes fail to exercise independent causality because they produce the effect only insofar as they are moved by a per se agent, and not through an inherent form (possessed by per se agents).¹⁶⁹ An infinite per se causal series is impossible because secondary causes cannot account in themselves for the effects.

In addition to the above explanation, the first two of the “five ways” of S.T. I 2.3 help illustrate claims a) [the unity of a per se cause in relation to its effects], b) [separability criterion’s application to a per se cause] and c) [the causal unity of action between a per se cause and its effect]. The reason that the per se cause must act in the order of one cause stems from the

moveretur a baculo, et baculus a manu, et hoc in infinitum. Sed per accidens in infinitum procedere in causis agentibus non reputatur impossibile; ut puta si omnes causae quae in infinitum multiplicantur, non teneant ordinem nisi unius causae, sed earum multiplicatio sit per accidens, sicut artifex agit multis martellis per accidens, quia unum post unum frangitur. Accidit ergo huic martello, quod agat post actionem alterius martelli. Et similiter accidit huic homini, in quantum generat, quod sit generatus ab alio, generat enim in quantum homo, et non in quantum est filius alterius hominis; omnes enim homines generantes habent gradum unum in causis efficientibus, scilicet gradum particularis generantis. Unde non est impossibile quod homo generetur ab homine in infinitum. Esset autem impossibile, si generatio huius hominis dependeret ab hoc homine, et a corpore elementari, et a sole, et sic in infinitum.”

¹⁶⁷ In a genealogical series, for example, the father is a cause of his son independently of his own father. Each link in the series possesses a similar level of causality extending to the next in its species.

¹⁶⁸ Aquinas explains in the “first way” in S.T. I 2.3 that “secondary movers move only inasmuch as they are moved by the first mover”. Cf. In VIII Phys. 1.9 (#1039).

¹⁶⁹ De veritate 27.4. This is not to say that instrumental causes have no inherent forms by which they act, but only that the action of these forms is insufficient to produce the actuality of the effect. For example, the stick moving the stone exercises its proper causality, but requires the movement of the hand to do so and to move the stone.

nature of causality as a reduction of potency to act: It takes a cause already in act with respect to a quality to produce that actuality in the effect. Because the actuality of the prior cause is required, the separability criterion ensues: If the cause were removed, its causality would not be transmitted to the effect, and the effect would not be reduced from potency to act:

Now whatever is moved is moved by another, for nothing can be moved except it is in potentiality to that towards which it is moved; whereas a thing moves inasmuch as it is in act. For motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality. But nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality.... The second way is from the nature of efficient cause... Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or one only. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause.¹⁷⁰

In possessing one grade of causality, the per se cause has the order of one cause. As the only independent causal power at work in the series, it is ordered to each of the instrumental causes and to the effect, and is required for the actuality of the effect. Thus, claims a) and b) are explained.

The temporal simultaneity of cause and effect and the causal unity of action in per se series (claim c) above) is illustrated in texts on creation and the world's eternity. In several discussions of creation from the viewpoint of the concept "ex nihilo", Aquinas distinguishes temporal from natural origin. The original dependence in being that "creation" signifies does not necessarily involve temporal beginning, he says.¹⁷¹ The temporal order implies that a thing

¹⁷⁰ S.T. I 2.3c: "Omne autem quod movetur, ab alio movetur. Nihil enim movetur, nisi secundum quod est in potentia ad illud ad quod movetur; movet autem aliquid secundum quod est actu. Movere enim nihil aliud est quam educere aliquid de potentia in actum; de potentia autem non potest aliquid reduci in actum, nisi per aliquod ens in actu...Secunda via est ex ratione causae efficientis...Non autem est possibile quod in causis efficientibus procedatur in infinitum. Quia in omnibus causis efficientibus ordinatis, primum est causa medii, et medium est causa ultimi, sive media sint plura sive unum tantum; remota autem causa, removetur effectus; ergo si non fuerit primum in causis efficientibus, non erit ultimum nec medium..."

¹⁷¹ See the analysis of "ex nihilo" in In 1 Sent. d.5 q.2 a.2 ("Utrum Filius sit ex nihilo"); In 2 Sent. d.1 q.1 a.2's and a.5's discussions of creation; De pot. 3.14, which focuses on the various meanings of "possible" with respect to the eternity of the world; De aeternitate mundi, which focuses more on the nature/time orders distinction. The emphasis in De aeternitate mundi is on proving the logical coherence of the concept of an eternal creation. De pot. 3.14 adds to this treatment the proof that the notion of "beginning" is not part of the concept of "creation" (ad 7) and that creation has a principle of origin, but not necessarily one of duration (ad 8).

“has” nonbeing prior to its having being, while the order of nature demands only that something has an esse dependens ab alio. Creation “ex nihilo” means that things are produced by God in their complete being, without a preexisting substrate such as matter or form.¹⁷² The natural priority of God to creature as Creator is philosophically¹⁷³ compatible with the temporal simultaneity of cause and effect, viz. with the world’s eternity.

The temporal simultaneity of cause and effect helps to illustrate the unity of action which they produce in a per se causal series. Moreover, this unity appears to utilize the problematic “mutual implication in being” type of natural priority. The unity of action between cause and effect is found in every sort of efficient causation, and is not limited to per se causes. However, this unity is more apparent in these causal series than in per accidens ones because of the certain and determinate relation the per se cause has with respect to its effect.¹⁷⁴ The unity of cause and effect in per se series is discussed by Aquinas in texts on creation,¹⁷⁵ conservation,¹⁷⁶ divine omnipresence,¹⁷⁷ and various “illumination” analogies used in these texts, as well as in discussions on religious acts.¹⁷⁸ Aquinas bases the unity of cause and effect in per se causal series on Aristotle’s proofs of the causal unity of cause and effect,¹⁷⁹ the essential points of which must be reviewed.

Aristotle develops a reductio ad absurdum proof of the temporal simultaneity of cause and effect in efficient causality in Post. An. II.12, to the effect that a time lapse between cause

¹⁷² The distinction between original dependence in being and temporal priority is treated at length in De aeternitate mundi. The notion of creation as universal causality, or production of the thing in its entirety, is attributed to Avicenna (through his notion of “being qua being”) and is contrasted with the PreSocratics’ theory of alteration (where substance was the material substrate) and with Aristotle’s theory of generation (which made substance form). See S.T. I 44.2’s outline of the “progress of philosophy”.

¹⁷³ Though not theologically, Aquinas notes: De aeternitate mundi.

¹⁷⁴ It will be recalled that the determinate relation to an end is one of a per se cause’s main features. See De malo I.3.

¹⁷⁵ S.T. I 46.2 ad 1, e.g. Cf. De aeternitate mundi #4-#5.

¹⁷⁶ S.T. I 104.1.

¹⁷⁷ S.T. I 8.1. The topic of divine omnipresence is closely linked to the question of conservation, since both involve the presence of God through continued efficient causality. One could also raise the interesting question of the identity of the topics of conservation and creation in Aquinas on a strictly philosophical level, from three premises: First, the quality of creation as “ab initio” is given through faith; second, philosophy can prove no contradiction between creation and the world’s eternity; and third, philosophy can find no conclusive grounds for a concept of a temporally initiated creation. From these premises we cannot deduce a philosophical distinction between conservation and creation, it could be argued. However, this topic deserves a separate study.

¹⁷⁸ e.g. S.T. II-II 81.7.

¹⁷⁹ Aristotle’s texts are: Physics II.3 (195b17-20) and III.3; Post. An. II.12. See Aquinas’ In 2 Phys. 1.6 (#195); In 3 Phys. 1.4 (#306-#307); 1.5 (#320); In II Post. An. lectios 10-12.

and effect obstructs the certainty in propter quid demonstrations. The unity of cause and effect provide the causal necessity for perfect demonstrations, he argues.¹⁸⁰ Physics II.3 and III.3 provide the metaphysical argument for the unity: The categories of action and passion are really identical and conceptually distinct, in that the action of the agent consists in the production of the effect in the patient, and not in any change in the agent itself. “To cause” and “to be caused” thus signify one process, in that action is the effect being produced as originating in the agent, and passion is the same effect residing in the patient.¹⁸¹ It is the relational quality of the cause that guarantees its unity in actuality with the effect. The operation of teaching, for example, requires the passivity of learning (and vice-versa) for its complete description.¹⁸²

Turning to Aquinas’ own texts, creation and conservation highlight the causal unity, since the action involved here, as instantaneous and not successive, does not require temporal priority of cause to effect.¹⁸³ The “illumination” analogy is given to explain causal unity: Just as the air is lit up as long as the sun acts on it, so do creatures exist by God’s continuing presence through efficient causality.¹⁸⁴ God efficiently causes the creature and its existence in a fashion

¹⁸⁰ Post. An. II 12. Cf. Aquinas’ commentary: In 2 Post. An. lectios 10-12. It will always be possible for an impeding cause to obstruct the effect, unless efficient causality is a single event process, Aristotle argues.

¹⁸¹ See especially Physics III.3 (202a18-22): “...there is a single actuality of both [viz. the mover and the moved] alike, just as one to two and two to one are the same interval, and the steep ascent and the steep descent are one - for these are one and the same, although they can be described in different ways. So it is with the mover and the moved.” Cf. 202b7-9: There is nothing to prevent two things having one and the same actualisation, provided the actualisations are not described in the same way, but are related as what can act to what is acting”. Cf. 202b21-23: “The ‘actualisation of X in Y’ and ‘the actualisation of Y through the action of X’ differ in definition”.

¹⁸² Cf. Phys. III.3 (202b6-8): “It is not absurd that the actualisation of one thing should be in another. Teaching is the activity of a person who can teach, yet the operation is performed on some patient - it is not cut adrift from a subject, but is of A on B”. At the end of Phys. III.3 (202b28-29) Aristotle notes that this unity of causality applies to all types of motion.

¹⁸³ S.T. I 46.2 ad 1: “...causa efficiens quae agit per motum, de necessitate praecedat tempore suum effectum; qui effectus non est nisi in termino actionis, agens autem omne oportet esse principium actionis. Sed si actio sit instantanea, et non successiva, non est necessarium faciens esse prius facto duratione, sicut patet in illuminatione...”

¹⁸⁴ Although the illumination analogy is mentioned in his articles on creation (e.g. S.T. I 46.2 ad 1), it is highlighted in his texts on conservation (S.T. I 104.1) and divine omnipresence (S.T. I 8.1), where creation is presumed. See S.T. I 104.1c: “Aer autem nullo modo natus est recipere lumen secundum eandem rationem secundum quam est in sole, ut scilicet recipiat formam solis, quae est principium luminis; et ideo quia non habet radicem in aere, statim cessat lumen, cessante actione solis. Sic autem se habet omnis creatura ad Deum, sicut aer ad solem illuminantem. Sicut enim sol est lucens per suam naturam, aer autem fit luminosus participando lumen a sole, non tamen participando naturam solis; ita solus Deus est ens per suum esse; omnis autem creatura est ens participative, non quod sua essentia sit eius esse”.

similar to the sun's illumination of bodies by its rays. Thus, the creature's form (=air) participates esse (=light) through the divine influx of being (=illumination), which being exists substantially in God (=sun). The illumination analogy is also found in S.T. II-II 81.7 in the context of external and internal religious acts. The analogy differs from its use in conservation texts, but the simultaneity between cause (internal religious act) and effect (external religious act) remains. The following analogy is given, to show this relation: Just as the air is lit by the sun, and the body receives life from the soul, so is man's mind enlightened, and his soul united to God, through certain external religious acts (e.g. liturgical signs) which originate in spiritual acts of worship (e.g. prayer). The sun, the soul, and the spiritual acts are the superior causes which produce the effects, viz. the illumined air, the living body, and the external religious act and the soul in a state of grace.¹⁸⁵

If the temporal simultaneity of cause and effect in these examples signals the dynamic causal unity, does it also thereby signal natural priority as mutual implication in being? The teaching of the Categories indicates that it does not. Temporal simultaneity is the simultaneous genesis of two or more things, where there is no order of priority or causality.¹⁸⁶ Aristotle does not include beings which mutually imply each other¹⁸⁷ in this type of simultaneity, and further distinguishes it from natural priority, which involves one-way causality in mutual implication.¹⁸⁸

Aquinas would agree that although the illumination example and the single-event theory of causality both could lend themselves to the "mutual implication in being" version of natural priority, the metaphysical superiority of cause to effect goes against such a view. In all of the examples given, the cause's plenitude and perfection is not implied by the effect. The light (esse) is in the air (form) only through the continued activity of the sun (God).¹⁸⁹ The separability criterion is thus more applicable here than is mutual implication in being.

¹⁸⁵ S.T. II-II 81.7c: "...quaelibet enim res perficitur per hoc quod subditur suo superiori, sicut corpus per hoc quod vivificatur ab anima, et aer per hoc quod illuminatur a sole. Mens autem humana indiget ad hoc quod coniungatur Deo, sensibilibus manuductione, quia 'invisibilia Dei per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta conspiciuntur', ut Apostolus dicit, Ad Rom. I. Et ideo in divino cultu necesse est aliquibus corporalibus uti, ut eis, quasi signis quibusdam, mens hominis excitetur ad spirituales actus, quibus Deo coniungitur. Et ideo religio habet quidem interiores actus quasi principales et per se ad religionem pertinentes; exteriores vero actus quasi secundarios, et ad interiores actus ordinatos."

¹⁸⁶ Categories 13 (14b22-26).

¹⁸⁷ "Mutual implication in being" is found in both naturally prior items and naturally simultaneous ones. See Categories 12-13.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Categories 12's fifth sense of priority (14b10-22).

¹⁸⁹ S.T. I 8.1c; 104.1c; II-II 81.7c. Cf. S.T. I 67.3.

Claim d) above (the parallel between per se and universal causes, and between per accidens and particular causes) is explained as follows. A per accidens cause is the generator within a species, which causes “this” form to be in “this” matter; it does not cause the form to be, as such. Only a universal cause of the form can cause its existence.¹⁹⁰ In his discussion of divine conservation in S.T. I 104.2, Aquinas classifies per se causes as universal and analogical causes of being, and per accidens ones as particular and univocal causes of becoming.¹⁹¹ The heavenly bodies are said to cause species themselves, while individual agents generate individuals within the species. The higher causes have more universal extension than the lower (particular) causes and for this reason communicate being analogically, in an approximate likeness of themselves, whereas the particular causes reproduce their form univocally.¹⁹² The universal causality of the per se cause means that nothing is presupposed in the creature, and that it is created in its entirety.¹⁹³

The communication of form according to similitude leads us to the final claim, e) above, viz., the possession of the form essentially by the prior per se cause. Both creation and participation illustrate this claim, as follows. In creation, God analogically communicates the being which He possesses substantially to the patient, and when His action ceases, so does the effect. A form possessed essentially or per se “belongs to a thing through itself (per se) as necessarily and inseparably in it”.¹⁹⁴ Per se existence and predication are inseparably linked, in

¹⁹⁰ Of course the reduction of potency to act encompasses both particular and universal causality in these senses, and different types of actualisation are involved. The real distinction between form and existence will be dealt with in the final chapter of this thesis.

¹⁹¹ He also indicates there that particular and per accidens causes can act analogically and univocally, but truly universal causes (of being) act only analogically. The issue of the relation between particular and universal causality, on the one hand, and per se and per accidens causes, on the other, is complex, and will be touched on in section 4.1.1 below, in this chapter.

¹⁹² The communication of being to an effect according to similitude fulfills the second feature of per se causality given above in De malo I.3.

¹⁹³ See S.T. I 44.2 on the universal causality involved in creation. Cf. In II Sent. d.1 q.1 a.2: “...Cum autem quaelibet res, et quidquid est in re, aliquo modo esse participet, et admixtum sit imperfectionem oportet quod omnis res, secundum totum id quod in ea est, a primo et perfecto ente oratur. Hoc autem dicimus, scilicet producere rem in esse secundum totam suam substantiam...” (Mandonnet pp.17-18).

¹⁹⁴ C.G. II.55: “Quod per se alicui competit, de necessitate et semper et inseparabiliter ei inest...Esse autem per se consequitur ad formam: per se enim dicimus secundum quod ipsum; unumquodque autem habet esse secundum quod habet formam...” This chapter proves the incorruptibility of intellectual substances, through discussing the relationship between form and esse.

that predication per se manifests essential being,¹⁹⁵ while nothing of what is predicated per accidens belongs to a thing's quiddity.¹⁹⁶

Creation, ironically, displays the natural priority of both God and creature according to the following principle: "That which something is of itself is naturally prior to that which it is from another".¹⁹⁷ Something is naturally prior to another thing, Aquinas argues, if it possesses a form essentially. God's substantial being makes Him naturally prior to the world, and interestingly, creatures "possess" nonbeing before they possess being, such that they have a limited¹⁹⁸ natural priority with respect to being.

Essential possession of a form qualifies the per se agent as separable and thus naturally prior in relation to its effect.¹⁹⁹ The characteristic of essential possession of a form by a per se cause is a better indicator of natural priority than is its causality, one could argue, from Aquinas' discussion on truth in De veritate I.2. In that text, Aquinas notes that when something is predicated of different things according to priority and posteriority, it does not necessarily follow that it is predicated in a prior fashion of that which causes it to be present in the others. Rather, it is predicated in a prior way of that in which its complete and perfect nature is realised.²⁰⁰ "True" is said in a prior fashion of that where truth's nature is first realised, and since the perfection of any operation is in its terminus, truth is predicated of an intellect (not of things) in

¹⁹⁵ See Post. An. I.4; I.22. See also Aquinas' commentary: In I Post. An. l. 33 (#282); S.T. I 85.5 ad 3 on the composition in the thing as the foundation for predication.

¹⁹⁶ In 7 Meta. I.3 (#1309). Cf. In I Post. An. l. 10 (#83): "Quando subjectum vel aliquid eius est causa eius, quod attribuitur ei, et hoc significat per se." On the different modes of predication, see P. Hoenen, La théorie du jugement d'après s. Thomas d'Aquin, 2nd ed. (Rome, 1953), pp. 107ff.

¹⁹⁷ See In II Sent. d.1 q.1 a.2: "...in re quae creari dicitur, prius sit non esse quam esse: non quidem prioritate temporis vel durationis, ut prius non fuerit et postmodum sit; sed prioritate naturae, ita quod res creata si sibi relinquatur, consequatur non esse, cum esse non habeat nisi ex influentia causae superioris. Prius enim unicuique inest naturaliter quod non ex alio habet, quam quod ab alio habet..." (Mandonnet, p. 18).

¹⁹⁸ One might argue that this is only a conceptual sense of natural priority.

¹⁹⁹ See S.T. I 104.1c: "...Aer autem nullo modo natus est recipere lumen secundum eandem rationem secundum quam est in sole, ut scilicet recipiat formam solis, quae est principium luminis; et ideo quia non habet radicem in aere, statim cessat lumen, cessante actione solis..." The text goes on to explain the nature of divine conservation and the analogical participation of creatures in esse.

²⁰⁰ For example, "healthy" is predicated of "animal" in a prior fashion because it is in animal that the nature of health is first and perfectly realised. Medicine may cause health but we do not predicate health of it first: De ver. I.2.

a prior fashion.²⁰¹ Things are said to be true insofar as they attain to a likeness of their forms in the divine intellect, which is the principle of all truth.²⁰²

Aquinas' doctrine of truth as intellectual, combined with his theory of the divine intellect as measure of all being,²⁰³ leads to the attribution of a strong sense of natural priority of God to creature in the relation of truth. This sense of natural priority combines the various types of natural priority listed thus far, viz. natural priority in terms of separability, perfection, and "absolute" natural priority. The relation of truth between God and creature is nonmutual or mixed, in that the relation on the side of creatures is real (for they depend on God for their being) but on the side of God it is only rational (for He is independent of creatures). Aquinas deduces this fact from the fact that the foundation of the relation differs in each term. In mutual relations, such as numerical²⁰⁴ and certain causal relations,²⁰⁵ the real extramental foundation in each term is the same: In numerical relations, the common foundation is quantity and quality; in causal relations, it is action and passion. The relation of truth between God and creature is psychological (knower/known) and the foundation in the creature is extramental, but in God it is mental. The foundation in the knower (God) is a spiritual act, whereas in the known (creature) it is in the physical order.²⁰⁶ The nonmutuality of the relation of truth is also inferred from God's existence outside the genus of created being²⁰⁷ and from His freedom in creating.²⁰⁸

²⁰¹ De ver. I.2.

²⁰² De veritate I.1-2 deals with the various senses of truth. In S.T. I.16.1, Aquinas indicates that things are related either per se or per accidens to an intellect: They are related per se to the intellect on which they depend for their being, and per accidens to an intellect by which they can be known. Thus, natural things are true as approximating their divine ideas.

²⁰³ God is the measure or standard of all types and grades of being as the plenitude of perfection. See C.G. I.28: "...In unoquoque genere est aliquid perfectissimum in genere illo, ad quod omnia quae sunt illius generis mensurantur: quia ex eo unumquodque ostenditur magis vel minus perfectum esse, quod ad mensuram sui generis magis vel minus appropinquat...Id autem quod est mensura omnium entium non potest esse aliud quam Deus, qui est suum esse. Ipsi igitur nulla deest perfectionum quae aliquibus rebus convenient: alias non esset omnium communis mensura..." God's simplicity is the basis for His perfection and status as first measure of all being. See De An. 7, e.g. For God's understanding as the measure and cause, see S.T. I 16.5.

²⁰⁴ Numerical relations are relations of similarity, quantity and equality.

²⁰⁵ Causal relations here include the relation between heating and being heated.

²⁰⁶ See De pot. 7.10 on the basis of relations.

²⁰⁷ De pot. 7.10. Cf. De pot. 7.8 ad 3; S.T. I 13.7c.

²⁰⁸ S.T. I 19.3. Some authors attribute a mutual implication in being to Aquinas in the God/creature relation, and in doing so, find necessitarian strains in his natural theology. N. Kretzmann argues that God's goodness necessitates the creation of free agents: N. Kretzmann, "A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?" in S. Macdonald, ed. Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Natural Theology (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp.

The creature's foundation of real dependence on God is its esse creatum, that is, the finite act of being as limited by essence.²⁰⁹ Creatures are "more or less" true to the degree that they approximate their divine likeness or produce truth in the intellect that knows them.²¹⁰ The role of measure in truth thus relates natural priority as "origin" to natural priority "in reference to a principle".²¹¹

The following conclusions can be made concerning natural priority as "origin": First, the analysis of per se causality revealed that God is the most appropriate candidate for natural priority in this sense, as communicator of being through immediate causal presence to His effects. Criterion (e)²¹² confirmed this fact, and revealed the relation between "origin" and natural priority of "perfection". Criterion (e) also pointed to a unique and limited sense of natural priority on the side of creatures.²¹³

Second, the fact that causal procession is a better indicator than temporal simultaneity of natural priority of "origin", points to the link between "origin" and the separability criterion. This causal procession, moreover, involved the analogical, universal level of causation of effects (criterion (d) of per se causes) which links "origin" with the "absolute" type of natural priority. In explaining the causal procession involved in creation, Aquinas confirms God's unique and

208-228. See esp. pp. 215-223. On pages 219-220 he says: "If perfect goodness is an aspect of God's essence, and self-diffusiveness is essential to goodness, it looks as if creation has got to be an inevitable consequence of God's nature - unless the diffusion of goodness can somehow be completely accounted for within the divine nature...the essential self-diffusiveness of goodness as an aspect of the essence of the triune God remains in force, calling for extrinsic, volitional diffusion, or creation..." Kretzmann thinks that Aquinas wavers between a necessitarian theory of creation based on a Dionysian view of natural necessity, and voluntarism.

²⁰⁹ See De pot. 7.10; De pot. 7.9 ad 4. See also F. Wilhelmsen, "Creation as a Relation in Saint Thomas Aquinas", Modern Schoolman 56 (1979)107-133. This area is most complex, and the question of how a nonexistent creature can have any foundation for a relation is as difficult a solution as positing its naturally prior non ens as the foundation.

²¹⁰ On the truth of entity as related to the divine exemplar and efficient cause, see In I Sent. d.19 q.5 a.1: "...Unde dico, quod sicut est unum esse divinum quo omnia sunt, sicut a principio effectivo exemplari, nihilominus tamen in rebus diversis est diversum esse, quo formaliter res est; ita etiam est una veritas, scilicet divina, qua omnia vera sunt...nihilominus sunt plures veritates in rebus creatis, quibus dicuntur verae formaliter..." See the same article on the secondary meaning of things' truth, viz. their aptitude to cause knowledge in the knower: "...Unde dico, quod ipsum esse rei est causa veritatis, secundum quod est in cognitione intellectus". On the role of the divine intellect in measuring the truth and being of all things, see De ver. I.2.

²¹¹ In an analogous sense, Aristotle used the example of "health" to illustrate the different predications of being always relate to a first principle: Meta. IV.2 (1003a33-b6).

²¹² This refers to the essential possession of the quality in question by the per se cause.

²¹³ This refers to their limited natural priority of nonbeing with respect to God, in the act of creation.

independent causality with respect to creatures.²¹⁴ Criterion (a) explained that per se causes act as one cause within the series, thus confirming both God's independent and irreplaceable role as Creator, and the separability criterion.

Third, the mutual implication in being that causal union in efficient causation only apparently implied a denial of the separability criterion type of natural priority. Criterion (c) was expressed in the illumination analogies of Aquinas' theories of conservation, creation, divine omnipresence and religious acts, but was offset by his reaffirmation of the separability criterion as expressed in his doctrine of truth. The nonmutual mixed relation of truth between God and creature reaffirmed the connection between natural priority as "origin" and the separability criterion, as well as natural priority as "perfection" and "in reference to a principle". Thus, the present type of natural priority exhibits more properties of the concept than does any other version.

3.3 *Applications of Natural Priority in Aquinas' Metaphysics*

3.3.1 *Per Se Causes*

3.3.1.1 *The Notion of a Per Se Cause*

In discussing the final type of natural priority, the topic of per se causality was treated in detail. Now, the question of whether natural priority exists between per se and per accidens causes must be raised. In several places Aquinas states that per se causes are prior to per accidens ones. Since an accidental cause is dependent on an essential one, it is logical to take up the question of how essential or per se causes are prior, and if natural priority is at work in this distinction. Aquinas' discussions in this vein concern i) the issue of incorruptible forms,²¹⁵ ii) the proper versus the common causes in the universe²¹⁶ and the realm of becoming or making,²¹⁷ iii) the question of the origin of distinction in things,²¹⁸ and iv) the proof of God as the first efficient cause of being in the five ways.²¹⁹

²¹⁴ This refers to criterion (a) of per se causality: In a per se causal series, the per se cause holds the level of one cause with respect to its effect.

²¹⁵ S.T. I 50.5; 75.2,6 (section 3.3.1.2 below).

²¹⁶ In 2 Phys. lectios 6 and 10 (section 3.3.1.3 below).

²¹⁷ In 11 Meta. l. 8, as read alongside In 2 Phys. l. 6 (section 3.3.1.3 below).

²¹⁸ C.G. II 39 (section 3.3.1.4 below).

²¹⁹ See section 3.3.1.5 below.

The first thing to note is that a per se cause is also called a necessary cause, but natural priority does not belong to all types of per se cause. Natural priority cannot belong to sine qua non or concurrent causes which are types of per se causes, since they rely on the principal cause.²²⁰ Concurrent causes fall under the type of “necessary” cause which is the first sense that Aristotle gives, viz., the necessary as “that without which a thing cannot be or live”.²²¹ Neither are Aristotle’s second or third senses of necessity relevant, namely, conditional or hypothetical necessity or the necessity of coercion.²²² Only the fourth and central sense is of importance for our purposes. “Absolute” necessity belongs to a thing “by reason of something that is intimately and closely connected with it, whether it be the form or the matter or the very essence of a thing”.²²³ This quality of absolute necessity echoes the fifth criterion of per se causes listed in section 2.5 above,²²⁴ and refers to the necessary possession of a form by the per se agent. Per se causes act directly and through their own power, where there is no impediment, in contrast to accidental causes, Aquinas frequently states.²²⁵ Causes are accidental if indirect, in two senses: When the agent is only the cause of a disposition to a certain effect (as the devil causes us to sin²²⁶) or when there is removal of an impediment, and the effect is not directly intended (as original sin accidentally causes death in all men, by removing original justice²²⁷).

3.3.1.2 Subsistent Forms

The question of natural priority in the analysis of per se causes arises in different contexts, one of which is Aquinas’ proof of the incorruptibility of subsistent forms, of angels²²⁸

²²⁰ An example of a conditional or “sine qua non” cause is respiration in a mammal. The act of respiration is not equivalent to the essence but a necessary condition for the existence of the creature: In 5 Meta. l. 6 #827-#829.

²²¹ See In 5 Meta. l. 6 for the four senses of “necessary”.

²²² This refers to the necessity of something for something else to occur, and the necessity imposed on effects by a forceful agent. See In 5 Meta. l. 6 #828 - #830.

²²³ In 5 Meta. l. 6 #833. Cf. S.T. I 82.1.

²²⁴ In the section on natural priority as “origin”, the essential or necessary possession of a quality was a condition of the cause acting per se with respect to its effect.

²²⁵ He states this in his lengthy examination of the causes of sin: S.T. I 114.3; I-II 75.4; 76.1; 85.5; 88.3, e.g.

²²⁶ S.T. I 114.3.

²²⁷ S.T. I-II 85.5. As the notion applies to the case of indirect culpability in nonvoluntary murder, see S.T. II-II 65.8. By failing to remove obstacles such as illegal activity, the accidental agent cause of a murder is still guilty.

²²⁸ S.T. I 50.5; C.G. II 55 [2].

and men.²²⁹ This example is interesting because it combines the Platonic removal criterion with the Aristotelian priority of act to potency in Aquinas' theory of the inseparability of esse from subsistent forms. As well, it uses the fifth criterion of per se causes listed in the section on origin above.

The issue of incorruptibility illumines the lack of any natural priority of form or esse, an issue examined in chapter five of this thesis. The axiom of his proof of the incorruptibility of subsistent forms is that "what belongs to a thing per se cannot be separated from it".²³⁰ This axiom is a corollary of quality of per se causes as possessing forms essentially or necessarily, indicated above. Only what belongs to a thing accidentally can be removed from it. Assuming Aristotle's proof of the priority of act to potency, Aquinas reasons that "everything is an actual being according to its form; whereas matter is an actual being by the form".²³¹ Since existence belongs to a form considered not accidentally but per se or in itself, and since what belongs to a thing essentially cannot be separated from it, a subsistent form is incorruptible. Evidence for spiritual forms' mode of possessing esse is the lack of contraries in an immaterial form, which is known through its mode of understanding.²³² Matter possesses esse through the power of form, however, and so has esse in an indirect fashion.²³³ From this analysis of Aquinas' proof of the incorruptibility of the angelic and human form, we see that that which possesses form depends on it for its esse, or that which has esse per accidens. Both the removal criterion and the natural priority of act to potency are elements in this proof.²³⁴

²²⁹ S.T. I 75.6.

²³⁰ S.T. I 50.5.

²³¹ S.T. I 50.5c: "...unumquodque enim est ens actu secundum quod habet formam. Materia vero est ens actu per formam. Compositum igitur ex materia et forma desinit esse actu per hoc quod forma separatur a materia. Sed si ipsa forma subsistat in suo esse, sicut est in angelis, ut dictum est, non potest amittere esse..."

²³² On this point, see S.T. I 50.5; 75.2,6. As well, see the article by F. Wilhelmsen, "A Note on Contraries and the Incorruptibility of the Human Soul in St. Thomas Aquinas" American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly 67 (1993) 333-338.

²³³ S.T. I 50.5; 75.6; 90.2 ad 1; 104.1 ad 1; C.G. II 55.

²³⁴ The question of the unity of matter, form and esse in the composite substance is dealt with in Meta. 10, and will be examined in chapter three of this thesis, sections 2.2 - 2.3. The issue of per se order is naturally connected to that of per se unity. An interesting topic which utilises both the notion of order and that of unity is that of the hypostatic union. The best text on the mode of unity in Christ for the coincidence of order and unity is C.G. IV 41.

3.3.1.3 Causes in the Universe

At In 2 Physics lectios 5 through 14, Aquinas reviews Aristotle's list of essential or "proper" causes versus the accidental or improper ones. The proper causes are intelligence, nature and the four causes, in contrast to fortune and chance, which are accidental.²³⁵ The proper causes act from a determinate principle to a determinate end and their effects always follow, unless something impedes their occurrence.²³⁶ Fortune and chance are improper or accidental causes in that their effects do not always occur, and these causes are not always "for the sake of something",²³⁷ or are indeterminate. That done for the sake of an end springs either from intention (intelligence) or nature (the four causes). Lectio six (#190) of In 2 Phys. also states that per se causes are posterior to per accidens ones, in the sense that they are more general than the prior per accidens particulars, which latter are also more proximate to the effect. Being a sculptor is the proper, per se cause of the statue, but being Polycleetus is the more proximate, less common accidental cause. Aquinas notes that this apparent priority of the accidental cause to the per se one is only in the order of predication, however, and not in the order of causality. In the latter order, the common cause is posterior with respect to the effect, and the proper, per se cause is prior, just as the sun is the common, improper cause of heating, while fire is the proper cause.²³⁸

From the various texts on the interaction of per se and per accidens causes in the universe, we can draw the following conclusions. First, the common (remote)²³⁹ and per se (proximate) causes do not coincide, but the particular per se cause depends on the common one to operate. Thus, the per se cause is not naturally prior to the common cause.²⁴⁰ The per se cause is naturally prior to the per accidens cause however, since the latter is outside yet dependent on the per se cause's nature.²⁴¹ However, this natural priority is not causal, as one might think, since the per accidens cause, although dependent on the per se, is not an effect of

²³⁵ Cf. In 11 Meta. l. 8 #2288.

²³⁶ In 2 Physics l. 14 (267).

²³⁷ That is, they have their own end which is extrinsic to that intended by the per se cause.

²³⁸ In 2 Phys. l. 6 #188 - #189.

²³⁹ In the analysis of common causes in contrast to per se ones, Aquinas does not identify common or remote causes with per accidens ones. This is probably because their causal action does not fall outside the intention of the per se cause.

²⁴⁰ An example of this is the following: The doctor is not naturally prior to the artisan or technician, although the doctor is the particular, proximate and per se cause of health.

it. Rather, neither is the cause of the other, and there is no single common proper cause of the per se and per accidens.²⁴² In order to determine the relationship between per se causes and natural priority, therefore, we must examine other instances of per se causes.

3.3.1.4 The Origin of Distinction in Things

C.G. II 39 states that only a per se cause is responsible for the original distinction in things, and links the per se cause to necessary forms. In this text, Aquinas presents an a fortiori argument for the conclusion that per se causes originate distinction in the universe, and in doing so, claims that the original per se cause is naturally prior to consequent per accidens ones in a way similar to substance's natural priority to operations. He starts by saying that if posterior things are caused by per se causes, then so are naturally prior things.²⁴³ The original distinction between things is naturally prior to their movements and operations, since the latter belong to determinate and distinct things. But operations are from determinate and per se causes, namely, substances. This is true since they proceed from substances in a determinate and regular manner. He concludes that therefore the original distinction in things also results from a per se cause, and not through chance.

C.G. II 16 proved that the original distinction in things was not through matter, and C.G. II 39 restates that matter is not the cause of order, but of chance.²⁴⁴ This is because matter is the source of contingency, or of "things possibly being otherwise", whereas form is the more determinate principle, limiting the reservoir of possibilities to one. The original distinction in being must originate with the per se and determinate cause which is form, and this becomes most evident in the case of necessary forms (those which possess no contrariety) such as angels.²⁴⁵ Their distinction cannot be the result of chance but only through form. Thus, C.G. II 39 in conjunction with other chapters, proves the natural priority of per se causes to per accidens or chance ones, in relation to the issue of the original distinction of things.

²⁴¹ An example of this is the following: James Jones is the per accidens cause of health, but being a doctor is the per se cause of health. Health would result if any individual doctor practiced his skills.

²⁴² For example, in the case of the musician who builds, there is no common cause of the builder and the musician as such, and the builder does not cause the musician to be. See In 11 Meta. l. 8 (#2278).

²⁴³ C.G. II 39 [5].

²⁴⁴ C.G. II 39 [3],[4].

²⁴⁵ This important issue has been overlooked by several existentialist Thomists who link contingency with all created or finite being. In fact, many finite beings have absolute (not merely suppositional) necessity, as Aquinas explains in great detail. See, e.g. C.G. II 30.

3.3.1.5 “Per Se” Causes in the “Five Ways”

The five proofs of God’s existence presented in S.T. I 2.3²⁴⁶ all use per se order in their universal rejection of an infinite series of essentially ordered causes, as well as in their assertion that a first cause is essentially ordered to all finite beings. The five ways present an interesting instance of per se order in that the focus on the primacy of act to potency argued for in the Metaphysics commentary²⁴⁷ is accompanied by a consideration of the various aspects of finite being in general. In C.G. I 13, Aquinas attributes the different avenues to God to various sources, although the presentation of his arguments shows that he has developed them considerably.²⁴⁸ The first two ways are a development of Aristotle,²⁴⁹ although the second way (efficient causality) stresses efficient causality as the bestowal of existence, and Aquinas attributes this argument to Avicenna elsewhere.²⁵⁰ The most recent literature has concentrated on the third way (contingence and necessity), which Thomas attributes to Aristotle and Arabic sources, specifically Avicenna.²⁵¹ The fourth way (grades of being) is taken from Aristotle, while the fifth (from the directedness of things) is attributed to John Damascene and to some extent, to Averroes.²⁵²

²⁴⁶ Cf. C.G. I 13.

²⁴⁷ In 9 Meta. This issue will be taken up in the course of chapter four of this thesis.

²⁴⁸ On this point, consult the various interpretations of the presentation and validity of the five ways, e.g. F. Van Steenberghen, Dieu Caché: Comment Savons-Nous que Dieu Existe? (Louvain, 1961); A. Kenny, The Five Ways (London, 1969); J. Owens, “Aquinas and the Five Ways”, in ed. J. Catan, St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God (Albany: S.U.N.Y., 1980), pp. 132-42. My analysis of per se order uses the various aspects or perspectives of being as the “key” or starting point for an understanding of the overall intention of the five ways.

²⁴⁹ The first way is Aristotle’s proof in Physics VIII while the second, Aquinas finds in Metaphysics II (994a5-7; 18-19).

²⁵⁰ In 1 Sent. 3.1.2 Solut.

²⁵¹ Some articles are H. Holstein, “L’origine aristotélicienne de la ‘tertia via’ de saint Thomas” Revue philosophique de Louvain 48 (1950), 354-70; J. Owens, “‘Cause of Necessity’ in Aquinas’ Tertia Via” Mediaeval Studies 33 (1971) 21-45; Barry Miller, “The Contingency Argument” Monist 54 (1970) 360; L. Dewan, “The Interpretation of St. Thomas’ ‘Third Way’” Littera Sensus Sententia: Studi in onore del Prof. C. J. Vansteenkiste, o.p. (Studia Universitatis S. Thomae in Urbe, 33: Milan, 1991), 189-200. On the Arabic background, see Aquinas, De pot. 5.3. J. Owens’ reading of the S.T. proof roots it in Avicenna (“Aquinas and the Five Ways” p. 136).

²⁵² On the origins of the last two ways, see C.G. I 13.

Natural priority figures into the five ways in the sense that all caused beings have the status of a potency with respect to a higher act, namely, God.²⁵³ In the five ways, the notion of a per se causal order is employed to show the impossibility of an infinite regress in per se causes. The following analysis of the third way in particular will show that Aquinas does not interpret this priority as the priority of subsistent esse to finite form, despite some philosophers' views.²⁵⁴ Rather, it is the per se order of all created being (viz., contingent and necessary) to the First Act which is the order indicated. Just like the example of subsistent forms,²⁵⁵ the five ways also combine the Platonic and Aristotelian senses of natural priority, namely, the removal criterion and the priority of act to potency. Now we must discover how Aquinas' position differs from the Gilsonian school's interpretation which makes the five ways an application of the real distinction.

The best instance of the "real distinction" ("RD") proponents' view which makes esse naturally prior to essence is their analysis of the third way. The RD interpretation of this proof admits a gradated series of created necessary beings but also equates "possibility" with "that whose existence is caused" (signalling the real distinction between esse and form). The first part of the third way proves the impossibility of an independent universe comprised of beings with the possibility towards being and nonbeing. Such beings contain matter and are subject to generation and corruption, and if being consisted of these alone, then at some time nothing would exist, which defies our experience of present beings. Thus, something necessary must also exist:

The third way is taken from possibility and necessity, and runs thus. We find in nature things that are possible to be and not be, since they are found to be generated, and to be corrupted, and consequently, it is possible for them to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which can not-be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything can not-be, then at one time there was nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist begins to exist only through something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would be impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence—which is absurd. Therefore, not all

²⁵³ In chapter four of this thesis, we will study Aquinas' proof of the natural priority of act with respect to potency, in his Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics Book 9.

²⁵⁴ In particular, J. Owens thinks that the real distinction follows the demonstration of God's existence. See: J. Owens, "Aquinas and the Five Ways"; F.X. Knasas, "Making Sense of the Tertia Via" New Scholasticism 54 (1980) 476-511.

²⁵⁵ Section 3.3.1.2 above.

beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary.²⁵⁶

The second part of the third way goes on to eliminate the possibility of an infinite regress of caused necessary beings, relying on the second way:

...But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes. Therefore we cannot but admit the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God.²⁵⁷

The basis of the RD interpretation consists in reading the real distinction's sense of contingency (as given in *De ente et essentia*) into the third way, such that to be "possible" means "that into whose definition existence does not enter".²⁵⁸ Aquinas accounts for necessary beings which cannot be described as "possibles re-being and not being", however, in the third way and in other texts, such as *In 1 de Caelo* l.26 (#258).²⁵⁹ Thus, what always is is not contingent in the usual sense of the term, since it has no potency to nonbeing, and is thus incorruptible.

The RD interpretation errs on two counts. First, regarding the third way in general, it doesn't explain the distinction between types of possibility, namely, the possibility to being and nonbeing (belonging to contingent creatures) versus that to being alone (which belongs to

²⁵⁶ *S.T.* I.2.3: "...Tertia via est sumpta ex possibili et necessario, quae talis est. Invenimus enim in rebus quaedam quae suntabilia esse et non esse, cum quaedam inveniantur generari et corrumpi, et per consequensabilia esse et non esse. Impossibile est autem omnia quae sunt talia, semper esse, quia quod possibile est non esse, quandoque non est. Si igitur omnia suntabilia non esse, aliquando nihil fuit in rebus. Sed si hoc est verum, etiam nunc nihil esset, quia quod non est, non incipit esse nisi per aliquid quod est; si igitur nihil fuit ens, impossibile fuit quod aliquid inciperet esse, et sic modo nihil esset, quod patet esse falsum. Non ergo omnia entia suntabilia, sed oportet aliquid esse necessarium in rebus..."

²⁵⁷ *S.T.* I.2.3: "...Omne autem necessarium vel habet causam suae necessitatis aliunde, vel non habet. Non est autem possibile quod procedatur in infinitum in necessariis quae habent causam suae necessitatis, sicut nec in causis efficientibus, ut probatum est. Ergo necesse est ponere aliquid quod sit per se necessarium, non habens causam necessitatis aliunde, sed quod est causa necessitatis aliis, quod omnes dicunt Deum."

²⁵⁸ See, e.g. Knasas, "Making Sense of the *Tertia Via*", *Dialogue* 19 (1980), p. 490.

²⁵⁹ *In 1 de Caelo* l. 26 (#258): "...Ponamus enim aliquid semper ens, ita tamen quod istud esse suum sempiternum sit contingens et non necessarium. Poterit ergo non esse respectu cuiuscumque partis temporis infiniti, in quo ponitur semper esse: nec propter hoc sequetur quod aliquid sit simul ens et non ens...illud quod semper est, scilicet per infinitum tempus, habet potentiam ut sit in infinito tempore: Potentia autem existendi non est ad utrumque respectu temporis in quo quis potest esse; omnia enim appetunt esse, et unumquodque tantum est quantum potest esse. Et hoc praecipue patet in his quae sunt

necessary creatures). In other words, the broad sense of contingency²⁶⁰ and the idea of corruptibility are not synonymous, since there are certain incorruptible creatures which possess a general dependence on God. The RD proponents' inability to meaningfully understand the distinction between possible beings and necessary beings also destroys the path of argument from contingent to necessary to caused necessary beings set out by the text.

As noted, their implied restriction of possible being to contingent being flows from the insistence in reading the proof as an instance of the real distinction. By adopting this perspective, the RD interpretation overlooks two essential points. First, this perspective on its own simply does not distinguish possible from necessary beings, a distinction which Aquinas repeats and requires for a proper metaphysical hierarchy of being.²⁶¹ Second, overlooking finite necessary being is a clear denial of Aquinas' essential divisions of being as such, which groups contingent and necessary being under the finite:

...the divine will must be understood as existing outside of the order of beings, as a cause producing the whole of being and all its differences. Now the possible and the necessary are differences of being... He disposes necessary causes for the effects that He wills to be necessary, and He ordains causes acting contingently (i.e. able to fail) for the effects that He wills to be contingent...all depend on the divine will as on a first cause, which transcends the order of necessity and contingency...²⁶²

In reply to the RD interpretation, we can say that if the real distinction were read into the text at any point, it would be in the second part, not the first. For only in the discussion of the series of necessary beings is the Avicennian second way (efficient causes) invoked. Moreover, the RD reading obscures the members of the per se causal order presented in the third way, envisioning the only per se relation to be that between subsistent esse (God) and finite

a nature, quia natura est determinata ad unum. Et sic quidquid semper est, non contingenter semper est, sed ex necessitate.”

²⁶⁰ I am taking the broad sense of contingency here to mean “dependence on God” and the narrow sense to mean “corruptible”, although Aquinas distinguishes incorruptible from corruptible beings on the basis of their necessity or contingency, in the narrow sense.

²⁶¹ *De ente et essentia* is in large part a description of this hierarchy, which is echoed in the third way's contrast of contingent, necessary and uncaused necessary being. On “necessity” as indicative of incorruptible substances, see *C.G.* II.30; *De pot.* 5.3 ad 12; *S.T.* I 44.1 obj.2 and ad 2.

²⁶² *In I Peri.* I.13 (#22): “...voluntas divina est intelligenda ut extra ordinem entium existens, velut causa quaedam profundens totum ens et omnes eius differentias. Sunt autem differentiae entis possibile et necessarium; et ideo ex ipsa voluntate divina originantur necessitas et contingentia in rebus...Et secundum harum conditionem causarum, effectus dicuntur vel necessarij vel contingentes, quamvis omnes

contingent creatures. This interpretation not only misses the per se causality of necessary finite substances (and makes the second part of the third way superfluous) but also limits divine causality to the efficient causation of esse. God does not act only as subsistent esse, however, in the mind of Aquinas. The discussion of efficient causes in S.T. I 19.4 indicates that God efficiently causes as an essence comprised of intellect and will, not just as Ipsium Esse Subsistens.²⁶³ Thus, the RD interpretation of the third way obscures the focus on modes of substantial being peculiar to the third way, and wrongly implies a natural priority of esse to essence.²⁶⁴

The denial of an infinite series of per se causes is also illustrated in S.T. I 104.2, on the conservation of being. This text confirms our interpretation of the third way, for a per se order between necessary creatures and God cannot base the inference that this order is between finite form and Subsistent Esse. A per se cause of being is defined in S.T. I.104.2 as one on which the being of the effect depends. The text implies that there is a per se order between necessary finite beings and contingent beings, on the one hand, and between creation and God, on the other. While creatures can instrumentally (yet directly) conserve other creatures in being, this does not point to a metaphysical priority of esse to essence in a way analogous to the RD proponents' interpretation of God's act of conserving. Rather, things are conserved in esse by means of the higher creatures' forms, which have no potency to nonbeing.

In conclusion, Aquinas' application of natural priority to the various instances of per se causality combines the Platonic separability criterion with Aristotle's doctrine of actuality, and develops certain aspects of natural priority of origin, specifically in the God/creature relation. This fact is supported through his theory of analogy, as well.

dependeant a voluntate divina, sicut a prima causa, quae transcendit ordinem necessitatis et contingentiae...”

²⁶³ Although He is described in this way as containing all perfections infinitely and virtually.

²⁶⁴ J. Owens cites the De ente et essentia as well as De pot. 5.3 as the background for the third way, which, he says, “states the contingency of things in the regular Thomistic observation that their existence is over and above (praeter) their essence” (“Aquinas and the Five Ways”, in Catan, p. 136), thus referring to esse's “accidentality”. J. Knasas likewise identifies possibility in the first sense (towards contraries) with things which have a real distinction between existence and essence (Knasas, “Making Sense of the Tertia Via”, New Scholasticism 54 [1980], p. 490).

3.3.2 *Analogy and Priority*

Analogy is both a logical and a metaphysical solution to the problem of the one and the many. It originated with Aristotle's emphasis on analogous predication as an explanation of the divisions of being,²⁶⁵ and was transformed by Aquinas into a doctrine of the causal relations among the divisions of being, especially between form and existence.²⁶⁶ In essence, analogy means a proportion between types of being or relations of being. How is priority present in his metaphysical theory of analogy? In a standard text on the question of analogy, Aquinas stated that there is priority and posteriority only in analogical predication, because only here is there an order based on inequality.²⁶⁷ The following analysis of the types of analogy will confirm the causal nature of natural priority, specifically in the relation of creation. Thus, a brief indication of some texts where God's causal natural priority is found, is in order.

Aquinas' transformation of Aristotle on the concept of natural priority consists in his stress on the causal nature of principles, on the one hand, and in his description of God's natural priority to creatures as their first efficient cause, on the other.²⁶⁸ Ultimately, it is the universal and infinite nature of the first cause of being which distinguishes God as the prime instance of natural priority.²⁶⁹ God subsists as infinite being and is the cause of the most common effect, namely, *esse*.

²⁶⁵ On the history of the doctrine of analogy as it wavered between purely logical and more speculative metaphysical portrayals, see, for example, L.M. de Rijk, "On Ancient and Mediaeval Semantics and Metaphysics" *Vivarium* 16 (1978) 81-107. 17 (1980) 1-62. On the Thomistic application of Aristotle, see, e.g. S. Breton, "La déduction thomiste des catégories" *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 15 (1962) 5-62.

²⁶⁶ For an historical perspective illustrating this claim, see, for example, C. Fabro, *La nozione...*; and the most acclaimed modern work on the topic: Bernard Montagnes, *La Doctrine de l'analogie de l'être chez S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain: Publications universitaires, 1963).

²⁶⁷ *C.G.* I 34. Here Aquinas states that predication of names belonging to creatures as effects and to God as cause must occur in the second mode of analogous predication, i.e. in the order of one to another, as opposed to the way in which many refer to a one which is extrinsic. It occurs in the same way in which we predicate being of substance and accident: "...Alio modo, secundum quod duorum attenditur ordo vel respectus non ad aliquid alterum, sed ad unum ipsorum; sicut ens de substantia et accidente dicitur, secundum quod accidens ad substantiam respectum habet...et ideo ens dicitur prius de substantia quam de accidente..." In this text he also notes that priority in nature and in cognition do not coincide. Rather, what is prior according to nature (i.e. the property existing in the prime analogate) is posterior in the order of discovery (for we know causes through their effects).

