

Harmonizing Plato and Aristotle on *Esse*: Thomas Aquinas and the *De hebdomadibus*

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Introduction

IT WAS in his second commentary on Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias* that Boethius announced the famous project of translating and commenting on all the works of both Plato and Aristotle. What the effect on the subsequent history of thought might have been, had he lived to carry out more than a small fraction of the project, we can only guess. But even the announcement may have had some impact. For it endorses a decided view of the relation between the two great philosophers. "In doing these things," Boethius declared, "I would not disdain to bring the positions of Aristotle and Plato into a certain harmony, and to show that they are not at odds about everything, as many hold, but that on most things in philosophy they are quite in agreement."¹

As is well-known, the assertion of a substantial agreement between Plato and Aristotle was typical with the neo-Platonist thinkers, among whom Boethius is usually numbered. The classification seems undeniable. Medieval readers too knew the "Platoni vehementer assentior" of the *De consolazione philosophiae*.²

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¹ Boethius, *In Librum De interpretatione editio secunda*, lib. 2 (*Patrologia Latina* 64, 433D): "His peractis non equidem contempserim Aristotelis Platonisque sententias, in unam quodammodo revocare concordiam, et in his eos non ut plerique dissentire in omnibus, sed in plerisque quae sunt in philosophia maxime consentire demonstrem."

² Boethius, *De consolazione philosophiae*, III, pr. 12, 1.

This makes it interesting to observe a certain feature—or rather, the lack of a certain feature—in St. Thomas Aquinas’s way of treating Boethius. This is the practically complete absence of places in which Thomas draws attention to Platonizing tendencies in Boethius’s thought.³ Thomas does not seem to feel the need to signal contrasts, resulting from Platonic influences, between Boethius’s teaching and Aristotelian philosophy, as he does, for instance, with the *Liber de causis*, pseudo-Dionysius, and even St. Augustine.⁴ We might very well wonder whether, in Thomas’s view, Boethius did not in fact achieve in his own thought that harmony that he never had the chance to put on display in the projected commentaries.

In any case, and however we might wish to classify Thomas himself, it is clear that he too sees a deep harmony between Plato and Aristotle. To be sure, he often dwells on the divergences between the two; and when he must judge, it is nearly always in favor of the “Philosopher.” Nevertheless, on a very fundamental point—perhaps we can even say the most fundamental of all—he holds that the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle are in perfect agreement. This is the doctrine of the universal participation in being or existence, *esse*.

Especially insistent upon this agreement is a passage from one of Thomas’s most mature writings, the *De substantiis separatis*.⁵ Over and above the mode of coming into being that is by the transformation of matter, he says,

[I]t is necessary, in the judgment of Plato and Aristotle, to posit another, higher one. For since the first principle must be most simple, it must not be posited to exist as a participant in existence, but as an existence itself. And since there can only be one subsistent existence, as has already been shown, all the other things, which are below it, must exist thus: as participants in existence. Hence in all things of this sort there must come about a certain common resolution, according to which each of them is resolved by the intellect into that which exists [*id quod est*] and its existence [*suum esse*]. Therefore, above the mode of becoming

³ I say “practically” in view of *De potentia*, q. 9, a. 1, ad 5, where Thomas says that Boethius, in affirming that genera and species “subsist,” is speaking “according to the opinion of Plato.” Note however that later, in the *Summa theologiae* (I, q. 29, a. 2, ad 4), Thomas urges an Aristotelian interpretation of the affirmation.

⁴ On Augustine, see *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 10, ad 8; *ST I*, q. 84, a. 5.

⁵ Thomas also mentions the agreement in *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 5; and *ST I*, q. 44, a. 1. On the composition of the *De substantiis separatis*, with references to works discussing its importance for Thomas’s metaphysics and for his view of Plato, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Initiation à saint Thomas d’Aquin* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires/Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1993), 321–23.

by which something comes to be through the arrival of form to matter, another origin of things must be pre-understood, according to which existence is conferred upon the whole universe of things by the first existent [*a primo ente*], which is its own existence.⁶

In the present essay I want to look at a much earlier work of Thomas's, his commentary on Boethius's *De hebdomadibus*.⁷ Anyone who has studied Thomas on participation knows that the theme plays a very conspicuous role in this work. My aim here is to bring out a rather inconspicuous facet of his handling of participation in *esse*. There are several places in the commentary where I think we can discern an effort, muted but serious, to "harmonize" Plato and Aristotle on this topic. I examine these in the third and chief section of the essay.

In the first section I briefly look over some of the circumstances of the commentary's composition and certain somewhat unusual features of its content. Taken together, I believe, these indicate a desire on Thomas's part to stay quite close to Boethius's way of thinking. This I think lends plausibility to the idea that he would have in mind the "harmonization" concern. In the second section, I trace various attributions of "Platonism" and "Aristotelianism" that have emerged in the course of what is surely the most prominent debate among the commentary's interpreters: the debate over the relation between Thomas and Boethius on the very meaning of the distinction between *esse* and *id quod est*. I shall not attempt to resolve this debate, but I do think the teachings that I explore in the third section will be seen to have a significant bearing on it.

⁶ *De substantiis separatis*, c. 9: "Sed ultra hunc modum fiendi necesse est, secundum sententiam Platonis et Aristotelis, ponere alium altiolem. Cum enim necesse sit primum principium simplicissimum esse, necesse est quod non hoc modo esse ponatur quasi esse participans, sed quasi ipsum esse existens. Quia vero esse subsistens non potest esse nisi unum, sicut supra habitum est, necesse est omnia alia quae sub ipso sunt, sic esse quasi esse participantia. Oportet igitur communem quamdam resolutionem in omnibus huiusmodi fieri, secundum quod unumquodque eorum intellectu resolvitur in id quod est, et in suum esse. Oportet igitur supra modum fiendi quo aliquid fit, forma materiae adveniente, praeintelligere aliam rerum originem, secundum quod esse attribuitur toti universitati rerum a primo ente, quod est suum esse."

⁷ On its dating, see section I below. For passages from the *De hebdomadibus* and Thomas's commentary, I shall generally use the text of the Leonine edition, as presented in St. Thomas Aquinas, *An Exposition of the On the Hebdomads of Boethius*, trans. Janice L. Schultz and Edward A. Synan (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001). Translations are mine.

The Purpose and the Spirit of the *De hebdomadibus* Commentary

The *De hebdomadibus* is one of Boethius's so-called theological opuscula.⁸ In the Middle Ages, starting in the Carolingian Renaissance, the opuscula were widely used in the study of theology.⁹ In the twelfth century several commentaries on them appeared.¹⁰ However, in the thirteenth century, even though theologians continued to draw upon the opuscula,¹¹ the only commentaries are those of Thomas on the *De trinitate* and the *De hebdomadibus*.¹² The very existence of Thomas's commentaries, then, is an indication that he assigned rather special importance to the two opuscula.

Other factors also give this impression. According to the evidence gathered by the Leonine editors, the two commentaries were composed between 1257 and 1259, that is, during Thomas's first period in Paris as master of theology. So if we set aside the commentary on Lombard's *Sentences*, which was an obligatory exercise, Boethius would be the first non-canonical author upon whom Thomas chose to comment. His commentaries on *De divinis nominibus*, the *Liber de causis*, and Aristotle appear much later.¹³ Moreover, there is no evidence that the Boethian commentaries were connected with his teaching activities, either at the University of Paris or in the convent of Saint-Jacques. They seem to be simply the fruit of a personal labor of study and reflection.¹⁴

On the other hand, there is no particular reason to regard them as single project. In fact there are very few internal connections between them, and there are also considerable differences. For example, the *De trinitate* commentary, which includes not only exposition of the text but

⁸ The others are *De trinitate*, *Utrum Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus de divinitate substantialiter praedicentur*, *De fide catholica*, and *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium* (known in the Middle Ages as *De duabus naturis*).

⁹ See Margaret Gibson, "The *Opuscula Sacra* in the Middle Ages," in *Boethius: His Life, Thought and Influence*, ed. idem (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1981), 214–34. On the reception of *De hebdomadibus* in the Middle Ages, see Gangolf Schrimpf, *Die Axiomenschrift des Boethius (de hebdomadibus) als Philosophisches Lehrbuch des Mittelalters* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966).

¹⁰ Besides Schrimpf, *Die Axiomenschrift*, see also Nikolaus M. Häring, *Life and Works of Clarembald of Arras* (Toronto: PIMS, 1965); idem, *The Commentaries on Boethius of Gilbert of Poitiers* (Toronto: PIMS, 1966); idem, *Commentaries on Boethius by Thierry of Chartres and His School* (Toronto: PIMS, 1971).

¹¹ For example, William of Auxerre, Alexander of Hales, Hugh of Saint Cher, and Albert the Great.

¹² After Thomas, there are three anonymous commentaries from the fifteenth century; see Schrimpf, *Die Axiomenschrift*, 147–48.

¹³ See Torrell, *Initiation*, 498–505.

¹⁴ See *ibid.*, 98–99.

also *quaestiones*, is more like the youthful *Sentences* commentary, whereas the *De hebdomadibus* commentary is solely exposition of the text and, in this respect, more like Thomas's later commentaries.

