THE COHERENCE OF AQUINAS'S ACCOUNT OF DIVINE SIMPLICITY

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All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. All source material taken from www.CorpusThomisticum unless otherwise noted.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is to determine whether Thomas Aquinas's claims about divine simplicity are compatible with claims about existence that have been made by recent analytic philosophers. According to Aquinas, everything that God creates is necessarily composed of existence (*esse*) and essence. He claims that God, however, is entirely void of composition, and therefore that God's existence is identical to God's essence. This is how Aquinas thinks that God is distinct from creation.

But is the claim that God is identical to his own existence coherent? Possibly not. According to some philosophers, existence is not a real property of individuals. In other words, on this view, while we often speak meaningfully about an object's properties, such as a baseball's whiteness or roundness, it is meaningless to talk about a baseball's existence in the same way. And it seems that our language about God should be no exception: The phrase "God's existence" would be meaningless and so, therefore, would the claim that God is identical to his own existence.

If the sentences "God is identical to his own existence" and "everything other than God is composed of existence and essence" are nonsensical, how can Aquinas distinguish God from what is not God? There are two possibilities: The first is that Aquinas (or someone thinking along the lines of Aquinas) could say that there is some other feature (such as, perhaps, temporality) common to all created things but lacking in God. The second possibility is that Aquinas simply cannot distinguish God from creation. As I will argue in Chapter One, I am skeptical about the first possibility. While it is true that God is not temporal, I do not think that Aquinas can prove divine eternity (which, for Aquinas, just amounts to God not being temporal) without having established God's simplicity, although he sometimes tries. The second possibility

leads to ramifications that would be devastating for Aquinas. If we lack some way of conceptually distinguishing God from creation, then everything that Aquinas has to say about natural theology will fall apart. Regardless of whatever contributions he may have to make to other areas of philosophy, his thinking about God will have been rendered incoherent because of God's lack of transcendence. Hence, if Aquinas's natural theology is to be saved, some sense must be made of the claim that for God alone is essence and existence identical.

While Aquinas's ideas about God as his own subsistent existence may represent the most robust version of divine simplicity, the claim that God is simple has been a staple of Christian thought since the time of the Church Fathers.[1] It was affirmed by Augustine, Boethius, and Anselm. [2] It was accepted by Duns Scotus and later by the Protestant Reformers.[3] It can also be found in Jewish and Islamic philosophy.[4] Despite its pedigree, however, the doctrine of divine simplicity has recently come under attack from a number of analytic philosophers, both theist and non-theist. These attacks can be broadly grouped into three categories.

The first group of attacks can be traced to Alvin Plantinga. His arguments have been

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[1] Wolfhart Pannenberg summarizes the Platonic and Aristotelian logic of the patristic era thus: "Everything composite necessarily has a ground of its composition outside itself, and therefore cannot be the ultimate origin. This origin must therefore be simple." *Basic Questions in Theology: Collected Essays Volume II*, trans. George Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 131.

[2] Augustine, *The City of God*, XI, 10 in Dyson, R. W. (ed.), *Augustine: The City of God Against the Pagans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1998). See also *Confessions* I, vi, 10 and XIII, iii, 4 in Chadwick, Henry (trans.), *Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Boethius, *Theological Tractates* 3 ("On Substance") in Stewart, H. F., and Rand, E. K. (Trans.) *The Theological Tractates* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 1918). Anselm, *Monologion* 17, *Proslogion* 18 in Davies, Brian, and Evans, G. R. (ed.), *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[3] Duns Scotus, John, *De Primo* 4 in Roche, Evan (trans.) *The De primo principio of John Duns Scotus: A revised text and a translation*. (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute: and Leuven : Nauwelaerts, 1949).For a history of the doctrine of divine simplicity in early Protestant theology, see Bavinck, Herman Bavnick, *Reformed Dogmatics*, *Vol. 2* ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 176 ff.

[4] For details about the doctrine of divine simplicity in Jewish and Islamic thought, David Burrell, C.S.C., has provided thorough accounts in the following: *Knowing the Unknowable God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986). *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993) and "Distinguishing God From the World," in Brian Davies (ed.), *Language, Meaning and God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 75-91.

echoed by Thomas Morris and Ronald Nash.[5] According to these arguments, an absurdity arises from claiming that God is simple because that claim entails that God is identical to whatever properties we predicate of him (a claim which these critics attribute to Aquinas). Yet since every property is a property, this would mean that God is a property. But whatever God is, he certainly cannot be a property: No property can love or create or do any of what people have traditionally said are the sorts of things that God does. Moreover, if God is identical to God's properties, and if it is both true that God is good and that God is wise, then it would seem that wisdom and goodness are one and the same property, which is patently false.

The second group of attacks come from philosophers of religion who are often called "perfect being theologians." Perfect being theologians make their opening move, so to speak, in thinking about God by asserting the thesis that "God is a being with the greatest possible array of compossible great-making properties."[6] Perfect being theologians will try to list whatever set of attributes would make a being the most perfect and then ascribe those attributes to God. Such a list typically includes such traditional properties as omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence. The task of philosophical theology, for many perfect being theologians, involves trying to define those attributes such that a single being can have all of them simultaneously without devolving into incoherence in the face of objections. And some perfect being theologians have argued that divine simplicity is not compatible with other properties they think we ought to be more committed to positing in God.[7] For example, Brian Leftow has argued that divine simplicity is incompatible with divine freedom. Roughly, his reason for thinking this

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[5] Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 39-59. Thomas Morris, *Our Idea of God* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1997), 117. Ronald Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exploration of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 80-95.

[6] Morris, 35.

[7] It would be a mistake to say all perfect being theologians rule out divine simplicity. Such philosophers often cite Anselm as the perfect being theologian *par excellence*, yet Anselm affirmed divine simplicity.

is that if God is simple, then his will is identical to his essence. Yet, God has his essence necessarily. Therefore, he has his will necessarily. Thus, God lacks freedom to will anything other than what he does. But, thinks Leftow, theists ought to be more committed to divine freedom than divine simplicity; since they are incompatible, he thinks, we must give up divine simplicity.[8]

The third group of attacks on divine simplicity, and this is the group with which I have already said that I will be concerned, revolves around whether it makes sense to call God *ipsum esse subsistens*: That is, can coherent sense be made of the claim that God is his own subsisting existence? There are several reasons that I have decided to focus only on this third kind of attack and not the first two. For one, a great deal has already been written in response to the sorts of criticisms that come from either Plantinga type arguments as well as perfect being theologians.[9] Less, it seems, has been written about the problems divine simplicity runs into when it comes to claims about existence. Moreover, I believe that getting clear on what Aquinas means when he says that God is his own subsistent existence makes the first two sets of objections irrelevant, a point I touch on in the final chapter. A second reason for concerning myself only with the issue of God as subsistent existence is that this question overlaps with the larger debate concerning Aquinas on existence generally.[10] In the early part of the 20th century writers such as Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, and Joseph Owens were hailing Aquinas's treatment of existence, or being (*esse*), as not only Aquinas's most important philosophical contribution, but as one of the

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[8]Brian Leftow, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity and Divine Freedom," in *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump*, ed. Kevin Timpe (New York: Routledge University Press, 2009), 21-38. Leftow explicitly endorses perfect being theology in his "Why Perfect Being Theology?" *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 69 (2011): 103-118.

[9]For a summary of these responses, see Chapter 1 of James Dolezal's *God Without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011). For a detailed response to Plantinga in particular, see Lawrence Dewan, "Saint Thomas, Alvin Plantinga, and the Divine Simplicity," *Modern Schoolman* 66 (1989): 141-151.

[10]For some recent considerations of this debate, see Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

most important contributions in the entire history of philosophy.[11] Later philosophers, influenced in large part by Frege, Russell, and Quine, found Aquinas's writings on existence simply confused. To the extent to which the present work explores the viability of Aquinas's thinking regarding existence, I hope to have made some progress regarding that issue.

It seems fair to say that the current problem, that is, the problem of whether Aquinas's claims about God as subsistent existence make sense, owes its origins to Peter Geach's 1955 paper "Form and Existence."[12] Geach was there concerned with what Aquinas thought about *esse* in contrast to prevailing views handed down from Frege. According to Geach, Aquinas thought that with the exception of God nothing is ever identical to that *by which* it is. For example, we can say that the redness of Socrates' nose exists. However, we should say that there is a distinction between the redness and that *by which* the redness exists. However, Geach tells us, Aquinas takes God alone to be identical to that by which God exists.

It was in this context that Anthony Kenny wrote his 1969 book *The Five Ways*.[13] There Kenny examined the five arguments that Aquinas intended as demonstrations of the existence of God. And Kenny claimed that none of the arguments could survive the scientific revolution: In some way or other, Kenny argued, each of Aquinas's five ways depended on medieval scientific claims which have since been overturned. However, he found in Aquinas's Fourth Way, the argument from gradations of being, additional metaphysical baggage. There Aquinas argues that there must be something which is maximal being (*maxime ens*) that is the cause of the being of every other existent thing. This notion of God as pure being, Kenny argued, runs into two problems: The first is that the idea of pure being is a very Platonic notion and is thus riddled with

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[11]See Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd Edition (Toronto, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952).
[12]P. T. Geach, "Form and Existence," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 55 (1954-55): 251-272.
[13]Anthony Kenny, *The Five Ways* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969). Kenny admits that it was Geach who inspired him to consider the topic in Kenny (2002), vi.

all of the problems that have perennially plagued Plato's theory of forms. Secondly, Kenny asks what could be meant by Aquinas when he says that God just is his own being? It can't be, according to Kenny, that Aquinas meant God is the existence common to every substance, for in that case "exists" is just too uninformative of a predicate to tell us anything about God. So Kenny takes Aquinas to have construed God along these lines: For anything other than God, when we say that it is, we mean "It is F." For example, "Kovacs is" means "Kovacs is a living human being." But, according to Kenny, Aquinas's Fourth Way seems to say that "God is...," deleting the letter F, and what results, Kenny says, is an incomplete sentence.

Kenny followed up on these ideas in his 1980 book *Aquinas* as well as *Aquinas on Being* in 2002. Meanwhile, another assault on Aquinas's idea of *ipsum esse subsistens* was brewing in the works of C. J. F. Williams (1930-1997). In 1981 Williams published *What Is Existence?*[14] Williams's basic claim regarding existence was that existence is never a first-order predicate that can be meaningfully applied to individuals. Any statement of the form "_____ exists," where the blank is filled in with the name of an individual, is a bit of nonsense: "The result of embedding a proper name in '_____ exists' is, in general, a meaningless string of words."[15] Instead, Williams argues that existence is a second-level predicate, that is, "a predicate of a predicate."[16] If Williams is right, this would seem to be the end of Aquinas's ideas about God as *ipsum esse subsistens*. If "X's existence" is gibberish, then to identify God with God's own existence is likewise gibberish.

Some so-called analytic Thomists then tried to reconcile Williams's arguments with various things that Aquinas has to say about existence. For example, Aquinas often says things

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[14]C.J.F. Williams, *What is Existence?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).
[15]Williams, *What Is Existence*? 79
[16]C.J.F. Williams, "Being" in *Blackwell Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, 1st Edition, Philip Quinn and Charles Taliaferro, ed. (Blackwell: Malden, MA and Oxford, 2000), 225. Note that while Williams sometimes asks whether existence is a property of individuals, he prefers to ask whether it is a predicate.

about God being responsible for the *esse* of creatures, leading some of his followers to say things like "God creates existence." Yet, what do we do with this if existence is not a property that creatures in fact have? That question was taken up in Brian Davies's 1990 article, "Does God Create Existence?" where he affirmed, with Williams, that existence is not a first-level property, and that God's rôle as creator is to bring it about that things begin to be and that they are preserved through time.[17] Turning specifically to Aquinas's claim that God is *ipsum esse subsistens*, Davies's 1997 paper "Aquinas, God, and Being" again argues that existence is not a real property and that Aquinas does not mean to say that God is identical with some property which he causes created beings to have. Rather, Davies argued, all Aquinas meant to accomplish in calling God *ipsum esse subsistens* was to remind us that God (and God alone) is uncreated, that created things owe existence to God and God owes existence to nothing.[18] This current dissertation is, in large part, an elaboration on that 1997 paper.

I will proceed as follows. In **Chapter One** I will show how divine simplicity is central to Aquinas's entire philosophical theology. I assume that some readers may have little familiarity with Aquinas's philosophy, let alone with his thought on divine simplicity. So, the first thing I do in the opening chapter is attempt to provide a non-technical, nuts-and-bolts (so to speak) description of what many philosophers of religion mean when they speak about divine simplicity. In short, for Aquinas, it amounts to a denial of six kinds of composition in God: Composition of material parts, of matter and form, of substance and accident, of genus and difference, of what Aquinas calls "suppositum" and essence, and, most importantly, existence and essence.

The bulk of the first chapter is a survey of six texts written by Aquinas where I show that he consistently claims that every created thing is, necessarily, composed of existence and

[17]Brian Davies, "Does God Create Existence?" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 30 (1990): 151 – 157.
[18]Brian Davies, "Aquinas, God and Being," *The Monist* 80 (1997): 500 – 520.

essence. God alone, according to Aquinas, has an essence that is identical to his own existence. This historical survey begins with Aquinas's *De ente et essentia* (*On Being and Essence*). This is a natural place to begin not only because of how young Aquinas was when he wrote it, but also because it introduces a number of philosophical terms that Aquinas uses throughout his life and that I use throughout this dissertation. The discussion of this text aims to familiarize the reader with what Aquinas means by words like "form," "matter," "substance," "accident," "essence," and so on. And it shows how Aquinas's thinking about these things leads him, from the beginning of his career, to believe that at most one thing, namely God, can have an essence that is identical to his existence. Anything that is not God, including angels, must be, according to Aquinas, composed of an essence distinct from its existence.

Aquinas advances other arguments for divine simplicity in *De potentia* and in his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. Some of these arguments are more notable than others. But in the last section of my first chapter I turn to an apparent discrepancy in Aquinas's thought about the centrality of divine simplicity. In two texts, *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Compendium Theologiae*, Aquinas's progression of conclusions regarding God runs, roughly, like this: First, he gives proofs for the existence of God; then, he tries to show that God must be eternal; only after that does he use divine eternity as a premise for the conclusion that God must be simple. If he is right to proceed like this, then divine simplicity may not be as important for Aquinas as I have maintained. All he would have to do is show that no creature can be eternal in the sense in which God is and this would be enough to secure God's transcendence, his distinction from all creation.

This stands in stark contrast to how Aquinas proceeds in the *Summa Theologiae*, often considered his most mature work (he died before finishing it). In the *Summa Theologiae* he

moves immediately from proofs for the existence of God to arguments for divine simplicity. After divine simplicity, he discusses a number of other predicates applicable to God (his goodness, perfection, and so on), and only at the very end of his treatment of the divine essence does he argue for God's eternity. Moreover, the *ST* argument for divine eternity presupposes that divine simplicity has been established.

Do these two different approaches—one which makes divine simplicity dependent upon divine eternity and the other that reverses the order---constitute for Aquinas two equally legitimate ways of thinking about the divine predicables? I think not. At the end of Chapter One I argue that Aquinas was mistaken in *SCG* and *CT* to treat divine eternity before divine simplicity. In order to show that God is eternal Aquinas needs to prove that God is unchangeable (which he explicitly does in *ST* but not the other two texts), and this in turn is only possible for Aquinas if he has shown that God is entirely simple. Thus, divine simplicity, and specifically the claim that God is his own subsistent existence, is the key for Aquinas to conceptually distinguishing God from all that is not God.

For this reason, it would be most unfortunate for Aquinas if it turned out that the very notion of self-subsistent existence were just incoherent. Yet this is what some philosophers have thought. For, suppose that existence is not a property that things can have; suppose that statements like "George exists" do not make sense and that references to "So-and-so's existence" turn out to be gibberish. In this case, claims about what things have essences distinct from or identical to their existence would make no sense; "God is identical to his own existence" just would not be a coherent sentence.

But are there reasons for supposing that existence is not a property that things can have, and that "exists" is not a predicate that can be attached to names of individuals? There are. And

in **Chapter Two** I turn to the most forceful arguments for this position, as they were articulated by the late C.J.F. Williams. After a brief summary of how I take it that subject-predicate sentences typically function, I discuss three arguments that Williams advances regarding existence: The Plato's Beard Argument, The Fregean Argument, and the Argument from so-called "Wrap Arounds."

Very briefly, here is what each of these arguments amounts to:

Consider the statement "Sherlock Holmes does not exist." If "exists" is a predicate that can be attached to the names of individuals, then "does not exist" must be, too. So, what does "does not exist" tell us about Sherlock Holmes? Could it mean that there is someone, namely, Sherlock Holmes, and among the various properties that he has, existence is not one of them? To put the same problem in terms closer to Kant's, consider "Kovacs exists." Does this mean that among the various properties that I have, you can also count existence? Surely it would be absurd to answer such questions in the affirmative. Yet Williams thinks we must accept that absurdity if we admit statements like "Kovacs exists" into our ordinary discourse. Following a cue from Quine, Williams dubs this problem "Plato's Beard."

None of this should come as a surprise to followers of Frege, for it was he who claims to have proved that "exists" is only a second-level predicate. That is, "exists" is a predicate that tells us about properties or other predicates. Specifically, it means "such-and-such property is instantiated at least once." The predicate "exists" functions like statements of number; "Happy graduate students exist" just means "At least one graduate student is happy" or "The number of happy graduate students is not zero."

The last argument that Williams deploys against counting "exists" as a first-level predicate borrows from Arthur Prior's terminology of "wrapping around." We can think of

predicates, metaphorically, as pieces of wrapping, as one finds on a stick of gum, and this is meant to help us see the distinction between the grammatical and logical structure of a sentence. In the statement "Jones is a killer," we take an individual, Jones, and wrap the predicate "killer" around him. The negation of the statement "Jones is a killer" yields a new wrapper, and a new statement, "Jones is a non-killer." *Notice that both statements cannot be true*. Now, what about "Some person is a killer?" Assuming "some person" is here a subject just like "Jones" was, if we negate this statement, we do not so easily get a new wrapper; for "Some person is a killer" is consistent with "Some person is a non-killer." Rather, we must assume the reverse. "Killer" must be the subject around which we wrap "some person." The point is that "killer," a first-order predicate as found in "Jones is a killer," has "some" predicated of it. So "some" is a second-level predicate. But, and this is the upshot, "some" seems to do the exact same work as "exists." Any statement of the form "Some x is F" is replaceable by "An x that F's exists." So, if "some" is only a second-level predicate, so too is "exists."

Not all analytic philosophers have accepted Williams's analysis of existence. In **Chapter Three** I consider the objections that have been raised specifically against Williams by Barry Miller, William Vallicella, and Kris McDaniel.[19] All three philosophers rely on sophisticated developments in philosophy of language, and I cannot offer an adequate summary of their objections here in the introduction. Briefly, however, their objections might be summarized as follows:

According to **Barry Miller**, Williams makes several errors. First, he confuses the reference of a name with the bearer of a name. The name "Abraham Lincoln" refers to the 16th

[19] Other recent philosophers have also objected to the thesis that existence and being are only second-level predicates. However, their objections are usually aimed at arguments I think inferior to the ones Williams makes. See, for example, Colin McGinn's "Existence" in *Logical Properties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). McGinn makes no mention of Williams and concentrates his refutation against Bertrand Russell.

President of the United States. Abraham Lincoln, of course, is dead. This just means the name currently has no bearer (assuming for the sake of argument that no one else currently has that name). So on Miller's view the statement "Lincoln does not exist" is not saying "There is a man, Lincoln, who does not exist." Rather, Miller thinks that it is saying that the name "Lincoln" can still be used to refer to the Lincoln who once existed but no longer does. Moreover, Miller does not think that we can infer from the fact that non-existence cannot be a property that individuals have that it follows that existence cannot be a property.

William Vallicella offers three objections to the traditional analytic view that existence cannot be predicated of individuals: 1) Frege was mistaken to think that statements of the form "Kovacs exists" are (illegitimately) attaching a second-order predicate to the name of an individual; 2) The Plato's Beard argument is based on a modal fallacy; 3) From the fact that non-existence cannot be had by individuals it cannot be inferred that existence cannot.[20]

According to Vallicella, there is a "systematic connection" between "existence" when it is used in its general, second-order sense, and "existence" when it is used with reference to singular objects.[21] General existential statements tell us that some property is instantiated. But for a property to be instantiated, on Vallicella's way of thinking, it must be instantiated by an existing individual. So Vallicella considers it a necessary truth that "If a property is instantiated, it is instantiated by an existent" and he thinks this ought to be an available premise in any argument that seeks to deploy "exists" as a first-order predicate. Thus, Vallicella accepts the following argument about Socrates existing:

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[20]Vallicella is unique among critics of the traditional analytic view in that he does not call existence a property. Rather, he thinks existence is the precondition for anything having properties (in contrast to, say, Barry Miller, who is content to say that existence is a unique property in that it does not presuppose something's existence).

[21]William Vallicella, *A Paradigm Theory of Existence* (New York: Springer, 2002), 110.

1. The property being a philosopher is instantiated.

2. If a property is instantiated, it is instantiated by an existent.

3. Therefore, the property *being a philosopher* is instantiated by an existent.

4. Socrates instantiates the property *being a philosopher*.

5. Therefore, Socrates is an existent (=Socrates exists).

Vallicella thinks Plato's Beard is entangled in what is called a modal fallacy. This sort of fallacy takes place when one illicitly shifts a modal term, such as “necessarily” or “possibly,” in such a way as to alter the truth value of a statement. For example, philosophers generally agree that something can only be known if it is true. So, one might say “Necessarily, if Alvin knows that the Pope is from Argentina then it is true that the Pope is from Argentina.” But notice that from this one cannot infer that “If Alvin knows that the Pope is from Argentina, then it is a necessary truth that the Pope is from Argentina.” After all, one can imagine a scenario where someone from Italy had been elected Pope.

According to Vallicella, the proponents of Plato's Beard have made a similar error. It is fine to say that necessarily, every nonvacuous name (that is, every name that *does* name) designates something that exists. But from this, Vallicella tells us, we ought not to infer the more dubious claim that every nonvacuous name designates a necessary existent. Thus, Vallicella rejects the Plato’s Beard argument.

It seems absurd to talk about non-existence as a property that things can have. But can someone infer from this that existence cannot be a property? Vallicella believes that those who do make such an inference overestimate the symmetry between existence and nonexistence.[22] If I tell you that something exists, you will naturally assume that the thing I am telling you about has

[22]*Ibid*., 114-15.

some properties. But, according to Vallicella, its possession of properties is not identical with its existence; when Descartes proclaimed "I think, therefore I am" he was not trying to tell us "I think, therefore I have properties." On the other hand, statements of non-existence just tell us about properties that are had by nothing. "Nessie does not exist" is not about an individual, but about a property, and it says something like "The property 'large uncategorized animal living in the Loch Ness' is a property nothing has."

So Vallicella's reply to the problem of non-existence is to say that there is no reason to deny that statements about existence can be either specific, as when I say "Kovacs exists," or general, as when I say "Happy philosophers exist." But he says that this does not warrant us to think statements about non-existence must also be capable of coming in both varieties. "There is," he writes, "only general non-existence, which is a second-level property."[23]

Kris McDaniel believes that he can attribute predicates like "at least three in number" and "at least one in number" to, for example, the people at a dinner party.[24] In other words, we will see him arguing that he can predicate number-terms of individuals. And he thinks that Frege's claim that numerical predicates could not be applied to individuals was the result of a purported mistake Frege made concerning examples involving composition.[25] Frege asks us to consider a standard deck of fifty-two playing cards divided among the four suits. If it is possible to predicate numbers of individuals, then Frege thinks we will have a problem deciding which number to predicate of the deck: One, because (as has been a popular saying since Aristotle) everything is one? Four, because of the four suits? Fifty-two, for each of the cards? Since these cannot all be the right answer, Frege thought it best to abandon any hope of predicating number of individuals and to instead say something like "being a suit in this deck is exemplified four

[23]Ibid.
[24]This is his example. Kris McDaniel, "Existence and Number.," *Analytic Philosophy* 54 (June, 2013): 215.
[25]*Ibid*., 216.

times," "being a card in this deck is exemplified fifty-two times," and so on.

McDaniel responds that Frege missed a simpler answer: The deck of cards is one, but is *composed* of fifty-two cards, and is *composed* of four suits. And he denies that composition is the same as identity. So the answer to Frege's question "What number is to be predicated of the deck of cards?" is, to McDaniel's way of thinking, "One." Likewise, when Frege writes that he can conceive of the *Illiad* as one poem, or as twenty-four books, or as a large number of verses, McDaniel replies he can conceive of the *Illiad* only as one poem. Yes, McDaniel agrees, he can understand what it means to say that the *Illiad* is composed of twenty-four books, but he thinks this does not warrant predicating the number twenty-four of *Illiad*.

McDaniel is willing to grant the claim made by Frege and Williams that statements of existence are statements of number (or at least they are sufficiently similar); but he denies that number statements are ordinarily second-level statements. In fact, they are first-level predicates that tell us about individuals.. So if existence is itself an answer to "How many?" type questions, it too is a non-distributive, first-level property.

Space prevents me from here detailing how I respond to each of the objections raised by Miller, Vallicella, and McDaniel. However, I will note now that none of Williams's critics that I know of have responded to what I call Williams's "Master Argument." The Master Argument begins by admitting that there is nothing to prevent one word from functioning as either a first-level or second-level predicate, depending on context. One might predicate "disappearing" of both a scoop of ice cream on a hot summer day and of reasonable congressmen. But this is not a simple case of equivocation; there is a systematic connection between how "disappearing" is being used in both cases, even though in the case of an ice cream scoop it is used as a first-level predicate and as second-level in the latter case. This systematic connection Williams calls

"analogy." In both cases the word "disappearing" has to do with diminishing, becoming less. For anyone who wants to say that "exists" can have a first-order sense, the challenge, according to Williams, is to explain how "some" can be used analogously. After all, Williams thinks that he has shown that "some" and "exist" do the same logical work. None of the objectors that I consider in the third chapter attempt to respond to Williams's Master Argument, and neither do I.