²⁶⁸ The issue of God's natural priority will be treated in detail in section 3.4 below. The Platonic removal criterion is also used to defend God's simplicity in *S.T.* I 3.7.

²⁶⁹ The proof of God as first efficient cause of all beings is found in *S.T.* I 2.3. The infinity of *esse* is shown by the fact that "being caused" lies outside of it: *C.G.* II 52. The universal quality of *Ipsium Esse*'s causality of *esse* is noted at *S.T.* I 65.1; *De pot.* 7.2. It also grounds God's omnipresence: *S.T.* I 8.3; *S.T.* I 105.5.

As the first principle of being, God is naturally prior to creatures, as per se causes are prior naturally to per accidens ones.²⁷⁰ Aquinas develops Aristotle's notion of natural priority through stressing the causal nature of prior principles. Reference to the Busa Index reveals three basic groups of texts which show this emphasis in Aquinas. First, there are the important references to God, the naturally prior principle of creation.²⁷¹ Second, there is Aquinas' statement that causality is a necessary part of the definition of natural priority,²⁷² and third, there are the texts revealing the causal nature of the naturally prior principle as an end or goal of action.²⁷³

The first group of texts cite God as naturally prior to creation as the first cause of being. De veritate 1.5 explains God's natural priority to the world as a one-way relation of dependence which is conceptual on the side of God. A rational relation posits nothing in reality, and the relation of God to creature at the moment of creation is that of being to nonbeing. C.G. II 16 [11] develops this notion of independence to prove God to be the creator ex nihilo. This is proven because as pure act, He is naturally prior to matter.²⁷⁴ The second discussion showing the feature of causality in naturally prior principles is De ver. 6.2 ad 13, where Aquinas argues that God's foreknowledge is not the cause of predestination. The criterion of nonreversible sequence of Cat. 12 is cited as insufficient for natural priority. God's foreknowledge and predestination are found in a nonreversible sequence, but not a causal order, which is required for natural priority. The cause of predestination is God's own goodness, assisting things to their end by the power of His will.²⁷⁵

In the final group of texts showing the feature of causality in naturally prior principles, Aquinas shows the coincidence of principles and final causes. The contemplative life is naturally prior to the life of action, he says, since as the final end, it is the principle of all action, and directs the active life.²⁷⁶ He also says that God is the first principle, yet has no principle,²⁷⁷ and is

²⁷⁰ See section 3.3.1.5 above.

²⁷¹ De ver. 1.5 and C.G. II 16 are representative discussions here.

²⁷² De ver. 6.2 ad 13. Cf. S.T. I 76.4 [3]; S.T. II-II 26.2.

²⁷³ These texts refer either to contemplation (S.T. II-II 182.4), charity (S.T. II-II 26.1), faith (S.T. II-II 4.7), or to the First Mover as the principle of motion (In 5 Meta. 1. 11)

²⁷⁴ Cf. other related texts showing that nothing precedes God, such as the five ways (S.T. I 2.3) or those on analogical predication (e.g. De pot. 7.7; C.G. I 34).

²⁷⁵ De ver. 6.2 Reply.

²⁷⁶ S.T. II-II 182.4.

²⁷⁷ C.G. I 26. At In 5 Meta. 1.11,n God is said to be the First Mover, and the naturally prior principle of motion.

the first principle of love, as well. The love of charity tends to God as the principle of all happiness, on which fellowship the friendship of charity is based.²⁷⁸ Here, God is said to be the principle of all action and appetite, as the end.²⁷⁹ Finally, faith, as an end, is naturally prior to all the other virtues, since the end is the principle of action.²⁸⁰

Returning now to the discussion of analogy, Bernard Montagnes discerns two broad Aristotelian theories about the nature of being in tracing the evolution of Thomas' thought on analogy: First, and most evident in the later stages of Aquinas' work, there is the analogy of relation, or of "unity with reference to a first"; second, there is the analogy between proportions, called "analogy of proportionality". The analogy of relation's definition is found in early works such as *De ente et essentia*²⁸¹ and *De principiis naturae*,²⁸² as well as in later works such as *In de Trinitate*,²⁸³ and explains the unity of order within being through things' common relation to their source. It is the relation of two things to a third, where the third is somehow prior to them, or it is the relation of one thing to another.²⁸⁴ The usual example of the first type is "health" as it conditions its signs, subject, cause and preserver.²⁸⁵ However, in *In I Sent.* Prol. q. 1 a. 2 ad 2,

²⁷⁸ *S.T.* II-II 26.1.

²⁷⁹ *S.T.* II-II 26.1 ad 1. The reference is to *S.T.* II-II 23.7 ad 2; I-II 1 ad 1.

²⁸⁰ *S.T.* II-II 4.7.

²⁸¹ The overall doctrine here is that participation of forms in existence at the transcendental level, and of accidents in substance at the predicamental level indicates that there is an analogical structure of being. Aristotle's hierarchy of substances is enlarged to a hierarchy of forms and existences, where the unity of the hierarchy is from reference to a one, the first. This "first" is defined as pure act without any admixture of potency or composition. See especially chapters 4 - 6 of *De ente et essentia*, *passim*.

²⁸² This work is judged by Montagnes (*La doctrine de l'analogie...* p. 24) most likely to be Aquinas' first work (and Weisheipl in *Friar Thomas d'Aquino...* places it in the same time period as *De ente et essentia*, i.e. between 1252 and 1256), and it closes with a chapter on analogy. Aquinas gives a detailed account there of types of "reference to a first": "Aliquando enim ea quae conveniunt secundum analogiam, id est proportionem vel comparisonem vel convenientiam, attribuuntur uni fini...aliquando uni agenti...aliquando autem per attributionem ad unum subjectum, sicut ens dicitur de substantia et de quantitate et qualitate et aliis praedicamentis...ens dicitur per prius de substantia et per posterius de aliis..." In: J. Perrier, ed., *S. Thomae Aquinatis: Opuscula omnia necnon opera minora* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1949), p. 16: "De principiis naturae" para. 16.

²⁸³ *In de Trinitate* V. 4. In this text, analogy of proportionality is reduced to that of relation: "Omnium autem entium sunt principia communia non solum secundum primum modum, quod appellat Philosophus in XI Metaphys. omnia entia habere eadem principia secundum analogiam, sed etiam secundum modum secundum, ut sint quaedam res eadem numero existentes omnium rerum principia, prout scilicet principia accidentium reducuntur in principia substantiae, et principia substantiarum corruptibilium in substantias incorruptibiles, et sic quodam gradu et ordine in quaedam principia omnia entia reducuntur."

²⁸⁴ See, for example: *C.G.* I 34, *De pot.* q. 7 a. 7. This second sense of the analogy of relation which is the reference of one thing to another, is only found in later works such as *C.G.*, *De pot.* and *S.T.*

²⁸⁵ e.g. *C.G.* I 34,

this subdivision is illustrated by the participation of potency and act and substance and accident in the ratio of being. In De pot. q. 7 a. 7, Aquinas gives the example of being as it is predicated analogously of those things belonging to substances (quality, quantity, etc.). It thus corresponds to the categories' degrees of participation in substance by priority and posteriority. The second subdivision here is illustrated by different examples. At times, it describes the reception of esse by creatures from God.²⁸⁶ Other times it describes the relationship between substance and quantity or another category.²⁸⁷ This latter division is the form of analogy which operates between God and creature, for nothing can be prior among the related terms (God and creature).²⁸⁸ Finally, this form of analogy is used sometimes in relation to the communication of being as a common form. Here, analogy is transcendental as opposed to predicamental, and is intrinsic.

The second broad division of analogy is present in De veritate but is later discarded as a description of the grades of being in relation to God. It is called the analogy of proportionality.²⁸⁹ Unlike the analogy of relation, this type of analogy is not based on a direct participation of something common (whether that thing be prior to a group or a member of it), but is rather a similarity of proportions or sets.²⁹⁰ It was seen to safeguard divine transcendence without introducing equivocity in terms relating God and creatures, as well as guaranteeing a relation between infinite and finite.

Both divisions of analogy thus make use of the concept of priority, because both reduce the plurality within being to a unified source, pointing to a first in reality (in the analogy of relation) or to a relation between things (in the analogy of proportionality). Metaphysical

²⁸⁶ See, e.g. In I Sent. Prol., q. 1 a. 2 ad 2; C.G. I 34; De pot. q. 7 a. 7, De ver. q. 2 a. 11, S.T. I q. 13 aa. 5 - 6; De subst. sep. 6; In 5 Meta. l. 8 #866 ff., In I Eth. Nic. l. 7. There are, of course, many more divisions of analogy references. This is just a sample.

²⁸⁷ De pot. q. 7 a. 7, e.g.

²⁸⁸ cf. S.T. I q. 13 a.5 and a. 6. A causal analysis of words and names applying to God and creatures determines that words implying perfections of being apply to creatures as they have a certain proportion to their source (God) by participation. In 4 Meta. l.1 #535-#539 and #629 develop the same insight with reference to being and the categories, citing the requirement of a "first" to avoid an infinite regress in predication.

²⁸⁹ See, for example: De ver. q. 2 a. 11. It should be noted that throughout his book Montagnes uses the term "proportion" instead of "proportionality" in this respect. His use of the terms is not standard.

²⁹⁰ It was introduced in De veritate q. 2 a. 11 to avoid the problem of univocal resemblance between God and creature. According to Montagnes, Aquinas did not see at this stage in his thought that the issue could have been avoided by focusing on efficient, as opposed to formal causality (La doctrine de l'analogie... p. 93, e.g.).

analogy focuses on the relations within being taken either predicamentally or between God and creature.

What are the conclusions to be drawn from this brief analysis of priority in metaphysical analogy? The analogy of relation, we see, points to a causal source of being in God, thus exhibiting characteristics of natural priority more than the analogy of proportionality. A similarity of relations, on the other hand, is not based on the eminence and causality of a “first”, and need not invoke the notion of degrees which flow from a perfect source. His theory of proportionality, Montagnes has shown, rests on a neglect of the concept of efficient causality in Aquinas’ earlier works, and on a limited analysis of resemblance between univocal causes and their effects. Apparently Aquinas perceived the dangers of participation by resemblance early in his career, but lacked an alternative other than that of proportionality. Proportionality between things, however, a) seems more conceptual and thus less descriptive of the actual relations within being in terms of causality, and b) is also a less accurate portrayal of the intrinsic nature of being in its various modes: it limits the analysis of direct relations between beings to things within the same genus.²⁹¹ One could even accuse Aquinas here of holding the early view that the unity of being is accurately represented by a concept common to all beings, but it is commonly held that Aquinas thought it impossible to abstract a notion of being from its instances. The concept of being may be univocal for the logician but not for the metaphysician, due to its close association with the modes in which it is found.²⁹²

The fact that Aquinas eventually adopted the analogy of relation as a mode of explaining the relations within being and the communication of existence to creatures shows that the unity in a metaphysical hierarchy is best explained by a theory invoking causal priority. It was also preferred because only that sort of analogy could properly guarantee a direct relation between cause and effect. The limitation of act by passive potency is a later doctrine of Aquinas which is also involved in this thesis, since it is similarly grounded in his views on efficient causality and the communication of being, but here we can only allude to it.²⁹³ (We have also omitted discussion about the role of priority and posteriority in the order of knowing in his theory of

²⁹¹ This is implicit in his distinction of types of analogy in De Ver. q. 2 a. 11.

²⁹² See, for example, S.T. I q. 12, a. 4 on the multiple ways or degrees in which being is found, either in corporeal, immaterial or subsistent entites, where the identity between essence and esse increases with the degree of immateriality.

²⁹³ On the introduction of this doctrine in Aquinas, see, for example: Bernard Montagnes, La doctrine de l’analogie... p. 58ff. He cites this development in Aquinas in writings after C.G.

analogy, which is the reverse of the ontological order, although this issue was discussed in the Aristotelian background.)

The second conclusion to be drawn is that within his analogy of relation, Aquinas adopts the relation of one to another, as opposed to that of many to a first which is prior to them, as a proper description of the relation of being between God and creature. This is because there can be nothing prior to these parties, since God is the cause of all being. Essences are viewed as modes and degrees of the perfection of being, and analogy finds its main locus in the analysis of essences as receptive but also determinative potencies to *esse*, as the *De ente et essentia* maintains.²⁹⁴ One finds many explicit treatments of relation among degrees to a “first” in Aquinas, where the perfection “realises” itself according to degrees in distinct subjects.²⁹⁵ Ultimately, the unity of being is seen to depend on the unity of its cause, so that the structure of analogy parallels that of participation. The mere substitution of real diversity for either a conceptual notion of proportionality, or for one where the source is somehow extrinsic (where two are related to a third) is an insufficient explanation of the community in being.

3.4 *The Role of “Contineri” in Aquinas’ Theory of Natural Priority*

The notion of virtual containment (*contineri*) plays an important role in drawing conclusions regarding Aquinas’ theory of natural priority. It is through use of this concept that Aquinas is able to posit God as the only “strong” instance of natural priority, that is, of natural priority taken in all five senses. Virtual containment also permits the juxtaposition of notes within the concept of natural priority, specifically, the notes of God’s transcendence and immanence. Chapter four below will illustrate Aquinas’ argument that God is the only true instance of natural priority, but here it is appropriate to examine the role that *contineri* plays.

Contineri can refer either to the containment of the higher in the lower, as all concepts are said to grow and exist within the concept of being (*ens*),²⁹⁶ and as touch is contained in the higher senses,²⁹⁷ or to the containment of the lower in the higher, as the specific essences of

²⁹⁴ And see as well the discussion of the limitations and modes within being at *De ver.* q. 1 a. 1, for example.

²⁹⁵ *De pot.* q. 3 a. 5 is the most historical treatment, with Plato and Aristotle being superseded by Avicenna, who introduced the notion of intrinsic limitation of the plenitude of being.

²⁹⁶ *De ver.* I,1.

²⁹⁷ *In 2 De An.* l. 19 #481; *In 3 De An.* l. 3 #602; l. 17 #849; *In 1 Meta.* l. 1 #9.

things are contained in universal causality,²⁹⁸ or as the lower souls are contained in the higher.²⁹⁹ Aquinas' general principle that "whatever the lower forms contain, is present in the power of the higher forms"³⁰⁰ is related to his view that the higher is somehow also the foundation of what follows it. It is precisely because the higher is the foundation of what proceeds from it that the lower principles can contain the higher ones, potentially. The higher principle's containment of the lower perfections is illustrated in the case of love and the passions,³⁰¹ of causality,³⁰² substance,³⁰³ the soul,³⁰⁴ and prudence,³⁰⁵ for example.

The containment of the higher in the lower can also refer to God's immanent presence in all beings, through essence, presence and power,³⁰⁶ while the containment of the lower in the higher refers to the creation and conservation of beings by God,³⁰⁷ and to their final perfection in Him. The containment of the higher in the lower is exhibited by natural priority "in reference to a principle", in that finite beings' participation in being points to the being which is complete being, viz. God. God's immanence in creation is illumined by the notion of natural priority "in reference to a principle" in that beings approach perfection and participate in being to the degree that they approximate the first principle of being.

All the other types of natural priority exhibit containeri as the containment of the lower (creaturely perfections) in the higher (God as first cause), and thus illustrate God's transcendence, as opposed to His immanence. The notion of God's natural priority in terms of "separability" is taken up in more detail in chapter four below, but we can note here that God's transcendence is determined by His pure actuality and removal from matter, and is described aptly in terms of the mixed relation of truth between God and creatures. God is also naturally prior as "absolute" in that He is the fullest intelligibility and furthest from perception, as the most universal cause of being. In our study of the absolute consideration of natures we found that the common nature is subordinate to divine exemplarity, thus supporting God's status as naturally prior in this second way.

²⁹⁸ In 1 Sent. d. 12, a. 2 ad 2; C.G. II 21; III, 65; S.T. I 13.5; 104.1.

²⁹⁹ S.T. I 76.4; In De Caus. 14 #299.

³⁰⁰ Quodl. 11.5; S.T. I 76.4.

³⁰¹ S.T. I-II 25.1-2; De virt. in comm. 12 ad 9.

³⁰² In de Div. Nom. 5.2 #560; De pot. 3.7, e.g.

³⁰³ In 3 Phys. l.5 #322.

³⁰⁴ S.T. I 76.4, e.g.

³⁰⁵ S.T. I-II 57.5; 65.2.

³⁰⁶ S.T. I 8.3.

God is also the paradigm instance of natural priority “in being” (vs. in generation) as perfect subsistent actuality and as the end and completion of all beings and of the entire universe.³⁰⁸ As the first principle in the orders of being, becoming and knowledge, God is also naturally prior “in reference to a principle”, as Pure Act, as First Mover and as the plenitude of intelligibility.

Finally, God is naturally prior as “origin”, and in this primacy He combines all the types of natural priority. The distance between God and creatures implies the greatest ontological dependence and substantial diversity of cause and effect, and His causality fulfills the five criteria of an essential cause. The causal unity of action required by a *per se* cause is demonstrated in creation and conservation, and it was found to be linked to Aristotle’s fifth type of natural priority, of “mutual implication in being”. As the most universal and analogical cause of all being in preeminent possession of all perfections, God is the primary instance of natural priority as “origin”. Finally, we discovered that Aquinas’ theory of truth as a mixed relation between God and creature supports the view that God is the primary bearer of natural priority, in that this relation which involves “origin” contains reference to all the other senses of natural priority.

The notion of containment thus illustrates God’s status as the only “strong” instance of natural priority, viz. the only bearer of all five types of natural priority. A detailed study of the notion of virtual plenitude, or the containment of all perfections in God, would reveal the additional fact that it is in virtue of God’s existence and His essence that this primacy obtains.³⁰⁹ It is equally in His function as divine Exemplar as in His function as the efficient source of existence that the causal activity of God operates, and produces all types of created causality, it will be shown.³¹⁰ On the finite scale, a thing’s “virtual quantity”, or intensity and perfection of being, is rooted first in the form, Aquinas says.³¹¹

From these considerations, we can conclude that Aquinas’ statements to the effect that perfections, taken in themselves (e.g. wisdom and life), are contained in the perfection of esse,³¹² must be balanced by other statements emphasizing the containment of all perfections in form, on

³⁰⁷ *S.T.* I 44.2-3; 104.1, e.g.

³⁰⁸ *S.T.* I 44.4, e.g.

³⁰⁹ The beginnings of such a study can be found in chapter 5 section 5.3 below. For an opinion focusing on the principle of esse as indicative of God’s perfection, see F. O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Brill: Leiden, 1992).

³¹⁰ Chapter five, section 5.4.

³¹¹ *S.T.* I 42.1 ad 1. On form in the predicamental order, see chapter five, section 5.3 below.

both the transcendental and predicamental levels. S.T. I 8.3 explains the involvement of form in both divine exemplar and divine efficient causality, and illustrates the mutual implication in being denoted by “containment”, viz. the presence of all perfections in God and God’s immanence in creation through “essence, presence and power”. The notion of containment thus illumines both the balance between immanence and transcendence in the concept of natural priority and the application of this concept most properly to God.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter the Aristotelian and Platonic background to Aquinas’ theory of natural priority was reviewed along with Aquinas’ criticisms of certain doctrines. While he accepted Plato’s notions of a subsistent first principle and participation, he blamed his theory of knowledge for an inadequate portrayal of separation and misconstrual of transcendental notions such as goodness. However, Aquinas adopted Plato’s separability as it applies to the natural priority of act over potency, especially in God. He corrected Plato’s theory of the natural priority of genera over species by noting that natural priority of potency over act is possible only in the order of predication, not causality. Only in the order of act is the more common naturally prior, as is shown especially in Aquinas’ distinction between an analogical versus a univocal cause of being.³¹³ Due to its superiority and suprageneric character, the analogical cause does not share an idea with its effect, in contrast with the univocal cause.

Aquinas borrowed more heavily from Aristotle than from Plato in developing his theory of natural priority, accepting his association of natural priority with separate and actual being, and applying it to God, as the first efficient cause of being. However, Aquinas developed a new notion of separability based on judgment, which expanded the subject matter of metaphysics to ens commune. While Aristotle’s list of types of priority in Meta. V.11 formed the starting point of Aquinas’ analysis of natural priority, it was the teachings inspired by his Christianity, such as creation, conservation and divine omnipresence, which permitted a full development of the concept of natural priority, especially in his analysis of truth.

Five types of natural priority were found in the texts of Aquinas. Natural priority as “separability” combined Aristotle and Plato and transcended them through the judgment of

³¹² S.T. I 4.2 ad 3, e.g.

³¹³ e.g. In 1 Eth. I. 6; D.V. I.5.

separation and a new notion of metaphysical hierarchy which made God the measure of all being and truth. Natural priority as “absolute” in cognition echoed Aristotle’s theory of the coincidence of epistemological and ontological priority through the analogous nature of principles, treated in chapter two. Through analysing the different senses of intelligibility involved in the *in se/quoad nos* distinction, it was determined that the ultimate reference of universals to first causes signified the “primary” as opposed to the general reading of “absolute”. Aquinas’ theories of the common nature and the real distinction of being and essence combined to delimit the natural priority given to the common nature, such that it obtained only in God’s mind.

The third type of natural priority in Aquinas’ texts was that of “perfection” (v. “generation”). Like the fourth type, the inclusivity of this concept made it apply to all other types of natural priority. Aquinas accepted Aristotle’s analysis of the natural priority of act to potency which bases the “perfection”/“generation” distinction, and developed it within his own theories of subsistence and divine causality. Closely related to the third type is the fourth type, natural priority “in reference to a principle”. This was seen to be an overarching category under which all types of natural priority fell. Separability, perfection, and universality in causation all refer to a principle determined absolutely. *Meta.* V.11’s final type of priority, that in “substance or nature” signified the priority of act to potency, and provided Aquinas with this ultimate naturally prior principle in the order of being.³¹⁴

Natural priority as “origin” was the fifth and final division of natural priority for Aquinas, and while it incorporated many Greek strains of the concept of natural priority, “origin” signalled the greatest advance from earlier notions. An analysis of *per se* causality revealed God to be the best candidate for natural priority in the causal sense of communicating being. It also pointed to the inclusion of all types of natural priority in that of “origin”, in that an origin of being must be fully separate, exercise the most universal causality, be supremely intelligible, be most actual and perfect, and be the naturally prior principle in every order. The apparent contradiction between separability and origin (as “mutual implication in being”) was resolved by an analysis of creation as a nonmutual relation of truth.

A review of some of the applications of the types of natural priority in Aquinas’ metaphysics revealed three points. First, the various instances of *per se* causal series and their

³¹⁴ The priority of act to potency is the topic of the next chapter in this thesis.

use of the criteria for per se causes, reflected various types of natural priority. Natural priority in origin figured largely in the examples chosen; separability was involved in the analysis of subsistent forms and texts on distinction in the universe; priority in se, in being, and in origin were at work in the five ways. The second point that the metaphysical topics revealed was that Aquinas' concept of metaphysical hierarchy based on per se order in the universe precluded the natural priority of esse to form, either on the finite level or between the finite and transcendental levels, in contrast to the "existentialist" interpretation of Aquinas' "third way". Finally, an analysis of types of analogy revealed that Aquinas' eventual adoption of the analogy of reference was instrumental in his concept of natural priority as the communication of being from a separate, universal causal source.³¹⁵

³¹⁵ This description involves several types of natural priority thus far indicated.

Chapter 4

THE PRIORITIES OF SUBSTANCE AND THE PRINCIPLES OF BEING

Chapter three established the most important metaphysical sense of priority for Aquinas to be natural priority as “origin”, as supported by his use of the concept of containment. The criteria of separate existence and causal power were combined in his synthesis of Aristotle and Avicenna on the topic, and his use of priority in the theory of analogy was discussed. This analysis located God as the primary bearer of natural priority as the primary substance embodying the criteria to the highest degree. Since Aquinas arrives at this notion of natural priority through an analysis of sensible substance, it is now necessary to turn to a study of substance in general and the principles of being.

4.1 *Substance and the Subject of Metaphysics*

According to Aquinas, the issue of substance is not the same as that of the principles of being, because the categories constitute one of the *divisiones* of being (along with rational being, for example¹) whereas the principles of being are the elements belonging analogically to all beings, such as matter, form, act, potency, existence, etc.² Both substance and metaphysical principles are known analogically,³ however, since the knowledge of them is nondefinitional, through simple concepts, and is conferred through the proper object of the intellect, which is the material *quiddity*. It is substance and the principles of being, moreover, that are primarily considered by the metaphysician, since substance, as the focal meaning of being (being *qua*

¹ There are several “*divisiones entis*” texts, but a representative one in *In 5 Meta.* l. 9, where *ens per se* (the categories, the being of judgments, and act and potency) is divided from *ens per accidens* (which is excluded from the subject of metaphysics).

² The “principles of being” are often designated the “principles of substances” since being is, in the first place, substance. See, e.g. *In 11 Meta.* l. 1, *In 12 Meta.* l. 1, *In 4 Meta.* l. 1.

³ On this topic, see J. de Finance, *Être et agir dans la philosophie de s. Thomas* (Librairie Editrice de l’université Grégorienne: 1960), pp. 34-41. Aquinas devotes several treatises to the topic of the principles

being) is the proper subject of the science, and the principles are considered along with the causes and properties of the subject.⁴

The precise reasons *why* substance and its principles are the subject matter of metaphysics seem to be a) the arguments for the priority of substance as a subsistent or independent existent, in its status as cause of accidents, properties, and other types of being,⁵ and b) the need for the subject of a science to be unified. For, the apparent multiplicity of types of being which metaphysics considers, combined with the fact that its subject is not a “common nature of being” (viz. concept) which is extracted from sensible beings,⁶ points to the need for some primary referent under which all types of being are contained as the focus for the science. As one Thomist states: “as the subject of metaphysics, ‘being’ (*ens*) is abstracted from its determinations without precision, yet it is clearly understood in the concrete.”⁷ The solution to the problem of unity is located by Aquinas (in agreement with Aristotle) in the quality of *primacy* which the science possesses, by virtue of the immateriality of its subject. Having the supersensible as its subject, it thereby treats all beings from the universal standpoint of their being. The highest science is such because it treats things through their highest causes. Primary

of being in composite substances, such as De ente et essentia, De principiis naturae, and De substantiis separatis.

⁴ See, e.g. In 4 Meta. l.1, In de Trin. 5.3 on the divisions and methods of the sciences; In 11 Meta. ll. 1-3; In 6 Meta. l.1, etc. on metaphysics as the “science of principles”. Not only real principles but also the principles of demonstration are considered, as these texts state.

⁵ The pros hen relationship between substance, and ultimately between immobile substance and the universe is the explanation of this priority in terms of the analogy of relation. See, for example, J. Owens, The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian “Metaphysics” (3rd ed., Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies: Toronto, 1978), passim. On Aquinas’ use of Aristotle in this area, consult B. Montagnes, La doctrine de l’analogie... Also, In 4 Meta. l. 1 explains the unity of the science of metaphysics by pros hen reference to substance.

⁶ For this subject could only be conceptual. Texts such as S.T. I 87.3, 85.5 describe our first knowledge of being through material things. The first concept of being here is not that which is the subject of metaphysics, for it is a confused knowledge quite different and less perfect than the knowledge attained through the judgment of separation (e.g. In de Trin. 5.3). In any case, the subject of metaphysics is real being, not conceptual being, although conceptual being can be considered under the heading of demonstrative principles, as Meta. 4 explains.

⁷ J. Owens, An Elementary Christian Metaphysics (Centre for Thomistic Studies: Houston, 1985, rpt.), p. 66 #17. He is relying on In 6 Meta. l. 1 #1147, and identifies this knowledge with “abstraction of the whole” as distinguished from “abstraction of the part”, and says that in this case, abstraction does not exclude the concrete elements of things.

beings are the avenue from which to *scientifically*⁸ approach the universal principles of being in all sensible things because they *are*, in fact, those very principles by way of causality.’

From the above statements, we see that it is partly the demand for unity of a science that forms an argument for substance and its properties and causes as the subject matter for metaphysics, and that this position also stems from the way in which we come to know being. As yet, however, we haven’t specified those qualities about substance which make it primary, and which will also serve to define it as “naturally prior” to other types of being. Our study of the subject matter of metaphysics only revealed its real and causal nature as immaterial, and seems to shift the focus of metaphysics away from sensible substances. Moreover, although there appears to be an approach to a solution to the problem of Platonic priority (namely, the priority of the universal) discussed in chapter two, in the causality of supersensible substance with respect to material substances, the precise relation between the principles of being still remains vague. Thus, a detailed analysis of substance in its priorities and principles is in order.

4.2 *The Priorities of Substance*

Both in Metaphysics 4.1 and 7.1 (and in their summaries in Meta. 11), the question of being is reduced to that of substance. Metaphysics 7 defends this in terms of the categories’

⁸ However, this is not the case in the order of discovery, where the avenue is from sensible to suprasensible substances.

⁹ e.g. In 4 Meta. l. 1, In 11 Meta. l. 7 (#2267 esp.), and on the statement about causes, see In 1 Meta. l.2. The problematic sketched here, namely, the relationship and tension between the two poles of metaphysical investigation (being in general and the being of separate substances) was first introduced by Aristotle, but spans the history of the philosophy of being. It is important to distinguish the subject matter of metaphysics and the “first subject” of the science. It is precisely because God is one of the things considered by metaphysics that He cannot be its subject, but He is part of the “subject matter” in the sense that metaphysics proves His existence, nature and properties. He is not the primary subject of the science, however; rather, being qua being is that subject. The medievals disputed the inclusion of God under the subject matter of metaphysics, beginning with Avicenna and Averroes: Avicenna denied that God is part of metaphysics’ subject matter, for metaphysics demonstrates God’s existence but presupposes its subject (Metaphysica I 1BC in Opera omnia (Venice, 1508), fol. 70r1-2). Averroes included God in the subject matter, claiming that His existence is demonstrated in physics (Physica I, 83 FG; ed. Venice (1562), fol. 47r2-v1). Descartes stressed the theological pole making the mind, God and certain axioms the subject matter, and the issue continues on with the special and general ontologies of Wolff. On this matter, see: J. Owens, An Elementary Christian Metaphysics, pp. 7-8. Owens might have added the fact that Heidegger’s well-known challenge to the traditional problematic was that it was an “ontotheology”, and his position that a reduction of being in general to a causal foundation is a confusion of Being with “essents”.

reference to substance. Before discussing the priorities of substance, it is necessary to discuss the criteria for identifying substance, for there are several candidates proposed.

4.2.1 *Identifying Substances*

There are many places where Aquinas, following the text of Aristotle, lists possible candidates for substance. The first and most important list is found in In 7 Meta. l. 2, where substance is said either of the essence, the universal, the genus, and the subject, and the subject is concluded to be the best candidate, while the essence absorbs the genus and universal (we will study the argument shortly). Generally, then, the criteria for identifying substances found in Metaphysics 5.8 (In 5 Meta. l.10) are those of being a subject or individual substrate, and an essence, combined to form a “separable this”. Metaphysics 7.1-6 is an argument showing the coincidence of the two criteria for substance, concluding that the primary subjects *are* essences.¹⁰ Aquinas modified Aristotle’s notion of essence to include matter, but the criterion of “essence” here seems limited to “form”, which excludes matter. The reasons for these criteria must be analysed in detail since they are found throughout Aquinas’ work, not only in his Commentary on the “Metaphysics” but also in texts on the relation between the supposit and the nature,¹¹ on the subsistence (natural priority) of substance,¹² and in texts on the distinction between the essence of the soul and its powers.¹³

While the “subject” criterion for substance stems from the requirement that substances be primary individuals, the “essence” criterion relates to substance’s quality of being the source of intelligibility in the individual. These criteria, then, parallel the Aristotelian and Platonic emphases on priority of the individual or of the universal. Since Aristotle’s work turns first to the “subject” criterion, it is first necessary to determine the precise meaning of a “subject” for Aristotle and Aquinas.

¹⁰ Cf. the conclusion at Meta. 7.13 that “form” is a “this”. Meta. 7.10-11 discusses form as the “essence”, while Meta. 7.12 discusses it as a “subject”.

¹¹ e.g. In 3 Sent. d. 5 q. 1 a. 3, C.G. 4.55, Quodl. 2.2.2. In all of these texts the supposit, the nature and the existence of the thing in question are studied and related. These examples are representative because they combine the “subject” and “essence” criteria in the study of substance.

¹² e.g. In 1 Sent. d. 23 q. 1 a. 1 on the subsistence of substance in relation to accidents; C.G. I.25 on the perseity of substance and its lack of definition, and the treatment of this issue in: John Wippel, “Substance in Aquinas Metaphysics” Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association 61 (1987), pp.9-11.

¹³ e.g. De Spir. Creat. 11.

The primary requirement for being a “subject” is taken from the observation of noninherence. Meta. 5.8 (Aquinas’ l. 10 #899) states that a substance is “neither said of nor present in any subject” (1017b10-14). Subjects are the basis for predications as real unified particulars.¹⁴ They are “separable” as independent in a way that nonsubstances are not, he states in Meta. 7.1 (l.1 #1248), and thus they conform to Plato’s “separability” criterion for natural priority, in relation to accidents. From Meta. 7.1-4, various candidates for the subject criterion are considered. In 7.3, the proposed candidates are matter, form and composite.¹⁵ By chapter four, form is identified as the best candidate, due to its priority with respect to matter and the composite. With respect to *matter*, Aquinas comments that form is prior naturally and temporally. Form is prior to matter “naturally” because the specifying principle is prior to the potential, since act is prior to potency in possessing more being. Proof of this axiom is found in Meta. 9, and we will consider those arguments shortly. It is also prior temporally absolutely speaking¹⁶ in that actuality required to reduce potentiality to act. Both reasons point to the causal character of form in relation to matter, specifying and determining it to a type. Form is also prior to the *composite*, since a) the composite includes matter; b) the principles of a thing are prior to it. However, later on in the same chapter (1029a30-32)¹⁷ another reason is given. The composite should not be considered to be prior because it is “open to view” or evident, as the object of sense perception. It is similar to matter in this quality, in that it lacks any traits of itself by which it may be known, since the principle of knowing is form.

Meta. 7.3 (Aquinas’ l.2) concludes that subjects exist separately and are particular things. However, subjects are also bases for predication (1029a9-12), and in this sense, matter seems naturally prior. The argument considered here is based on “removal”: matter is what is left when all else (i.e. even bodily affections, actions, dimensions) is removed. Yet substance is not predicated of matter essentially, but denominatively, in the same way as accidents are predicated

¹⁴ The statements at De Interp. 21a8-14 show that Aristotle is not relying on mere grammatical descriptions for this claim, but is pointing to real, versus mere accidental unity for the instantiation of a form.

¹⁵ cf. 1042a25-31.

¹⁶ That is to say, not in this particular instance, where potentiality precedes actuality due to the imperfection of finite natures. This distinction is made clear but the reason I cite is not explicit in the text.

¹⁷ In Aquinas’ commentary, see In 7 Meta. l.2 #1296.

of substance.¹⁸ The ultimate reasons expressed in this chapter for excluding matter as the subject criterion are its inability to exist separately or be determinate and particular of itself. Meta. 7.3 (1.4) introduces the essence criterion, because what the thing essentially is also classifies it as a substance. Meta. 7.6 (1031b6-7, 20-22) identifies essence as the principle of knowledge (cf. 7.2). Here, Aquinas identifies the two criteria (subject and essence), in that to know a thing's essence is to know it itself.¹⁹ Chapter 4 (1030a11-14) identified essences as species.²⁰ Definable things are identified as primary in that there is no addition to their formulae (1029b30-36), for "an essence of a thing is what is said of it per se" (1029b13-14). Accidents and properties lie outside the essence (although they of course can be signified). Essence is what a thing is, and corresponds to the definition. Definitions apply only to "primary things" moreover, which are the subjects of predication (1030a8-10). In chapter 6 (1.5) the identity of thing and essence is established,²¹ in further support of the identification of the subject and essence criteria. The context of the question is whether the thing and its essence are identical. Aristotle establishes that in the case of essential predication, this is necessarily true, even within Plato's theory of

¹⁸ In his commentary (In 7 Meta. l.2 #1285-1287), Aquinas notes that another counterargument to this Presocratic view of the primacy of matter is adopted by Aristotle in his natural philosophy. Book 1 chapter 7 of the Physics establishes the distinction between the subject of change and motion and the limits of that motion. Matter underlies all forms and yet is not a principle by which being is divided or made determinate. This type of argument is neglected by Aristotle in the Metaphysics since the latter uses dialectic, and hence, proofs involving predication. For an analysis of dialectic as a method in metaphysics, see: Michael Ryan, The Notion and Uses of Dialectic in St. Thomas Aquinas (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Dissertation, 1963). For a defense of the exclusion of matter from metaphysical consideration, see: L. Dewan, "St. Thomas Aquinas against Metaphysical Materialism" in Atti del VIII Congresso Tomistico internazionale. V - Problemi Metafisici (Studi Tomistici 14) Citta del Vaticano, 1982, esp. 428-434.

¹⁹ As one author puts it, "Aristotle claims that the knowledge of x is just knowledge of what x is, the essence of x, and it is hard to see how knowledge of x could consist wholly in knowledge of something else, y; for knowledge of x and y will have different properties, and our knowledge of y will leave out some properties of x or include some properties that x lacks." T. Irwin, Aristotle's First Principles (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1988), p. 219.

²⁰ Irwin (Aristotle's First Principles, p. 220) adds here that only species "are the genuine kinds of things that exist, and their members are the genuine instances of coming to be and perishing", but does not give a reference. He concludes that "if a subject does not depend on some more basic subject for its coming to be and perishing, then it has an essence" (*ibid.*).

²¹ Meta. 7.5 in toto (esp. #1375). It is a "reductio ad absurdum" argument considering the implications of the separability of thing and essence (1031b28-1032a6). These arguments can be summed up thus: First, separability would mean that a thing would be unknowable and the essence would not exist; and second, separability would lead to an infinite regress of essences inhering in essences, and so a thing would have an infinite number of essences. A good discussion of this text can be found in: E. Halper, One and Many in Aristotle's "Metaphysics": The Central Books (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989), pp. 80-89.

separate Ideas, but Aristotle's main motivation for his position is to maintain the unity of the individual and the understanding of the individual.²²

4.2.2 *Apparent Problems in the Criteria for Substance*

So far, we have surveyed Meta. 7.1-6, and have concluded that the essence and subject criteria coincide for Aristotle, and following him, for Aquinas. A few questions remain, however, from that analysis. First, there is the question of the priority of parts to wholes (Meta. 7.10-11) which establishes the priority of form to the composite. This is connected to Meta. 7.17 which argues for form as a principle and cause in the substance.²³ Also here is the argument that forms are not universals (Meta. 7.13-14). Second, there is the problem of several texts in Aquinas which appear to disagree with the coincidence of these two criteria, in separate substances.²⁴ Third, there is the issue of the *actuality*, as opposed to the *potentiality*, of form which is also part of the proof of its priority to matter. This issue is broad and will be treated separately from the other apparent problems regarding substance's criteria. For the moment we can allude to Meta. 12 where the criteria coincide through separate immaterial causes and principles of being in things. With these points in mind, we can turn to an overview of Meta. 7.10-11 and follow it with an analysis of the formal cause of being in some of Aquinas' key texts on the topic.

4.2.2.1 *Parts and Wholes*

The question is raised at the beginning of Meta. 7.10 (l.9) whether the parts in a definition are prior to the whole, and in what way. Aquinas' commentary (#1464-7) explains that the wholes or composites are in fact naturally prior to the parts (matter and form) in that they can exist after the dissolution of the part, and yet the question of priority here is a complex one, as Aristotle insists. It is central to note that his conclusion in this chapter does not contradict the earlier conclusion that form is prior to composite, for the following reason: the composite is not being contrasted with the substantial form, but rather with material parts.²⁵ The whole which is being considered is the thing corresponding to the definition, and it is prior

²² He also points to the impossibility of an infinite regress of essences *per se* and essences of their corresponding individuals, if essence and individual were really distinct.

²³ Cf. Aquinas' De ente essentia ch. 1.

²⁴ See texts such as De pot. 9.1, In 1 Sent. d.8 q. 5 a. 2.

²⁵ The example he gives at 1034b29-31 is the man to his finger, and that of a syllable to its letters.

to parts which are pluralities. A substantial form, however, is prior to the concrete whole in that the latter includes material parts (1035b18-23), and thus possesses less unity than a form. It is the form in immaterial substances which is pointed to in 7.6 as that which is prior, and this is important for our question. Only in immaterial substances are the form and thing identical, he says, for in material composites, matter forms part of the thing.²⁶ The question of priority of parts to wholes is thus one which does not yield a simple answer, and depends on the separability of form from matter in immaterial substances.

In order to justify the claim that the subject and essence criteria coincide, we must therefore link the discussion of parts and wholes in Meta. 7.10-11 with that of form as the cause of being in composites, in Meta. 7.17 and in texts of Aquinas outside the Commentary. As well, the rejection of universals as forms must be considered, as treated in Meta. 7.13-14.²⁷ Without these discussions, one would identify subjects with composites, and would not have justification for the separability of form which is essential to its identity as a subject.

Meta. 1.3 introduced the issue of substance as cause by stating that when we know a thing we also know its cause (983a24-30).²⁸ Meta. 7.17 takes up the question of the principles or causes of a substance by distinguishing intrinsic causes (matter and form) from extrinsic causes (efficient and final causes). The consideration of form as the cause of a substance's being, then, refers to the "what" question.²⁹ The presence of a certain form in matter explains the observable functions of the substance and thus is the cause of being in the sense of causing by determining the matter in question. In Meta. 7.17, the efficient cause of being isn't considered, since Aristotle did not raise the question of the cause of existence, but only that of the principles *by which* something exists.³⁰ The cause of being in question is the cause of the matter's being (for Aristotle, the cause of being is the cause of being "something"), which is accounted for only by a principle of unity, which is form.

²⁶ Meta. 7.6 (1031a28ff.) and Aquinas' commentary: In 7 Meta. 1.5 (#1362); cf. 1.11 (#1533-35).

²⁷ We will treat this latter issue in a very brief fashion, but the discussion of form as act is more central for our purposes.

²⁸ Later on in this chapter, we will return to this text in its relationship to Meta. 7.1's discussion of substance's various types of priority.

²⁹ See Aquinas' commentary, In 7 Meta. 1. 17 #1651.

³⁰ As in Post.An. II,1, the inquiry seeks to know why something belongs to something else. In this sense, the "si est" must already be clear, i.e. *that* the thing is itself. The question of Meta. 7.17 is "why does this form belong to this matter?" One modern interpretation of Meta. 7.17 which coincides with this one is found in C. Witt, Substance and Essence in Aristotle: An Interpretation of "Metaphysics" 7 - 9 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989)pp. 112-121.

In Book 9 of the Metaphysics Aristotle goes on to prove the various priorities of actuality to potency (ch. 8-9).³¹ Aquinas follows these teleologically based arguments closely and in this context does not deviate from Aristotle's views. Since the arguments in Meta. 9 are more Aristotelian than the views of Aquinas elsewhere, we will leave them for a later part of this chapter. The only directly relevant point for our present analysis occurs in the middle of 9.8. The third priority of actuality is in substance or form, since "things that are posterior in becoming are prior in form and in substance...and because everything that comes to be moves towards a principle, i.e. an end...and the actuality is the end..." (1050a4-9). Aquinas says that this reasoning is based on the twofold perfection of substance, i.e. in form and in finality (l.8 #1856). Form is act or perfection since it is that by which something is perfected or comes to be a complete being (the example used is that of generation: the form in the man exists prior to the form in the boy, since it exists first in the seed, and thus only potentially).

In addition to the statements in the Commentary on the "Metaphysics" concerning form as actuality, there are several treatments of the issue elsewhere. De ente et essentia ch. 1 cites essence as "hoc per quod aliquid habet esse quid."³² Form as essence is the cause of being in that esse is often said to be the result of the principles of the essence, namely, of matter and form.³³ Form is cited as the cause of the actuality in the thing, then, as the condition on the side of the subject, of the thing's coming-to-be.³⁴ There is, however, an important distinction involved here, namely, between generation and creation. The form is *never* the cause of the thing's being created, for the creation of a thing occurs through its esse by way of efficient causality through a source of being which is both universal and infinite.³⁵ The created form is

³¹ See Aquinas commentary, In 9 Meta. ll. 7-10.

³² De ente et essentia c. 1 (4). Cf. In 7 Meta. l. 3 #1310. As a principle and cause, we can cite l. 17 again (#1648-1649).

³³ e.g. In I Sent., d. 23 q. 1 a. 1, Solut.; d. 38 q. 1 a. 3 Solut. Elsewhere Aquinas speaks of esse as a result of the "principles of the thing": In 9 Meta. l. 11 # 1903 (cf. #1896-1902); In Boeth. de Trin. q. 5 a. 3c. Implicit in all these texts is the connection between the complexity of the act of judgment and the complexity of the term of existential judgment, namely, a thing's act of being. This complexity is the synthesizing of the principles of the thing, according to Aquinas.

³⁴ Matter cannot be a condition, since some subjects lack matter. Aquinas used this argument against those philosophers who believed that God did not create the separate substances since these were viewed to have no cause of their being (as necessary beings with no potency to nonbeing). The main text here is De subst. sep. 9, but the argument can be found in S.T. I q. 61 a. 1 as well.

³⁵ The creation of a thing in actual existence requires efficient causality (vs. formal) to avoid univocity in being, and the efficient causality communicates existence to the thing, thereby being the thing's "total" cause. See the many texts on creation in De Pot. q. 3, C.G. II 15-16, for example, where various descriptions of the act of creating are given.

neither infinite nor universal, but is particular. Thus it can only cause generation, which is the coming-to-be of a particular form in a univocal fashion.³⁶ The distinction is also found in De subst. sep. c. 9 as well as in In de Caus. l. 18, where a “duplex modus causandi” is considered: one where a form is presupposed (generation) and one where nothing is presupposed (creation).³⁷ The latter requires a “causa universalis totius esse”³⁸ whose causal action is described as a “quaedam simplex emanatio”.³⁹ In these texts the requirement of universality of the first cause follows from esse’s being the most common effect.⁴⁰ The commonness of the effect is elsewhere associated with the greater causal extension of an equivocal agent, for the higher cause has more universal effects.⁴¹ The analogical causality of being is from God, while univocal agents only cause becoming.⁴² The reason for form’s particularity as a cause of becoming is found in De pot. q. 3 a. 1: a) its whole substance is not in act, since it is composed of act *and* potency, and b) compared to something wholly in act, it only has specific and generic perfections, which do not exhaust the realm of perfections. It thus requires matter as its subject

³⁶ The distinction between generation and creation is that generation does not require a universal cause, since its terminus is particular. The type of being or the form becomes *per se*, but being, taken in its generality or absoluteness, i.e. as distinct from nothingness, becomes only *per accidens* in generation, since it emerges from something, i.e. matter. See C.G. II, 21, In 8 Phys. l. 2 #975. The basis for this is Phys. I, 8 (cf. l. 14 #125). On this topic in general, see: J. Aertsen, Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas’ Way of Thought (Brill: Amsterdam, 1988), pp. 112-116.

³⁷ In de Caus. l. 18: “Est enim duplex modus causandi: unus quidem quo aliquid fit praesupposito altero, et hoc modo dicitur fieri aliquid per informationem, quia illud quod posterius advenit se habet ad illud praesupponatur per modum formae; alio modo causatur aliquid nullo praesupposito...” De pot. q. 3 a. 1c refers to De caus. prop. 18 in the following way: “esse eius est per creationem, vivere vero, et caetera huiusmodi, per informationem. Causalitates enim entis absolute reducuntur in primam causam universalem; causalitas vero aliorum quae ad esse superadduntur, vel quibus esse specificatur, pertinet ad causas secundas, quae agunt per informationem, quasi supposito effectu causae universalis...”

³⁸ In 8 Phys. l. 2 #987.

³⁹ *ibid.* #974. Aertsen (Nature and Creature p. 115) notes that Neoplatonic notion of cause as “some influence on the being of the thing caused” finds its true meaning in this influx of being.

⁴⁰ Cf. De subst. sep. c. 8 (#87): “Ipsium esse quod est communissimum.” Section 4.2.3.2 below will analyse the universal causal power of the first cause more extensively.

⁴¹ e.g. De subst. sep. c. 10 #101 and following expresses this in terms of the twofold cause of a nature, i.e. its univocal cause, which is the cause of the nature in an individual, and its *per se* cause, which is the cause of the nature in *all* subjects possessing that form. The latter is more universal and in In 6 Meta. l. 3 it is said to be prior, as such (cf. In 2 Sent. d. 18 q. 2 a. 1; De pot. q. 7 a. 7 ad 7).

⁴² De subst. sep. c. 10 Resp. On this text and related texts on grades of causality, see: Aertsen, Nature and Creature, pp.302-317.

and so can only effect a mutatio or motus.⁴³ A universal cause of being, however, transcends change and brings the whole substance into being.⁴⁴

While form is thus the cause of being as the principle by which esse is communicated to the creature, it is better described as the principle of generation, and thus, as the cause of becoming. It is nevertheless the principle of the thing's esse as "that whereby something is in act",⁴⁵ which cannot be separated from the esse.⁴⁶ Although not a productive cause, it is still the necessary condition and medium of God's creation since "esse per se consequitur formam creaturae".⁴⁷

4.2.2.2 *Universals*

After considering the subject and essence criteria, Aristotle and Aquinas turn to another candidate for substance, namely, the *universal*. The main treatment of this issue is found in Meta.7.13 (Aquinas' l. 13). It would appear from Post. An. I 24, that there is a case for universal substances, since there must be *scientific* knowledge of substance.⁴⁸ However, Meta. 7.10-11 established that science refers to particular forms (c.g. 1036a8). There are four main arguments against positing universals as substances. First, universals, as concepts, are common, whereas substances, by the subject criterion, are particular. The commonness of the universal comes

⁴³ De pot. q. 3 a. 1 Resp.

⁴⁴ De pot. q. 3 a. 1 Resp.: "...per suam actionem producit totum ens subsistens, nullo praesupposito, utpote qui est totius esse principium..."

⁴⁵ De ente et essentia c. 1; cf. In de caus. l. 26. The latter text distinguishes a twofold cause of being: the formal cause, which is intrinsic and univocal, is the principle whereby something is in act. The efficient cause, which is extrinsic and analogical, effects the being in question to be in act.

⁴⁶ De anima q. 1 a. 14: "Id quod per se consequitur ad aliud, non potest removeri ab eo...Manifestum est autem quod esse per se consequitur formam; unumquodque enim habet esse secundum propriam formam; unde esse a forma nullo modo separari potest." Cf. C.G. II, 55; S.T. I q. 75 a. 6.

⁴⁷ S.T. I q. 104 a. 1 ad 4. The reply here is to an objection that divine conservation of being is not necessary in the case of separate substances, since they lack a potency towards nonbeing. Aquinas answers that conservation *is* necessary, since the necessary status of these forms presupposes a prior influx of being through creation. Here he presents his famous analogy of this "influx" of esse in the creature. Just as light follows the transparency of the air, presupposing the influence of the sun, so esse follows necessarily from the form, presupposing the causality of God. The texts on conservation thus exemplify Aquinas' theory of participation. On the necessary connection between esse and certain forms, i.e. necessary forms, see C.G. II, 55; S.T. I q. 75 a. 6c.