This last point is one of the factors leading the Leonine editors to conjecture that the *De hebdomadibus* commentary was the second of the two.¹⁵ However, it does not seem to have been written much later. Among other things, in the *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, which are dated between 1256 and 1259, Thomas draws heavily on the *De hebdomadibus*. He mentions it by name no less than fourteen times—considerably more than in any previous or subsequent work. The opusculum seems to be especially on his mind.

What was Thomas aiming at in commenting on the *De hebdomadibus*? The fact that he only expounds the text suggests that his chief aim was simply to understand the work better. Other aspects of the commentary suggest the same thing. For example, one of its most singular features—distinguishing it also from the *De trinitate* commentary—is the scarcity of references to other authors. Apart from Boethius himself and the Scriptures, Thomas mentions only two: Aristotle, four times, and Plato, twice.¹⁶ (Boethius mentions neither.) Moreover, Fr. Louis Bataillon finds no trace of influence from the commentaries of the preceding century, despite the fact that Thomas must have known of at least two or three of them. Nor does Thomas seem to have drawn upon any of the thirteenth-century readings of the opusculum.¹⁷

With respect to the question of the harmony between Plato and Aristotle, another singular feature stands out: Nowhere in the commentary does Thomas criticize Plato or the Platonists. It is true that in the two places where he mentions Plato, Thomas reminds us of certain differences between the Platonic and Aristotelian positions. But he does so only to

¹⁵ Louis J. Bataillon and Carlo A. Grassi, preface, in *Expositio Libri Boetii De hebdomadibus* (Roma: Commissio Leonina/Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1992), 263–64.

¹⁶ The references to Aristotle (or to the Philosopher) are found at Aquinas, *Exposition of the On the Hebdomads*, 26 (ch. 2), 32 (ch. 3), 34 (ch. 3), and 44 (ch. 4); those to Plato, at 26 (ch. 2) and 34 (ch. 3).

¹⁷ See Bataillon and Grassi, preface, 259–60. Thomas probably did not know the *Fragmentum Admontense* or the commentaries of Thierry of Chartres and Clarembald of Arras; but those of Remigius of Auxerre and Gilbert of Poitiers were widely diffused, and the latter is frequently cited in the *Summa fratris Alexandri*. However, regarding Gilbert's commentary, see below, notes 23 and 73. There is no trace in Thomas of Albert the Great's discussion of the *De hebdomadibus*. Albertus Magnus, *De bono*, tr. 1, q. 1, a. 7, in *Alberti Magni Opera Omnia*, t. XXVIII, ed. H. Kühle et al. (Aschendorff: Monasterii Westfalorum, 1951), nos. 22–26, pp. 12b–15a.

set them aside as irrelevant. That is, in his opinion, Boethius's teaching is compatible with both.

I will present these passages further on. What I am trying to convey here is simply the extent to which the *De hebdomadibus* commentary seems almost a kind of tête-à-tête between Thomas and Boethius. The Boethian spirit is very present. I think this consideration is of no little help in understanding the way in which the theme of participation in *esse* is handled in the commentary. But before getting into that, let us glance at the *status quaestionis* on Thomas's treatment of Boethius's distinction between *esse* and *id quod est*.

The Question of Boethian and Thomistic *Esse*

The *De hebdomadibus* is entirely devoted to the resolution of a single question: How it is that substances are good "insofar as they are," and that nevertheless they are not "substantial" goods. Before even explaining the question, Boethius lays down a series of axioms that will be needed for resolving it. The first axiom is: "Diuersum est esse et id quod est" (To be is diverse from that which is). He glosses this briefly. "Ipsum enim esse nondum est. At uero quod est accepta essendi forma est atque consistit" (To be, itself, is not yet. But that which is, having received the form of being, is and subsists).¹⁸

In chapter 2 of his commentary, Thomas says that Boethius is not here referring to a "real" diversity between *esse* and *id quod est*.¹⁹ It is only a matter of diverse *intentiones*, diverse significations. *Esse* signifies in an abstract way, whereas *id quod est* signifies in a concrete way. As he goes on to say, *id quod est* signifies as a subject of *esse*, or in other words, as that which "participates" in an *actus essendi*.²⁰ And so, he explains, the expres-

¹⁸ Aquinas, *Exposition of the On the Hebdomads*, 14.

¹⁹ "Dicit ergo primo, quod 'diuersum est esse, et id quod est,' que quidem diuersitas non est hic referenda ad res de quibus adhuc non loquitur, set ad ipsas rationes seu intentiones. Aliud autem significamus per hoc quod dicimus esse et aliud per id quod dicimus id quod est; sicut et aliud significamus cum dicimus currere et aliud per hoc quod dicitur currens. Nam currere et esse significatur in abstracto sicut et albedo; set quod est, id est ens et currens, significatur in concreto uelud album." Aquinas, *Exposition of the On the Hebdomads*, 16.

²⁰ "Deinde cum dicit, 'Ipsum enim esse' etc., manifestat predictam diuersitatem tribus modis. Quorum primus est quia ipsum esse non significatur sicut subiectum essendi, sicut nec currere significatur sicut subiectum cursus. Vnde sicut non possumus dicere quod ipsum currere currat, ita non possumus dicere quod ipsum esse sit; set id quod est significatur sicut subiectum essendi, uelud id quod currit significatur sicut subiectum currendi; et ideo sicut possumus dicere de eo quod currit siue de corrente quod currat in quantum subicitur cursui et participat ipsum, ita possumus dicere quod ens siue id quod est sit in quantum participat

sion “having received the form of being” refers to the reception, in a subject, of an *actus essendi*.

It will be when Boethius addresses the difference between composite and simple things that, according to Thomas, a real diversity is established, in some cases, between *esse* and *id quod est*.²¹ What is especially controversial about Thomas’s reading, however, is how he has already interpreted the very terms of the diversity; especially the term *esse*. Is it really true that when Boethius speaks of *esse* and of *forma essendi*, he means precisely *actus essendi*? The discord among scholars on this question is almost amazing. This issue has much to do with that of the respective roles of Platonism and Aristotelianism in the ontologies of Boethius and St. Thomas. Here is a sketch of the situation.²²

Already in the Middle Ages Thomas’s reading had its opponents. Henry of Ghent held that by *esse* Boethius means God.²³ Peter Olivi held

actum essendi. Et hoc est quod dicit quod ‘ipsum esse nondum est’ quia non attribuitur sibi esse sicut subiecto essendi, set id ‘quod est, accepta essendi forma,’ scilicet suscipiendo ipsum actum essendi, ‘est atque consistit,’ id est in se ipso subsistit. Non enim dicitur ens proprie et per se nisi de substantia cuius est subsistere; accidentia enim non dicuntur enca quasi ipsa sint, set in quantum eis substantia est aliquid ut post dicitur.” Aquinas, *Exposition of the On the Hebdomads*, 16, 18.

²¹ See below, sec. III.A.

²² For this sketch I am drawing partly on Ralph McNerny, *Boethius and Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 161–98. For bibliography on the interpretations of Boethius’s distinction between *esse* and *id quod est*, see Tommaso d’Aquino, *Commenti a Boezio*, trans. Pasquale Porro (Milano: Rusconi, 1997), 47, note 30. A survey of the principal views up to 1945 is found in James Collins, “Progress and Problems in the Reassessment of Boethius,” *The Modern Schoolman* 23 (1945): 16–19.

²³ Henrici de Gandavo, *Quodlibet I*, ed. R. Macken, O.F.M. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1979), q. 9, pp. 57–62. To support his interpretation, Henry cites portions of a passage from the commentary of Gilbert of Poitiers (57–58). For the passage in full, see Häring, *The Commentaries on Boethius of Gilbert of Poitiers*, I, §27–37, 193–95 (= PL 64, 1317D–1318D). The interpretation that Henry takes from Gilbert is remarkably similar to a position that Thomas criticizes the “Porretanians” for holding (see below, note 73). Actually this interpretation is only one of two offered in Gilbert’s passage. The other one takes *esse* to refer to a thing’s *subsistentia*, which evidently means its essence. Gilbert develops this at some length, but Henry feels justified in dismissing it as *nihil ad propositum* (p. 58, ll. 86–88). Thomas shows no awareness of it at all. This is not the place to go into the matter, but one should note the serious discrepancy between what we read in Häring’s edition at §34, ll. 86–88, and the quotation given by Henry on p. 58, ll. 81–83. Oddly, although drawing upon a large number of manuscripts, Häring’s edition presents no variants that are even close to Henry’s version of these lines.

that he means form.²⁴ A judgment similar to Olivi's was rendered by the first modern interpreter to address the question, Pierre Duhem, at the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁵ According to the French scholar, Boethius's distinction is not between *actus essendi* and essence, but between a universal nature and a concrete or particular instance of it. Duhem attributed Thomas's reading to the influence of Avicenna.