In **Chapter Four** I return to Aquinas's claim that God is his own subsistent existence, that is, *ipsum esse subsistens*. It is the *esse* in that phrase that gets rendered "existence" when English translators of Aquinas provide phrases like "his own subsistent existence." It is likewise *esse* that Aquinas thinks, in created things, is really distinct from essence. But does Aquinas mean by *esse* what Williams takes him to mean by "existence"? Is God, on Aquinas's thinking, identical to some first-level property that we might call "existence"? And, if not, how does this square with the objection that Aquinas's conception of divine simplicity is just incoherent?

As I point out in this chapter, the first thing to note about Aquinas on *esse* is that he thinks that *esse* is that by which individual beings (*entia*) are anything at all instead of nothing whatsoever. Importantly, however, Aquinas is clear that *esse* is not an accident that things have. What Aquinas calls "accidents," I take it, are certainly among the things that Williams would call "properties." Even though Aquinas sometimes talks as if *esse* were an accident, he more often writes, as I note, that *esse* is something we have to speak of as if it were an accident. To get clear on what Aquinas means by *esse*, what we will need is an understanding of his conception of all creation in terms of act and potency. Once this is understood, we will be in a position to understand what Aquinas means when he says that *esse* is the "act of all acts" and "the act of every existent insofar as it is an existent."[26]

Aquinas understands *esse* as an act that all created things *participate* in. So, also in the

[26] *In I Sent*., d. 19, q. 2, a. 2.

fourth chapter, I will have something to say about what Aquinas understands participation to amount to, especially with an eye towards what it means to say that things participate in *esse*. Participation, according to Aquinas, is a "sort of taking part."[27] However, it is important to distinguish Aquinas's notion of participation from views associated with his predecessors, especially Plato. Aquinas, unlike Plato, does not believe that there are forms separate from matter other than the angels (and, in a unique sense, God).[28] He even considers Platonism with regard to separate forms incompatible with Christian faith.[29] Nevertheless, from his earliest works he makes use of the term "participation."[30] "When one thing receives in a particular manner what belongs to another in a universal manner, it participates in it," Aquinas tells us, and it is this definition that I explore in the fourth chapter.[31]

Crucially, Aquinas thinks that the phrase "participates in *esse*" is not something said univocally of things that belong to different categories, genera, and species. Everything that Williams has to say about "exist" and "exists" suggests that he thinks that the word, whether used legitimately as a second-level predicate or (purportedly) illegitimately as a first-level predicate, is univocal. Whatever someone means by the statements "President Bartlett does not exist," "Pope Francis exists," and "The Hope Diamond exists," the word "exist(s)" is meant to have the same exact meaning. This seems damning for anyone who wants to say that Aquinas's notion of divine simplicity is incoherent for the sort of reasons that Williams has submitted.

However, the *esse* that Aquinas thinks that created things participate in is not the *esse* that he thinks is God's essence. The former he sometimes calls *esse commune* (common *esse*), and it

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[27] *De Hebd*., l. 2.
[28] I had once thought it well known that Aquinas is not a Platonist. However, Lawrence Dewan argues, forcibly I think, that Alvin Plantinga's objection to Aquinas on divine simplicity presupposes that Aquinas must be committed to Platonism. Plantinga is mistaken. See "Saint Thomas, Alvin Plantinga, and the Divine Simplicity" in *Modern Schoolman* 66 (1989): 141-51.
[29] A claim that he makes in the prologue to his commentary on Dionysius's *Divine Names*.
[30] Cf. *DE* ch. 5; *In I Sent*., d. 8, q. 1, aa. 1-2.
[31] *De Hebd*., l. 2.

is distinct from the divine *esse*, or *esse tantum* (*esse* only). So in **Chapter Five** I turn to a discussion of divine *esse* and the implications involved in thinking of God as *ipsum esse subsistens*. The key to understanding Aquinas on *ipsum esse subsistens* is found in his treatment of plurality in *De ente et essentia* (which I consider at length also in the first chapter). In that text, Aquinas notes that there are three ways something can be diversified: 1) A genus diversified by being multiplied in diverse species, 2) a species is multiplied by being in diverse individuals, and 3) something separate and unreceived is received in others. My focus in this chapter will be on the third of these types of multiplication. As an analogy (which I take from Gaven Kerr), one might consider how the sun's energy is received in multiple ways by things on earth: In warm rivers, in solar panels, in plants which need light for growth.[32] Yet the sun itself remains separate, uncontaminated by anything on earth. In other words, it is not the sun itself that is multiplied, but its effect. So, as I explain in the fifth chapter, God's effect is the created *esse* that is multiplied among creatures. This *esse* depends on and is derived from God, who is pure, underived, uncreated *esse*.

The remainder of this final chapter is a series of short considerations about objections that might be raised against Aquinas's notion of God as *ipsum esse subsistens*. The common thread in these objections is that *ipsum esse subsistens* just doesn't seem like what people mean when they talk about God; it seems hardly religious, one might think. For example, does Aquinas's theory about divine simplicity make God too *abstract*? Does God lose the sort of singularity we expect from the proper object of worship? The answer, for Aquinas, must be no. For Aquinas thinks that God is truly subsistent (though not a substance). God, according to Aquinas, and God alone is both *esse* and a "that which is," a term he normally reserves for concrete entities. However, here

[32] Gaven Kerr, *Aquinas's Way to God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 26.

he means the term “that which is” to just mean that God is not a universal, but a unity.

I’d like to say upfront that when I began writing this I had every intention of avoiding what Aquinas has to say about God as Trinity. For one, this seems to me to be more of a theological, rather than strictly philosophical, issue. However, two things caused me to change my mind: First, since Chapter One is about why divine simplicity is so crucial to everything else that Aquinas has to say about God, it seems awkward to omit how it affects his thinking about the Trinity.

Secondly, as I was writing the final chapter, I noticed that divine simplicity is central to much of Aquinas’s thinking about God in ways not sufficiently explained in the first chapter. In Chapter One I am merely interested in how divine simplicity, for Aquinas, is key to understanding God’s transcendence. But there are issues other than divine transcendence that Aquinas discusses which presuppose what he has said about divine simplicity. God’s involvement with creation, God’s rôle vis-a-vis our prayers, and God’s omniscience all involve, for Aquinas, a serious reflection on divine simplicity. Interestingly, these are issues that some thinkers have accused Aquinas of neglecting in order to preserve his supposedly abstract metaphysical considerations. So I consider these issues in the final chapter with eye toward defending Aquinas. But I conclude that chapter by noting, in what has to be much too little space, that divine simplicity is also why Aquinas can think that God is somehow three, while also being one God. If it were not for divine simplicity Aquinas would have to risk rendering the doctrine of the Trinity as a belief in three gods.

Hopefully, by the end of this dissertation readers will have some appreciation for Aquinas on divine simplicity. At the minimum, I have shown that his thinking on divine simplicity is not incoherent insofar as it posits God as subsistent *esse*. Yet arguments that it is incoherent, while

wrong, are helpfully wrong: For they compel us to notice that *esse*, as Aquinas uses the word, is sharply different from what contemporary English speakers and analytic philosophers typically mean by "existence." The upshot is that we will be in a position to see how the phrase *ipsum esse subsistens*, for Aquinas, expresses, in one commentator's words, "the unfathomable and all-encompassing richness of the divine reality."[33]

[33] Peter Weigel, *Aquinas on Simplicity: An Investigation of the Foundations of his Philosophical Theology*" (Peter Lang AG, 2008), 141.

Chapter One: The Importance of *Ipsum Esse Subsistens* in Aquinas's Philosophical Theology

Writing about a question concerning the divine will, Aquinas at one point says that God is "outside the order of existing things" (*extra ordinem entium existens*).[34] What could it possibly mean, one might wonder, to say that something exists outside the order of existing things? After all, if something exists, isn't it by definition a part of the order of existing things? The purpose of this chapter is to explore how Aquinas's thinking about divine simplicity is intended as they key to answering these questions.

I will begin by sketching in a broad fashion what Aquinas means when he talks about divine simplicity and why it is important. This section will be especially helpful for those unfamiliar with Aquinas's philosophy of God and I hope it provides some context for the discussion of divine simplicity while avoiding unnecessary technicalities. Then, in 1.2, I will go into some details and explore some nuances regarding Aquinas on divine simplicity by tracing his thought on the matter in an historical fashion. The point of this section will be to show that for Aquinas, God is outside the order of created existence in virtue of the fact that God alone is identical to his own subsistent existence (*ipsum esse subsistens*). Lastly, I will consider whether Aquinas has any other means available to him for distinguishing God from creation, which would thus render divine simplicity (as well as the rest of this dissertation) unimportant, if not uninteresting.

[34] *In Pery.* I, XIV.

1.1. Divine Simplicity: An Overview

In this section I will introduce Aquinas's general ideas about divine simplicity as well as the terminology he uses when discussing it, and the reasons he has for believing it. First, however, a word about what Aquinas means when he talks about the existence of God at all.

1.1.1. Aquinas on the statement "God exists"

Early in the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas asks whether God exists (*an Deus sit*).[35] Ordinarily, we might think about questions of the form "Does x exist?" like this: I have a pretty good idea of what I mean by "x," and now I just have to go see if there is one. For example, I might wonder whether the Loch Ness Monster exists. By "Loch Ness Monster" I have a pretty good idea that I mean something like "Large animal living in Loch Ness in Scotland that has not been scientifically cataloged." And to find out if one exists, all I have to do is inquire about whether anything in the universe matches that description.

But when it comes to the question "Does God exist?" Aquinas does not think that we can proceed like that at all. For one thing, Aquinas does not think that God is anything in the universe, so we can't go looking to find out if anything in the universe matches our idea of God. More importantly, though, Aquinas thinks we do not really have an idea of what God is at all. We might have some ideas about how we have heard people use the word "God," as when religious people say things about God being powerful or benevolent. But, according to Aquinas, we do not know what God is. How, then, can we go about considering the question "Does God exist?"

Aquinas thinks that there is a kind of demonstration whereby we reason from the existence of an effect to the existence of its cause. As he puts it: "A demonstration can be

[35] *ST* 1a,2,3.

made … through an effect, and this is called a *demonstration that* [*demonstratio quia*], and this is to argue from what is prior with respect to us; when the effect is better known to us we argue from the effect to the cause."[36] The idea here is that any time we know of an effect, we can reasonably make a sentence of the form "Something exists such that it is the cause of _____," where the blank is filled in with the name of the effect. Suppose the room I am sitting in started getting warmer. I know it is getting warmer not only because I have begun to sweat but because the thermometer on my desk says the temperature is rising. Here I have an effect: The room is getting warmer. And here I can make a *demonstration that*: Something exists such that it is the cause of the room getting warmer. Of course, I might have no idea what that something is. It may be a furnace, it may be that the temperature outside is rising, or it might be something else entirely. Any investigation I make of it must begin from the fact that I know that it exists as a cause of something else.

It is this kind of reasoning that Aquinas thinks we have to use when considering the question "Does God exist?" Given our familiarity with how people have often used the word "God," that is, to refer to something as a cause of the universe or some features of the universe, Aquinas thinks we need to see if we can find effects for which we can say that God is the cause. In other words, are there features of the universe which it seems should be causally explainable, but which cannot be causally explained by any other features of the universe? If so, thinks Aquinas, we may call the cause of those features "God."

Aquinas goes on in *ST* 1a,2,3 to identify five such features: change (*motus*), efficient causality, generation and corruption, gradations of being, and the orderly tendencies of things that are unaware of their tendencies. Aquinas has reasons for thinking that these five features cannot be causally explained by anything in the universe, as you will see later. For now I just

[36] *ST* 1a,2,2

want to draw attention to the fact that when Aquinas argues for a positive answer to the question "Does God exist?" he is intending, in light of what I have said about *demonstrations that*, to show that something exists such that it is the cause of change, something exists such that it is the cause of efficient causality, and so on for each of these five features.

With this in mind, I now turn to a general account of Aquinas's thinking on divine simplicity.

1.1.2. Denying Composition in God

What I have said above about Aquinas's thinking on "God exists" leads him to what is often called his doctrine of divine simplicity. This is the claim that God, and God alone, lacks any composition whatsoever. Various kinds of composition can be found in created things: Most obviously, material creatures are composed of material parts. Moreover, material creatures can be said to be composed of their individuality and the kind of thing that they are, so that Sally, for example, is a human being distinct from her humanity. And there seems to be a distinction between a thing and its properties: A banana, for example, is distinct from its color. Furthermore, according to Aquinas there is real distinction between the fact that a thing exists (its existence) and what a thing is (its essence), so that all created things are composed of existence and essence.[37] The doctrine of divine simplicity rules out all such composition in God.

Why does Aquinas believe such a thing? In line with what I have already said, Aquinas thinks that the name "God" can be given to whatever it is that is responsible for there being anything rather than nothing. Or, to use language consistent with that of the last section, something exists such that it is the cause of the existence of the universe, and given the way

[37]For a more recent defense of this view, see Peter Geach, "Form and Existence," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 55 (1954): 251-272.

people often use the word "God," we can call this first cause "God."[38]

The claim that God is what is responsible for the existence of anything whatsoever entails important consequences. As a preliminary to these consequences though, I wish to draw attention to the fact that all of the following claims Aquinas makes about God in this section are *negative* claims. In other words, in what follows, Aquinas should be construed as determining what we cannot say about God and making no effort to say what God is, as, indeed, the divine simplicity doctrine is meant to preclude us from being able to say what God is.

One thing that Aquinas can immediately rule out is the possibility of God being anything material. Note that anything material is subject to being changed: Its matter could, for example, be rearranged. But what could possibly change that which is responsible for the existence of everything other than itself? Aquinas puts it this way: "Matter is in a state of potentiality. But it was shown that God is pure act, and has nothing potential. Thus it is impossible that God is composed of matter...."[39] What Aquinas is getting at in saying this is that if God is the agent responsible for everything that is (as he takes himself to have established), then how can God be in any way susceptible to being made something else? Anything that is so susceptible cannot be that which is responsible for there being anything at all. And, thinks Aquinas, the presence of matter is always going to make something to be susceptible to being altered. So, God cannot be the sort of thing made of matter.

But consider what it means to be immaterial. Materiality, at least on some views, is what allows us to distinguish members of the same kind from one another.[40] The idea here is that I

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[38]Why does Aquinas think that there must be a first, uncaused cause for the existence of anything? I will turn to that question when discussing the Five Ways in Section 1.2. For now, I merely need to note that Aquinas does think this and that this has implications for his thinking about God.

[39]*ST* 1a,3,2

[40]This view traces itself to Book VII of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (1034a 5-8): "The completed whole, such-and-such a form induced in this flesh and these bones, is Calias or Socrates. And it is different from that which generated it, because the matter is different" (tr. Hugh Tredennick).

might ask you, for example, how many *kinds* of pets you own. And you might answer four: Cats, penguins, snakes, and fish. So, material things fall into kinds and we can count them. A snake is different from a penguin in virtue of being a member of a different kind of thing. But, suppose I asked you how many snakes you have. This presupposes a distinction between each individual snake and the kind of thing that each individual snake is. What I am now asking about is just one specific kind of thing and the individuals that belong to that kind of thing. And if you answered "three snakes," we are warranted in wondering what makes each snake different from each other snake. One answer to that question would be "This snake has *this snake's* matter, and that snake has *that snake's* matter." So members of a kind can be distinguished according to their matter.

But what of immaterial things? If two members of the same kind are distinguished based on their matter, how can two immaterial things of the same kind be distinguished? One answer is that they cannot. Or, rather, anything immaterial must be a kind unto itself. In such a case, there can be no distinction between an individual thing and the kind to which it belongs. In the case of God, we may say then that God is identical to what God is. To use language closer to Aquinas's, we may say that God is God's own divinity. Note how this contrasts with material things: No snake is identical to snakeness, and no human is identical to humanity. An individual snake is composed of the snake and its snakeness; an individual human is composed of the human and humanity. But, according to the doctrine of divine simplicity, this kind of composition cannot exist in God.

Yet, can we speak of God as being a member of a kind at all? Angels, if they exist, are also presumably immaterial, and believers in them might claim that each angel is identical to its own kind.[41] But consider what it means for kinds to differ. We can only differentiate kinds of things by grouping them together under some broader kind, or genus. Snakes, penguins, and cats

[41]As, indeed, Aquinas does: *ST* 1a,50,4.

can all be grouped together under the broader genus, animal. And each of their kinds can be distinguished according to what makes each kind different from each other kind in the same genus. So, even angels, if they exist, would fall under some genus, namely the genus angels. And this gives us a new kind of compositionality: The composition of genus and difference.

However, what broader kind, or genus, could include that which is responsible for the existence of all the kinds of things that there are? What genus could include God and something else such that there is a difference between God and everything else in that genus? One might be tempted to answer this question by saying that God and the universe belong to the genus *being* or *existent things*. However, if being is a kind, what is it distinct from? The answer is that there is nothing other than being for being to be distinct from. And so, there is no such genus to which God belongs. This rules out yet another kind of distinction in God: God is not composed of a genus and a difference, for, indeed, God is not a member of a kind at all.

There is one additional kind of composition that Aquinas denies of God, and that is the composition of existence and essence. Because this is the kind of simplicity with which this entire dissertation is concerned, I will not say much of it now. There are interpretive issues regarding what Aquinas's claims regarding the distinction between existence and essence. To get some idea what Aquinas's claims about existence and essence in God amount to, we need now to turn to the details of the texts where he discusses divine simplicity.

1.2. Historical Overview of Aquinas on Divine Simplicity

In the previous section I have attempted to give a very general account of Aquinas's thinking on divine simplicity. Aquinas, however, was a nuanced writer careful to draw important distinctions regarding the issues he thought about. And his thinking about divine simplicity is no exception.

Furthermore, some aspects of his thought about these issues evolved over time. So, in order to explore what Aquinas thought about divine simplicity, I now wish to look at the details of the texts in the order in which he wrote them. Hopefully, the previous section provided enough context that the more technical details of what follows will make more sense.

There are six texts where Aquinas explicitly devotes discussion to divine simplicity: *De Ente et Essentia* (*On Being and Essence*), *Scriptum super libros Lombard* (a commentary on the *Sentences of Lombard*), *Summa Contra Gentiles*, *Compendium Theologiae* (Compendium of Theology), *Quaestiones Disputate De Potentia Dei* (*Disputed Questions on the Power of God*), and *Summa Theologiae*.

1.2.1. *De Ente et Essentia*

Aquinas's early work *De Ente et Essentia* is usually dated to his student years between 1251-1252.[42] But it is helpful to begin our survey with this text not only because of its chronological priority, but also because in it Aquinas introduces and explains a number of technical terms that he will continue to employ throughout his life.

Right away Aquinas announces he is concerned, as the title of the work suggests, with elucidating the notions of being and essence. Regarding the first notion, Aquinas, borrowing a distinction from Aristotle's *Metaphysics,* tells us that something is called a being (*ens per se*) in two ways: First, a being is anything that falls into the ten categories, and second, something is called a being about which true affirmative propositions are made.[43] The ten categories that Aquinas refers to are the ten general kinds of things Aristotle thought we find in the world. So, in this sense something is a being if it is a substance, a quality (such as a color), or even a place or

[42]References to the text will be to chapters found in Vol. XVIII of the Leonine Edition.
[43]The origin of this distinction, repeated throughout Aquinas's writings, is found in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* V, c. 7, 1017a22-3.

relation. As an example of the second sense in which we call something a being, Aquinas refers to blindness. There is no real thing called blindness that we can talk about or study in its own right; when we say someone is blind we mean that the person lacks an ability we would usually expect people to have, namely the ability to see. So blindness, Aquinas tells us, is a mere privation. Nevertheless, privations and anything else we can form assertive sentences about can be called a being.

Aquinas's present interest focuses not on privations or any other kinds of being in the second sense, but only on the sort of beings that fall into one of the ten categories. These are the beings, thinks Aquinas, that can be said to have essences; blindness and anything else called being in the second sense cannot be said to have an essence. In fact, whatever falls into one of the ten categories falls into the category it is in on account of its essence, and it is because of essence that a thing even falls into the more particular species, or kind of thing, that it is in. So, the essence of a human being makes one to be a human being, and the essence of a penguin makes a thing to be a penguin.

It may be helpful to think of essence as allowing us to answer the question "What is it?" And Aquinas thinks this is exactly how some philosophers have thought about it. Thus he tells us that some philosophers have called essence by the term "quiddity," from the Latin *quid est*? Or *What is it*? And Aquinas notes that other philosophers, seeking to emphasize different aspects of essence, have also called it by the terms "form" and "nature." But he emphasizes the importance of the term "essence" because it is "by and through essence that beings have *esse*."[44]

Esse literally means "To be." Aquinas often uses it as a noun, as he does here when he speaks of things "having *esse*" or in other places where he says things like "*Esse* is the first of

[44]*DE*, c. 1. *[E]ssentia dicitur secundum quod per eam et in ea ens habet esse.*

created things."[45] Given the awkwardness of an English phrase like "having To be" or "To be is the first of created things," the word is often translated as "being" or "existence." This, of course, lends itself to confusion since Aquinas, as we have already seen him doing in *De Ente et Essentia*, also writes about *ens*, which is also translated as "being." This might appear to put Aquinas in the awkward position of talking about "The being of beings." Yet Aquinas does think that *esse* is something that individual beings in some sense have.[46]

Having made these preliminary remarks about essence and *esse,* Aquinas indicates he wants to investigate how these metaphysical principles play out in "simple substances." Yet, he tells us, because we have little or no familiarity with simple substances, we have to begin by thinking about essence in terms of complex substances. What he means here is that our ordinary, everyday experience is of common worldly substances: Rocks and trees and penguins. And by simple substances he means things which lack matter, such as angels and God, who is the simplest substance. So, thinks Aquinas, by first thinking about *esse* and essence as found in common worldly substances like rocks and trees and penguins we will be better suited to then think about them in angels and God.

The components that Aquinas thinks ordinary objects are composed of he calls matter and form. Aquinas takes his reader to already be familiar with these technical terms, as they are also important in the philosophy of Aristotle. Aquinas himself said more about matter and form in his other early short work, *De Principiis Naturae*. The example Aquinas frequently uses for these notions is that of a block of marble which is sculpted into a statue. Clearly, the same matter is

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[45]*QDP* 3,5, ob. 2.

[46]For a detailed study of Aquinas's thought about *esse* throughout his life see Anthony Kenny's *Aquinas on Being* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Kenny concludes that Aquinas was "thoroughly confused" regarding *esse*. For criticisms of Kenny's book, see the following: Brian Davies, "Kenny on Aquinas on Being," *The Modern Schoolman* 82 (2005): 111-129; Gyula Klima, "On Kenny on Aquinas on Being," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (2004): 567-580. Chapters Four and Five of this dissertation are devoted to an exploration of what Aquinas means by *esse* with an eye toward divine simplicity.

there both before and after the sculpting takes place: It's just marble. On the other hand, it seems natural to say we have quite a different substance after the sculpting, for a block of marble surely is not a statue. So Aquinas thinks that matter is what remains throughout a substantial change, and that substantial change indicates that before the change the matter had a certain form, after the change, a different form. Before the sculpting, on this account, the matter had the form of a block; after, the form of a statue.[47]

So, according to Aquinas, composite substances, like all substances, receive their being (*esse*) from their essence. And, he tells us, essences can be expressed by way of definitions (*quid est*, or what is it?). But the definitions of composite things always include a reference to their matter. For example, suppose the definition of human being is "Rational animal." Animals, according to Aquinas, are necessarily material things. Since the definitions of composite things always contain reference to matter, it seems that the essence of material things cannot be form alone. Nor, however, can it be matter alone since matter itself is nothing at all until it receives some form. Thus, Aquinas concludes, in material composites essence refers to both matter and form.

Having said all of this, Aquinas notes an important distinction, namely that between particular matter (*materia signata*) and matter in general (*materia non signata*).[48] The problem which compels Aquinas to make this distinction has to do with what he calls the principle of individuation. The issue runs like this: Suppose you have several things which fall under the same general term. So, for example, Jane, Tom, and Harry are all human beings: They are all rational animals. Likewise, cats, penguins, and snakes are all animals: They are all living

[47]To be sure, this account, commonly called hylomorphism, is applied only imperfectly to artifacts like statues. While the statue example is helpful, Aristotle and Aquinas thought this was the appropriate theory of change in the natural world, as when the same parcel of matter has at one time the form of an acorn and at another the form of a tree.

[48]*DE* c. 2.

substances capable of sensation. What is it in virtue of which Jane, Tom, and Harry are different, then? And what is it in virtue of which cats, penguins, and snakes are different? Whatever answers that question will be, in Aquinas's terminology, the principle of individuation.

For composite substances like Jane, Tom, and Harry, Aquinas thinks that the principle of individuation is matter. But, as I have pointed out, Aquinas includes matter in the essence of composite substances. So one might think that Jane, Tom, and Harry each have a different essence; from this it would follow that Jane, Tom, and Harry each have their own different corresponding definition. But Aquinas thinks no individual substance can ever properly have its own, unique definition. So, he says, the matter that is included in the essences of composite substances is matter in general. In the case of human beings, we might say (as Aquinas did say) it is human flesh and bones in general. Jane, Tom, and Harry, however, are not individuated by matter in general, but by each of their particular matter. Jane has her own flesh and bones, Tom has his, and Harry has his, and for this reason we can count each of them as distinct from each other despite each having the same essence.

It will be helpful here to also say what the principle of individuation is for different species that fall under the same genus. Cats, penguins, and snakes are all species of animal that fall under the same genus, namely that of animal. So if they are all living substances capable of sensation (which is what Aquinas thinks that an animal, by definition, is), how are they grouped into different species? Here Aquinas thinks that the principle of individuation is the *specific difference*. This is the characteristic feature of the species that separates the species from every other species in the genus. For example, some sensitive living substances meow. Those, and only those that meow, fall into the species cat. So, meowing is a specific difference.[49] Another specific

[49]These examples are meant to be but helpful ways of thinking about Aquinas's terminology. I leave it to the biologists to determine whether I have identified the correct specific differences.

difference may be the characteristic of slithering around on the ground, and this individuates the species of snake. The definition that identifies an essence is constructed simply by naming the thing's genus and its specific difference (which is why Aquinas defines human being as the rational animal).

Aquinas has more to say about *esse* and essence in composite things, but that does not concern us here. For now I must turn to how, when writing *De Ente et Essentia*, Aquinas develops the notions that I have been talking about when he discusses simple substances. And the three kinds of simple substances that Aquinas concern are angels,[50] human souls, and God; for each of these three, he thinks, are simple in notably different ways.