⁴⁸ Post. An. I, 24 (85b15-18). This seems to agree with the "Platonic" sense of priority discussed in chapter one of this thesis, where universals are prior to individuals, as well as with Post. An. I, 2. Cleary does not draw the connection, but see: J. Cleary, The Many Senses of Priority in Aristotle (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), pp. 9-21.

from its disposition to being applied to many things:⁴⁹ if it lacked this ability, it would be identified with one particular, for it could not be the substance of all. Second, universals are always predicated of a subject, whereas the metaphysical sense of substance⁵⁰ is naturally prior to predications. The third and fourth reasons given that universals are not substances are based on the universal as being a “part” of a definition or essence. First, universals are “qualities” of substances and so would be “parts” of them, and yet, by the priority of parts as principles to the whole, they would have to be “prior accidents”. Meta. 7.1 established the universal priority of substance to accidents,⁵¹ so this thesis is proven impossible. Furthermore, the universals would have to be accidental, not substantial qualities, since they would be distinct from singulars (as attributable to them), and thus they would not define substances. This leads to the fourth reason against making universals substances, namely, the implications of this view for per se unity in things. It would follow, Aristotle says, that an individual would have a substance in its substance, in that a plurality of universals (i.e. man, animal, body, etc.) correspond with a single individual (Socrates). Hence, one substance (animal) would belong to two things (man, Socrates). The chapter concludes by listing the absurdity of the “third man” argument and discussing the basis of essential unity, namely, the unity of act and potency (versus the unity of two actual things): the conclusion is that substance is composed of “potential substances” (the principles of being treated in Meta. 8) but never of “actual” ones.

In sum, the universal, first proposed in Meta. 7.1 as a possible candidate for substance fails, due to the requirements of the subject criterion.⁵² Since the essence and subject criteria coincide in the particular form, there is no reason to associate the universal and the essence as candidates for substance.⁵³

⁴⁹ Aquinas notes (In 7 Meta. l. 13 #1574) that the universal is distinguished by its *disposition* to exist in many, and not by its actual existence in many, since some universals exist only in one (e.g. the sun or moon).

⁵⁰ And here (#1576) Aquinas distinguishes the metaphysical from the logical sense of “substance” which was unclear in Aristotle’s Categories. A secondary substance *can* be predicated of a subject.

⁵¹ The last part of this chapter will consider the priorities of substance.

⁵² The issue of universals is also treated in In 3 Meta. ch. 3-4 (lectios 8-9). One of the main reasons why universals are presumed by some people to be substances, or even to be the “principles of things” (ch. 3) is that science requires universality. Aristotle and Aquinas note that this universality is in the mode of knowing (ch. 4, cf. l. 15 #528) only (although without a more detailed explanation this would lead to a version of nominalism). The case for the “separateness” of universals, on the other hand, arises from the requirement of *unity* in the subject of a science (ch. 4; l. 9).

⁵³ In her study on Aristotle’s theory of substance, C. Witt claims that there are epistemological reasons for making universals substances, but no ontological reason, since the form in the subject, which grounds

4.2.2.3 *The Issue of Separate Substances*

Now that we have qualified the sense in which form can be said to be the cause of being in a thing, we should briefly consider texts where there is no apparent connection between the “subject” and “essence” criteria. A lack of overlap of these two criteria may overturn the argument that the form is prior to the composite and to the matter. (After this analysis we will turn to the question of actuality’s priority to potency in relation to the priority of form to matter.)

De pot. q. 9 a. 1 discusses the relation of the divine persons to the divine essence.⁵⁴ “Substance” is said to be predicated either of the subject or of the subject’s form or nature. These do not coincide, since the common nature is predicated of the individuals, as dependent on them. The individual or subject, on the other hand, is that which is not predicated of another.⁵⁵ The reality of individuals thus requires that the nature be distinct from the subject. In addition to this disjunction, however, the reply contains a qualifier which resolves the apparent contradiction between this text and the Commentary on the “Metaphysics”. The subject under consideration here is a “whole”, while the nature or essence is a “part”, as excluding matter and individual differences.⁵⁶ Thus, in simple substances we find an *identity* of subject and essence, due to the lack of matter.⁵⁷ In the language of De ente et essentia, when the essence is

knowledge, is particular. Her interpretation of the dilemma of the universal’s ontological status is that not *all* knowledge is potential or of universals, and in fact sense knowledge is actual and of particulars. Thus even the epistemological priority that universals appear to require, is qualified. However, she notes that others (J. Owens, e.g.) have interpreted Aristotle to have made the principles of being *neither* universal nor particular: C. Witt, Substance and Essence in Aristotle: An Interpretation of “Metaphysics” 7-9 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 155-74.

⁵⁴ The article title is “Quomodo se habeat persona ad essentiam, subsistentiam et hypostasim”.

⁵⁵ De pot. q. 9 a. 1 Resp. Aquinas takes the distinction between “subject” and “nature” here from Aristotle’s Meta. 5.

⁵⁶ This is an odd addition by Aquinas, since in De ente et essentia III, it is not the nature considered as a “part” which is predicated of individuals, but the nature considered as a “whole”, i.e. as considered absolutely and abstracted without precision. Taken as a “part”, the nature could not be attributed to individuals, since it would have cognitional being and unity. However, this addition makes sense under an analogous use of “nature” as a “part”, namely, as an element or co-principle of being in the thing, as contrasted to the entire subject. But this would *not* prohibit the identity of subject and essence.

⁵⁷ De pot. q. 9 a. 1 Resp.: “...Et ideo in rebus, ex materia et forma compositis, essentia non est omnino idem quod subjectum; unde non praedicatur de subjecto...In substantiis vero simplicibus, nulla est differentia essentia et subjecti, cum non sit in eis materia individualis naturam communem individuans, sed ipsa essentia in eis est subsistentia...”

abstracted with precision it lacks identity with the subject.⁵⁸ One possible reply to this problem is to say that this is not the essence usually intended by Aquinas, for he argues against Averroes that essence is the combination of matter and form.⁵⁹ However, our discussion of the “essence” criterion identifies form as the primary meaning of essence. So, can we discount the De pot. text as disproving the identity of the subject and essence criteria?

There is, moreover, a similar position to that of De pot. in Quodlibet II q. 2 a. 2. There, the supposit or subject is said to be distinct from the nature even in angels, due to the inclusion of esse in the supposit and its distinction from the nature.⁶⁰ The supposit here is again the “whole” (versus the nature, which is the “part”). J. Wippel explains this passage as a loose usage of “supposit” designed to prove the real distinction even in angels.⁶¹ The emphasis in both the texts is on the subsistence of the supposit, as that which is a foundation for accidents and which is its per se existence, in contrast to the common nature as “form” alone.

How can we at once maintain a real distinction between esse and essence analogous to that between supposit and the nature, *and* identify the subject and essence criteria? This question can be answered fully only once the significance of form’s actuality is related to the supposit.⁶² For now, it is enough to note that Aristotle’s view is that being designates a group of $\pi\rho\delta\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu$ equivocals. As the science of the highest causes, metaphysics is ultimately the science of

⁵⁸ De ente et essentia c. III explains the nonidentity in terms of the being which the essence adopts in its cognitional state: it takes on the universality and unity of the concept, which prohibits identity with an individual thing which occurs in predication. Only when abstracted “sine praecisione” (para. 2-4) does a quiddity include individual differences necessary for attribution of a nature to individuals.

⁵⁹ De ente et essentia c. II para. 1-2, on the metaphysical meaning of the term “essentia”.

⁶⁰ J. Wippel notes in an article on the topic that Aquinas’ descriptions of the supposit vary, but in this Quodlibet, it is said to include esse for its complete definition: J. Wippel, “Substance in Aquinas’ Metaphysics” (Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association 61 [1987]), p. 14.

⁶¹ J. Wippel, “Substance in Aquinas’ Metaphysics”, p. 15. It should be noted that although Wippel points this out as a distinguishing mark of Quodl. II q. 2 a. 2, the assertion of a mere “logical” distinction between being and essence in angels is also found in the De pot. text (q. 9 a. 1c).

⁶² See section 4.2.4.2 below, on the notion of form as “source of operations” for the supposit. Some might argue for a nonidentity of essence and supposit from the nature of predication. This does not address the metaphysical issue at stake, however. For this approach, one could consult De ente et essentia III. Cf. De unione verbi incarnati 1.3: “...Substantia secundum duos modos dicitur, scilicet suppositum, quod de alio non praedicatur; et forma, vel naturalis speciei, quae de supposito praedicatur.” Certainly the emphasis on form as predicable of individuals is apparent in De pot. 9.1c. Cf. J. Aertsen’s comment: “It is the polarity of unity and multiplicity which leads to substance being said in two ways and to Aristotle’s speaking, in his Categoriae, of “first” and “second” substance (ousia).” Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas’ Way of Thought (Leiden: Brill, 1988), p. 62.

separate entities.⁶³ In addition, the Aristotelian form, when found separate from matter, is actual in the highest degree, and identified with knowing (*Meta.* 12.9, e.g.), and in this sense is both separate *and* the actually cognitive. There is full identity between the subject and essence criteria only in the prime movers, then, or in God (Aquinas). The question of the real distinction applies to the predicamental order, where Aquinas holds there is ultimately always a distinction between the supposit and the nature, since the supposit is an agent of the nature's existence.

4.2.3 *The Priority of Actuality to Potency*

Our analysis of priority among the metaphysical principles of substance has focused on Aquinas' *Commentary on the 'Metaphysics'* of Aristotle, which has been a discussion of substance and essence. By the end of *Metaphysics* Book 8, Aristotle has determined 'form' to be the meaning of substance as *ens per se*, when being is divided by the categories. In Book 9 of the *Metaphysics*, being is considered as divided by act and potency, which is the logical move after determining form to be primary in the order of nature, in substances. The discussion turns to the notion of act because apparently the analysis of the categories was insufficient to establish the identity of form as essence. The transcendental character of "act" alone can define the form as prior to matter and the composite. In *Meta.* 9, the division of *ens per se* and *ens per accidens* is more sharply focused around the notion of generation, where being as act is seen to be the terminus of generation.⁶⁴ Thus, the question of final causality is involved in the primacy of act to potency, and in the identification of form as essence. Our analysis of the priority of act to potency in Aquinas' texts will accomplish three things: a) it will prove that form is naturally prior in relation to matter in Aquinas' senses of natural priority as "perfect", "absolute" and as "separable", in the instances of separate substance, and most particularly, in the example of God; b) it will prepare us to understand the priorities of substance with respect to accident; c) it will lead us to consider Aquinas' conception of the act of existence as the most perfect and final

⁶³ Joseph Owens has established this in his book *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian 'Metaphysics'*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), esp. pp.107-36; 379-402; 455-74.

⁶⁴ The division between *ens per se* and *ens per accidens* in *In 6 Meta.* l.2 #1179 (on 1026b22-24) is that between beings which are generated and corrupted (*entia per se*) and those where there is neither generation nor corruption (*entia per accidens*). The point is that something accidental does not correspond to one act of generation, since it is not itself a unity.

act in a thing.⁶⁵ After analysing the texts of Aquinas' Commentary on the 'Metaphysics', we will study his arguments for the priority of act to potency against Avicbron, in De substantiis separatis cc. 5 - 9, and a few other pertinent texts.

In chapter seven of Metaphysics Book 5 (1017a7ff.; cf. Aquinas' l. 9), Aristotle introduces the basic divisions of being, namely, ens per se and ens per accidens.⁶⁶ Under ens per se we find the categories, intramental being, or truth, and act and potency. Aquinas says that this third sense of ens per se is the most complete or widest division, since it includes imperfect being.⁶⁷ This division is treated only after the categories, as we have noted above with respect to the outline presented in Meta. 6.1 which is followed throughout Meta. 6 - 9. The division of being into act and potency was denied by the Megarians, who denied the possibility of unactualised potentialities (Meta. 9.3). However, Aristotle repeatedly resorts to this division, in terms of the three "principles of nature", namely, matter, form and privation, in order to explain the self-evident fact of change.⁶⁸ Potency is a necessary feature in things, Aristotle repeats. In fact, it is more evident than act, which we originally know only by analogy with respect to certain types of change.⁶⁹

What exactly is actuality in these Aristotelian texts and in Aquinas' Commentary? At the end of Meta. 9.3 (1047a30-35), actuality is identified with "complete reality" and is first⁷⁰ applied

⁶⁵ The question of the priorities of essence and existence is the subject of the next chapter of the thesis. At this point, we can allude to texts such as De pot. q. 7 a. 2 ad 9; S.T. I q. 3 a. 4; q. 4 a. 1 ad 3; q. 5 a. 1 ad 1; I-II q. 31 a. 2; C.G. II ch. 52 a. 7. This question becomes one of the best ways in which to approach esse for Aquinas, and authors differ on whether the approach of essence or judgment is more illuminating. In any case, it seems evident that the consideration of existence is a logical conclusion to the consideration of being as divided by the categories (Meta. 7-8) and by act and potency (Meta. 9).

⁶⁶ There are several texts in which Aquinas sketches the "divisiones entis", and the divisions differ according to the context. See, e.g. In de Hebd. l. 2 (#26-30), where there is division according to types of composition (whether esse and id quod est are identical or not); In subst. sep. c. 8 (#87), c. 15 (#137-138), C.G. III c. 94, and In I Peri. l. 14 (#22) on the "first" division being between necessary and contingent being, and many other texts.

⁶⁷ In 5 Meta. l. 9 #889: "...Tertio dividit ens per potentiam et actum: et ens sic divisum est communius quam ens perfectum. Nam ens in potentia, est ens secundum quid tantum et imperfectum..."

⁶⁸ e.g. De gen. anim. 2.1 (734a30-31); Phys. I (passim); Meta. 11.2 (1069b15-16). And cf. Meta. 9.3 versus the Megarians.

⁶⁹ e.g. Meta. 9.6, passim, where the definition of actuality is in contrast to a thing's potential existence. In Meta. 9, the order of the texts goes from an analysis of the different senses of potency (rational, irrational; innate, acquired; active, passive) to those of act, which latter correspond to the potencies.

⁷⁰ Although not necessarily most properly so applied, is the implication we think we can draw. We say this because the texts continue the explanation of act in terms of the *terminus* of movement, where act and perfection are connected. Aquinas notes the complexity of the definition at In 9 Meta. l. 5 #1824:

to movement. This seems strange, since movement connotes potentiality *towards* perfection equally well, but the connection between movement and things which actually exist supports the identification: things which are potential in the sense of existing only mentally, are not subject to movement, whereas things which actually exist can be moved.

Although motion is the point of departure for an understanding of act, it is not the meaning of act. Act is the state of the thing when it is not potential (Meta. 9.6 1048a31-3). It is known only inductively and by analogy (1048a35-38) because, Aquinas notes, simple notions can't be defined ("prima simplicia definiri non possunt, cum non sit in definitionibus abire in infinitum": In 9 Meta. l. 5 #1826). What precisely, are the analogous senses of act? Aristotle divides acts into two types: "as A is in B or to B, C is in D or to D; for some are as movement to potency, and the others as substance to some sort of matter" (1048b7-8). Aquinas explains the text as dividing act into two types: first, act as act, or as operation⁷¹: this is an example of act as "hoc in hoc" [my emphasis].⁷² This is the relation of actuality that form has in its inherence in matter. Second, act can be taken in the sense of relation, and this is the way in which act is related to operative powers in the thing. The power of sight is related to the act of seeing (as "hoc ad hoc" [our emphasis]). This is the sense of act which is related to motion. Of these analogous senses of act, the first represents the primary actuality, while the second represents the second actuality in a thing.⁷³

We have seen that the notion of act is understood in relation to motion but has its own distinct meaning. Motions are incomplete because the thing in motion lacks the end of the motion; whereas in acts, the end belongs to the motion.⁷⁴ Acts have a unity that motions lack, since they have no "parts", and this will form the basis of their priority to things in potency (Meta. 9.8-9). Not only is unity a way of approaching the notion of act, but perfection in the sense of completion is, as well. The sense of perfection as completion or totality is derived from

"...Licet enim nomen actus a motu originem sumpserit, ut supra dictum est, non tamen solum motus dicitur actus; unde nec dicitur solum possibile in ordine ad motum..."

⁷¹ The description of act here as a type of "operation" is only for the sake of the examples he gives, i.e. sight being *in* the eye. The real meaning of act here is the strong sense of inherence. It is a stronger sense of act than the second meaning he gives, which is relational.

⁷² In 9 Meta. l. 5 #1828: "...Potest enim sic accipi proportio, ut dicamus, quod sicut hoc est in hoc, ita hoc in hoc..."

⁷³ This is my reading of the text along with Aquinas' commentary. I am not considering the more removed senses of act which Aristotle discusses in Meta. 9.6, namely, the actuality of the infinite and the void, because these are more closely related to potentiality for the Greeks, and because I am discussing the metaphysical principles in actually existing substances.

an analysis of motion, as an end intrinsic to the motion. For this analysis, we must turn to Meta. 9 and Aquinas' commentary.

After discussing potency and defining the senses of actuality (Meta. 9. 1-7), Aristotle turns to the various priorities of act to potency (9.7-10). In chapter 8 (Aquinas' lectio 7), actuality is said to be prior to potency in intelligibility (natural priority as "absolute"), in time and in generation. It is prior conceptually because the meaning of something in potency is that it is able to become actual. Aquinas notes that the concept of act is used in defining something in potency.⁷⁵ This does not contradict the earlier statement that act is known via potency, if we account for the sense of "proportion" involved our knowledge of each. Act is prior temporally only specifically, since what is actual is always produced from something potential by means of something which is actual.⁷⁶ In an individual, potency precedes act temporally. Generation is included under "time" here, as an explanation of the way in which act is prior to potency within species.

4.2.3.1 *The Natural Priority of Act: Intrinsic Ends*

The most important priority of act to potency is that of *substance* (Meta. 9.8; Aquinas' lectio 8). Here, the focus is on act as the term of generation, and so final causality is prominent. What is prior in generation/time is posterior in substance, because everything generated moves towards its principle, source and end (9.8 1050a4ff.): an adult is prior to a child, and a man is prior to sperm. The emphasis is on the substantial form here, since what is prior has the form. Acts are ends, then, in the sense of being the completion of an agent. This echoes our earlier discussion of the *unity* of an act in contrast to the plurality of motions, which are relative

⁷⁴ Meta. 9.5 1048b18-35, and Aquinas' commentary: In 9 Meta. l. 5, #1828ff.

⁷⁵ In 9 Meta. l. 7 #1846. Cf. S.T. I q. 84 a. 2c, where he refers to the Metaphysics text to support the notion that potency is known through act.

⁷⁶ Aquinas notes (In 9 Meta. l. 7 #1849) that further justification for this is found in the book on substance: Meta. 7.7 (l. 6 #1383, which reviews the conditions of generation) and 7.8 (l. 7 #1417, which discusses the causes of generation). The mutual priorities of act and potency with respect to time are applied and explained in texts taking up the issues of creation and the agent intellect. For instance, in C.G. II, 16, the temporal priority of potency with respect to act is denied in the case of creation, since the whole subsisting thing is created; whereas only in the case of agents which require a prior existing matter as a condition for their causality is there a temporal priority of potency to act; but this is change, not creation. In C.G. II, 78, the temporal priority of potency to act is applied in a qualified manner to the possible and agent intellects in one and the same subject.

“pluralities”, as mixtures of contraries.⁷⁷ It follows directly from 9.6 where motion (*kinesis*) is contrasted to act (*praxis*) by virtue of act’s intrinsic or self-contained goal (the example of act is sight, whereas the example of motion is housebuilding).⁷⁸

Aristotle applies the finality of act and the corresponding dependence of potency to it, to two principles of being, namely, matter and form: matter exists for the sake of form and gains any actuality it has from union with it (9.8 1050a 15-16). It follows that form *is* act because it is a goal.⁷⁹ Essential here is the coalescence of the formal and final causes: the form is final with respect to matter, and is actual in this respect.⁸⁰ Elsewhere, Aquinas applies this priority of act in the order of nature or substance to the relationship between the human soul and the body⁸¹ and to the existence of subsistent forms as intellectual substances,⁸² which examples stress the link between perfection, completion, and act. An act is related to potency as something which fulfills and completes the existing substance. (Moreover, the different ways in which act “completes” a potency are derived from the objects related to the acts.⁸³)

This sense of completion as perfection of a thing then, which is expressed through the relation of act to potency, concerns two aspects of the thing: its *form* and its *end*.⁸⁴ In the formal order, act is always prior to potency, since the perfections belong primarily to the thing’s act, and only secondarily to its potencies. This is true also with respect to the end, since potency is not an end with respect to act, but the reverse is true. The end is a principle since it is the first thing

⁷⁷ On this point, see Edward Halper, *One and Many in Aristotle’s ‘Metaphysics’*, pp. 208-216.

⁷⁸ Cf. *N.E.* I, 1, where the finality and perfection of a goal is measured by its proximity to and inherence in, an activity. Extrinsic ends characterise inferior acts; intrinsic ends characterise superior ones.

⁷⁹ *Meta.* 9.8 1050a 21-2: “...the action is the end, and the actuality is the action. And so even the word ‘actuality’ (*energeia*) is derived from ‘action’(*ergon*), and points to the complete reality.” A good commentary on this derivation can be found in J. Cleary, *Aristotle on the Many Senses of Priority*, p. 60.

⁸⁰ The primacy of the final cause over all the rest is found in several places. It originates in *Physics* 2.3 (195a28; Aquinas’ lectio 6) and is taken up during the examination of act’s priorities, in *Meta.* 9.8 (l. 7) and elsewhere in Aquinas’ works: *S.T.* I-II 1.2; *In II Sent.* 37.3.2; *S.T.* I 105.5; *De princ. nat.* c. 4. This cause is prior since it a) causes the causality of the agent, and b) generates its like. On this, see *S.T.* I 6.1, where Aquinas explains the connection between self-generation, perfection and finality. To the degree to which a cause communicates its own proper perfection, it is good and final, for it exercises an attraction on the beings. The perfection of a thing is its resemblance to its cause (cf. *De subst. sep.* 12; *De ver.* 21.1; *De pot.* 7.10).

⁸¹ *C.G.* II, 83.

⁸² *C.G.* II, 91 [5], where act is associated with “complete perfection” and contrasted with forms which require matter for their being.

⁸³ *S.T.* I q. 77 a. 3c; *In 9 Meta.* l. 6; *De pot.* II, 6, 2; *De Ver.* q. 15 a. 2 ad 12; *In I Sent.* 7, 1, 2, 2; ad 2.

⁸⁴ *Meta.* 9.8 1050a4ff.; *In 9 Meta.* l. 8 #1856-1857.

intended by the agent, and in this sense it is prior as the goal of potency.⁸⁵ From our analysis of this text, we see that the priority of act to potency in the order of substance or nature gets its argumentative force from the priority of the final cause over the other causes in the thing, and from some sort of identity of formal and final causes in the thing. In the next chapter, we will draw out the implications of Aquinas' development of Aristotle's link between the final cause and the perfection of a thing, where goodness ultimately refers to the thing's act of existence, which is said to make goodness a "naturally prior" perfection in the creature.⁸⁶

4.2.3.2 *The Natural Priority of Act: Primary Causes*

We have described the priority in substance of actuality to potency in terms of act's complete and unified character, in contrast to the composite nature of motion, the paradigm case of potency. Before applying the issue of act's priority to the priorities of substance in relation to accidents, it is necessary to note the causal character of act, specifically in the context of the celestial substances of *Metaphysics* Lambda chapters 5 - 6. The eternal and necessary qualities of these bodies are part of the argument establishing act's natural priority to potency, the priority of these substances to all the principles in sublunar things, and ultimately the priority of substance in general. Their priority also illumines the issue of universal causation, which is entailed by natural priority.

The background of *Meta.* 12.5-6 is the second half of 9.8, which discusses the "strict" sense of act's priority in substance, i.e. in eternal things (1050b6 - 1051a3). Eternal things are prior in substance in the sense of being independent, by virtue of their limited potency. They lack absolute potency to contradictories, in that they lack potency to nonbeing, since they lack

⁸⁵ Cf. *Meta.* I.3 983a24ff. (*In I Meta.* l. 4 #71) on the formal and final causes of a thing. These are closely connected because, as Aquinas comments, "...finis generationis est forma ipsa, quae est pars rei. Finis autem motus est aliquid quaesitum extra rem quae movetur..." (l. 4 #71). The causes are treated at length in *Physics* II, 3 194b15ff. (*In II Phys.* ll. 5 - 6).

⁸⁶ *De ver.* q. 21 a. 3c develops this notion, contrasting the transcendental "true" with that of "good", taken in themselves and in relation to the creatures being perfected. The priority of goodness stems from its more universal extension and origin in the creature's act of being.

matter.⁸⁷ They do have the qualified potency to opposites in the sense of changing place, but they are more active than passive by virtue of their absolute activity.⁸⁸

They are naturally prior to all else, not only by virtue of their eternity, but also by virtue of their causal power, and thus qualify as naturally prior in a modified way as “separate”, “perfect” (actual), and yet not in the strong sense that God possesses these same qualities. If they did not exist, nothing else would (1050b19-20; 1071a33-35), apparently since that which is first in respect of complete reality is the cause of all things (1071a35-36). This causal character of form as actuality indicates natural priority as “origin” in a limited sense as well, and consists of the formula, “what has complete reality is the cause of all things” (1071a35).⁸⁹ The causal priority of act then, grounds its extension: due to their separate, independent existence, itself rooted in actuality, separate substances are things’ causes, albeit analogously.⁹⁰ Meta. 12.6 draws the conclusion that eternal motion requires a mover whose essence *is* act, in that potency (even active potency) is dependent on a naturally prior act. Aristotle combines the natural priority of act with the previous argument for necessary substances, to reach the conclusion of a first mover essentially in act.⁹¹

The causal character of act, then, is established through the independence of eternal substances, i.e. through their lack of potency to nonbeing. In the mature treatise De Substantiis Separatis, Thomas combines his own views with selected insights from Arab philosophers to prove the priority of act over potency through various arguments for a universal, all-extensive first cause of being. In this treatise, universality and causal extension are shown to coincide in

⁸⁷ The proof of their lack of absolute potency, i.e. to nonbeing, is the proof of their necessity and eternity, i.e. of the impossibility of their nonbeing. This proof is presupposed in Meta. 9.8 and 12.5-6, but is found in Physics 8.6 (258b10ff), and concerns the nature of eternal circular motion.

⁸⁸ The sense of change here is “locomotion”, since only locomotion exhibits the eternal trait of circularity. The argument for the natural priority of locomotion to all other types of change is found in Physics 8.7, which also contains the different senses of “prior” (at 260b17-19). Briefly, the metaphysical principle that “the prior in substance is the posterior in generation” is explained through the notion of perfection in particular things, and locomotion is said to be one of the last perfections, since it involves no change in being and is caused by self-movers.

⁸⁹ This notion will be taken up in the analysis of the De Substantiis Separatis and the In de causis texts below.

⁹⁰ This demand also follows from the requirement for a unified science of metaphysics. See section 4.1 in this chapter, “Substance and the Subject of Metaphysics”.

⁹¹ This chapter reminds one of the first and third “ways” of S.T. I, 2, 3. For our limited purposes in this section, we must omit the various proofs for a necessarily existing first instance of actuality, but these can readily be found in S.T. I, 2, 3; C.G. I, 13, for example, and their parallel texts. For an early treatment of this issue in connection with the composition of act and potency in intellectual substances, see De ente et essentia c. 4.

First Act. The alliance between something *prior* and something *causal* (which we discussed in chapter three of this thesis in the context of analogy) is central for our purposes, since what is naturally prior as independent and actual must also be causal with respect to posterior things in the same order. This is due to the quality of dependence involved in the type of order between substantially different things related to their principle.⁹²

How is the causality of act described in De substantiis Separatis? In the course of developing and critiquing the views of Avicbron (cc. 5 - 8), Aquinas argues for act's priority to potency as something nobler and conditional for potency, and rejects Avicbron's univocal notion of potency. This notion was one which equated being in potency with being a subject and a recipient (c. 5). These are not identical because there are different ways of receiving form, namely, particularly (corporeal things) and totally (angels).⁹³ Avicbron's spiritual hylemorphism resulted from his error, and destroyed a proper notion of spirituality.⁹⁴ Chapters 9 and 10 establish Aquinas' view of the universal and causal nature of the first cause of being, in contrast to the particular, [univocal] causal nature of causes of change.⁹⁵

Chapter 9 of De substantiis Separatis gives a history of philosophizing on the primary causes from the Presocratics to the Neoplatonic theory of participation in a causal source of unity.⁹⁶ The proportion between causes and effects is established (i.e. particular effects have

⁹² The distinction between "principle", "cause" and "element" is found in S.T. I, 33, 1. "Cause" involves relation to a principle where the effects are distinct from and dependent on the cause, either for their being or for their causality, or both.

⁹³ See c. 7 on different modes of receiving form and on the perfection of act with respect to potency. Form and act are said to be naturally prior, (as causes of) to matter and potency, since perfection is prior to imperfection in nobility.

⁹⁴ There were several reasons behind Avicbron's position, but the main reason appears to be his notion that only matter can account for distinction and diversity, and the accompanying view that matter must account for the unity in things, through the existence of a common material substance in the universe (c. 5 - 6). In c. 7, Aquinas distinguishes the modes of reception of forms, to refute these views. He maintains that only by this sort of distinction can the substance - accident division of being be maintained.

⁹⁵ Cf. chapter two, section 3.2.3 of this thesis. Aquinas develops the argument for a universal cause of being (*esse*) elsewhere (e.g. De pot. 3.5), but the De subst. sep. c. 10 text contains the fullest account, and so I limit my analysis to that text. In many places, more cryptic accounts are given, without emphasis on "commonness", but rather on the perfective causal character of *esse* (e.g. De pot. 7.2 ad 9; S.T. I 3. 4; I 4. 1 ad 3). See also, Lawrence Dewan, "Being *per se*, being *per accidens* and St. Thomas' Metaphysics", Science et esprit 30/2 (1978) p. 181. On the development of the notion of community and causal power, see Leo Elders, "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et la métaphysique du Liber de causis" Revue thomiste (1989) 427-42.

⁹⁶ Cf. De pot. 3. 5; S.T. I 44.2. In the De subst. sep. text, Aquinas notes three errors concerning the origin of separate substances: First, the Averroists, who thought they were uncaused; second, Avicenna,

particular causes; universal effects have like causes) and universal causes are said to be prior (#49), as relating to ens per se, i.e. to existence as opposed to nothing. The first cause is said to be causal with respect to all else since “quod est maxime semper causam esse eorum quae sunt post ipsum”. Against the predominant Arab view, angels are said to be created, their forms receiving existence from God. Chapter 10 argues in a more detailed fashion for the *universal* causal extension of the first cause, against Avicenna’s theory of secondary efficient causes of being. In addition to the points made in c. 9, four general steps of argument can be discerned:

- A) A common effect (e.g. esse) must be reduced to a universal cause (#56), and by virtue of its commonness it is “first” in a thing (i.e. subject to determination by other forms: #57).⁹⁷
- B) Due to the similarity between causes and effects, the first in each thing is the effect of the highest power of an agent causing it.⁹⁸
- C) The common element (esse) in things is caused by the highest power of the most universal agent (from A] and B]).
- D) Esse distinguishes something from nothing, and this difference is the greatest possible. Since it is the greatest distance possible, it requires the greatest power to reduce something from nonbeing to being⁹⁹ (from C]).

The conclusion is that every instance of esse requires a universal, primary causal origin.¹⁰⁰ Step B above presupposes the proportion or relation between cause and effect, which is axiomatic. It also presupposes the oft-repeated Aristotelian dictum that the highest in any order is the cause of all else in that order.¹⁰¹ The more common, more profound an effect is,¹⁰² the

who thought they were caused but not by God; and third, the Platonists, who identified forms with ideas. On the question of causal origin, see: A. Pegis, “St. Thomas and the Origin of Creation” in F. X. Canfield, ed. Philosophy and the Modern Mind (Detroit: Sacred Heart Seminary, 1961), pp. 49-65.

⁹⁷ The notion that esse is the “first” element in a thing is an issue I will take up in the following chapter. For now, we can point to In de Caus. l. 4 #105 on Proposition 4 of Liber de Causis, which stated that esse is the first of created things. In lectio 4, the issue is the multiplication of being. Cf. l. 2 #56.

⁹⁸ This is apparently axiomatic, as is the Aristotelian dictum used in c. 9 that the first in a genus is the cause of all else in it.

⁹⁹ This is true given the notion that “quanto aliqua potentia magis distat ab actu, tanto maiori virtute indiget ad hoc quod in actum reducat” (#59).

¹⁰⁰ Elsewhere, Aquinas argues for its unity, from the nature of subsistent existence. See, e.g. De ente et essentia c. 4, Comp. Theol. c. 15; S.T. I 11, 3; In 1 Sent. 2.1; In 2 Sent. 1.1.1; C.G. I, 42; De pot. 3.6; In 8 Phys. l. 12; In 12 Meta. l. 12.

¹⁰¹ We alluded to this in the analysis of De Subst. Sep. c. 9. It is also found in De ente et essentia 6, S.T. I 2, 3, among other places. The dictum is Proposition 18 of Liber de Causis (Aquinas’ In de Caus. l. 18 #340). It is related to Proposition 1 that “every first cause exercises a greater influence on its effect than the universal secondary cause”. Throughout the analysis of the causality of esse, Aquinas is intending

higher, more far-reaching and more remote is its cause.¹⁰³ All causality is of esse in some way or other,¹⁰⁴ and thus, the most universal cause is the cause of all things. De potentia. 3.5 elaborates the same argument according to three perspectives: The need for a unified cause for a shared common perfection, the demand for a maximum instance of a given perfection where degrees of perfection are discerned, and the reduction of the per accidens to the per se. In the De potentia text, the principle of participation forms the explicit basis of the argument, however, i.e. “where a perfection is found partially it is possessed essentially by something else”. An analysis of esse in the context of participation will be found in the last chapter of this thesis.

4.2.3.3 Conclusions Regarding Act’s Natural Priority

The natural priority of act to potency in terms of “separability”, “perfection” and “origin” was first analysed in terms of the priority of final causality, where act is prior as the goal which perfects and completes a substance. Final and formal causes converge as an explanation of the perfection and completion of a substance (section 4.2.3.1). Act’s natural priority was then analysed from the viewpoint of a primary cause of a thing’s being, in contrast to the causes of change (section 4.2.3.2). Eternal things were found to be prior in substance to temporal beings by virtue of their limited potency, and their natural priority was seen to ground their universal causal extension. This extension was discovered through the requirements of the proportion between cause and effect: the most common effect requires the most common cause, and where the common effect is the most fundamental principle in a thing,¹⁰⁵ it is caused by the cause’s highest power. The natural priority of act is thus a notion which results from an analysis of the

efficient causality. On this topic, see, e.g. Leo Elders, “S. Thomas d’Aquin et la métaphysique du Liber de Causis” Revue thomiste 1989 (427-42).

¹⁰² That is, the more necessary or conditional that the effect is for the other perfections in the thing. Cf. De Subst. Sep. c. 10 #57.

¹⁰³ Cf. De pot. 3.7: “Quanto causa est altior, tanto communior, efficacior, et profundior est, et de remotiore potentia, reducit ad actum.” Cf. In 6 Meta. l. 3 #1205: “... Habet enim causa altior proprium causatum altius quod est communius et in pluribus inventum...”

¹⁰⁴ e.g. In 2 Post An. l. 7 #471, where something is called “caused” ultimately because it has a cause of its esse. This cause is either identical with the matter and form (i.e. is intrinsic) or comes from outside to the thing, as with the efficient and final causes (i.e. is extrinsic). A good commentary on the notions involved here can be found in: Lawrence Dewan, “St. Thomas, Metaphysical Procedure and the Formal Cause” (New Scholasticism 63 [1989], pp. 179-180 and #22 *infra*). I will return to this issue in the final chapter of the thesis.

directedness of a composite towards the fulness of form¹⁰⁶ and certain forms' limited type of potency.

The commonness which characterises the universality and priority of the first cause requires specification, however. It is only commonness in causality, and not in predication, that establishes natural priority. In *De veritate* 7.6 ad 7, Thomas describes commonness in predication (or effect) as occurring when something is found in many things according to one intelligible character. Here, the more common is the less perfect, as animal is more common than man. Commonness in the order of causality however, signifies the perfection of something prior, in the way that something numerically one extends to many effects (the example is the preservation of a city being more noble than the preservation of a family). This distinction is also found in *De veritate* 3.7 obj. 4 and ad 4. Where there is natural priority, there is no common idea: substance and accident share no common notion or predication, but do share a commonness by causality, in that accidents are caused by substance. Now that the priorities of act to potency have been treated, with focus on act's priority in substance to potency, we can apply our findings to the issue of the natural priority of substance.

4.2.4 *The Natural Priority of Substance to Accidents*

The commonness of causality signals natural priority as “origin”, and the example used by Thomas is the priority of substance to accidents. What, precisely, are the priorities of substance to accident, and how do these involve the priority of act to potency?

Before analysing substance's priorities to accident, we must attempt a definition of substance, in line with our previous findings. As we saw earlier in this chapter (section 4.2.1), substance involves the coincidence of subject and essence in the actualising form of separate substance for Aquinas and Aristotle. In several respects, Aquinas modifies Aristotle's treatment of substance. He emphasizes that there is no proper definition of substance (just as there is no

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *De ver.* 14.5 ad 12 on the distinction between two kinds of commonness, one, where the common element is the “most perfect”, and the other, where it is the “first thing found in something”. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

¹⁰⁶ A further analysis of the exact meaning of this statement must wait for the next chapter, where the priority of *esse* to form is taken up. It will consist partly in an “unpacking” of the “causal proposition”, that every effect has a cause. In his article on the topic, L. Dewan contrasts various views on the evidence for this principle, from an analysis of material composites: “St. Thomas and the Principle of Causality” in ed. Jean Louis Allard, *Le philosophe dans la cité* (Ottawa: Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1985), pp. 53-71.

proper definition of act), for it is a nongeneric, simple notion not composed of a quiddity and esse.¹⁰⁷ Substance is distinct from the existence which actualises it. Substance has the common quality of ens in that it is not properly speaking in a genus, or rather, it is the most general genus.¹⁰⁸ It is a narrower reality than ens, however, since it has the quality of subsistence.¹⁰⁹ Two qualities characterise substance: a) subsistence or perseity, and b) being a causal substrate for accidents. Since these qualities are basic to an understanding of the natural priority of substance, we will define them briefly.

Subsistence and being a substrate are the two characteristics of substance as subject or supposit, i.e. as an individual substance.¹¹⁰ Being a “supposit” differs from the other meanings of substance, in that it is limited to beings which are a) capable of separate existence, and b) are determinate particular things.¹¹¹ “Subsistence” signals something both negative and positive for Aquinas: it is the negation of inherence and the affirmation of self-existence: “esse in se et non in alio”, or substance’s independent existence.¹¹² The positive meaning is more elusive than the negative meaning, and one author has pointed to the intellectual act of “complete return” (“reditio completa”) which marks spiritual substances, as an indicator of subsistence.¹¹³ The definition of substance in terms of “subsistence” or per se existence is admittedly one of the

¹⁰⁷ On this topic, see, e.g.: E. Gilson, “Quasi Definitio Substantiae”, in St. Thomas Aquinas 1274-1974: Commemorative Studies Vol. 1 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), pp. 111-129. Cf. John Wippel, “Substance in Aquinas’ Metaphysics” (Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association 61 [1987], pp. 9-11. On the notion that there is no “definition” of substance since it doesn’t “have” esse, see, e.g. In 1 Sent. 8.4.2; In 2 Sent. 35.2.1 ad 1. Similar reasons are gathered in defense of excluding God from a genus, as well: C.G. I 25, 22; In 1 Sent. 8.4.2; S.T. I 3.5. On the denial of ens being a genus, see, e.g. De pot. 7.3 ad 4.

¹⁰⁸ On substance not being in a genus, see C.G. I 25; S.T. I 3.5 ad 1.

¹⁰⁹ See, e.g. In 12 Meta. l. 1 #2419: “...Nam ens dicitur quasi esse habens, hoc autem solum est substantia, quae subsistit...” Cf. De ente et essentia c. 1.

¹¹⁰ In 1 Sent. 23.1.1; S.T. I 29.2; De potentia 9.1, on the the relation between essence, subsistence and hypostasis among the divine Persons. All these texts identify subsistence and hypostasis (or, standing) as definitive of substance as supposit.

¹¹¹ In 7 Meta. l. 2 #1291. The other meanings of substance were reviewed in section 2.1 of this chapter of the thesis, and are: substance as essence, as universal and as genus. (In 7 Meta. l. 2).

¹¹² C.G. I 25: “...hoc quod dicitur per se...non videtur importare nisi negationem tantum: dicitur enim ens per se ex hoc quod non est in alio: quod est negatio pura...” Cf. In 12 Meta. l. 1 #2419-20, where accidents’ inesse is contrasted to substances’ per se esse, and cf. De ente et essentia c. 6. And, see especially S.T. I 29.2c: “...Secundum enim quod per se existit et non in alio, vocatur subsistentia; illa enim subsistere dicimus, quae non in alio, sed in se existunt...” (Cf. S.T. III 77.1 ad 2).

¹¹³ Jan Aertsen, Nature and Creature: Thomas’ Aquinas’ Way of Thought, p. 255. See, e.g. In De causis l. 15; S.T. I 14, 2 ad 1.

thorniest concepts in Aquinas' philosophy,¹¹⁴ and thus we will return to it after reviewing substance's role as hypostasis, or causal substrate for accidents.

4.2.4.1 Substance as "Hypostasis"

Being a "substrate" or "hypostasis" is equivalent to the "subject" criterion for substance, with the addition of the causal relation between substance and accidents. De ente et essentia c. 6 explains the causation of substance in relation to accidents in detail, but a briefer treatment is found in S.T. I 77.6. In ad 2, the priority of substantial form to both the material composite and to the *per se* accidental forms is argued, in the context of the relation of the soul to its powers. Substance is related to accidents through a triple causality: final, material and in a certain way, efficient.¹¹⁵ The body of the same article explains the various causalities of substance in detail: Substance is first of all the *efficient* cause of accidents, actively causing their actuality as distinct forms. This is different from the more basic *formal* causality that the substantial form has with respect to a composite, where there is no diversity created, but an absolute *to be*.¹¹⁶ In this first type of causality, substance is to accident as act to potency. Substance can also be related to accidents as potency to perfecting act, however,¹¹⁷ for every act is a perfection.¹¹⁸ In this way it is

¹¹⁴ J. Maritain ("On the Notion of Subsistence": Appendix IV [first version] of Distinguish to Unite, or The Degrees of Knowledge [Tr. G. Phelan; New York: Scribners, 1959], p. 430: "The notion of subsistence is one of the most difficult and most controversial in Thomistic philosophy." We shall analyse Maritain's position on subsistence shortly.

¹¹⁵ "Dicendum quod subjectum est causa proprii accidentis et finalis, et quodammodo activa; et etiam ut materialis, in quantum est susceptivum accidentis. Et ex hoc potest accipi quod essentia animae est causa omnium potentiarum sicut finis et sicut principium activum; quarundam autem sicut susceptivum." Cf. De virtutibus in Comuni 3c.

¹¹⁶ In the case of the substantial form, it is identically the same actuality as the matter it informs, and so there is no diversity. This obviously differs from the case of the substance's relation to accidents. For an explicit example of diversity of substance and accident, see C.G. I, 23 [7]. Where substance is to accident as act is to potency, there is distinction and natural priority, for: "substantia non dependet ab accidente, quamvis accidens dependeat a substantia. Quod autem non dependet ab aliquo potest aliquando inveniri sine illo..." Interestingly, Aquinas asserts this independence of substance with respect to accidents only in the context of God, where there are no accidents. This text also illustrates the diversity required for the causal relation of priority of substance to accident. It remains to be seen whether diversity is required for *all* causal relations, and for all instances of natural priority. It would seem necessary for the latter but not necessary for all causal relations.

¹¹⁷ Cf. C.G. I, 23 [4]. This is one reason why God is not composed of substance and accidents.

¹¹⁸ "Secundum hoc enim dicitur aliquid esse perfectum quod est in actu" (S.T. I 4.1). Cf. C.G. I 28; 39; C.G. III 7. The notion of perfection connotes a passage from potency to act, and imperfection is proportionate to potency: C.G. I, 28; 39; 43; C.G. II, 52; De Spir. creat. a. 1 ad 25. The implications of the alignment of act and perfection are studied in chapter four of this thesis, in light of the dictum "actus irreceptus est illimitatus".

the *material* cause of accidents, or their receptive potency. Finally, in its active role substance is the *final* cause of accidents, as their fulfilment and end.¹¹⁹ Substance is a final cause of accidents in that certain accidents, such as operations and powers, are intelligible as acts only in corresponding to a nature. Examples given elsewhere are sensation and understanding.¹²⁰

Now that we have given an partial “definition” of substance in terms of its role as hypostasis, what are its priorities with respect to accidents? A brief attempt to answer this question will reveal the dependence of substance’s role as hypostasis on its quality of subsistence. There are three places in the Commentary on the ‘Metaphysics’ which outline the priorities of substance: In 5 Meta. l. 13 (#950), In 7 Meta. l. 1, and In 12 Meta. l. 1. *Book Delta* identifies substance’s priority as that of a subject-supposit, and lists this as a second sense of “priority in substance”. The first (and very similar) sense is “priority in being,” i.e. in nature or substance, which is the Platonic sense of natural priority, i.e. separate, subsistent existence.

Book Zeta gives a more exhaustive list of priorities. Substance is the first division of ens per se (the second is act and potency). It is prior to accidents in three ways or, as Aristotle says, “in every respect” (1028a30): a) knowledge, b) definition, and c) time (In 7 Meta. l. 1 #1257-#1259). Priority in knowledge is not priority in psychogenesis, for we come to know accidents first. Rather, “prior” here means that which conditions a scientific understanding of accidents, i.e. their causal origin. Substance is prior in answering the “what” question with respect to a thing.¹²¹ It is also prior in definition, in that the notion of substance is included in the definition of accident. Finally, it is prior in time, apparently due to its “separate” existence. The ability of substance to exist without accidents without the reverse being true, constitutes its natural priority. We take “separateness” in the limited sense that no substance exists in a subject, which is the negative meaning of subsistence. In addition, a causal relation is implied, in that all accidents exist in substances as their subjects. Priority in time then, hinges on the separate

¹¹⁹ Cf. C.G. III, 75. On this topic, see : Barry Brown, Accidental Being: A Study in the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas (New York: University Press of America, 1985), pp. 83-118. His view is that strictly speaking, substances have a plural accidental esse over and above the single substantial esse. An accident, strictly speaking, has no esse at all.

¹²⁰ De ente et essentia c. 6, where accidental forms are variously related to the substance’s form and matter. The example of powers as accidents provides a good example of the substance’s role of final cause with respect to accidents, in that the powers are actualised only by an agent.

¹²¹ J. Aertsen (Nature and Creature... pp. 25-29) notes that the “what” question carries a certain ambiguity for Aquinas, sometimes inquiring into the supposit (e.g. In 1 Sent. 23.1.3 ad 4) and sometimes inquiring into the essence (*ibid.*; cf. De ente et essentia c.1). We have already indicated the way in which these criteria coincide in the identification of substance.

existence of substance. Opinions vary on the order of dependence among these three senses of priority,¹²² but that is another issue.

Finally, *Meta.* 12.1 (lectio 1) gives three reasons for substance's priority to accidents: First, it is prior in the order of a whole to a part, and in succession (#2417). Second, in its subsistence or independence it is prior (#2419), and third, it is the subject for accidents (#2422). The first sense of priority takes its cue from the earlier statement that "substance is thought to belong most obviously to bodies" (*Meta.* 7.2: 1028b8-10). Aquinas comments that Aristotle is implying that the universe is like a sensible body wherein one part (substance) is the "first" among all (#2417). Another perspective on substance's priority is found if we notice that accidents flow causally from substance. The second sense of priority (#2419) has a specific meaning for Aquinas: only substances subsist, whereas all other beings *have esse* (#2419).¹²³

The lists of the priorities of substance in *Metaphysics Delta*, *Zeta* and *Lambda* all indicate the subsistence of substance among these priorities: *Delta* calls it "priority in being or nature"; *Zeta* calls it "priority in time" (and identifies it with "separateness");¹²⁴ *Lambda* calls it "being in an unqualified sense", in contrast to accidents. For Aquinas, this indicates a particular type of possession of *esse*, but the text does not explain this relation between the thing and its mode of existence. What we *can* conclude is the following: The mode of existing attaching to substances is called "subsistence", and this must be the explanation of its role as hypostasis, for the emanation of accidents from the substance is an effect of its mode of being.¹²⁵ In the orders of being and of demonstration, substance as subsistent subject is prior to substance as hypostasis.

¹²² T. Irwin (*Aristotle's First Principles* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1988, p. 83]) thinks that Aristotle could have based priority in time on priority in knowledge or explanation, although he thinks Aristotle failed to exploit this possibility. This supposed failure resulted, he says, in his failure "to face the crucial issues that arise for his claims about first substances" (p. 83). C. Witt (*Substance and Essence in Aristotle: An Interpretation of "Metaphysics" 7-9* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989, pp. 58-60]), on the other hand, makes Aristotle's priority in time the basis of the other senses, at least in the order of demonstration. She rightly insists (p. 60) that the priorities in definition and knowledge justify the claim in *Meta.* 4.1 that metaphysics consists in the study of the principles and causes of substance.

¹²³ Cf. *S.T.* I 29.2c, quoted in #112 above, where subsistent beings *in se existunt*.

¹²⁴ The controversial notion of "separateness" is a topic beyond our study. It is controversial because there is no instance of a substance existing in total separation from accidents, except for God. How then, can "separateness" be proof of substance's priority to accidents? I attempt to diffuse the controversy somewhat by subsuming "separateness" under "subsistence". Cleary (*The Many Senses of Priority...*) correctly traces "separateness" to the Platonic notion of natural priority (pp.44ff.).

¹²⁵ *S.T.* I 89.1c: "Modus operandi cuiuslibet rei, sequitur modum essendi eius". (Cf. *Q. De Anima* 2 ad 7). *S.T.* II-II 58.2c: "Operatio attribuitur hypostasi ut operanti; naturae autem, ut principio operationis".

4.2.4.2 *Substance as Subsistent or as “Per Se” Existent*

Aquinas repeatedly describes subsistence as the mode of existing per se, and in some contexts, as a mode whereby substance is apt to exist per se.¹²⁶ The occasion for the texts concentrating on this aspect of substance is often theological, namely, in the context of discussing the hypostatic union, or the eucharist.¹²⁷ Subsistence is introduced as a partial explanation of how, on the one hand, two natures can exist in the one person of Christ, and on the other, accidents can sometimes be found without a subject. In philosophical contexts outside the Commentary on the “Metaphysics”, the discussions concern substance’s role as hypostasis, divine simplicity, or the soul’s subsistence (S.T. I 3; 75.2,6; 77.8; 89). Although the meaning of subsistence is ambiguous, often finding its roots in theological concerns, its role is central in determining the natural priority of substance. To research it properly, we must go beyond the Aristotelian commentary.¹²⁸ Two main questions can be asked as a focus for Aquinas’ theory of subsistence:¹²⁹ First, what is the relation between subsistence, natures and supposits? Involved in this question is the second question, namely, how is subsistence a sign of substance’s natural priority, and does this priority apply to all types of subsisting substances, or only to Ipsium Esse Subsistens?