Duhem's interpretation was seconded by M-D. Roland-Gosselin;²⁶ and it quickly became the standard one, even among Thomists. Roland-Gosselin suggested that the Avicennian influence was mediated by William of Auvergne (~1180–1249). William seems to have been the first of the theologians to adopt Avicenna's distinction between *essentia*, understood as *possibile esse*, and *esse*, understood as an "accident," something that "happens" to a thing.²⁷

Over the course of the twentieth century, as the study of Thomas's metaphysics proceeded, the difference between his conception of *esse*—especially as presented in the more mature writings—and Avicenna's became clearer.²⁸ In particular, it came to be recognized that Thomas rejects the idea that *actus essendi* is something that "happens" to an essence, something accidental to it.²⁹ The *esse* that is an accidental predicate is only *esse ut verum*, the *esse* that consists in the truth of a proposition.³⁰ At the same time, most of the Thomists continued to hold that Boethius has no notion of *actus essendi*. On their view, although Boethius's language is neo-Platonic, on this point his thought would not go much beyond Aristotle's.

For example, in the reading of Cornelio Fabro, Boethius stays in the domain of what Fabro calls "formal" *esse*, the *esse* that is divided according to the categories: substantial and accidental *esse*.³¹ Thomas's *actus essendi* would be something else; and in order to arrive at it, Boethius did

²⁴ Petrus Iohannis Olivi, *Quaestiones in Secundum Librum Sententiarum*, ed. Bernardus Jansen (Quaracchi, 1922), q. VIII, p. 154.

²⁵ Pierre Duhem, *Le système du monde*, vol. 5 (Paris: Hermann, 1917), 285–316; see the discussion in McNerny, *Boethius and Aquinas*, 163–68.

²⁶ M.-D. Roland-Gosselin, O.P., *Le De ente et essentia de S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Kain: Le Saulchoir, 1926), 142–45, 185–99; see the discussion in McNerny, *Boethius and Aquinas*, 168–76.

²⁷ See William of Auvergne, *De trinitate*, ed. Bruno Switalski (Toronto: PIMS, 1976), c. I, p. 18.

²⁸ The first to notice this seems to have been De Raeymaker; see Rudi te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 68, note 5.

²⁹ See, e.g., *In IV Metaphysicorum*, lect. ii, §556, §558; also *De potentia*, q. 5, a. 4, ad 3.

³⁰ See *In V Metaphysicorum*, lect. ix, §896.

³¹ Cornelio Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione* (Torino: Sei, 1963), 30; see also Cornelio Fabro, "Intorno al fondamento della metafisica tomistica," *Aquinas* 3

not suffice. Also needed was the help of the pseudo-Dionysius and the *Liber de causis*. A similar judgment, though more along the “existential” line of Etienne Gilson, can be found in the recent bilingual edition of the *De hebdomadibus* commentary produced by Janice Schultz and Edward Synan. Here Thomas’s reading of Boethius is dubbed “creative.”³²

Also important is a work published in 1996 by the Dutch scholar Rudi te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*. In comparison with the readings of Fabro and Gilson, te Velde finds in Thomas’s ontology a much tighter relation between essence and *esse*, and a much stronger causal role of form with respect to *esse*. In his view, Thomas posits no *esse* in things other than substantial and accidental *esse*. These are distinct from, but also intimately associated with, substantial and accidental form. However, te Velde continues to maintain that the *esse* of Boethius is nothing but form.³³

Now, in a rather surprising development outside the various currents of Thomism, the studies of neo-Platonism carried out in the last three or four decades have led some scholars to the conclusion that Thomas’s *actus essendi* is actually quite close to Boethius’s *esse*. The chief figure in this development is Pierre Hadot. Starting with a study published in 1963, Hadot has interpreted the Boethian distinction between *id quod est* and *esse* in the light of a neo-Platonic commentary on Plato’s *Parmenides*, which Hadot attributes to Porphyry.³⁴ Its doctrine would perhaps have reached Boethius by way of Marius Victorinus. In this commentary, the first principle of all reality is characterized as a pure εἶναι, a pure *esse*, which would be a pure and infinite activity, beyond all form. Then, according to a typical neo-Platonic scheme of participation, *esse* descends from the first principle and is received in the lower beings. In these, *esse* is contracted and determined to one species or another, according to the diverse forms.

Thus, for Hadot, very far from a substantially Aristotelian notion, Boethius’s distinction would in fact be solidly neo-Platonic. Its only

(1960): 103–6; reprinted in Cornelio Fabro, *Tomismo e Pensiero Moderno* (Roma: Libreria editrice della Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1969), 187–90.

³² Schultz and Synan, introduction, in Aquinas, *Exposition of the On the Hebdomads*, xxxix.

³³ Te Velde, *Participation*, 81.

³⁴ See Pierre Hadot, “La distinction de l’être et de l’étant dans le *De hebdomadibus* de Boèce,” in *Die Metaphysik im Mittelalter*, ed. P. Wilpert and W. Eckert (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1963), 147–53; idem, “Forma essendi. Interprétation philologique et interprétation philosophique d’une formule de Boèce,” *Les Études Classiques* 38 (1970): 143–56; idem, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, 2 vols. (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1968), esp. vol. 1, 489–92. For discussion, see D. Bradshaw, “Neoplatonic Origins of the Act of Being,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 53 (1999): 383–401.

peculiarity, according to Hadot, would be that Boethius's *id quod est* does not signify the "second hypostasis" posited by many neo-Platonic thinkers. Instead of standing for a single reality, it would be a general expression applicable to all substances. On this reading, Thomas's distinction would lie very close to Boethius's, perhaps especially in the interpretation of Thomas proposed by Fabro.³⁵

Bruno Maioli reads Boethius in a way similar to Hadot: *Esse* signifies an act distinct from form.³⁶ However, Maioli departs from Hadot's view that Boethius's *esse* is first received in the beings and only in a second moment contracted or determined according to their forms.³⁷ For Maioli, Boethius would hold a conception of form that is closer to Aristotle's: A thing's form would be not only a principle determining *esse* to a particular species, but also a principle or cause through which it has *esse* at all.³⁸ Without referring explicitly to Thomas, Maioli contrasts this notion of form as cause of *esse* with what he calls the "scholastic" distinction between "possible essence" and *esse*. He seems to be thinking of the Avicennian distinction. In reality, however, his reading would put the Boethian doctrine rather close to the interpretation of Thomas offered by te Velde.

The panorama of interpreters would not be complete without reference to Ralph McNerny.³⁹ As far as I know, McNerny is the only Thomistic scholar in recent times to hold that Thomas's reading of the *De hebdomadibus* does not depart significantly from Boethius's thought. On McNerny's account, which is along Aristotelian lines, both Boethius and Thomas distinguish between form and *esse* in creatures, and for both the distinction is very subtle. *Esse* is not form; it is rather the *actual inher-*

³⁵ See Hadot, "La distinction de l'être et de l'étant," 152; idem, "Forma essendi," 151–52. Hadot suggests that Boethius's expression *forma essendi* does not signify *esse* itself, as Thomas takes it, but rather the form that determines the thing's mode of being (idem, "La distinction de l'être et de l'étant," 152; idem, "Forma essendi," 154). But this would be a secondary point. Thomas's reading of Boethius's *esse* as an act distinct from form would still be correct.

³⁶ Bruno Maioli, *Teoria dell'essere e dell'esistente e classificazione delle scienze in M. S. Boezio* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1978).

³⁷ Hadot rejects the idea that for Boethius form is a "principle" of the participation in *esse*. Hadot, "Forma essendi," 153–54.

³⁸ Maioli, *Teoria dell'essere*, 21–27. In *De trinitate*, Boethius says that "omne namque esse ex forma est"; Boethius, *De trinitate*, in *The Theological Tractates: The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, and S. J. Tester, new ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), II, p. 8, line 21.

³⁹ McNerny, *Boethius and Aquinas*, 161–231.

ence of form in matter.⁴⁰ McInerny does not explain how the distinction between *esse* and form should be understood in immaterial creatures.

The situation is certainly curious, in various ways, perhaps especially with regard to the question of the roles of Platonism and Aristotelianism in our two thinkers' ontologies. Nearly all of the possible permutations have been proposed. There is a substantially Aristotelian Boethius, a solidly neo-Platonic Boethius, and a neo-Platonic Boethius with important Aristotelian elements. There is an Avicennian Thomas, a neo-Platonic Thomas along the lines of the pseudo-Dionysius and the *Liber de causis*, and a fundamentally Aristotelian Thomas. In some cases Boethius is judged more Aristotelian, Thomas more neo-Platonic; in others, they are judged more or less equally neo-Platonic; in still others, more or less equally Aristotelian. The only possibility that does not seem to be represented is the one that we would perhaps most expect: a more neo-Platonic Boethius and a more Aristotelian Thomas.

Participation in *Esse*

It is not my intention to pronounce directly on the various interpretations of Boethius, of Thomas, and of Thomas's reading of the *De hebdomadibus*, with respect to the distinction between *esse* and *id quod est*. Instead I now wish to return to Thomas's own concerns in the *De hebdomadibus* commentary. Even though the distinction between *esse* and *id quod est* is of obvious importance in the commentary, it cannot really be considered one of the principal targets of reflection. In comparison with other works, the explanations of the distinction that are offered here are very reduced. For example, not even once does Thomas mention the doctrine, so fundamental in his own thought, that *esse* stands to essence as act to potency.