Regarding angels and human souls, Aquinas notes that some thinkers had denied that they are simple in any way whatsoever. Angels and souls, according to this view, are also composed of some sort of matter and form. Aquinas finds this position untenable, however, because he takes it that angels and human souls are able to understand and know the essences of things.

The reason Aquinas thinks that the ability to understand or know is indicative of immateriality has to do with how he thinks the process of learning and understanding works. According to a way of thinking about the problem that can be traced back to Ancient Greek philosophers, there is a tension between the following three claims: 1) The world around us, the world we experience with our senses, is made up of contingent, changing, particular things; 2) Knowledge is not of the changing nor of the contingent and particular but of the necessary, the universal, and the unchanging; 3) Nevertheless, we do have some knowledge.

This might seem like an odd way to use the contemporary English word “knowledge.” After all, I say I know about contingent, particular, changing things all the time. When I say “I

[50]In fact Aquinas mentions not angels specifically but “intelligences.” These included both the angels familiar to the religious tradition but also certain celestial entities responsible for the movement of heavenly bodies. Since these latter objects are unfamiliar for contemporary readers, I will just refer to the intelligences as angels.

know the lamp is on right now" I certainly do not mean that the lamp had to be on of necessity, and I know that the lamp has not always been on. But medieval thinkers, like their Ancient Greek predecessors, drew a distinction between knowledge (or *episteme* in Greek and *scientia* in Latin) and a weaker epistemic state that the Greeks called *doxa* (and which is sometimes today translated as "opinion," though, again, the English word "opinion" carries connotations *doxa* did not). Knowledge (or *episteme* or *scientia*) pertains to the necessary, universal, and unchanging; my ideas about particular, contingent changing things like the state of my lamp fall into some weaker epistemic state.

So, given the tension between the three above claims, how does Aquinas think we can have knowledge about the necessary, unchanging, and universal when our experience is always of the contingent, changing, particulars? He rejects the theory put forth by some philosophers that we have innate knowledge, that is, knowledge that is somehow in us prior to our experience of the things which our knowledge is about. Instead, Aquinas thinks all of our knowledge begins with the senses. And he thinks that we come to know things when the things come to somehow be in our minds immaterially. This immaterial aspect of things is the essence of things and, insofar as it is knowable, is called the "form." So, for example, if the form of the penguin comes to be abstracted by my mind from individual penguins in the world, then by virtue of that form being in my mind I will know necessary, unchanging, universal truths about penguins. That is to say, what I know about penguins will apply, by necessity, to all penguins that ever lived and ever will live.[51]

Aquinas does not spell out why this conception of knowledge as form coming to be in the knower leads to the conclusion that the human soul must be immaterial. But I think that such an

[51]The account of Aquinas's theory of knowledge presented here is, for reasons of economy, brief. For Aquinas's own thinking on the matter, see *ST* 1a,85. Cf. *QDV* 1. 10, a. 5-6; *In De An*. III, 4, 8. For analysis of the relevant *Summa* text, see Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 108-110.

argument would be straight-forward: If knowledge amounts to forms coming to exist in the soul, then the soul could not be material because if it were, then in receiving a form, it would be informed other than how it is; so it must be something immaterial receiving the form.[52] In other words, if it were my matter that received the form of a penguin when I understand what the essence of a penguin is, it seems that my matter would have a form other than the human form it actually does have.

While Aquinas introduced the human soul and the angels as something he would discuss under the heading of simple substances, once he has said that they are immaterial he quickly qualifies what he means by "simple" in this case. Aquinas cites with approval the pseudo-Aristotelian *Liber de Causis* (Book of Causes) which states that human souls and angels (or what Aquinas would call angels) nevertheless have form and *esse*. So while human souls and angels are simple with respect to their lack of matter, they cannot be said to lack any kind of composition whatsoever. Human souls and angels are still composed of essence (which is what Aquinas means by "form" here) and their existence.[53]

So whereas the essence of composite things includes form and matter in general, Aquinas thinks that in simple substances the essence will just be the form. And before moving on to discuss divine simplicity, Aquinas draws our attention to two important upshots of this: First, that every simple substance is its own essence; second, that because of how essences are individuated, each simple substance will be its own species.

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[52]For a more critical treatment of this passage in *DE* see Kenny, *Aquinas on Being*, 26-28. Aquinas does attempt to offer an argument for the immateriality of the human soul in two places in *ST*. Only one of these, however, references the soul's ability to know. *ST* 1a,75,1 argues that the soul is not a body from the fact that the soul is defined as the first principle of life. The immediately following article also contains an argument for the immateriality of the soul that starts from the soul's ability to know bodily things. The gist of the argument may be that for human beings, and only for human beings, the soul permits us to engage in an activity that, unlike every other activity enabled by the soul, is not an activity of some bodily organ, namely understanding. For a philosopher critical of the argument in *ST* 1a,75,2 see Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind*, 132.

[53]*DE* c. 4.

Aquinas argues for the first point as follows. Consider some particular human being, Jones. Jones's essence, we've seen, includes both her form as a human being and her human matter in general, though not her particular matter. And she shares that essence, humanity, with every other human being. The only thing separating them is that each of them has his or her own particular matter. So, on account of Jones's particular matter, we have to say that she is not her own essence. Jones may be a human, but she is not humanity. Rather, humanity is something she shares with all of the other humans. Things change, however, when we start talking about immaterial substances like angels.[54] The essence of an angel just is its form, and so each angel is its own essence. Whereas each human being just is a human being and never identical to his or her humanity, each angel is both an angel and its own angelity. You will see the same analysis below applied to the divine essence.

The second point, that each simple substance is its own species, comes from how Aquinas had already explained the principle of individuation. If an essence is multiplied in composite substances on account of particular matter, how can an essence be multiplied in simple substances? Aquinas thinks that such an essence cannot be so multiplied. Rather, he endorses the claim of Avicenna[55] who said that there are as many species of simple substances as there are particular simple substances.[56] So, each angel, for example, is its own species.[57]

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[54]"What about human souls?" One might object. After all, when discussing simple substances so far haven't we been talking about both angels and human souls? Yes, but it seems Aquinas's analysis of how essence relates to human souls isn't as precise as it is when it relates to angels. The reason is because the human soul is what some philosophers following Aquinas's thought call an *incomplete substance*. The human soul is such that it naturally and usually is the form of a human body; it is only temporarily, thinks Aquinas, that the human soul exists independent of a body, namely during the time between the body's death and the final Resurrection promised by Christian revelation. Angels, on the other hand, are immaterial substances absolutely: It is never natural for an angel to be united to a body.

[55]An 11th Century Persian philosopher.

[56]*DE* 4.87-89.

[57]For some interesting comments on what all might be involved with this claim about immaterial substances, see Robert Sokolowski's "The Science of Being qua Being in Aristotle, Aquinas, and Wippel" in *The Science of Being as Being: Metaphysical Investigations*, ed. Gregory T. Doolan (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2011), 9-35.

We can now take stock of the kinds of simplicity Aquinas has shown us so far. First, there are purely composite things like people and penguins and rocks, which we don't describe as simple at all. Then there is the simplicity that distinguishes angels from composite things, which is the simplicity of being an immaterial form. From this it follows that each angel is also simple with regard to essence: Every angel is its own angelity. And, moreover, there is the simplicity of being an individual identical with its own species, which is why each angel is a species unto itself.

Given that each angel is its own species, why is God, who, like an angel, is immaterial, not among their number? The answer Aquinas gives, as I mentioned above, is that even angels are not absolutely simple. So the next task for Aquinas will be to show that there is some further kind of simplicity that can describe something and, moreover, that this kind of simplicity can apply, at most, to only one thing, which will be God.

Aquinas's argument is worth quoting in full:

> Whatever is not included in the understanding of an essence or quiddity is coming to it from without and enters into composition with the essence, because no essence can be understood without all of its parts being understood. But every essence can be understood without anything regarding its existence [*esse*] being understood. For I can understand what a human is or what a phoenix is and yet be ignorant about whether they exist in reality [*esse habeat in rerum natura*]. Therefore it is clear that existence is different from essence or quiddity, unless, perhaps, there is something for which its quiddity is its own existence [*ipsum suum esse*], and this thing could not exist unless it were first and primary.[58]

[58] *DE* 4.94-105. All translations my own unless otherwise noted.

Before proceeding, let's consider what Aquinas has already said here. Aquinas is often taken to be arguing for what some philosophers have called the real distinction between existence and essence. If someone understands an essence, according to Aquinas, then that person must understand all of the parts of the essence. For example, suppose I understand the essence of human beings. Then I understand what it means for something to be an animal and rational. And I have to understand what it means to be an animal. If an animal is a living substance capable, and I don't know that, then it would be false to say that I understand what a human being is, on Aquinas's account, because I don't understand a part of the definition of human being.

So Aquinas's argument runs as follows: If I understand the essence of *x*, then I understand everything in *x*'s essence. Yet I am able to understand some essences (such as those of humans and phoenixes) and I don't even ask about existence when I do. So, for such things, existence cannot be part of their essence. If existence were part of the essence of humans, for example, then in knowing the essence of human beings I would be able to tell you which humans do in fact exist, since it would be part of the essence of humans that they do exist.

This part of Aquinas's argument is often misunderstood because it is assumed that Aquinas, like his contemporary readers, did not believe that phoenixes existed. This contributes to further misunderstandings when considering the next part of Aquinas's argument, where he tells us why he believes only one, first, unique being could have an essence identical to existence. On this reading of the passage above, what Aquinas means is that he can know the essence of something without knowing whether that essence is ever instantiated in something real. Yet the assumption that Aquinas knew that phoenixes were fictitious has two problems: First, it lacks historical evidence; second, it commits Aquinas, in the passage above, to a very

strange view regarding his ability to know the essences of humans.

There is no historical evidence that Aquinas believed the phoenix to be a fictitious animal. In fact, the evidence suggests he would have accepted the phoenix as a real (albeit perhaps ephemeral) animal. Aquinas's own teacher, Albert the Great, seems to have accepted the existence of the phoenix as a real animal.[59] This seems natural, as earlier thinkers such as Clement of Rome and Isidore of Seville also speak of the phoenix without indication that they mean to refer to a fictitious animal.[60] Moreover, Aquinas himself refers to the phoenix as an example of something that is generated and corrupted despite being alone in its species.[61]

If Aquinas means to say that he can know the essences of things without knowing whether the essence in question corresponds to any really existing thing, then Aquinas's use of human being as an example is just baffling. For we would have to read Aquinas as saying something like "I (a human being) can know what the essence of human beings is even if I did not know if anything is a human being." Aquinas would be involved in a problem of self-reference. If Aquinas knows what a human being is, and given that he is himself a human being, how could he possibly be ignorant about the very existence of human beings at all? It is more plausible that Aquinas means that he can know what his essence is and yet realize there is nothing about that essence that requires him to have ever come into existence.

What of Aquinas's claim that if something does have an essence that is identical to its existence, then it must be unique and primary? He argues as follows:

> For it is impossible for there to be a plurality of something unless this is the result

[59]*De Animalibus* XXIII, available in English as *Albert the Great: Man and the Beasts, De Animalibus Books 22-26*, tr. James Scanlon (Binghamtom, New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1987), 288 ff.
[60]Clement of Rome, *1 Clement*, 25. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies* Book 12, 7:22.
[61]*Sententia Super Librum De Caelo et Mundo*, III, 8.

> of the addition of some difference, as when the nature of a genus is multiplied into different species, or when a form is received into diverse bits of matter, as when a species is multiplied into diverse individuals, or when one thing is absolute and the others are received instances of the thing, for example, if there were a warmth that is separated (i.e., separate from any body) it would, by virtue of this separation, be separate from any warmth that is not separated (from a body). However, if there is something that is just its existence, such that it is subsisting existence itself [*ipsum esse subsistens*] then this existence could not receive some difference, because then it would not be existence alone but existence plus the addition of some other form. Even less could it receive some matter, because then it would not be subsistent but would be a material thing. Hence we must say that such a thing that is its own existence cannot exist unless there is only one such thing.[62]

The idea here is that there are three ways of accounting for plurality among things. As you have by now seen, there is a plurality of species within a genus on account of the addition of the specific difference. And within a species there is a plurality of individuals on account of the addition of matter. Aquinas also introduces a third way, reminiscent of Platonism, that there may be a plurality among things. Namely, there could be one instance of something that is separate from the conditions by which every other instance of the thing exists. For example, if there is a Platonic form of warmth, then it is not the warmth of this thing or that thing, but just warmth itself; and there is a plurality of warmths because every other instance of warmth is the warmth of this or that thing.

Aquinas thinks we can rule out there being a plurality of things whose existence is

[62] *DE* 4.105-121.

identical to its essence. The first way of multiplying something, by means of adding a difference, can't apply here because the difference would have to be something outside of existence, or non-existent. Yet what does not exist can make no difference at all. The second way, by adding matter, would undermine the very notion of subsisting existence because, strictly speaking, material beings aren't subsistent; they depend on their matter for existence.

Aquinas does not again mention the third way of multiplying something, where one instance is separate from all others and the others are each individuated by some other condition (such as matter). Probably this is because Aquinas thought this describes the relation between divine existence and any other kind of existence. God's existence is entirely separate. Each existing thing, however, has an existence that is the existence of this or that particular thing. Each thing whose existence is separate from its essence, that is, everything other than God, receives its existence, thinks Aquinas, from the prime existence, which is one.

And so we have here, in this early treatise, an answer from Aquinas to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter. How is it that God exists and yet is not one of the existent things in the universe? The answer is that to speak of an existent thing in the universe is to speak of something whose essence, its what-it-is, is distinct and different from its existence, its that-it-is. This is an idea that Aquinas continued to develop throughout his life.

1.2.2. Sentences Commentary

The *Sentences of Peter Lombard* were written about one hundred years before Aquinas began his own career, and by the time Aquinas was working they had become a kind of standard text book for theology students. To be given the title Master of Theology, it was expected that one would write a commentary on this text. Aquinas was no exception. Some of his commentary he would

have written around the same time that he produced his *De ente et essentia*. It's unknown whether he wrote about divine simplicity first in the *Sentences* commentary or first in the *De ente,* and my reason for discussing the *De ente* first has only to do with the convenience resulting from his introduction of a lot of technical vocabulary in that work.[63] Nevertheless, he does make additional points about the matter in the *Sentences* commentary, and so now I turn to that text.[64]

Peter Lombard titled Book I, Distinction 8 of his text "On the Truth, Immutability, Unchangability, and Simplicity of God's Essence." In his commentary, Aquinas devotes Question 4 of Distinction 8 to the simplicity of God; then, somewhat uncharacteristically, he adds another Question about whether simplicity is found in creatures. One reason it might strike readers of Aquinas as uncharacteristic to talk about simplicity in God prior to simplicity in creatures is that, in other texts such as *De Ente Et Essentia*, Aquinas often prefers to use considerations about creatures as his in-road, so to speak, for considerations about divine perfections. This is the only place Aquinas devotes a specific space to discussing creaturely simplicity. On the one hand, Aquinas sees himself as following Lombard's own division of the issue.[65] However, by talking about simplicity in creatures, Aquinas finds that he has the philosophical tools, so to speak, to explain how divine simplicity sets God apart from creatures.

In *In Sent*. 8,4,1 Aquinas provides three arguments, soon to be familiar to readers, for God's simplicity:[66]

1) If something is not simple, then its composite parts are prior to it. But nothing is prior

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[63]Kenny refers to an opinion that the *De Ente* was written before Aquinas reached Distinction 25 of Book I of the commentary on the *Sentences* (*Aquinas on Being*, 51). This isn't helpful, however, since the treatment of divine simplicity comes in Distinction 8.

[64]Citations refer to the Mandonnet and Moos edition (abbreviated MM) (Paris, Léthellieux, 1929). Also provided are page numbers for the fine English translation of Book I, Distinction 8 by E. M. Marcierowski published as *Thomas Aquinas's Earliest Treatment of the Divine Essence* (abbreviated ETDE), (Binghamton, New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1998).

[65]*In Sent*. 8,4,*Divisio Secundae Partis* (MM 217, ETDE 89). Aquinas notes that Lombard first considers simplicity as it is excluded from corporeal creatures, and second as it excludes the spiritual.

[66]MM 218-19; ETDE 93.

to God. Therefore, God must be simple.

2) Whatever is first and gives being to others does not depend on something else for its being. This is because if something depends on something else for its being, whatever it depends on would be first instead. But God is the first and it is God who gives being to everything else. Yet, if something is not simple, then for its being it must depend on something else, namely its composite parts, for its being. After all, if you take something apart, it no longer exists. So, God is simple.

3) A property is always more perfect in a cause than in an effect. So, the first cause of being must have being (*habet esse*) in the most perfect way. And, if the first cause of being has being in the most perfect way, then the way it has it is the way by which it is entirely its own being. Thus, God is his own being (*Deus est suum esse*). But in things that are not simple, being follows upon their component parts, none of which will be being itself. So, God must be simple.

It is worth noting that the first of the two above arguments take it as a premise that God is the first being. This is different from the *De ente,* where Aquinas argued that if anything were to be absolutely simple, then it would have to be first. Here, he argues in the other direction. This is because, following Lombard's text, Aquinas takes it as having already been established that God is the first being.[67] Moreover, Aquinas takes it that his readers by this point in the *Sentences* Commentary understand God to be the first cause, which becomes a premise in the third argument above. So, while Aquinas has discussed a number of other claims about God, such as eternality and immutability, prior to simplicity in this text, his premises for divine simplicity take for granted only the claims that God is the first being and first cause. As we will see, there is only one text where he does otherwise.

While the third argument given above for divine simplicity mentions that God is his own

[67]Cf., *In. Sent*, Prologus,1,2, ad. 2 (MM 10).

being, Aquinas does not there explicitly say that God *alone* is his own being. What is to prevent some creature from being identical to its own being? Aquinas takes this up in the first article of Question 5 of Distinction 8, which is titled "Whether any creature is simple."[68]

Aquinas begins his argumentation in this article with what might appear to be a puzzling statement: "Everything which proceeds from God in a diversity of essence falls short of his simplicity. However, from the fact that it fails to be simple, it does not mean that it falls into composition." Given that simplicity just is a lack of composition, what can Aquinas possibly mean by this? To shed light on his comment, he follows with the following analogy: "Just as something fails to be the highest good, it does not follow that it itself falls into any badness." The idea seems to be that something call fall short of the simplicity proper to God (*deficit a simplicitate ejus*)[69] and yet not necessarily be composite in every way whatsoever. And this is what Aquinas goes on to claim.

There are two kinds of creatures to be considered, Aquinas tells us, when thinking about simplicity with regard to created things. The first kind of creature is that which has being complete in itself (*habet esse completum in se*). Here Aquinas seems to be thinking of ordinary substances that are composed of matter and form, and his example of human beings suggests as much. Because such creatures can never be the first being, and because Aquinas takes himself to have established that only the first being can be its own *esse* (see argument 3 above), Aquinas thinks that all such created beings will be composed of *esse*, or that by which it is (*quo est*), and quiddity, or what it is (*quod est*). And, he tells us, this will be true of creatures both corporeal and spiritual, the latter of which present additional questions he returns to in Article 2.

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[68]MM 226-7; ETDE 109.

[69]Note the possessive pronoun *ejus*: It is *his* simplicity that created things fall short of, further reinforcing the idea that there is a simplicity proper to God but leaving open the possibility of other kinds of composition that can be lacking in creatures.

The second kind of creature Aquinas discusses is the kind which does not have being in itself. He gives three examples of the sort of thing he has in mind: Prime matter, forms, and universals. What all three have in common is that Aquinas thinks that while they are each real in the sense that they can be meaningfully talked about and true statements can be made about them, they can never be found on their own in nature. Prime matter is the potential stuff out of which every material substance is made, Aquinas thinks, yet you will never find a glob of prime matter that isn't formed as some particular kind of stuff, even if that stuff is very basic, such as hydrogen molecules. Form is what prime matter has to combine with to become actual matter, and yet you will never find any forms that are not forming some matter. Likewise with universals, such as humanity. I can say plenty of true things about humanity (such as "Humanity is what allows us to make great works of art that beasts can't"), but I can never find humanity; I can only find individual humans who share in humanity.

So, each of these are real in some sense and yet are the sorts of things that, in themselves, are not composite with something else; rather, they are the components which are found in composite things. These things, prime matter and forms and universals, are what Aquinas tells us do not fall short of simplicity in such a way as to be composite. So how does Aquinas think these incomplete beings fall short of divine simplicity? In two ways: First, Aquinas notes that, unlike God, these things are potentially divisible. Prime matter and forms are divided up among many substances and universals are divided up among all those who partake in them. Second, unlike God, these incomplete beings are able to be components (*componobile*) with other things. As to where forms and universals and prime matter only have complete being when they are components of actual substances, God alone has complete being and actuality in himself without needing to be (or even able to be) a component of some other substance.

These considerations lead Aquinas, in the second article of Question 5, to a special problem concerning human souls and angels.[70] The human soul, according to Aquinas, is the form of a human body. And so, like the forms considered above as incomplete beings, one might think that the human soul lacks composition. On the other hand, Aquinas thinks that human souls, like angels, are complete beings able to exist without coming into composition with anything like prime matter; for both theological and philosophical reasons Aquinas holds that the human soul continues to exist after the death of the body of which it was the form. And so it would seem that the human soul must be composite in the way that the first group of beings discussed above, that is, complete beings, are composite. Which is it?

Aquinas begins resolving this problem by noting that the human soul cannot be composed of matter and form. If it were composed of matter and form, it would not be itself the form of a human being, since matter cannot be a form. He then argues as follows:

> If we find some quiddity which is not composed of matter and form, then that quiddity is either its own being [*ipsum esse*], or it is not. If it is its own being, then it will be the essence of God himself, who is his own being, and it will be entirely simple. If it is not its own being, then it follows that it has being acquired from another, as is the case with every created quiddity. And because it has been posited that this being does not subsist in matter, it will not be the being-in-another that is acquired by it, but rather being-in-itself is acquired by it. And thus the quiddity itself will be the what-it-is [*quod est*] and its being will be that-by-which-it-is [*quo est*]. And because everything that does not have something from itself is possible with respect to what it does not have from itself, any such quiddity that receives

[70]MM 227-32; ETDE 113-17.

> being from something else will be possible with respect to that being and with respect to that by which it has being, in which there will be found no potency. […] Hence an angel or a soul can be called a simple quiddity, nature, or form, insofar as their quiddity is not composed out of diverse elements; but nevertheless there does come to be a twofold composition, namely, of quiddity and being.

What Aquinas is driving at in this passage is similar to the point he made in *De ente et essentia*. Something not composed of matter and form can be multiplied either by introduction of some principle of individuation or else it is identical to its own existence, as in the case of God. Since we have posited ourselves to be talking about human souls (and, implicitly, souls once separated from their bodies), we can't say that such spiritual substances are identical to their own existence, since they are not God. Rather, they are related to God as that which receives something to which it was previously only in a state of possibility to that which has that same something of itself essentially. God has his existence of himself essentially; everything else receives its existence from God and does not have it of itself essentially. Thus, separated souls and angels are composed of an essence and of an existence which they otherwise had only potentially.

The *Sentences* Commentary is the only text where Aquinas explicitly addresses simplicity on the side of the creature. Once again, divine simplicity is the lack of distinction between existence and essence. Those creatures that have complete being in themselves, whether corporeal or spiritual, are always composed of an essence distinct from their existence. The only oddity about this text is the discussion of incomplete beings, such as forms, universals, and prime matter. Aquinas never says that these are composed of existence and essence (though he does not

deny it, either); he merely points out that these fall short of divine simplicity by virtue of the fact that they do not have complete being and are such that they enter into composition with others. But this need not worry us; possibly, Aquinas does not touch on this again because he rarely sees it as necessary to talk about these kinds of things in the same way he talks about natural substances of the kind we find in the world. For the moment, it suffices to say that once again God's identity with his own existence is the feature by which Aquinas distinguishes God from creation.

1.2.3. *Summa Contra Gentiles*

Aquinas began writing his *Summa Contra Gentiles* around 1259. Divided into four books, the first represents Aquinas's attempt to provide an account of what we can say about God working from purely philosophical principles, that is, from principles that do not depend on divine revelation. Accordingly, after some prefatory remarks (Chapters 1-12), Aquinas begins this investigation with proofs that there must be a first being, whom we call God (Chapter 13). Then, after noting that we know God by way of remotion (Chapter 14), he argues that the first being whose existence was established in Chapter 13 must be eternal (Chapter 15). After this, Aquinas devotes a dozen chapters to arguments to the effect that an eternal first being must be simple (Chapters 16-27). The rest of Book I concerns other things that Aquinas believes we can say about God. Here, however, I wish to only look at the progression from God's existence to his eternity to his simplicity. At the end of this chapter, in Section 1.3, I will return to the *Summa Contra Gentiles* to consider a special problem in this text regarding divine simplicity.

The bulk of Chapter 13, regarding proofs for the existence of God, deals with two arguments that Aquinas attributes to Aristotle. The first can be summarized as follows:

1. Anything in a process of change (*motus*)[71] is being changed by something else.

2. Something is in a process of change.

3. Therefore, something is being changed by something else.

4. This something else is either undergoing change or it is not.

5. If it is not, then it is an unchanging changer, which we may call God.

6. If the thing causing the change is undergoing change, then by (1) it is being changed by something else, and we will either proceed like this infinitely or else we will arrive at some unchanged changer.

7. It is impossible to proceed infinitely.

8. Therefore, we must arrive at unchanged changer, which we may call God.

Aquinas spends considerable time defending both Premise 1 and Premise 7, both crucial if the argument is to succeed. However, it is enough that the argument is valid for present purposes.[72]

The second argument that Aquinas attributes to Aristotle also seeks to defend the claim that something is a changer yet is not being changed by anything else. It proceeds as follows:[73]

1. Suppose every changer were being changed by something else.

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[71]In this and the proceeding argument I have rendered *motus* as "change" where many English translators have preferred "motion." This is because, like Aristotle, Aquinas distinguished three kinds of *motus*: Change in place (what we would ordinarily call motion, which is local motion), change in quality (as when something changes temperature or color), and change in size. See Aristotle's *Physics* V, 226a. See also Kenny, *The Five Ways*, 7.