4.2.4.2.1 *Natures and Supposits*

We turn to the first question first. Subsistence, it seems, differs from the nature, the supposit, and the act of existing, for it is not identical with any of these. Instead, it is the existential mode of an individual nature, whether that nature is related directly to a higher

¹²⁶ S.T. I 29 2c; In 1 Sent. 23.1c; C.G. I 25; S.T. III 77.1 ad 2, and the introductory part of S.T. III in general: qq. 2-4.

¹²⁷ One excellent study incorporating both questions is that of Nestor Cerbo, Substantiality of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist: An Inquiry into Aquinas’s Theology of Transubstantiation (Roma: Pontificia Studiorum Universitas a S. Thoma Aq. in Urbe, 1990).

¹²⁸ Just as Aquinas altered and expanded Aristotle’s notion of act, to include the idea of existence as the summit of perfections, so he altered the Stagirate’s notion of substance, from two angles, namely, the quality of its being (as “subsistent”) and the extent and type of its causality (here, I am referring to Ipsium Esse Subsistens’ relationship of efficient causality to all beings). My position differs from that of E. Gilson (see #134 below). I shall take this up later in the chapter.

¹²⁹ We will give very limited answers to these questions, insofar as they relate to the issue of the real distinction between esse and essence which we are anticipating.

supposit or to the supposit proper it.¹³⁰ Aquinas defines substance as that which has a quiddity to which it pertains not to be in another,¹³¹ and as an essence to which it pertains to exist by itself.¹³² If we define substance through its mode, namely, subsistence or *ens per se*, we can observe that only a “quasi”-definition applies: Since being is not a genus to which differences (such as *per se*) can be added, substance has only a loose definition.¹³³ Thus Thomas concludes that “...‘non esse in subjecto’ non est definitio substantiae...,sed ‘habere quidditatem cui tale esse competat’” (*In 4 Sent.* d. 12 q. 1 a. 3 ad 2).

Subsistence is the mode which enables the substance to have its noninherent *esse*. It differs from both the substance and the essence or quiddity, as the *In 4 Sent.* and *De pot.* texts show. It differs from *substance* because it is a wider term, while substance is generic (God is analogously speaking, a substance). Other texts on the Eucharist show that subsistence is a wide existential mode connoting noninherence, which can apply to *nonsubstances* as well, i.e. to accidents. The miracle of divine conservation of accidents in the Eucharist extends the mode of subsistence to accidents, without destroying the definition of accident as “a thing to which it is *due* to be in something else”.¹³⁴

The reason for the nonidentity of substance and subsistence interestingly also reveals subsistence’s distinction from *essence*: Subsistence is on the side of *esse* and outside the essential

¹³⁰ In the case of Christ’s human nature, it is assumed into the higher unity of the divine supposit; in the case of the human separated soul, the nature is not assumed into a higher unity but neither is it complete in itself. See texts indicated above. I am not inferring that a nature can subsist without being individualised in a supposit.

¹³¹ *De pot.* 7.3 ad 4; *In 2 Sent.* 3.2.1 ad 1; *C.G.* I 25.

¹³² *S.T.* I 3.5 ad 1.

¹³³ On this point, see: E. Gilson, “Quasi Definitio Substantiae” in: *St. Thomas Aquinas: 1274-1974: Commemorative Studies* Vol. 1 (Toronto: P.I.M.S., 1974), pp. 111-29. Gilson provides the Avicennian context of the real distinction for this problem, and quotes both philosophical and theological texts in Aquinas. On Aquinas’ reasoning in the context of why God is not in a genus, see pp. 120-21.

¹³⁴ *In 4 Sent.* d. 12 q. 1 a. 1 expands the definition of substance (and therefore, of accidents) in this way, with the implication that the Eucharist’s accidents do not *become* substance in their noninherence. Cf. *S.T.* III 77.1 ad 2; *Quodl.* 9.3.5 ad 2. On this point, see: Gilson, “Quasi Definitio Substantiae” pp. 122-24. The interesting point about Gilson’s view of Aquinas on substance is that despite the theological context of many of the discussions in Aquinas, Gilson maintains that Aquinas has incorporated Aristotle’s theory of substance into his own in an intact manner. He says that Aquinas’ world is “a world of Aristotelian substances which *are* in their own right”: Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: P.I.M.S., 1952), p. 162. Other authors disagree with Gilson on this point, identifying it as an error even within Aquinas and as his failure to address problems within the Aristotelian project of identifying substance: Joyce Little, *Toward a Thomist Methodology* (Toronto: Toronto Studies in Theology, Vol. 34; Mellen Press: Lewiston).

order, in that it is what makes something individual.¹³⁵ Only that which “has” an essence can be placed in a genus. As pure esse, God is not in a genus and is only analogously a substance, yet He subsists, as a nature whose essence it is “to be”. Something can subsist as a nature in this one instance only, for in all things containing potency and composition, the nature does not of itself subsist, but is part of the *supposit*. Two groups of texts illustrate this claim: 1) texts on the Hypostatic Union;¹³⁶ 2) texts on the identity of supposit and nature in immaterial things and their nonidentity in material things.¹³⁷

In the Hypostatic union, Christ’s human nature is said to subsist only by its assimilation to the divine nature and person of Christ. Only the supposit subsists, as an individual thing. This purely theological support for the claim that natures do not subsist led Maritain to his first understanding of subsistence as that which lends an “incommunicability” to a nature.¹³⁸ But the inherence of accidents shows that individuality is insufficient for subsistence. Maritain’s second attempt at defining subsistence avoids this problem, by defining subsistence as an existential mode whereby the individual nature exercises esse. I understand Maritain to be saying that subsistence is a mode whereby the individual essence becomes an *operating supposit*.¹³⁹ Without subsistence, the nature cannot be a source of operations, nor be a principle quo in a thing: it fails as a cause without the independence conferred to it by the existing supposit. Maritain rightly places subsistence on the side of esse without identifying it with esse. The problem with his

¹³⁵ See, e.g. S.T. III 2.2c; and texts such as C.G. II 53; Quodl. 12.5, where subsistence is described as a complementum naturae, closing it off from commonness and making it an individual. We will return to this in more detail shortly.

¹³⁶ e.g. S.T. I 29.2; In 1 Sent. 23.1; De Pot. 9.1; De Unione Verbi a. 2.

¹³⁷ De pot. 9.1; In 3 Sent. 5.1.3; C.G. IV 55; Quodl. 2.2.2. As well, see the texts on divine simplicity (e.g. S.T. I 3). On this topic and substance in Aquinas’ metaphysics, see: J. Wippel, “Substance in Aquinas’ Metaphysics” Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association 61 (1987) pp. 2-22. It is unfortunate that Wippel neglected to treat the issue within the context of divine simplicity, and instead limited his treatment to immaterial substances.

¹³⁸ J. Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge Appendix 4, First Version, pp. 430-34. He admitted his dependence on Cajetan for this theory, and in the second version of the same appendix, saw a need to correct what he viewed as a philosophically uninformative interpretation. He attempted a purely philosophical defense of subsistence as an existential state whereby the substance is said to “exercise” as opposed to merely “receive” esse. While existential, subsistence is not itself esse, but preparatory to it. It is the condition on the side of the subject, as source of operations, for the exercise of esse. In short, it is what makes a particular essence a subject or supposit. It is thus more than essence and different, although lesser, than esse, since these are only principles (pp. 434-44). Neither version can be deduced from the actual texts of Aquinas, but his solution is innovative.

¹³⁹ See #138 above. Maritain does draw on other texts than the Hypostatic Union for the revised Appendix, namely, those distinguishing the orders of specification and exercise in intellection and volition. He uses these as an analogy for the essence-esse relationship.

view is that one can find just as many references in Aquinas which illustrate the operations of a supposit in terms of *form* as one can find alliances between being a supposit and being an existent.¹⁴⁰ What *is* correct is his alignment of subsistence and “source of operations”, and denial of any subsisting *nonexisting* thing. His claim that subsistence is in no way of the “essential” order stems, it seems, from his version of existentialism which holds that a focus on essences leads to Plato’s confusion of the modes of being and knowing.¹⁴¹ The causality of form is underplayed in such a theory, we will see, as it is in similarly inspired theories.¹⁴²

A second group of texts showing the subsistence of the supposit as opposed to the nature concern the comparison between material and immaterial supposits.¹⁴³ Supposits subsist through their state as “whole” individual existents, in contrast to natures, which are only “parts” of substances. In earlier texts,¹⁴⁴ the supposit is distinguished from the nature as a whole individual is distinguished from its quiddity. The nature is only a “part” of the substance in that it is shared by many, and is not an ultimate subject.¹⁴⁵ Essence is a principle of being and intrinsic cause,¹⁴⁶ and can be identical with the “whole” only where there is nothing added to it. Since matter individuates, nature and supposit differ in material composites, but not in immaterial ones. The nonidentity of subject and essence is explained by the presence of matter in these texts. J. Wippel has pointed out that the method of distinguishing nature and supposit by means of individuation is not his mature approach, however.¹⁴⁷ In later works (e.g. *Quodl.* 2.2.2), the supposit is more aligned with *esse*, and less with the fact of individuation, so that

¹⁴⁰ I will return to this issue shortly. It should be noted that the alliance between “act”, “operation” and “form” repeats itself in the context of divine simplicity (e.g. *S.T.* I 3.7). For the origin of the soul’s activities in form, one should consult the texts identifying the intellect as something subsistent: e.g. *In III De Anima* l. 10 #741; *S.T.* I 75.2 ad 2. For texts aligning “supposit” and “existing individual”, see the texts distinguishing supposit and nature, in the analysis that follows.

¹⁴¹ See, e.g. J. Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, tr. L. Galantière and G. Phelan (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1957), p. 12.

¹⁴² E. Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed., and some of his followers (e.g. J. Owens) have been accused of holding this notion, but that is a simplistic interpretation of Gilson and his school. Other Thomists exemplify this position more easily: Arthur Little, *The Platonic Heritage of Thomism* (Dublin: Golden Eagle Books, 1949); William Carlo, *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1966); G. Phelan, “The Being of Creatures According to St. Thomas” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 31 (1957)118-25. I will take up this issue in chapter five.

¹⁴³ This was cited in #137 above.

¹⁴⁴ e.g. *De pot.* 9.1; *In 3 Sent.* 5.1.3; *C.G.* IV 55.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. the various texts on the modes of abstraction, i.e. with or without precision: *De ente et essentia* III;

¹⁴⁶ See, e.g. *De ente et essentia* 1; *In 7 Meta.* l. 17 #1648-49; #1658; *In 1 Sent.* 8.5.2.

there is a distinction between supposit and nature even in angels.¹⁴⁸ In this later Quodlibet, an angel's supposit differs from its nature because esse lies outside the nature. Section 4.2.2.3 above noted that the nonidentity of subject and essence criteria in material composites was a consequence of the real distinction, and a departure from Aristotle. Can the existential explanation of subsistence in turn explain this nonidentity?

The fact that subsistence is more closely aligned with existence than with individuality becomes most evident in texts which deal with the intellect as a subsistent source of immaterial operations.¹⁴⁹ In S.T. I 75.2, the soul is subsistent as a source of nonmaterial operations, for “dicendum quod per se agere convenit per se existenti” (ad 2). The human intellect is cautiously called “separate” due to its operation apart from matter (In III De An. l. 10 #741), but it does not subsist in its separation from matter, since it is part of a supposit containing matter (e.g. Q. de An. 2). In S.T. I 75.2, subsistence is given two meanings: i) noninherence, and ii) noninherence as a whole. The human intellectual soul is the only thing that is both noninherent and a *part*, which indicates that for Aquinas, subsistence is really noninherence. The soul is an entity (not a supposit) which subsists because it has its own proper (i.e. nonbodily) operation, namely, understanding. The ultimate explanation for subsistence then, comes from esse which is communicated first to the form and only through the form to the composite.¹⁵⁰ However, while a form has its causality through esse, it is properly speaking the form which effects the immaterial operations, and which is the source of the supposit's subsistence (this also applies in texts on divine simplicity, e.g. S.T. I 3.4). Thus, the subsistence involves the mutual causality of form and esse, and cannot be reduced to the level of existence.

¹⁴⁷ J. Wippel, “Substance in Aquinas’ Metaphysics” p. 15.

¹⁴⁸ This is supported by De spir. creat. a. 1 ad 8, where the quo est/quod est distinction corresponds to the nature/supposit, and not to form/matter.

¹⁴⁹ Space does not permit a detailed proof of the soul's subsistence, but we know it from immaterial operations: S.T. I 75.2,6, e.g. Cf. Q. De An. 1, and parallel texts on whether the soul can be at once a form and a hoc aliquid: e.g. In 2 Sent. 1.2.4; C.G. II 56-9; 68-70; De Pot. 3. 9, 11; De Spir. Creat. 2; De An. 2. 14; De Unit. Int. 3; In II De An. l. 4; In III De An. l. 7; C.Th. 80; 87. The case of the separated soul does not in fact break the link between subsistence and supposit, since in its separated state the soul is not a hoc aliquid properly speaking. One could say regarding S.T. I 75.2 ad 3 that the soul subsists “subjectively” but is “objectively” dependent on the body. This view can be defended only by an argument for form's natural priority to matter, which we have already considered.

¹⁵⁰ S.T. I 75.6c: “...Unde patet quod actualitas per prius invenitur in forma substantiali quam in eius subjecto; et quia primum est causa in quolibet genere, forma substantialis causat esse in actu in suo subjecto...” This mode of the communication of esse is the opposite of that found in accidental forms, Aquinas goes on to explain.

Returning to our first question (section 4.2.4.1), we can now state the relation between subsistence, natures and suppositis. Subsistence is a mode of substance whereby it is the source of its proper operations. The supposit exists by formal causality but the material cause of existence is subsistence, since a quod, not just a quo, is needed for the exercise of existence and for operations. Subsistence involves the causality of esse to the supposit and the causality of form with respect to operations.

4.2.4.3 *Substance's Natural Priority*

The second question regarding subsistence (section 4.2.4.1) concerned the natural priority of substance and its relation to Ipsum Esse Subsistens. We concluded there that substance as subsistent grounds the relation of substance to accidents, as hypostasis. The causality of esse in the supposit can now be identified as the transcendent source of substance's efficient causality with respect to accidents. In what sense is the priority of substance "natural"? Its priority seems problematic, since there is no substance existing without accidents (i.e. existing by natural priority) except for God.¹⁵¹

A solution to the problem may lie in Aquinas' treatment of divine simplicity.¹⁵² In S.T. I 3.7, Aquinas employs the Platonic "separability" criterion, namely: "when the posterior is removed, the prior can still remain",¹⁵³ to defend God's simplicity. His second argument is that parts are naturally prior to the whole which they compose, i.e. the whole depends for its existence on the existence of the parts but the reverse is not true. This priority applies to the composite essences of generable and corruptible substances, as section 4.2.2 above has shown: substantial form is prior in these substances, as that through which the composite has its existence. In the case of God however, there is no act/potency composition. If God had parts, He would depend on them and they would be independent, which is false, since God's esse is not caused (S.T. I 2.3; 3.4)¹⁵⁴ and creation is a result of God's free will. Aquinas did not consider

¹⁵¹ The issue also involves the relationship between what C. Fabro has coined the "predicamental" versus "transcendental" modes of causality (La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino 2nd ed. [Turin: 1950]). We will approach this issue in chapter five.

¹⁵² S.T. I 3.7 and previous articles: That God is not a body, (a.1), that God is not composed of matter and form (a. 2), that in God the supposit is identical with the essence (a. 3), for example. Cf. In 1 Sent. 8.4.1; C.G. I 16; 18; De pot. 7.1; De Caus. l. 21; C. Th. 9.

¹⁵³ He does not state this axiom explicitly, but the second argument in the corpus presupposes it.

¹⁵⁴ The remaining arguments in S.T. I 3.7 (from God's uncaused, separate and absolute nature) use natural priority as well.

the possibility of the parts/whole relationship in God as that of members of a heap (where there is no relation of act and potency), but he could have, for his basic doctrine is that God's simplicity stems from the view that every per se unity has but *one* substantial act of being: "Nihil enim est simpliciter unum nisi per formam unam, per quam habet res esse; ab eodem enim habet res quod sit ens, et quod sit una..."¹⁵⁵ The notion either of a constituent part as prior to the whole as act to potency (which would give a strong sense of complex unity) or of several related things each with a substantial esse of its own (a weaker type of unity) contradicts this view. Where constituents in a thing have their own esse, there is priority of parts to the whole.

What does the denial of priority in God reveal about the natural priority of substance on the predicamental level? Both the real distinction and the different types of causality in the levels of being are involved here. Sections 4.2.3.1 and 4.2.3.2 distinguished the universal causation of esse on the transcendental level from the finite causality of form on the finite level. This in part establishes the natural priority of Ipsium Esse Subsistens to creation. Also involved is the proof of God as first efficient cause of all beings (S.T. I 2.3), which means the composition of act and potency in all else, since Pure Act is unique.¹⁵⁶ In composites with a strong (i.e. act/potency) unity, there is natural priority of substance to accident only in this sense: the form is separable from matter, if that form is subsistent. Even immaterial composites are *not* ultimately divisible as cause and effect (act and potency) however, which seems necessary for the type of natural priority as "separable" and as "origin". This type can only be found on the transcendental level, since God *is* separable from His effects as their cause. This leads us to the question, "what is the difference between the natural priority of Ipsium Esse Subsistens and the natural priority of form in composites?"

A distinction between esse commune and Ipsium Esse Subsistens has often been used to mark the difference between God and creaturely esse.¹⁵⁷ However, the distinction does not lie in

¹⁵⁵ S.T. I 76.3c. Aquinas holds the minority view on this issue in the thirteenth century. See: Marilyn McCord Adams, William Ockham Vol 2 (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1987), pp. 633-70. Aquinas also reasons that composition requires an agent to unite the parts (De pot. 7.1) and that every composition of potentially dissoluble (C.G. I 18; S.T. I 3.7).

¹⁵⁶ For arguments that God is one, see De ente et essentia c. 4; S.T. I 11; In 1 Sent. 8.1.3; De ver. 1.1; 21.1; De pot. 9.7; Quodl. 10.1.1; In 3 Meta. l. 12; In 4 Meta. l. 2; In 10 Meta. l. 3.

¹⁵⁷ See, e.g. L.B. Geiger, La participation dans la philosophie de S. Thomas d'Aquin (Paris: 1942), p. 377; J. de Vries, "Das esse commune bei Thomas von Aquin" Scholastik 39 (1964)163-77; L. Dumpelmann, Kreation als ontisch-ontologisches Problem (Zur Metaphysik der Schöpfungstheologie des Thomas von Aquin) (Freiburg: 1969), pp.31ff; and Hoye, Actualitas Omnium Actuum... pp. 66-83. K. Kremer takes a

the “commonness” of created esse versus the individual nature of Ipsum Esse, for esse is not contrasted to “individual” esse except when we consider created esse conceptually (C.G. I 26). Nor can the difference be that God, unlike finite substance, is the cause of effects, for *both* finite substance and Ipsum Esse are related to their effects by a “commonness of causality” (see section 4.2.3.3 above). Rather, the difference is in the universal extension and infinite nature of the first cause. The *infinity* of Ipsum Esse Subsistens means that nothing can be added to it, whereas it is not contrary to esse commune’s ratio that something be added to it.¹⁵⁸ It is His unlimited nature that qualifies God’s subsistence and makes Him naturally prior to His effects, as “perfect” (pure act), “separate” (subsistent) and as “origin”. How universal causality is related to finite composition is known by an inspection of created esse. Reflexive awareness reveals that a) the existence of things is limited and b) that limitation is not intrinsic to esse,¹⁵⁹ and this awareness leads to the following conclusion: transcendental Esse grounds all perfections and is thereby present in all agents, but predicamental esse actuates particular essences as a coprinciple of being. To sum up: predicamental esse’s relation to the form confers subsistence to the substance but does not make it naturally prior to accidents, whereas Ipsum Esse’s *identity* with its form makes it unlimited subsistence and naturally prior to all It efficiently causes.

This brief excursus into the theory of created esse thus combines conclusions from divine *simplicity*, *infinity*, and *causal extension*. Esse is a common trait in substances which is reduced to Ipsum Esse’s universal causality (e.g. S.T. I 65.1; De pot. 7.2). Ipsum Esse’s independence (natural priority) in turn conditions finite substance’s subsistence, due to God’s omnipresent causality. Thus, Ipsum Esse’s natural priority is the explanation for its intimacy in finite substance, by way of “essence, presence and power”.¹⁶⁰

dissenting view on this matter in his article “Die Creatio nach Thomas von Aquin und dem Liber de Causis” *Ekklesia: Festschrift für M. Wehr* (Trier: 1962), pp. 321-44.

¹⁵⁸ De pot. 7.2 ad 6; S.T. I 3.4 ad 1; De ente et essentia c. 5. He does not say that esse commune (it is the same as ens commune here) is actually added to, but rather that it prescind from addition.

¹⁵⁹ De ente et essentia c. 4. “To be caused by another” is not an inherent characteristic of esse, for of itself it is unlimited: e.g. C.G. II, 52.

¹⁶⁰ S.T. I 8.3 ad 1. Cf. S.T. I 105.5 on God’s omnipresence, where Aquinas goes so far as to make God the “most formal” element in things, the prior and most universal cause. We will return to this in the next chapter. The limited nature of our question does not allow a detailed analysis of the arguments for God’s omnipresence, and its relation to divine conservation. On God’s omnipresence, see, for example: William Hoye, Actualitas Omnium Actuum: Man’s Beatific Vision of God as Apprehended by Thomas Aquinas (Meisenheim: Anton Hain, 1975), pp. 100-116. In chapter five, we will further describe the modes of divine causality, as an explanation of the reciprocal causality of esse and essence in the predicamental order.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter analyses the principles of composite substances in an attempt to determine the meaning of substance's natural priority. We first observe that substance's priority as an immaterial cause of being makes it the main part of the subject of metaphysics, while also guaranteeing its unity. The criteria by which substance is identified are its roles as essence and subject. These criteria are found to be identical only in immaterial substances within Aristotle's metaphysics, due to the eternal nature of the unmoved movers.

In Aquinas' metaphysics, an analysis of form and supposit in immaterial substances, and of subsistence's relation to individual substance confers the same conclusion, with two additions: First, substance here is distinct from actualising esse caused efficiently from above, and second, the notion of subsistence is enlarged to include esse, which determines the degree of separation forms can have from matter. Investigation of the concept "subsistence" in Aquinas verified Aristotle's $\pi\rho\delta\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu$ notion of substance as immaterial, and specified it to the supposit as a "source of operations". Unfortunately, this analysis could not establish any priority among form and esse in composites.

Aristotle's analysis of form as act in Meta. 9 bases Aquinas' view that form is prior to matter and the composite in material substance, using Aristotle's argument from perfection for the coincidence of the formal and final causes in the proof of the ultimate priority of act to potency. Once again, however, Aquinas introduces his own additions in the analysis: First, there is the issue of *universal causation*. An argument from the reduction of plurality to unity established that it is the commonness of caused esse in finite things which leads to a *unique* subsistent Esse, their causal origin (4.2.3.3). This in turn introduced a causal link between the transcendental and predicamental orders of substance. Second, reflection on *divine infinity* and *divine simplicity* reinforced the uniqueness of Ipsum Esse Subsistens and its causal presence in all composites. Aquinas incorporates these originally Neoplatonic elements (universal causation of being, divine infinity, the distinction between substance and its esse) into a theory of substance which is faithful to its Aristotelian roots.

We can conclude that substance is naturally prior particularly in the case of finite substances with subsistent forms, or in the case of Ipsum Esse Subsistens, in applying all five senses of natural priority used by Aquinas. Further, it is the quality of subsistence, having its

origin in an infinitely extensive first efficient cause, which conditions the relation of finite substance to its accidents. God was seen to be the primary bearer of natural priority (in relation to creation) in Aquinas' analysis, exhibiting natural priority as "perfect", "separable", and in terms of "origin". His ultimate intelligibility expanded Aristotle's notion of the separate substances as actually cognitive, which also granted Him natural priority as "absolute", whereas subsistent finite form was argued to possess only a limited natural priority with respect to matter. We must now consider the final and crucial question in the analysis of natural priority in substance: "What is the relationship between substance and esse for Aquinas, in composites?" The review of the strict existentialist arguments for esse's priority to form will serve as the vantage point from which to construct an answer.

THE APPLICATION OF NATURAL PRIORITY
TO ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE

5.1 *Introduction*

In an attempt to determine the meaning of Aristotle and Aquinas' assertion of the natural priority of substance, the preceding chapter analysed the priorities of act to potency in the created composite. We found that form, as the cause of being and substance, is naturally prior to the composite and to matter. Aquinas' notion of subsistence pointed to the relationship between form and existence, and located the reason for subsistence in the communication of being to form. An analysis of efficient and formal causality will now show the relative priorities of *esse* and form in created substances. The cause of being in a substance is form, and form in turn is that by which something has existence.¹ There is thus a twofold composition in things, the second of which we must now address: the order of *matter* to *form*, and that of *form* to *esse*.²

In particular, does it make sense to speak of a natural priority of essence to existence, or vice-versa, in creatures? This question may at first sound naive, since all composition requires diversity and thus both principles of being are required, for Aquinas.³ Yet the diversity required for the hierarchy of beings illustrates an order, so there ought to be an order among the principles of being, as well. Moreover, earlier commentators as well as twentieth century interpreters disagree on the "key" metaphysical principle on which Aquinas' theory of participation is grounded, dividing into "esseist" or "essentialist" camps.⁴ Further, Aquinas

¹ *De ente et essentia* c. 1.

² *De subst. separ.*, c. 8: "Invenitur igitur in substantia composita ex materia et forma duplex ordo: unus quidem ipsius materiae ad formam; alius autem ipsius rei jam compositae ad esse participatum. Non enim est esse rei neque forma eius neque materia ipsius, sed aliquid adveniens rei per formam."

³ Although it should be noted that other thirteenth century thinkers rejected the real distinction between existence and essence, arguing that a difference between God and creature can be maintained through "degrees of potentiality" or other such notions, without resorting to real composition. E.g. Siger of Brabant, *Q. in Metaphysicam* q. 7 and ad 7, in: ed. W. Dunphy, ed. *Siger de Brabant, Quaestiones in Metaphysicam* (Louvain-la-Neuve 1981), pp. 35.83-36.6.

⁴ The problem of the proper approach to metaphysics is an issue fraught with epistemological problems, as well. See, e.g. Sr. Helen James John, *The Thomist Spectrum* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1967). A biased but scholarly discussion of the various positions on the real distinction

places the plenitude of perfection on the side of esse, which is contracted, limited and diversified by form, which points to the relative priority of esse, due to its role as the mediator between the First cause of being and creatures. In the order of acts, being is prior to form, in the sense that through existence a thing is completed.⁵

On the other side of the issue, however, there are arguments for the priority of form in Aquinas' metaphysics, and that existence is featured as a property of form: All the "divisiones entis" texts in the Commentary on the "Metaphysics"⁶ isolate ens per se as the focus of metaphysical investigation, which turns out to be substance and ultimately, form.⁷ Reflection on the Summa Theologiae's question on divine infinity⁸ shows that the plenitude of perfection found in subsistent esse flows from form. Thus, the question we have posed involves multiple subquestions, such as the relation of form to infinity and perfection, and the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic causes.⁹ Since Ipsium Esse Subsistens is naturally prior to all creatures, we shall include an analysis of divine simplicity, where esse is not contracted or determined but is universal and infinite.¹⁰ This analysis will accompany a study of finite esse and essence, and answer the following questions: "Is the principle of similitude between God and creature existence or essence, or both?"; and "Does this establish any priority within the causal relation between form and esse in the creature?"

can be found in: F. Cunningham, Essence and Existence in Thomism: A Mental vs. the "Real Distinction"? (University Press of America: New York, 1988).

⁵ De quatt. opp. c. 1: "In ordine enim principiorum formalium primum est esse, quia esse est primus actus... ideo omnes formae sequuntur ipsum esse in ordine actuum sive principiorum formalium."

⁶ There are a multitude of such texts. See, e.g. In 4 Meta. lectios 1, 4; In 5 Meta. lectios 9, 10; In 6 Meta. l. 2; In 7 Meta. lectios 1, 2; In 8 Meta. l. 1; In 9 Meta. l. 11.

⁷ For the most part, this is the approach of chapter four above. One recent interpreter takes this to be the best approach to Thomistic metaphysics: Lawrence Dewan, "St. Thomas, Metaphysics and Formal Causality" (Laval théologique et philosophique 36 [1980], 285-316); "St. Thomas, Joseph Owens, and Existence" (New Scholasticism 56 [1982], 399-441); "St. Thomas, Metaphysical Procedure and the Formal Cause" (New Scholasticism 63 [1989], 173-82).

⁸ S.T. I q. 7. We will return to this text in the analysis of this approach to Aquinas' metaphysics. See sections 5.4.1 and 5.4.3 below.

⁹ We have already broached this issue in reviewing the arguments of Aquinas for the necessity of a transcendental, or extrinsic efficient cause of being. In the present context however, the formal cause is present in both orders (extrinsic and intrinsic, as exemplar and immanent form), while the efficient cause of being is extrinsic only.

¹⁰ The analysis that follows omits reference to the Trinity but focuses on the relation of form and esse in the divine substance. Although there is no relation of cause and effect, but only of principle to principled within God (in the Trinity), the fundamental notions of essence and existence can be analysed from this perspective. We are choosing it primarily because of the role of infinity in the perfection of a thing, which God exemplifies.

5.2 *The Relative Priorities of Form and Esse*

Before introducing the question of the divine attributes, as well as other considerations which prove the mutual causality and lack of any natural priority of form to esse or vice-versa in the predicamental order, we should consider cases against our thesis. On the one hand, we analysed the views of “esseist” Thomists¹¹ such as William Carlo¹² who carry reductive existentialism to its extreme, and others such as W.N. Clarke¹³ and A. Little¹⁴ who develop similar positions, making essence either a purely negative limit principle (Little) or a limiting mode of esse (Clarke). In chapter one above, we considered Thomist existentialism from the perspective of three considerations: a) the requirement of a causal reductio to esse to guarantee the unity of metaphysics; b) Gilson’s attempt¹⁵ to transport Aristotle’s “substance” (οὐσία) into the Thomistic world intact, by means of a particular notion of the real distinction; and c) Aquinas’ notion of efficient causality on the transcendental level of creation, which was seen to make only esse the principle of similitude between the First Cause and creatures. There are, of course, several issues involved in these arguments, which can only be alluded to here. Some of these issues are the status of the possibles, the divine ideas and Platonic participation (all of which the “esseists” see as problematic for the existentialist interpretation), as well as the controversy over whether Aquinas attributed a doctrine of creation to Plato and Aristotle.¹⁶

¹¹ Some (e.g. Joyce Little, Towards a Thomist Methodology Toronto Studies in Theology, vol. 34 [Lewiston: Mellen Press, 1988], p. 57) prefer to label this approach “thin essence” Thomism—referring to the position that, for Aquinas, essence is merely a mode of esse.

¹² Carlo’s central work in this connection is entitled The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics (Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague, 1966).

¹³ See Clarke’s articles: “The Role of Essence within St. Thomas’ Essence-Existence Doctrine: Positive or Negative Principle?” (Tommaso d’Aquino [Symp. Roma] 6, 109-15); “What Cannot be Said in St. Thomas Aquinas’ Essence-Existence Doctrine” (New Scholasticism Aquinas Septicent. 1974; 19-39).

¹⁴ See Little’s book entitled The Platonic Heritage of Thomism (Dublin: Golden Eagle Books, 1950).

¹⁵ The attempt is found, for example, in the second chapter, “Beings and their Contingency, of his work L’Esprit de la Philosophie Médiévale (2nd ed.), Paris: Vrin, 1944. Tr. A.H.C. Downes, as The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy (New York: Scribner, 1940).

¹⁶ Although this “esseist” interpretation of Aquinas is generally held to deny the NeoPlatonic influence of the Ideas and participation, (at least in the thought of Gilson, although not regarding Clarke), it need not, for the participation maxim “every unreceived act is infinite” refers to esse. On the controversy of Aquinas’ attribution or lack of attribution of the notion of creation to the Greeks see, e.g., Mark Johnson, “Did St. Thomas Attribute a Doctrine of Creation to Aristotle?” (New Scholasticism 63 [1989], 129-55); c.f., Thomas Pegues, o.p., Commentaire français littéral de la “Somme Théologique” de saint Thomas d’Aquin, t. 3 (Toulouse: 1908), pp; 14-15; and A.D.Serullanges, o.p., who gives a more Gilsonian rendering, in his L’idée de création et ses réentissements en philosophie (Paris: Aubier), t. 1, pp. 261-62.

On the other side of the question, there are a few possible interpretations which emphasize *form* and formal causality instead of *esse* and efficient causality, in the thought of Aquinas. This interpretation is rarer, and the existentialist Thomists view it as closer to Giles of Rome's insight that existence needs an *extrinsic* principle of limitation to diversify it—diversity coming not from the agent but from the patient.¹⁷ The Thomists representing this interpretation are not as radical as Giles, however,¹⁸ and are not reductionists as are many of the existentialist Thomists. L.B. Geiger¹⁹ tries to rehabilitate the positive function of essence as a limiting principle of *esse*, in giving natural priority to formal participation, or “participation by similitude”, over and against “participation by composition” (his dispute being with C. Fabro²⁰ over the role of the real distinction in establishing the hierarchy in being). Lawrence Dewan, o.p.²¹ posits form as the focus of the science of metaphysics and argues for the intimacy, versus the dichotomy, of form and *esse* in the creature, from an analysis of the four causes, and from their identity in God. While Geiger's emphasis on form is a continuation of the Platonic revival in Thomism,²² Dewan's analysis is a return to the Aristotelian account²³ of *ens per se* as form, with an account of *esse* opposed to that of Gilson and his school. Next we reply to the positions of Carlo, Gilson and Fabro, and analyse their theories of the role of form in Aquinas'

¹⁷ See, e.g. W. Carlo, *The Ultimate Reducibility...* chapter 2. Giles' view, as Carlo represents it, stems from a misplaced notion of efficient causality as well as from a NeoPlatonic ascription of determinism to God, which is itself based on the imperfection that the emergence of multiplicity from the First Cause would introduce.

¹⁸ Indeed, they avoid the logical impossibility of giving essence a “preexistent” status as an extrinsic limitation principle, which was, later on, Suarez' contention with the real distinction (See Suarez' *Disputationes Metaphysicae* D. 31, S. 2 (Vives: Paris, [1861] ed. C. Berton), t. XXVI. We shall return to the problem of preexistent essences as dealt with by Aquinas in *De ente et essentia* c. 4 in our argument for the reciprocal causality of essence and *esse* in section 5.2.

¹⁹ See his book *La Participation dans la philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 1942)

²⁰ See his work entitled *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione* (Torino: Societa Editrice Internazionale, ed. 2a, 1950).

²¹ See his articles: “St. Thomas and the Principle of Causality” (in: ed. J.L. Allard, *Le philosophe dans la cité* [Paris: Alsatia, 1960], pp. 53-71; “St. Thomas, Metaphysics and Formal Causality” (*Laval théologique et philosophique* 36 [1980], 285-316; and “St. Thomas, Joseph Owens and Existence” (*New Scholasticism* 56 [1982], 399-441).

²² On the various twentieth century trends within Thomism, see, for example, Helen James John, *The Thomist Spectrum* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1967), with chapter 7 on the views of L.B. Geiger.

²³ This account is best exemplified in a less textual manner by Garrigou-Lagrange's manual style Thomism, e.g. *Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought*, tr. P. Cummins (London: Herder, 1950); *Dieu: Son Existence et sa nature*, 6me ed. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1946). We identify the Aristotelian emphasis with Garrigou-Lagrange because although he is primarily concerned with commenting on the *Summa*

metaphysics in order to determine whether form possesses any type of natural priority to esse on the predicamental level.

5.2.1 *Reply to the Thomist Existentialists: The Case for Esse's Natural Priority to Form?*

The three main types of arguments on which existentialist Thomists base their interpretation of the primacy of esse are, as we noted, a) the necessity for a unified first principle of being which guarantees the unity of the subject of metaphysics; b) an interpretation of the real distinction and the contingency of creatures which attempts to transport Aristotle's substance into Aquinas' metaphysics intact, and c) an emphasis on transcendental efficient causality of esse which argues for the natural priority of esse from divine efficient causality.

5.2.1.1 *Reply to "Modalist" Existentialists*

Carlo's position of "modalist" existentialism was seen to be a causal reduction to a single principle of being (esse) linking the finite to the infinite order and guaranteeing the unity of metaphysics' subject matter. His view was seen to rest on three ideas: First, esse is the sum of all perfections, while essence introduced inequality and imperfection; second, the incompatibility between essence and infinity, and third, a single principle of similitude between God and creature.

Several problems with the modalist existentialist argument must now be considered. At this point, a restatement of Carlo's argument is in order:²⁴

1. In itself, esse is infinite and perfect. God is esse ipsum, infinite and perfect. All perfections are identical with His essence, which is esse ipsum.
2. Creatures' esse participates in infinite esse. Since God's essence is reducible to esse ipsum, and all perfections in God are identical with His esse, esse is the sole principle of perfection in creatures. Thus, all metaphysical principles are ontologically posterior to esse, as dependent on it and as less perfect.
3. All differences of being (ens) are found in it since being is not a genus. Ens and esse are synonymous terms. Thus, the relation of essence to esse is one of a mode to an act, and not one of differences in relation to a genus.

Theologiae (and not the Aristotelian commentaries), his starting point and "key" is the Aristotelian division of being into potency and act.

²⁴ The initial statement of the argument is found in chapter one, section 1.2.1.

One recurring problem in each of the three stages of the argument is the exclusive identification of esse with perfection, both on the infinite and finite levels. The axiom of 1) above is accurate, but equally accurate is Aquinas' alliance of form with infinity and perfection.²⁵ A second problem is the limitation of creaturely participation to God's esse (and the neglect of formal similitude) in 2) above. A third problem is the leap from collapsing all perfections in God into ipsum esse to positing esse as the sole principle of perfection in creatures, which denies nonexistential notes of perfection in creatures and imposes divine simplicity on them. A fourth problem is the synonymy of "ens" and "esse" in 3) above. Although there are some texts, which aligned, may lead to the view of synonymy of these terms,²⁶ "ens" possesses its own specific meaning which covers act and potency,²⁷ and "esse" has its own significance aside from "ens", Aquinas says. Ens has four particular divisions: 1) the real, of reason, and the true;²⁸ 2) the essential and accidental;²⁹ 3) substance and accident;³⁰ and 4) act and potency.³¹ Esse contains a threefold division: The quiddity, or that which corresponds to the definition

²⁵ S.T. I.7 treats the infinity of God in the context of divine form. Modalist existentialism has some justification if one takes S.T. I.4 (on divine perfection) on its own, for perfection indicates the possession of being in the highest and fullest mode (without limitation or participation: S.T. I.4.1 ad 3; I 4.2 ad 3). However, even here, the fulness of esse refers not only to the causal preeminent unity of ipsum esse in God, but also to the possession of specific formalities (S.T. I 4.2c; I 4.3 ad 3).

²⁶ For example, one can isolate one meaning of ens, viz., the act of being, and make it synonymous with esse as the act of a being.

²⁷ See S.T. I 77.1c; C.G. III.7; II.54 as well as Aquinas' treatment of the divisions of ens per se in In 5 Meta. 1.9, where ens is divided into the essential and accidental, substance and accidents and into potency and act. De ente et essentia c.1 begins by dividing ens per se into the ten predicaments, on the one hand, and the truth of proposition, on the other.

²⁸ De ente c.1: "...sicut in V Metaphysice Philosophus dicit, ens per se dupliciter dicitur: uno modo quod dividitur per decem genera, alio modo quod significat propositionum veritatem. Horum autem differentia est quia secundo modo potest dici ens omne illud de quo affirmativa propositio formari potest, etiam si illud in re nihil ponat; per quem modum privationes et negationes entia dicuntur...Sed primo modo non potest dici ens nisi quod aliquid in re ponit; unde primo modo caecitas et huiusmodi non sunt entia..."

²⁹ In 5 Meta. 1.9 (#885): "...ens dicitur quoddam secundum se, et quoddam secundum accidens...divisio entis secundum se et secundum accidens, attenditur secundum quod aliquid praedicatur de aliquo per se vel per accidens..."

³⁰ In 5 Meta. 1.9 (#885): "...Ens igitur dividitur in substantiam et accidens, secundum absolutam entis considerationem, sicut ipsa albedo in se considerata dicitur accidens, et homo substantia..." Accidental being differs from accidents, he goes on to explain, because it considers not just a thing (viz. the accident) but the relation of accident to substance. In this way the proposition "the man is white" is an accidental being, but not an accident (#885).

³¹ In 5 Meta. 1.9 (#889) divides ens per se into extramental being, intramental being and act/potency. Aquinas continues to explain Aristotle's division of act/potency (#897) in the realm of predicamental being, logical being, and substance and accidents. Meta. 9 deals with act and potency in detail, as a division of ens per se.

(“ipsa quidditas vel natura rei”); the act of an essence (“ipse actus essentiae”); and third, the copula signifying the composition or division in judgments.³² The first and second esse are real, and the third is intramental, referring to the being the intellect produces in its analysis of real things.³³

If “ens” and “esse” are not synonyms, then the fact that being is not a genus cannot establish modal existentialism. Rather, it only affirms that all divisions and instances of being are intrinsic to it. Nor can the fact that neither God nor being are in a genus³⁴ lend support to the identification of Ipsium Esse and ens, for Aquinas distinguishes the name (“ens”) from its imposition (“esse”).³⁵ Gilson’s view that esse cannot be conceptualised also implies the lack of synonymy between the terms.³⁶ It is only by its participation in the immediate intuition of existing things by the senses that the intellect grasps existence, since its concept of being is abstract and general.³⁷

³² In 1 Sent. d.33 q.1 a.1 ad 1. This division is thus between real and logical being. It is also formulated at In 1 Sent. d.19 q.5 a.1 ad 1; In 3 Sent. d.6 q.2 a.2; S.T. I 3.4 ad 2. At In 3 Sent. d.6 q.2 a.2, the subdivision of esse in real being (essence or existence) describes esse as “actus entis resultans ex principiis rei”. The being of the composition results from the esse of the thing (In 3 Sent. d.6 q.2 a.2) and the esse of the thing results from the thing’s principles (In 3 Sent. d.33 q.1 a.1 ad 1; In 1 Sent. d.19 q.5 a.1).

³³ In 1 Sent. d.19 q.5 a.1.

³⁴ Aquinas proves this in C.G. I 25. Carlo often links God and esse through the notion that esse is “the thesaurus of perfection including within itself all modes of being” (Carlo p. 100). Both such a notion of being and its link to God would be impossible if being were generic, he states (p. 100).

³⁵ C.G. I 25 [10]: “...nomen autem rei a quidditate imponitur, sicut nomen entis ab esse...” On the distinction of a name from its imposition, see also De ver. I.1 ad 3; In 1 Sent. d.25 q.1 a.4. See S.T. I.13.2 ad 2: “...in significatione nominum, aliud est quandoque a quo imponitur nomen ad significandum, et id ad quod significandum nomen imponitur, sicut hoc nomen lapis imponitur ab eo quod laedit pedem, non tamen imponitur ad hoc significandum quod significet laedens pedem, sed ad significandam quandam speciem corporum; alioquin omne laedens pedem esset lapis...” Aquinas is referring here to the more eminent way in which God possesses perfections signified by His names (imposed from the divine processions). Taking this text as an example of the relation between names and their impositions, one could argue that the complex concept “ens” encompasses “esse” (that from which it is imposed) and contains the perfections that “esse” signifies in a more eminent or inclusive way.

³⁶ “It is not enough to say that being [viz. ens] is conceivable apart from existence [viz. esse]; in a certain sense it must be said that being is always conceived by us apart from existence, for the very simple reason that existence itself cannot possibly be conceived.” (L.-M. Regis, “The Knowledge of Existence in St. Thomas Aquinas” [Modern Schoolman 2 (1951) p.124]. Gilson makes the distinction between existence as a concept and as a conception: “...every time we said that esse is inconceivable, we intended to convey that, not being an essence, it cannot be grasped by a conceptus. Naturally, this does not prevent it from being an object of ‘conception’. Otherwise, how could it be known?” (Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers [Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952], p. 223).

³⁷ The question of the intellect’s knowledge of esse is closely related to its knowledge of singulars, for Aquinas. On this topic he says: “Impossibile est intellectum nostrum secundum praesentis vitae statum, quo passibili corpori coniungitur, aliquid intelligere in act nisi convertendo se ad phantasmata” (S.T. I

Returning to the first part of the modalist existentialist argument, there is the fifth problem, which concerns the axiom that esse as such is infinite.³⁸ While modalist existentialists deduce the intrinsic modes of esse from this premise, Aquinas actually used it to prove the real distinction between essence and esse.³⁹ The modalist existentialist argument proceeds to deduce the perfection of esse in creatures from the identity of God as infinite esse (steps 1 and 2). This leads to the problem of adopting God as the starting point of metaphysics.⁴⁰ The relation between God as Ipsum Esse and the being which is the subject of metaphysics is a much debated topic, however, and requires substantiation prior to commencing an argument for modalist existentialism.⁴¹ Aquinas indicates that it is ens commune, and not Ipsum Esse that is the subject of metaphysics, for the philosopher studies divine beings (like God and angels) only insofar as they are the principles of being as being.⁴² Further, the subject of metaphysics is marked by composition (of potency and act)⁴³ and therefore cannot be the simple esse implied by modalist existentialists.⁴⁴

84.7). On the role of the senses and imagination in the process of knowing real singulars, cf. De ver. 2.6; 10.8.

³⁸ John Wippel discusses the axiomatic quality of this claim in his book Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas (Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy vol. 10) (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1984), pp. 158-160 (see esp. p. 160 #65).

³⁹ De ente et essentia c.4, e.g.

⁴⁰ Cf. footnote #105 in chapter one above, regarding Hoyo, O'Grady and Carlo.

⁴¹ The issue of the precise type of immateriality which serves as the foundation for metaphysical demonstration was taken up in a dispute between Joseph Owens and the Gilsonian school, on the one hand, and John Wippel (for example) on the other. See John Wippel, "Metaphysics and Separatio in Thomas Aquinas"; "Essence and Existence in the De Ente, Ch. 4" in his book Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas (Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy Vol. 10), pp. 69-132. References to Gilson and Owens are found in Wippel. On the Gilsonian approach, cf. John Knasas, The Preface to Thomistic Metaphysics: A Contribution to the Neo-Thomist Debate on the Start of Metaphysics (New York: Peter Lang, 1990).

⁴² In de Trin. V.4,c. Cf. In Meta. Proemium.

⁴³ See C.G. II 54: "...Sic igitur patet quod compositio actus et potentiae est in plus quam compositio formae et materiae; unde materia et forma dividunt substantiam materiale, 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."

⁴⁴ The relationship between the "separate" nature of the subject matter of metaphysics (see In Meta. Proemium) and the type of natural priority that modalist existentialists ascribe to esse is an important issue and will be considered later. Carlo (p. 112) does claim that esse considered separately is not the subject matter of metaphysics (for the latter is a composite of esse and essence), and his investigation then commences with theological principles, along the lines of Gilson's notion of Christian philosophy. His interpretation of Aquinas' "Christianisation" of Greek metaphysics rests on a Gilsonian idea of

We can now make the following conclusions regarding the argument for modalist existentialism as reconstructed from the arguments of Carlo and his followers. The first step of the argument was the alliance of esse, infinity and perfection and the collapse of all perfections of God into esse. This was criticized on the basis of the exclusivist character of the claims, which denied the perfection of form on the divine level. The second step of the argument deduced the notion that esse is the sole principle of perfection in creatures from the description of esse in God, such that esse has priority in relation to all other metaphysical principles. Finally, the third step in the argument proposed a “modalist” vision of being, where all metaphysical principles and differences in being are found within esse, which is identical with ens. We have noted several problems with the argument and its assumptions, such as the exclusive identification of esse with infinity and perfection, the confusion of esse commune and Ipsium Esse, and of ens and esse, all of which led to erroneous deductions. In the next section we will analyse Aquinas’ theory of “modes” and conclude that Carlo misinterpreted Aquinas’ sense of the term in relation to form and esse.

The three ideas on which Carlo’s modalist existentialism rests must now be examined. The first idea was that esse is the sum of all perfections, a claim which based the identity of esse as the sole principle of perfection and similitude. In sections 5.2 and 5.3 below, the perfection that is form is analysed from both the finite and infinite perspectives. Here, however, the lack of natural priority of esse to form (and the corresponding relative perfection of form in relation to esse) can be deduced from the following facts. First, esse is not a subject for Aquinas, and thus is not the sole principle of perfection. Second, while the modalist interpretation emphasizes a “maximalist” sense of esse, it ignores the more foundational “minimalist” understanding. Third, Carlo’s denial of a real distinction between esse and form constitutes a denial of the perfection of form.

Taking each of these ideas in turn, we can say that since esse is not a subject, but rather a nonpredicamental accident, and since substances are naturally prior to accidents as separable subjects, then esse is not naturally prior to form. Esse is separable and therefore a subject only

metaphysical investigation, which starts from the datum of revelation that God is pure esse. From the notion of esse as pure perfection and as identical with God’s essence, the conclusions of modalist existentialism follow for Carlo, Clarke, Connor, Hoye and O’Grady. The relation of the order of metaphysical investigation and the proof of God’s existence and attributes is often considered in light of the real distinction and its emergence in metaphysical proof. See, e.g. the discussion of the metaphysical

as subsistent, in God. In creatures, esse (referred to as esse commune) does not exist “separately” from individual existents, except conceptually.⁴⁵ Finite subjects “are” not esse, but are described as habens esse.⁴⁶ As the intrinsic principle “common” to every entity, esse cannot be naturally prior as separable, and as distinct from God, creaturely esse cannot be naturally prior as “origin”. In section 5.4 below form and esse in God are discussed, to conclude that perfection in God is not limited to esse.

The second reason one cannot simply state that esse is the sum of all perfections and then base a modalist metaphysics on this claim is that Carlo and his followers miss the “minimalist” understanding of esse in favor of a “maximalist” reading. That is, the sense of esse as esse ut actus intensivus, as the source of all limiting modes of esse, ignores the minimalist yet foundational grasp of esse as esse in actu,⁴⁷ in the existential judgment. This meaning of esse differs from the former in that it puts the subject beyond nothingness, and is something the thing “has”. In short, Carlo has confused the judgment of attribution (*how* a thing is) and that of existence (*that* it is). The natural priority assigned to esse fails to take account of the minimalist meaning and is thus misapplied.

The third reason Carlo cannot defend modal existentialism through making esse the unqualified sum of all perfections is that his elevation of esse ignores the real distinction between esse and form. Essence is only a negative limit principle and in the end the real distinction is merely logical⁴⁸ according to Carlo and his followers. While Aquinas does allow for a relation of natural priority between something and nothing (in the case of the creation, and in the case of the priority of non ens to esse on the side of the creature in creation), this is not the priority that Aquinas envisions between form and esse.⁴⁹ From our refutation of the modalist interpretation of the notion of esse as the “sum of all perfections”, it can be seen that the first, second, third and fifth senses of natural priority do not apply to esse in the way that they think.

judgment of separation in Wippel, Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas (Washington, D.C.: C.U.A. Press, 1984), pp. 69-132).