What Thomas dwells upon much more in the commentary is Boethius's teaching that *id quod est* "participates" in *esse*. Indeed, if there is any single notion that dominates Thomas's concerns in this writing, it is surely that of participation. The origin of this notion is of course Platonic. It seems to me that here we see Thomas making a concerted effort to master the doctrine of participation in *esse* and, at the same time, to interpret it in a way that would be coherent with Aristotelian principles, and even with Aristotle's own criticism of Platonic participation. It is this aspect of the commentary that I will try to bring out in the rest of this essay. I hope that the bearing of this matter on the issue of Thomas's reading of Boethius's *esse* will emerge clearly enough along the way.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 252.

It has long been recognized that the *De hebdomadibus* commentary is of capital importance for Thomas's conception of participation.⁴¹ Its treatment of the theme is far and away the longest and most systematic of any to be found in Thomas's works. Moreover, assuming the dating indicated above, in the writings prior to the commentary the language of participation plays only a minor role, and there is little effort to clarify its meaning.⁴² It is with the *De hebdomadibus* commentary that participation becomes a truly fundamental element in Thomas's metaphysics.

Obviously this is not the place to present the commentary's entire treatment of participation or to consider all of its implications for Thomas's doctrine of *esse*. (Here too, however, significant divergences among the interpreters could be noted.) I only wish to bring out his concern to avoid possible connotations that would be problematic from an Aristotelian point of view. It is not that Thomas ever expresses this concern as explicitly as I have just done. On the contrary, he could hardly be quieter about it. But there are at least five places in the brief work where I think we can see it operating, especially if we consider them alongside related passages from other writings. The order in which I shall present the texts is not that in which they appear in the commentary, but I think it better reflects the doctrinal relations among them and makes for a more linear exposition.

There Can Be Participation With or Without Platonic Ideas

The first text, from chapter 2, is one of the passages in which Thomas mentions Plato. He is explaining the axiom about composites and simples: "Omni composito aliud est esse, aliud ipsum est. Omne simplex esse suum et id quod est unum habet" (In every composite, one thing is to be, and another is the composite itself. Every simple thing has as one its to be and that which is).⁴³ Thomas explains that in composite things, *esse* and *id quod est* differ not only in signification, but also in reality. This is because *esse* cannot itself be composite. Any composite thing will therefore be something other than its *esse*, something that only participates in *esse*.⁴⁴ Thomas

⁴¹ Both Geiger and te Velde begin their investigations of participation in Thomas with studies of the commentary. See L.-B. Geiger, O.P., *La participation dans la philosophie de S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 1942), 36–47; te Velde, *Participation*, 8–20.

⁴² See te Velde, *Participation*, 3–5.

⁴³ Aquinas, *Exposition of the On the Hebdomads*, 14.

⁴⁴ "Est ergo primo considerandum quod sicut esse et quod est differunt secundum intentiones, ita in compositis differunt realiter. Quod quidem manifestum est ex praemissis. Dictum est enim supra quod ipsum esse neque participat aliquid ut eius ratio constituatur ex multis, neque habet aliquid extrinsecum admixtum ut sit in eo compositio accidentalitatis; et ideo ipsum esse non est compositum; res ergo

then dwells at some length on the identity of *esse* and *id quod est* in “every simple thing.” He wants to make it clear that really there can only be one absolutely simple reality, and hence only one being in which *esse* and *id quod est* are one and the same. This is God. If there were many, then *esse* itself would have to be composite, containing something other than itself by which to diversify and multiply it.⁴⁵

In the course of this discussion, Thomas has us consider the fact that things are sometimes called simple, not because they are entirely so, but because they are lacking in some particular sort of composition. Such things are only simple in a certain respect, *secundum quid*. He mentions this in view of the possibility of a multiplicity of pure forms, beings withouthylomorphic composition.

If therefore any forms are found not in matter, each of them is indeed simple as to its lacking matter, and hence quantity, which is a disposition of matter. But because every form is determinative of *esse* itself, none of them is *esse* itself, but is something having *esse*; for instance if, following the opinion of Plato, we posit that an immaterial form subsists which is the idea and *ratio* of material men, and another form which is the idea and *ratio* of horses, it will be clear that the immaterial subsistent form itself, being something determined to a species, is not common *esse* itself, but rather participates that. And it makes no difference, in this regard, if we make those immaterial forms to be of a higher grade than are the *rationes* of these sensible things, as Aristotle had it; for each of them, insofar as it is distinguished from another, is a certain special form participating *esse* itself, and so none of them will be truly simple.⁴⁶

composita non est suum esse; et ideo dicit quod in ‘omni composito aliud est esse’ ens, et ‘aliud ipsum’ compositum quod est participando ipsum esse. Deinde cum dicit: ‘Omne simplex’ etc., ostendit qualiter se habeat in simplicibus in quibus necesse est quod ‘ipsum esse et id quod est’ sit ‘unum’ et idem realiter. Si enim esset aliud realiter id quod est et ipsum esse, iam non esset simplex set compositum.” Ibid., 24.

⁴⁵ “Id autem erit solum uere simplex quod non participat esse, non quidem inherens set subsistens. Hoc autem non potest esse nisi unum, quia, si ipsum esse nichil aliud habet admixtum preter id quod est esse, ut dictum est impossibile est id quod est ipsum esse multiplicari per aliquid diuersificans, et, quia nichil aliud preter se habet adiunctum, consequens est quod nullius accidentis sit susceptium. Hoc autem simplex, unum et sublime est ipse Deus.” Ibid., 26.

⁴⁶ “Si ergo inueniantur alique forme non in materia, unaqueque earum est quidem simplex quantum ad hoc quod caret materia, et per consequens quantitate que est dispositio materie. Quia tamen quelibet forma est determinatiua ipsius esse, nulla earum est ipsum esse, set est habens esse; puta secundum opinionem Platonis, ponamus formam immaterialem subsistere que sit ydea et ratio hominum materialium, et aliam formam que sit ydea et ratio equorum, manifestum erit quod ipsa forma immaterialis subsistens, cum sit quiddam determinatum ad

In short, even if there are subsistents other than God that are not composed of form and matter, other subsistent forms, these will still be only participants in *esse*. Such forms will not be identical with their *esse*, but rather “determinative” of *esse*. This is true, Thomas insists, whether they be conceived as Platonic Ideas—that is, as the separate *rationes* of the species of material things—or in Aristotelian fashion, as *rationes* of a higher grade. Thomas does not decide here between the two conceptions.

Elsewhere, of course, Thomas pronounces in favor of the Aristotelian way of conceiving immaterial beings. The species of things without matter cannot be of the same nature as are the species of material things, for the simple reason that the latter include matter in their nature. In the proemium to the *De divinis nominibus* commentary, he says flatly that the Platonists erred in holding that physical things have their species by participation in separate species. They were right only as regards the participation of all beings in a first principle that is essentially good, and one, and *esse*.⁴⁷

But here, in the *De hebdomadibus* commentary, the accent is much more conciliatory. Thomas wants to underscore the possibility of a correct use of the notion of participation in the sphere of *esse*. To this end, it suffices to set aside the difference between Plato and Aristotle as to the relation between material and immaterial beings.

Esse Itself Participates, in a Cause

The second text that I wish to consider, also from chapter 2, concerns another of Boethius’s axioms: “Quod est participare aliquo potest, set ipsum esse nullo modo aliquo participat” (That which is can participate

speciem, non est ipsum esse commune, set participat illud. Et nichil differt quantum ad hoc si ponamus illas formas immateriales altioris gradus quam sint rationes horum sensibilium ut Aristotiles uoluit: unaqueque enim illarum, in quantum distinguitur ab alia, quedam specialis forma est participans ipsum esse, et sic nulla earum erit uere simplex.” Ibid., 24, 26.

⁴⁷ “Platonici enim omnia composita vel materialia, volentes reducere in principia simplicia et abstracta, posuerunt species rerum separatas, dicentes quod est homo extra materiam, et similiter equus, et sic de aliis speciebus naturalium rerum. Dicebant, ergo, quod hic homo singularis sensibilis non est hoc ipsum quod est homo, sed dicitur homo participatione illius hominis separati. . . . Nec solum huiusmodi abstractione platonici considerabant circa ultimas species rerum naturalium, sed etiam circa maxime communia, quae sunt bonum, unum et ens. Ponebant, enim, unum primum quod est ipsa essentia bonitatis et unitatis et esse, quod dicimus deum et quod omnia alia dicuntur bona vel una vel entia per derivationem ab illo primo. . . . Haec igitur platoniorum ratio fidei non consonat nec veritati, quantum ad hoc quod continet de speciebus naturalibus separatis, sed quantum ad id quod dicebant de primo rerum principio, verissima est eorum opinio et fidei christianae consona.” *In De divinis nominibus*, proem.

in something, but *esse* itself in no way participates in anything).⁴⁸ It is in commenting on this axiom that Thomas dwells at greatest length on the nature of participation.