[72]Those interested in some evaluation of this and of the rest of Aquinas's SCG proofs for the existence of God can see Norman Kretzmann's *Metaphysics of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

[73]Again, because I am not here interested in the soundness of Aquinas's proofs for the existence of God, I have attempted the most charitable reconstruction of Aquinas's argument. For a more critical evaluation with an eye toward a lot of nuances, see Kretzmann, *Metaphysics of Theism*, 66-72.

2. If (1) were true, it would be true either in itself or by accident.

3. From (2), we can conclude that any statement that is true neither in itself nor by accident is a false statement.

4. If (1) is true by accident, then it is not necessarily true, and it could possibly be that no changer is changed by something else.

5. Yet, by (1), if a changer is not changed, it does not change anything else, and then there would be no change at all.

6. But Aristotle has shown that there is no time at which there is no change.

7. Since a statement that is false and possible does not lead to a statement that is false and impossible, (1) is not true by accident.

8. On the other hand, if (1) is true in itself, then the changer is changed either by the same kind of change by which it changes something else, or by another.

9. If the changer is moved by the same kind of change by which it changes others, the following awkward situations result: Whatever causes alteration is itself altered; whatever causes healing is itself healed; whatever teaches is itself taught.

10. The examples in (9) are impossible, since something cannot be both possessed and not possessed by the same being at the same time.

11. Yet, if every changer is changed by a different species of change, there will have to be an infinite number of kinds of change.

12. But there cannot be an infinite number of kinds of change.

13. So, (1) is false.

The argument is complicated, to be certain. It relies on a distinction between statements

true of necessity, or in themselves (such as “If some shape is a triangle then it has only three sides”) and those true accidentally (such as “Some plate is triangular” when it could have been any shape at all). Now, consider the statement “Every changer is changed by something else.” Is it true accidentally or in itself? If it turns out neither is the case, then it is false. Yet, if it is true accidentally, Aquinas thinks that this would mean that it is possible that at some time nothing is changing; yet, following Aristotle, Aquinas believes this to be impossible. On the other hand, if it were true necessarily, then either a contradiction follows or else an infinite regress follows. And so Aquinas concludes that in fact there must be some changer itself unchanged.

Aquinas proceeds to provide three shorter arguments for the existence of God in SCG 1,13, but these two Aristotelian proofs provide him, he thinks, with enough to establish God's eternity and, subsequently, his simplicity. Before discussing those arguments, however, I wish to point out again that in SCG 1,14 Aquinas draws our attention to what he calls “the way of remotion.” This just amounts to the claim that much of what Aquinas goes on to say about God will not be indicative of him telling us positive attributes about God, but rather that attributes that we find in created things are not to be found in God. For example, created things exist in time and God does not; created things are composed of parts and God is not.

Why does Aquinas believe that we can deny that God's existence is temporally measurable or that he has a beginning or end? Because, he says, anything that begins or ceases to be does so as the result of some change. And Aquinas thinks he showed in Chapter 13 that God is altogether unchangeable (*omnino immutabliem*). Moreover, Aquinas understands time to just be a measure of change. It is a way of marking how something is before or after some change. So, for an unchangeable being there can be no before or after, that is, no time. From arguments like these we can see that Aquinas, in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, sees divine eternity as closely related to

God as unchangeable, something he presumes himself to have established previously.

Likewise, the following twelve chapters take the establishment of divine eternity for granted when denying that various kinds of composition can be found in God.

As a sort of preface to his treatment of divine simplicity, Aquinas first, in SCG 1,16 and 1,17, rules out the possibility of anything potential in God. More specifically, he argues that in God there can be neither matter nor what he calls "passive potency." Passive potency is just the ability to be changed or acted upon. I have passive potency to be made intoxicated by alcohol, water has a passive potency to become hot and eventually become steam, and hopefully someone has the passive potency to learn about divine simplicity by reading what I am writing. So it is not surprising that in SCG 1,16 Aquinas thinks that God, being unchangeable, lacks passive potency. Moreover, Aquinas hinges the entire argument on what he takes himself to have established about the eternity of God: "If God is eternal, necessarily there is nothing potential in him." The idea is that change takes place in time; so, something not in time cannot change. And since matter is always what is potential to change in something, as I said that Aquinas thought in the discussion of *De ente et essentia*, there can be no matter in God.

Aquinas thinks a composition of act and potency is the precondition for any kind of composition whatsoever. Even angels, as we have already seen, have potentiality with regard to their *esse* according to Aquinas. So, in SCG 1,18 Aquinas naturally declares that God, lacking any sort of potentiality because he is eternal and unable to not exist, lacks any kind of composition.

Some of the kinds of composition that Aquinas rules out with regard to God in the following chapters of SCG are not surprising. Nor were they original to Aquinas's thought. For example, since every material body, as something extended, has parts, it follows that the non-

composite God cannot be a body (SCG 1,20). Likewise, since accidents of a thing are always caused, Aquinas can easily argue that God cannot be composed of substance and accident since nothing can causally act on God (SCG 1,23). Nor, if Aquinas has been so far correct, can God be in a genus, since each species in a genus is determined by some specific difference to which it must stand in potential toward (SCG 1,24 and 1,25).

More central to Aquinas's ideas about divine simplicity are the conclusions he draws in SCG 1,21 and 1,22. In the first of those chapters, Aquinas argues that God is his own essence. His reasoning is straight-forward: If something is not its own essence, then it is composite. God is not composite. So God is his own essence. His defense of the first premise is also easy to understand: "If a thing has in it nothing other than its essence then all it has is its essence, and so the thing just is its essence; and if a thing were not its essence, it would have something outside its essence, and so would be composite." Put another way, if a thing has anything in addition to its essence, whatever that additional thing is makes it by definition composite.

Aquinas, I've noted, believed that angels were things identical to their essence. Yet, Aquinas believed angels are composite. What makes both of these things true of angels, for Aquinas, is that outside of their essence angels also have *esse*, or existence. In SCG 1,22, Aquinas argues that the first being, God, cannot be composite even in this fashion. His line of thought throughout this chapter is that God, being the first being who cannot not be, cannot depend on anything else for existence. Yet, whatever a thing has that is not entailed by its essence comes to it from some other cause. So, existence must be entailed by God's essence. As Aquinas writes at the beginning of SCG 1,22:

It was shown above that there is a being whose being is through itself necessary. If

> this being, which is necessary, is in an essence not identical to it, either it is repugnant to and not compatible with its essence (as it is repugnant to whiteness to exist of itself), or it is compatible and appropriate with its essence (as it is appropriate for whiteness to exist in something else). In the former case, the necessary being will have an essence inappropriate to it (just as it is inappropriate for whiteness to exist outside of something which is white). In the latter case, either (i) this being depends on its essence, (ii) both the being and its essence depend on some other cause, or (iii) the essence depends on the thing's existence. Both (i) and (ii) are contrary to that which is a necessary being, because whatever depends on something else is not a necessary being. From (iii) it follows that essence is added accidentally to a thing which is through itself necessary; for whatever follows after the thing's being will be accidental to it, and thus will not be its essence. Therefore God has no essence that is not his existence.[74]

The gist of Aquinas's argument here seems to be that if the relation between God and his essence is to be in any way appropriate (as it is appropriate for whiteness to only exist in something, never to exist as just whiteness itself), there are only two possibilities: God's essence and existence are one and the same, or they are distinct in one of three ways.[75] All three of these ways in which they might be distinct, however, would lead us to believe that either God somehow depends on something else for existence or else that God's essence is a mere accident, and thus not really his essence at all. This leaves us, according to Aquinas, with the claim that

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[74]*SCG* 1,23.

[75]Kretzmann proposes a possible interpretation of this passage in which Aquinas means not to say that God's essence and existence are identical, but that God's essence merely entails, among perhaps other things, that God is real. However, like Kretzmann, I ultimately find this interpretation less plausible given what Aquinas says about the matter in other places. See Kretzmann, *Metaphysics of Theism*, 121-127.

God's existence and essence are identical.

The *Summa Contra Gentiles* and the *Compendium Theologiae* are unique among Aquinas's writings in that some of what they have to say about divine simplicity relies on a prior proof for God's eternity. From God as immovable Aquinas concludes God is eternal, from God as eternal Aquinas concludes that God lacks anything potential, and from that Aquinas concludes that God is not composite. So one might think that eternity can do as good a job as simplicity in answering the question this chapter is about, "What distinguishes God from creation?" I will return to this consideration at the end of the present chapter. For the moment, two things are worth noting: First, as you will soon see, these two texts, likely written around the same time, are the only exception to the rule regarding this. Elsewhere proofs for divine eternity depend on proofs for divine simplicity, not vice versa. Second, the pinnacle of Aquinas's account of divine simplicity, that is, the claim that God is his own subsistent existence, *ipsum esse subsistens*, is independently motivated by Aquinas's conviction that God is a necessary being, regardless of what he thinks about God's eternity.

1.2.4. *Compendium Theologiae*

Dating the composition of the *Compendium Theologiae* has not been without controversy. The current consensus, however, has been that what Aquinas has to say here about the divine predicates likely was written around the same time that he was completing *Summa Contra Gentiles,* around 1264-65. Such a dating would make sense, given the similarity in the ordering of divine predicates between the two texts.[76]

The *Compendium* is like the *Summa Contra Gentiles* in that it places God's eternity prior

[76]For some discussion on the dating of this text, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Vol. 1: The Person and His Work*, tr. Robert Royal (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2005): 164-67.

to his simplicity. There is an important difference, however. In the *Compendium*, Aquinas puts yet another predicable after his argument for the existence of God but prior to his argument for divine eternity: Divine immutability. The reason I draw attention to this difference now will become clear by the end of this chapter.

Chapter 3 of the *Compendium* contains a very short argument for God's existence. Oderberg summarizes the argument concisely:

1. Everything that is changing is being changed by something else.
2. But the series of changers and things changing cannot be infinitely long; therefore
3. There must be a first cause of all change, which we call God.[77]

Already you can see that this is an argument condensed from *Summa Contra Gentiles*, and you will see yet another variation of it in what Aquinas says in the *Summa Theologiae* below. For now, let's look at how this argument leads to Aquinas's conclusion in Chapter 4, that the first cause of all change must be itself entirely incapable of change.

The argument goes like this: Suppose God were changed. He is either changed by something else, or else he changes himself. If God is changed by something else, he would no longer be the first changer, which is what he said that he means when he uses the word "God." And if he is changed by himself, he is either changing and changed in the same respect or changer in one respect and changed in another. But since change always implies something being changed from potentiality to actuality by something in actuality, and since nothing can be both potential and actual in the same respect and at the same time, the first option can be ruled out.

[77]David S. Oderberg, "'Whatever is Changing is Being Changed by Something Else': A Reappraisal of Premise of One of the First Way,' in *Mind, Method, and Morality: Essays in Honor of Anthony Kenny*, ed. John Cottingham and Peter Hacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 143.

Likewise, if one part of God were to change some other part of God, it would not be God himself who were the first mover, but rather that part of God which is doing the changing. Thus, the source of all change can never be in any way changed.

In Chapter 5 Aquinas is able to quickly infer that God is therefore eternal, and this in much the same way as he does in *Summa Contra Gentiles*: Whatever begins to be or ceases to be does so on account of some change taking place; so, whatever cannot be changed can have neither a beginning nor an end in time. The following three chapters then tease out some details of divine eternity: That God's existence is everlasting, that there is no succession of events in God, and that God's existence is not contingent upon anything else.

With God's immutability and eternity dealt with, Aquinas then turns to the three issues which are relevant to this investigation: God's simplicity (Chapter 9), his simplicity with regard to his essence (Chapter 10), and his identity with his own existence (Chapter 11). As is characteristic of the *Compendium*, each of his arguments for these claims is quite short.

Aquinas says in Chapter 9, because all composition hinges on a distinction between potentiality and actuality. But an unchanged changer has no potentiality. Moreover, any simple being must be identical to its essence: For anything added to its essence would, in virtue of the fact that it is added, entail that the thing has become composite. Lastly, Aquinas argues that since existence is what all things naturally tend toward (that is, we speak of things insofar as they are rather than that they are not), the source of all change must be its own existence: For since God lacks any potentiality, his own ultimate act must just be existence. Thus, insofar as God's pure act is what is responsible for things tending toward existence, and because there can be no composition in God, Aquinas says that even with regard to existence and essence God is simple.

Like many of the arguments in *Compendium Theologiae*, Aquinas's arguments about

divine simplicity move quickly, are less concerned with explaining details, and spend no time responding to possible objections. Nonetheless, we see here that Aquinas sees God as *ipsum esse subsistens*, and he thinks he can conclude this from his consideration of God as the source of change that lacks any potentiality. In fact, even though divine eternity once again precedes simplicity in its place in the discussion, simplicity is nevertheless independently motivated. And, since Aquians presumably thinks God alone can lack any admixture of potentiality, it is God as *ipsum esse subsistens* that allows us to distinguish God from creation.

1.2.5. *De Potentia*

Having completed the *Summa Contra Gentiles* around 1264, Aquinas next found himself as regent master at Santa Sabina, in Rome. It was during this time that he presided over a number of public disputations, the first of which comes down to us as the *De Potentia*, or *Disputed Questions on the Power of God* (QDP). Likely this work dates to around 1265-6. While all 11 Articles in Chapter 7 of *De Potentia* deal with issues pertaining to divine simplicity, only the first two need concern us. The first article presents familiar arguments for ruling out composition in God. The second asks "Whether God's substance, or essence, is identical to his existence (*esse*)."

Aquinas provides three arguments for God's simplicity in DP 7,1:

1) "All beings come from one prime being, whom we call God." And since God makes all things actual, he must be actual, and being produced by nothing else, he must have no potentiality. But every composite is a mixture of actuality and potentiality. Therefore, God, who is only actuality and in no way potential, is not composite.

2) Every composite is (obviously, perhaps) made up of different parts. But different parts

> are not by their nature brought together unless some prior agent acts on them. Yet, nothing is prior to God and so no prior agent can act on him. And so God cannot be composed of parts.
>
> 3) The first being, God, must be the most perfect being and supremely good. Whatever is supremely F will lack nothing with regard to F, and so God will lack nothing with regard to goodness. However, in composite things goodness results from the composition of its parts, and not just from any particular composite part. So the goodness of the whole is different in some way from the goodness of its parts. So to be supremely good, that is, to lack nothing with regard to goodness, will be to lack parts. Therefore, God is simple.

The first of these arguments is reminiscent of what we saw in *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Whereas in that text Aquinas derives eternity from God as *purus actus* and then derives his simplicity from his eternity, here Aquinas cuts out the middle man of eternity, so to speak. The second argument, likewise, is the same as an argument Aquinas had already made in SCG.

The third argument is less intuitive, and it is a variation on a similarly unclear argument also found in SCG. In the earlier text, Aquinas claimed that the nobler something is, the simpler it is.[78] Here he tries to elaborate on that line of thinking by explicitly showing that the goodness of composite wholes derives from the goodness of each of its parts. Still, it is difficult to make a clear and convincing case for what Aquinas means based on the text in *De Potentia*. The idea seems to be that in composite things, we only call the whole good insofar as each part is good. A good car will have good wheels, good steering, and so on. But for a thing to be supremely good, its goodness cannot be contingent on something else, such as its parts. So, the supremely good

[78] *SCG* 1,18.

thing, God, will lack parts.

Arguments that God is not composite, however, are not of themselves enough to say what it is that Aquinas is driving at when he talks about God's simplicity. More has to be said. After all, if one believes in angels (as Aquinas did), one might ask questions inspired by the above arguments: Being immaterial, what are the different component parts of angels that an agent must act on to bring them into existence? And what is it that angels are potential to? The answers to these questions, of course, have to do with the distinction in angels between existence and essence. So, while not explicitly raising any such questions about angels, Aquinas does turn, in DP 7,2, to the identity of existence and essence in God.

Among the various texts where Aquinas argues that God is *ipsum esse subsistens*, the argument in *De Potentia* is unique. The idea is that if more than one kind of thing can produce the same effect, then all the things able to produce the effect are caused to have that ability by some single common higher cause.[79] Aquinas's example, awkward by standards of modern science, is that ginger and pepper both produce heat in the mouth, and so their ability to do so must be caused by some higher cause (which he claims is fire). Yet everything has, in some sense, existence as an effect: Fire makes heat exist, builders make houses exist, and so on. Since a thing causes something according to the essence of the cause, God's essence must just be existence.

Recall that Aquinas said that the word "being" can refer to either the being of things that fall into the ten categories, or it can refer to what is signified by the copula in a proposition. Aquinas repeats this distinction when addressing an objection to the claim that God's essence is identical to his existence.[80] The objection notes that if we can know that God is, we should be

[79] This is also the crucial premise in the Fourth Way argument for God's existence in *ST*.
[80] *QDP* 7,2,2.

able to know what God is unless what he is were distinct from his being. Yet, Aquinas was always careful to insist both that we can know God exists and yet are unable to know what God is. His reply is that when we refer to the being of God we are using being in the second of his two senses, that is, to refer to the truth of the copula. However, it is not in this sense that Aquinas thinks that God's essence and existence are identical.

But, in his reply to the fourth objection, Aquinas seems to tell us God's essence is not existence in the first sense, either. This objector argues that since being is common to all things, if God's essence were being then it would be impossible to distinguish God from anything. Aquinas's short reply to this is a mere 30 Latin words to the effect that God's being just is different from the being of everything else, and so of course God is distinct from everything else. Everything other than God exists on account of common being (*esse commune*), and Aquinas thinks that God's being is not common being.

Anthony Kenny thinks that Aquinas is just being inconsistent here.[81] After all, the body of the article argued that since everything has being as an effect in some way or other, the one common cause of all things must just be *esse*. But what *esse* means when referring to the effects of all created things and what it means when referring to their cause is quite different.

I'm not convinced this is as devastating for Aquinas as Kenny would have us believe. The common *esse* of created things is being as it falls into the ten categories, and it would be very strange if Aquinas thought that God, who is the source of all the categories, was in one of them. In fact, the very next article of *DP* 7 goes over familiar ground and denies that God can be in any genus. Aquinas is simply noting that the source of created being is in no way a member of the set of created things, that God's being is not the sort of thing we can mentally grasp and talk about in the same way we talk about common *esse*. And this should hardly be surprising, given

[81] *Aquinas on Being*, 116-121.

that the whole point of Aquinas's account of divine simplicity is to say how it is that God is distinct from, not a part of, the universe.

1.2.6. *Summa Theologiae*

The *Summa Theologiae* is often taken to distill Aquinas's most mature thinking on the numerous philosophical and theological issues that he wrestled with throughout his life. What he writes here about divine simplicity was likely written some seven years after he wrote about the same topic in *Summa Contra Gentiles*. In *Summa Theologiae* simplicity is the first of eight divine predicates that Aquinas argues for immediately after his famous Five Ways for knowing that God exists. Notably, divine eternity no longer has the priority that it had in *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Compendium Theologiae*. In fact, it is now the penultimate item in the list of divine predicates, with only divine unity coming after it. Peter Weigel describes the rôle of divine simplicity in *Summa Theologiae* thus:

> Simplicity leads the entire discussion of the divine predicates and its claims consistently show up in arguments for the others in qq. 4-11. God as pure actuality argues for absolute perfection in q.4 a.1. God as subsistent existence argues for the divine infinity in q.7 a.1. Pure actuality and absolute simplicity provide the first two arguments for divine immutability in q.9 a.1. Divine eternity in q.10 a.2 comes from immutability.[82]

And, he adds, Aquinas sees divine simplicity as "the ontological precondition of the other major

[82]Peter Weigel, *Aquinas on Simplicity* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang AG, 2008), 34.

divine predicates... the hallmark of God's self-sufficiency and transcendence."[83]

Before I explain how Aquinas derives his claims about simplicity in 1a,3 from the arguments for God's existence in 1a,2, the following chart might be helpful. In the first column the number of the article of 1a,3 is provided along with the claim Aquinas seeks to make. In the second column I list the number of arguments he makes and which prior claims he is depending on as premises, either claims from the Five Ways or from another article in the divine simplicity question.

[83]Ibid., 37.

Article 1: God is not a body.	Three arguments that depend on the First Way and Fourth Way.
Articlde 2: God is not composed of matter and form.	Three arguments that depend on the First Way, Second Way, and Fourth Way.
Article 3: God is his own essence.	One argument that depends on Article 2.
Article 4: God's existence and essence are identical.	Three arguments that depend on the Second Way, Article 1, and Article 3.
Article 5: God is not in a genus.	Three arguments that depend on the First Way and Article 4.
Article 6: There are no accidents in God.	Three arguments that depend on the First Way, Second Way, and Fourth Article.
Article 7: God is altogether simple.	Five arguments that depend on the preceding six articles, the First Way, the Second Way, and the Fourth Way.
Article 8: God does not enter into composition with things.	Three arguments that depend on the Second Way and Fourth Way.

As a glance at the above chart shows, only three of the Five Ways play important rôles in the *ST* account of divine simplicity: The First Way, Second Way, and Fourth Way. So, a brief word about these arguments.

The First Way is basically an abbreviated version of the first argument from change that we saw in *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Things are undergoing change because something is

changing them; and change is just when something which is potentially F becomes actually F. So things are changed by things which are already actual with respect to the change taking place. But to block the infinite regress, there must be some first changer who is purely actual.

The Second Way is similar to the First but, instead of tracing the source of change back to a first changer, Aquinas seeks to trace the source of efficient causation back to a first efficient cause, which is God. Some efficient causes do cause change, but Aquinas thinks that efficient causation is a wider genus than just causes of change (*motus*), and so he sees his Second Way as doing more than the First. For example, efficient causes can also cause things to remain the way they are: The chair I am sitting on prevents me from falling to the ground, the chair's legs keep it in place, and so on. And Aquinas thinks that there must be a first efficient cause of anything whatsoever.

The Fourth Way depends partly on a metaphysical notion sometimes referred to as "the transcendentals of being."[84] The idea is that insofar as a thing exists that thing can be said to also be good, true, and noble. So, being, goodness, truth, and nobility are transcendentals. Suppose, for example, that a bird were unable to fly. We might then say that such a bird isn't a very good bird, because a good bird is one that flies well. So Aquinas would say that such a bird was also somehow deficient with regard to its existence: It has less being than birds that can do what it is birds do. And Aquinas thinks we make comparative, evaluative statements about the world all the time: This is better than that, what the Senator said is closer to the truth than what the President said, and so on. But all of this is possible, according to Aquinas, only if there is something that is the most good, true, and noble. And if his ideas about transcendentals are correct, whatever is most good, true, and noble must also be the maximum with regard to being.

[84]For a good study of this topic as it appears in the work of Thomas Aquinas, see Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (E.J. Brill: Leiden, 1996).

And this maximal being, no one will be surprised, Aquinas thinks is what we call God.

The First Way, I noted, concludes that what we call God must be pure actuality. And earlier I noted that Aquinas thinks that matter is something potential. That is, it can potentially take on any number of forms to become some particular substance. So it should be obvious that if all that is right, then God is not something material. This is how Aquinas begins his ST treatment of divine simplicity in the first two articles of 1a,3. Moreover, Aquinas thinks that things act the way they do not in virtue of their matter but in virtue of their form. And he thinks that his Second Way argument showed that God is what is responsible for anything acting in any way whatsoever. Thus he concludes that God is pure form with no admixture of anything material.

To show that God is identical to his own essence, Aquinas returns to an argument he deploys throughout his career. If things composed of matter and form are individuated within their respective species in virtue of their individuating matter, what is to be said of things not composed of matter and form? These forms, Aquinas thinks in *ST* 1a3,3, must be individuated through themselves (*ipsae formae per se individuantur*). Aquinas also concludes in this article that God is identical to his own divinity and life and anything else we truly predicate of him.

But the most important article of the question, at least for our purposes, is *ST* 1a,3,4, which contains three arguments to the effect that God's essence and existence are identical. These arguments can be summarized as follows:

1) Anything that a thing has other than its essence is caused by either the thing's essence or by some external agent.[85] So, in things whose existence is other than their essence, it follows

[85]The former, that is things other than essence that are caused by the essence, are what Aquinas calls *propria*. His typical example is the ability of human beings to laugh. Laughter is not the essence of humans. Humans are not the

that their existence is either caused by their essence or else is caused by some external agent. And it is impossible for anything to be a sufficient cause of its own existence. Thus in all things whose existence is caused, existence and essence differ. But God is the first efficient cause. So, in God existence and essence are identical.

2) Forms, or essences, are made actual by *esse*. Therefore *esse* stands to essence as actuality stands to potentiality. But it was shown that in God there is no potentiality. Thus his essence does not differ from his *esse*.

3) Whatever has F but is not F itself has it by participation.[86] So whatever has existence, without being existence itself, is an existent by participation. Now if God is his own essence but not also his own existence, he will exist by participation. But something that exists by participation cannot be the first being, as God has been shown to be. Thus, God is not only identical to his own essence, but also his own existence.

So once again you will see that, for Aquinas, a first being (and a first being alone) must be *ipsum esse subsistens*. In the first of the three arguments above, Aquinas argued that to be caused (as all creation is) is to have an essence that cannot be responsible for existence, as to where God is his own existence; in the second argument, he argues that to be in any way potential (as all creation is with regard to existence) is to have an essence distinct from existence, while in God there is nothing potential; and in the third argument Aquinas tries to show that to be entirely subsistent, depending upon nothing else for existence, entails that the first being, and the first being alone, have an existence identical to its essence.

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laughing animal, but the rational animal. Yet, Aquinas thinks, the ability to laugh, which depends on the ability to comprehend jokes, is something only a rational animal can do. An example of what Aquinas has in mind by the latter, of something caused by an external agent, would be when fire causes water to become warm.

[86]To understand this obscure sentence consider: Many things can be hot without being heat itself. The surface of a table is hot, the inside of the oven is hot, boiling water is hot; yet the definition of hot includes nothing about surfaces, ovens, or boiling water. So, each of these in some way participates in heat without being heat itself.

Of course, this does not mean Aquinas believes that God is in the genus "existence." For one thing, Aquinas thinks that there can be no such genus, since there is nothing outside of existence to distinguish it. So, since God is just his own existence, and since existence is not a genus, Aquinas tells us that God is not in a genus (*ST* 1a,3,5). And, being just his own existence with nothing else able to be added to him, no accidents accrue to God, Aquinas argues in *ST* 1a,3,6. With all this said, Aquinas concludes, in *ST* 1a,3,7 that God is altogether simple, for he can find no kind of composition applicable to God, nor can he admit that an uncaused being can be caused to be composite, nor can he find how something lacking potentiality be in any way composite.