⁴⁵ See C.G. II 52; C.G. I 26. Here, Aquinas gives a second reason for the error of some who identify God with creaturely esse.

⁴⁶ See, e.g. In de divinibus nominibus 5.2 #658-#659.

⁴⁷ The meaning of this type of esse is found in In 1 Peri. 1.5 #22. Cf. Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers p. 209; 220; 230-231.

⁴⁸ Another existentialist Thomist who sees essence’s metaphysical status as incompatible with the notion of creation ex nihilo is John Deck. See his article “St. Thomas Aquinas and the Language of Total Dependence” (Dialogue 6 [1967] 74-88).

⁴⁹ See section 5.3 below.

Through confusing esse commune and Ipsum Esse, natural priority as “separable” and as “origin” are misapplied, for only in the case of God is esse a separable origin. Through ignoring the signification of esse in the existential judgment, “absolute” natural priority is misapplied, for esse cannot be described as cognitively and causally prior without reference to its analogous senses. Finally, through denying the real distinction, natural priority as “perfection” cannot be applied to esse, for it is not the exclusive bearer of the term.

The second main idea on which Carlo’s theory rests is the juxtaposition of essence and infinity. In sections 5.3 and 5.4 below, the positive role of form will be discussed, as well as form’s alliance with infinity, refuting Carlo. Carlo’s view was seen to rest on his interpretation of the claim that in itself, esse is infinite. Since God is esse ipsum, and therefore infinite and perfect, creaturely esse is a participation in infinite esse, and all other metaphysical principles are limiting grades of non ens, he said. Esse is the thesaurus of perfection from which all else flows. The type of natural priority applied to esse from this analysis combines all five senses of natural priority, viz. that of separability, “absolute” natural priority, natural priority as proximity to a principle, perfection and origin. That is, the Platonic resolution to a separate principle of universal being signifies intensive causality and perfection (not mere “facticity”). As well, the agreement between intellect and reality occurs in the notion of universal causation, such that the first and most universal principle of knowledge coincides with ipsum esse subsistens, to which every being owes its grade and origin.⁵⁰

Carlo’s proposed alliance of esse with infinity and consequent denial of infinity to form stems partly from his confusion of God with the subject of metaphysics. His starting point of esse as infinite led Carlo to adopt God as the starting point of metaphysics, it was shown, and eventually to adopt God as its subject matter as well. This was accomplished through arguing *from* the identity of infinity and esse in God *to* the perfection of esse in creatures. The theory of modalism completed the deduction so that all beings are taken as modes, or various degrees, of the perfection that is self-subsistent esse. We concluded that the various natural priorities of esse which Carlo introduces involve panentheism.

Carlo did agree with Aquinas by making esse’s “separate” quality responsible for its primacy both in commonness or predication (signalling “absolute” natural priority) and in being.⁵¹

⁵⁰ See W. Hoye, Actualitas Omnium Actuum, pp. 45-46.

⁵¹ Hoye (Actualitas Omnium Actuum, p. 68) makes this point. Aquinas distinguished two uses of the attribute “common”: First, commonness in predication, and second, commonness in causality. See In de

Unfortunately, the relationship between “absolute” natural priority and natural priority as “separability” and “origin” cannot be drawn through assimilating Ipsum Esse with esse commune, since Aquinas refuses to identify esse commune (existence in general) with self-subsisting existence.⁵² Also, God’s perfection and infinity are not derived solely from esse, even when God is considered in Himself.⁵³

The third main idea on which Carlo’s theory rests is that of a single principle of similitude between God and creature, which is said to guarantee the unity of metaphysics’ subject matter. Only by a “reduction” of metaphysical principles to a unity can the two notions of metaphysics as the study of being qua being and as knowledge of the First Cause of being be reconciled, he said. The primacy of esse requires a collapse of form into esse for Carlo.

This view is closely related to the conclusions present in the second main idea above, and can be discredited on a number of counts. First, it is unclear what type of reduction he has in mind. The attempt to collapse the subject matter of metaphysics into the cause of that subject matter is a confusion of common being and divine being, which are distinct as an effect from its cause.⁵⁴ Aquinas’ Proemium to his Commentary on Aristotle’s “Metaphysics” distinguishes metaphysics from first philosophy on this basis, as proved by different grades of immateriality: Ens commune embraces being and its properties as these are *sometimes* found in matter, whereas ens divinum comprises beings with negative immateriality, i.e. those that are *never* found in matter (God and the angels). These latter are the first causes. In In de Trinitate VI.1 he distinguishes the sciences by method, moreover, showing that even though both metaphysics (which studies being and its universal properties) and divine science (which studies the first causes) use the method proper to the intellect, namely, that of *analysis* or “resolutio”,⁵⁵ the *terms* of the method differ according to the science: When the intellect reasons secundum rem, that is, according to *extrinsic* causes in the process of analysis, the term is the simplest, primary causes, which are the separate substances. When the intellect reasons secundum

Trin. 5.4c; In 4 Sent. d. 49 q. 1 a. 1, sol. ad 3. Aquinas also speaks of commonness in causality in De pot. 3.5c.

⁵² C.G. II 52; De pot. 7.2 ad 4; S.T. I 3.4 ad 1.

⁵³ On these points, see section 5.3 below. Also, see: D. Walker, “Trinity and Creation in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas” (Thomist 57 [1993] 443-455).

⁵⁴ Aquinas usually distinguishes ens commune from God by pointing out the modes of addition ens commune can acquire, whereas the infinity of God harbors no addition: S.T. I 3.4 ad 2. Cf. #172 below.

⁵⁵ It is in resolutio that reason is said to grasp one truth from many, going from particular to universal, or from effect to cause.

rationem, that is, according to *intrinsic* causes in the process of analysis, the term is being as such and its properties. The reduction of which Carlo speaks is not found, therefore, on the level of analysis or “*resolutio*”, except in that the cause of the subject matter of metaphysics is God, and this is the final term of the study. What Carlo requires for his argument however, is an identity of metaphysical principles with esse on the level of being. The two texts analysed have shown that there is no “reduction” of metaphysics to divine science on the level of reason, except in the sense of a causal resolution to the latter; indeed, there is no identity of the two sciences’ subject matter. What justification is there then, for a *metaphysical* reduction such as Carlo’s?

The only possible evidence for such a view is the virtual containment of the reality of the effect in its cause, a point which Carlo fails to consider, and which still avoids a strict identity of being.⁵⁶ What we shall prove in sections that follow is that the primacy of esse, even in the transcendental order, does not establish its natural priority to form, for both are distinct and related modes of causality.

Finally, the reduction Carlo proposes involves a denial of the natural priority of Ipsum Esse it is meant to defend, since modalist existentialism involves panentheism, the view that the world is a part of God but does not exclude His creativity or divinity.⁵⁷ The mixed relation of truth and creation that we discussed in the texts of Aquinas is exchanged for a more immanent view of God and ultimately a denial of His natural priority to creatures.

In sum, there are four problems with modalist existentialism: a) the attempt to “reduce” matter and form to esse in a causal, scientific explanation through causes not only fails to guarantee the unity of metaphysics through its subject matter, but b) also fails to distinguish orders through denying the nonlimiting role of form in God. As well, c) the erroneous deduction of esse’s natural priority as a metaphysical principle from the fact of its primacy, and d) the mistaken disassociation of form and infinity, all weaken Carlo’s case such that a metaphysical reduction is impossible, at least in the sense that he envisions it.

⁵⁶ Although Carlo insists that “reducibility” is not equivalent to “identity” (p. 114: for he wants to maintain the real distinction), he argues throughout chapter four of his work in such a way as to make form and matter lesser or even deficient (“debile”: p. 121, e.g.) esses and two forms of limitation from below. He has confused predicamental metaphysical principles with their cause, in that form is not limited in God. This point relates directly to his identification of form with negation and limit, which contradicts, we have noted, S.T.’s question on divine infinity (I.7).

⁵⁷ Panentheism is distinguished from pantheism in that the latter holds that God is identified with the world (deism holds that the world and God are two separate entities), while the former holds that God’s being exceeds the world but is part of it.

5.2.1.1.1 Aquinas on "Modes"

We turn now to an underlying problem of terminology. In what way do the modalist existentialists use the term "mode", and how does it compare to Aquinas' use of the term?

Modalist existentialists hold the view that esse is the sole metaphysical principle of perfection, and that other metaphysical principles are "modes" of esse. They equate "mode" with "determination" (in the essential order) and "intrinsic limitation" and thus with relative imperfection. Modes distinguish God from creatures through their introduction of plurality and composition (of essence and existence).⁵⁸ Two facts indicate the modalist existentialists' identification of esse with God. First, modes (e.g. essences) are said to "flow" from esse through the efficient causality of the creative act. Second, considered in itself (without limitation), esse is said to be the totality of perfection, that is, to be Ipsium Esse.⁵⁹ We have already indicated the problem with placing God at the beginning of metaphysical investigation.⁶⁰ Is the relation between esse and essence (and other metaphysical principles) that between God and creature, for Aquinas, and how are modes and esse related, for him? Does "mode" signify formal limitation, or some other reality?

Aquinas used the term "mode" in several senses, and was familiar with at least five meanings of the term. First, "mode" can refer to the "general way of being" of something, such as being as participated or as absolute. Henry of Ghent used this sense of "mode" to describe the threefold existence of a nature: In the mind, in things and in itself, where it has "essential

⁵⁸ See Carlo p. 112, for example.

⁵⁹ For both of these statements, see Carlo p. 112.

⁶⁰ Although Gilson adopts the "theological" order of investigation in his interpretation of Aquinas' metaphysics, he also admits that St. Thomas encountered God as "the pure act of being" only at the end of his metaphysics. See E. Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas [tr. L.K. Shook], 5th ed. (New York: Random House, 1956), pp. 84-95. The inconsistency of these statements deserves attention. Gilson taught that medieval thinkers such as Bonaventure, Aquinas and Scotus all held philosophies distinct from their theologies, because they follow the theological, and not the philosophical order (that is, their philosophical arguments descend from God to creatures, not vice-versa). See Gilson, The Philosopher and Theology [tr. C. Gilson] (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 95. For his criticisms of reconstructions of Aquinas' philosophy by following the philosophical order, see Gilson The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas p. 442 #33; pp. 21-22. To interpret Aquinas' philosophy as using the philosophical (vs. the theological) method is to present "philosophia ad mentem sancti Thomae" as though it were a "philosophia ad mentem Cartesii" (p. 443). Cf. Gilson, Elements of Christian Philosophy (New York: Random House, 1960) p. 290, #42. Gilson finds the distinction between the two orders in C.G. II.4.

being”.⁶¹ Although he does not adopt Henry’s (originally Avicenna’s) threefold *modi essendi* with respect to the nature,⁶² Aquinas does concur in his presentation of broad modes of being as participated and absolute, and narrower modes of being as the categories.⁶³ This first meaning of “mode” is similar to the Augustinian definition of mode accepted by Aquinas, as “some determination according to a specific measure”.⁶⁴ Here, measure extends to all created being (not just quantity) and refers to substance as its limitation according to its own principles.⁶⁵ The modes of determination of a subject include modification regarding substantial being and accidental being.⁶⁶ Modes, as determinations, here signify “to confer a perfection” rather than to “limit” a perfection.⁶⁷

The second possible meaning of “mode” concerns the transcendentals, as general and specific *modi essendi*. “Transcendentals” (being, unity, truth, goodness, beauty) are general

⁶¹ See Henry of Ghent, *Quodl.* III q.9: “Est igitur intelligendum quod circa quidditatem et naturam rei cuiuscumque triplicem contingit habere intellectum verum et unum falsum. Triplicem quidem habet intellectum verum sicut et tres modos habet in esse. Unum enim habet esse naturae extra in rebus, alterum vero habet esse rationis, tertium vero habet esse essentiae. Animal enim acceptum cum accidentibus suis in singularibus est res naturalis; acceptum vero cum accidentibus suis in anima est res rationis; acceptum vero secundum se est res essentiae de qua dicitur quod esse eius est prius quam esse eius naturae vel rationis, sicut simplex est prius composito.” (*Quodlibeta Magistri Henrici Goethals a Gandavo Doctoris Solemnis* Vol. 1, fol. 61 0. (Repr. Louvain, 1961). Cf. *Summa* a. 43 q.2 (= *Quaestiones Ordinariae*) Vol. 2, fol. 9E. (Repr. St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1953).

⁶² Aquinas limits the “threefold mode” here to that of consideration. See his *Quodl.* VIII 1.1; *De ente et essentia* III [2]-[3].

⁶³ See, e.g. *De subst. sep.* c.8 (#43): “Sed considerandum est quod ea quae a primo ente esse participant, non participant esse secundum universalem modum essendi, secundum quod est in primo principio, sed particulariter secundum quemdam determinatum essendi modum qui convenit huic generi vel huic speciei.” Cf. *In de div. nom.* I 1.1 (#29). For Henry, all categorical being has the *ratio* or mode of existing of participated being (*Quodl.* V, q.2: Vol 1, fols. 196C-197C). This general mode of categorical being is subdivided into two other modes of being, viz. substance (subsisting being) and accident (inherent being), and the various accidents constitute further *modi essendi*. (*Quodl.* V, q.2). Aquinas presents much the same picture in his discussions on the modes of being in *De ver.* I.1 and on the terminology and analogy of being. See *In 1 Peri.* l. 6 #39; *In IV Meta.* 1.1. The treatment of participated versus subsistent being is found in Aquinas’ *In de Hebdomadibus*, for example.

⁶⁴ *S.T.* I-II 49.2c.

⁶⁵ *S.T.* I 45.7c. In this sense of the term, “mode” is the way in which quality relates to substance, for quality is a determination of substance according to some measure, that is, a disposition of parts among which there exists a certain order (*S.T.* I-II 49.2c).

⁶⁶ *S.T.* I-II 49.2c. In *S.T.* II-II 27.6, Aquinas again accepts the Augustinian definition of “mode” as “the measure which nature appoints to a thing”. According to his theory of participation, the mode is found in the measure essentially and in the measured, relatively.

⁶⁷ The two senses of “determination” can be illustrated by an example from ordinary language. As conferring a perfection, determination is expressed in the following example: “Electing one candidate over another determines the kind of government we will have”. Determination can also mean “to limit a

determinations or qualities of being, coextensive or convertible with being but not explicit in the term ens itself; nor are they conceptually synonymous.⁶⁸ They are universal qualities of ens in that they belong to everything that exists, and transcend the ten Aristotelian categories of being.⁶⁹ Aquinas derives the transcendentals as “modes” of being because he agrees with Aristotle that nothing can be added to being in the way a specific difference is added to a genus, or as an accident is added to a subject, because there is nothing except being, and being is not a genus.⁷⁰ Some things add to being, however, as expressing a mode (modus) of it which is not expressed by the term “being” itself, and this can occur in two ways, viz., in the expression of a particular mode of being and of a general mode of being.⁷¹ Particular or special modes of being signify distinct and exclusive content, such as substance’s ens per se; while general modes of being⁷² express that which follows on every being, as considered in itself,⁷³ or as ordered to another.⁷⁴ The second “transcendental” sense of “mode” refers to the properties of being and the wealth of its content.⁷⁵

The third sense of “mode” is that of the distinction between “modes of being” and “modes of signification”. Modes of signification differ from modes of being because we know things in the mode of human knowledge as immaterial, not material in the manner of a material thing.⁷⁶ The notion of modi significandi is developed by Aquinas to explain the limited indirect human knowledge of God.⁷⁷ While the names of God are taken from creaturely perfections, they exist in a more eminent way in God. With regard to what they signify (id quod significant),

perfection”, as when we say, “the number of republican voters determines the possibility of a republican majority”.

⁶⁸ De ver. I, 1 explains the various transcendentals or general modes of being as conceptual additions added onto the notion of being (ens).

⁶⁹ As implicit in the concept of ens, the transcendentals (including ens itself) belong to everything that exists, since they echo the all-encompassing universality of ens.

⁷⁰ Aristotle denied being as a genus in Meta. III, and Aquinas derives his transcendentals in De ver. I, 1.

⁷¹ Aquinas uses this transcendental sense of “mode” in De ver. I, 1.

⁷² The general modes of being are the transcendentals, as such.

⁷³ This first general mode expresses something in being in an affirmative or in a negative manner (res and unum).

⁷⁴ This second general mode of being is either according to the division of one from another (aliquid) or according to a thing’s agreement with another, either with the faculty of striving (bonum) or with the intellect (verum).

⁷⁵ This second sense does not refer to second intentions (genus, species, etc), which belong to the domain of logic.

⁷⁶ S.T. I 85.1 explains that truth is possible despite the different modes of being in the thing and in the intellect.

⁷⁷ S.T. I 13.3, e.g.

the perfections apply eminently to God, but with regard to their modus significandi, they are not said properly of Him, since they are signified in human speech.⁷⁸ There is a proportion between modes of being and understanding, since types of forms determine types of knowledge.⁷⁹

The fourth and fifth senses of “mode” apply more easily to the modalist existentialists’ use of the term. A common medieval sense of “mode” is found in the Augustinian division whereby things are related according to “mode, species and order”.⁸⁰ Here, “mode” is a thing’s relation to its efficient cause. Henry understands “mode” in this division as “determinate esse”,⁸¹ which is similar to Augustine’s and Aquinas’ sense of the term here as a determinate measure or limit of perfection which is the term of creation.

Finally, “mode” can be taken as that which characterises a thing and distinguishes it from others. Aquinas says that different things have different modes of being. Bodily things exist only as material things; incorporeal things lack matter, but their mode of being is distinguished from God’s, because they are not their own esse.⁸²

The first, fourth and fifth senses of “mode” are closest to the modalist existentialist usage, where the term applies to forms as limited gradations of infinite esse. These senses all involve the Augustinian definition of mode as “a certain determination according to a certain measure”, where the measure (infinite esse) determines the mode (the creature’s degree of perfection). A central text on the relation between mode, God and creature in Aquinas is his discussion on the essence of goodness⁸³ (and the parallel treatment on the essence of sin⁸⁴). The essence of goodness in a thing consists, he says, in mode, species and order (echoing Augustine).

⁷⁸ S.T. I 12-13; esp. 13.3.

⁷⁹ Different things have different modes of being. Bodily things exist only as individual material things; incorporeal things lack matter, but their mode of being falls short of God’s, because they are not their own esse. See S.T. I 12.4; In 2 Meta. l.13; De ver. V.8 (3).

⁸⁰ In commenting on the Wisdom text (Wisdom 11.21) which says that God has ordered all things according to number, weight and measure, Augustine develops a theory of the Good. “Number” becomes “species”, “measure” becomes “modus” and “weight” becomes “order”. See De ordine I.10. Aquinas adopted Augustine’s definition of order in S.T. I 96.3; I 5.5; I-II 85.4.

⁸¹ Henry understands “species” as the form which gives esse simpliciter, and “order” is form as related to an end. See Summa questionum ordinarius, Vol. I, art. 72, q.3 (1520 ed., reprinted, 2 vols.).

⁸² See S.T. I 12.4; In 2 Meta. l. 1; 13; De ver. V.8 (3).

⁸³ S.T. I 5.5.

⁸⁴ S.T. I-II 85.4.

The form is the species (“number”), the order is the form’s relation to its final cause (“weight”) and the degree of perfection of a thing in relation to its measure is the form’s mode.⁸⁵

Unlike Aquinas, the modalist existentialists imply that forms are modes, rather than making modes qualities of forms. Further, they make modes identical with (and so inseparable from) substances, while Aquinas distinguishes between types of modes, and makes those which are qualities separable from substance.⁸⁶ The modalist existentialists thus misuse the term “mode” and confuse it with substantial forms.⁸⁷ In so relating finite form and infinite *esse*, they espouse panentheism, the theory that the world is included in God’s being without exhausting it.⁸⁸

In this connection, Aquinas’ critique of Arab causality established that a universal cause has the ability to bring about many effects without exhausting itself in any one or relying on any other cause beyond itself.⁸⁹ The modalist existentialists accept this critique but distinguish God and creature only by saying that God is not an individual, for He is the fulness of *esse*, and individuation requires a limited mode of *esse*.⁹⁰ Further, they deny any emphasis on the distinction between God and creature through efficient causality, (that is, through an agent

⁸⁵ *S.T.* I 5.5c. In defining mode, species and order, he says: “Praeexistitur autem ad formam determinatio sive commensuratio principiorum, seu materialium, seu efficientium ipsam: et hoc significatur per modum, unde dicitur quod ‘mensura modum praefigit.’ Ipsa autem forma significatur per speciem, quia per formam unumquodque in specie constituitur...Ad formam autem consequitur inclinatio ad finem...quia unumquodque, in quantum est actu, agit, et tendit in id quod sibi convenit secundum suam formam. Et hoc pertinet ad pondus et ordinem...”

⁸⁶ *S.T.* I 67.3. As light is to the sun and as heat is to the substantial form of fire, so are active qualities related to substances. Only substantial forms are separable as capable of existing without their accidents, and qualities do not enjoy this ability: “...Lux autem non est forma substantialis aeris, alioquin ea recedente corrumpetur. Unde non potest esse forma substantialis solis...”

⁸⁷ Although there is perhaps some warrant for the association between modes and forms, the modalist existentialists fail to use it. Aquinas does relate the two notions in his discussion of the nature of grace in the soul (*S.T.* I-II 110.2). Grace is a quality, modification or accidental form (ad 2) acting on the soul like a formal cause (ad 1). One has to read “quality” as “mode” here, to accept the connection. For other associations of the terms, cf. *S.T.* II-II 27.6 (man’s love of God); I-II 49.2 (habits as qualities); *In 5 Meta.* l. 16 (quality as difference and as mode). In no text, however, is mode identified as form or substance.

⁸⁸ Pantheism, on the other hand, denies the transcendence of God and identifies Him with creation. On the definition of these terms, see: A.P. Martinich, “Pantheism”, in ed. R. Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 556; V. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), pp. 172-173.

⁸⁹ *De pot.* 3.4c. See Hoye p. 138 for a confirmation of the modalist existentialist belief.

⁹⁰ See, e.g. Hoye p. 141. The text here is *De pot.* 7.2 ad 5. Cf. *De pot.* 7.3c; *S.T.* I 4.3 ad 2. Hoye criticizes Geiger for “cutting the line of separation [between God and creatures] too deeply”, stating that the distinction between infinite *esse* and its modes suffices, as long as the language of participation is used (*Hoye* p. 142).

which by its activity produces existence or change in another⁹¹ and fail to explain the precise way in which infinite esse is present in its limited modes.⁹² In stressing the nongeneric character of ens,⁹³ they deny the duality of causal principles in God as well as creatures,⁹⁴ as well as Aquinas' view that God's esse is never "received", even in a contracted way, by creatures.⁹⁵ A final consequence of their neglect of duality is their failure to explain the circulation of being as procession and assimilation.⁹⁶

5.2.1.2 Reply to the "Theological" Existentialists

The second type of existentialist Thomism which stresses the role of esse at the expense of form, is found in Gilson's notion of Aristotelian substance within Aquinas' metaphysics.⁹⁷ As indicated in chapter one, Gilson interprets Aquinas to have "Christianised" the Stagirite through the addition of contingency to the Aristotelian substance. By means of the nonpredicamental accident, esse, Aquinas is thought to have maintained the Aristotelian worldview alongside an additional metaphysical principle, without thereby jeopardising that same worldview. In effect, Aristotle's ousia became the category of "thing" for Aquinas (not "form"), which, through the addition of esse, became a creature. This addition of esse onto Aristotelian substance to make it exist, is problematic in that a) Gilson also admits a sense of esse as "substantial" esse, i.e. that of

⁹¹ Aquinas describes the three roles of an efficient cause as giving being, imparting motion and conserving being and activity in *In De div. nom.* IV l. 5 (#352), e.g. Cf. *In 2 Sent.* d.1 q.1 a.4; *C.G.* III, 66-67; *S.T.* I 105.5; *Comp. Theol.* I, 129-130; 135.

⁹² Aquinas, on the other hand, makes these points clear and considers them an important rejection of Alan of Lille's views of God's formal causality. On the existence of God in things, see *S.T.* I 8. Here, he explains God's separate transcendence (a.1) and His mode of presence in creation (aa. 2-3).

⁹³ Modalist existentialists reduce ens to esse, we have seen.

⁹⁴ Aquinas is careful to place this duality, which is necessary for creation, in God Himself. See, for example, *S.T.* I 44.3. This point will be treated again in the final chapter of this thesis, in considering exemplar causality.

⁹⁵ *S.T.* I 7.1: "...Illud autem quod est maxime formale omnium, est ipsum esse...Cum igitur esse divinum non sit esse receptum in aliquo...manifestum est quod ipse Deus est infinitus et perfectus..."

⁹⁶ The NeoPlatonic motif of circulatio is central to the composition of the *Summa Theologiae* and involves God's presence to forms through creation and operation. See *C.G.* II, 46: "...Tunc enim effectus maxime perfectus est quando in suum redit principium; unde et circulus inter omnes figuras, et motus circularis inter omnes motus, est maxime perfectus, quia in eis ad principium reditur. Ad hoc igitur quod universum creaturarum ultimam perfectionem consequatur, oportet creaturas ad suum redire principium..." On the motif of circulation, see J. Aertsen, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas' Way of Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1988) pp. 40-45.

⁹⁷ This view of Gilson is found in E. Gilson, *L'Esprit de la philosophie médiévale* 2nd ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1944). Tr. as *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* tr. A.H.C. Downes (New York: Scribner, 1940), in the chapter entitled "Beings and Their Contingency", which focusses on creation.

Aristotle's substance,⁹⁸ which introduces multiple senses referring to the single esse Gilson perceives as present;⁹⁹ and b) the relationship between Aristotle's substance and Aquinas' metaphysical principle "form" is not indicated, which is necessary for an explanation of Aquinas' transformation of Aristotle.¹⁰⁰

In chapter one we analysed the three basic ideas in Gilson's interpretation of esse in Aquinas, viz. his notion of God's essence, his distinction between substance and esse, and his notion of theological order in metaphysics. The natural priority of esse to essence was indicated first by the reduction of all essential perfections in God to esse, such that esse has natural priority as "separable", as "perfect" and as the "origin" of all being. In section 5.3 below, the role of form in the transcendental order will be reviewed, but here, the specific role of God's essence in the context of Gilson's statements must be analysed.

Also in chapter one we noted Gilson's statement to the effect that God confronts us with the unique case "where existence is alone" (i.e. without essence).¹⁰¹ In this interpretation, essence connotes limitation which cannot reside in God, which position is comparable to Avicenna's statement about God, "Quidditatem non habet": "In both doctrines, the notion of God without an essence, or whose essence is his very esse, is reached at the term of an induction which consists in removing all composition from the notion of God...after removing essence, only existence is left, and this is what God is..."¹⁰² Essence entails limitation, contingency and therefore imperfection from its link with "otherness"¹⁰³ for in virtue of possessing certain traits a thing lacks opposing traits of another essence. Unfortunately, Gilson fails to consider two facts

⁹⁸ Gilson, *ibid.*

⁹⁹ The only text related to Aquinas' use of the term esse substantiale would be that which cites the usage of esse as the 'quiddity' of things: *In 1 Sent.* 1.33.1 ad 1: "Esse has three meanings. One is the very quiddity or nature of the thing, as when it is said that the definition is the statement signifying what the esse is: for the definition signifies the quiddity. Used in another way, esse is the act of the essence: ...first act. Used in a third way, esse signifies the truth of the composition in propositions, according to which usage 'is' is called 'the copula'..." The first of these meanings would be similar to Aristotle's usage (see *In VII Meta.* l. 3, #1310). However, L. Dewan has noted that Aquinas would rarely associate the two meanings, and substitutes the term "ratio" (*In VIII Meta.* l. 2 #1694): L. Dewan, "Thomas Aquinas, Creation and Two Historians" *Laval théologique et philosophique* 50 (1994) 363-87.

¹⁰⁰ Along the lines of Gilson, see, e.g. Joseph Owens, *Aquinas on Being and Thing* (Niagara Falls, N.Y.: Niagara University Press, 1981), p. 33.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Gilson's statement in *The Elements of Christian Philosophy* p. 123: "Of this esse we know very little at first, except that in God it is that to which entity or essence (essentia) or quiddity (quidditas) has to be reduced." Cf. pp.128 ff; 139.

¹⁰² Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy* p. 128.

¹⁰³ Cf. Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* p. 180.

in this regard. First, distinction need not be exclusive nor limiting, for a thing can be distinct by possessing *more* perfections than another. Second, a thing's internal distinctness does not imply imperfection but rather wealth of content. Both descriptions of essence run counter to Gilson's interpretation, and are affirmed in the texts of Aquinas below.¹⁰⁴

Gilson's position on essence also entails the following four errors: First, to have an essence is not to be contingent, for there are certain necessary essences and contingent *esses*, we have indicated. Otherwise, pantheism would ensue, since *esse* would be uncreated, a position which some of Gilson's followers have implied.¹⁰⁵ In fact, Gilson implies that *esse* is not created, but only limited by essence.¹⁰⁶ Second, Gilson's view that essential attributes of God are posited only from the requirement of the deficient mode of human knowing entails that God's indefinite infinity lacks all quidditative content. As pure existence, God is nothing, for no reality can be without essence. Gilson's admission that God is in a sense "nothing" stems from Aquinas' negative theology, and the "beyond-essence" of God is retrieved by Gilson only through recourse to theology.¹⁰⁷

The third error implied by Gilson is the internal contradiction of a being whose precise *lack* of essential content makes Him *more* perfect than a (finite) being which *has* essential perfections. Also, Gilson himself discusses God in Aquinas' own words, in terms of simple and pure perfections. The fourth error entailed in Gilson's view of essence is that it overlooks Aquinas' discussion of supereminence, or the containment of all essential perfections in God. If

¹⁰⁴ See section 5.3 below.

¹⁰⁵ See Phelan, "The Being of Creatures" p. 89: "Diversity is a meaningless term when applied to *esse* as such...In being created creatures...pass unintelligibly...from being in the Divine Mode (i.e. in the *Esse* of God) to being in the created mode (i.e. in the *esse* proper to each). Thus God is each and every creature; but no creature is God, nor all creatures together." Cf. Wilhelmsen, in his book The Paradoxical Structure of Existence (Irving, TX: University of Dallas Press, 1970) p. 91: "It follows that the existential identity of the creature is God...I am not God because I am not identically my 'to be'...the only identity the creature possesses in itself is the identity with its essence..." (cf. p. 89).

¹⁰⁶ He implies this in his discussion of God as "*esse* alone" (i.e. without essence), meaning, where existence subsists without essential determination or limitation. See, e.g. Elements... pp. 124-133. Gilson would not consciously imply pantheism, but his followers seem to have espoused some version of it in defense of the divinity of *esse* (and correlation of "form" with finitude and contingency). See G. Phelan, "The Being of Creatures" p. 93.

¹⁰⁷ Gilson, The Elements of Christian Philosophy p. 133: "If God has no essence, He has no 'whatness', so that to the question: What is God? the correct answer should be, nothing...To say that God has no essence really means that God is as a beyond-essence..." Gilson goes on to indicate that it is man's limited cognitional apparatus that forces a discussion of God's "essence", and says that it is the theologian, not the philosopher, who guarantees that truth of our statements about God in this regard (p. 133-134).

essence connotes not imperfection but rather determination or definiteness, God's essence is the source, not the denial, of infinity.¹⁰⁸ Aquinas' statement that Ipsum Esse is the most appropriate name for God because it implies no determinate mode of being¹⁰⁹ is not contradicted. Rather, contrary to Gilson's refusal to identify quidditative content in God, Aquinas places the plenitude of pure perfections in God's essence. The divine essence is not posited as something necessary merely for human cognition,¹¹⁰ nor is it subordinated to the limitless character of esse, but is infinite and necessary in itself.

Taking Gilson's second main idea, the substance/esse distinction was seen to be closely related to his interpretation of Aquinas' metaphysics of creation. The analysis of Gilson on God's essence revealed that the alignment of contingency with existence¹¹¹ on the one hand, and necessity with form, on the other, misses the contingency of certain (creaturely) forms along with the necessity of certain (creaturely) esses.

In his interpretation of Aquinas' understanding of Plato and Aristotle, Aquinas distinguished, we saw, between a "wide" and a "narrow" sense of esse, which he called Aristotle's "substantial" and his own "existential" senses, respectively. By using this distinction, Gilson maintained that Aquinas could at once attribute a doctrine of creation ("wide" sense of esse) and deny such an attribution (in the "narrow" existential sense of esse) to Aristotle. Whether Gilson called it "two senses of being" or "two types of causing", the meaning of the distinction appears to be on the logical level,¹¹² and is intended to distinguish Aquinas' metaphysics of creation through the role of origin and contingency that esse plays. There are seven problems with Gilson's picture of the relationship between substance and esse, and the two meanings of esse, which must now be considered.

¹⁰⁸ S.T. I 7 discusses God's infinity in light of divine form and the divine ideas. See section 5.4.3 below.

¹⁰⁹ S.T. I 13.11.

¹¹⁰ Gilson frames his discussion of God's essence in a hypothetical manner, referring to the necessity of His essence for human cognition and knowledge by remotion. Yet, in the same work, he notes that God's esse is "equally unknowable"! See Gilson, Elements of Christian Philosophy pp. 116-119; p. 309 #14.

¹¹¹ The tendency of Gilson here is continued by Joseph Owens' analysis of the properties of esse in his articles on existence: See, e.g. Joseph Owens, "Aquinas - Existential Permanence and Flux" Mediaeval Studies 31 (1969), 71-92; and An Interpretation of Existence (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co, 1968).

¹¹² Gilson's picture of the "two meanings of esse" does not refer to two *types* of esse within the same being, viz. a "substantial" and an "existential", for this would deny the unity of the substance.

First, if esse is a nonpredicamental and per se accident,¹¹³ Gilson's division of esses into substantial and existential is redundant, and overlooks the necessity of creaturely esse in the case of necessary creatures, such as angels.¹¹⁴ Second, the very text that Gilson uses to distinguish "two modes of causing" (S.T. I 45.1) has been proven to deny the point he wishes to prove, namely, the distinction between Greek "substantial" causation and Aquinas' "existential/creative" causation. L. Dewan has noted that that very text¹¹⁵ points to creation as "causing the entire substance". As Dewan puts it, "This use of "tota substantia" to focus on the proper product of creation is not isolated...Gilson is, of course, attempting to distinguish between causing the substance to exist as a substance, and causing the very existence of the substance."¹¹⁶ In creating such a distinction, Gilson is setting up "existentially neutral substantiality" which Aquinas would not admit, nor would Aristotle, says Dewan.¹¹⁷ According to Gilson, it is precisely this "existentially neutral" sense of substance that allows Aquinas to transport Aristotle's ousia intact into Aquinas' metaphysics, and which forms an important factor in Aquinas "substance/esse" distinction, and which makes Aquinas' doctrine of the real distinction, in Gilson's eyes, one of "creaturely contingency", to use Dewan's phrase.¹¹⁸ This viewpoint both denies the intimacy between form and esse and denies some creaturely existence as absolutely necessary.¹¹⁹

The third problem with Gilson's views on substance and esse is that one cannot separate form and existence in the way which Gilson implies, for the cause of one is the cause of the other. According to Gilson, Aquinas attributes to Aristotle a doctrine of a "cause of all being, in the sense of substantial being",¹²⁰ where the first cause is a source of being by causing form (or

¹¹³ It is a per se accident in that esse is the per se result of form (see, e.g. De pot. 7.2 ad 10). This is not to deny that form participates in esse, for all causality is of esse (In 2 Post. An. l. 7 #471). In the order of efficient causality, esse is a nonpredicamental accident, as causing essence to be; in the order of formal causality, esse is principle of being, as a product of essence. It is the formal/efficient causality distinction which allows esse's dual role. Esse is also a *nonpredicamental* accident in that it is an accident only in the wide sense of being praeter essentiam (See Quodl. 12.5) which is prior to the subject.

¹¹⁴ Angels are not subject to generation and corruption. See C.G. II 30; De pot. 5.3 obj. 12 and ad 12; S.T. I 44.1 ad 2; I 9.2. This difficulty with Gilson's interpretation is introduced first because it is connected with the issue just considered, viz. God's essence (where the notion of "contingency" was seen to be connected with esse for Gilson).

¹¹⁵ S.T. I 45.1 ad 2

¹¹⁶ L. Dewan, "Thomas Aquinas, Creation, and Two Historians" pro manuscripto p. 23 #12.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 6.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

¹²⁰ Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas p. 461 #6.

esse in the “wide” sense). Aquinas would not have so distinguished himself from the Philosopher, however, because the origin of form is as such the origin of existence, and this notion is based on well-known Aristotelian texts.¹²¹ If form is that whereby a thing has existence, then it follows that the origin of form is the origin of existence.¹²²

The fourth problem in Gilson’s picture of Aquinas’ incorporation of Aristotle is that it ignores the analogous senses of “essence” conceived by Aquinas. In his works on the human knowledge of God’s essence, Aquinas denies that we possess quid sit knowledge of God in this life, since we can have no definitional knowledge of infinite being or separate substances; these are known only by way of negation, causality and transcendence.¹²³ To know anything quid est the essence must be grasped in itself, so that the essential properties are defined and defended along with the thing’s existence.¹²⁴ Quidditative or definitional knowledge of a thing is greater than nominal knowledge, for the former is conditional on knowledge that the thing exists, Aquinas says.¹²⁵ In addition to the senses of essence as nominal and as the object of definition, however, there is the additional sense of essence as the subject of esse.

Gilson implies at times that the real distinction is between esse and the quidditative sense of essence, which is purely logical. One can infer this from Gilson from his viewpoint that Aristotle’s substance is imported “intact”¹²⁶ into Aquinas’ metaphysics: “Aristotle had no doubt as to the fact that to demonstrate the truth of an essential definition was, by the same token, to demonstrate its reality, its being... There was no reason for Aristotle to go beyond the domain of logic to that of metaphysics...”¹²⁷ Gilson’s failure to incorporate the diverse senses of essence into his substance/esse distinction led to this interpretation which contradicts Aquinas. Just as Gilson’s seeming ignorance of the analogous senses of form led to the equation of esse with infinity and essence with finitude, so it led to a denial of the positive role of form in the real distinction.

¹²¹ See Dewan, ibid. p. 4. The Aristotelian texts here are De anima 2.4 (415a26-b8), on the universal striving to share in the eternal and divine, and Physics I 9 (192a17-25), on appetite for form as belonging to matter’s nature.

¹²² Dewan, ibid. p. 4.

¹²³ See, e.g. In de Trin. VI.3; I.2; C.G. I 30. On this topic, see J. Wippel, “Quidditative Knowledge of God” in his book Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas, pp. 215-241.

¹²⁴ See In II Post. An. l. 1 #8 (and see Aristotle, Post. An. .7, 92b11f.).

¹²⁵ See In II Post. An. l. 6 #4; l. 1 #5-#6; In de Trin. 6.3.

¹²⁶ See chapter one, s. 1.3.2 of this thesis.

¹²⁷ Gilson, The Elements of Christian Philosophy p. 126.

Two additional problems are involved in Gilson's substance/esse distinction. The fifth problem is his view that the real distinction is generated by Aquinas' theory of creation, which in turn distinguishes him from Aristotle. The sixth problem is, Gilson's exclusive identification of esse with plenitude, a problem which echoes earlier critiques of Gilson above. Taking the more difficult problem first, we turn to the issue of creation, which Gilson perceived as isolating esse as the sole principle of similitude binding God to creatures. Against Gilson, one can say that if the origin of esse is identical with that of form, and if there is a formal, not only an existential sense of universal being which is God, then his positing esse as the principle of similitude fails.

Gilson's argument for the priority of esse turns partly on the thesis that Aquinas did not attribute a doctrine of creation to the Greeks, who nevertheless did manage to distinguish the cause of being from that of becoming.¹²⁸ Gilson notes in a footnote, for example, that Aquinas says in In VIII Phys. l. 2 that Plato and Aristotle came to a knowledge of the principle of all being ("principium totius esse"). Placing that text alongside that of De articulis fidei I, #112-119, which says that according to Aristotle, the world is not made by God (but is eternal), Gilson interprets the Physics commentary to refer to a "wide" sense of being (as substantial) and not to the narrow existential sense,¹²⁹ thus denying the doctrine of creation to Plato and Aristotle. Gilson's denial of the knowledge of a mode of universal causation of being (what he calls the narrower, existential sense of esse) to Aristotle, thus also denies to Aristotle Aquinas' insight into esse. Gilson uses C.G. II 21 to prove his point, as though Plato and Aristotle did not acknowledge a cause of form *as such*, and only acknowledged the particular mode of causing. As

¹²⁸ The view that Aquinas did not attribute creation to Plato and Aristotle is held by Gilson in Le Thomisme, 6me ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1965), pp. 155-56; Introduction à la philosophie chrétienne (Paris, 1960), pp. 38-39; Elements of Christian Philosophy (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960) pp. 95-103. It is also held by Anton Pegis in his article "The Dilemma of Being and Unity" in R. Brennan, ed. Essays in Thomism (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1942), pp. 149-83 (see especially pp. 179-83); "A Note on St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I 44. 1-2" in Mediaeval Studies 8 (1946) 159-68; "St. Thomas and the Coherence of Aristotelian Theology" in Mediaeval Studies 35 (1973), 67-117 (see especially #143). See Mark Johnson, "Did St. Thomas Attribute a Doctrine of Creation to Aristotle?" in New Scholasticism 63 (1989), 129-55.

¹²⁹ There is no reference in Aquinas for this distinction. The footnote is found in Gilson's Le Thomisme, 6me ed. p. 155, #6. In the English translation of the 5th edition, The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, tr. L. Shook (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 461 #6. M. Johnson has pointed out ("Did St. Thomas Attribute..." pp. 143-46), however, the De articulis fidei text says the exact opposite, namely, that the world *is* made by God according to Aristotle. Even though the critical edition was not available until 1979, Gilson should have been aware of the mistake, by consulting the manuscripts on this important point.

L. Dewan has pointed out,¹³⁰ however, one of the very texts Gilson uses in his argument actually *identifies* Plato and Aristotle as proponents of the universal cause of being.

If the Greeks cannot be distinguished from Aquinas in a limited notion of particular causation, neither can Aquinas' view on universal causation be limited to the causality of esse. Rather, there is a mutual causality of form and esse, both in the transcendental and the predicamental orders: form is that whereby a thing has existence; accordingly the origin of form as such must be the origin of all existence.¹³¹ Far from making esse the principle of similitude between God and creatures, it must therefore be esse and form; in fact, there are texts making form the principle of similitude, in that form is the principle of action in a thing:

Since every agent acts producing something like itself, it is from that thing that the effect acquires its form, viz. the thing to which it becomes "like" by virtue of form; as for example, the house-in-matter [acquires its form] from the art, which is the form [species] of the house in the soul. But all things are rendered like God, who is pure act, inasmuch as they have forms, through which they are made to be actually; and inasmuch as they have appetite for forms, they are said to have appetite for the divine likeness. Therefore, it is absurd to say that the formation of things pertains to another than the Creator of all, viz. God.¹³²

Gilson's exclusive identification of esse and plenitude is similar to his equation of esse and infinity. Briefly, Gilson and his followers align form with finitude and esse with infinity to distinguish Aquinas from Aristotle. That which is separate in being and in notion¹³³ coincide for the Stagirite, since he failed to distinguish abstraction (which grasps form) and judgment (which grasps esse).¹³⁴ Aquinas differs from Aristotle, however, by making an infinite act the ground and term of metaphysics, an act which is grasped not by simple abstraction, but by a negative

¹³⁰ The text is the In VIII Phys. reference, and L. Dewan's article is: "Thomas Aquinas, Creation and Two Historians" (pro manuscripto), p. 5.

¹³¹ Form and existence are distinguished in creatures, identical in God, but never separated (see e.g. S.T. I 50.5). Although Gilson never stated that God has no form, the emphasis on esse might lead one to attribute this view to him. Aquinas, on the other hand, grades forms by their simplicity in an order culminating in God (see De ente c. 1).

¹³² See C.G. II 43: "Quum omne agens agat sibi simile, ab illo acquirit effectus formam cui per formam acquisitam similatur; sicut domus in materia, ab arte, quae est species domus in anima. Sed omnia simulantur Deo, qui est actus purus, in simulantur Deo, qui est actus purus, in quantum habet formas per quas fiunt in actu; et in quantum formas appetunt, divinam similitudinem appetere dicuntur. Absurdum igitur est dicere quod rerum formatio ad alium pertineat quam ad creatorem omnium Deum."

¹³³ In other words, that which is naturally prior as "separable" and as "absolute" coincide for Aristotle. See J. Owens, "Metaphysical Separation in Aquinas" Mediaeval Studies (1972) p. 292.

¹³⁴ See, e.g. J. Owens, "Metaphysical Separation in Aquinas" 287-306.

judgment which extends notions like substance to the immaterial order.¹³⁵ Against the Gilsonian reading, we can say that if the association of esse and plenitude are drawn from considerations regarding the subject matter of metaphysics, then the position that immaterial and infinite being provides a base for the judgment of separation and ultimately guarantees the universality of ens commune, must be defended. Gilson cannot maintain both the view that human knowledge has a sensory origin and that metaphysics adopts a theological starting point of infinite esse, without contradiction.

Regarding the priority of esse to substance and form in Gilson, we can draw the following conclusions. First, esse as the plenitude of perfection is discovered before the real distinction; second, it is distinct from the esse in judgment, and third, because knowledge begins in sense, it must be the result of purification from material notes.

From our analysis of the first two issues in Gilson's interpretation of Aquinas, we can deduce the following conclusions. From his analysis of God's essence, Gilson cites esse as the sole principle of perfection, and essence as the vehicle of contingency and limitation. Moreover, by confusing the esse of creatures with the esse of God, a form of pantheism is implied. From his substance/esse distinction, Aquinas' existential metaphysics is set over and against Aristotle's "substance" metaphysics. Yet since esse is extrinsically caused, Gilson interprets Aquinas to have included Aristotle's substance within his own existential metaphysics in an intact (yet incomplete) fashion.

From these two conclusions we can deduce the following argument. The first issue concerned the nature of God. There, Gilson argued from the identity of esse and perfection, and the reducibility of essence to esse in God, to the identification of form with imperfection and contingency. Yet in the second issue (i.e. the substance/esse distinction), Gilson argued from the necessity and self-complete nature of Aristotelian substance¹³⁶ to the extrinsic addition of esse, which placed contingency on the side of esse. How can both form *and* esse play the role of contingency in a metaphysics of reciprocal causes? It seems that esse should confer contingency, for efficient causality "does not make beings to be what they are, it makes them *to*

¹³⁵ Owens, "Metaphysical Separation" pp. 302-303.

¹³⁶ That is, Aristotle's substance is deemed complete in itself, while incomplete with reference to its existential origin.

be".¹³⁷ We shall return to answer the question of the roles of esse and form in sections 5.3 and 5.4 of this chapter.

This last point leads us to Gilson's final main idea, viz. his notion of a "theological order" of Thomistic metaphysics. In chapter one, we reviewed Gilson's teaching in this regard, and concluded that it pointed to the natural priority of esse to form in positing esse as the subject matter of metaphysics, through its reference to Ipsum Esse, the goal and origin of being. The real distinction between form and esse was seen to follow from the theological insight that God is Ipsum Esse, such that there is a logical dependence of metaphysics on revealed theology.

Gilson's position on "theological order" both confuses the subject matter and terminus of metaphysics, and destroys the rational independence of metaphysics through denying its natural starting point. It is certain that Aquinas' loose identification of metaphysics' subject as "divine things" (in the sense of the principles of the subject) refers to ens in quantum ens, and not to pure esse:

Accordingly, there are two kinds of theology or divine science. There is one that treats of divine things, not as the subject of the science but as principles of the subject. This is the kind of theology pursued by the philosophers and that is also called metaphysics. There is another theology, however, that investigates divine things for their own sakes as the subject of the science. This is the theology taught in Sacred Scripture.¹³⁸

One cannot excuse Gilson on this point by appealing to the fact that he was primarily a historian of philosophy, and not a metaphysician, since he explicitly claims a philosophical interpretation for himself.¹³⁹ Gilson himself maintains that while the theological order dictates beginning philosophy with the primacy of Ipsum Esse, philosophy's integrity demands that God be

¹³⁷ Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers pp. 168-169.

¹³⁸ In de Trin. V.4c: "Sic igitur theologia, sive scientia divina, est duplex. Una in qua considerantur res divinae, non tamquam subjectum scientiae, sed tamquam principia subjecti, et talis est theologia quam philosophi prosequuntur, quae alio nomine metaphysica dicitur. Alia vero quae ipsas res divinas considerat propter seipsas, ut subjectum scientiae, et haec est theologia quae in sacra Scriptura traditur." (tr. Maurer, Thomas Aquinas: The division and methods of the sciences 4th revised ed. [Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies] p. 52). Aquinas goes on to cite being (ens) and its properties, act, potency and substance as the subject of metaphysics. Cf. In Meta. Proemium.

¹³⁹ See Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers Preface, ix-x: "[This] is not a book in the history of philosophy; it is a philosophical book, and a dogmatically philosophical one at that..." In this book, Gilson subjects the history of the concepts of essence and existence to a detailed analysis through his own interpretation of Aquinas' metaphysics.

discovered at the *end* of metaphysics.¹⁴⁰ Gilson in fact cannot have it both ways, but must subordinate the integrity of philosophy to the propadeutic demands of Christian doctrine, and to the final end of Christian wisdom, to be faithful to his assertion of a “theological” order in Aquinas’ metaphysics. It seems that for Gilson, the primacy of divine esse to finite Greek form and substance is maintained at the cost of philosophy’s independent nature. The notion of philosophy becomes relatively superfluous since philosophically, God is reached at the end of metaphysics, but de facto, this does not occur within the theological order.

Also, Gilson’s “logicizing” of essence and minimizing of exemplar causality in God point to the fact that the theological order is less a matter of context than of content in his interpretation of Aquinas’ approach to metaphysics. In his desire to isolate esse as the keystone in Aquinas’ metaphysics through a distinctly Thomistic creationist metaphysics, Gilson fails to explore other possibilities for the relationship between God and the real distinction, which would be more consonant with his Aristotelian framework.

There remains the problem of maintaining that the proof of God’s existence precedes the real distinction, while also acknowledging the movement of knowledge from sense objects to pure intelligibles. If all knowledge starts in sense, it would seem that the knowledge of ens qua ens¹⁴¹ arises from the intellect’s establishment of its own immateriality, through abstraction from all intelligible matter. The discovery of esse as perfect can then occur, and the real distinction emerges, eventually leading to God. Of course the “factual” (vs. “intensive”) sense of esse in the real distinction precedes knowledge of esse’s intimacy, foundational nature, etc., and it is this interpretation which Gilson avoids, for it aligns Aquinas too closely to Aristotle. The priority in knowledge of esse ut actualitas to esse as “plenitude”, moreover, does not establish the natural priority of creaturely esse that Gilson wants.