Participare, he says, is as though *partem capere*: to take part. He then distinguishes various ways of taking part in something. In one way, the participant receives in particular fashion that which belongs to another in a more universal or common fashion. This is how a species participates in a genus. Man, for instance, does not have the *ratio* of animal according to its entire community; man is only part of the genus of animal. This is also how an individual participates in a species, as Socrates in man. A second way to participate is that of subject in accident and of matter in form. Note that Thomas treats these two as examples of a single type of participation. His thought is that any form, whether accidental or substantial, considered solely according to its own *ratio*, is something common; and that what receives it, whether an already constituted substance or prime matter, “determines it to this or that subject.” That is, the recipient contracts the form to a particular instance. Yet a third way is the participation of an effect in its cause; especially, he says, when the effect is not proportioned to the power of the cause, as in the case of the light received in the air, which does not have the full luminosity of the light in the sun. We might say that the effect is only a partial expression or influence of the cause.⁴⁹

A little further on, Thomas reminds us that there is still another mode of participation, the one that he already alluded to in discussing the distinction between *esse* and *id quod est*:⁵⁰ the participation of the concrete in the abstract.⁵¹ Here I suppose that the “taking part” refers not to the fact that the participant has only a part of what is participated, but to the fact that what is participated is signified as a part of the participant. Concrete terms signify in the manner of wholes, while abstract terms signify in the manner of certain parts.

⁴⁸ Aquinas, *Exposition of the On the Hebdomads*, 14.

⁴⁹ “Est autem participare quasi partem capere. Et ideo quando aliquid particulariter recipit id quod ad alterum pertinet uniuersaliter, dicitur participare illud, sicut homo dicitur participare animal quia non habet rationem animalis secundum totam communitatem; et eadem ratione Sortes participat hominem. Similiter etiam subiectum participat accidens et materia formam, quia forma substantialis uel accidentalis, que de sui ratione communis est, determinatur ad hoc uel illud subiectum. Et similiter etiam effectus dicitur participare suam causam, et precipue quando non adequat uirtutem sue cause, puta si dicamus quod aer participat lucem solis quia non recipit eam in claritate qua est in sole.” *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵⁰ See above, note 20.

⁵¹ See below, note 52.

If we put this mode at the beginning of the list, I think we can see a clear order among the various modes of participation, according to the lesser or greater distance between the nature of the participant and the nature participated by it. In the participation of the concrete in the abstract, the distance is minimal. It is not a question of diverse natures, but only of diverse modes in which the same nature is signified. In the participation of the particular in the universal, the nature of the participant is diverse from that of what is participated, but it also includes it. The nature of the genus, for example, is included in the nature of the species. Then, in the participation of subject in accident and matter in form, the participated nature is not included in the nature of the participant at all. However, it does somehow inhere in the participant. Finally, in the last mode of participation, that of an effect in a cause, the participated nature remains entirely separate from the participant. For instance, the nature of the sun remains separate from the illuminated air.

Thomas will use these distinctions among ways of participating at various points in the commentary. Here he only wants to determine the sense of Boethius's axiom. The first part of the axiom says that *ens*, "what is," can participate in something. Taking *ens* in all of its universality, Thomas refers this statement to the participation of the concrete in the abstract.⁵² In this way, *ens*, despite having the greatest possible community, participates in *esse* itself.

Now, presumably *ens* can also participate in something in the third way, that of an effect in its cause. Thomas does not make this explicit, but it is implicit in his gloss on the second part of the axiom, the part that says that *esse* itself cannot participate in any way. To uphold this, Thomas sets aside the last mode, the participation of an effect in its cause. The implication is that according to the last mode, even *esse* itself could be said to participate in something. And if *esse* itself can participate in something in this way—if it can have a cause in which it participates—then clearly so can *ens*.

Here then is Thomas's explanation of "esse itself in no way participates in anything."

Setting aside this third mode [the participation of an effect in its cause], it is impossible that *esse* itself participate in something according to the two prior modes. For it cannot participate in something in the manner in which matter or subject participates in form or accident, because, as

⁵² "Set id quod est siue ens, quamuis sit communissimum, tamen concretiue dicitur, et ideo participat ipsum esse, non per modum quo magis commune participatur a minus communi, set participat ipsum esse per modum quo concretum participat abstractum." Aquinas, *Exposition of the On the Hebdomads*, 18.

was said, *esse* itself signifies as something abstract. Likewise neither can it participate in something in the manner in which the particular participates the universal; in this way, things said in the abstract can indeed participate in something, as whiteness in color; but *esse* itself is most common, whence it is indeed participated in other things, but it does not participate in anything else.⁵³

Esse cannot participate in something as matter in form or subject in accident because, as we saw earlier, it already signifies as something abstract—and hence, it is understood, as something formal.⁵⁴ Nor can it participate in something as the particular in the universal, because there is nothing more common or universal than *esse*.

At first glance this second thesis might seem untrue. Cannot more common terms, that is, terms that are also predicable of other items, be predicated of *esse*? For example, Thomas often predicates the terms “act” and “perfection” not only of *esse* but also of forms and operations. The “entire community” of these terms does not seem confined to *esse* itself. However, in contrast to what happens in the case of a genus vis-à-vis one of its species, or of a species vis-à-vis one of its individuals, the entire community of these terms still *depends* on or “flows” from *esse* itself. Thus, even if, in addition to *esse*, there are also other realities that are perfections and acts, they are so only to the extent that through them, something somehow *is*.⁵⁵ By contrast, *esse* does not derive its status as “act” and “perfection” from its relation to something else. It is the “act of all acts, and therefore the perfection of all perfections.”⁵⁶ In other words, the natures signified by these other terms are not related to the nature of *esse* in the way that items that are more “absolute” and “broader” are related to those that are more “conditioned” or “narrower,” for example, as genus is related to species. They are not more *formal*.⁵⁷ There is nothing more formal than *esse*.⁵⁸

⁵³ “Pretermisso autem hoc tercio modo participandi, impossibile est quod secundum duos primos modos ipsum esse participet aliquid. Non enim potest participare aliquid per modum quo materia uel subiectum participat formam uel accidens quia ut dictum est ipsum esse significatur ut quiddam abstractum. Similiter autem nec potest aliquid participare per modum quo particulare participat uniuersale; sic enim etiam ea quae in abstracto dicuntur participare aliquid possunt sicut albedo colorem, set ipsum esse est communissimum, unde ipsum quidem participatur in aliis, non autem participat aliquid aliud.” Ibid., 18.

⁵⁴ See *ST* I, q. 7, a. 1.

⁵⁵ See *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, c. 28, §2.

⁵⁶ *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9.

⁵⁷ For this language as applied to the genus in relation to the species, see *ST* I-II, q. 18, a. 7, ad 3; cf. *ST* I, q. 7, a. 1; and I, q. 82, a. 3.

⁵⁸ See *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9; *ST* I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3; q. 7, a. 1; q. 8, a. 1.

But let us go back for a moment to the fact that Thomas wants to admit—though without dwelling upon it—a way in which *esse* itself can participate in something. To repeat, this is the way in which an effect participates in its cause, especially when the effect is not proportioned to the power of the cause. In the case of *esse*, what the cause must be is clear: It must be the very first cause, the divinity.

Having in mind the neo-Platonic doctrine of participation in *esse*, I think we should be struck by this idea that *esse* itself participates in a cause that transcends it. What is striking is that not only in the neo-Platonic doctrine, but also in Thomas's own, the cause itself is characterized by *esse*. God is an *esse* itself, *ipsum esse subsistens*. How then are we to understand that *esse* itself is an *effect* of this cause, and in fact one that participates in it in such a way as not even to be proportioned to its power?⁵⁹

One answer might be that we should think of *esse* as already received in some particular subject, in something “determinative” of it. It is easy to see that such *esse* will be limited and reduced in comparison with the first cause. But as we noted a moment ago, Thomas is talking about the *esse* than which there is nothing more common. He is speaking of *ipsum esse* in an absolute way, in all of its universality and perfection.⁶⁰

Elsewhere Thomas explains how we can understand this “participation” of *esse* itself in the divine cause. Even taken universally, *esse* itself turns out to be “deficient” in comparison with God, because it is still something “determined.” It is determined “according to its own *ratio*”: that is, according to the very *ratio* of “*esse*.”⁶¹ The divinity certainly contains the whole perfection falling under the *ratio* of *esse*. But it also transcends this perfection. Although utterly simple, the divinity contains *all* of the perfections found in things, and *esse* is not the only perfection.⁶² *Esse* is formal with respect to all other perfections, and so it perfects them all; but it does not contain them all. It is distinct from them; and in a way it is even dependent upon them, as an act is dependent upon its correlative

⁵⁹ Very helpful on this question is Lawrence Dewan, O.P., “St. Thomas and Creation: Does God Create ‘Reality’?” *Science et Esprit* 51 (1999): 5–25.

⁶⁰ Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 2, a. 5, ad 2.

⁶¹ “*Ipsum esse creatum non est finitum si comparetur ad creaturas, quia ad omnia se extendit; si tamen comparetur ad esse increatum, invenitur deficiens et ex praecogitatione divinae mentis, propriae rationis determinationem habens.*” *In De divinis nominibus*, c. XIII, lect. iii, §989.

⁶² “*Divina essentia est aliquod incircumscriptum, continens in se supereminenter quidquid potest significari vel intelligi ab intellectu creato. Et hoc nullo modo per aliquam speciem creatam repraesentari potest, quia omnis forma creata est determinata secundum aliquam rationem, vel sapientiae, vel virtutis, vel ipsius esse, vel aliquid huiusmodi.*” *ST* I, q. 12, a. 2. Cf. *ST* I, q. 4, a. 2.

potency. The divine essence, then, must not be conceived as identical with *esse* itself. It is indeed identical with its own *esse*, the *esse* that is divine; and in this it is unique, since no other subsistent has an essence that is identical with its own *esse*. But the reality of the divine *esse* is not “circumscribed” according to the *ratio* of *esse*.