1.3. Simplicity Precedes Eternity

This completes my survey of texts in which Aquinas argues that God is identical to his own existence. It has been my contention that Aquinas's ability to distinguish God from creation, and thus his entire philosophy of God, hinges on his ability to argue that God is so supremely simple. If he loses divine simplicity, he loses everything else he has to say about God separate from divine revelation. Yet perhaps you might think that Aquinas has other means for distinguishing God from creation. You may even recall that in two texts, the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and the *Compendium Theologiae*, Aquinas argues for divine eternity first and from eternity argues that God is simple. So, should Aquinas be wrong on divine simplicity, why can he not just rely on divine eternity for distinguishing God from creation? The remainder of this chapter will concern itself with that question.

One straight-forward answer would be to say that Aquinas changed his mind about whether eternity or simplicity ought to be the first divine predicate and that this change of mind

is reflected in his last treatment of the topic, the *Summa Theologiae*.[87] And one might say that such a change of mind is hardly surprising, given Aquinas's shifting theological concerns in his final years. Not long before he died he completed a commentary on a text called *Liber de Causis*. Much like his earlier commentary on a book called *The Divine Names,* this text relies heavily on divine simplicity.[88] Moreover, Aquinas seems to be aware of the influence of the Roman Neo-Platonist Proclus and his book *Elements of Theology* on both *Liber de Causis* and *The Divine Names*.[89] In the *Elements of Theology*, a text Aquinas became familiar with in his later years, Proclus begins his discussion of the First Being by noting its indivisibility. So it is possible that in his later years Aquinas's interest in texts like these caused him to see divine simplicity as more fundamental than divine eternity.

This just tells us that Aquinas's concern with divine simplicity may have had different motivations at different parts of his career. But this still does not answer the question: Why can't Aquinas use eternity as the primary way of distinguishing God from creation? I wish to suggest that Aquinas may have come to believe, by the time he was writing *Summa Theologiae*, that he could not argue for divine eternity until after he had argued for divine simplicity, contrary to what he had tried to do in *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Compendium Theologiae*.

In an important 1991 article, "Aquinas's Parasitic Cosmological Argument," Scott MacDonald noted an important difference between the argument from change as it is presented

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[87]Weigel seems to think there is evidence for this view. See *Aquinas on Divine Simplicity*, 33, n. 9.

[88]Both *Liber De Causis* and *The Divine Names* were texts circulated throughout the Middle Ages and misattributed to incorrect authors. For a long time, *Liber De Causis* was thought to be by Aristotle; *The Divine Names* by Dionysius, the learned scholar that *Acts of the Apostles* has being converted by the apostle Paul. However, by the time Aquinas wrote about each of these texts he seems to have had a pretty good idea that neither of these authors were correct.

[89]Aquinas explicitly discusses Proclus in the preface of his commentary on *Liber de Causis*. See *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, tr. Vincent Guagliardo, Charles Hess, and Richard Taylor (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 4.

in the two *Summae*.[90] The argument from change in *Summa Contra Gentiles* concludes that there is a first, unchangeable changer; however, in *Summa Theologiae* the First Way concludes with a much weaker claim: There is a first, *unchanged* changer. In fact, in the latter work Aquinas devotes an entire question to demonstrating why he thinks that God must be unchangeable (ST 1a,9). There is no such corresponding text in *Summa Contra Gentiles*. As MacDonald puts it:

> The sort of causal series [Aquinas] has in mind in the proof from motion has as a member something, *M*, that is being moved. *M*'s going from being in potentiality with respect to some state *S* to being in actuality with respect to *S* needs to be explained by some primary mover, *P*. All that is required of *P* is that it be in actuality with respect to *S*; *P*'s being in actuality with respect to *S* is what makes *P* the primary mover in this causal series ordered *per se*. So in order to count as a primary mover, as the stopping point in a causal series ordered *per se*, *P* must be unmoved (because it is in actuality) in the relevant respect. But it does not follow from this that *P* must be unmoved (and hence in actuality) in *all* respects.[91]

The idea here is that Aquinas was unwarranted in moving from the fact that something is being changed by another to the conclusion that what is responsible for any change at all is itself incapable of change. To make this further point, he requires additional premises.

You should not be surprised that the additional premises Aquinas relies on in ST 1a,9,1 are bound up with what he takes himself to have established when talking about divine simplicity. When something changes, Aquinas notes, in some way it remains the same and in

[90]Scott MacDonald, "Aquinas's Parasitic Cosmological Argument," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 1 (1991): 119-155.
[91]*Ibid*., 146-7.

some way it changes. For example, I might die my hair red and we would say that part of me, my hair, has changed. But I am still me because everything else is the same. If somehow no part of me remained the same (if I were vaporized by a nuclear blast, say) we would not say that I changed, we would just say that I was no more. So, something is changeable insofar as it is composite. Thus, Aquinas argues, God is in no way changeable.

This has consequences. Remember, in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* Aquinas argued that if something is unchangeable, then, lacking a beginning or an end, it will not be a temporal thing. Thus, Aquinas argues from divine unchangeability to divine eternity. And, as I noted above, from divine eternity Aquinas begins his SCG discussion of divine simplicity.

The *Summa Theologiae*, on the other hand, tells the story differently, so to speak. There Aquinas argues from the proof that there is a first changer to God as supremely simple, that is, that the unchanged changer is identical to his own existence. And from this supreme simplicity, Aquinas argues that God is entirely unchangeable. It is only *then* that Aquinas rounds out his list of divine predicables by noting (as he did in the first *Summa*) that something not subject to change is not subject to time: That is to say, God is eternal.

So, given that Aquinas cannot argue for divine eternity without having first established divine simplicity, and that he was mistaken to try to do so in *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Compendium Theologiae,* we are left to conclude that, on Aquinas's account, we distinguish God from creation by denying any sort of composition is to be found in him. The most radical sort of composition that we deny, the kind of composition that marks every created thing just in virtue of its being a creature and not creator, is the composition of existence and essence. Even angels, on this account, are not simple with regard to their existence. For Aquinas, for God to be "outside the order of existing things" is for God to be *ipsum esse subsistens*: Existence subsisting itself.

Chapter Two: Questions about Existence

In the last chapter we saw Aquinas making statements like "God is identical to his own existence" and "In everything other than God, essence and existence are distinct." And he often uses the phrase "to have existence" (*habere esse*).[92] But what can it mean to "have existence?" Can coherent sense even be made of statements like this? And, if not, can any sense be made of Aquinas's doctrine of divine simplicity? In this chapter, I turn to what contemporary analytic philosophers have often thought about existence; in the following chapters I will return to Aquinas's thinking on divine simplicity to see if it is reconcilable with what we establish regarding existence.

The standard view of existence over at least the past century can be summed up in slogans like "existence is not a real property" and "existence is not a first-level predicate." The most famous defenders of the standard view have been Gottlob Frege (1848-1925), Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), and Willard Van Orman Quine (1908-2000). However, the most forceful arguments that existence is not a real property of individuals was put forth by C.J.F. Williams (1930-1997) in his book *What is Existence?*[93] Thus, in this chapter, I will be summarizing Williams's arguments.

The standard analytic view, however, can be seen as a denial of what might be called "the naïve view" of existence, according to which existence *is* a real property of individuals. Whether it is a successful refutation of the naïve view (I think that it is) will be treated in Chapter Three.

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[92] See, for example, *SCG* 2,37; *SCG* 3,133; *ST* 1a,63,5; and *DP* 7,2.

[93] Williams often implies in his writings that his thoughts on existence are entirely derived from Frege. However, I am not interested in whether Williams correctly interprets Frege or not and will stick as closely as possible to Williams's own text. Regarding possible objections to the Fregean thesis about existence that I address below in 2.4, Williams's responses are not to be found in Frege. Williams also offers reasons to think that the advances made by Russell and Quine (as well as Kant, who anticipated Frege's thesis) run into obstacles; his arguments on this matter are outside the scope of this dissertation. See *What is Existence* Chapters 2 and 8.

Moreover, whether it is a refutation of what Aquinas thinks about *esse* (I think that it is not) will be dealt with in Chapter Four. So, before diving into arguments for the standard analytic view, let me first say exactly what the naïve view is.

2.1. The Naïve View of Existence[94]

The naïve view of existence, which most of this chapter will give reasons for thinking is flawed, is that existence is a real property that individuals have. On this view, the statement "Pope Francis exists" is on par with the statement "Pope Francis is from Argentina." Both statements have an individual for their subject and purport to tell you something about that individual by means of attaching a predicate to the subject term. To cash this out a little more, let's look at some basic features of language.

2.1.1. Things and Words; Properties and Predicates

Suppose you asked me about myself. I might tell you that I am 5'10", weigh 180 lbs, and I am lazy. When I do this, I would be telling you about a thing, myself, by telling you about my properties: my height, weight, and behavioral disposition. I could even have told you I am a human. And then I would have had to tell you about an additional property that I have: My humanity.

So it seems like this is the kind of world we live in. There are things, that is, concrete individuals that can be touched and moved and pushed and studied, and there are the properties of these things. The difference between things and properties is this: Properties can be repeated,

[94] This pejorative sounding label has been adopted even by defenders of the naïve view. See, for example, Colin McGinn, *Logical Properties* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

individual things cannot.[95] People, trees, and marbles can all be 5'10"; but at most one thing can be me. There can be lots of people, which is why we can think of humanity as a property, too; but you know the difference between me and every other person that you know.[96]

This distinction between things and their properties, between what cannot be repeated and what can, is reflected in our language when we speak of subjects and predicates. In the sentence, "Kovacs is a human that is 5'10, 185 lbs., and lazy," the word "Kovacs" is a subject that refers to the thing that is the thing writing this sentence. And the words "human," "5'10," "185 lbs.," and "lazy" are predicates that refer to my properties of height, weight, and disposition. (Below we will see that properties can serve as subjects, too, as when one says "Laziness is common.")

But surely this is too simple. If a property is just something repeatable, what do we do with sentences like "Kovacs was remembered by his students?" Lots of things, hopefully, can be and have been remembered by my students, and so in that sense it is repeatable. Yet being remembered by them seems different from other things that can be repeated, like being a human or being green or being literate. These latter repeatables all tell us something meaningful about an individual. And why talk about properties at all if not to give information about an individual? Yet being remembered by students tells us nothing except, perhaps incidentally, about the students themselves. My grandparents have been dead for a long time; when I tell you "My

[95]It is possible to have *conjunctive properties* which, because of the constituents of the conjunction, cannot be repeated. For example, plenty of people have been President of the United States. Moreover, plenty of people have been the first to do something or other (Neil Armstrong was the first to walk on the moon, Ishmael was the first son of Abraham, and so on). But when you combine the properties "First" and "President of the United States," you have a conjunctive property which cannot be true of more than one person. But the notion of property as something able to be exemplified by more than one thing provides a rough and ready understanding of the difference between properties and individuals.

[96]I am offering here but one simplified way of thinking about properties that, I think, suffices for understanding what I have to say regarding existence. For a good anthology that explores how different analytic philosophers have thought about the notion of a property, see *Properties*, ed. D. H. Mellor and Alex Oliver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

grandparents are remembered by Kovacs" it is impossible that this give you any new information about them since they are not alive anymore.

This is why some philosophers distinguish between real properties and what they call Cambridge properties.[97] The parameters of the distinction are difficult to specify, and at any rate not everyone agrees where to draw the lines, but for our purposes we can say that real properties are those that, when expressed as predicates, provide meaningful information about individuals considered in themselves. Cambridge properties, on the other hand, do not. They make no difference to the subject of which they are predicated. My students can remember me a hundred times a day and I might not be modified in any way by this fact.

2.1.2. Verbs as Predicates and an Account of the Relation Between Words and Properties

So far all the properties we have been considering are ones linguistically expressed by adjectives. But we can also consider actions as properties and take verbs and verb phrases to be predicates. So, in the statement "Sally sees" we predicate "sees" of Sally. Examples of more complex verb phrases turned into predicates would be when we predicate something such as "likes watching television more than listening to opera" of Sally to form the sentence "Sally likes watching television more than she likes listening to opera." So, talk of properties is not limited to adjectival properties; verbs can be predicates and express properties just as well as long as the sentence formed is correct. I mean, for example, that the statement "February drinks" is not correct. "Drinks" just cannot be predicated of months. The difference between the naïve view of existence and the standard analytic view, as I will soon bring to your attention, has to do with what can serve as the subject in statements about existence.

[97] As we will see in the next chapter, Barry Miller makes a lot of use of the distinction between properties proper and Cambridge properties in, for example, *The Fullness of Being* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2002).

So far, then, things look straight-forward. It looks as if any time you take some phrase that refers to an individual (whether you do so with a name, such as "Kovacs," or as a description, such as "The author of the present paragraph") and make a grammatically acceptable sentence out of it, what you have done is used predicates to say that the individual has the properties named by those predicates (with the above mentioned exception for so-called Cambridge properties). The only caveat, so far, to keep in mind is that some predicates are not appropriate to the individual expressed by the subject, such as in the phrase "February drinks." Conveniently, language provides a map to how things in the world are. [98]

2.1.3. Predicates and Predicables: A Warning

Williams thought that questions about existence would be resolved by reflecting on philosophy of language.[99] Thus I have been trying to explain some of the nuts and bolts, so to speak, of how many philosophers think that subjects and predicates work and what they might tell us about individuals and their properties. Yet a superficial understanding of what I have said so far might lead to a confusion when identifying a term as a predicate or a subject. In particular, one might be tempted to think that any term that can be identified as a noun serving the *grammatical* rôle of a subject is the subject being talked about, and whatever else the sentence appears to say about that noun can be identified as a predicate that picks out a property for the subject. But here the grammatical and logical structures of sentences come apart. The importance of this coming apart and its relevance to our discussion of existence will become clear below, but it is important to get ourselves straight on this issue right away.

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[98]If this is a controversial claim, I can only remind the reader of Michael Dummett's saying that "Language may be a distorting mirror, but it is the only mirror we have." *Origins of Analytical Philosophy* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993): 7.

[99]Williams, *What Is Existence*, ix, ff.

To dispel this confusion I need to introduce a distinction between a predicate and a predicable.[100] This distinction may serve no purpose to the grammarian, but it will prove very useful for us. A predicable is any term that *can* be used as a predicate (that is, as a term that tells us about some property that a subject has), even if it is not so used in every such instance. When we learn to diagram sentences as children, we were trained to divide the sentence "No drug is safe" into its grammatical subject, "No drug," and its grammatical predicate, "safe." But logically, this won't do. If logical predicates denote the properties that individuals have, then what individual am I talking about when I tell you "No drug is safe?"

A more robust demonstration of the distinction between predicates and predicables is available if we reflect on the logical operation of negation. Logicians negate statements by placing "It is not the case that" before the statement that they wish to negate. The negation of "Kovacs is lazy" is "It is not the case that Kovacs is lazy." And the negation of "No drug is safe" is "It is not the case that no drug is safe."[101] No statement and its negation can be simultaneously true. There are more natural sounding ways of forming negations in English, but we need different means of doing so for different kinds of statements. This will bring out the difference between predicates and predicables. In statements that predicate a property of an individual, a more natural way of forming a negation is to simply find a word that is antonymous with the predicate. Thus, the negation of "Kovacs is lazy" becomes "Kovacs is industrious." If our language lacked a suitable word to oppose "lazy," we have plenty of prefixes to resort to, and one might say "Kovacs is not lazy" (or, more awkwardly, "Kovacs is non-lazy"). If you believe

[100]This distinction can be found in P. T. Geach, *Reference and Generality* (Ithica, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), 50, §18.

[101] If anyone is uncertain of this and what follows, here is the formalization. Let "No drug is safe" be translated $\forall x\,(Dx \rightarrow \sim Sx)$. The negation, of course, is then $\sim [\forall x\,(Dx \rightarrow \sim Sx)]$. This is equivalent to $\sim [\sim[\sim \exists x \sim (Dx \rightarrow \sim Sx)]$. Removing the double negation, then $\exists x \sim (Dx \rightarrow \sim Sx)$. Implication yields $\exists x \sim (\sim Dx \vee \sim Sx)$. Finally, by De Morgans, $\exists x\,(Dx \wedge Sx)$, i.e, "For some x, x is a drug and x is safe," which is more naturally stated as "some drug is safe."

either of those two statements, you cannot, no matter how hard you try, simultaneously believe the original sentence "Kovacs is lazy."

But this procedure falls apart when we start talking about the safety of drugs. We cannot move from the wordy "It is not the case that no drug is safe" to "No drug is unsafe." If you were to protest to your doctor's prescription by insisting "No drug is safe!" he might reply "It is not the case that no drug is safe; for this antibiotic is perfectly safe." However, not even Dr. Timothy Leary was brazen enough to declare that "No drug is unsafe," for some are quite deadly. Rather, if we want to negate statements that have quantifying terms (such as "some," "no," or "all") we must alter the term that we mistakenly treated as the subject. Thus, "It is not the case that no drug is safe" becomes "Some drug is safe," which is why your doctor prescribes antibiotics.

Now let's briefly state two rules for identifying predicables and predicates, formulated by Peter Geach (1916-2013) and Arthur Prior (1914-1969) respectively.

1. *Rule for identifying predicables*: A term is a *predicable* if and only if it is possible to form a further predicable such that, if you were to predicate it of a subject, the result would be the negation of a statement formed by predicating the original predicable of the same subject. (Example: "Safe" is a predicable; for we can form a further predicable, namely "unsafe," and we can see that if we predicate the latter of spoiled milk, we get a statement equivalent to "It is not the case that spoiled milk is safe." Of course, as we saw in some of the above examples, sometimes "safe" is merely a predicable and not a predicate at all.)[102]

2. *Rule for Identifying a Predicable as a Predicate:* A predicable is actually being used as a predicate if and only if, when it is substituted for its opposing term in a statement, the new

[102]*Ibid.* 57-59, § 27. Cf. Geach's "Names and Identity" in *Mind and Language,* ed. Samuel Gutterplan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). See also Williams, *What is Existence*, 45.

statement is the negation of the original statement. (Example: In “This law is unjust,” the term opposing “unjust,” which is “just,” can be substituted in and yield the negation of the original statement, or “It is not the case that this law is unjust.” However, notice that the same does not happen when we have the mere predicable in the sentence “All laws are unjust.”)

Below we will see that in sentences like “No drug is safe,” the rôle of predicate and subject are reversed, which is why such statements have to be understood differently than how sentences with singular subjects like “This antibiotic is safe” are understood. The full importance of this will have to wait. For now, I merely want to draw your attention to an important nuance in how subject-predicate statements work: When a predicable takes the grammatical place of the subject in a subject-predicate sentence, the process by which such a sentence yields a negation is other than how it would be otherwise. However, now the time has come to see how these considerations apply to views about existence.

2.1.4. The Naïve View of Existence Explained

Here are some sentences that many people would say are perfectly innocuous: “Pope Francis exists,” “The Loch Ness Monster does not exist,” “The Library at Alexandria used to exist but not anymore.” Each of these statements consists of a subject followed by a verb, the denial of what is signified by the verb, or (in the third case) an assertion that what the verb signifies once was the case but now is not. According to the above account of the relation between language and properties, then, each of these statements should be predicating properties (or denying them) of a subject, namely the property “existence.” Pope Francis, in addition to having the property of being from Argentina, also has the good fortune of having the property of existing. The Library at Alexandria once had a lot of properties, including that of existing, but now has none of them.

(You may already be wondering what to do about the phrase “Nessie does not exist.” What object could I possibly be saying lacks that property if I were to utter such a statement? Surely such a statement runs into problems where other statements of denial, such as “This pear is not ripe,” do not. Nevertheless, the statement appears perfectly normal. More on this in a moment.)

If you found Aquinas's arguments about the distinction between existence and essence in created things as laid out in the last chapter persuasive, it may be because you already intuitively held the naïve view of existence. I've already said that my humanity (which is my essence) can be considered a property, so why can't my existence?

2.2. The Traditional Analytic View of Existence

The traditional analytic view of existence is that existence is never a property of individuals. It is what philosophers call a second-order property. In particular, the view which I will be laying out, put forth by C.J.F. Williams, makes the bold claim that any statement of the form “_____ exists,” where the blank is filled in with the name of an individual, is a “meaningless string of words.”[103] First (Sections 2.2.1-2.2.3), let's look at the arguments for the traditional analytic view. After that (2.2.4) I will look at a number of sentences which appear to use “exists” as a first-level predicate and tell you why Williams thinks such sentences do not disprove his claims.

2.2.1. Argument One: Plato's Beard

“Plato's Beard” is the name of a simple argument against the naïve view that existence is a property of individuals and it hinges on the problem of trying to talk about things that do not

[103]Williams, *What Is Existence*? 79

exist.[104] We can think about this argument by returning to an example from a previous section. Suppose we were wondering about Nessie, that purported beast, hitherto unclassified by science, supposedly living in the Loch Ness in Scotland. What are we to do with the sentence "Nessie does not exist?" I am going to assume that, in fact, there is no such beast living in the Loch Ness. But let's compare "Nessie does not exist" to sentences with a similar structure but which do not use the word "exist" or any of its synonyms. The comparison sentence will be "Kovacs does not sing well." This statement is true. Grammatically, the two statements look similar: Both appear to consist of a subject and then a denial that the subject in question has a certain property.[105]

But what does the second sentence mean? I take it that it just means that if you exhaustively studied the thing, Kovacs, represented by the subject term, and could list of all its properties, the ability to sing well would not be on the list.

Now let's assume that the naïve view of existence is correct, and that the first sentence, "Nessie does not exist," functions not only grammatically the same as the second, but also logically the same. The problem is clear: What is it that we are talking about when we say that, among the properties Nessie has, existence is not one of them? It seems that there is simply nothing there for us to talk about. Yet, on the naïve view, it is difficult to find any other way to analyze the sentence "Nessie does not exist." If the sentence is not telling us about Nessie (by telling us that there is some property it lacks), then what is it telling us? Yet it certainly cannot be telling us about Nessie, for as I said, there isn't one for us to be told anything about.

Plato's Beard forces us to see a problem that comes from considering existence as a property of individuals or "exists" as a meaningful predicate that describes individuals. For on the naïve view, negative existential statements like "Nessie does not exist" are self-contradictory.

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[104]The argument, and its associated name, come from Quine's "On What There Is," in *From a Logical Point of View* (Harvard University Press, 1963): 2.
[105]Cf. Williams, *What Is Existence*, 37-41.

Conversely, positive existential statements like “Kovacs exists” turn out tautologous. But *that* can't be right. Normally, we consider a statement to be self-contradictory because, upon analysis, we find that it entails two statements which are not capable of being consistent. Suppose you heard someone say “I am thinking of an odd number divisible by two.” You would realize at once that there was something self-contradictory about such a statement. If asked to say why, you might point to the fact that the statement entails these two incompatible claims: “I am thinking of a number not divisible by two (for that is all an odd number is)” and “I am thinking of a number divisible by two.”

But what pair of inconsistent statements does “Nessie does not exist” yield? Perhaps, by mere mention of Nessie as a subject, one might think we are entitled to the statement “Nessie exists.” And so the contradictory statements would be “Nessie exists” and “Nessie does not exist.” But this runs into two problems: First, if existence is a property of individuals, the first statement is still tautologous (just like every positive existential statement) and the second still self-contradictory. Moreover, the second statement just is the same as the original statement which we are trying to analyze. We would have to again explain why the second statement is self-contradictory, leading to an infinite regress.

In the next section I am going to propose a reason that statements involving existence don't fit the pattern that we've come to expect from other subject-predicate sentences. However, first I wish to draw your attention to an exception to the Plato's Beard examples we have been considering: Statements that assert existence of a plurality.

Consider the claim “Happy philosophers exist.” This statement seems innocent of the sort of problems I accused the statement “Nessie exists” to be guilty of. The reason for this is that, if you were to hear someone say “Happy philosophers exist,” you would not take him to be saying

that any particular individual has the property of existence. Rather, you would understand the claim to be that, among philosophers, at least some of them are happy. In fact, if you learned of Smith that she is a philosopher and that she is happy, you would be entitled to the claim "Happy philosophers exist," and it would be difficult to imagine that your claim could be reduced to a tautology in the way that the naïve view of existence has forced to us to think about existence claims referring to individuals. Maybe you thought the philosopher, Smith, was happy, and so inferred "Happy philosophers exist." Upon learning how miserable Smith really is, you would not then decide "Turns out there are no happy philosophers after all."

So the word "exists" behaves more strangely than we might have first supposed. When we try to use it as a predicate like any other predicate that refers to a property of an individual, we find ourselves in awkward paradoxes. Nevertheless, we can refer to the existence of pluralities with no problem because when we do so we are not trying to predicate a property of any individual. So, what is the truth about existence? To try to answer that question, I now turn to the solutions proposed by C.J.F. Williams.

2.2.2. Argument Two: Statements of Number are Analogous to Statements of Existence

To help sort out the problem of why assertions of existence make sense when referring to a plurality of things but not to individuals, it may be helpful to note that the word "exists" is hardly the only word that has this peculiarity. Statements about number, naturally enough, also only comfortably work in sentences where the subject is plural.

Williams cites Frege as being the first to have a certain insight regarding statements of number.[106] For it was Frege who noticed a peculiar thing about answers to questions of the sort "How Many?" To use his own example, suppose you were to ask "How many horses draw the

[106]Williams, *What is Existence*, 42-73.

king's carriage?"[107] And suppose I were to answer "The king's carriage is drawn by four horses." On the surface such an exchange might be thought to resemble one where you asked me what sort of horses draw the king's carriage and I replied "The king's carriage is drawn by thoroughbred horses." But, of course, the two are really not much alike at all. When I tell you that the king's carriage is drawn by thoroughbred horses, I am telling you that each particular horse drawing the carriage has a property, namely that of being thoroughbred. On the other hand, when I tell you that the king's carriage is drawn by four horses, I am not telling you anything about any horse at all. I am answering a "How many" question.

Why is it that "thoroughbred" in "thoroughbred horses" and "four" in "four horses" do such different work? That is, why is thoroughbred a property of individuals yet four never is? The reason, Frege tells us, is that "the content of a statement of number is an assertion about a concept." In other words, numbers are not properties of individuals; rather, they are properties of properties. They tell us *how many* times a property is instantiated. "Four horses draw the king's carriage" is just a way of saying "The property 'Horse that draws the king's carriage' is instantiated four times." And that is what philosophers mean when they speak of second-level (or second-order) properties: First-level properties are properties that tell us about individuals; second-level properties are properties of properties.