5.2.1.3 Reply to the “Causality” Existentialists

The third type of existentialist Thomism which stresses esse at the expense of form was seen to be Fabro’s theory of divine efficient causality and similitude. In chapter one, we

¹⁴⁰ See Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas p. 93, for the statement that the Christian philosopher discovers God at the *end* of metaphysics. Gilson’s view that the proof of God’s existence *precedes* the real distinction is found, for example, in his article “La Preuve du Ente et Essentia” (Doctor Communis III-IV, 1950-51, p. 258): “On va plutôt de l’identité de l’esse et de l’essentia prouvée en Dieu à leur distinction dans le reste, qu’on ne va de leur distinction dans le reste à leur identité en Dieu.”

reviewed the three basic tenets of his theory, namely, a) his reduction of all types of causality to divine efficient causality, b) his position that esse is the term of creation, and c) his notion of the subject matter of metaphysics. Regarding a), we analysed his three notions of esse as the instrument of metaphysical hierarchy, esse's role in the priority of the transcendental to the predicamental order, and esse as a divine name. Regarding b), we analysed Fabro's distinction between esse and existence ("facticity"), and the relation between ens and esse. Regarding c), we discussed esse as the term of a process called "resolution", and Fabro's opinion regarding the identity of esse as this term.

While Fabro admits that the divine ideas ground essential intelligibilities in things,¹⁴² form is seen as operative only on the predicamental level, its role as formal cause of esse somehow said to mirror Aristotle's "immanentism".¹⁴³ Fabro seems unclear as to whether ens has a greater affinity with esse or with essence. Ens' affinity with esse stems from its being ordered to esse,¹⁴⁴ yet ens is opposed to esse as the concrete and finite order is opposed to the abstract and infinite order. Esse is the infinite plenitude beyond our knowledge, while ens signifies the concrete id quod est, and so ens is limited to the sphere of knowing.¹⁴⁵ The overall effect of Fabro's ens/esse distinction is to stress transcendental (esse - real) at the cost of predicamental participation (univocal predication - logical), since he views the act of being as the source both of the finite being's existence, value and intelligibility.

Summarising our conclusions regarding each of the above points, we argued that with respect to divine efficient causality, Fabro limited analogy to the transcendental realm and "logicized" the predicamental realm, limiting it to univocal causality. In chapter one, we noted that Fabro viewed "predicamental" (finite) participation to be between univocal formalities such as genera, species and individuals, while "transcendental" participation concerned esse and the

¹⁴¹ The concept ens qua ens comprises the note of essence as well as existence.

¹⁴² "Intensive Hermeneutics" p. 474.

¹⁴³ Participation et causalité p. 631, e.g.

¹⁴⁴ Fabro quotes Aquinas' statements that "hoc autem nomen ens significat ipsum esse" (In 4 Meta. l. 2 #556); "ens autem non dicit quidditatem, sed solum actum essendi, cum sit principium ipsum" (In I Sent. d. 8 q. 4 a. 2). See Fabro, "The Transcendentality of Ens-Esse" p. 412.

¹⁴⁵ Participation et causalité pp. 232-243. Aquinas' treatment of the ens-esse distinction treated here is found in his commentary on De divinis nominibus of Pseudo-Dionysius, and In de Causis. Fabro also explicitly says that the abstract order is infinite, and the concrete order is finite (p. 255); and repeats that ens is more concrete while esse is always abstract (pp. 267, 269), and draws on Aquinas' commentary on Boethius' Quomodo substantiae in eo quod sint, bonae sint, where the esse/quod est distinction is found.

principles of being.¹⁴⁶ Esse is not the sole agent of metaphysical hierarchy, we will see, since God's creativity involves both formal and efficient causality. Esse's presumed status as the preeminent divine name was questioned on the basis that Fabro failed to link esse's predicamental and transcendental roles.

In chapter one we indicated that Fabro's identification of esse as the most appropriate divine name demanded an inquiry into the relation between the notion of God as He Who Is and that of esse as the first of all created perfections, and of the relation between esse as a divine name and our powers of knowledge. Aquinas' statement that esse is the "first of all created perfections"¹⁴⁷ was not linked by him to his view that the most appropriate name we can have for God is Qui est, and was not used as a justification for the divine name. The name Qui est is the most proper name of God because of its signification, which relates to human understanding, Aquinas says.¹⁴⁸ It is only the nature of our limited and negative knowledge which yields this divine name, since more proper quidditative knowledge is denied regarding an infinite object.¹⁴⁹

Also, in identifying esse as the perfectio separata as the meaning of the divine name Ipsum esse subsistens¹⁵⁰, Fabro does not intend esse ut actus as the *terminus* of metaphysics, but sees the beginning and end of metaphysics as coinciding. Yet, esse as the most common and factual content which is the act of being cannot be the same as the esse which, as the perfection of perfections, is most representationally rich, intensive and inclusive. Also, even if Ipsum Esse were the most proper name for God (leaving aside the issue of metaphysics' starting point), it surely is not all-inclusive in the way Fabro presumes, because then one divine name would suffice, and Aquinas points to its lack of determination, saying that it is "indeterminately related to all" (other divine names).¹⁵¹

The second issue in Fabro's thought was his notion of esse as the term of creation. Here, the distinction between esse as "intensive plenitude" and existence as "facticity" was introduced, to explain the link between God's creative causality and creaturely perfection, and to distinguish Aquinas from Aristotle. Fabro's placing esse's status as the "preeminent perfection"

¹⁴⁶ See chapter one, section 1.4.1 above. The reference is to Fabro, "Intensive Hermeneutics" p. 471.

¹⁴⁷ De pot. 7.2. ad 9; In de Causis Prop. 4.

¹⁴⁸ S.T. I 13.11; In 1 Sent. d.8 q.1 a.1; De pot. 7.5; 10.1 ad 9.

¹⁴⁹ C.G. I 30, e.g. On this topic, see J. Wippel, "Quidditative Knowledge of God", in his book Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas pp. 215-241.

¹⁵⁰ Fabro, La nozione... p. 169). Cf. Participation et causalité p. 252.

was seen to relegate essence to the realm of logical content, which in turn denied the universality of ens and the transcendental role of form. The maximum universality of ens cannot but include form and esse, and yet Fabro assigns an almost purely logical function to form, and fails to give it proper explanation in the transcendental order.

He assigns a purely logical function to essence by distinguishing “predicamental” and “transcendental” participation, where the former concerns itself with “univocal formalities, such as genera..species...individuals”, and the latter concerns “esse, with the pure perfections that are directly grounded in it.”¹⁵² Against Fabro, however, one can note that predicamental participation is not equivalent to essential participation, for analogical participation also occurs on the finite level, and thus, making essential predication equivalent to predicamental participation is a confusion of the real and logical orders. We will now analyse the notion of containment in esse, as well as Aquinas’ theory of instrumental causality, in order to evaluate Fabro’s theory.

In chapter one, we discussed Fabro’s theory of God’s presence to creatures, in outlining his second reason for adopting esse as the term of creation. The presence of all perfections in Ipsum Esse is the teaching of preeminence, as found in the divine attribute of perfection (S.T. I 4.2). The reason for the perfection in the case of the preeminent cause would be its efficient causality, according to Fabro. However, when one assembles various statements of Thomas on the nature of preeminent causes, Fabro’s view seems too restricted. The general principle often invoked by Thomas to the effect that “whatever is greatest in a genus, is the cause of all else in it”¹⁵³ applies to both univocal and analogical causality, both formal and efficient.¹⁵⁴ While it is true that the question on divine perfection (S.T. I 4.2) introduces God’s efficient causality as an explanation of the perfection of God, this applies to Him only as the *efficient* cause of all being. But the text goes on to say that *all* creaturely perfections are found preeminently in God. S.T. I

¹⁵¹ S.T. I 13.11.

¹⁵² Fabro, “Intensive Hermeneutics” p. 471. He says that he is trying to salvage Aristotle’s doctrine of immanence, or the idea that substance resides in the concrete singular and not in the genus or species (versus transcendental participation, where the participated being remains whole and intact) in this way (p. 471).

¹⁵³ S.T. I 2.3.

¹⁵⁴ For, lesser degrees of heat come forth from the sun (analogical), seed from a plant or animal (univocal). C.G. I 28. The communication of perfection being based on the presence of that which is actual acting upon that which is in potency, combined with the notion that the more perfect is related to the less perfect, as actuality to potency (Lib. de Caus. Prop. IV), shows that degrees of perfection are also present in univocal formal causality.

4.3 explains God's perfection as formal, as the basis for similarity between God and creature. S.T. I 44.4 ad 4, as well as other texts, state that God is the efficient, final and formal cause of all beings: "Since God is the efficient, the exemplar and the final cause of all things, and since primary matter is from Him, it follows that the first principle of all things is one in reality."¹⁵⁵ As well, his commentary on Liber de causis, prop. 12 explains Proclus' assertion "omnia in omnibus" as the causal *and* essential presence of all perfections in the First Cause. God is present to creatures by "essence, presence and power" (S.T. I 8.3 ad 1), which signifies the immediate presence of God to the form and its operations, as "most intimate" to the thing.¹⁵⁶

Clarifying the issue of divine omnipresence, Aquinas denies that God is the intrinsic formal cause of things, for this would be pantheism,¹⁵⁷ but neither does he reduce the communication of perfection to divine efficient causality, as Fabro would have it. The creative and conserving causality of God resembles efficient causality in its analogical import, but this does not justify the view that it is *more* like an efficient cause than any other kind of causality. Rather, the total causality of the creative act of God "includes all kinds of causality, while eluding the limitations of each of them."¹⁵⁸ Thus, God is both the universal efficient cause as well as the universal formal (exemplar) cause of all being. Fabro's view that all modes of causality are reducible to divine efficient causality might be implied by texts which point to efficient causality as the cause of the causality of the other causes,¹⁵⁹ but this description applies *only* to the predicamental order, and *not* to God.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ S.T. I 44.4 ad 4: "Cum Deus sit causa efficiens, exemplaris et finalis omnium rerum, et materia prima sit ab ipso, sequitur quod primum principium omnium rerum sit unum tantum secundum rem." Cf. In 2 Sent. 1.1.1 ad 5: "Under omnes formae reducuntur in primum agens sicut in principium exemplare. Et sic patet quod est unum primum principium simpliciter, quod est primum agens, et exemplar, et finis ultimus." The texts on divine omnipresence indicate the universal causal presence of God well: S.T. I 8.3 ad 1 states that God's presence "by essence" (vs. "by power" and "by presence") is due to his causing the being of the thing.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. S.T. I 105.5 on the causal activity of God in all agents. The argument concludes that God operates most intimately in things because He causes their forms (cf. De mal. 3.3).

¹⁵⁷ S.T. I 3.8.

¹⁵⁸ William Hoye, Actualitas Omnium Actuum... p. 107.

¹⁵⁹ e.g. In 5 Meta. l. 3 # 782: "Efficiens autem est causa causalitatis et materiae et formae. Nam facit per suum motum materiam esse susceptivam formae, et formam inesse materiae." Cf. De pot. 5.1.

¹⁶⁰ For, the dependence of form on esse which Fabro and Hoye view as descriptive of the natural priority of esse, is found only on the level of creatures. But this leads us to the question of similitude, to be taken up shortly.

Finally, the view that everything denotes modes of esse, from an interpretation of phrases such as “vivere autem est esse viventium”¹⁶¹ to mean that every perfection is only a participation in esse, is correct only in the sense that creaturely esse is derived from divine esse. Far from coalescing the two orders of form and agent, God is present in both ways, as a creator of universal being: “totius esse universalis effector”.¹⁶² We will return to this point shortly, in discussing the proper term of creative causality.

Closely related to the issue of the containment of all perfections in the First Cause of being is the issue of instrumental causality. Here again, all modes of causality cannot be reduced to divine efficient causality, which is the view of Fabro. Before analysing Fabro’s position however, we must outline the doctrine of Aquinas. Instrumental, or secondary causality, is limited to the causation of a nature being *in* an individual, that is the generation of a particular effect. It is subordinate to the primary or per se cause of the nature, which causes it to be in all subjects having that form, i.e. the cause of the nature as such.¹⁶³ The equivocal (analogical) cause is prior as having greater extension, and is God.¹⁶⁴ However, His causality does not exclude natural causes even though it is presupposed by them.¹⁶⁵

Thus, instrumental causality has its place in the predicamental order, as opposed to the transcendental order. An understanding of this type of causality, however, involves much more than the distinction between a particular and a universal mode of giving being to effects; in the case of the causation of esse, we are speaking of instrumental causality with respect to the *being*, not the becoming, of the creature and its operations. This distinction between causation of being and of becoming is made in S.T. I 104.1c:

...an agent may be the cause of the *becoming* of its effect, but not directly of its *being*. This may be seen in both artificial and in natural things. For the builder causes the house in its *becoming*, but he is not the direct cause of its *being*. For it is clear that the *being* of the house is a result of its form, which consists in putting

¹⁶¹ De anima a. 1: “Vivere enim viventis est ipsum esse eius...et ipsum intelligere primi intelligentis est vita eius et esse ipsius” Cf. In Lib. De Caus. l. 12; and In de Div. Nomin. c. 5 l. 1. See: Fabro, Participation... p. 201. “To live” or “to think” then, represent esse taken at a grade. Cf. the important text on participation of perfections in esse: S.T. I-II 2.5 ad 2.

¹⁶² C.G. III Proem. Cf. S.T. I 45.2.

¹⁶³ See, e.g. De subst. sep. c. 10. Another mode of expressing the same view is found in In de Caus. l. 26, where two causes of being are listed: First, the *form*, which is “that whereby x is in act”, and second, the *agent*, which effects beings in act. The latter is extrinsic, analogical and efficient. In the order of principles, form is said to be prior (as causal) of esse; in the order of acts however, esse is prior: C.G. II.54; In quat. opp. l.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. C.G. IV.7.

¹⁶⁵ De Pot. 3.7-8.

together and arrangement of the materials, and which results from the natural qualities of certain things...¹⁶⁶

Instrumental causality is thus of two types: of the being of effects (analogical causality: when the cause is removed so is the effect) and of the becoming of the effects (generation - univocal causality: the effect receives the same specific nature).¹⁶⁷ While creaturely, it is contrasted to the creature's "proper" causality, which involves the principle of limitation, viz. the limitation of esse by passive potencies or essences.¹⁶⁸ Thus, the situation is not simple. Both instrumental and proper creaturely causality require divine causality as their condition,¹⁶⁹ but there are also instrumental analogous causes of esse (which also conserve esse, even though they do not create). Now while creatures in matter have their esse caused by God and also instrumentally by the heavenly bodies, creatures without matter (souls, angels and the heavenly bodies) have no instrumental or conserving cause of their esse, but owe it to God alone.¹⁷⁰ The reason Aquinas posits instrumental causes of esse in the predicamental order is to guarantee finite causal efficacy (against the Arabic view of causality),¹⁷¹ since natural causes are a sign of God's goodness, which allows imitation through the noblest activity, which is the giving of being.¹⁷²

Before detailing Fabro's interpretation of instrumental causality and his deduction from it to a "reduction" to divine esse as the first metaphysical principle, we must explain God's causal influence in creatures in order to distinguish it from analogous causation of esse by the heavenly bodies. It is, we will see, ironic that Fabro uses considerations of instrumental causality

¹⁶⁶ "...Sed considerandum est quod aliquod agens est causa sui effectus secundum fieri tantum, et non directe secundum esse eius. Quod quidem convenit et in artificialibus, et in rebus naturalibus. Aedificator enim est causa domus quantum ad eius fieri, non autem directe quantum ad esse eius. Manifestum est enim quod esse domus consequitur formam eius; forma autem domus est compositio et ordo, quae quidem forma consequitur naturalem virtutem quarundam rerum..." It should be noted that the question of instrumental causality concerns both the realm of being as well as that of becoming, in relation to the effects. In sum, the cause of the being of the house, even the instrumental cause (i.e. the cement, stones, etc.) is *naturally prior* to the effect of the house, since if it were removed, the effect would cease to exist. That is not the case with respect to the instrumental cause of the *becoming* of the house.

¹⁶⁷ De pot. 5.1; S.T. I 104.1. For the distinction between univocal, equivocal and analogous causes, see: In 1 Sent. 8.1.2; S.T. I 4; 6.2; 13.5 ad 1; I-II 60.1; De pot. 7.7 ad 7.

¹⁶⁸ e.g. C.G. III 66.

¹⁶⁹ This is due to the subordination of causes: The power of a lower agent depends on the power of the higher one: C.G. III 70.

¹⁷⁰ De pot. 5.1.

¹⁷¹ C.G. III 69, e.g. against the views of Averroes and Avicenna.

¹⁷² C.G. III 70.

to argue for the reduction to “esse intensif”, when Aquinas intended the causality of esse to be at once wholly a result of the principal *and* the secondary agent.¹⁷³

The relation between the primary and secondary cause is, we have indicated, quite complex. If one stresses the unity of the effect and the dual contribution of causes, then Fabro’s reduction to primary efficient causality is a strained interpretation of the causality of esse. On the other hand, if one stresses the transcendental/predicamental distinction in its interpretation, then Fabro’s reading is plausible. For, the relation of the principal cause of being and its conservation by God to the instrumental, or secondary cause of being (creatures which cause being, namely, the heavenly bodies and the individual composites of which esse is a result) is that of condition to conditioned, despite their presumed “equal” contribution to the effect, which is the material composite’s esse. Nothing gives being except insofar as it acts by the divine power, and this is true for three main reasons.¹⁷⁴ The first is from participation: When several different agents are subordinated to one agent, the effect that is produced by their common action is attributed to them as they are united in their participation in the motion and power of this agent. The second is from finality: In all ordered agents, that which is last in generation and first in intention is the proper product of the primary agent: esse is last achieved and first intended in the process of generation. Third, since the order of effects follows that of causes, and since esse is the proper effect of the primary agent, creatures produce being through the power of primary agent, as determining its power.

If God conditions creature’s causation of being, how precisely is His causal presence felt in instrumental causes? De pot. 3.7 outlines four modes of the divine presence: First, there are two mediate or remote ways in which God is present: He (1) gives creatures their powers and (2) conserves these same powers. Second, there are two immediate or direct modes of divine presence: God (1) “applies” creatures’ powers to action¹⁷⁵ and (2) causes the creatures’ powers to

¹⁷³ C.G. III 70 argues, at the end, for the total and sufficient contribution of the secondary agent in the causation of esse, alongside the equally total and sufficient causality of God with respect to one and the same effect. However difficult it is to understand the notion of two causes equally causing a single effect, each in their proper order, Aquinas is arguing against the notion of “partial” causes, which would denote imperfection of power in the agent. And, an imperfection of power contradicts the purpose of secondary causality to begin with, namely, to reflect the goodness of God.

¹⁷⁴ C.G. III 66.

¹⁷⁵ This is because no finite power is per se in act, and every potency is reduced to act by something already in act; ultimately by something per se in act. Thomas avoids the charge of determinism in this whole issue by showing that even though divine efficient causality is naturally prior, it is simultaneous,

attain the actual existence of the effect. These immediate modes of divine efficient causality can be distinguished by explaining the two formalities that every secondary effect has: form and esse. First, the power is applied to action, as a man applies the sharpness of the knife to cutting: The effect here is conditioned by God, since all action must be traced back to a per se agent, but the effect is the result of the proper power of certain finite form. Second, the power is “moved as an instrument”: it attains the effect of the prime cause, namely, esse, only by virtue of that prime cause: The power is not only moved to action by God; it is *elevated* to an effect which is beyond its proper powers.

This fourth mode of divine efficient causality which characterises the instrumental cause’s dependence is the most central of the divine modes for our purposes, since it concerns the causality of esse. How does this attainment of esse by creatures which is not proper to their powers, occur? Thomas says that the creature is moved by the principal agent, and rises above the ability of its own form,¹⁷⁶ so that the creature’s effect is conferred by an influx of a higher cause¹⁷⁷ which is transitory, incomplete and dynamic in nature, in contrast to the form which possesses it. This “intentio” or intentional (viz. imperfect) being is due to the natural priority of the cause which sustains it,¹⁷⁸ and it is likened to an image in a mirror, light in air and the power of the carpenter moving through his tools:

But that which God does in a natural thing to make it operate actually, is a mere intention, incomplete in being, as colours in the air and the power of the craftsman in his instrument. Hence even as art can give the axe its sharpness as a permanent form, but not the power of the art as a permanent form, unless it were endowed with intelligence, so it is possible for a natural thing to be given its own proper power as a permanent form within it, but not the power to act so as

and above the creaturely order of necessity and contingency. The human will is free because the divine mode operates in accord with the finite thing’s nature: “Omnia movet [Deus] secundum eorum conditionem”: S.T. I-II 10.4. Cf. S.T. I-II 113.3; De mal. 6.1 ad 3; S.T. I.19.8; 83.1 ad 3.

¹⁷⁶ De ver. 27. 4c, ad 4; 7. For the other main texts on the twofold action and power of an instrumental cause, see S.T. III 62.1 ad 2; C.G. III 70; De pot. 5.1 ad 6; 5.6 ad 4; 3.7 ad 7; In 4 Sent. 1.1.4 q. 2; q. 4.

¹⁷⁷ Often the example here is the causation of grace by the sacraments. The term “influx” is used to represent the divine causal presence in nature. The interesting metaphysical point is the analogy between God’s presence through sanctifying grace in the sacraments and the dynamic (vs. static) communication of esse, which elevates a creature’s causal ability: “...quando similitudo effectus non secundum eandem rationem, nec ut natura quaedam, nec ut quiescens, sed per modum cuiusdam defluxus est in causa; sicut similitudines effectuum sunt in instrumentis, quibus mediantibus defluunt formae a causis principalibus in effectus.” (De ver. 27.7c)

¹⁷⁸ For when the cause of being is removed, so is the effect of esse.

to cause being as the instrument of the first cause, unless it were given to be the universal principle of being.¹⁷⁹

The divine efficient causality which elevates a natural form to attain the *esse* of its effect works simultaneously with the divine power applying the natural powers to action and with the finite form which produces the form of the effect. In comparison to the principal agent, the proper action of the creature is to determine and particularise the first agent's action, and this action terminates in the production of the form of the effect, which is the effect's first formality.¹⁸⁰

What does the above explanation of instrumental causality indicate about the "reduction" of all types of causality to divine efficient causality, which is the conclusion of Fabro? The problem with Fabro's interpretation is that it a) doesn't address the universality of *form* in the transcendental order, which is an equally important issue for both the explanation of creaturely causality and divine causal preeminence;¹⁸¹ b) stresses the need for a reduction to a single metaphysical principle (*Esse Subsistens*) at the expense of explaining Aquinas' view that God and creature are both "sufficient causes", each in their own order, of *esse*.

Regarding this second point, Fabro does admit that the finite form, as the principle of action in a thing does cause being, for the form is the mediator between infinite and finite *esse*.¹⁸² But he interprets the principle of limitation to mean that the plenitude of actuality which

¹⁷⁹ *De pot.* 3.7 ad 7: "Sed id quod a Deo fit in re naturali, quo actualiter agat, est ut intentio sola, habens esse quoddam incompletum, per modum quo colores sunt in aere, et virtus artis in instrumento artificis. Sicut ergo securi per artem dari potuit acumen, ut esset forma in ea permanens, non autem dari ei potuit quod vis artis esset in ea quasi quaedam forma permanens, nisi haberet intellectum; ita rei naturali potuit conferri virtus propria, ut forma in ipsa permanens, non autem vis qua agit ad esse ut instrumentum primae causae; nisi daretur ei quod esset universale essendi principium...." For the example of the image in a mirror, and its connection to the notion of analogous causes of *esse* in corporeal beings, see *De pot.* 5.1 ad 6.

¹⁸⁰ For a limitation by passive potency is the only way in which the divine motion can be determined: *De pot.* 1.4 ad 3; *De ver.* 5.9 ad 10; *C.G.* III 66; *In 2 Sent.* 1.1.4.

¹⁸¹ We will take up the universality of form in the context of divine infinity (*S.T.* I.7, in section 5.2.1 below), but also involved is the role of the divine ideas in God's presence to creatures.

¹⁸² *Ibid.* Pt. II S. 2, pp. 344-58. Fabro's most important advance over other twentieth century Thomists was to illustrate Aquinas' transcendence of both Plato's and Aristotle's notions of causality in a metaphysics of *esse*. He characterises Plato's as a "vertical" perspective of participation which stresses formal participation, and Aristotle's as a "horizontal" communication of form; where the former stresses transcendence and the latter, immanence (e.g. p. 195). Aquinas, he states, preserves both insights: "Ce n'est plus simplement la causalité formelle verticale du platonisme, ni la causalité efficiente horizontale de l'aristotélisme, mais un dépassement, qui les conserve, selon la terminologie hégélienne, toutes les deux." (p. 362).

is the divine causality is determined only as passive potency.¹⁸³ It is at this point that one sees Fabro's zeal to distinguish the principal from instrumental cause on the basis of the latter's universal causal power, which encompasses all being. This reduction of causality to divine efficient causality echoes modalist existentialism's concern to place all being in God and fails to account for Aquinas' nuanced terminology of esse commune and commonness. Regarding esse commune, Aquinas distinguishes creaturely esse commune (which can be added to) and divine esse commune (which can harbor no addition).¹⁸⁴ Regarding commonness or universality, Aquinas distinguishes between commonness by predication and by causality.¹⁸⁵ Fabro's insistence that nothing can be added to esse except by passive potentiality is thus founded on a problem that Aquinas had solved through his teaching on participation. One can also ask Fabro how the finite form can at once limit as passive potency and give being on the predicamental level.¹⁸⁶

An analysis of Fabro's notion of divine and instrumental causation of esse, shows that what Fabro calls the original "diremption" of being,¹⁸⁷ namely, the attribution of total causality of esse to God and the conferral of secondary causal efficiency to creatures in varying degrees, remains unexplained. This is the case because the positive nature of predicamental causality in relation to transcendental esse is also left unexplained. In short, while predicamental causality answers to the composition of matter and form and of substance and accident, the composition of esse and essence, as "transcendental perfections" have as their correlative total dependence of

¹⁸³ For if it determined as an act, it would "add" to esse commune and determine as a difference to a genus, which would destroy the total and fundamental nature of divine causality. His example of the human free will determining divine causality, as "particularising" the tendency towards universal goodness, is strange, in that this limitation appears to be quite actual. See Participation et causalité... Pt. III S. 1, pp. 506-508. Also involved in the question of the principle of limitation is the debate between Fabro and Geiger on the priority among types of participation: composition or similitude. Fabro's stress on the role esse plays leads him to posit participation by composition first in the order of nature, whereas Geiger's stress on the positive role of essence leads him to posit the other type of participation (by similitude or formal hierarchy) as first. But we will return to this issue.

¹⁸⁴ S.T. I 3.4 ad 1; De pot. 7.2 ad 6.

¹⁸⁵ In de Trin. 5.4; In 4 Sent. d.49 q.1 a.1 sol.1 ad 3.

¹⁸⁶ The causality of finite form is highlighted especially in texts which show the spiritual soul to be the principle of life. Here, there is a close alliance between form and esse because the esse belongs immediately and necessarily to it: S.T. I 75. 2,6, e.g. Although esse is caused ad extra efficiently, it results from the form (or from the composite's principles) as from a mediator, just as diaphaneity is the principle of light in the air, making it the proper subject of whiteness, form is the quo est of the thing: C.G. II 54; 68. Cf. the various texts assembled by Fabro, op. cit. Pt. II S. 2, pp. 349-354.

¹⁸⁷ ibid. Pt. II S. 3, p. 379.

being on the Creator.¹⁸⁸ This emphasis allows Fabro to secure a unified first metaphysical principle in the transcendental order but fails to explain the close union and concurrence of principal and instrumental causes, which cooperate not as partial or insufficient causes but as perfect and total causes each in their own order.

In C.G. III 70 and S.T. I 104.1 Aquinas hints at the sense in which both finite and infinite analogous efficient causes can both produce the same effect “each in their own order”. God does not cooperate with the creature as if “diceretur de duobus portantibus aliquod pondus, vel de pluribus trahentibus navem”, for this type of concurrence indicates that each cause possesses only part of the power, which makes the power of each imperfect.¹⁸⁹ Rather, both God and the heavenly bodies cause the forms of species as such, both are the “total” cause of their being, not just their becoming, and both are naturally prior as separable in relation to their effects.¹⁹⁰ Creatures hold other creatures in being both indirectly (through removing causes of their corruption) and directly (through creating and conserving them).¹⁹¹ Thus, although Aquinas says that God alone can properly create,¹⁹² he also holds that divine providence has created an order among causes such that while God’s efficient causality is universal, some creatures transcend mere specific causality and are used as subordinate tools to create forms as such.

To conclude this point, Fabro’s assimilation of esse to the principal cause is correct only in the remote modes of divine presence, and must be balanced with an explanation of instrumental causality that explains the finite causation of esse. For Aquinas, the finite causation of esse involves a close alliance between instrumental causality (the instrument acts only by virtue of the principal cause) and secondary causality (which acts by virtue of its own nature). One can hypothesize that Aquinas understood the matter in the following way. Heavenly bodies cause esse instrumentally, in that their action is dependent on the influx of God’s esse, and their powers are elevated in a transitory manner to produce their effect. In this sense they act in a manner like the carpenter’s tools, in virtue of the carpenter’s action on and through them. Yet, the hierarchy among causes established by God’s goodness means that causing forms as such is a real, although not proper, power of action. One could say that their action is real and yet their

¹⁸⁸ ibid. Pt. II S. 3, p. 364.

¹⁸⁹ Contra Errores Graecorum, c. 23. C.G. III 70 expresses the same point without using the examples.

¹⁹⁰ S.T. I 104.1.

¹⁹¹ S.T. I 104.2.

causality is not principal, since the initiative and elevating influx rests with God, and the act of creation is more properly God's. Yet God and creature are complete causes "each in their own order", i.e. either by an infinite causality extending to all being, or by a finite analogous causality extending to individual beings.

Yet another example is found in Aquinas' theory of inspiration of Scripture: The inspired authors of Scripture are "free" instruments of God used by Him for a work that is directly and properly His own. Yet they use their own natural resources, although at the most profound level, their work is the Word of God. Instrumental causality so understood involves the natural priority of God to creation *and* the natural priority of some creatures to others, by origin and separability.

The third and final reason Fabro gave for positing esse as the term of creation was that esse is the basis for all perfections. In order to analyse Fabro's interpretation and to present an alternative understanding of the relation between form and esse in the predicamental order, we must give a brief outline of the metaphysics of creation in Aquinas. There are two main issues involved in the question of the relation of form and esse in creation, which together contain Aquinas' position on the relative priority of esse to form in the created subject. First, there is the question of the foundation of creation: As a relation which is founded in the creature, creation is problematic because an accident requires an existent subject for its inherence. What is the foundation of relation from the side of the creature? Second, there is the question of the order in which metaphysical principles are created.¹⁹³

The second question is easier to answer. Fabro's emphasis on esse as the foundation of the relation of creation can easily lead to the view that esse is naturally prior to form in predicamental order, and this is the force of the question concerning the order of metaphysical principles. Those philosophers who identify esse as the term of creation should not identify esse with that relation itself, for this is to reify created esse. And esse, Thomas insists, is not a subject.¹⁹⁴ Thus, the metaphysical principles are concreated, that is, created together, even though in the creature they compose an act-potency structure. Only subsisting things can be

¹⁹² C.G. II 21, e.g.

¹⁹³ This answer to this question answers, in part, the question of how esse is "the first effect".

¹⁹⁴ In Boeth. de Hebdom. l. 2 #22-23: "Nam currere et esse significatur in abstracto, sicut et albedo; sed quod est, id est ens et currens, significantur sicut in concrete, velut album...sicut non possumus dicere quod ipsum currere currat, ita non possumus dicere quod ipsum esse sit: sed sicut id ipsum quod est,

said to exist, strictly speaking, and no principles or accidents are “created”, properly speaking: they are concreated.¹⁹⁵ Thus, the phrase “prima rerum creatarum est esse” requires interpretation. The primacy is neither natural nor temporal, for this would imply subsistence. Rather, *esse* is primary as the foundation of all other acts and perfections, in the sense that it contains them all.¹⁹⁶

Next is the question of the foundation of the relation of creation. Creation is distinguished from relations of change in that it signifies total dependence of the creature on the source of its being:

...creation...cannot be taken for a movement of the creature previous to its reaching the term of movement, but denotes the accomplished fact. Wherefore creation does not denote an approach to being, nor a change effected by the Creator, but merely a beginning in existence, and a relation to the Creator from whom the creature receives its being.¹⁹⁷

In the order of nature, however, the foundation must be prior to the relation.¹⁹⁸ Close scrutiny of the texts which distinguish creation from change show that the foundation of the real relation on the side of the creature is its nonbeing, since only motion (and action and passion) require a preexistent subject.¹⁹⁹ Although predicamental, and so prior to the creature, Aquinas says that

significatur sicut subiectum essendi, sic id quod currit significatur sicut subiectum currendi...ipsum esse nondum est, quia non attribuitur sibi sicut subiecto essendi.”

¹⁹⁵ *De pot.* 3.3 ad 2.

¹⁹⁶ Fabro links the foundational character of predicamental *esse* with its indeterminacy and commonness: “...l’*esse* causé par Dieu signifie l’indétermination de plénitude et d’actualité; c’est l’acte qui actualise tout autre act substantiel et accidentel, et qui est présuppose afin que toute autre chose soit en act et puisse agir...” (p. 508). See, e.g. *In 2 Sent.* 1.1.3; *C.G.* III 66; *De pot.* 3.1; *S.T.* I 45.5; 65.3; *C.Th.* c. 69; *De subst. sep.* c. 10 on the indeterminacy of created *esse*.

¹⁹⁷ *De pot.* 3.3c: “...Creatio, autem, sicut dictum est...non potest accipi ut moveri, quod est ante terminum motus, sed accipitur ut in facto esse; unde in ipsa creatione non importatur aliquis accessus ad esse, nec transmutatio a creante, sed solummodo inceptio essendi, et relatio ad creatorem a quo esse habet...” Cf. *C.G.* II 18; *In 1 Sent.* d. 40 q. 1 a. 1 ad 1; *In 2 Sent.* d. 1 q. 1 a. 2 ad 4 et 5. The teaching is emphasized in *S.T.* I 45.3.

¹⁹⁸ And in God, there is such a foundation for creation, although it is only logical. It is not real, for there can be no “new being” added in creation: God contains all being: *S.T.* I 4.2; *In 1 Sent.* 2.1.2; *De Pot.* 1.2; ad 6; *C.G.* I 43; *C.Th.* c. 15. It is God’s infinite power which bases Aquinas’ view that God’s being cannot be limited because it is not received in a subject. All this leads to the view that created *esse* does not exist or subsist. For an exegesis of the *In de Hebd.* l. 2 #22-23 text, see: F. Wilhelmson, “The Concept of Existence and the Structure of Judgment: A Thomistic Paradox” *Thomist* 41 (1977), n. 3, pp. 317-49.

¹⁹⁹ See, e.g. *De pot.* 3.1 ad 10. On the role of negative judgments in this understanding of creation’s foundation, see: *De mal.* 1.1; *In 2 Sent.* 37.1.2 ad 3.

creation is *concreated* with the creature. Thus he can say that creation “taken passively is in the creature and is the creature”.²¹⁰

Thus, the balance of two positions (viz. the accidental character of relation and its identity with the whole creature) is maintained by Aquinas. What is the foundation of the relation, however? Fabro’s emphasis on *esse* as the term of the relation from the side of God makes it the creaturely foundation, and this seems to agree with Aquinas’ metaphysical reasoning that *esse* is prior to form in the predicamental order.²¹¹ Moreover, while *esse* is prior to form in this order, it is not naturally prior, in the sense of being subsistent, and the same can be said of the foundation of a relation.

While Fabro’s interpretation enables him to draw a neat deduction to transcendental *esse* as the supreme metaphysical origin, by the same token it confuses the relation of creation (“creaturehood”) with created *esse*. In fact, although the relation of creation *is* the creature (taken passively), the foundation of creaturehood is not *esse* alone. In other words, “to be a creature” *cannot* be deduced directly from the fact of existence. If it could be, then the notion of existence would analytically imply “being caused” (and eventually “being derived from God”). Given the implications of Fabro’s view, two positions would ensue: a) the view that essences are “theistically neutral”, or eternal and uncaused;²¹² b) a version of ontologism, where the concept of existence contains the predicate “being deduced from infinite *esse*”.²¹³ Even reasoning to a

²¹⁰ *S.T.* I 45.3 ad 2. There is no major distinction between the subject and the relation in this case, except secondarily, since creation is somehow both a *quod*, as a subsisting creature, and a *quo*, of a relation. Creation thus differs “quasi secundario, sicut concreatum”: *De pot.* 3.3 ad 7.

²¹¹ His reasoning usually centers around the priority of *esse* as efficiently caused and coming to the form *ad extra*. The cause of being in things is either the principles of the essence or an external agent: e.g. *S.T.* I 3.4; *De pot.* 3.3 ad 3; *De ente et essentia* c. 4. In the important *De pot.* text, the balance between the priority and posteriority of the relation of creation to the creature is explained by saying that according to its *esse* (the order of nature) the relation is posterior, but according to its *ratio* (that is, viewed from the viewpoint of the efficient cause) it is prior.

²¹² Such a view is expressed by Avicenna, whereas Aquinas argues that the essence only has two modes of existence: in a mind and *in rerum natura*. The third mode of considering an essence, that is, absolutely, is only a mode of consideration. See *De ente et essentia* c. 3. On this issue of Aquinas’ refusal to attribute being to Avicenna’s essence absolutely considered, see J. Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1963), pp. 131-42; J. Owens, “Unity and Essence in St. Thomas Aquinas” *Mediaeval Studies* 23 (1961), pp. 240-59. On the texts of Avicenna, see Avicenna, *Metaph.*, V, 1-2, fol. 86va-87v; *Logica* I, fo. 2b; *De Anima* II, 2, fol. 6vb.

²¹³ This second position is not as easily deduced as the first, for the notion of contingency doesn’t necessarily point to an *infinite* source of being. However, it is certain that no proof of God can start from finite *esse* alone, for such a starting point yields no knowledge of a type of being, and could not be demonstrative. It would also entail converting *esse* into a relation of dependence, which denies the fact that being has no presuppositions, even relation. See, e.g. *De pot.* 3.4c; 3.8 ad 19.

priority of esse over nature or form in the predicamental order does not conclude to the identity of esse with creaturehood.

If esse alone is not the foundation of the relation, then what is? It is not essence taken in isolation, because the ratio of creation is the ad extra efficient causality of God, and creaturehood and the notion of production, are anterior to the understanding of the specific essence in question.²¹⁴ The knowledge of creaturehood, while not deducible directly from the fact of existence, can neither be deduced from a thing's essential content, for effects are known as effects only as deduced from their proper causes. Thus, the *created* status of things is deduced from the Cause of their being, and not from essence or existence alone. The foundation of the relation then, must be these two metaphysical principles taken together. Since "to create" means to make an entire substance ex nihilo,²¹⁵ the term of creation is the entire creature. The relation signifies the dependence in being of the whole creature, so that the esse ab alio is not merely the "existence" side of the real distinction, but the *whole* creature, which, taken in itself, is nothing.

The above analysis of Aquinas' metaphysics of creation shows that Fabro's emphasis on esse confounds the relation of creation with esse itself, and leans towards an interpretation of esse as naturally prior in the created order, as "the first effect". What his argument in general shows correctly is the transcendence of universal analogical causality as properly creative. What his argument misses is a) the equal role afforded to transcendental *exemplar* causality and divine causal preeminence within Aquinas' metaphysics, b) a proper explanation of the intimacy of form and esse in the predicamental order and the role of finite form, as indicated by the theory of instrumental causality, for instance, and finally, c) Aquinas' emphasis on the term of creation as the *whole* being, not just esse. Thus, the existentialist reduction to divine efficient causality of esse which Fabro presents is not a complete or just explanation of the priority of esse to form in the predicamental order, and in the attempt to unify metaphysics through a single overarching first metaphysical principle, could be seen to translate transcendental unicity²¹⁶ into the natural priority of esse in the predicamental order.

The third and final topic considered in our analysis of Fabro is his view on the subject matter of metaphysics. In chapter one, we indicated that Fabro moved from an Aristotelian

²¹⁴ In fact, the essential order abstracts from all being, for essences are nothing in themselves. See De ente et essentia c. 3.

²¹⁵ De pot. 3.1 ad 7.

²¹⁶ This refers to the identity of form and existence in God.

position to his own unique view that the subject matter consists of esse ut actus intensivus, which is grasped by way of “intensive abstraction”. We saw that this view identified the traditional starting point of metaphysics (ens in quantum ens) with its terminus, the infinite plenitude of being. Three difficulties emerge in Fabro’s view. First, it is unclear why Fabro came to believe that the terminus of metaphysics, namely, the infinite plenitude of being, is also its subject, especially since Aquinas clearly distinguishes the cause of the subject matter and ens in quantum ens.²⁰⁷ Perhaps his relegation of predicamental participation to the sphere of logic forced him to describe the subject matter of metaphysics solely in terms of the transcendental level of being.

Second, although Fabro clearly identifies the initially known common being with Ipsium Esse,²⁰⁸ it is unclear how this identification can be defended. Further, Fabro introduced the predicamental/transcendental distinction partly to explain the human intellect’s limited grasp of the nature of being, in that an increasingly “intensive” concept is had of things by turning away from the abstract (e.g. that x is a being) to the concrete (e.g. that x is living, sensitive or rational).²⁰⁹ Thus, the “being beyond knowing” (viz. Ipsium Esse) could not serve as the subject matter of a human science, as Fabro implies by his identification of the beginning and end of metaphysics.

Third, Fabro insists that the subject matter of metaphysics is not the result of any type of abstraction: “Insofar as the notio entis properly includes esse as its distinguishing characteristic, it rivets and connects consciousness of necessity to reality in act, from which, for this reason, the mind cannot abstract.”²¹⁰ While “ordinary” abstraction isolates only the essence, the act which grasps the subject matter of metaphysics includes both the essence and the actus essendi, he says.²¹¹ Neither is the act one of judgment, “...for the notio entis precedes them both [viz. simple apprehension and judgment], just as, in fact, ens precedes res and verum in the grounding of the transcendentals...”²¹² Rather,

²⁰⁷ See In Meta. Proemium. e.g., as well as In de Trin. 5.3c.

²⁰⁸ Participation et causalité p. 252: “...le départ [de l’analyse métaphysique] est l’esse comme acte de l’ens et l’arrivée est l’esse comme acte des actes et perfections de toutes les perfections. L’esse qui est au départ, l’acte le plus commune, se manifeste à la fin comme acte le plus intense, qui transcende tous les actes et doit les engendrer de l’éternelle et inépuisable profondeur de sa plénitude”.

²⁰⁹ See Participation et causalité pp. 341-343.

²¹⁰ “The Transcendentality of Ens-Esse and the Ground of Metaphysics” p. 425.

²¹¹ “The Transcendentality...” p. 424.

²¹² “The Transcendentality...” p. 426.

...the notio entis is a synthesis of content and act...a certain ineffable form of “conjoint apprehension” of content on the part of mind and of act on the part of experience...not on the part of any sort of experience, that is, not the mere fact of existence, but the experience of the simultaneous awareness of the being-in-act of the world in relation to consciousness and of the actuation of consciousness in its turning to the world.²¹³

We have noted that Fabro’s identification of “being qua being” with infinite being, the term of metaphysics, was unclear, and that it contradicted Aquinas’ clear distinction of the cause of ens in quantum ens and the cause of that subject matter. As well, Fabro’s theory of “conjoint apprehension”, the act which is said to combine the notes of esse and essence in the metaphysical notio entis, also remains unclear. Fabro said that a third act other than abstraction and judgment is required to grasp metaphysics’ subject matter, since ens’ inclusion of both metaphysical principles demands something more than the individual acts corresponding either to esse (judgment) or to form (apprehension).

Taking each of these issues in more detail, we can first question Fabro’s identification of Ipsum Esse with esse. Here, Fabro is confusing the primacies of commonness and causality, making esse “separate” in identifying it with Ipsum Esse.²¹⁴ Presumably this occurred because Fabro wanted to distinguish metaphysics’ consideration of being from “facticity”, which signalled mere formal content, and wanted to identify it with intensive causality, or act. Although Fabro wants to include the note of form in the metaphysical notion of being which is its subject matter, his focus on intensive act leads to the position that esse is in some way naturally prior as “separable” from form and matter.²¹⁵ Yet Aquinas makes it clear that the separability criterion applies only to substantial forms, and not to metaphysical principles.²¹⁶ Further, we noted that Aquinas repeatedly distinguishes the cause of the subject matter of metaphysics (Ipsum Esse) from the subject matter itself (ens in quantum ens). Esse is known as

²¹³ “The Transcendentality...” p. 425. That Fabro is here discussing the subject of metaphysics is signalled by his rejection of factual existence as the note of actuality (versus content) in such a concept.

²¹⁴ On this, see W. Hoye, Actualitas Omnium Actuum p. 68. It is evident that Hoye agrees with his teacher, Fabro. See Hoye pp. 52-54.

²¹⁵ Hoye develops this point which is implicit in Fabro’s teaching on “intensive esse”. Hoye says that esse ut actus intensivus is reached through “dialectical emergence” (cf. Fabro) in the sense that it is the apex of our understanding of act, as foundation and as summit of perfection. This notion of act follows Plato’s principle of separated perfection, he goes on to say (Hoye pp. 45-46. He quotes De pot. 3.5c, a text which establishes a unified cause for several effects.)

²¹⁶ S.T. I 67.3, in his discussion of whether modes are forms.

causally “separate” long after the properly metaphysical viewpoint of universal being is assumed.²¹⁷

The second problem involved in Fabro’s conception of the subject matter of metaphysics is his notion of “conjoint apprehension”. Here, there are two problems. First, Fabro fails to account for Aquinas’ own analysis of universal being, where separate esse is considered only indirectly, at the upper reaches of form, and long after the properly metaphysical viewpoint is adopted.²¹⁸ Aquinas introduces the universality of ens qua ens by showing a gradated hierarchy of perfections, such as goodness, truth and beauty, in the “fourth way”,²¹⁹ indicating that the metaphysical viewpoint does not identify the analogical cause of beings with their effects. Rather, the need for a cause of the hierarchy of being is revealed only after the magis/minus order is established as metaphysics’ proper field of study.²²⁰

The second problem with Fabro’s notion of “conjoint apprehension” is that it contradicts Aquinas’ statements on the derivation of ens in quantum ens. While Fabro says that since ens is not the result of judgment or of abstraction, for in themselves, these acts are mutually exclusive, Aquinas refers to both acts in his description of the attainment of metaphysics’ subject matter. The negative judgment of separation attains this subject matter,²²¹ and it must involve some sort of abstraction as well, in order to accommodate form through which esse is known.²²² Aquinas also calls ens a universal form which is abstracted,²²³ in the sense that one leaves out both signate and common intelligible matter in abstracting ens, such that ens has the signification of pure form.²²⁴

²¹⁷ Aquinas traces the development of the properly metaphysical viewpoint in S.T. I 44.2 (cf. C.G. II 15).

²¹⁸ S.T. I 44.2. Cf. the “fourth way”, S.T. I 2.3.

²¹⁹ S.T. I 2.3. In S.T. I 19.6, universal perfections are called “universal forms”.

²²⁰ In this interpretation of the “fourth way”, I am in agreement with L. Dewan, “St. Thomas’ Fourth Way and Creation” (Thomist 59 [1995] 371-379).

²²¹ In de Trin. 5.3c: “Sic igitur in operatione intellectus triplex distinctio invenitur. Una secundum operationem intellectus componentis et dividensis, quae separatio dicitur proprie; et haec competit scientiae divinae, sive metaphysicae.”

²²² Ens in quantum ens is the subject matter, which includes form, through which esse is known: S.T. I 85.1 ad 2: “Quaedam vero sunt quae possunt abstrahi etiam a materia intelligibili communi, sicut ens, unum, potentia et actus, et alia huiusmodi, quae etiam esse possunt absque omni materia, ut patet in substantiis immaterialibus.”

²²³ S.T. I 85.1 ad 2: “...Quaedam vero sunt quae possunt abstrahi etiam a materia intelligibili communi, sicut ens, unum, potentia et actus, et alia huiusmodi, quae etiam esse possunt absque omni materia, ut patet in substantiis immaterialibus...” Cf. S.T. I 19.6: “In formis autem sic est quod, licet aliquid possit deficere ab aliqua forma particulari, tamen a forma universali nihil deficere potest; potest enim esse aliquid quod non est homo vel vivum, non autem potest esse aliquid quod non sit ens.”

²²⁴ Forms are perfections, as well. See S.T. I 14.6.

Esse is known “confusedly” in ens, just as differences are known confusedly in the species.²²⁵ While Fabro’s view is driven by an exclusive identification of esse as the subject matter of metaphysics, Aquinas says that esse is considered only indirectly through the form in the conversion to the phantasm, so that an isolation of esse as the single note of ens oversimplifies our knowledge of being.²²⁶ Far from focusing on an advanced notion of esse as the subject matter of metaphysics, Aquinas envisions esse as a participation in the nature of the first cause only after outlining the proportionality, or analogical nature of being. Aquinas’ insistence that the subject matter of metaphysics is attained by separatio must include reference to abstraction as well, or at the very least, be preceded by it.²²⁷ Separatio, or the judgment whereby one distinguishes one thing from another by understanding that the one is not found in the other,²²⁸ is distinct from abstraction in that it attains things as they are, and focusses on esse (as judgment). Yet this is not inconsistent with the knowledge of the proportional notion of ens through a universal form transcending all matter, and Fabro fails to consider any connection between Aquinas’ two ideas.

In the above analysis of Carlo, Gilson and Fabro, we found that Aquinas’ five senses of natural priority were used in various ways with respect to esse. Regarding Carlo, the identification of esse as the sum of all perfections, the disassociation of form and infinity, and the notion of a unified principle of similitude were all discussed and his arguments were found to be inadequate defenses of esse’s natural priority. Gilson’s defense of existentialism from the viewpoint of God’s essence, and from his notions of “substantial” esse and theological order in metaphysics were found equally wanting, and contrary to Aquinas’ own position. Finally, Fabro’s version of existential Thomism which reduced all causality to divine efficient causality,

²²⁵ S.T. I 85.8; 85.4 ad 3.

²²⁶ For Aquinas’ view that esse is considered only through the form and not on its own, see S.T. I-II 85.4; I 7.3, e.g. While a human or angelic intellect can by its natural powers “isolate” esse, or know it separately, this is not how esse exists normally, and the case of separate and subsistent esse (God) can be known only through an elevation by grace (S.T. I 12.4 ad 3).

²²⁷ On the topic of separatio, see: J. Wippel, “Metaphysics and Separatio in Thomas Aquinas”, in his book Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas pp. 69-104. On pp. 80-81, Wippel argues against associating abstraction with separatio in attaining metaphysics’ subject matter, saying that an abstracted notion of being would be univocal, and not sufficiently universal or transcendental to apply to individual differences. In short, the operation must be ordered directly to a thing’s esse. We are not arguing, however, that abstraction is sufficient to grasp this subject matter, but rather that it is involved in establishing the formal hierarchy required for the metaphysical notion of being, from which one can view esse as a perfection.

²²⁸ In de Trin. 5.3.

isolated esse as the term of creation and as the subject matter of metaphysics also contradicted Aquinas' view on the relation between form and esse. Having replied to the various existentialist Thomist arguments for the natural priority of esse to form, we can now turn to an analysis of form in the predicamental and transcendental orders, in order to further discern Aquinas' viewpoint on the relative priorities of form and esse.