In other words, the divine *esse* cannot be conceived as the merely separate version of *esse commune*. The nature or essence of the divine *esse* is “beyond” the essence of *esse* itself.⁶³ *Esse* itself “participates” in the divinity in the sense of being a partial likeness of it. This of course does not mean that it is a part of the divinity, or that it has a part of the divinity’s *ratio*. Neither the divinity nor its *ratio* has any parts. It means that *esse* resembles God imperfectly. We can perhaps see that if we consider the fact that *esse* does not have a monopoly on resemblance to him. Other created perfections also display God’s power and reflect his nature. Granted, they do so only insofar as they *exist*. In the creaturely representations of God, *esse* is once again what is most formal. But it is not the whole picture.

In the *De hebdomadibus* commentary, this teaching is not explicit. Yet it seems to me that the small qualification that Thomas introduces carries a very important implication: His *esse subsistens* is not to be understood as a Platonic Idea of *esse*. Its own nature is not the same as the nature of *esse* itself. If it were, it could not be *cause* of *esse* itself, especially a cause that transcends the effect; for *esse* itself would be just what it is. Nor is its own nature the same as that of some even simpler, more formal component of *esse* itself. There is no such thing.

We reach *esse* itself by a kind of resolution or analysis of the things we experience. This points us to the first, most universal cause. But I think it is clear that for Thomas it would be a mistake to conceive the highest cause as nothing other than *esse* itself “pulled out” of things and posited as subsisting on its own.⁶⁴ To do that would be, willy-nilly, to conceive the

⁶³ That it is legitimate to speak of the “essence of *esse* itself” is confirmed in this very chapter of the commentary: “*set ipsum esse nichil aliud habet ammixtum preter suam essenciam.*” Aquinas, *Exposition of the On the Hebdomads*, 20, emphasis added.

⁶⁴ This would be the method of ἐκθεσις typical of the “Platonists” (whether or not justly ascribed to Plato); see Enrico Berti, *Il problema della sostanzialità dell’essere e dell’uno nella Metafisica di Aristotele*, in E. Berti, *Studi Aristotelici* (L’Aquila: Japadre Editore, 1975), 181–208 (on ἐκθεσις, 183–84). Thomas refers to the method in *De veritate*, q. 21, a. 4: “Plato 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.” That for Thomas himself there is a role for analysis or

subsistent *esse* as univocal with the *esse* inherent in things, in the same way in which the Platonic Ideas of the species of things are conceived as univocal with those species. It would run afoul both of Aristotle's general criticisms of the Ideas, and of his special insistence that being cannot be univocal.⁶⁵ This is why, it seems to me, that Thomas's identification of a mode of participation in which the nature of what is participated remains separate from the participant, together with his indication that *esse* itself can participate in something in this mode, constitutes a quiet nod to Aristotle.

The next passages have to do with the way in which *esse* itself is composed with things.

Esse Is Not Participated as a Genus, Yet It Inheres in Things

The other place where Thomas mentions Plato is in the third chapter. It concerns Boethius's formulation of the problem that the opusculum is aimed at resolving. In synthesis the problem is this: If things are good only by participation, then it seems that they will not be good per se; but on the other hand, if they are substantially good—if goodness is in their very essence—then they will be indistinguishable from God. Thomas observes that in this division it is supposed that being something by participation is opposed to being something substantially or essentially. He recalls the type of participation according to which a species participates in a genus. Concerning this, he notes that, according to Plato, the Idea of the genus is other than the Ideas of the differentia and the species. By contrast, according to Aristotle, the genus belongs to the essence of the species, such that its existence is one with that of the differentia. If we take the Aristotelian view, then being something by participation is not always opposed to being something essentially. Here is the passage in full.

resolution in the process of arriving at the first cause is clearly indicated in the passage from the *De substantiis separatis* quoted above (note 6). But the resolution's own term is only the cause's proper *effect*, not its very nature. The cause so far transcends the effect that whereas the nature of the effect is something that a created intellect can naturally understand, the nature of the cause is not: *ST I*, q. 12, a. 4, ad 3. For a fuller discussion of this and some of the other ideas presented in section III.B, see Stephen L. Brock, "On Whether Aquinas's *Ipsium Esse* Is 'Platonism,'" *The Review of Metaphysics* 60 (2006): 723–57.

⁶⁵ Along this line, notice Thomas's final reason for rejecting the Platonic method (see note 64 above) as a way of reaching an Idea of the good: "Sed haec opinio a Philosopho improbat multiplicitate: tum ex hoc quod quidditates et formae rerum insunt ipsis rebus particularibus, et non sunt ab eis separatae, ut probatur multiplicitate in *VII Metaphysicorum*; tum etiam suppositis ideis: quod specialiter ista positio non habeat locum in bono, quia bonum non univoce dicitur de bonis, et in talibus non assignabatur una idea secundum Platonem, per quam viam procedit contra eum Philosophus in *I Ethic.*" *De veritate*, q. 21, a. 4.

So the question is whether beings are good by essence or by participation. To understand this question, it should be considered that it is supposed in this question that to be something by essence and to be something by participation are opposed. And this is plainly true in one of the aforesaid modes of participation, namely that by which a subject is said to participate in an accident, and matter in a form. For an accident is outside the substance of the subject, and a form is outside the very substance of matter. But in another mode of participation, namely that by which a species participates in a genus, this will also be true in the opinion of Plato, who posited the idea of animal to be other than that of biped and of man; but according to the opinion of Aristotle, who posited that a man truly is what an animal is, such that the essence of animal does not exist apart from the difference of man, nothing prevents that which is said by participation from being predicated substantially as well. However, as is clear from the examples that he subsequently adduces, Boethius is speaking here of the mode by which a subject participates in an accident; and so he distinguishes as opposites what is predicated substantially and what is predicated by participation.⁶⁶

Once again, in other works Thomas expresses his agreement with Aristotle: The genus belongs to the essence of the species.⁶⁷ But here, as in the other passage in which he mentions Plato, he simply calls the question irrelevant. Boethius is not talking about the participation of a species in a genus. He is talking about the type of participation according to which matter participates in form and subject participates in accident. With respect to this type of participation, the Platonic and Aristotelian doctrines agree that what is participated is outside the essence of the participant. And this, Thomas holds, is how substances participate in their substantial *esse*.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Aquinas, *Exposition of the On the Hebdomads*, 32, 34: "Est ergo questio utrum essentia sint bona per essenciam, uel per participationem. Ad intellectum huius questionis considerandum est quod in ista questione supponitur quod aliquid esse per essenciam et per participationem sunt opposita. Et in uno quidem supradictorum participationis modorum manifeste hoc uerum est, scilicet secundum illum modum quo subiectum dicitur participare accidens uel materia formam. Est enim accidens preter substanciam subiecti et forma preter ipsam substanciam materie. Set in alio participationis modo, quo scilicet species participat genus, hoc etiam uerum est secundum sententiam Platonis qui posuit aliam esse ydeam animalis et bipedis et hominis; set secundum Aristotilis sententiam qui posuit quod homo uere est id quod est animal, quasi essentia animalis non existente preter differenciam hominis, nichil prohibet, id quod per participationem dicitur etiam substancialiter praedicari. Boetius autem hic loquitur secundum illum participationis modum quo subiectum participat accidens, et ideo ex opposito diuidit id quod substancialiter et participatiue praedicatur, ut patet per exempla que subsequenter inducit."

⁶⁷ See *In VII Metaphysicorum*, lect. 3, §1328; *ST I*, q. 3, a. 5.

⁶⁸ Cf. *ST I*, q. 6, a. 3 (esp. sc. and ad 3).

This is a delicate matter. As John Wippel explains in detail, Thomas does not view the participation of substances in (substantial) *esse* as identical in every respect, either with the participation of matter in form or with that of subject in accident.⁶⁹ However, I think it is also important to keep in mind that here Thomas is taking the participation of matter in form and of subject in accident as one single type of participation, not two. Wippel judges that since participation in *esse* differs from each of those, it does not fall under this type. But it seems to me that if Thomas can treat those two as one, this is because there are aspects common to them. And in fact these aspects also belong to the participation of substances in *esse*.

First of all, there is the aspect that Thomas signaled when he introduced this type of participation: “[A] subject participates in an accident, and matter in a form, because a substantial or accidental form, which by its *ratio* is common, is determined to this or that subject.”⁷⁰ *Esse* too is something which by its own *ratio* is common, and which gets determined to this or that subject.⁷¹ Another aspect is the relation of potency to act that obtains between participant and participated. Still another is the participated nature’s inherence in the participant.

This last aspect would in fact be crucial for Thomas in relation to what he considers yet another problematic tendency in “Platonism.” I am referring to a concern that comes out very clearly in *De veritate*, question 21, article 4. This is a text that, in addition to being more or less contemporary with the *De hebdomadibus* commentary, addresses an issue very close to the opusculum’s theme. The issue is whether all things are good “by the first good.”

In the body of the *De veritate* article, Thomas presents a long and very critical discussion of a teaching that he ascribes to “the Platonists.”⁷²

⁶⁹ John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 103–10.