To see this point about number statements more clearly, and to point to how it relates to statements about existence, consider number statements where the number in question is zero.[108] What am I saying if I say "The Pope has zero children?" On the Fregean account favored by Williams, I must be saying that the predicate "children of the Pope" cannot be predicated of anyone if I am to tell the truth. The alternative is this: Each object has the property one. And

[107] *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, tr. J. L. Austin (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1980), 59.
[108] For present purposes, I see no problem calling zero a number.

agglomerations of objects have the properties of numbers greater than one. What then, of zero? Is it the number ascribable to no object at all? How can we predicate a property of that which does not exist? To do so gets us entangled in Plato's Beard once again.

We can now state the traditional analytic view of existence with some precision: Existence can be thought of as a kind of number-statement, or at least be thought of us as being very much like one.[109] So, on this account, existence is never a property of individuals, but is only a higher-level property. It applies to concepts and tells us that the concept it is applied to is instantiated at least once. This is why we see no problem making existential statements about nouns in the plural. “Happy philosophers exist” tells us that some philosopher is happy; the number of happy philosophers is not zero; in more technical language, for some x, x is a happy philosopher. None of these statements amount to the tautology threatened by the Plato's Beard line of thought. For the same reason, the statement “Dragons do not exist” is not self-contradictory; all it is saying is that the concept “Dragon” has nothing that falls under it.

2.2.3. Argument Three: “Wrapping Around” and a Further Argument About Existence

Perhaps the claim that existence is not a real property seems scandalous in light of everything I said about language in 1.1 and 1.2. The sentence “Ken likes drinking soda” means one of Ken's properties is his fondness for drinking soda; and “Juanita cries” tells us about a first-order property of Juanita, namely that she cries. So, given the very claims I have made about language, why shouldn't the statement “The Hope Diamond exists” do the same sort of thing and tell us about one of The Hope Diamond's properties? You might even point out the force of the last example by expanding it: “The Hope Diamond exists, but the Pink Panther Jewel does not.” That

[109]Frege preferred to err on the side of caution and say existence statements are analogous to statements of number; Williams makes the stronger claim that statements of existence *are* statements of number. *What is Existence*, 54.

is a sentence, such an objection would go, that no English speaker would think incoherent at all. Williams agrees that the latter sentence makes sense, yet he does not think it disproves his thesis about existence; I will say why below (Section 2.4.1). For now, let's look at his argument that the statement "The Hope Diamond exists," without any addition, fails to be meaningful. And here we will have to recall my warning from Section 2.1.3 about statements involving words like "some."

Williams seeks to show that "some" is a second-level predicable. Recall that a predicable is an expression that *can* be used as a predicate, regardless of whether or not it is being used as a predicate in any given sentence. For Williams's argument here to succeed, he thinks he must show that this premise is true: If "some" is only ever a second-level predicable (that is, never first-level) then the same is true for "exists." To see how this argument unfolds, I need to introduce a new bit of terminology, that of "wrapping around."

Let's start with the sentence "Some philosophers are happy." In Section 1.3 we already saw how this sentence differs from "Smith is happy." The logical structure of the latter sentence is the same as its grammatical structure: "Smith" refers to the subject, the person Smith, and "happy" is a (first-level) predicate that tells us about Smith. However, in the first sentence, our considerations about negation led us to observe that the logical rôles are reversed: "happy" does the logical work of a subject-term, while "some philosophers" does that of a predicate.[110] Following a convention established by A. N. Prior, Williams describes the logical work of each part of a sentence in terms of which part is "wrapped" around the other.[111]

On this view, we can consider the second sentence by seeing that we have started with a

[110]Williams at times does write this way, suggesting that "Happy" is a subject-term while "some" a predicate; however, he prefers to replace the whole subject-predicate language of grammarians with the language of "wrapping around." See *Being, Identity, and Truth*, 14.
[111]A. N. Prior, "Is the Concept of Referential Opacity Really Necessary?" *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 16 (1963): 95-6.

name, “Smith,” and then wrapped around that name an incomplete expression, “is happy.” Whereas there may be some instances where “Smith” is a complete expression (as when someone asks you for the name of a happy person and you just say “Smith”), “is happy” is by its nature incomplete; like a piece of wrapping paper waiting for the stick of gum that it will be wrapped around, it is empty until we couple it with something like a name, such as “Smith.” We can even wrap the complete sentence “Smith is happy” into other wrappings, including “It is not the case that,” which as we have seen, is equivalent to “Smith is not happy.”

Since we have seen how the subject and predicate rôles get reversed in statements that involve quantified terms (that is, terms preceded by words like “some” or “every”), we will not be surprised to see the order of wrapped and wrapping also gets reversed in sentences like “Some philosophers are happy.” Here we must start with the expression “are happy” and wrap “some philosophers” around it to get our complete sentence. So in such statements, “some” is the logical predicate; and since every predicate is also a predicable, “some” is a predicable. But is “some” a first or second-level predicable?

We can answer that question by noting the symmetry between what happens when we wrap predicables around names and when we wrap predicables around other predicables. A predicable, like “happy,” when wrapped around a name, like “Smith,” produces a complete sentence where the predicate in question is first-level. But when a proposition is formed by wrapping a predicable around a first-level predicable the predicable that wraps around the first-level predicable is a second-level predicable.

Williams's evidence for this comes from considering what happens whenever we attempt to deal with other second-level predicates.[112] Take a statement like “Four philosophers are happy.” We know from Frege's example of the horses drawing the king's carriage, discussed

[112] *Being, Identity, and Truth*, 18.

about in Section 2.2, that “four” is a second-level predicate. And we know that “happy” is a first-level predicable because I have predicated it of Smith. Moreover, the negation of the statement “Four philosophers are happy” is not “Four philosophers are unhappy” but rather “It is not the case that four philosophers are happy,” which, of course, is equivalent to “Fewer than four philosophers are happy (and perhaps no one is a happy philosopher).” So if all that we have said about wrapping around checks out, what is happening here is that we start with the first-level predicable, “happy,” and wrap “four philosophers” around it. The negation comes when we wrap “It is not the case that” around both. And we see the same process at work with any second-level predicate you can think of: The negation of an expression where a predicable is wrapped around a first-level predicable always requires us to alter the term that is the grammatical subject; this is never true when a first-level predicable is wrapped around a name. And so it seems that “Some” is indeed only a second-level predicable.

Next, Williams argues that his conclusion about “some” applies with equal force to “exist.” And he does this by showing that many second-level predicables which have the appearance of grammatical adjectives (as “some” does in “Some philosophers”) can be expressed just as well using verbs. So, “Many philosophers are happy” can be expressed as “Happy philosophers abound.” In the same way, the work done by “some” is done by “exist:” “Happy philosophers exist” tells us nothing about any philosopher, predicates nothing of any individual, but instead expresses the same thought as “Some philosophers are happy.” Likewise, the statement “No philosophers are happy” tells us happy philosophers do not exist.

This brings us to Williams's conclusion about the absurdity of attaching “exists” to names of individuals. I can form a valid argument from premises like “All happy philosophers read Aristotle” and “Smith is a happy philosopher” and reach the conclusion “Smith reads Aristotle.”

This is because “reads Aristotle” is clearly admissible as a first-level predicable. But when we try to make valid arguments using terms which we have seen can be only second-level predicables we get nonsense: “Happy philosophers abound” and “Smith is a happy philosopher” should not lead us to believe that Smith abounds, whatever that could mean. And just as “Smith abounds” is not a meaningful sentence, so we ought to conclude the same of “Smith exists.” Tempting though it is, premises like “All happy philosophers exist” and “Smith is a happy philosopher” cannot lead us to conclude “Smith exists.”

So, on Williams's view, for all the sentences we have that use the word “exists,” we can discard those which attach the word to names of individuals: For existence is never a property that an individual has and, therefore, never a meaningful predicate about an individual. It can only ever be used, thinks Williams, as a second-level predicate, one which tells us about a property of a concept and which can answer “How many?” type questions.

2.2.4. Apparent Counter-Examples

To recap: Plato's Beard showed us the problems we find ourselves in with the naïve view of existence. Then Frege relieved of us of this problem by showing the relation between statements of existence and answers to “How Many” type questions. Finally, C.J.F. Williams purports to have settled the matter by showing how the work done by “exists” is done with just as much force by the word “some,” a predicate which is only second-order, for it is wrapped around other predicates, not vice versa.

But aren't there sentences where the expression “_____ exists” (where the blank is filled with the name of an individual) occurs that are obviously intelligible? And if there are, doesn't that mean “exists” is at least sometimes a first-level predicate that corresponds to a first-level

property? Each of the following sentences seems intelligible for English speakers, and each appears to predicate existence of an object:

1. “The difference between President Trump and President Bartlet is that *Trump exists* and Bartlet does not.”

2. “The problem with time travel is that you might go to the past, prevent your parents' marriage, and then *you will never exist*.”

3. “This parrot is no more” means that the parrot he bought but an hour ago *no longer exists*.

4. “Pope Francis does not know that *Kovacs exists*.”

The above four sentences might be categorized as follows: The first is an instance of sentences about fiction, where we understand fictional characters as those that do not exist. The second is an instance of a sentence about contingent existence, and brings to our attention the fact we know what we mean when we say something might not have existed. The third example pertains to death, to things which once were but now are no longer. Lastly, sometimes “x exists” appears intelligible when it is embedded into sentences concerning epistemic states. Williams was aware of these possible counter-examples to his thesis about existence. To conclude this chapter, then, let us see why he thinks these plainly intelligible statements do not assert a first-level property of any individual.

2.2.4.1. Fictional Existence[113]

High school students are often made to read Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. It begins “He [Santiago] was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish” and tells of how Santiago and his apprentice, Manolin, fight a large marlin before catching it, only to have their fish eaten by sharks before returning to land empty-handed. Teachers wishing to test students' knowledge of the book might administer true/false type exams, where students have to say whether statements like “An old person fished in the Gulf Stream for over 80 days” and “Manolin was killed by the marlin” are true or false. Obviously, they are expected to say that the first is true and the second false.

But suppose those high school students proceeded from their literature exam to their logic class, where their teacher has a conversation like this with them:

Teacher: Tell me, did Santiago exist?

Students: No, of course not.

Teacher: So then, when you say that the sentence “An old person fished in the Gulf Stream for over 80 days” is true, who is the person you are referring to?

We would say something has gone wrong. Yet logicians tell us about existential generalization: From “Santiago is an old man who went fishing” we can infer “Some old person went fishing” (or “For some x, x is an old person who went fishing”). But if I say there was no Santiago, and that I do not know if anyone else has ever gone fishing in the Gulf Stream or for how long (I might venture to guess, but I couldn't say that I know), such an inference falls apart.

[113]Williams's account of fictional existence can be found in Chapter X of *What is Existence* and in *Being, Identity, and Truth*, pp. 25-28. He claims to be extrapolating on a view put forward by Michael Dummett in *Frege: Philosophy of Language* (London: Duckworth Press, 1973), pp. 310 f.

What went wrong, of course, is that the logic teacher has misunderstood the *context* in which her students talked about statements they read in *The Old Man and the Sea*. When we talk about fiction and the sentences that are uttered in fiction, it is not that our words take on any different meanings; "We use all the old words in the old ways," Williams says, "but what we are doing is subject to some extra constraint, is seen in a new context."[114] In other words, we need to concern ourselves with what happens in the whole enterprise of what we might call "story telling."

Story telling puts us in a context different from other human activity by virtue of the fact that we are pretending. Psychologists and social scientists might have plenty to say about why we sometimes like to pretend, but Williams takes it for granted that it is something humans do. Children especially like to do it, but it is also something adults do when they read fiction or watch TV. To understand the logic of pretense, so to speak, we ought to note that when we watch TV or read a novel we are pretending that the names in our shows and books name things. We open *To Kill a Mockingbird* and we read "When he was nearly thirteen, my brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow." Provided we understand that we have entered a new context, a context of pretending and not one of reading an autobiography or a police report or something like that, we know what to do. We are supposed to pretend someone is telling us that "Jem" names a boy, though it does not, and that "his arm" refers to the make-believe boy's body part, although it does not, and so on.

This brings us to our point about "President Trump exists and President Bartlet does not." We are speaking in the context of a TV show, a work of fiction. Thus, on Williams's account, we are pretending, and we are pretending with names. We are not saying that there are two kinds of presidents, one which has a property of existing and the other that does not; we are saying that

[114] *What is Existence*, 243.

there are two kinds of names, thinks Williams, ones which name individuals and ones that we only pretend name individuals.

Historians have sometimes disagreed about whether King Arthur is only a character from legends, or if that character has some basis in historical reality. In other words, they disagreed about whether King Arthur existed. Williams uses this example to force home his point about predicating existence of real people and non-existence of fictional characters.[115] Clearly, when an historian says "King Arthur never existed," he is not denying that some subject had some property. But suppose another historian wishes to contradict him: "King Arthur *did* exist," he protests. But if these two historians are truly contradicting each other, the second historian can't be predicating existence of a person, either. So, if in the context of talking about fiction, "This person did not exist" is about names, not persons, so too must be "This person did exist."

2.2.4.2. Contingent Existence[116]

The candidates for counter-examples to Williams's thesis in this and the following two sections all involve embedded instances of "_____ exists."[117] The statement "Kovacs is numerous" is gibberish for the same reason, on Williams's thinking, "Kovacs exists" is: It attaches a second-level predicate to the name of an individual. And any sentence that I embed "Kovacs is numerous" into will likewise be gibberish: "It need not have been the case that Kovacs is numerous" is meaningless just because the last three words are ill-formed and in spite of the fact that everything coming before those words is quite ordinary.[118]

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[115]*Being, Identity, and Truth*, 26.
[116]Cf. *What is Existence,* 101-105.
[117]Williams devotes an entire chapter to the analysis of how "_____ exists" functions when embedded into other sentences. See *What is Existence* 81-107.
[118]The exception to this rule, of course, comes when one wants to refer to a string of words themselves, in which case they are put inside quotation marks. "'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves" can tell you nothing, but "The old man ran downstairs shouting "Twas brillig, and the slithy toves' can tell you quite a bit about the old man's state of mind.

Yet we seem to embed statements about existence into wider contexts all the time and then find ourselves with meaningful statements. Alvin Plantinga, for example, points out that we can easily understand what is meant by "If Socrates had not existed, Plato would not have been his student."[119] He means this as an example of contingent existence, similar to if I were to say "I might never have existed at all." This latter sentence is nothing but a paraphrase of "It need not have been the case that I exist," which appears to embed the purportedly nonsensical "I exist" into "It need not have been the case that." But how could that be licit if "exists" is not a first-order predicate?

Williams's strategy for dealing with these cases will be to show that, despite appearances, such sentences are not the result of embedding "_____ exists" into a new context. It is contingent that Louie had ice cream for breakfast, the truth of which is seen when we embed the sentence "Louie had ice cream for breakfast" into the wider statement "It need not have been the case that..." So shouldn't the contingency of Socrates not likewise be made apparent by embedding "Socrates existed" into "It need not have been the case that...?"

Not necessarily, thinks Williams. For one thing, such a line of thought would run us right back into a version of Plato's Beard. This is because another way of saying "It need not have been the case that Socrates existed" is to say "It could have been the case that it would always be the case that Socrates does not exist."[120] But suppose someone once did say "It will always be the case that Socrates does not exist." Who could such a person be talking about, given that Socrates would never exist?

Williams's solution to this problem hinges on the plausible claim that things have properties that are both 1) necessary to the thing if the thing is to be what it is, and 2) unique to

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[119]*The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974): 148.
[120]Cf. *Being, Identity, and Truth*, 29.

the thing. I am the only child of a certain Michael and a certain Karen. If you talk about anything or anyone such that you cannot say that it is the only child of Michael and Karen, what you are talking about just won't be me. So, being the only child of the Michael and Karen in question is a necessary property that I have (philosophers will sometimes call these "essential properties"). Moreover, it is impossible for more than one thing to be the only child of this Michael and this Karen. And it seems that every individual will have at least one property like this, such that the property is both necessary and unique to the individual (Williams suggests that, if nothing else, at least the properties describing the origin of a thing, such as my being the only child of Michael and Karen, will be such properties). Let us follow Williams in calling such essential and unique properties "individuating" facts or properties.[121]

Statements about contingent existence, according to Williams, will not be statements predicating a first-level property of an individual, and certainly will not be predicating existence of an individual; such statements are, in fact, statements about individuating properties. Such statements tell us that while something does or did have such an individuating property, things could have been otherwise. "Kovacs might not have existed" comes out meaning "There is a property that is an individuating property of Kovacs, but it is possible that there could have been nothing ever having that property." Plantinga's worry that had Socrates not have existed, Plato would not have been his student, can likewise be understood to say that there is some individuating property that only Socrates could have had and did have, but had nothing ever had it we would not now understand Plato to have been Socrates' student.

So, on Williams's account, statements about contingent existence are not unintelligible

[121] *What is Existence*, 102. It seems that individuating properties, which cannot be repeated because of the sort of thing they are, fall into the category of conjunctive properties that I describe in n. 2 above. Plenty of people can be a child of Michael and Karen; plenty of people can be an only child; but when the two properties are combined, the conjunctive property "Only child of Michael and Karen" cannot be repeated.

statements of the form "_____ exists" made intelligible by embedding them in some wider context. But they make sense because they are statements about individuating properties.

2.2.4.3. "Pope Francis Doesn't Know that Kovacs Exists"[122]

Given everything I have reported so far in this chapter about what Williams thinks of existence, it should not be surprising that he does not believe the statement "Pope Francis does not know that Kovacs exists" to be ascribing to Pope Francis ignorance about some first-level property that I instantiate called "existence." But it should not take a great deal of philosophical argument to see that something is unusual about this sentence. A papal adviser informs Francis, "Your Holiness, the Americans have bombed an airfield in Syria," and the Pope has learned something. "Your Holiness, Kovacs exists," on the other hand, might just be met with a blank stare.

Williams's strategy for dealing with statements like this is similar to the one he employs for statements of contingent existence. That is, he sees such statements as being about some sort of property that a thing has and then telling us that a particular person is ignorant of the fact that anyone at all has that property. A general form of what Williams thinks a statement like "Pope Francis does not know that Kovacs exists" can be expressed, with important caveats, as follows: "It is not the case, that for some property, both Kovacs alone has that property and Pope Francis knows that for just one thing, that thing has that property."[123]

But there are important restrictions on what property can play the rôle demanded by this analysis. The property must be one which, when predicated of the individual in question, forms a contingent proposition; and it must be a property whose instantiation cannot be deduced logically from generally known facts. For example, so long as Pope Francis knows that the population of

[122] *What Is Existence*, 81-100.
[123] *Ibid*., 94.

the United States is in the hundreds of millions, he can deduce that someone is the 3 millionth tallest American. And suppose that I am the 3 millionth tallest American. It still seems true that Pope Francis does not know that Kovacs exists, even though this sentence comes out false: "It is not the case, both that Kovacs alone is the 3 millionth tallest American and Pope Francis knows that only one person is the 3 million tallest American" (it is false because Francis *can* deduce that someone has to be the 3 millionth tallest American).

On the other hand, suppose that I am the only person from Akron, Ohio to ever write a dissertation chapter about C.J.F. Williams on existence.[124] Now, when our hypothetical Papal Adviser is met with a blank stare upon exclaiming "Your Holiness, Kovacs exists," he can clarify in a way that Williams would approve: "Some person, and only one person, from Akron, Ohio has written a dissertation chapter about C.J.F. Williams on existence." And then the Pope's ignorance of me will have been relieved, however slightly, however trivially.

2.2.4.4. Birth and Death[125]

Peter Geach once argued that the word "is" can have the force of expressing actuality. When Jacob proclaims "Joseph is not and Simeon is not," as the King James translation of the Old Testament has him saying, he is surely saying something about Joseph and Simeon. And so, Geach argued, we have a sense of exists that seems "to be certainly a genuine predicate of individuals."[126]

Williams agrees that when we say someone has died or someone was born, we are saying

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[124] And so far, it appears that I am. While a philosopher from Akron by the name W.V.O. Quine figures into some of what Williams has to say about existence, Quine never mentions Williams by name in anything he published.

[125] Williams covers this material in *What is Existence*, 108-152. His arguments in that book are quite technical, and a simplified version can be found in *Being, Identity, and Truth* 24-41.

[126] Geach, "Form and Existence," 266. I take Geach to use the term "genuine predicate" to imply that it refers to a real, meaningful property of individuals.

something about that person and her properties, but he denies that the property in question is existence. Rather, he invokes what he calls “pairs of predicables of reidentification.” Suppose I want to know whether the car that Ike is driving today is the same car that Mary was driving last week. Supposing it is, we can say that it has the following two properties: “Was driven by Mary last week” and “Is driven by Ike today.” But, disregarding the supposition that it is the same car, these two properties are not, in themselves, enough to establish that we have one and the same car. Rather we need two properties that serve to tell a story, so to speak, that establishes a line of continuity between what Mary was driving last week and what Ike is driving this week. So suppose we make the predicables complex: “Was driven by Mary last week until she sold it to Ike on Friday,” and “Is the only car driven by Ike since purchasing it from Mary on Friday” are two predicables which, because of the way they tell a story of continuity, can't help but to apply to one and the same car.

But when we talk about the beginning or ending of something's existence, we are talking about terminal points of continuity. “David Kovacs came into existence on October 5, 1982” means that, starting on that date, a series of things can be predicated of me such as to tell a continuous story. When I die, there will be no further predicate (save those that express Cambridge properties) that can be paired with some earlier property that I had; thus there will be nothing to re-identify me with when I die, that is, when I stop existing.

So, when John Cleese's character in the Monty Python skit about an irate customer returning a dead animal to a pet store declares “This parrot is no more,” he is not saying that the parrot lost some property that it used to have. This, of course, would lead to the question, “What parrot no longer has that property?” Rather, the irate customer, on Williams's account, must be telling us that there is no pair of predicables of re-identification that will serve to identify the

previously living parrot with anything that currently has any property at all.

2.5 Summary

We have seen how the naïve view of existence would treat statements like “Kovacs exists” as being on par with “Kovacs runs.” That is, it treats “exists” as a first-level predicate that indicates some property that individuals have. But the naïve view would then make affirmations of existence tautologous and denials of existence self-contradictory. Frege provided the way out of this conundrum by treating “exists” as a statement of number; it is a second-level predicate that tells us that the number of something is at least one. Williams appears to have made this line of thought convincing by noting that any time a second-level predicable is attached to the name of an individual, the resulting statement is non-sensical, as when one says “Kovacs is numerous.” But we can see that “exists” does the same work as “some.” And “some” is a word wrapped around first-level predicables, a fact made apparent from a consideration of how statements get negated. Yet if a second-level predicable is obtained by wrapping an expression around a first-level one, then “some” is a second-level predicable; and so “exists” must be, too, according to Williams's argument.

We concluded by looking at several statements about existence that would seem to threaten Williams's view. And we saw that Williams has responses to these purported counter-examples. But what of rebuttals to Williams's argument itself? In the next chapter, I examine three philosophers who believe there are serious short-comings in Williams's very approach to the issue. If any of these responses proves fruitful, we will be on our way to accepting that existence is a property of individuals and that Aquinas should have no problem identifying God with his own existence. On the other hand, if these arguments against Williams fail, we will

either have to find some other means of making sense of Aquinas's claims about divine simplicity or else admit that Aquinas fails to satisfactorily say how God is distinct from creation.

So, let's see if Williams's views on existence stand up to scrutiny.

Chapter Three: Recent Objections to Williams's Claims About Existence

The claim that existence cannot be a first-order property of individuals is widespread among analytic philosophers. It has achieved this status for many of the reasons that Frege and Williams have put forward. If this claim is maintained, then Aquinas's view of God as identical to his own existence are either nonsensical (because it makes no sense to speak of something's "own existence") or else needs to be understood very carefully and very differently from how one might understand a claim such as that God is identical to his own wisdom.

But not all philosophers accept Williams's arguments. In this chapter I will discuss three thinkers who have criticized Williams on existence: Barry Miller (1923-2006), William Vallicella, and Kris McDaniel. First, I summarize each of their arguments that aim to show Williams was wrong to insist existence can be only a higher-order property. Then, I evaluate in turn each of their criticisms. Although Miller and Vallicella have both also offered positive accounts of what existence is if not a mere higher-order property (McDaniel so far has not), it will not be necessary to investigate these positive accounts if their negative accounts fail, which I shall claim they do.

3.1. Barry Miller

Any attempt to defend a first-order view of existence is going to have to confront the problem of Plato's Beard. Recall that this is the line of thinking according to which, if "exists" is a first-order predicate, someone who utters a statement like "Lincoln does not exist" will have the problem of not being able to say what it is he is denying has the property of existence. So,

any statement that denies that an individual exists will be self-contradictory; likewise, any true statement affirming that an individual exists will be tautologous. Miller considers Plato's Beard to be two separate, but related, problems.[127] The first he calls a paradox: When someone treats existence as a property of individuals and says "Lincoln does not exist," it seems paradoxical since there is no Lincoln for this statement to be about. The second problem he calls an absurdity. Because properties allow us to distinguish things, to sort things out from other things, if existence were a property of things we should be able to distinguish existing things from non-existing ones. A sheep farmer may well separate the mature sheep from the young sheep, but imagine a sheep farmer who sets out to separate the existing sheep from the non-existing ones.[128] Such is the purported absurdity, according to Miller, that people like Williams believe occur when we treat existence as a first-order property.

Here I will show how Miller attempts to respond to both the purported paradox and absurdity that results from considering existence to be a first-order property.

3.1.1. The Paradox: Miller's Response

Miller's devotes only one paragraph responding to the paradox, that is, the claim that "Lincoln does not exist" can only be true supposedly if there is a Lincoln to talk about. Using Williams's example of "Lord Hailsham does not exist," he writes:

> The so-called paradox, however, is illusory, for it arises purely from confusing a name's reference with its bearer. In particular, proponents of the paradox are confusing the

[127] *Fullness of Being*, 31.