5.3 *The Role of Form in the Predicamental Order*

5.3.1 *Metaphysical Investigation of Form*

In studying being, metaphysics concentrates on the formal cause most of all, for ens per se is form without matter:

...every substance either is ens through itself, if it is form alone, or else, if it is composed out of matter and form, it is ens through its own form; hence, inasmuch as this science undertakes to consider ens, it considers most of all the formal cause.²²⁹

“Every substance is ens through form” is the doctrine of Metaphysics 7-8, which treats the study of being through analysis of the categories. In short, the cause of ens is form; so that if a thing is itself form then it is ens per se; if a thing is composed of matter and form, then it is a being through form. Thus, there is a universal causality of form in relation to being. If metaphysics is to be a necessary deductive science, then the contingency of certain creatures cannot serve as the starting point for investigation. Rather, the hierarchy of forms guarantees both the necessity involved in the subject matter²³⁰ and the abstractive effort which grounds the judgment of separation, which attains esse commune.

What can be said about the primary role Aquinas ascribes to esse as the dominant metaphysical principle, within this scheme? The plan of De ente et essentia shows one of the main tasks of metaphysics is to show the order of things according to their relation to esse. The nobility of esse is deduced from its causality, for simpler substances “cause” composite ones. In

²²⁹ In 3 Meta. l. 4 #384: “Omnis autem substantia vel est ens per seipsam, si sit forma tantum; vel si sit composita ex materia et forma, est ens per suam formam; unde in quantum haec scientia est considerata entis, considerat maxime causam formalem.”

²³⁰ It has been the mistake of many Thomists to simplify Aquinas' notion of contingency by attributing it to creation unqualifiedly. For Aquinas, the “necessary/contingent” distinction represents the first division of categorical being, which God transcends. Creatures with no potency to nonbeing (through

short, it is the immateriality of esse which gives it causality, and this power is known through the thing's various operations. How does metaphysics study esse in the predicamental order, however, if it is distinct from essence and not subject to immediate conceptualisation? The problem of the scientific character of metaphysics, we said, is solved by the focus on form. One can avoid interpreting Aquinas' metaphysics as either a deduction from Ipsium Esse²³¹ or as a study of ens per accidens (focusing on finite esse) by attending to two points: First, not all existence is contingent, for being is a prior consideration to "being caused", and contingency means the propensity to fall into nonbeing, through alliance with matter. Second, although all causality *is* of esse²³², insofar as the predicamental order is considered as such, this is reducible to the causality of esse by essence.²³³

The analysis of esse is thus first through analysis of formal causality, including form's per se accidents, and second, through analysis of ad extra efficient causality, which introduces analogous causes to grade esse. Thus, the focus on formal causality need not exclude esse as the dominant principle within metaphysics. In addition, the focus on the formal cause specifies metaphysics as a science of finite substances, with a relation to the transcendental order through the avenue of ad extra efficient causality. The priority of esse to form which characterises the real composition in creatures is known only after pursuing this avenue.²³⁴

To sum up, one can observe the order of investigation in In 6 Meta. through In 9 Meta. against the background of texts pointing to esse's priority to form, as a nonpredicamental

alliance to matter) are properly necessary. See, e.g. In 6 Meta. l. 3 (#1188); In Peri. l. 14 (#197); S.T. I 48.2.

²³¹ J. Owens views metaphysics as such a deduction.

²³² In 2 Post. An. l. 7 (#471): "The reason for this, viz., that it is the same thing to know 'what it is' and to know the cause of the very 'it is', is this: that it is necessary that there be some cause of 'the thing is' [rem esse]: for something is called 'caused' because of this, viz., that it has a cause of its esse. Now, this cause of being [essendi] either is identical with the essence of the thing itself, or is other than it. Identical indeed, as form and matter, which are the parts of the essence; but other, as the efficient cause and the end: which two causes are in a way the causes of the form and the matter: for the agent operates on account of the end, and unites the form to the matter."

²³³ This of course is the study of being without reference to natural theology. An ultimate search through causes would of course lead to the causes esse and form in the transcendental order. The whole issue of the relative independence of metaphysics from natural theology is focused in the debate over the priority of the real distinction to the theory of causal participation, in the articles of J. Owens and J. Wippel of recent years.

²³⁴ I am not saying that the introduction of the real distinction into metaphysics requires a proof of God's existence, or even a theory of participation, which is the view of J. Owens. For that would violate the relative independence of metaphysics from natural theology, and is a position identifying esse with caused contingency.

accident.²³⁵ Metaphysics' study of ens per se moves from the treatment of substance and essence as found in the categories, to being as divided by act and potency, and finally to a consideration of the act of existing, considered scientifically as the actuality of the essence. Thus, the metaphysical investigation of form leads naturally to the principle of esse, but a natural priority of either principle is not posited.

5.3.2 *The Principle of Limitation: Positive or Negative?*

The "principle of limitation", as it has been called, concerns Aquinas' transposition of NeoPlatonic participation and Aristotelian act/potency into a metaphysics of esse. Specifically, Aquinas took over the Neoplatonic participation framework of an infinite source and a limited receiving subject, and made the ultimate perfection esse, and form, the limiting, participating principle. Also, Aquinas disengaged Aristotle's act/potency couplet (which originally explained change by composition within being) from its exclusive home in the context of change, to a hierarchical function of a higher plenitude of perfection limited by a receiving subject. Aquinas' synthesis of participation with act and potency is found in several texts,²³⁶ and can be expressed in the formula: "Act is not limited except by reception in a distinct potency".²³⁷

²³⁵ e.g. De pot. 5.4 ad 3. Aquinas presents Books 7 through 9 of Aristotle's Metaphysics as first, a consideration of substances via logic (Book 7), second, as treating sensible substances through their proper metaphysical principles (Book 8), and third, as focusing on the duality of the overarching metaphysical principles (Book 9): In 8 Meta. l. 1 (#1681); cf. In 7 Meta. l. 3 (#1306). Given the close association of form and esse, and metaphysics' refusal to include ens per accidens in its ambit, for beings per accidens are beings "quasi solo nomine" (In 6 Meta. l. 2 (#1176)), the study of existence is inextricable from that of form, which is the point I am trying to make.

²³⁶ Some representative texts are: C.G. I 43; II 52-54; De pot. 1, 2; 7, 2 ad 9; S.T. I 7.1-2; 50.2 ad 4; 75.5 ad 1 and 4; De spir. creat. 1; De subst. sep. 3 and 6; Quodl. III, 8, 20; Comp. Theol. 18 - 21; In 8 Phys. 10, l.21; In de Div. Nom. 5, l.1. A good study of participation in Aquinas is that of John Wippel: "St. Thomas and Participation" in Studies in Medieval Philosophy, ed. J. Wippel (Washington, D.C.: C.U.A. Press, 1987) pp. 117-58.

²³⁷ See, for example, C.G. II 52: "Esse autem, in quantum est esse, non potest esse diversum: potest autem diversificari per aliquid quod est praeter esse; sicut esse lapidis est aliud ab esse hominis". Cf. Comp. Theol. 18; C.G. I 43. The notion that act as such (and especially esse) is infinite is an axiom that Aquinas accepts. His reasons for holding this axiom deserve investigation, notes J. Wippel ("Essence and Existence in Other Writings", in J. Wippel, Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas [Washington D.C.: C.U.A. Press, 1984] p. 160 #65). On the limitation of act by reception in a subject, see J.-D. Robert, "Le Principe: 'Actus non limitatur nisi per potentiam subjectivam realiter distinctam'" (Revue philosophique du Louvain 47 [1949] 44-70). On the historical background to the issue, see W.N. Clarke, "The Limitation of Act by Potency: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism?" (New Scholasticism 26 [1952] 167-194).

The principle of limitation is required because esse as such is not self-diversifying.²³⁸ Aquinas' mode of distinguishing creatures from God is through the real composition of esse and essence, which limits or specifies esse.²³⁹ On the side of the creature, composition is the corollary of being caused. From the side of God, God cannot view Himself as imitable finitely without this combination of being and nonbeing in his act of understanding.²⁴⁰ We have seen that some view form as a purely negative limit principle (e.g., Carlo: section 1.2.1 above) and interpret Aquinas' metaphysics as a "grades of esse" theory. Others, such as L.B. Geiger and L. Dewan, view form as far more positive, and in doing so, downplay the role of the real distinction. Which approach, if either, best illustrates Aquinas' position?

Some existentialist Thomists make essence a purely negative mode of esse by placing all positive perfection on the side of esse, citing NeoPlatonic influences for the participation in existence theory.²⁴¹ Predictably, these thinkers see esse as self-diversifying, and they even dispense with the reality of the divine Ideas as grounds for similitude between God and creature, making esse the only principle of similitude.²⁴² As the ultimate in act and perfection,²⁴³ esse is seen as all-inclusive with nothing extraneous to it, so that form and matter become "modes" of it.²⁴⁴ Within this view, metaphysics focusses almost exclusively on judgment, and the notion of "receiving subject" is said to "constitute"²⁴⁵ the finitized act of existence, and not to actually "finitize" it.

²³⁸ *C.G.*, II 52: "...Esse autem in quantum est esse, non potest est diversum: potest autem diversificari per aliquid quod est praeter esse; sicut esse lapidis est aliud ab esse hominis. Illud ergo quod est esse subsistens, non potest esse nisi unum tantum..." Cf. *In de Trin.* 4.1.

²³⁹ See, e.g. *In I Sent.* 8.5.1. No creature is perfectly simple, due to this composition. It is a composition of ens and non ens and in fact has more nonesse than esse: *De Ver.* 2.3.

²⁴⁰ e.g. *De Ver.* 2.4 ad 2; 3.2. In order for God to create, He must view His own essence alongside the relation of that essence to the creature. This knowledge of imitation connotes knowledge of inequality, and hence, of some type (viz. relative) nonbeing.

²⁴¹ Besides Carlo, there is Arthur Little (*The Platonic Heritage of Thomism* [Golden Eagle Books: Dublin, 1949]), G. Phelan, ("The Being of Creatures" [*ACPA* 31, 1957, pp. 118ff.], and W.N. Clarke ("The Role of Essence within St. Thomas' Essence-Existence Doctrine: Positive or Negative Principle? A Dispute within Thomism" [*Atti del Congresso Internazionale Tomasso d'Aquino VI*, pp. 109-115]).

²⁴² Even Gilson views the divine Ideas as Platonic intrusions into Aquinas' metaphysics of existentialist participation. See, e.g. L.B. Geiger, "Les idées divines dans la philosophie..."

²⁴³ *De pot.* 7.2 ad 9. In language obviously indebted to Fabro, Clarke describes esse as "the intensive thesaurus of all perfection" ("The Role of Essence..." p. 111).

²⁴⁴ Even language of "modes" bespeaks the analogous presence of the same form, or quantitative grades of a univocal esse, it seems to me. Both conceptions destroy the intrinsic duality of principles at the heart of the predicamental order's participated structure.

²⁴⁵ "Clarke", p. 113. Incidentally, Aquinas' language of "habens esse" often used to express the relation of participation, also becomes inverted, so that esse "has" certain modes: "Existence here is horsy,

The merits of such a reading are that it stresses transcendental participation in Aquinas, identifies a single principle of similitude between the transcendental and predicamental orders, and guarantees the unity of the subject of metaphysics by identifying it with a single principle of being. The disadvantages however, far outweigh the explanatory power of such a theory. The most obvious problem is its denial of the close relationship between limitation and composition, or the real distinction in finite things. The existentialists' fear of a world of preexistent, eternal essences, which is at the root of their denial of a positive limiting subject, is not solved by transferring the unicity of being in the transcendental order to the exclusive perfection of *esse* in the predicamental order. Aquinas emphatically denies any such Avicennian state of the essence for an essence cannot be realized as such apart from its corresponding existence principle in a given substance.²⁴⁶ Further, form as positive does not refer to its *actual* state, which is conferred through the act of being, but refers only to essence as *potential* with respect to existence. Finally, from the perspective of God, the notion of hierarchy requires a positive principle of similitude, in the divine Ideas.

One good example of an existentialist Thomist who diminishes the role of essence in participation is Arthur Little, who views essence as a negative limit principle, with no positive content in participation or in the real distinction.²⁴⁷ In short, Little views essence as the pure negative limit of the plenitude of *esse*, calling essence “nonbeing”,²⁴⁸ “no-more-existence”,²⁴⁹ and “the no-moreness of being”.²⁵⁰ In tracing the heritage of Aquinas' theory of participation in being, Little ignores the NeoPlatonic influences and focusses on the Platonic notion of participation. From this starting point, he finds Aquinas' theory of participation, and

human, in the human mode” (*ibid.* p. 115). How does this reflect the *In de Heb.* l. 2 presentation of participation of subject and what is received, however?

²⁴⁶ On his denial of Avicenna's preexistent essence, see *De ente et essentia* c. 3.

²⁴⁷ See Arthur Little, *The Platonic Heritage of Thomism* (Dublin: Golden Eagle Books, 1949).

²⁴⁸ A. Little, *The Platonic Heritage...* p. 197, e.g.: “The being or perfection (*esse*) of the creature is limited by intrinsic union with the real fact of the exclusion or non-being of all the perfection by which God's infinite being infinitely exceeds that of the creature...The creature therefore is composed of being and non-being or limit, which are real constituents of the creature...” Cf. pp. 199; 207.

²⁴⁹ A. Little, *The Platonic Heritage...* p. 184.

²⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 210. Little's language, and his analogy of a glass holding water to demonstrate the essence/existence relationship (p. 195) is reminiscent of the modalist existentialists' language of form as “the place where *esse* stops”.

consequently, Aquinas' doctrine of the real distinction in the texts of Plato.²⁵¹ Thus, Little understands Aquinas' doctrine of the real distinction from within a Platonic understanding of participation, and credits Plato with the relationship between esse (pure perfection) and essence (passive or limiting potency, construed as pure negation):

The composition of potency and act discovered by him (Plato) was not that of matter and form (Aristotle's achievement) but of essence and existence. His composition of existence with non-existence...for a gleaming moment he saw unspoiled the metaphysical law of the real distinction of contingent existence from its limiting principle of no-more existence, or the essence.²⁵²

How did Little reach this conclusion regarding the role of essence in the real distinction?

First, he identifies Plato's solution to the problem of multiplicity with that of Aquinas:

...Plato's doctrine on passive potency...can be summarised. Non-being...is "otherness" or the principle of difference between being and being. It is also therefore the limit or exclusion of one being by another being...Moreover it is clear that Platonic non-being is exactly what Scholastics call a limit...²⁵³

Little then defines non-being as "the real exclusion of possible or actual positive reality or perfection",²⁵⁴ makes participation prior logically to real composition,²⁵⁵ and concludes by identifying Plato's idea with Aquinas' Ipsium Esse, in which beings participate analogically, through act/potency composition.²⁵⁶

Drawing on such texts as Comp. Theol. c.17 and De Ver. 2.2c and 2.3 ad 16²⁵⁷ and In de Trin. 4, 2, Little considers the notion of participation in terms of "measure" and similitude in relation to God. He interprets relative non ens as essence which is pure negative limit, without any positive content: "The creature therefore is composed of being and non-being or limit...the

²⁵¹ Little sees Aquinas' theory of participation as one influenced primarily by Plato with certain Platonic elements corrected by Aristotle (e.g. act/potency introduced) and Christianity (the infinitude of pure esse, for example). See Little, The Platonic Heritage... p. 192.

²⁵² Little, Platonic Heritage... p.184.

²⁵³ Little, Platonic Heritage pp. 183; 179. However, Little is careful to add that Aquinas, unlike Plato, did not make the error of identifying passive potency with space (p.191).

²⁵⁴ ibid., p. 178.

²⁵⁵ ibid., p.194: "The real distinction presupposes and logically requires knowledge of the doctrine of participation, of the finite being's derivation and distinction from the Being that is Being itself."

²⁵⁶ ibid., p. 192: "...the perfection participated must be received into a limiting principle with which it is intrinsically composed in the manner conceived by Aristotle."

²⁵⁷ Aquinas' text reads: "The more a creature approaches (in likeness) to God the more it has of being, and the more it recedes from God the more it has of non-being; and because it only approaches to God in the measure of the finite being that it has, but is infinitely distant, therefore it is said to have more non-being".

receptive potency *does* nothing, produces nothing, to effect its determination of the act..."²⁵⁸

Little does admit that this sense of non-being is not absolute but gives no explanation of how this passive potency is a real principle in composition,²⁵⁹ except by noting that "the limit is a positive reality since it is a relation to the being which it connotes".²⁶⁰

One main problem associated with Little's interpretation echoes the problem inherent in modalist existentialism, viz. the notion that all perfection is on the side of esse, and the corresponding implication that the principle of limitation has no positive ontological or conceptual content. The positive determining role of essence in the real distinction must not be underemphasized. The fact that the positive character of the essence is actually positive only through the being that actualises it, specifies its role as receptive potency. Yet in being made to exist, it thereby determines formally the being that is its proper act and complement, limiting it to its own capacity.²⁶¹ As B. Brown has noted, Little mistakenly identifies positive perfection with the act of being, since the positivity of essence originates in esse.²⁶²

Limitation cannot be a privation or negation for it is the thing itself, constituted by form (which makes an essence a definite, positive thing, as a man) which is the limitation. J. Owens explains the situation succinctly:

What properly constitutes the limitation of being in every case (viz. the stone, the tree, the man) is the positive content of these essences. In *being* positively *what* the stone is, a stone or a tree or any other finite thing limits that very being. The stone or the tree, etc., is in fact that limitation.²⁶³

In addition to the confusion of passive potency and negative limit, Little's position on limit cannot account for either real differentiation among beings or for the intelligibility of things. If Little is positing the theory as an explanation of specific differences in things, the problem arises as to the meaning of limit. When limitation and positive perfection become

²⁵⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 197; 195.

²⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 202: "By non-being he (viz. Aquinas) meant a limit, not the exclusion of all positive perfection...The union of being and non-being is intrinsic, a composition in which the components are mutually the determinations of each other and of the whole."

²⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 211.

²⁶¹ See J. Owens, "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being in the Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas" (*Med. St.* 20 [1958]) 38-39.

²⁶² Barry Brown, The Limitation of Act by Potency in Recent Thomistic Discussions of Existence (M.A. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1963) p. 38.

²⁶³ J. Owens, St. Thomas and the Future of Metaphysics [the Aquinas Lecture, 1957] (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1973) p. 70.

disassociated, the thing is no longer individuated by either its signate matter or its esse; rather, horseness or humanity, now identified with being as existence, would be swallowed into uniqueness.²⁶⁴ Thus, the metaphysical issue of distinction is left unsolved in Little's theory. Moreover, if the essence in its positivity is identified with the esse of a creature, there is no conceptual or intelligible content to the limit principle and essence would have no definition, which is absurd. Predication would be reduced to the judgmental affirmation of existence and the Parmenidean paradox would be verified and complete.²⁶⁵ An examination of the positive roles of essence in the predicamental and transcendental orders will support this critique of Little's position.

In the predicamental order, form plays both a positive and a negative role as the limit principle. Given the Neoplatonic axiom that esse as such is infinite and does not diversify itself, Aquinas introduces essence as the principle of diversity.²⁶⁶ In this sense it plays a negative role of limiting transcendental esse, and of specifying it. Essence is relative nonbeing as negating created esse. Matter also has a relative nonbeing, as negating the form by which it participates esse.²⁶⁷ The sense of nonbeing is thus "nonidentity with created esse", and not "absolute nonbeing". The key is the recognition of form and existence as metaphysical principles, not as subjects. Strictly speaking, neither principle can exist as a subject. Rather, it is the same concrete substance which exists by reason of esse and which is what it is by reason of its essence.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁴ B. Brown states that the "positivity of essence, although it originates in the act of being, must remain distinct from it if the multiplicity of creatures is to be maintained" (The Limitation of Act by Potency... p. 38).

²⁶⁵ B. Brown reflects this viewpoint in his view that "Little's interpretation of the metaphysics of St. Thomas entails the following paradox: Being is one; being is unknowable" (The Limitation of Act by Potency pp.38-39). Little's theory is based on the conception that one must argue from the necessity of limitation (in participation) to the real distinction. But Aquinas himself cites limitation as a consequence of the reception of being (De ente 5) by reasoning that since being is received by a thing, it is limited according to the determining capacities of the thing itself. Essence becomes pure negation only within a system which starts not from inspection of a thing's quidditative content but from the fact that all its perfection and being is derived. Surely the Aristotelian perspective which characterised Thomas' adoption of the thing as a sensible model precludes any wholly negative conception of essence.

²⁶⁶ e.g. In de Trin. 4.1; De pot. 3.13 ad 4. The latter text includes an analysis of the "nonbeing" of creatures in relation to God. This is not absolute nonbeing, however, but only the negation of esse, as we shall see.

²⁶⁷ De sep. subst. c. 8 (#44).

²⁶⁸ In 3 Sent. 2.2.3: "Dicendum quod nulla natura habet esse nisi in supposito suo. Non enim humanitas esse potest nisi in homine. Unde quidquid est in genere substantiae per se existens, rationem hypostasis vel suppositi habet." Cf. S.T. I 45.4; S.T. III 17.2. Cf. J. Owens, "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being in the Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas" in J. Catan, ed., St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God (Albany, 1980), 78-90.

Thus, the first sense of nonbeing is the relative nonbeing of the essence as an intrinsic principle of an existing substance which is not identical with esse. The second type of negation is of the fulness of divine perfection, in that the essence only approximates the divine idea, by way of imitation.²⁶⁹

The positive role of essence in the finite order is threefold: First, it accounts for the determination and specification of the being.²⁷⁰ In this sense the form is seen to possess esse, and specify it to a certain type or grade.²⁷¹ Second, essence is required to limit and receive esse which as such is not self-limiting. It enjoys some positive content in order to perform this function, he states, in several texts.²⁷² In this second consideration, form takes on the role of maintaining the God/creature distinction, by conditioning composition and thus finitude. This approach to form also guarantees the primacy of esse as originating in the transcendental order, where it gets its name as the first and most perfect act.²⁷³ Connected to this function is the individuation of material substances, which comes from the side of essence.²⁷⁴ Third, the metaphysics of participation requires a positive role for essence, to participate on the

²⁶⁹ On this second sense of negation and hence nonbeing implied in the essence, see, e.g. De ver. 2.4 ad 2; 3.2. De ver. 3.2: "...unde essentia sua est idea rerum; non quidem ut essentia, sed ut est intellecta. Res autem creatae non perfecte imitantur divinam essentiam; unde essentia non accipitur absolute ab intellectu divino ut idea rerum, sed cum proportione creaturae fiendae ad ipsam divinam essentiam, secundum quod deficit ab ea, vel imitatur eam..."

²⁷⁰ De ente et essentia c. 1, on the meanings of "essentia".

²⁷¹ In de Hebd. l. 2 (#34): "...quia tamen quaelibet forma est determinativa ipsius esse, nulla earum est ipsum esse, sed est habens esse". Cf. C.G. I 26; II 52; De pot. 7.2 ad 5 et ad 9. The specifying principle in the case of the matter/form composite is form as act, whereas form as potential specifies esse in the form/esse couplet.

²⁷² See especially In 1 Sent. 8.5.1 and C.G. II 52 on the necessity of a positive principle to receive and limit esse. One principle is needed for a thing's actual existence, and another for its reception. The Neoplatonic background of the notion of limitation of act by a potency/subject and the theory that this limitation by reception accounts for diversity, can be found in the Liber de Causis. Aquinas recognised the fundamental relationship between this work and the Elements of Theology of Proclus, as he points out in In de Caus. l. 1. On the anonymous tract, see "Liber de Causis" - Die pseudo-aristotelische Schrift über das reine Gute, bekannt unter dem Namen "Liber de Causis", ed. Otto Bardenhewer (Fribourg in Breisgau, 1882).

²⁷³ The primacy of esse in the predicamental order thus stems from its characterisation in the transcendental order as infinite. See, e.g. Quodl. 12.5.1: "Primus autem actus est esse subsistens per se; unde completionem unumquodque recipit per hoc quod participat esse; unde esse est complementum omnis formae, quia per hoc completur quod habet esse, et habet esse cum est actu: et sic nulla forma est nisi per esse..." Cf. S.T. I 3.4; 4.1 ad 3: "...ipsum esse est perfectissimum omnium: comparatur enim ad omnia ut actus..." However, J. Wippel notes that the alliance between the axiom that esse as such is not self-limiting and God's infinity is so close that infinity is a consequence, not a premise, of the nature of esse as such.

²⁷⁴ De pot. 7.2 ad 5 et ad 9.

predicamental level in esse and prevent the identity of principles. This is closely connected to the axiom that esse as such is not self-diversifying, but requires composition on the finite level to limit it.²⁷⁵ Essence is positive, although potential, on both the predicamental level of participation (essence participates in the actus essendi) as well as the transcendental level (essence participates in the First Act by imitation).²⁷⁶

J. Wippel²⁷⁷ notes correctly that L.B. Geiger's²⁷⁸ emphasis on the metaphysical priority of "participation by similitude" to "participation by composition" indicates his failure to recognise this relationship of essence to esse on the predicamental level of participation. For, participation by similitude or formal hierarchy states that more or less perfect states of the same form exist in a hierarchical ordering, where limitation of the form is *naturally prior* to its composition with esse. But this third sense of the positive role of essence points instead to Fabro's position. In his view, participation by composition is prior naturally, since esse as such is diversified only by a distinct receiving subject, so that limitation is explained through composition, not vice-versa.²⁷⁹ In fact, neither type of participation is naturally prior to the other, for the role of form as imitation is secured by its limited state within the real composition. And composition is a direct result of

²⁷⁵ At this point one could deal with the objection that Aquinas has either introduced pantheism in this notion of existential transcendental participation, or has confused transcendental with finite esse. A full reply to this objection would distinguish efficient creative causality from formal, univocal causality (which latter signifies pantheism), as well as outlining Aquinas' arguments against the "multiplication" of subsistent esse. His view is that the latter is unique, suprageneric, simple, and so not participated in the ordinary way as accident in subject or matter in form, but rather as what is received, as act, is participated by a subject which is related to it as limiting potency. On the various types of participation, see, e.g. In de Hebd. l. 2; De ente et essentia c. 4; C.G. II 54. On arguments for the uniqueness of Ipsium Esse, see De ente c. 4; C.G. II 52; De sp. cr. 1.1; In 8 Phys. l. 21 (#1153); De subst. sep. c. 5. The notion of God's simplicity bears on the theme of participation insofar as His essence is identical to His esse and He is not in a genus. See In 1 Sent. 8.4.2; De ver. 27.1 ad 8; S.T. I 3.5; C.G. I 25; De pot. 7.3. On the identity of form and esse in God, see: In 1 Sent. 8.5.1; In 2 Sent. 3.1.1; De sp. cr. 1,1; S.T. I 3.4. On participation in Aquinas, see: J. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and Participation" in Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy Vol 17: Studies in Medieval Philosophy, ed. J. Wippel, pp. 117-158.

²⁷⁶ The role of the divine Ideas in the theory of participation will be considered briefly in 5.3.2 below.

²⁷⁷ J. Wippel, "St. Thomas Aquinas and Participation", p. 155.

²⁷⁸ See: L.B. Geiger, La participation dans la philosophie de S. Thomas d'Aquin (Paris: 1942), pp. 28ff.

²⁷⁹ On the view of Fabro, see his article "Un itinéraire de S. Thomas", Revue de philosophie 39 (1939), 301-307. According to him, the real distinction was first thought out in terms of participation and only afterwards was Aristotle's distinction of matter and form used as an analogy for it. For our purposes, an analysis of Fabro's theory of participation in Aquinas would be too lengthy. Let it suffice to indicate three main aspects which he sees in Aquinas: First, the Platonic explanation of multiplicity through transcendental formal participation; second, Aristotle's explanation of causality on the immanent level, and third, Avicenna's real distinction (*ibid.* pp. 116-118). Aquinas thus is said to combine transcendental formal participation with predicamental causality and apply the real distinction to both levels, thus introducing the fullest account of the theory.

being caused,²⁸⁰ so that to be limited and to be in a state of composition are two sides of the same coin.²⁸¹ It is thus clear that the principle of limitation is both positive and negative, and that form thus plays a dual role within the predicamental order in its relation to esse.

5.3.3 *The Order of Causes*

Composition, we have said, implies the negative role of form only insofar as the latter is a potential receiving subject for esse. In its role as the principle of esse through formal causality, on the other hand, form is clearly a positive (though passive) potentiality, which is distinct from a privative potentiality, such as evil.²⁸² Even before considering the operations of a given substance, form denotes perfection, and is the most basic meaning of perfection.²⁸³

²⁸⁰ On the connection between being caused and being composite, see, e.g. In 2 Sent. 3.1.1; Quodl. 9.4.1; In de Hebd. 1.2; Quodl. 3.8.1. Conversely, absolute simplicity implies no potency, and thus, being uncaused. From chapter one of this thesis, we can conclude that intrinsic composition of form and esse is posterior to diversity. Multiplicity then, is in part explained through composition. Geiger is opposed to this explanation of multiplicity, because he views it as a step on the road to a world of esses without positive essences. Essence's intrinsic intelligibility is what grounds its ontological perfection for Geiger, and his concern for the universal transcendental of being causes him to force certain texts of Aquinas which place perfection on the side of esse. For example, his analysis of In de Hebd. 1.2 leads him to conclude that the transcendental perfection of goodness is not merely on the side of esse but also applies to form in the creature, so that the limitation of the goodness of the essence is clearly a datum independent of composition (Geiger pp. 61-63). Yet Aquinas states clearly that as substantial act, it is esse which perfects as an end, and thus corresponds to the quality of goodness: De ver. 21.2c; 21.5c. Aquinas is not saying that creatures' essences are not good, but rather only that creatures are not good essentialiter or per se, but rather only by participation. Geiger appears to have confused the application of goodness to an essence with absolute (versus accidental) goodness. In general, Geiger's version of Aquinas' theory of participation stresses the intelligibility aspect of essence to such a degree that the role of esse is merely that of "givenness", as one author puts it: "Esse in this context is reduced to the fact of a quasi-univocal existence or given-ness...The natural consequence of the reification of the essence, and the corresponding diminution of the intelligibility of esse appears...in the refusal to accord to the real distinction more than an incidental role in the elaboration of metaphysics." (Helen James John, The Thomist Spectrum p. 118). Geiger's presentation does carry the advantage however, of illumining the proper term of creation: "...first being...proper action will be creation, the gift of the whole being, essence and existence..." (Geiger p. 205).

²⁸¹ At root, the explanation of being composed is being caused, for in every effect, there is a duality of act and potency. See, e.g. S.T. I 3.7 ad 1: "Est autem hoc de ratione causati, quod sit aliquo modo compositum: quia ad minus eius esse est aliud quam quod est." The nonidentity of principles is found even in angels (De ente c. 5, S.T. I 50.2 ad 3, C.G. II 54, etc.). For the explanation of the essence/esse couplet through the potency/act composition, see: In 2 Sent. 3.1.1; In 8 Phys. l. 21 (#1153); Quodl. III 8.1; VII 3.2; In Boeth. de Trin. 5.4 ad 4; C.G. II 53; De subst. sep. c. 3 (#59).

²⁸² On the difference between the negation of being which evil represents, and the negation of esse which coexists with goodness and perfection, which is form, see: S.T. I 48.3.

²⁸³ S.T. II-II 184.1 ad 2. The perfectio simpliciter of form is of course not transcendental, or absolute perfection, which belongs to God alone, although it will also be a part of a description of the latter.

Also, it is the perfection of form which establishes the per se order of diversity within the universe, for form is the basis of gradated participation in God.²⁸⁴ Finally, in the creature, form is the principle of esse, for it is the vehicle through which esse is communicated to the composite:

A twofold order...is found in a substance composed of matter and form. One is the order of the matter to form, and the other is the order of the composite thing itself to the participated "to be". For the "to be" of a thing is neither its form nor its matter but something coming to the thing through the form.²⁸⁵

The form is the principle of subsistence in relation to the matter²⁸⁶ and the subject for the esse. Thus, in the order of *inherence*, being is consequent on form because through it, the thing becomes a certain existent, and through its form the thing participates in being itself from God according to a determinate mode.²⁸⁷ But in the order of *acts*, esse is prior to the form, for each thing is *completed* by participating in being,²⁸⁸ and a form cannot bring itself into being without the absurdity of being prior to itself.²⁸⁹ Esse is prior in the order of actuality not in the sense that it corresponds to the most universal cause,²⁹⁰ for this deduction omits the equal universality of form in the transcendental order.²⁹¹ The degree of act and potency in a thing places it on the hierarchy of being culminating in God, where creaturely perfection is gauged according to the

²⁸⁴ See, e.g. C.G. II 20; In 1 Sent. 44.1.2 ad 6. Multiplicity connotes material diversity but diversity, formal: S.T. I 47.2. Formal diversity is more basic because it implies inequality and thus conditions per se order (cf. De sp. cr. 8). On the difference between per se and per accidens order, see, e.g. In 6 Meta. l. 3 #1205. When effects are viewed according to their common trait which unites them to single cause, there is per se order. Two flowers blooming in a field form a per accidens order, since each has its own individual cause. Only viewed in terms of their form do they constitute a per se order.

²⁸⁵ See, e.g. De subst. separ. c. 8 (#44): "Invenitur igitur in substantia composita ex materia et forma duplex ordo: unus quidem ipsius materiae ad formam; alius autem ipsius rei iam compositae ad esse participatum. Non enim est esse rei neque forma eius neque materia ipsius, sed aliquid adveniens rei per formam." Cf. In 7 Meta. l.7 #1419.

²⁸⁶ S.T. I 29.2 ad 5; De ver. 28.7; In 1 Sent. 23.1.1.

²⁸⁷ See, e.g. De quatt. opp. c.1; S.T. III 17.2 ad 1; C.G. II 54; De subst. sep. c. 8 (#88). (De quatt. opp. is of doubtful authenticity.)

²⁸⁸ De quatt. opp. c. 1; Quodl. 12.5.1.

²⁸⁹ See, e.g. De ente et essentia c. 4, among many other references.

²⁹⁰ However, the texts aligning the universal cause with the primacy of esse, as the terminus of creation, might lead one to form this conclusion.

²⁹¹ This deduction is seen in texts such as De pot. 7.1 ad 3: "Per unum et idem Deus in ratione diversarum causarum se habet: quia per hoc quod est actus primus, est agens et est exemplar omnium formarum et est bonitas pura, et per consequens omnium finis."

degree of union with the Origin.²⁹² This union is a result of a creature's operation, which stems from a thing's form.

From the viewpoint of generation, as well, esse is closely allied to form, and is defined through it, as the act of an essence and the ultimate act at which generation terminates:

Being, as we understand it here, signifies the highest perfection of all...Hence being is not determined by something else as potentiality by act but rather as act by potentiality: since in defining a form we include its proper matter instead of the difference: thus we define the soul as the act of an organic body. Accordingly this being is distinct from that being inasmuch as it is the being of this or that nature.²⁹³

The potentiality of form is known through its comparison with its more perfect state as existent, and this comparison is only known through observing the stages of generation. The form is seen as incomplete and thus, as potential, before it acquires esse, for what is prior in the order of nature is posterior in generation or time. And although ens is denominated by esse, and not form,²⁹⁴ the entire analysis of esse is through reference to form and its operations, which gauge immateriality and hence, esse.²⁹⁵

Aquinas' various discussions on the order among the causes thus illumine the mutual causality of form and esse in creatures, and also the vantage point from which the knowledge of esse is gained, viz. through the focus on the form and the application of the axiom of act's perfection in relation to potency, to the causes of sensible substances. The degree to which these two principles are separable is noted by Aquinas in his description of esse as "maxime formale omnium".²⁹⁶

The intrinsic relation between esse and the thing's completion, on the one hand, and form and the thing's perfection, on the other, indicates the mutual causality between form and esse in creatures. This causality is also illumined by texts which deal directly with the priority

²⁹² See, e.g. De ver. 8.6; De ente c. 5. De ente grades the proximity to the First Principle in terms of immateriality, which in turn is known through the level of operation of the individual form.

²⁹³ De pot. 7.2 ad 9: "...hoc quod dico esse est inter omnia perfectissimum...Unde non sic determinatur esse per aliud sicut potentia per actum, sed magis sicut actus per potentiam. Nam et in definitione formarum ponuntur propriae materiae loco differentiae, sicut cum dicitur quod anima est actus corporis physici organici. Et per hunc modum, hoc esse ab illo esse distinguitur, in quantum est talis vel talis naturae." On esse as the term of generation or the completion of a form, see S.T. I-II 31.2; C.G. II 52.

²⁹⁴ De ente c. 1.

²⁹⁵ De ente, passim.

²⁹⁶ S.T. I 7.1. Cf. S.T. I 4.1 ad 3; C.G. I 23.

among the four causes. When these texts are placed within the context of the real distinction, the conclusion that the two metaphysical principles of form and esse coalesce in the final cause, and are necessarily identical in God. The first perfection of a thing is from the form, by which it is constituted in its esse; the second perfection is its accidents required for its proper operation and its third perfection is its attainment of its end.²⁹⁷ Elsewhere Aquinas indicates that form and end are the two causes of perfection.²⁹⁸ The final cause is first in causality, in that it causes the movement of the other causes, whereas the form is first in being.²⁹⁹ The form is first in being as it is presupposed by all other types of act, whereas the final cause motivates the causality of the efficient cause to act. The efficient cause in turn acts according to its form, imparting its own perfection with a view to the end.³⁰⁰ The efficient cause relies on the form in that its self-communication reveals it as a source of *form* for another thing. Within a species, there is even identity between the form and the end, in that the form of the generator is the end of the generated thing.³⁰¹ This exemplifies the causal axioms that “an agent reproduces its like” and “an effect, as dependent on its cause, imitates it”. This analysis of the four causes and their relationship within a finite thing displays the close association of form and esse in the predicamental order, and their mutual causalities of their individual orders.

²⁹⁷ S.T. I 6.3.

²⁹⁸ See, e.g. In 5 Meta. l. 18; In 9 Meta. l. 8 (#1856). Cf. S.T. III 27.5 ad 2: “...perfectio dispositionis, formae, et finis”. The perfection of the end consists in beatitude for humans, which aptly resembles the stability of form, as the state of ultimate rest. The analogy used is the resting place of fire. (S.T. I 103.1).

²⁹⁹ The form is first also in intelligibility, although perhaps not in intention. The form is first among the causes in the order of cognition because just as the first conception of all is ens, so the first conception of a cause is of form: “ens autem non importat habitudinem causae nisi formalis tantum, vel inhaerentis vel exemplaris; cuius causalitas non se extendit nisi ad ea quae sunt in actu” (S.T. I 5.2 ad 2). The causality of form is more intelligible absolutely than the final or efficient causes, because being is absolutely prior to cause: S.T. I 82.3 1d 1; 13.11 ad 2; 16.4; I-II 66.3; 174.2 ad 3.

³⁰⁰ A number of phrases express the different types of causality aptly: With respect to the efficient cause, Aquinas says that “every agent acts insofar as it is in act” (S.T. I 89.1; C.G. II 6; S.T. I 25.1 ad 1) and “every agent acts for the sake of an end” (for otherwise, it would not produce a determinate effect: e.g. C.G. III 17-18; In 5 Meta. l. 2 #775). Further, “the proximate end of every agent is that it induces in something else the likeness of its form” (S.T. II-II 123.7; De pot. 2.1). The causality of the final cause with respect to the other causes is best expressed in De princ. nat. c. 4: “...Unde finis est causa causalitatis efficientis, quia facit efficiens esse efficiens; et similiter facit materiam esse materiam et formam esse formam, cum materia non suscipiat formam nisi propter finem et forma non perficiat materiam nisi propter finem. Unde dicitur quod finis est causa causarum, quia est causa causalitatis in omnibus causes...” (cf. S.T. I-II 1.2; In 2 Sent. 37.3.2; S.T. I 105.5). It is noteworthy that Aquinas insists on the priority of the final cause as “first in intention” (C.G. III 18), but still, its causality is prior. Certain final ends are also prior naturally, such as God, and the city in relation to its king, and the resting place of fire (C.G. III 18; In de Div. Nom. c. 1 l. 3 #92).

³⁰¹ C.G. III 19; C.G. III 21.

5.4 *The Role of Form in the Transcendental Order*

5.4.1 *The Source of Perfection*

God is the source of all perfection as the first causal principle³⁰² that cannot be added to.³⁰³ In virtue of God's absolute subsistence, He contains all actuality and perfection.³⁰⁴ The locus of the discussion of perfection, we have seen (section 5.3.2), is both the form and the esse in the creature. Although existentialist Thomists are often tempted to locate divine perfection solely on the side of esse, citing numerous texts,³⁰⁵ Aquinas maintains that God is the source of perfection as both form and esse, as these two coalesce in the identity of subsistent form and its end of self-imitation through production of creatures.

God is identified, it is true, as Ipsium Esse, and as the source of perfection and actuality through the identity of His form with His esse.³⁰⁶ Does this mean that the Source of perfection is such only by virtue of His existence? Such an answer would be plausible only if two conditions were fulfilled: a) if one could explain God's goodness, which grounds being's communicability, through esse alone; and b) the explanation of God's infinite perfection did not appeal to form in any way, or at most, made it reducible to esse. However, neither of these conditions can be fulfilled.

³⁰² This point is proven by the "five ways" or proofs of God's existence, through the various types of effects: S.T. I 2.3.

³⁰³ In this sense God is distinguished from ens commune or the universality of created being: De pot. 7.2 ad 6: "Ens commune est cui non fit additio, de cuius tamen ratione non est ut ei additio fieri non possit; sed esse divinum est esse cui non fit additio, et de eius ratione est ut ei additio fieri non possit; unde divinum esse non est esse commune." Ens commune merely prescind from addition, while ens divinum excludes it. Cf. De ente c. 5; S.T. I 3.4 ad 1.

³⁰⁴ S.T. I 4.2 on the preeminent containment of perfection in God. Preexistence in the efficient cause is meant here, since a) God is the productive cause of things' being; b) analogous causes represent a greater diversity than univocal ones, which communicate being according to the same formality.

³⁰⁵ See W. Hoye, as cited in #306 below.

³⁰⁶ The "primacy of esse" texts can be marshalled to form the existentialist's conclusion. These texts usually focus on the primacy of esse in relation to created form however, and then make the leap to God's perfection as Ipsium esse. See such texts as S.T. I 4.1 ad 3: "Ipsium esse est perfectissimum omnium: comparatur enim ad omnia ut actus. Nihil enim habet actualitatem, nisi in quantum est: unde ipsum esse est actualitas omnium rerum, et etiam ipsarum formarum..." This esse is finite, however, and is not meant to apply to God. On the identification of the esse of creatures with that of God, see, for example: W. Hoye, Actualitas Omnium Actuum: Man's Beatific Vision of God as Apprehended by Thomas Aquinas (Meisenheim am Glan: A.Hain, 1975), p.35. He correctly notes his affinity with Fabro's "esse intensif" on this point.

Why can't the first condition be met? The communicability or fecundity of being which Aquinas adopted from the anonymous author of the Neoplatonic Liber de causis is usually expressed in terms of goodness as "diffusivum sui",³⁰⁷ but communicability as such belongs to *act*: "Communicatio enim consequitur rationem actus".³⁰⁸ This communicability of being is its ability to reproduce itself by imitation, which requires the activity of a form.³⁰⁹ Further, it is grounded in the fact that God is at once the efficient, formal and final cause of all things.³¹⁰ God's presence in things is characterised as being as intimate as their very forms,³¹¹ influencing without determining the immaterial powers.³¹² Indeed, the whole purpose of the diffusiveness of being is its imitative glory of God, which requires degrees of approximating similitude, which occurs only through the diversity introduced by forms.³¹³

Neither can the second condition, viz. the explanation of God's infinite perfection exclusively through esse, be maintained. Subsistence, or independent being, is the root of God's identity as the Source of perfection, and His infinity adds to this description. God's subsistence is a conclusion from His character as the First Cause, since what is first in the order of actuality has no composition and thus exists per se.³¹⁴ God's perfection is proved through His subsistence, in that His uncaused nature implies the denial of any lack in His essence.³¹⁵ But the containment of all perfection in God, which elaborates the mode of His subsistence, is closely tied to His infinity, which, as section 5.4.3 below will show, is based on form. In connoting the

³⁰⁷ e.g. In de Div. Nom. c. 4 l. 9 (#409). Cf. S.T. I 5.4 ad 2: "Bonum dicitur diffusivum sui esse eo modo quo finis dicitur movere"; C.G. I 37; De ver. 21.1 ad 4. On this topic in general, see: J. Peghaire, "L'axiome 'bonum est diffusivum sui'" Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa 1932, pp. 5-30.

³⁰⁸ In 1 Sent. 4.1.1

³⁰⁹ See, e.g. De pot. 11.1: "Natura cuiuslibet actus est quod seipsum communicet, quantum possibile est. Unde unumquodque agens agit secundum quod actu est..."; In 1 Sent. 4.1.1: "Communicatio consequitur rationem actus: unde omnis forma, quantum est de se, communicabilis est." Also, Aquinas' discussion of the relationship between creatures and God in S.T. I 4.3c points to the activity of form as the vehicle through which esse is communicated analogously.

³¹⁰ In 2 Sent. 1.1.1 ad 5. Cf. S.T. I 44.4 ad 4.

³¹¹ S.T. I 105 on God's presence to things. Cf. S.T. I 8.1.

³¹² De mal. 3.3c.

³¹³ On similitude being a result of formal diversity, see C.G. III 97. Formal diversity grades beings according to their proximate likeness to God (cf. De ver. 8.8). The inequality imposed by form permits the providential structure of governance in the universe, even among creatures, and illustrates the perfection associated with causality. Cf. S.T. I 47.3; De pot. 3.7. Order is found in things according to two aspects: where one is better than the other, and where one is moved by the other (S.T. I 103.4 ad 1). Finally, similitude with respect to God requires forms, since similitude only occurs with analogous effects. Thus, similitude indicates assimilation to the cause, by participation (De pot. 6.1 ad 17).

³¹⁴ S.T. I 3.4.

³¹⁵ S.T. I 4.2.

non-absence of any actuality proper to a nature, “perfection” leads to the attribution of “infinity” to the First Cause, for that which is actually infinite is not terminated in anything and “comprises every perfection of being.”³¹⁶ “Subsistence” equally implies infinity in the case of God, since a subsisting being is not received.³¹⁷ Thus, given the explanation of infinity through form in S.T. I 7 below, the second condition is not fulfilled, and the description of God as the Source of perfection is not exclusively in terms of existence.

In addition to the above examination of God as form in the context of His goodness and infinity, we can point to texts where Aquinas proves that God acts as *form*, and not just as *existence*, in his use of the notions of “virtual quantity” and “virtual intensity in being”. These concepts find their root in the themes of the “plenitude of being” and “containment”, which Aquinas inherited from Pseudo-Dionysius.³¹⁸ Aquinas combines the notions that being contains all perfections with the Platonic dictum that the effect is contained virtually in its cause in his discussions of virtual quantity and virtual intensity. What do these latter terms signify, and how do they illustrate God’s identity as form?

Aquinas uses the notion of “virtual quantity” in the same context as he uses the notion of “intensity”, to denote varying degrees of perfection, in contrast to “dimensional” (corporeal) quantity, which refers to extension. One such discussion is on the topic of whether the grace of Christ is infinite, and Aquinas notes the distinction between “dimensive” and “virtual” quantity.³¹⁹ “Virtual” signifies an intensity or degree of perfection (secundum intensionem), or the perfection of a power in relation to its goal.³²⁰ Aquinas states that while the being’s perfection can be measured in terms of its relative perfection of existing,³²¹ the virtual quantity of a being’s perfection is also first rooted in the form. He establishes this point in his defense of the notion of virtual quantity in God:

³¹⁶ C.G. II 52.

³¹⁷ Subsistent being is also not terminated in some recipient: C.G. II 52.

³¹⁸ On the Dionysian heritage of many elements of Aquinas’ theory of being, see Fran O’Rourke, Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas (Brill: Leiden, 1992). O’Rourke deals with the notions of “virtual quantity” and “virtual intensity in being” in chapter 6, pp. 155-187.

³¹⁹ De ver. 29.3: “Est enim duplex quantitas: scilicet dimensiva, quae secundum extensionem consideratur; et virtualis, quae attenditur secundum intensionem: virtus enim rei est ipsius perfectio, secundum illud Philosophi in VII Physic: Unumquodque perfectum est quando attingit propriae virtuti..”

³²⁰ S.T. I-II 55.1.

³²¹ De ver. 29.3: “...sicut ex hoc quod dicitur ens, consideratur in eo quantitas virtualis quantum ad perfectionem essendi.”

Quantity is twofold. There is quantity of bulk or dimensive quantity...There is also quantity of virtue, which is measured according to the perfection of some nature or form...Now this virtual quantity is measured firstly by its source—that is, by the very perfection of the form or nature: such is the greatness of spiritual things...Secondly, virtual quantity is measured by the effects of the form. Now the first effect of form is being, for everything has being by reason of its form. The second effect is operation, for every agent acts through its form.³²²

Aquinas then goes on to summarise the role of form in determining a thing's perfection:

Consequently, virtual quantity is measured both in regard to being and in regard to action: in regard to being, inasmuch as things of a more perfect nature are of longer duration; and in regard to action, inasmuch as things of a more perfect nature are more powerful to act.³²³

Form determines the virtual quantity of a being both inwardly, in that it determines the act of being (forma dat esse) and outwardly, in that it originates a being's activities (omne agens agit per suam formam). A thing's virtus essendi is directly proportionate to the measure and intimacy of its form.³²⁴

At In 1 Sent. 19.3.1, Aquinas applies the notion of virtus as perfection to God, Who is seen to be perfect not only according to His esse, but also according to His form and operations.³²⁵ The notion of intensity is introduced in De pot. I.2 to explain the nature of God's infinite power, viz. as extensive (referring to the number of objects to which it refers) and as intensive (referring to the level of efficacy and intimacy of its action).³²⁶ The powers which exhibit virtual intensity are spiritual activities such as intellectual knowing and loving, Aquinas

³²² S.T. I 42.1 ad 1: "Dicendum quod duplex est quantitas. Una scilicet quae dicitur quantitas molis vel quantitas dimensiva...Sed alia est quantitas virtutis, quae attenditur secundum perfectionem alicuius naturae vel formae...Huiusmodi autem quantitas virtualis attenditur primo quidem in radice, idest in ipsa perfectione formae vel naturae, et sic dicitur magnitudo spiritualis...Secundo autem attenditur quantitas virtualis in effectibus formae. Primus autem effectus formae est esse, nam omnis res habet esse secundum suam formam. Secundus autem effectus est operatio, nam omne agens agit per suam formam."

³²³ ibid.: "...Attenditur igitur quantitas virtualis et secundum esse, et secundum operationem; secundum esse quidem, in quantum ea quae sunt perfectioris naturae, sunt magis potentia ad agendum."

³²⁴ De pot. 5.4 ad 1: "Nam quantum unicuique inest de forma, tantum inest ei de virtute essendi."

³²⁵ In that text, eternity is seen to be the power of His existence.