⁷⁰ For the Latin text see note 49 above.

⁷¹ See note 90 below.

⁷² After the passage quoted above, note 64, Thomas says: “sicut autem [Plato] inveniebat hominem communem Socrati et Platoni, et omnibus huiusmodi; ita etiam inveniebat bonum esse commune omnibus bonis, et posse intelligi bonum non intelligendo hoc vel illud bonum; unde et ponebat bonum esse separatum praeter omnia bona particularia: et hoc ponebat esse per se bonum, sive ideam boni, cuius participatione omnia bona dicerentur; ut patet per Philosophum in *I Ethic*. Sed hoc differebat inter ideam boni et ideam hominis: quod idea hominis non se extendebat ad omnia; idea autem boni se extendit ad omnia etiam ad ideas. Nam etiam ipsa idea boni est quoddam particulare bonum. Et ideo oportebat

According to this teaching, things are good by the first good, which is God, in a “formal” way; yet not in virtue of a conjoined or inherent form, but rather in virtue of “participating” in a separate form by which they are “denominated.” Thomas also notes that this position was held by the “Porretanians.” They said that when a creature is called good *simpliciter*, this is not by an inherent goodness, but by the first goodness, “as though common and unqualified goodness were the divine goodness.”⁷³

The article goes on to tell us that this position was refuted by Aristotle in many ways:⁷⁴ in general, because the forms of things are in the things, not separate;⁷⁵ and in particular, with respect to the good, because the good is not said univocally of things.⁷⁶ Thomas also provides another argument, based on the fact that the first good is the agent of all good things. Every agent produces its like. Hence, the first good must impress its likeness *in* all things. So each thing is called good as by a form inhering in it, which is a likeness of the first good; and also by the first good, as by an exemplar and an agent. And thus, Thomas concludes, Plato’s view would be partly right, insofar as things are indeed formally good by the

dicere, quod ipsum per se bonum esset universale omnium rerum principium, quod Deus est. Unde sequitur secundum hanc opinionem, quod omnia denominentur bona ipsa bonitate prima, quae Deus est, sicut Socrates et Plato secundum Platonem dicebantur homines participatione hominis separati, non per humanitatem eis inhaerentem.” *De veritate*, q. 21, a. 4.

⁷³ “Et hanc opinionem aliquo modo Porretani secuti sunt. Dicebant enim, quod de creatura praedicamus bonum simpliciter, ut cum dicitur: homo est bonus; et bonum aliquo addito, ut cum dicimus: Socrates est bonus homo. Dicebant igitur, quod creatura dicitur bona simpliciter non aliqua bonitate inhaerente, sed bonitate prima, quasi ipsa bonitas absoluta et communis esset bonitas divina; sed cum dicitur creatura bonum hoc vel illud, denominatur a bonitate creata; quia particulares bonitates creatae, sunt sicut et ideae particulares secundum Platonem” (*De veritate*, q. 21, a. 4). For the reference to the Porretanians, the Leonine edition of the *De veritate* sends us to a discussion in the *Summa fratris Alexandri* of a quotation from Gilbert of Poitiers’s commentary on the *De hebdomadibus*: Alexandri de Hales, *Summa theologica*, vol. I (Quaracchi, 1924), pars I, inq. 1, tract. iii, quaest. 3, cap. 2, resp., 165. The passage quoted is that of Häring, *The Commentaries on Boethius of Gilbert of Poitiers*, I, §27–33, 193–94 (= PL 64, 1317D–1318B). I find it doubtful that Thomas was looking at this discussion. The quotation presents both of the meanings of *esse* that I mentioned above in connection with Henry of Ghent (note 23 above). The second of these is something inhering in things. The *Summa fratris Alexandri* asserts corresponding meanings for *bonitas*. This hardly provides grounds for Thomas’s claim that the Porretanians denied any inherent goodness in things.

⁷⁴ See the passage quoted above, note 65.

⁷⁵ Thomas refers us to *Metaphysics* VII; see ch. 3–14, 1038b1–1039b19.

⁷⁶ Thomas refers us to *Ethica Nicomachea* I; see ch. 4, 1096a12–b29.

uncreated goodness, as by an exemplar. But they are *also* formally good by a created goodness that is an inherent form.⁷⁷

In his answer to the article's seventh objection Thomas applies this same doctrine to *esse*. The objection invokes a quotation from St. Hilary, according to which *esse* is proper to God, and hence is not inherent in other things. Thomas replies that *esse* is not proper to God in the sense that there is no *esse* other than the uncreated *esse*. It is proper to God only in the sense that God alone *is* his *esse*. Other things only *have* their *esse*. But the *esse* that they have is truly their own, inhering in them; and it is not the divine *esse*.⁷⁸

*Esse Is Participated According to the Categories,
and Esse Simpliciter Is Substantial Esse*

There can be no doubt that Boethius understands *esse* as something inherent in things. Also, he is explicit about the fact that, as Aristotle insisted against Plato with regard to the good, *esse* is diversified in things according to substance and accident, that is, according to the categories. Thus, another Boethian axiom says: "Diuersum est tamen esse aliquid et esse aliquid in eo quod est. Illic enim accidens, hic substantia significatur. Omne quod est participat eo quod est esse ut sit. Alio uero participat ut aliquid sit" (To be something, and to be something insofar as one is, are diverse. The former signifies accident, the latter substance. Everything that is, participates in *esse*, so that it be. But it participates in something else so that it be something).⁷⁹

One might think that Boethius is talking only about substantial and accidental *form*, not about any "act of being." But Thomas reads *esse* here,

⁷⁷ "Specialiter tamen quantum ad propositum pertinet, apparet falsitas praedictae positionis ex hoc quod omne agens invenitur sibi simile agere; unde si prima bonitas sit effectiva omnium bonorum, oportet quod similitudinem suam imprimat in rebus effectis; et sic unumquodque dicitur bonum sicut forma inhaerente per similitudinem summi boni sibi inditam, et ulterius per bonitatem primam, sicut per exemplar et effectivum omnis bonitatis creatae. Et quantum ad hoc opinio Platonis sustineri potest. Sic igitur dicimus secundum communem opinionem, quod omnia sunt bona creata bonitate formaliter sicut forma inhaerente, bonitate vero increata sicut forma exemplari." *De veritate*, q. 21, a. 4.

⁷⁸ "Cum dicitur: Esse est proprium Deo; non est intelligendum quod nullum aliud esse sit nisi increatum; sed quod solum illud esse proprie dicitur esse, in quantum ratione suae immutabilitatis non novit fuisse vel futurum esse. Esse autem creaturae dicitur esse per quamdam similitudinem ad illud primum esse, cum habeat permixtionem eius quod est futurum esse vel fuisse, ratione mutabilitatis creaturae. Vel potest dici, quod esse est proprium Deo, quia solus Deus est suum esse; quamvis alia esse habeant, quod esse non est esse divinum." *Ibid.*, q. 21, a. 4, ad 7.

⁷⁹ Aquinas, *Exposition of the On the Hebdomads*, 14.

the very *esse* that he had previously glossed as *actus essendi*. What I wish to stress is the significance that this reading has with respect to Thomas's own conceptions of *esse* and of participation in *esse*.

To explain the axiom, Thomas observes that every form is a principle of *esse*.⁸⁰ Through every form, something is somehow rendered a *habens esse*. If the form is outside the thing's essence—if it is an accidental form—the result is what Boethius calls “being something.” If on the other hand the form is constitutive of the thing's essence, the result is “being something insofar as one is.” This is the subject's proper *esse*. According to such a form, Thomas says, something has *esse simpliciter*. And hence

“there,” that is, where it is said that a thing is something and not that it simply is, “accident is signified,” because the form that makes for such *esse* is outside the thing's essence. But “here,” that is, when it is said to be something insofar as it is, “substance is signified,” because the form making for such *esse* constitutes the essence of the thing.⁸¹

Later on in the commentary (chapter 4), *esse in eo quod est* is called *esse essenziale*. The context is a passage in which Boethius says that the *esse* of things is diverse from their goodness. Thomas explains that things are not called good *simpliciter* according to their *esse essenziale*; they are called good *simpliciter* insofar as they are perfect not only in *esse* but also in *agere*. Such perfection requires something added to their *esse essenziale*, some “virtue.”⁸²

⁸⁰ “Circa primum considerandum est quod ex quo id quod est potest aliquid habere preter suam essenciam, necesse est quod in eo consideretur duplex esse: quia enim forma est principium essendi, necesse est quod secundum quamlibet formam habitam habens aliquid esse dicatur. Si ergo forma illa non sit preter essenciam habentis, set constituat eius essenciam, ex eo quod habet talem formam dicitur habens esse simpliciter, sicut homo ex hoc quod habet animam rationalem. Si uero sit talis forma que sit extranea ab essencia habentis eam, secundum illam formam non dicitur esse simpliciter, set esse aliquid, sicut secundum albedinem homo dicitur esse albus. Et hoc est quod dicit quod diuersum est esse aliquid quod non est esse simpliciter et quod aliquid sit in eo quod est, quod est proprium esse subiecti.” Ibid., 22.