[128] Miller takes this example of the sheep farmer from D. G. Londey, "Existence," *Philosophia Arhusiensis* 1 (1970): 3. The objection is echoed by Williams, who asks what he could do if he were told that blue buttercups do not exist: "Would I have felt obliged to examine several specimens of blue buttercup before concluding that none of them exist, that as a variety blue buttercup lacks existence?" *Being, Identity, and Truth*, 1.

> reference of "Lord Hailsham" with its bearer.... The truth of "Lord Hailsham does not exist" requires only that "Lord Hailsham" have a reference. To have a reference, however, does not require that the bearer exist *now*, but merely that it does exist or *has existed*. Once that is recognized, there is nothing even odd, let alone paradoxical, about propositions like "Lord Hailsam does not exist."[129]

Miller seems to have in mind a passage from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, where Wittgenstein distinguished between the *meaning* [*bedeutung*] of a word and the reference of a word:[130]

> It is important to note that it is a solecism to use the word "meaning" to signify the thing that 'corresponds' to a word. That is to confound the meaning of a name with the bearer of the name. When Mr N.N. dies, one says that the bearer of the name dies, not that the meaning dies. And it would be nonsensical to say this, for if the name ceased to have meaning, it would make no sense to say "Mr N.N. is dead." [Philosophical Investigations, § 40][131]

So once a name has a reference, thinks Miller, it will always have a reference. However, a name stops having a bearer once there is nothing to bear the name. That might seem obvious but Miller thinks that conflation between bearer and reference is what has led to the purported paradox in sentences like "Lincoln does not exist." I can refer to Lincoln in sentences like

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[129]*Fullness of Being*, 32.
[130]Bedeutung is the German word that appears in Frege's "Über Sinn und Bedeutung," which is typically rendered in English as "On Sense and Reference." In the passage quoted, Anscombe has translated the same word as "meaning."
[131]Wittgensgtein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations*, Revised 4th Edition by P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 24.

“Lincoln was the President of the United States during the American Civil War” even though the name “Lincoln” has no bearer; and so on Miller's view the statement “Lincoln does not exist” is not saying “There is a man, Lincoln, who does not exist.” Rather, Miller thinks it is saying that the name “Lincoln” can still be used to refer to the Lincoln who once existed but no longer does.

3.1.2. The Absurdity: Miller's Response

When I say “Lincoln does not exist,” it appears that I am predicating non-existence of Lincoln. And if first-order predicates signify first-order properties, it would follow that non-existence is such a property. But if “exists” is admissible as a first-order predicate, then surely “does not exist” must also be; but how then can one escape the absurdity of trying to claim that an individual has the property of non-existence?

Miller responds to this objection by trying to show that non-existence is a mere Cambridge property, even though existence is a real property. A Cambridge property, you may recall from the last chapter, is one which makes no difference to the subject of which it is predicated. When a boy plays a flute he can be said to have the real property of flute playing; but that he is heard by me makes no difference to him. “Being heard by Kovacs” would be a mere Cambridge property that the flute playing boy has. Likewise, Miller thinks that the statement “Lincoln exists” predicates a real property of Lincoln. “Lincoln does not exist,” on this account, predicates a Cambridge property.

Here is a short reconstruction of the argument that Miller will employ to show that non-existence is a Cambridge property. In what follows after this reconstruction I will provide some further details:

1. In “Lincoln does not exist” either (a) “does not exist” is being predicated of Lincoln, or (b) “It is not the case that _____ exists” is being predicated of Lincoln.

2. If (a), a mere Cambridge property is predicated of Lincoln.

3. If (b), a mere Cambridge property is predicated of Lincoln.

4. Therefore, the statement “Lincoln does not exist” predicates a mere Cambridge property of Lincoln.

To try to build his case that non-existence is a mere Cambridge property, Miller first points out two kinds of negation: Sentential negation and predicate negation, or as he calls them, external negation and internal negation. “Lincoln does not exist” can be construed according to either type of negation. It can mean “It is not the case that (Lincoln exists)” or it can mean “Lincoln (does not exist).”[132] In the first of these renderings non-existence is never mentioned. So if Miller can make the case that the two ways of understanding “Lincoln does not exist” do not collapse into the same thing, he thinks we ought to prefer “It is not the case that (Lincoln exists)” for the sake of avoiding the absurdity involved in predicating non-existence.

But what about the negative predicate “It is not the case that _____ exists?” This expression is, after all, what comes about if the name “Lincoln” is removed from “It is not the case that Lincoln exists.” Yet this predicate need not signify a real property. Indeed, Miller argues it signifies a mere Cambridge property because it does not occur in what's called the “constructional history” of “It is not the case that (Lincoln exists).” Miller subscribes to the view that he attributes to Michael Dummett that an examination of the constructional history of

[132]Miller never says what he intends to convey by his use of parentheses. Presumably he wants to draw the reader's attention to what exactly is being predicated. “Lincoln (does not exist)” predicates non-existence of Lincoln; “It is not the case that (Lincoln exists)” predicates existence of him, but asserts the denial of that predication. Cf., *Fullness of Being*, 34.

propositions reveals their logical components, and that these logical components should guide our ontological commitments (that is, which types of entities we are committed to admitting the existence of) when we assent to propositions.

Elmar Kremer provides an illuminating example of what Miller means when he talks about a constructional history of a proposition.[133] Consider the sentence "Tom is a student and Henry is a student." If true, then being a student is a real property of Tom since "is a student" can be truly predicated of him. But what of the complex predicate "Is a student and Henry is a student"? This surely does not stand for a real property of Tom because if it turns out Henry is not a student it will make no difference to Tom. What we have is the real property expressed by the predicate "Is a student" being said of Tom, and then the resulting statement, "Tom is a student," being inserted into the proposition "____ and Henry is a student." At no point does the complex predicate "Is a student and Henry is a student" come into this constructional history.

Miller thinks something similar happens in the case of "It is not the case that Lincoln exists."[134] Here we have the predicate "_____ exists" and we put the name "Lincoln" into the place for a proper name; then we put the resulting expression "Lincoln exists" into the gap which is present in "It is not the case that _____." So, Miller concludes, "It is not the case that _____ exists" plays no logical part in the constructional history of "It is not the case that Lincoln exists" and thus non-existence can be no more than a Cambridge property.

Miller prefers to construe "Lincoln does not exist" as a case of external negation, as "It is not the case that (Lincoln exists)," and to avoid the purported absurdity by showing that the predicate involved signifies a mere Cambridge property. But what if some argument were given to force him to accept "Lincoln does not exist" in terms of internal negation, construed as

[133]Elmar Kremer, *Analysis of Existing, Barry Miller's Approach to God* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 27-30.
[134]*Fullness of Being*, 35.

"Lincoln (does not exist)?" Once again, Miller thinks the predicate "Does not exist" will signify a mere Cambridge property, and once again he argues for this point by making an observation about the proposition's constructional history.

When we negate the predicate "exists" we get "does not exist." And when we insert the name "Lincoln" into the gap in "_____ does not exist" we produce "(Lincoln)(Does not exist)."[135] So "does not exist" does enter into the constructional history of "Lincoln does not exist" understood in terms of internal negation. The question Miller raises is this: Supposing existence to be a real property, and not a merely Cambridge one, does it follow that non-existence must also be a real property? His strategy for answering that question is to put it in terms of a more general question: Supposing some property *F* is a real property, under what circumstances must non-*F* also be a real property?

Consider a piece of wood that is red. Miller thinks that because it has a property, redness, which precludes other colors, we can say that the wood has a real property that can be expressed, for example, by the predicate "non-green." But the situation is different if it is not wood we are speaking of, but glass. Glass can be red, and can be green, but it need not be any color at all. And whereas my statement that "This wood is not red" entails "It is one of the other colors," the same cannot be said if I were to say "This glass is not red." That a piece of glass is not red could mean that it is noncolored; "but," Miller points out, "so too might a pain or a flash of insight, though their being noncolored could hardly be claimed as a real, rather than a Cambridge, property."[136]

With this example in mind, Miller formulates the following principle: Lack of a real property *F* bespeaks the presence of a correlative real property non-*F* only if *F* and non-*F* are

[135]I am, again, following Miller's own convention regarding the use of parentheses.
[136]*Fullness of Being*, 36.

determinates of one determinable property.[137] In the case of a piece of wood, red and non-red are both determinates of a determinable property, namely, color. And so to say that a piece of wood is not red is to attribute a real property to that wood. (Miller prefers to consider properties as determinates related to determinables and not as species related to genera for this reason: Each species in a genus is distinguished by a specific difference—humans, for example, are animals that are rational, birds are animals that fly, and so on—whereas it is not always the case that one can say what distinguishes determinate properties from the determinables; "One cannot *specify* just what the difference is between color and red."[138])

But, Miller claims, this is not the case with existence. There is no further determinable common to both existence and non-existence such that they could both be considered determinates related in that way. So when I say that something lacks existence, according to Miller, I need not be saying that the thing in question has a real property called non-existence. That is, even if one insists on an internal negation interpretation of "Lincoln does not exist" the predicate "does not exist" would signify a mere Cambridge property, not a real property.

Thus Miller believes he has dealt with Williams's objections to the claim that existence is a real property of individuals. For, according to Miller, Williams seems to think that statements like "Lincoln does not exist" result in both paradox and absurdity. But, counters Miller, the paradox arises because of confusion of the bearer or a name and the referent. And the absurdity arises only if one thinks that admission of existence as a real property entails that non-existence is a real property. But Miller has tried to show that the statement "Lincoln does not exist," regardless of whether it is interpreted as a case of internal negation or external negation, predicates a mere Cambridge property.

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[137]Ibid.

[138]Ibid., 37, n. 27. Miller traces this distinction to A. N. Prior, "Determinables, Determinates, and Determinants (I, II)," *Mind* 58 (1949): 1-20 and 178-94.

3.2. William Vallicella

William Vallicella offers three objections to the traditional analytic view that existence cannot be predicated of individuals: 1) Frege was mistaken to think that statements of the form "Kovacs exists" are (illegitimately) attaching a second-order predicate to the name of an individual; 2) The Plato's Beard argument is based on a modal fallacy; 3) From the fact that non-existence cannot be had by individuals it cannot be inferred that existence cannot.[139]

3.2.1. Attaching Second-Order Predicates to the Names of Individuals

"Numerous" seems to be an obvious example of a second-order predicate.[140] Attaching it to the name of an individual will not produce an intelligible statement. So, Vallicella notes, there is a fallacy in the following argument:

> Philosophers are numerous.
>
> Socrates is a philosopher.
>
> Therefore, Socrates is numerous.

If that argument is fallacious, then should not this argument also be: Philosophers exist; Socrates is a philosopher; therefore Socrates exists?

Vallicella thinks not. On his view, those who claim that the second argument is as problematic as the first make the mistake of thinking that "exists" must be a univocal term. If the

[139]Vallicella is unique among critics of the traditional analytic view in that he does not call existence a property. Rather, he thinks existence is the precondition for anything having properties (in contrast to, say, Barry Miller, who is content to say that existence is a unique property in that it does not presuppose something's existence). Instead Vallicella prefers to say something "has existence." In this section I will attempt to follow his conventions.

[140]I say it seems to be because, as we will see below, Kris McDaniel has denied that it is.

predicate "exists" in the second argument were first-order then the argument would be as unoffensive as "Zebras have stripes; Hamu is a zebra; so, Hamu has stripes." The reason this argument is valid is because "has stripes" is a first-order predicate. But is it clear that just because "Happy philosophers exist" employs "exist" as second-order that there can be no first-order use of the same predicate?

You may think that if "exists" is not a univocal term then inferring the existence of Socrates from the existence of philosophers and the fact that Socrates is a philosopher is itself a fallacy, namely the equivocation fallacy. For example, the reason the argument "All banks are FDIC insured; I have walked along the banks of the Mississippi; therefore, I have walked along something FDIC insured" is a bad argument is because the term "banks" is not a univocal term. So if Vallicella is right that "exists" can be both first-order and second-order without being univocal, how can the argument about the existence of Socrates be valid?

The answer, according to Vallicella, is that there is a "systematic connection" between "exist" when it is used in its general, second-order sense, and "exists" when predicated of singular objects.[141] General existential statements tell us that some property is instantiated. But for a property to be instantiated, on Vallicella's way of thinking, it must be instantiated by an existing individual. So Vallicella considers it a necessary truth that "If a property is instantiated, it is instantiated by an existent" and he thinks this ought to be an available premise in any argument that seeks to deploy "exists" as a first-order predicate. Thus, Vallicella revises the argument about Socrates existing thus:

1. The property being a philosopher is instantiated.

2. If a property is instantiated, it is instantiated by an existent.

[141] *A Paradigm Theory of Existence*, 110.

3. Therefore, the property *being a philosopher* is instantiated by an existent.

4. Socrates instantiates the property *being a philosopher*.

5. Therefore, Socrates is an existent (=Socrates exists).

According to Vallicella, the upshot of reconstructing the argument this way is that we need not abandon Frege's insight about general statements of existence being statements about number, yet we also need not worry that we are engaged in any fallacy when we argue from the existence of philosophers to the existence of Socrates.

3.2.2. Vallicella on Plato's Beard

Vallicella reconstructs the Plato's Beard argument as follows:[142]

1. If "exists" were a first-level predicate, then affirmative singular existential statements would be necessarily true, and negative singular existential statements would be necessarily false.

2. Some affirmative singular existential statements are contingently true, and some negative singular existentials are contingently false.

3. Therefore, "exists" is not a first-level predicate.

4. Therefore, existence is not a first-level property.[143]

The reasoning behind the first premise has already been given in Chapter Two. The idea

[142]Ibid., 112.

[143]Again, Vallicella does not call existence a property. Rather, he claims that the Plato's Beard argument ought to be rejected insofar as it establishes that existence is only a second-order property or insofar as it shows that individuals cannot have existence. Ibid., 114.

is that if the statement "Nessie exists" is true, then it is necessarily true that there is a Nessie to say this of. Yet it is this premise that Vallicella believes renders the argument unsound. Consider, as an example, the sentence "Kovacs exists." It is certainly the case, Vallicella thinks, that as long as "Kovacs" does name someone, a sentence like this is, at least in some sense, necessarily true. However, Vallicella argues that it does not follow from this that my existence is necessary. In other words, one could consistently hold both of the following sentences to be true: 1) It is possible that Kovacs not exist;[144] 2) If it were to be actually the case that Kovacs never existed, no sentence using the name "Kovacs" could be used to express that state of affairs.

So Vallicella thinks Plato's Beard is entangled in what is called a modal fallacy. This sort of fallacy takes place when one illicitly shifts a modal term, such as "necessarily" or "possibly," in such a way as to alter the truth value of a statement. For example, philosophers generally agree that something can only be known if it is true. So, one might say "Necessarily, if Alvin knows that the Pope is from Argentina then it is true that the Pope is from Argentina." But notice that from this one cannot infer that "If Alvin knows that the Pope is from Argentina, then it is a necessary truth that the Pope is from Argentina." After all, one can imagine a scenario where someone from Italy had been elected Pope.

According to Vallicella, the proponents of Plato's Beard have made a similar error. It is fine to say that necessarily, every nonvacuous name (that is, every name that *does* name) designates something that exists. But from this, Vallicella tells us, we ought not to infer the more dubious claim that every nonvacuous name designates a necessary existent.[145]

And so he urges the rejection of Plato's Beard.

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[144]Recall that Williams too considers this kind of sentence unoffensive,
[145]Ibid., 113.

3.2.3. Asymmetry Between Existence and Non-Existence

When I say "Nessie does not exist" I cannot mean that there is some individual called Nessie who lacks the property of existence. So, as we saw in the last chapter, it is absurd to talk about non-existence as a property. But can someone infer from this that existence cannot be a property?

Vallicella believes that those who do make such an inference overestimate the symmetry between existence and nonexistence.[146] If I tell you that something exists, you will naturally assume that the thing I am telling you about has some properties. But, according to Vallicella, its possession of properties is not identical with its existence; when Descartes proclaimed "I think, therefore I am" he was not trying to tell us "I think, therefore I have properties." On the other hand, statements of non-existence just tell us about properties that are had by nothing. "Nessie does not exist" is not about an individual, but about a property, and it says something like "The property 'large uncategorized animal living in the Loch Ness' is a property nothing has."

So Vallicella's reply to the problem of non-existence is to say that there is no reason to deny that statements about existence can be either specific, as when I say "Kovacs exists," or general, as when I say "Happy philosophers exist." But he says that this does not warrant us to think statements about non-existence must also be capable of coming in both varieties. "There is," he writes, "only general non-existence, which is a second-level property."[147]

3.3. Kris McDaniel

Another line of objection to the traditional analytic view of existence comes from Kris McDaniel.[148] Since Williams's arguments rely on the purported claims that statements about existence are number statements and that such statements of number are ascriptions of second-

[146]Ibid., 114-15.
[147]Ibid.
[148]Kris McDaniel, "Existence and Number," *Analytic Philosophy* 54 (2013): 209-228.

order properties, McDaniel tries to show that attributions of number can be first-order.[149] And he does this by drawing a distinction between what he calls distributive and non-distributive predicates. Suppose I said "Pints of beer sold during happy hour are always cold." The predicate "cold" tells you something about each and every pint of beer sold during happy hour. If I point to any pint of beer sold during happy hour, you will know something about it. This sort of predicate, which tells you "whenever some things are *F*, each one of them is *F*," is called distributive.[150]

On the other hand, consider the statement "Pints of beer are lined up along the bar." Here, the predicate "lined up along the bar" is not a distributive predicate. I cannot point to any pint of beer and say that it is lined up along the bar. So any predicate that is not distributive is non-distributive.

With this in mind, McDaniel's argument might be reconstructed as follows:

1. All predicates are either first-order or higher-order.

2. Higher-order predicates are about concepts, not individuals.

3. First-order predicates are about individuals, not concepts.

4. Some non-distributive predicates (such as "lined up along the bar") are not about concepts.

5. Therefore, such predicates are about individuals.

6. Therefore, such non-distributive predicates are first-order.

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[149]McDaniel agrees that "the most promising version of this argument [i.e., that existence is only a second-order property] is by C.J.F. Williams." Ibid., 209. McDaniel expressed skepticism that the connection between existence and number is as close as Williams maintains, but contents himself merely with attacking the premise that number statements must be second-order.

[150]Ibid., 212.

A striking feature of McDaniel's claim is that non-distributive predicates "say something of some *things* not of some particular thing" but that, nonetheless, these predicates attribute a property to individuals.[151] So, on his account, the following argument is flawed not because it treats a second-order predicate as first-order, but because it treats a non-distributive predicate as distributive:

Fordham students are numerous.

Theresa is a Fordham student.

Therefore, Theresa is numerous.

According to McDaniel, a similar mistake is committed by the argument:

Those Fordham students have surrounded the building.

Theresa is one of those Fordham students.

Therefore, Theresa has surrounded the building.

McDaniel thinks that neither "Numerous" nor "Surrounded the building" are predicates telling us about concepts, and so must be about individuals.

So McDaniel believes that he can attribute predicates like "at least three in number" and "at least one in number" to, for example, the people at a dinner party.[152] And he thinks Frege thought numerical predicates could not be applied to individuals because of a purported mistake Frege made concerning examples involving composition.[153] Frege asks us to consider a standard deck of fifty-two playing cards divided among the four suits. If it is possible to predicate numbers of individuals, then Frege thinks we will have a problem deciding which number to predicate of the deck: One, because (as has been a popular saying since Aristotle) everything is

[151]Ibid, 213.
[152]This is his example. Ibid. 215.
[153]Ibid., 216.

one? Four, because of the four suits? Fifty-two, for each of the cards? Since these cannot all be the right answer, Frege thought it best to abandon any hope of predicating number of individuals and to instead say something like “being a suit in this deck is exemplified four times,” “being a card in this deck is exemplified fifty-two times,” and so on.

McDaniel responds that Frege missed a simpler answer: The deck of cards is one, but is *composed* of fifty-two cards, and is *composed* of four suits. And he denies that composition is the same as identity. So the answer to Frege's question “What number is to be predicated of the deck of cards?” is, to McDaniel's way of thinking, “One.” Likewise, when Frege writes that he can conceive of the *Illiad* as one poem, or as twenty-four books, or as a large number of verses, McDaniel replies he can conceive of the *Illiad* only as one poem. Yes, McDaniel agrees, he can understand what it means to say that the *Illiad* is composed of twenty-four books, but he thinks this does not warrant predicating the number twenty-four of *Illiad*.

To sum up: McDaniel is willing to grant the claim made by Frege and Williams that statements of existence are statements of number (or at least they are sufficiently similar); but he denies that number statements are ordinarily second-order statements. In fact, they are first-order predicates that tell us about individuals, albeit non-distributively. So if existence is itself an answer to “How many?” type questions, it too is a non-distributive, first-order property.

If Miller, Vallicella, or McDaniel is right about existence then Aquinas's claim that God is identical to his own existence appears straight-forward and not as problematic as Williams's arguments would have us think. But do any of the arguments from Miller, Vallicella, or McDaniel stand up to scrutiny? I now turn to that question.

3.4. Williams's "Master Reply"

In what follows, I will consider each of the three sets of objections to Williams that I outlined above. But first I want to note a point made by Williams himself which he thought any defense of "exists" as first-level would have to account for. This point I call Williams's "Master Reply" to any potential criticism of his thoughts on existence.[154]

Williams realizes, of course, that there is nothing to prevent a word from having a use both as a first-level predicate and as second-level. He thinks "Disappearing" is such a word. I can say that "Reasonable Senators are disappearing" and I can say "At David Copperfield's magic show I saw the Statue of Liberty Disappearing before my eyes" and I can say of an ice cream on a hot summer day "That ice cream is disappearing too quickly to eat." In the first statement the same word functions as a second-level predicate that functions as a first-level one in the other sentences. Nevertheless, it cannot be the case that the word is being used univocally in all three sentences. From "Reasonable Senators are disappearing" one cannot then infer "Since my Senator is reasonable, she must be disappearing." Whatever sense can be made of my Senator disappearing (perhaps David Copperfield can make her disappear, too) it just cannot be the same sense in which reasonable Senators are disappearing.

But the two uses of the word are not entirely equivocal, either. When an ordinary English speaker hears the sentences "The team lost because of a bad coach" and "In spite of his wealth the miser would only pay for a coach seat," the native English speaker is unlikely to perceive any connection between the two uses of the word "coach."[155] However, this is not the case with our examples involving the word "disappear." So Williams tells us that when a predicable has both a

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[154] *What is Existence*, 69-73.

[155] I use this example because I think an English speaker unlikely to perceive a connection, even though there is such a connection: The coach carriage was invented in the Hungarian town Kocs (pronounced "coach"). Wealthy young boys receiving lessons from tutors in coach carriages were thus said to be "coached." Despite the etymology, the two sentences in the main text clearly use the word equivocally. Equivocation does not depend on etymology.

first-level and second-level use, we can expect to find that the two uses are in between, so to speak, equivocation and univocation, This in-between use he calls "analogical."[156]

"It is not difficult," Williams writes, "to show connections between these different uses" of a word like "disappears" when it has both first-level and second-level uses. The connection here is that in each instance an ordinary English speaker might get in mind something of the phenomenon of becoming "less and less." If I hear someone say "Reasonable Senators are disappearing" I understand that person to mean that it seems that every year there are fewer and fewer of them in number (and, as a statement about a number, "disappearing" is here a second-level predicate); a cup of ice cream left outside on a hot summer day becomes less and less bound together as it becomes more and more melted cream until it is no longer ice cream proper at all; a magician makes something disappear by making it less and less a part of the world we can perceive, by making it shrink from visibility (even if only by sleight of hand).

So when a word can be used as either a first or second-level predicate, the two uses are called analogous and it should be possible to point to some connection between them, just as it is when we point to "less and less" in the above example.[157] What could be the point of connection between "exists" as a second-level predicate and any conceivable first-level use it might have? Williams reminds us of what he takes himself to have established regarding the relation between "exists" and "some." Since, Williams argues, the negation of "Happy philosophers exist" is no different from "No philosophers are happy," and since the negation of "No philosophers are happy" is no different from "Some philosophers are happy," Williams takes "exist" and "some" to do the same logical work (See 2.3 above).

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[156]Aquinas, of course, also has something to say about analogical uses of words that are neither entirely equivocal nor univocal. It is best not to treat Williams's and Aquinas's accounts of analogy at the same time. It is probably that their uses of the same word are not univocal.

[157]It seems possible that a word can be used as a first-level predicate and have a completely unrelated, completely equivocal use as a second-level predicate.

Thus, Williams's Master Reply to any possible objection to his view will be this: “We cannot then in principle rule out the possibility that 'exist' can have different senses, one in which it is first-level and in another of which it is a second-level predicable. But if it is held to be used analogically, now as a first-level, now as a second-level predicate, the person who holds this owes us an account of the connection between the two senses.”[158] And such an account, Williams goes on to say, will have to turn on how the word “some” or “something” can do the work of “exists” when used as a first-level predicate.

Neither Miller, nor Vallicella, nor McDaniel make an effort to show how their accounts of the word “exists” when said of individuals can do the logical work that “some” does. So if you agree with what I have called Williams's Master Reply you might consider this pretty damning evidence against Miller, Vallicella, and McDaniel. Nevertheless, you might think that Williams's Master Reply is not convincing. Perhaps once a first-level account of existence is given it will be seen that there is some point of connection with the second-level use that isn't reducible to what is done by the word “some.” Or perhaps you think that Williams expects too much of a connection between first and second-level uses in his account of analogy. Whatever you make of Williams's Master Reply, the criticisms of Williams offered by Miller, Vallicella, and McDaniel each deserve their own evaluation. So now I will examine each of them and propose some reasons I think that they fail to disprove Williams's thesis on existence.

3.5. Barry Miller: Evaluation

According to Miller, the paradox of talking about non-existence (that is, how can “Lincoln does not exist” be true if there is no Lincoln?) is based on confusion between a name's bearer and a

[158] *What is Existence*, 72-3.

name's reference. And he thinks that the purported absurdity of talking about existence as a property (that is, the absurdity that arises when trying to sort existing sheep from non-existing ones, given that properties are what let us make such distinctions) confuses non-existence for a real property, while he thinks that non-existence is a mere Cambridge property.

In what follows I will argue that Miller's reply to the paradox of non-existence does nothing to diminish Williams's argument; in fact, it may even strengthen it. Likewise, I believe he fails to show that there is no absurdity in treating existence as a property of individuals.