³²⁶ De pot. I.2: "...in action also there is a certain intensity - according to its efficiency, so that a certain infinity may be ascribed to active power after the manner of the infinity of quantity, whether continuous or discrete. Of discrete quantity, forasmuch as the quantity of a power is measured by many or few objects, and this is called extensive quantity: of continuous quantity, forasmuch as the quantity of a power is measured by the intensity or slackness of its action - and this is called intensive quantity...active power is the principle of both. In both ways the divine power is infinite."

says, since they vary in degrees of efficacy and intensity with respect to the subject exercising them.³²⁷

In addition to the above references to the descriptions of God as form, in terms of virtual quantity and intensity, there is the important distinction between virtus essendi and virtus ad esse, which points to the role of form as the origin of active potency. Whereas virtus ad esse signifies the power to exist, or the potency of matter (ens in potentia), virtus essendi signifies the power of existing, or the active potency of form (potentia ad agere):

Virtue, from the very nature of the name, implies some perfection of power, as we have said above. Therefore, since potency is of two kinds, namely, potency in reference to being, and potency in reference to act, the perfection of both these potencies is called virtue. But potency in reference to being (ad esse) is on the part of matter, whereas potency in reference to act (ad agere) is on the part of the form, which is the principle of action, since everything acts in so far as it is in act.³²⁸

Virtus ad esse (potency of matter) is thus distinct from virtus essendi (active potency of form) in that the former is ens in potentia, while the latter is potentia ad agere. Virtus essendi signifies the actualising perfection of the individual being which exists, and not just the potency of matter. The power of being (virtus essendi) belongs to the entire being but is first rooted in form, since each thing exists through its form.³²⁹ Moreover, Aquinas repeatedly attributes this

³²⁷ De ver. 8.2. Here, Aquinas explains that intellectual knowledge depends on dimensive quantity only indirectly (inasmuch as it relies on sensation for its object), but considered in itself, it varies in virtual quantity, inasmuch as it grasps its object more or less perfectly. Cf. De ver. 20.4 ad 14, where Aquinas says that extensive quantity is accidental to knowledge, whereas intensive quantity is essential to it. At S.T. II-II 24.4 ad 1 Aquinas shows that love is also measured intrinsically, as measured by the intensity of its act.

³²⁸ S.T. I-II 55.2: “Dicendum quod virtus ex ipsa ratione nominis importat quamdam perfectionem potentiae. Unde cum duplex sit potentia, scilicet potentia ad esse, et potentia ad agere, utriusque potentiae perfectio virtus vocatur. Sed potentia ad esse se tenet ex parte materiae, quae est ens in potentia; potentia autem ad agere se tenet ex parte formae, quae est principium agendi, eo quod unumquodque agit, in quantum est actu.”

³²⁹ C.G. I 20 contrasts the two potencies, one passive and the other, active. The context of the discussion is Aristotle’s celestial substances, who possess the power to exist always (who thus possess virtus essendi, and not virtus ad esse):

“Etsi detur quod in corpore caelesti non sit potentia quasi passiva ad esse, quae est potentia materiae, est tamen in eo potentia quasi activa, quae est virtus essendi: cum expresse Aristoteles dicat, in I Caeli et Mundi, quod caelum habet virtutem ut sit semper.” Cf. De pot. 5.4 ad 1: “Potentia ad esse non solum accipitur secundum modum potentiae passivae, quae est ex parte materiae, sed etiam secundum modum potentiae activae, quae est ex parte formae, quae in rebus incorruptilibus deesse non potest. Nam quantum unicuique inest de forma, tantum inest ei de virtute essendi; unde et in I Caeli et Mundi Philosophus vult quod quaedam habeant virtutem et potentiam ut semper sint.”

power of being, called the posse or virtus essendi to God, in Whom the power and virtue of being acquires its most proper significance:

If anything had the infinite power of being (infinite virtutem essendi), such that it did not participate in being from another, then it alone would be infinite, and this is God.³³⁰

A thing is said to be more or less excellent according as its being is limited to a certain greater or lesser mode of excellence. Therefore, if there is something to which the whole power of being belongs, it can lack no excellence that is proper to some thing. But for a thing [viz., God] that is its own being it is proper be according to the whole power of being (secundum totum essendi potestatem).³³¹

Thus, the power of existing (not the potency of matter) which affirms the intensity of being's presence and intimacy within the finite and infinite levels, requires form as its foundation and completion. Although esse is the primary and ultimate act,³³² and is an infinite plenitude which is shared analogously throughout creation, esse cannot subsist in itself in creation, but is found in existing things, and even in God is a co-principle with form, as the virtus essendi/virtus ad esse distinction indicates.

5.4.2 Exemplar Causality

The second area in which formal causality is operative on the transcendental level is that of creative exemplar causality. This level of causality integrates the connection between *form* and *end* illustrated in section 5.4.1 and the preeminent role of infinity and its relation to divine form, which will be taken up in section 5.4.3. Aquinas' theory combines Plato's vision of transcendent being with Aristotle's self-thinking Thought in a new synthesis integrating the implications of an infinite and creative causality.³³³ Two opposed positions are rejected by Aquinas in his analysis

³³⁰ In de causis IV, 109: "Si autem aliquid sic haberet infinite virtutem essendi quod non participaret esse ab alio, tunc esset solum infinite et tale est Deus."

³³¹ C.G. I 28: "Nam res, secundum quod suum esse contrahitur ad aliquem specialem modum nobilitatis, maiorem vel minorem, dicitur esse secundum hoc nobilior vel minus nobilis. Igitur si aliquid est cui competit tota virtus essendi, ei nulla virtus nobilitatis deesse potest, quae alicui rei conveniat."

³³² Esse is described as the "actus ultimus, qui participabilis est ab omnibus; ipsum autem nihil participat" (Quaest. De Anima 6 ad 2. Cf. In Hebd. 2, 24. Cf. S.T. I 75.5 ad 1: "Primus actus est universale principium omnium actuum quia est infinite, virtualiter in se omnia praehabens, ut dicit Dionysius.")

³³³ As one author puts it: "For it is by introducing Plato's metaphysics of transcendent Being into the formal void of Aristotle's Prime Mover's Mind that the relation of the transcendent God to the world that depends on Him is rationally established and Divine Providence assured." C.J. de Vogel, "Deus Creator Omnium: Plato and Aristotle in Aquinas' Doctrine of God", in Graceful Reason: Essays in

of divine form: First, the view that God has no essence, by virtue of being subsisting esse;³³⁴ and second, the position that makes God the formal being of all things, by virtue of containing their perfections essentially.³³⁵ Neither position is acceptable. The first denies God as the ultimate principle of intelligibility and source of formal perfections in the world, and the second confuses efficient with formal causality, and the created and transcendental orders, in the attempt to explain the mode of divine presence in the universe. Thus, the issue of divine exemplar causality must balance the natural priority of God to the universe with an explanation of this central causal connection. Ultimately, the dominant role given to the doctrine of the divine ideas offsets the tendency of existentialist Thomists to make esse the sole principle of similitude between God and creature.

Existentialist Thomists view Thomas' doctrine of divine ideas as a Platonic intrusion into an otherwise Aristotelian metaphysic, and as a concession to the authority of the theological tradition.³³⁶ It is true that Biblical references form the background of his theory, but other influences play an equal role, such as Plato and NeoPlatonism, especially that of Pseudo-Dionysius and St. Augustine, as well as Boethius. All of these sources explain the relationship between God and creatures as one of degrees of proportion between an exemplar, measure or archetype, and its corresponding effect.³³⁷ At the heart of divine exemplar causality is the

Ancient and Medieval Philosophy Presented to Joseph Owens, CSSR (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1983), p. 227.

³³⁴ Some existentialist Thomists in the line of Carlo interpret Aquinas this way, concluding that properly speaking, God has "no essence" since He has no limit principle. See, e.g. W. Hoye, Actualitas Omnium Actuum... p. 81: "...First of all, essence signifies the delimitations of a being, and consequently, God is said to have no essence." He attempts to modify his view but returns to the reducibility position of Carlo: "...the divine essence can be defined only as ipsum esse, for essence expresses the mode of being possessed by something." (p. 83).

³³⁵ C.G. I 26. Such a position was attributed to Amauric of Bene, and it implies pantheism. See: E. Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages pp. 240-41; 654 (#8). In the text cited, the origins of the error are said to be in Pseudo-Dionysius' emphasis on the divine origin of all perfection, but the Areopagite is noted to have retracted any such interpretation of his views. Cf. S.T. 8.1-4.

³³⁶ See, e.g.: L.B. Geiger, "Les Idées Divines Dans l'Oeuvre de S. Thomas" in ed. A. Maurer, St. Thomas Aquinas, 1274-1974: Commemorative Studies (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974) Vol 1, p. 178: "...il est à peine exagère de dire qu'au fond, tout ce que S. Thomas a dit des Idées était dans son esprit une concession de plus faites au langage d'une philosophie qui n'était pas vraiment la sienne. C'était aussi, n'en doutons pas, la reconnaissance de l'autorité théologique de Saint Augustin." R. Henle draws much the same conclusion, in his work Saint Thomas and Platonism (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956), p. 359.

³³⁷ On these various sources and their connection to the theme of divine exemplarism, see: H. Pinard, "Création" in Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique t. III, 2me partie (Paris: Libraire Letourzey et Ane, 1938) pp. 2150ff. Among the Biblical materials are those books depicting God's relation to His creation

explanation of God's natural priority to the world through His infinite act of understanding and preeminent containment of all the secondary objects of His understanding, made possible by His divine omnipotence as Pure Act. The unity and actual nature of God argued for in chapter one of this thesis is reinforced by considerations of God as exemplar cause.

The divine ideas play both an epistemological and a metaphysical role in Aquinas' thought about God. God's knowledge of things beyond Himself is possible only through the ideas, which must avoid introducing passivity in God. Aquinas avoids this predicament by specifying the ideas as secondary objects of God's knowledge (the first is His essence) and by stressing the unicity of the intelligible species by which God understands Himself in diverse modes of imitability.³³⁸ The divine ideas play a metaphysical role in that they are causal exemplars of God's productive knowledge. Without divine intentionality and its creative causality, there would be no order of beings or indeed, any beings at all. It is in this sense that the term "exemplar" takes on its active meaning as a type of formal cause (although extrinsic) existing in the practical intelligence of an informing agent, in contrast to our modern association of passivity with models.³³⁹

as one of an artisan to his product, the texts on the creative role of the Verbum (Gen. 1.3, 6, 9; John 1.3); the imago Dei texts (e.g. Gen. 1.26-27). Plato's exemplarism is found in Phaedo 100ff (in its expression of idealism and the concrete world) Timaeus 30ff. (where the demiurge is presented, who creates according to "the original of the universe" which "contains in itself all intelligible beings"). There is also the work of Philo (On the Creation of the World IV, in ed. N. Glatzer, The Essential Philo [New York: Schocken Books, 1971]). There is also the important contribution of St. Augustine: Aurelius Augustinus, Eighty-Three Different Questions, q. 46.2, tr. Vernon Bourke, in ed. V. Bourke, The Essential Augustine (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1974), p. 62: "...Ideas are the primary forms, or the permanent and immutable reasons of real things; so they are, as a consequence, eternal and ever the same in themselves; and they are contained in the divine intelligence..." Augustine's view is pivotal in that it makes the divine ideas intrinsic to the divine mind, whereas Plato's ideas were subsistent and separate from it, being products of the demiurge. Cf. Augustine, City of God XI, 29 tr. Marcus Dodds (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), etc. On Boethius, see his De consolatione philosophiae III ix, cited in Pinard, "Creation", p. 2155: "Tu cuncta superno, Ducis ab exemplo, pulchrum pulcherrimus ipse Mundum mente gerens, simulque in imagine formans." Pseudo-Dionysius' De divinibus nominibus c. 5 depicts the paradigms as intelligible and immutable, but distinct from God, Who is beyond being. It is interesting that Thomas does use this text in his portrayal of the issue in In 1 Sent. d. 36 q. 2 a. 1. On the source material, consult: J. Farthing, "The Problem of Divine Exemplarity in St. Thomas" Thomist 49 (1985), 187-94.

³³⁸ The epistemological dilemma is solved in different ways in different texts, but the claim that the ideas are objects, (quod) not merely media (quo) of divine knowledge, means that the plurality is among objects known, and not in the intelligible species by which things are known. See In 1 Sent. d. 36 q. 2 a. 1. Cf. C.G. I 53-54. That there must be a plurality of divine ideas guarantees God's omniscience, and His knowledge of singulars. See De ver. III.2; aa.3-4 on the four modes of divine knowledge, which extend even to evil. God's omniscience was viewed to be in jeopardy in the Platonic system which saw the ideas as co-creators: De ver. III.8.

³³⁹ See Marie-Charles Perret, "La Notion d'Exemplarité" in Revue Thomiste (1936) p. 450.

Although the epistemological role of the divine ideas is important for an understanding of God's self-knowledge and transcendence, it is the metaphysical role which establishes the natural priority of God to the world and which is an important balance to God's existential influence. This role is best exemplified by the detailed treatment of the ideas in *De ver.* q. 3 a.1. Here, the Greek term "idea" is translated into Latin as "form", and is defined as "a form which something imitates because of the intention of an agent who antecedently determines the end himself." This is the third meaning of form. The first is "that from which something is made or receives the form in virtue of which it is what it is", namely, the cause. The second meaning is "that by which something is made", as the soul is the form of the body. Here, the form is part of a compound. Only the third sense of form expresses the relation of imitation which obtains between God and creation, as well as the intentionality required to ground such a relation of proportion. The intentionality expressed in the doctrine of exemplar causality is introduced to oppose the opposite errors of determinism (necessary emanation from the First Principle) and mere chance (chaos or lack of order). Thus the link between form and end is once again apparent, this time on the transcendental level.

The notion of final causality in the universe validates the intentionality of divine ideas, from a creaturely standpoint, but it also guarantees the simplicity of God's essence by making the ideas identical with it. Since the ideas function as ends (i.e. as diverse modes of imitability by creatures in relation to their Cause), they must exist in the mind of God. They "can only be within the divine mind, for it is unreasonable to say that God acts on account of an end other than Himself or that He receives that which enables Him to act from a source other than Himself."³⁴⁰ The identity of the ideas with God's essence as the ultimate final cause excludes the passivity of the knower in this instance of knowledge, and it also guarantees divine simplicity. The ideas "create" not in the Platonic sense of being subsistent causes *outside* of God, but as being the intentional expression of God's productive causality, where God acts freely in accordance with His own intellect.³⁴¹

Divine exemplar causality thus strikes the balance between God's absolute transcendence and priority to creation, and His causal and intentional presence to that same order.³⁴² This

³⁴⁰ *De ver.* q. 3 a.1.

³⁴¹ *De ver.* q. 3 a. 1 ad 5-7.

³⁴² This is the case even unto the knowledge of singulars: *De ver.* q. 3 a. 2. To say that there is only one exemplar in the divine intellect is to limit God's creative intention only to being in general, which is a

relation between God and the world is explained by the notion of exemplars, which represent the varying degrees of defectiveness with which things imitate the divine essence. The plurality of exemplars is understood as the divine essence known in its full range of imitability by creatures, and the product of this divine act of understanding is the multiplicity of creatures.³⁴³ The doctrine of divine ideas connotes the priority and posteriority of *per se* or formal order in that an idea in its principal meaning “signifies something other than God’s essence, namely, the proportion a creature has to His essence.”³⁴⁴

Due to the productive power of God’s knowledge,³⁴⁵ multiplicity in the predicamental order is thus a result of intentional order where form and end coincide in the Actualiser of all forms. Exemplar causality maintains the priority of the final cause in the order of causality, in stressing the requirements of an *end* involved in the notion of imitation. Exemplars are a requirement of an agent who communicates being through self-imitation, and in this way, exemplar causality guarantees the order of effects to their cause. The natural priority of cause to effect in turn guarantees God’s absolute transcendence, thought to be maintained only by His identity as *Ipsium Esse* by some Thomists. Finally, exemplar causality illustrates the equal role that *form* plays as a similitude between God and creature, along with *esse*.

denial of Providence. Again, either an intermediary demiurge would then explain God’s relation to creation, or there would be a world of chance.

³⁴³ Again, it is important to note that this does not disturb the divine simplicity for Aquinas, since the ideas are not so much the media of divine knowledge as they are the objects or content of that knowledge. The distinction is outlined in *De ver.* q. 3 a. 2, among several places. An idea exists in the intellect either as a *principle* of understanding or as a *term*. As a principle, the idea is a likeness of that which is understood. As a term, the idea is the product of knowledge, for the idea is understood. In the case of God, no idea is a principle of understanding, since God is wholly actual and has no end beyond Himself. Thus, divine ideas are terms of His knowledge (*quod*, not *quo*). As such, they are encompassed in the divine Verbum, who is of one substance with God the Knower. The picture is a bit different in *In 1 Sent.* d. 36 q. 2 a. 1. See: L.B. Geiger, “Les Idées Divines...” p. 197.

³⁴⁴ *De ver.* q. 3 a. 2 ad 2. Equally important is the necessity of God’s infinity, as preeminent form containing all creaturely perfections. This connection is central because the plenitude of exemplar causality and its identity with God as His own end is understood by Thomas in light of God’s infinite act of understanding, which extends to singulars, accidents, prime matter, possibles, contingents, and even (indirectly) to evil. See *De ver.* q. 3 aa. 2-8.

³⁴⁵ The various texts on measure indicate that while our intellects are measured by natural things in a passive way, God’s intellect is the measure of all things, as their productive cause. His intellect is wholly active. See: *De ver.* I.1-2; *In Peri.* l. 3 (#29); *S.T.* I 21.2; *C.G.* I 62; *In 10 Meta.* l. 2 (#1959); *De virt. in comm.* I. 13. See also J. Aertsen, *Nature and Creature...* pp. 147-148; 153-158; as well as G. Isaye, *op. cit.*

5.4.3 *The Divine Attributes*

In order to conclude our study of causal relation between form and existence in creatures, we must also examine their self-identical origin in God, which is noncausal. God's natural priority to the universe must be included in a study of the principles of composite substances, since unity precedes plurality in perfection and nature, and being as "principle" is prior to being as "cause".³⁴⁶ Composition and dependence are the results of diversity, for where there is unity there can be no causality. The question of God's simplicity is closely connected with that of His infinity, since both attributes show the link between form and existence in subsistent being from the perspective of *formal* causality. These articles depict God as containing all perfections as the combination of pure form and existence. After the analysis of formal causality, the issue of efficient causality, through God's perfection, is approached (q. 4), and it is followed by the analysis of God as final cause, as supreme goodness (qq. 5 - 6). A brief treatment of the themes of formal and efficient causality in God as displayed in these articles will conclude the discussion of the relation between essence and esse in finite creatures.

The question on divine simplicity (S.T. I.3) argues to the noncomposed nature of subsistent esse using two premises which conclude each of the five ways (S.T. I.2.3): The *first* of these premises is that there must be a first instance of being, and it is used to argue for the lack of priority in God, and thus for His noncomposition. It is also used in arguments for God's unparticipated nature, which fact is founded more on the conclusions that God is one (S.T. I.11)³⁴⁷ and contains all perfections supereminently (S.T. I 4.2). The *second* premise is not justified by Aquinas except to say that God is the first efficient cause (S.T. I 3.4c) but is presumably self-evident, namely, "every unreceived act must be infinite".³⁴⁸ How then, does

³⁴⁶ See, e.g. S.T. I 33.1. "Cause", versus "principle", implies diversity and dependence. "Principle" implies procession and origin. Of course God's simplicity is not the same thing as His unicity, for the former connotes lack of composition or parts, while the latter (S.T. I.11) connotes the nonmultipliability, or uniqueness of God.

³⁴⁷ Cf. De ente et essentia c. 4 (para. 6 - 8). For, only from the argument that subsistent esse is unreceived in a formal fashion can one establish the composite causal structure in all other instances of being, Aquinas thinks.

³⁴⁸ He applies this to form as well as to existence, in that taken of itself, form is said to be subsistent (S.T. I.3.2 ad 3). John Wippel notes that the Neoplatonic axiom is justified nowhere in Aquinas' writings: "Essence and Existence in Other Writings" in J. Wippel, Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas (Washington, D.C.: C.U.A. Press, 1984), p. 158. A similar statement can be found in: Christopher Hughes, On a Complex Theory of a Simple God: An Investigation in Aquinas' Philosophical Theology (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), p. 25: "...how we get...to the supposition that there is a simple, unlimited full-strength esse that includes every perfection is not clear."

Aquinas argue from the primary, causal and unreceived character of subsistent esse to its simplicity? Moreover, what does God's simplicity indicate about form and existence in general?

Premise one (God's primary nature) bases the first type of argument, that God has no potency.³⁴⁹ Since act is prior to potency, and since form is prior to matter on this basis, God lacks matter. Moreover, His essence is the same as His existence, since the members of this pair are also related as potency and act.³⁵⁰ The middle premises of both conclusions are explicit in article one: "something in potency passes into act only through the agency of something already in act", and "such a state requires dependence on something prior", and, finally, "God is in no way dependent (for God is first: premise one)." Put simply, because there is an instance of subsistent esse, it is in no way dependent on anything, and is thus simple or noncomposed.³⁵¹

The first premise also bases the argument for God's simplicity from God's uncaused, unparticipated nature in article four.³⁵² First, Aquinas describes the possible ways of possessing esse: it is either externally caused or consequent on (caused by) the form. Since God is first in the order of efficient causes, His esse is not received. Therefore, subsistent esse is unparticipated. And, since nothing is efficiently self-caused, God is not composed of essence and existence. Subsistent existence is in no way composed with subsistent form, but is the same thing (cf. S.T. I 3.3.).

Premise two (the unreceived quality of subsistent esse) is implied in both of the above arguments, but is brought out more clearly in article eight. As the efficient but not the (immanent) formal cause of all beings, God does not enter into composition with them. Thus subsistent being is not composed in this last way, either. The second premise is at work here in Aquinas' view that where there is communication of a numerical form, there is participation. Now God is the efficient and exemplar cause of all things, but not through identity with them, since the efficient cause is not identical with the form of the effect, except specifically. Although

³⁴⁹ S.T. I. 3.1 and 4.

³⁵⁰ Although His essence and existence are identical, this is not in an identical way as act/potency are related, since form takes the side of potency in the form-esse relationship: C.G. II 54, e.g.

³⁵¹ The argument that God is not in potency is explained in many texts, but in sum: Potentiality is not self-actuating and is dependent on a prior agent (see, e.g. S.T. I 3.1; C.G. I.16; De pot. 7.1). The proof of this latter point is best expressed at S.T. I 2.3, where the potency/act relationship is said to be causal and thus requiring dependence of potency on act: "nothing can move from potency to act save by something already in act", so that what is in act is the cause and is distinct from what is in potency (for, nothing is in potency and act in the same respect simultaneously).

³⁵² Cf. De ente et essentia c. 4 (para. 6 - 8).

it is not stated, the reason for this nonidentity is the infinite quality of subsistent esse, and thus from its inability to be received.

The notion of self-subsistent esse, which is really a conclusion from the primacy of act in the Thomistic sense of existence, is thus important for the third type of argument to divine simplicity. On the other hand, God's primary nature, a conclusion of the "five ways", bases the proof from God's nonpotentiality to His noncomposition. What do these arguments indicate about the form/esse relationship? Articles two and seven of S.T. I.3 provide the answer to this question by linking the issue of *simplicity* to that of *infinity* (q. 7). S.T. I 3.2 clarifies that it is not only esse but also *form* which subsists in the primary being. Goodness and perfection are due to form, and since God is unparticipated good, He is unparticipated (subsistent) form. Also, since agents act by their forms, the primary agent is also essentially a form (cf. ad 3). This is an important article, because it shows the cooperation of efficient and formal causality, which appears again in S.T. I 4-6. S.T. I 3.7 once again identifies God as absolute form, here meaning a being in which there is no internal nonidentity. Both articles two and seven thus point to the perfect nature of form, which is stressed in the question on divine infinity.

S.T. I.7 argues for God's infinity from the perfect, unreceived nature of form. Contrary to the Greek identification of infinity with imperfection and matter (since form in a sense limits the potentiality of matter), Aquinas expands the notion of infinity to reflect the perfection of form unreceived in matter, which he here characterises as unreceived esse. Thus, potentiality also has a limiting function for Aquinas, both on the level of form and of matter, which is subordinate to infinite act. The identity of form and esse is presupposed in God (from question three) and was explained in S.T. I 4.1 ad 3 in the following manner: Esse is most formal, i.e. closest to form, since form is that by which a thing has being.³⁵³ It is a formal principle as "something received" in all finite beings. Where esse is unreceived, there is subsistent esse, uncontracted by matter. The formal principle is identical with unreceived existence in this case. There is no question of dispensing with it, for perfection, even in God, requires substantial form as the principle of perfection. This point is taken up in more detail in S.T. I.6.3, where the threefold perfection of things is considered. Although the analysis is first applied to beings which are good by participation, it will apply analogously to God. The first perfection consists in the completeness brought by substantial form, which consists in the thing's existence. The

³⁵³ Compare this statement to the meanings of form and essence in De Ente 1.

second consists in what is required for the being to act *according to* this nature, such as its powers, and the third perfection is its attaining an extrinsic final end (cf. S.T. I 103.1).³⁵⁴

The proof of God's infinity in S.T. I.7 through the nature of subsistent, unreceived form can be supplemented by a brief analysis of infinity in two texts. In his commentary on Aristotle's Physics, Book III 1.7, the Greek meaning of infinite taken in the *privative* sense is given, as the untermiated. Applying to sensible things, the infinite is "something whose nature is not to be gone through" (In III Phys. 1.7 #344). It does not allow perfection in the sense of completion, and applies to quantity and thus, to *matter*. There is an additional sense of infinite taken in the *negative* sense, however, in Compendium Theologiae c. 20, which is from *form*: "Since God is infinite by reason of the fact that He is only form or act, His infinity pertains to the highest perfection" (#40). In VIII Phys. 1. 21 (#1149) also speaks of form as infinite, in connection with active potency, and he attributes infinite power to Aristotle's First Mover, probably having the efficient cause, or creation, in mind in this connection.

While the questions on divine simplicity and infinity illumine God as subsistent form, the questions on divine perfection and goodness stress God's efficient causality as first agent. The formal and efficient causes are connected because perfection in the sense of completion requires the action of a form, which its secondary perfection (see above, S.T. I 6.2c). God's perfection corresponds to His actuality as being itself (S.T. I 4.1) as well as to His communication of form, which grounds his likeness to creatures. S.T. I 4.3 develops this latter point explicitly, explaining the mutual causality of form and agent: It is the ratio of an agent (efficient cause) to reproduce itself, i.e. communicate itself according to some formality or mode.³⁵⁵ And, every agent acts according to its form. Thus, every effect resembles its cause. Analogical (versus univocal) causality occurs where the agent is either under a different species than the effect, or when the agent is not contained in *any* genus, as in the case of Ipsum Esse. Here, the effect (esse) bears only a distant similarity to its cause, and the resemblance is only from effect to cause, not vice-versa (cf. ad 4).

³⁵⁴ Cf. In 4 Sent. d. 8 q. 1 a. 1 #17: "The perfection of a thing consists in this, that it is led through to its ultimate".

³⁵⁵ For, the cause/effect relationship implies a similarity, even if inequality, between cause and effect. There is equality of being and likeness however, in univocal causes, which produce the most perfect likeness (S.T. I 4.3c).

8 We have seen that it is esse which is cited as the reason for perfection throughout S.T. I.4 (especially in 4.2, where Ipsum Esse is identified with the sum of perfections), and the position is logically developed in the questions on goodness (S.T. I.5-6), for as a final cause, goodness implies completion and thus, perfection. Question five treats “goodness in general”, and provides an analysis of the order among Aristotle’s four causes. The logical collapsing of the notions of “good”, “desirable”, “perfect”, and “end” in S.T. 5.1’s³⁵⁶ treatment of the transcendental “good” is developed in article four into an analysis which shows a) the priority of the final cause with respect to the formal and efficient, but also, importantly, b) the necessity of both formal and efficient causes for the attainment of perfection. Aquinas’ position is that the final cause is first in the order of *causality* (though not in being) in that it moves the *efficient* cause to act (for, a thing is perfect qua reproducing its like). So, the efficient cause must reproduce itself (a form) and thus cause the form. In the order of *nature* or *being*, however (which is the reverse of that of causality), *form* is first, as that whereby a thing is a being, and the efficient and final causes follow, as fulfilling the form’s perfection.³⁵⁷ Finally, S.T. I 6. 3 argues for the identity of the formal, efficient and final causes in God corresponding to the threefold perfection in things of being, operation and end.

Aquinas’ treatment of the divine attributes in questions three through seven of the *Prima Pars* thus shows the necessity of both form and esse in God, from the perspective of God’s being and operation. The preceding analysis of transcendental perfection, as well as the texts on exemplar causality bear out this same dual necessity, although without the emphasis on their identity in God. As primary and unparticipated being, God is the identity of form and existence, subject and act, whose end is identical with itself. Due to its simplicity, its operation or “secondary perfection”, is also identical with itself. Although really identical, both metaphysical principles of form and esse are logically necessary to explain the plenitude of perfection which the name “God” signifies.

³⁵⁶ In this text, the deduction is made in such a way that “good” = “desirable” = “end” = “final” = “perfective” = “actual being”.

³⁵⁷ Thus, the dictum that what is first in causality and intention is last in execution, or what is caused: See S.T. I 5.4c. Cf. section 5.3.3 above for the order of causes in the predicamental order.

5.5 Conclusion

In applying the notion of natural priority to the relationship between form and existence in both the predicamental and transcendental orders, we established the lack of any such priority, except in the case of God, the source of being and essence, being naturally prior to creation. As the source of perfection, God is both form and existence, in their subsistent identity. As omniscient Creator, God communicates His goodness in a participated manner on both the formal and existential levels. Both types of causality were seen to be required in order to explain the plurality which is a result of the proportionate order between the finite order and its Cause. The unity of the subject matter of metaphysics is maintained by focus on the form and its connection to its property of being; the dual role of form as limit and as act illumines the equal contribution of form as well as esse as inseparable metaphysical principles; and while neither the priority of form nor esse is “natural”, in the sense of being reducible to the other (as Carlo would state), the priority of esse in the predicamental order is secured in its transcendental origin, by way of efficient causality. Thus, the explanation of predicamental priorities underscores the only type of natural priority, viz. that of transcendental Subsistent Being, to finite composites.

The main objection to this portrayal of the nonreducible duality of causes in the predicamental order arose from the existentialist school. The existentialist Thomists’ attempt to ground the predicamental priority of esse to form, on the basis of a causal “reduction” to divine efficient causality failed, in that it confused the transcendental and predicamental orders, and made the causal identity of form and esse in Subsistent Being into a unified metaphysical principle of explanation in the predicamental order as well. In reducing Aquinas’ metaphysics to a “modes of esse” theory, this interpretation denigrated the function of form in both God and creature, and in some cases, reified esse into a subject in order to isolate it as the term of creation. Its overly simplistic alignment of finite esse with contingency and finite form with necessity even (ironically) deemphasized the intimacy of form and esse and the stability and permanence of certain types of creaturely existence. Once again, the attempt to highlight Aquinas’ unique contribution of existentialist participation³⁵⁸ ended up in a caricature of his

³⁵⁸ On both the predicamental and transcendental levels, viz. of the form in the esse, and of the finite actus essendi in the esse of God.

understanding of Aristotle's metaphysics of substance. What this interpretation missed lay ultimately in its misunderstanding of Aquinas' transformation of Aristotle's doctrine into a metaphysics of dynamic codependent principles of being, which forced contingency on the entire creature through its radical dependence on its causal Source. These failures on the side of certain existentialist Thomists created a certain distortion of Aquinas' notion of similitude between God and creature, and in some cases, led to a view of esse's natural priority on every level.

The issue of natural priority is located within the context of separability and causal independence, as the previous chapters have shown. The lack of any such priority among the ultimate principles of metaphysical explanation, namely, between essence and existence, has been shown in both the created and the uncreated orders. On both levels, the order among causes is reciprocal, in that the perfection which the term "cause" denotes, requires both a form and its fulfilment through an end. While esse has priority in the order of acts, as the completion of a thing,³⁵⁹ it nonetheless requires a form for the self-communication of its infinite goodness, and as the principle of its intelligibility. Thus, the necessary and essential role fulfilled by esse is paralleled by the dynamic and flexible role played by form, in Aquinas' metaphysics of causes.

³⁵⁹ Esse has priority as a sign of its subsistent infinity, in the case of God.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the concept of natural priority in Aquinas' metaphysics in the context of his theory of transcendental and predicamental order, and has shown that Aquinas' five senses of the natural priority are combined in the unique instance of God, Who, as both transcendent and immanent source of being, is the only instance of natural priority. Both form and esse were seen to operate within God, as principles of similitude between God and creature, and within creatures in relation to their end, even though form plays a limiting role with respect to esse in the finite substance's reception of existence. Neither form nor esse is naturally prior with respect to the other, in that there is no reducibility to one in any order, and neither can exist independently. The relation of natural priority exists only between the causal plenitude of the universal principle of being (God) and its finite effects. God's priority is primarily one of causality and origin, and not a primacy of "commonness", it was discovered.¹ God is distinct from ens commune in this way, for the latter is apprehended in the knowledge of each thing because of its universal predicability, whereas nothing is proportional to the primary analogous cause of being.

The first chapter laid the foundation for the study of the concept of natural priority in Aquinas by outlining ten characteristics of existentialist Thomists, and by outlining the various arguments of Carlo, Gilson, and Fabro on the primacy of esse. Carlo's "modalist" existentialism was seen to rest on the three ideas of esse as the sum of all perfections, the incompatibility between essence and infinity, and the principle of similitude between God and creature as guaranteeing the unity of metaphysics' subject matter. Various problems with Carlo's argument for esse's primacy were indicated, including the exclusive identification of esse with perfection

¹ See, e.g. S.T. I 85.3 ad 1 on the cognitional priority of ens. In both natural processes and in our way of knowing, the universal comes first, since both advance from potency to act. Of course, from the viewpoint of the senses, the particular is the first thing known (In 1 Phys. l.1 #8; In 1 Post. An. l.4 #43; In 10 Meta. l.4 #1990). On the priority of ens in the order of commonness versus the being which is prior in causality, see De ver. 10.11 ad 10.

(and the ensuing reduction of all principles into esse) and the terminological confusion of ens and esse. A study of Aquinas' theory of modes confirmed the view that modalist existentialists confuse modes with substantial forms, which view also entailed panentheism and a denial of causal duality.

Gilson's "theological" existentialism was then examined, from the viewpoint of God's essence, the real distinction and the "theological order" he attributes to Aquinas' metaphysics. A plausible interpretation of Gilson's theory said he "logicized" the real distinction, confused divine and creaturely esse, confused the starting point of metaphysics with its cause, and jeopardized the integrity of philosophy by adopting the theological order of investigation in metaphysics.

Also in the first chapter, Fabro's version of existentialism was examined from the perspective of his views on the "reduction" of all types of causality to divine efficient causality, of esse as the term of creation and of the subject of metaphysics. Regarding his reduction of causalities, we reviewed his adoption of esse as the principle of metaphysical hierarchy or order, his neglect of form on the transcendental level and his identification of esse as the divine name. Esse's status as the term of creation was analysed within Fabro's notion of "esse intensif" and his distinction between ens and esse, and his tendency to "logicize" the real distinction was revealed, reminiscent of Gilson's similar tendency. Finally, his views of the subject of metaphysics (also reflective of his existence/esse distinction) revealed a confusion of the terminus and subject of metaphysics, in that both are identified with the infinite plenitude of being. Chapter one concluded with a brief indication of the ways in which these thinkers implemented Aquinas' five senses of natural priority, showing the nonsystematic application of the concept in their works.

Chapters two through four explained the notion of natural priority and attempted to discover what type(s) of priorities, if any, exist between the metaphysical principles of the composite. Chapter two placed the question of the nature of causal hierarchy within the framework of the different types of natural priority. A brief analysis of the various notes of the

concept of order revealed the background for Aquinas' theory of natural priority, in that causal order relates particularly to natural priority.

It was seen that Plato furnished Aquinas with the "separability" criterion, and made the Ideas naturally prior in relation to things as separable, as "absolute", as perfect and as causal. Aquinas modified Plato's separability criterion in light of his denial of subsistent Ideas. Aristotle's exhaustive use of the concept of natural priority formed a list of five general types, namely, natural priority as "separability", as "absolute", "priority by nature or being", as "proximity to a principle" and as "mutual implication in being".

It was argued that Aristotle transferred Plato's separability criterion to primary substance, and made priority in proximity to a principle govern the relation between epistemological and ontological priority. Also, an apparent contradiction in Aristotle's use of the separability criterion in *Categories* 12 was resolved by reference to his theories of substance and truth. Finally, an analysis of *Meta.* 5.11 revealed Aristotle's idea that all senses of priority are reducible to natural priority; he there distinguishes "natural" priority from priority in knowledge (what we have called "absolute") and priority in proximity to a principle. It was argued that in this text, Aristotle's claim that all the senses of priority are reducible to this one, viz., the natural priority of primary substance as defined by actuality, is defensible, given the analogical meaning of the term "principle" as both a source of being and as a causal explanation. In this way, Plato's identification of the universal as naturally prior is harmonised with Aristotle's identification of the universal as primary substance.²

Chapter three showed both how Aquinas transformed the Greek notion of natural priority, described his own list of types of natural priority, and reviewed his applications of the concept in his theories of essential causes and analogy. From Plato, Aquinas inherited the notions of a subsistent first principle and participation, but he rejected Plato's linking of separability and absoluteness in relation to universals. From Aristotle, Aquinas borrowed the natural priority of act to potency as applied to primary substances, thus distinguishing natural

priority by predication and causality, versus Plato. Aquinas also developed a new notion of separability based on judgment, which changed the subject matter of metaphysics to ens commune, and was influenced by the Christian concepts of creation, conservation and divine omnipresence in his theory of natural priority.

Aquinas' five types of natural priority, viz. as "separability", as "absolute", as natural priority in "being", "in reference to a principle", and in "origin" all coincided in the only candidate for natural priority for Aquinas, namely, God. In his use of these concepts, Aquinas both borrowed from and transformed the views of Plato and Aristotle, in the course of developing his theories of God as the measure of all being and truth, of judgment and separatio (section 3.2), of the real distinction and intelligibility (section 3.2), and of subsistence and divine causality (section 3.3.1).

Aquinas' greatest advance over the Greeks in the theory of natural priority consisted in his theory of natural priority as "origin" (section 3.2.5). In this discussion, the five senses of natural priority are combined in reference to God, the primary bearer of natural priority, and the apparent contradiction between "separability" and "mutual implication in being" (as "origin") is resolved through his theory of creation. Thus, the concept of natural priority in its completeness applies only to God, and it is in this referent that the differences between Plato's and Aristotle's notions are reconciled, and the transcendent and immanent aspects are embraced.

The applications of natural priority within Aquinas' theories of essential causality and analogy revealed the primacy of the sense of natural priority as "origin", thus reinforcing the way in which Aquinas developed and yet also transcended the Greek concept of natural priority. Moreover, this analysis revealed a lack of any natural priority of esse to form, on either the finite or infinite level, in contrast to an existentialist interpretation of the "third way". Finally, Aquinas' adoption of the analogy of reference in his more mature writings pointed to an understanding of natural priority which combined the emphasis on "origin" with the other four senses of the concept.

² Thus, Cat. 5's and Meta. 5.11's identification of primary substances as naturally prior (Aristotle's mature view) is harmonised with Post. An. I.2's and Cat. 12-13's emphasis on the coincidence of priority

Having outlined the problematic of natural priority in chapter one, the Greek heritage of the concept in chapter two, and Aquinas' development and application of the concept in chapter three, chapter four turned to a detailed study of its application of the concept in the predicamental realm of finite substance. The metaphysical priority of substance, through its role as principle of unity, makes it the subject matter of metaphysics, along with its properties and causes. The problem of the coincidence of Plato's and Aristotle's senses of natural priority, viz. of the universal and the singular substance, is tackled once more, in Aquinas' analysis of subsistence. The demand that natural priority include both priority in intelligibility and being, was met by the two criteria of substance, namely, that it be both subject and essence. These criteria coincide only in immaterial substances, where form and thing are identical. Here alone is the form, as the "separate" cause of being in a thing,³ identical with the thing itself. However, even here, Aquinas' introduction of esse as something outside the form, could be interpreted to prohibit the Aristotelian identity.⁴

The metaphysical priority of substance was seen to lie in the presence of form, as a cause of being in the thing, and the existential mode of subsistence was seen to condition the substance's role as hypostasis. We argued that the very meaning of subsistence is its conferral of noninherence to the substance, through which it is the source of its own operations. While subsistence confers a mode of noninherence to the substance, it has a metaphysical dependence on the type of form, through the latter's degree of immateriality of operation. The metaphysical mode of subsistence, however, is not sufficient to make the substance naturally prior to its accidents, we argued.

The universal priority of substance was established through the actuality which form confers to it, and through the completion it permits, through the thing's secondary acts or operations. The arguments for the primacy of act through the unity present in final causality permitted the identification of the formal and final causes in the substance. We argued that natural priority in the created order was possessed only by immaterial substances, for the quality

in cognition and substance (more Platonic), which makes the universal prior.

³ This is called the "part", in contrast to the subject, which is the "whole" individual", in De pot. 9.1.

of their actuality alone exhibited universal causality⁵ of existence. Finally, the causal priority of act was seen through its universal extension to the most common effect, esse. Aquinas' understanding of act and potency, which concluded to the angels' reception of esse through efficient causality, was juxtaposed with Avicbron's spiritual hylemorphism throughout this analysis of spiritual creatures.⁶ Once again, commonness in causality grounds natural priority, which is now seen to apply to angels in a qualified way (as instrumental causes of being) but primarily to God, Who lacks any composition of act and potency.

In deepening and extending the analysis of the natural priority of act to potency introduced in chapter four to the real distinction between essence and esse, chapter five both replies to the existentialist positions presented in chapter one and traces the role of form and the relative priorities of form and esse through the predicamental and transcendental orders.

The examination of Carlo's modalist existentialism in chapter one is extended in this chapter, and the foundations and implications of his theory are set out and weighed. The first idea on which his modalism rests is his interpretation of esse as the sum of all perfections. This notion was seen i) to involve the erroneous notion that esse is a subject, ii) to ignore the "minimalist" sense of esse, and iii) to deny the real distinction and thus the perfection of form. The second foundation of Carlo's modalist existentialism is his juxtaposition of essence and infinity, which revealed his confusion of God and the subject of metaphysics and his espousal of a sort of pantheism. Carlo's third foundational notion was that esse supplied the single principle of similitude between God and creature. This notion was rejected as a form of reductionism which collapsed metaphysics' subject matter into its cause and principle, and implies a panentheism which denies his very thesis, the inclusive natural priority⁷ of esse and its transcendent character.

Chapter five continued with an analysis of Gilson's interpretation of Aquinas' theory of esse in relation to natural priority. An examination of Gilson's interpretation of Aquinas on

⁴ Quod. 2.2.2.

⁵ This causality is instrumental, not primary.

⁶ De subst. sep. 9-10.

⁷ That is, Carlo implicitly envisions esse as including all of Aquinas' five types of natural priority.

God's essence found that he adopted a univocal sense of form, rather than an analogical one which would encompass both finite and infinite orders, in his attempt to highlight the role of esse. Four errors were cited in his interpretation, all revealing his denial of Aquinas' attribution of pure perfections to God's essence.

Gilson's second main idea involved the substance/esse distinction, which he employed to distinguish Aristotle's "substance" metaphysics from Aquinas' creationist metaphysics. Gilson viewed the distinction as necessary in order to guarantee his interpretation of esse as the principle of similitude between God and creature. In his arguments, Gilson misapplied the contingency/necessity distinction, ignored the analogous senses of form, denied any knowledge of creation to the Greeks, and identified esse and "plenitude" or perfection exclusively.

Gilson's third main idea, the "theological order" of Aquinas' metaphysics, was rejected on the grounds that it confused metaphysics' subject matter and term, and denied philosophy's independence or integrity throughout its natural development. His implicit notion of the natural priority of esse to form embraced the various senses of the concept used by Aquinas, but contradicted Gilson's own Aristotelian framework and ultimately confused the transcendental and predicamental orders.

The third and final existentialist introduced in chapter one was C. Fabro. Chapter five examines the foundations of his "divine causality" existentialism, viz. his reduction of all types of causality to divine efficient causality, his view that esse is the term of creation and his notion of the subject matter of metaphysics. Chapter five continued the analysis of chapter one regarding these points, focusing on the notion of esse as a divine name (involved in his reduction of causalities), divine omnipresence and instrumental causality (involved in his view of the term of creation) and on the way in which ens and esse are grasped (regarding the subject of metaphysics).

Regarding esse as a divine name, Fabro implicitly appeals to esse's natural priority in terms of perfection and origin, yet it was found that Aquinas envisioned esse's "indetermination" in a different sense. The analysis of Fabro on the term of creation revealed the same senses of natural priority applied to esse, yet misinterpreted Aquinas on divine

preeminence and exemplar causality. Moreover, it underestimated the role of instrumental causes in creation (as well as Aquinas' motives in positing such causes) and so misapplied the notion of natural priority as "origin". Thus, Fabro's view of the natural priority of esse implicit in his reduction to a single metaphysical principle and term of creation failed to address the role of form in the transcendental order, "logicized" the predicamental order,⁸ and leaves the positive role of form unexplained on both the divine and finite levels. Fabro's causal reduction was argued to imply theistically neutral essences and ontologism, or the confusion of existence with infinite existence.

While the first two topics in Fabro's theory of esse imply esse's natural priority as "separable", "absolute" (universal), "perfect", and as "origin", the third topic, viz. the subject matter of metaphysics, involves esse's natural priority as "separate" and as "perfect". Fabro's mature view of the subject matter of metaphysics as esse ut actus intensivus betrayed a confusion of "absolute" natural priority (which has a primacy of commonness) and natural priority as "origin" (which has a primacy of causality) and as "separability". Aquinas, on the other hand, attributed separability to substances, and not to metaphysical principles, and distinguished God from the subject matter of metaphysics. In his zeal to distinguish the creationist metaphysics from Aristotelian metaphysics, which identified existence with facticity, Fabro ignored the universality of ens in Aquinas' thought, as well as the mode of its derivation. Thus, his third main idea which supports the natural priority of esse as "separable" and "perfect" fails.

It was found that Aquinas' five types of natural priority were used in various ways by all three existentialist theories. Carlo's "modalist" existentialism invoked esse's natural priority as a) "perfection", as "separable", as "origin", as "in proximity to a principle" and as "absolute" in his view of esse as the sum of all perfections, as b) "separable" and as "perfection" in his disassociation of form and infinity, and c) as "perfect", as "in proximity to a principle" in his theory of esse as similitude. Gilson's "theological" existentialism likewise invoked all five senses of natural priority in relation to esse, as a) "perfection" as "separable" and "in proximity to a

⁸ (see chapter one, s. 1.4)

principle” in his notion of God’s essence, as b) “origin”, as “absolute” and as “perfection” in his substance/esse distinction, and as c) “separable”, as “absolute”, as “perfect”, “in proximity to a principle” and as “origin” in his theory of theological order in metaphysics. The flaws of interpretation (of Aquinas) found in each of these thinkers’ defense of their main positions, however, coupled with the internal inconsistencies of their individual arguments and their reluctance to adopt the implications of their views, combined to invalidate their implicit adoption of the natural priority of esse with respect to form.

The more positive parts of chapter five (sections 5.3 and 5.4) lay in recovering Aquinas’ arguments for the mutual causality between form and existence in both the created and uncreated order. In the finite order, form serves as the focus of the study of being, as the cause of being and as ens per se. The grading of form by esse (De ente) is balanced by the immateriality of operation of a form. This immateriality gauges the form’s degree of proximity to pure act, or Ipsum Esse. As a principle of limitation, form is both positive and negative. It is negative insofar as it represents a denial of the infinitude of God’s perfection, but is positive as determining being to a certain category, and by representing a similitude of God’s essence by approximating its perfection through being received in a subject. Within the finite system of causes, form is positive as the principle of esse, as the vehicle of its communication to the substance. Form is required as much as esse for the perfection of a substance, as a principle of both its first (esse) and second (operations) acts.

Form contributes equally as much as esse on the transcendental level as well, for here, the two principles coincide. The principle of perfection is God’s goodness, which is explained in terms of the fecundity of being, reproducing itself by means of imitation. Now imitation requires the activity of a form as well as that form setting itself up as the final cause. Diversity of forms on the finite level creates the hierarchy of imitation which the totality of perfection requires. The infinite character of subsistent being, on the other hand, is also based on form, and is represented according to various proportions through exemplar causality. Divine intentionality establishes the coincidence of the formal and final causes on the transcendental level, thus again associating form with the perfection of existence. Exemplar causality represents

the priority of the final cause which was present in the finite order, and illumines the dual character of similitude between God and creation as both formal and existential.

The final stage of our argument for the equal role of form as esse on the transcendental level concluded to the prominent role of form in Aquinas' explanation of the divine attributes. The analysis of God's *perfection* revealed the dependence of divine efficient causality on form. God's efficient causality, like that of creatures, depends on communication of a form and the form's priority in the order of nature.⁹ The arguments for divine *simplicity* appeal to the nature of subsistent or unreceived being, and to God's primacy. If a being is simple because it is subsistent and wholly actual, it has no internal nonidentity. Subsistence is acquired by the first being in the denial of its "possession" of esse. Rather, this form is esse, and this being is absolute or subsistent form.¹⁰ God's *infinity* also depends on His being absolute form, as the positive principle of perfection, and the infinite extension of the First Cause to the innermost depths of each creature terminates in the "most formal" of principles, esse. Thus, the premises involved in arguments for the divine attributes, as well as the attributes themselves, illustrate the interdependence of form and existence on the transcendental level.

In reply to the existentialist Thomists evaluated in this thesis, one can interpret Aquinas as having applied the concept of natural priority in five distinct ways, whose totality pointed to one referent, that of God in relation to creation. The diverse notes in the concept embrace elements both transcendent (separability, origin, perfection) and more immanent (natural priority as absolute and in relation to a principle), the combination of which is explained through the notion of containment or virtual plenitude. The containment of the higher in the lower explains God's omnipresent immanence in all the principles of being, while the containment of the lower in the higher explains the origin of diversity in a separate source. For Aquinas, only God as both subsisting existence and as formal plenitude can embrace the five notes in the concept of natural

⁹ This does not introduce a natural priority of form to esse in either God or creature, however, since forms must exist in order to reproduce themselves (also, on the transcendental level, there is "reproduction" only by imitation, which is the case with all analogous causes). The natural priority is on the level of being, namely, the necessity of an existent form for the operation of the efficient and final causes.

¹⁰ Subsistent esse is in no way composed with form, but is the same thing: S.T. I 3.2-3.

priority, for He alone is “separable” or independent, “absolute” as universal cause and perfect intelligibility, “perfect” in His plenitude of being, prior “in relation to a principle”, or proportioned to Himself, and “origin” of all being and multiplicity.

An interpretation of natural priority consonant with Aquinas’ inclusive concept must explain *both* form and existence as principles involved in both the transcendental (transcendent) and predicamental (immanent) level. In misinterpreting Aquinas’ notion of *esse* to be naturally prior to form, the existentialist Thomists examined gave form perfection only on the predicamental level, and ultimately confused the predicamental and transcendental orders of being. In their zeal to find a unifying principle and “key” to Aquinas’ metaphysics, these thinkers have often succumbed to the temptation to yield to the spontaneous train of consequences involved in the the adoption of one principle’s inherent necessities, and have thereby upset Aquinas’ delicate equilibrium of metaphysical principles.

For Aquinas, on the other hand, the concept of natural priority involves the analogous signification of being and maintains both distinction and harmony among the variety of causal orders. Aquinas’ balanced incorporation of diverse principles operative throughout the metaphysical hierarchy mirrors his acceptance of dialectical tension within a nonsystematic metaphysics and implies the ultimate success of his reflective struggle over the nature of being.

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