⁸¹ “‘Illic,’ ide est ubi dicitur de re quod sit aliquid et non quod sit simpliciter, ‘significatur accidens,’ quia forma que facit huiusmodi esse est preter essenciam rei. ‘Hic’ autem cum dicitur aliquid esse in eo quod est, ‘significatur substantia,’ quia scilicet forma faciens hoc esse constituit essenciam rei.” Ibid.

⁸² “Alia uero bonitas consideratur in eis [scil. in bonis creatis] absolute, prout scilicet unumquodque dicitur bonum in quantum est perfectum in esse et in operari, et hec quidem perfectio non competit bonis creatis secundum ipsum esse essenziale eorum, set secundum aliquid superadditum quod dicitur uirtus eorum.” Ibid., 48.

This is a teaching to which Thomas returns, not only in question 21 of the *De veritate*,⁸³ but also in his fundamental account of the nature of the good in *Summa theologiae* I, question 5. Here, in the very first article, Thomas explains Boethius's distinction between the *esse* of things and the goodness of things by the fact that good *simpliciter* does not coincide with being *simpliciter*. In my opinion, the subsequent discussion constitutes one of his most illuminating formulations of the nature of being and of *esse* itself.

For since "a being" properly signifies that something is in act, and act bespeaks order to potency, something is called a being *simpliciter* on account of that through which it is first divided from what is merely in potency. And this is the substantial *esse* of each thing. Hence a thing is called a being *simpliciter* through its substantial *esse*. But through additional acts, a thing is called a being only in a qualified sense [*secundum quid*].⁸⁴

Besides substantial and accidental *esse*, there is no other *esse* in things. Participation in *esse* does not establish another "order," superimposed on the "formal" or "categorical" order. Participated *esse* is itself configured according to the scheme of the categories. And *esse* in the unqualified sense, *esse simpliciter*, is nothing other than substantial *esse* or *esse essentialis*.

Obviously this *esse simpliciter* is not the same as Porphyry's pure εἶναι. It is a participated *esse*. Moreover, the reason it is called *esse simpliciter* is not that it excludes any qualifying predicate. It is always "being something"—"being something insofar as one is." For example, the substantial *esse* of a

⁸³ "Sicut multiplicatur esse per substantiale et accidentale, sic etiam et bonitas multiplicatur; hoc tamen inter utrumque differt, quod aliquid dicitur esse ens absolute propter suum esse substantiale, sed propter esse accidentale non dicitur esse absolute: unde cum generatio sit motus ad esse; cum aliquis accipit esse substantiale, dicitur generari simpliciter; cum vero accipit esse accidentale, dicitur generari secundum quid. Et similiter est de corruptione, per quam esse amittitur. De bono autem est e converso. Nam secundum substantialem bonitatem dicitur aliquid bonum secundum quid; secundum vero accidentalem dicitur aliquid bonum simpliciter. Unde hominem iniustum non dicimus bonum simpliciter, sed secundum quid, in quantum est homo; hominem vero iustum dicimus simpliciter bonum." *De veritate*, q. 21, a. 5.

⁸⁴ "Cum ens dicat aliquid proprie esse in actu; actus autem proprie ordinem habeat ad potentiam; secundum hoc simpliciter aliquid dicitur ens, secundum quod primo discernitur ab eo quod est in potentia tantum. Hoc autem est esse substantiale rei uniuscuiusque; unde per suum esse substantiale dicitur unumquodque ens simpliciter. Per actus autem superadditos, dicitur aliquid esse secundum quid, sicut esse album significat esse secundum quid, non enim esse album aufert esse in potentia simpliciter, cum adveniat rei iam praesistenti in actu." *ST I*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 1.

man is precisely “being a man,” the being that he has through his rational soul.⁸⁵ *Esse simpliciter* is not, so to speak, an “absolute” reality, something with an autonomous constitution, to which a form is somehow attached merely so as to limit it. The form by which a thing’s substantial *esse* is limited is also a constitutive principle of that *esse*.⁸⁶ It is called *esse simpliciter* because it is the act through which its subject is first divided from that which is merely in potency. And it has this role because the form on which it depends is found in the subject’s essence, that is, in that which constitutes its very identity. The *esse simpliciter* of the subject, I think we can say, is nothing other than its act of *being itself*.

Naturally the question remains whether Thomas is right to read the act of being in Boethius where so many others read only form. But if for Thomas it is so easy to read Boethius in this way, perhaps at least part of the reason lies in the fact that his way of conceiving the distinction between *esse* and form also differs from that of many others. The distinction is there, certainly, but it goes hand in hand with an extremely close affinity. As Thomas puts it in *De veritate*, it is the sort of distinction that obtains between “man” and “being a man,” or between “knowledge” and “being knowledgeable.”⁸⁷

Participated Esse Belongs Per Se

The last passage that I wish to consider, from chapter 3, is a clarification that Thomas offers concerning the participation of subject in accident. In the formulation of the opusculum’s question, Boethius says that if things are only good by participation, then they are not good per se. Thomas says that this is true if we take “per se” in the sense in which that which enters into a thing’s definition, or belongs to its essence, is predicated of it per se. This, he says, is the sense intended by Boethius. But Thomas goes on to remind us that there are also other senses of “per se.” He is of course referring to a teaching of Aristotle.⁸⁸ One of the other senses of “per se” is that according to which a proper accident is predicated per se of its subject. In this case it is the subject that enters into the definition of the

⁸⁵ See the quotation above, note 80.

⁸⁶ “Esse enim rei quamvis sit aliud ab eius essentia, non tamen est intelligendum quod sit aliquod superadditum ad modum accidentis, sed quasi constituitur per principia essentiae. Et ideo hoc nomen ens quod imponitur ab ipso esse, significat idem cum nomine quod imponitur ab ipsa essentia.” *In IV Metaphysicorum*, lect. 2, §558.

⁸⁷ *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 11.

⁸⁸ See *In I Post. an.*, lect. x; *In V Metaphysicorum*, lect. xix, §1054.

predicate. In this sense, although it is predicated per se, an accident is nevertheless predicated of its subject *participative*, by participation.⁸⁹

Thomas does not explain why he mentions this point. However, it will certainly play an important role in his own doctrine of the participation in *esse*. The *esse* of a thing is not included in the thing's definition. But it does belong to the thing per se, in the sense that the thing is included in its definition. Thus, in the *De potentia* (~1265), Thomas uses the fact that the definitions of forms include their subjects to explain the way in which the *esse* of one thing is distinguished from that of another.⁹⁰

I think it is very important to keep in mind that just as "per se" is not always equivalent to "per essentiam," so in Thomas's lexicon "per participationem" is not always equivalent to "per accidens." The very *esse* that things have by participation belongs to them per se. Indeed, it is even more immediate to them than are their proper accidents. As Thomas also says in the *De potentia*, against Avicenna, a thing's substantial *esse* is not in a genus of accident. It is nothing other than the *actus essentiae*.⁹¹

Conclusion

To sum up the implications that I see in the passages surveyed: (1) to accept participation in *esse* does not require thinking that the species of things subsist outside the things; (2) *esse* itself participates in a cause, to whose power it is not proportioned, and whose essence does not enter into composition with it or with anything else; (3) *esse* itself inheres in things, though not in the fashion of a genus; (4) *esse* is configured accord-

⁸⁹ "Dicit ergo primo, quod si omnia sunt bona per participationem, sequitur quod 'nullo modo' sint 'bona per se'; et hoc quidem uerum est si per se accipiatur inesse quod ponitur in diffinitione eius de quo dicitur, sicut homo per se est animal. Quod enim ponitur in diffinitione alicuius pertinet ad essenciam eius, et ita non dicitur de eo per participationem de qua nunc loquimur. Si uero accipiatur per se secundum alium modum, prout scilicet subiectum ponitur in diffinitione predicati, sic esset falsum quod hic dicitur, nam proprium accidens secundum hunc modum per se inest subiecto, et tamen participatiue de eo predicatur. Sic igitur Boetius hic accipit participationem prout subiectum participat accidens, per se autem quod ponitur in diffinitione subiecti." Aquinas, *Exposition of the On the Hebdomads*, 34.

⁹⁰ "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." *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9.

⁹¹ *De potentia*, q. 5, a. 4, ad 3. See also *In I Sent.* d. 4, q. 1, a. 1, ad 2; d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, obj. 1; d. 33, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1; d. 37, q. 1, ad 2; *De veritate*, q. 10, a. 1, obj. 3; *De spiritalibus creaturis*, a. 11; *ST I*, q. 54, a. 1; *Expositio Peryermeneias*, lib. I, lect. 5, §22. Cf. *De potentia*, q. 9, a. 5, ad 19.

ing to the categories, and in such a way that *esse simpliciter* is nothing other than substantial *esse* or *esse essentiae*; (5) participated *esse* belongs to its proper subject *per se*, not *per accidens*.

I think it is clear that the drift of these points is to integrate participation in *esse* into the framework of Aristotle's ontology. Their bearing upon the debate concerning Thomas's interpretation of Boethius's *esse* should also be fairly clear. Obviously the teaching of the *De hebdomadibus* commentary on participation in *esse* cannot be reduced to these points alone. Nor has the aim been to suggest that on the whole, the commentary should be qualified as "Aristotelian," especially if that means "rather than Platonic." What I think we should be struck by is simply the degree to which it is, or at least wants to be, Boethian. N V