3.5.1. Evaluation: Barry Miller on the Paradox

Recall (Section 2.4.4) that Williams thought statements involving death, like “Lincoln no longer exists,” were sensible, meaningful statements, albeit not statements that denied that some individual had a property. Rather, they were statements about pairs of predicables of reidentification, and they tell us that there is no individual of whom such a pair of predicables can be predicated. If you thought that Williams's line of reasoning here seemed convoluted, it may be because it seems odd that what you mean to talk about when you say “Lincoln does not exist” is a pair of predicables of reidentification, especially given that if you had never read Williams or my summary of his thought you probably would never have even thought about predicables of reidentification. When you learned about subjects and predicates (and perhaps most of the other terminology I discussed in Section 2.1.1) you were likely not surprised; those definitions and distinctions come naturally to speakers of natural languages. But when someone talks about pairs of predicables of reidentification things may feel amiss.

If you thought this was a weakness of Williams's account, then you might like Barry Miller's explanation of why sentences like “Lincoln does not exist” make sense, but

unfortunately Miller's explanation *does nothing to demonstrate that existence is a property of individuals*. Miller's explanation of the paradox of non-existence is that statements that appear to attribute non-existence to individuals in fact tell us something about the names we use for individuals. “Lincoln does not exist” says that the name “Lincoln” once had a bearer, and now it has only a reference (where, as I have said, references can refer to things in the past).

So, like Williams, it appears that Miller agrees “Lincoln does not exist” cannot be telling us that there is an individual, Lincoln, and that among whatever properties he has he nevertheless is lacking the property of existence (that would be paradoxical). And, like Williams, Miller agrees that such a statement is meaningful to anyone who reads it. But, unlike Williams, Miller argues that the statement is about the name “Lincoln,” not about pairs of predicables of reidentification. I see no reason Williams could not have agreed with Miller on this. It does not force him to abandon his thesis about existence. And the distinction between bearer and reference, which goes at least back to Wittgenstein, looks unobjectionable.

3.5.2. Evaluation: Barry Miller on the Absurdity

Supposedly, if existence is a real property that individuals can have, then non-existence must also be, as when we say “Lincoln does not exist.” But that would be absurd. Obviously no individual could ever have a property called non-existence. Recall, then, that Miller thought that the easiest way to avoid this absurdity was to construe the statement “Lincoln does not exist” as “It is not the case that (Lincoln exists)” and to note that no predicate corresponding to a purported property of non-existence ever enters into that propositions constructional history.

But isn't that just how predicate negation comes about? Suppose I wanted to tell you that Lincoln is blind. I could say “Lincoln is blind,” or I could say “It is not the case that Lincoln can

see.” And since you know that “blind” and “cannot see” mean the same thing, you realize that these two statements make up what Williams called “a distinction without a difference.” Putting part of the statement in parentheses doesn't really change it, either.

So what of Miller's argument that, construed as a case of internal negation, the statement “Lincoln (does not exist)” can be attributing only a mere Cambridge property to Lincoln? Here Miller claimed that for any real property *F*, non-*F* will also be a real property only if there is some determinable property such that *F* and non-*F* are both determinates of it. His example was of color, a determinable property, and if some object has a color other than red we can say that it has a real property which we can call non-red. However, according to Miller, there is no determinable property such that existence and non-existence can both be determinates of it.

Let's think more about Miller's proposed rule for when *F* and non-*F* are correlative properties.

According to Miller, whenever non-*F* is a determinate of the same determinable as *F*, non-*F* tells us something about the individual of which it is predicated. That's why it a real property. If, on the other hand, non-*F* and *F* don't have a common determinable (as he says existence and non-existence do not), then we may infer that non-*F* is a mere Cambridge property. So if there is a flaw in his rule, there will be some property *F* that satisfies one of the following to sets of conditions:

F is a real property.

Non-*F* is a Cambridge property (tells us nothing about that of which it is predicated).

F and non-*F* are determinates of a determinable.

Or:

F is a real property.

Non-*F* is a real property.

F and non-*F* are NOT determinates of a determinable.

Regarding the second set of conditions, there doesn't appear to be any obvious reason that correlative real properties must always be determinates of a common determinable. Consider the property *goodness*. Unlike some philosophers, such as the logical positivists, who thought there was no such property and that statements of the form "x is good" are statements of approval, I think that goodness is a real property that individual things can have. It is what Geach called *logically attributive* and to say that something is good is to say that the thing does well the sort of thing it is supposed to do.[159] A good car is one that drives as it is expected to drive; a good bird flies well. A piano hopelessly out of tune just isn't a good piano and we can predicate *non-goodness* of it (forget for the moment that we have the synonym "badness").

Non-goodness is a real property that we can attribute to things. It makes too much of a difference and tells too much about that of which it is predicated to be a mere Cambridge property. In 2007, when the first iPhones came out reviewers often said that they were remarkable gadgets, but not good phones. First-generation iPhone users complained that when they tried to call someone they would get either no signal or else get cut-off before they could say anything. It was understood that this meant that for everything they could do (send e-mail, play movies, and so on) they could not do what phones do: allow users to talk with people far away. Non-goodness was a real property of that first generation of iPhone insofar as they were just not good phones.

[159]I take it that this isn't far from Aquinas's position. See Herbert McCabe, "Aquinas on 'God is Good,'" in *The McCabe Reader*, ed. Brian Davies and Paul Kucharski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Yet what determinable could goodness and non-goodness both be determinates of? Usually, whenever *F* and non-*F* are both determinates of some determinable *D*, being told "x is non-*F*" entails "x is one of the other *D*s." When I learned that some pizzas are not shaped like circles, I knew that some are shaped like one of the other shapes. When I learned some songs have more than one chord, I knew that some have another number of chords. This is because circle and non-circle, with regard to pizzas, are real properties that are determinates of common determinables. So too with the number of chords in musical compositions. But when I learned some pizza is not good, there is no way I could complete the sentence "It is one of the other...." Nor can they belong to some determinable called "quality," since to say something is non-good is to say it is lacking some quality, namely the quality of doing well what we expect something to do.[160]

So it looks like we have here a pair of real properties of the forms *F* and non-*F* that are not determinates of a common determinable. But, according to Miller, the same is true of existence and non-existence, except here he thinks the former is real while the latter merely Cambridge. The rule he proposes for admitting existence as a real property but not non-existence cannot accommodate goodness and non-goodness. And so, if he wants to insist that existence is a real property, he has not given sufficient reason for denying that status to non-existence. Thus the absurdity of claims like "Lincoln does not exist" remains.

If existence could be a property of individuals, it seems that it would be relevantly like goodness, in that both would be expressed by predicates ("exists" and "is good") that have meanings that differ based on that of which they are predicated. What it means for a pizza to be good is different from what it means for a car to be good. Likewise, if existence could be a

[160] This is why it does not matter if you replace "not good" with the synonym "bad." Both are telling us about the quality, or lack thereof, of something.

property, what it means for a pizza to exist would differ from what it means for a car to exist. “For Socrates to be is for Socrates to be a human,” as the Aristotelian maxim goes. So it seems especially appropriate that what we learn about goodness and non-goodness (namely, that both can be real properties despite not being determinates of a determinable) would apply with equal force to existence and non-existence. If, as Miller claims, existence is a real property, we have no reason to rule out non-existence from being a real property; yet, that would be absurd.

Before moving on, I want to mention a possible counter-objection to what I have said. I have claimed that non-goodness is a real property that something can have. This does not, I think, commit me to the view that every predicate of the form non-F designates a real property. “That phone is not good” tells me something important and specific (that is, something no other non-synonymous predicate can tell me) about the phone; “That phone is not 40 pounds” does not. It could mean my phone is an ounce, that it is a ton, or that it is 41 pounds. Predicates of the form non-F designate real properties only when they serve to tell us something relevantly important about the subject of which they are predicated.

3.6. William Vallicella: Evaluation

Recall from above that Vallicella thought there are three problems for the view that existence cannot be had by individuals: 1) Frege was mistaken to think that statements of the form “Kovacs exists” are (illegitimately) attaching a second-order predicate to the name of an individual; 2) The Plato's Beard argument is based on a modal fallacy; 3) From the fact that non-existence cannot be had by individuals it cannot be inferred that existence cannot.

3.6.1. Evaluation of Vallicella's First Argument

Vallicella, I have said, thought that the syllogism “Philosophers exist; Socrates is a philosopher; therefore Socrates exists” was not so much flawed as abbreviated. He says it should be expanded as:

1. The property *being a philosopher* is instantiated.
2. If a property is instantiated, it is instantiated by an existent.
3. Therefore, the property *being a philosopher* is instantiated by an existent.
4. Socrates instantiates the property *being a philosopher*.
5. Therefore, Socrates is an existent (=Socrates exists).

The first premise is true. It is phrased in the way that Frege said we ought to understand general existential statements. But what could “existent” mean in the next two premises? If it is true that existence is not a property that individuals can have, then “existent” cannot coherently mean “an existing individual.” If existence were something individuals could have, then every individual would be an existing individual; there would be no non-existing individuals. Moreover, barring what some philosophers might have to say about abstract Platonic-type entities (and, as well will see in Chapter Five, what Aquinas thought regarding God), it is hard to think of what would count as an existent other than particular individuals, that is, particular things I might point to and say “that one (whether it be a dog or a rainbow or an instance of love).” So the second and third premises might just as well mean:

2a. If a property is instantiated, it is instantiated by an individual.

3a. Therefore, the property *being a philosopher* is instantiated by an individual.

And now it is not hard to see that the conclusion of the argument is not that Socrates exists, but that Socrates is an individual. Hardly controversial. Moreover, consider the predicate "instantiates the property *being a philosopher*" in the fourth premise. Following the terminology I laid out at the beginning of Chapter Two, individuals, considered as objects, are what have first-level properties. And "instantiates the property *being a philosopher*" would be a first-level predicate. So the fourth premise alone is enough to get an argument like the following:

1. Socrates instantiates the property *being a philosopher*.
2. Individuals are what instantiates properties.
3. Therefore, Socrates is an individual.

Again, existence never has to enter the picture.

In fact, again thinking about the fourth premise, any time there is a true sentence of the form "x is F," where *x* names an individual (that is, *x* picks out something), we know that x is an individual so long as the predicate expressed by F can be predicated of x.[161] Someone who subscribes to the naïve view of existence, according to which existence is a property of individuals, will infer from "x is F" that x exists. But that would just beg the question about existence.

[161] I mean that we learn nothing from statements like "February is dignified." Nor do we learn anything from "x exists."

3.6.2. Evaluation of Vallicella on Plato's Beard

According to Vallicella, proponents of the Plato's Beard argument have made the following mistake: From the fact that, necessarily, every non-vacuous name (that is, every name that *does* name) designates something that exists, they have tried to infer that either non-vacuous names must name necessary existents or else existence is not a first-level property of individuals.[162] And this would be a modal fallacy: Just because non-vacuous names must name (that is what makes them non-vacuous) it does not follow that what they name have to be necessary beings.

But by introducing the distinction between vacuous and non-vacuous names into the disagreement about Plato's Beard, Vallicella seems to miss the point of the argument. Williams has already admitted that a statement like "Kovacs exists" might make sense in certain contexts, such as when comparing me to fictional characters, because such a statement is not about a property that I have but about a property the name "Kovacs" has (see Section 2.4.1), namely that it really does name someone (whereas the name "Sherlock Holmes" does not, which is why I can say he does not exist).

The point of the Plato's Beard argument is to draw our attention to what subject-predicate sentences ordinarily tell us about individuals and their properties. Sometimes such sentences only appear to tell us about an individual and some property it has, but in fact are short-hand disguises for something else: Examples of sentences like this are what Section 2.4 was about, when, for example, I showed how Williams could argue that "President Trump exists and President Bartlett does not" were not sentences about Trump and Bartlett at all but were about names.

But ordinarily subject-predicate sentences tell us about individuals and their properties.

[162] Vacuous names do not name. "President Bartlett" is a vacuous name. See discussion of fictional characters in Chapter Two.

This is true even of sentences whose subject is abstract: “The distance from Cleveland to Akron is shorter than that from Cleveland to New York” tells us of a property that the distance between Akron and Cleveland has. But it is easier to consider a sentence like “Pope Francis was born in Argentina.” Someone who hears such a sentence will, upon picking out who the term “Pope Francis” refers to, understand that Pope Francis has the property of being born in Argentina. You can even imagine someone hearing that sentence who didn't understand what the words “Pope Francis” might refer to; perhaps he had never heard of popes and had managed to go through life without ever encountering “Francis” as a person's name. Provided this person had an otherwise reasonable grasp of English, this hypothetical person would at least be able to infer that whatever “Pope Francis” was meant to name it has to be the sort of thing capable of being born and physically located in space, in particular, in Argentina.[163]

But this process breaks down if I tell someone “Pope Francis exists.” Once the object named is picked out, there is nothing new to learn. (The same goes, incidentally, for the statement “The distance between Akron and Cleveland exists.”) If the sentence is meant to tell us about a property that an individual has, telling me that the individual exists does not seem to tell me anything at all. *If* it were telling us about a property that Pope Francis has, then the fact that it would be true would be guaranteed by the ability to pick out the object that the sentence is telling us about. But that is why it *can't* be telling us about a property Pope Francis has. If it were telling us such a thing, how could it fail to be true? Yet, we know that it could fail to be true. So the Plato's Beard argument shows that whatever statements like “Pope Francis exists” might purport to tell us, such statements cannot meaningfully tell us about individuals and their properties.

[163]What if this hypothetical hearer misunderstood our word “born” for an analogous word? After all, like Pope Francis, wasn't liberation theology was born in Latin America? Yet liberation theology is not the sort of thing that is located in space. In such an instance we could safely inform our confused interlocutor that he has equivocated on the word “born.” He had misunderstood the intended meaning.

3.6.3. Evaluation of Vallicella on the Problem of Non-Existence

Vallicella's approach to the issue of non-existence is to say that singular affirmations of existence tell us about something individuals have but that denials of existence tell us that some property is not instantiated. So, on his account, only singular existential affirmations are about individuals. This response to the problem of non-existence, that is, to the question of how singular negative existential statements can be true, appears *ad hoc*. Vallicella doesn't give an argument for it, but he proposes it as an option to show that statements about non-existence need not be as problematic as thinkers like Williams have made it out to be. But are there any reasons for accepting or rejecting Vallicella's claim that statements about existence and non-existence are asymmetrical?

There are at least two reasons for treating Vallicella's claim as suspect. The first is that there are no other examples of statements and their negations not both being about the apparent subject of the statement. If I say either “Zita sings” or “It is not the case that Zita sings” in both cases I am talking about Zita. In fact, singular denials of the form “x is not-F” seem to never be about properties, but about the x, the object that the subject names. While Williams's account of a statement like “President Bartlett does not exist” also admits to not being about an individual, but about a name, he could at least say that both “President Bartlett exists” and “President Bartlett does not exist” would be about the same thing, the same name.

Secondly, Vallicella's analysis of statements of the form “x does not exist” says that the statement is about a property, but cannot specify what property. Let's take the case of “Sherlock Holmes does not (or “did not” or “has never”) exist (or “existed”).” It seems Vallicella would have us look for a property that corresponds to a description of what comes to mind when

someone speaks of “Sherlock Holmes.” So perhaps “Sherlock Holmes does not exist” is about the property “World-famous detective who lived at 221B Baker Street.” But suppose you were considerably less familiar with the Holmes canon. Suppose when you hear the same sentence, “Sherlock Holmes does not exist,” you get it in mind that the statement is about the property “The morphine addict who was eventually killed by Moriarty.” Moreover, the speaker of the sentence might have even less clear of an idea. The speaker understands by “Sherlock Holmes” only “a detective with great powers of deduction.”

Now it seems to be a problem that one sentence can cause so much confusion as to what it is really about. Notice that it cannot be the case that the above descriptions all pick out the same thing, either; it is not a discrepancy explainable in terms of what Frege called sense and reference. It is true that if I tell two people “Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was a spiritualist,” one might think “The man who created the Sherlock Holmes stories was a spiritualist,” and the other “The man who wrote *The Lost World* was a spiritualist.” This is because both “The man who wrote *The Lost World*” and “The man who created the Sherlock Holmes stories” pick out the same individual; they have the same reference. But, according to Vallicella, when we deny existence of Sherlock Holmes, we are not talking about an individual, but about a property. And “World-famous detective who lived at 221B Baker Street” just is not the same property as “morphine addict who was eventually killed by Moriarty.” Proof of this is that the former property really can be instantiated (if, at any time, a famous detective lives at that address), but the latter never so (since I take it there is no Moriarty to kill anyone).

So there are two reasons to be suspicious of Vallicella's claim about the problem of non-existence. First, it seems strange that statements regarding the existence of an individual would have a different subject than the negation of the same statement; second, that it is not even clear

how to determine what property such negations are about. Neither of these objections are knock down arguments. But neither is Vallicella's explanation of why non-existence is not a problem. Rather, I intend only to draw attention to why you might think Vallicella's account is not conclusive. If his account is correct, a defender of his view should provide more reason for thinking so.

3.7. Evaluation of Kris McDaniel on Existence

McDaniel argues that statements of number predicate first-level properties of individuals. Therefore, he says, if existence is a statement of number like Williams claims it is, it too is a first-level property of individuals. But he thinks that numerical predicates are non-distributive; they tell us about individuals but not about any individual. If this is true of numerical predicates, it is hard to see how it can be true of the predicate “exists.”

First, non-distributive predicates, like “lined up along the bar,” cannot be meaningfully attached to the names of individuals. But what is at stake in Williams's arguments about existence is that “exists” can never be attached to the names of individuals. So saying that “exists” is a non-distributive predicate just like all statements of number gets us nowhere if the goal is to show Williams was wrong about how to use the word “exists.”

Second, what information does McDaniel think the word “exists” could be conveying if it is a statement of number at all? When he speaks of guests at his dinner party existing because there is at least one guest at his dinner party, he is still on the same page as Frege and Williams. But does he then mean that “Kovacs exists” is just a way of saying “Kovacs is at least one in number?” What could this latter expression convey? Assuming someone who heard it understood “Kovacs” to be the name of an individual, why would there be any inquiry about number?

Further complicating this last point is the fact that McDaniel says he is skeptical of the claim that "exists" is a statement of number, but that he is willing to concede the issue and show that number statements are first-level. If he said what he thinks statements of existence really are, if not statements of number, the objection I have just laid out may become irrelevant.

Third, according to McDaniel, non-distributive predicates cannot be predicated of any one member of the set of individuals of which they are predicated. "The students surrounded the building" cannot be justification for the claim "Theresa, who is a student, surrounded the building." If this is right, then even if McDaniel finds a way of meaningfully attaching "exists" to the name of an individual, he still won't get a valid argument like: "Philosophers exist; Socrates is a philosopher; so Socrates exists." Yet this is usually the sort of argument defenders of a first-level view of existence aim to defend.

3.8. A Verdict on Williams's View of Existence

In this chapter I have summarized criticisms leveled against Williams made by three philosophers. However, I have also argued that none of their criticisms stand up to scrutiny. Moreover, Williams has already made what I have called a "Master Reply" that any critic has to confront: Namely, anyone who thinks Williams is wrong to deny existence can be a meaningful first-level predicate will have to show how a first-level meaning has some connection to the word "some." But none of the objectors considered in this chapter have done so.

I am therefore prepared to render a verdict in Williams's favor. Existence is not a property that individuals have; and, given what has been established about existence in the Fregean analysis, it makes no sense to talk about whether or not something is identical to or distinct from its existence.

But is any of this really what Aquinas was concerned with when he argued that God is *ipsum esse subsistens*? After all, while we find it convenient to translate "*esse*" as "existence" or "being," it may be that Aquinas meant something more nuanced by the term. If so, it might be that Aquinas was never trying to claim that God is identical to some first-order property while everything else has a first-level property (like existence) distinct from some other first-level property (like essence). These are problems to which I will now turn in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: *Esse*

When Aquinas writes that God is identical to his own *esse*, he certainly cannot mean that God is identical to a second-order property that corresponds to an answer to "How many?" type questions. That is, he does not mean by *esse* what Williams thinks must be meant by "existence." However, he also need not mean by *esse* what Williams denied existence could be. In other words, if Aquinas thinks of *esse* as a first-order property that is had by everything, then his account of God as *ipsum esse subsistens* will be incoherent in light of the Fregean analysis of existence that Williams provides. But if Aquinas means something else by *esse*, then we ought to examine what he means on his own terms and evaluate his thinking on divine simplicity in light of that. So, the purpose of this chapter is to sort out what Aquinas means when he writes about *esse*. Some of this will echo comments I made in the first chapter, but here I will lay out the details with an eye toward comparing Aquinas's thinking on the matter to Williams's. The first five sections focus on some important features of Aquinas's thinking on this topic; the final section compares Aquinas's *esse* to Williams's "existence."

4. 1. *Ens* and *Esse*

Aquinas divides beings (that is, everything that can be called a being, *ens* in Latin) in various ways, including into substance and accident, as well as actual beings and potential beings.[164] But the most fundamental division, as I noted in a previous discussion of the first chapter of *De ente et essentia*, is into what commentators sometimes call "real being" (*ens secundum rem*) and "beings of reason" (*ens secundum rationes*). A real being is anything that falls into one of the ten Aristotelian categories. A being of reason, on the other hand, is called a "being" only with

[164] *In Met*. V, l. 9, n. 1; n. 5; n. 13.

qualification and by a sort of convention. A human being, as a substance, is a real being. On the other hand, a lawyer is a being of reason. Even though all lawyers are substances insofar as they are people, there is no Aristotelian category that includes lawyers; the designation of a person as a lawyer is something that depends on a mental act. When making this distinction, Aquinas is trying to account for how a statement like "Blindness exists" can be true when there is no essence of blindness since blindness is merely the privation of sight. By reclassifying things like blindness (and lawyers and societies and artifacts) as beings of reason, he can then say that real beings are beings that have essences.

In addition to essence, however, Aquinas also thinks that real beings have *esse*.[165] Literally translated, this word is the Latin infinitive "to be." Many translators render it as "existence" or "being." But since my intention is to find out whether or not it maps onto what Williams called "existence" and "being," for the remainder of this chapter I will leave it untranslated. Moreover, both "being" and "existence" are problematic translations. The way Aquinas uses *esse* is awkward Latin. He writes things like *ens simpliciter est quod habet esse*, which literally translated is "a being [*ens*] simpliciter is that which has *to-be*" (where I have here translated esse as the hyphenated *to-be*).[166] The verb *habet*, "has" in English, should ordinarily take a noun, not an infinitive verb. Yet Aquinas frequently uses *esse* in just this way.

Since Aquinas thinks that *esse* is what combines, so to speak, with essences to make finite real beings (that is, all beings other than God), what does he take *esse* to be?

[165] *ST* 1a2ae,26,4. See also In *BDH* Lec. 2.
[166] *Ibid*.

4.2. Is *Esse* an Accident?

To begin figuring out what Aquinas means by *esse*, that is, that which he thinks is responsible for entities (*entes*) being anything at all, it will be helpful, I think, to consider a few texts where Aquinas addresses the question of whether *esse* is an accident. After all, if he thinks that it is an accident, without qualification, then we can proceed from there to inquire what else he thinks about it.

Let's look at a text where Aquinas is concerned with the composition of *esse* and essence in angels.[167] An objection to the claim that they are so composed is this: Since God alone is essentially being, and since nothing can be a composite of essence and something accidental to its essence, angels cannot be composites of essence and *esse*. To this Aquinas responds:

> There are two ways that something can be participated in. In one way it can be participated in as if it belonged to the substance of the thing participating, such as how a genus is participated in by one of its species. But creatures do not participate in being (*esse*) this way. For whatever belongs to the substance of a thing falls into its definition. However, being (*ens*) is not placed in the definition of any creature, because it is neither a genus nor a difference. So it [i.e., *esse*] is participated in as something not belonging to the thing's essence. And so the question "Is it?" is different from the question "What is it?" Hence, since all that is outside a thing's essence may be called an accident, the being (*esse*) which pertains to the question "Is it?" is an accident.

I have something to say below regarding what Aquinas means by "participation." For

[167] *QQ* 2,2,1.

now Aquinas can be understood to be arguing that to properly answer the question "What is it?" about anything, you have to say what a thing's genus is and what makes it different from all the other sorts of things in that genus. For example, an answer to the question "What is Pope Francis?" would be, according to Aquinas, "a rational animal" because Pope Francis is a human being and human beings are rational animals. Here, "animal" indicates the genus, and "rational" indicates what makes human beings different from every other species of animal. However, being cannot be a difference because there is nothing outside of being by which it could be distinguished. And since whatever is not included in the essence of a thing or entailed by its definition can be called an accident, Aquinas appears to conclude that *esse* is an accident.

The slogan "Being is not a genus" can be traced at least back to Aristotle.[168] Aquinas repeats it often.[169] One argument that Aquinas gives for why being cannot be a genus runs something like this:[170] In an important sense, the differences that we include in the definitions of species are outside of the genera the species fall in. One reason for this is that nothing prevents one difference from applying to many things across different genera. For another, the definition of a genus does not include reference to any of the differences that demarcate the various species. The definition of "animal," for example, as "Living thing capable of sensation and locomotion" makes no reference to rationality, which is the difference proper to the human animal. Yet nothing could fall outside of being to possibly serve as a difference. Therefore, being is not a genus.

Does Aquinas need to consent to *esse* being an accident, however? In other words, given that we typically think that accidents are what something can lose without ceasing to be the sort of thing that it is (at least, this is a traditional understanding found in Aristotle), and given that

[168] *Posterior Analytics* 92b14, *Metaphysics* 998b22.
[169] C.f., *ST* 3a,77,1, ad.2.
[170] *In Met*. III, l. 8, n. 9.

esse is what makes something to be anything at all, isn't there something odd about calling *esse* an accident?

There is, and Aquinas seems to be aware of this. We thus rarely find him referring to *esse* as an accident. Rather, he prefers to say things like *esse* is "different from" a thing's essence or that it "happens upon" the essences of things.[171] One of the few other texts where Aquinas does call *esse* an accident shows him immediately clarifying: *esse* does not fall into one of the nine Aristotelian categories of accidents, but we call it an accident because of "similitude," that is, because like an accident, it falls outside of a thing's essence.[172] In still other passages, Aquinas tries to make his position on the question of whether *esse* is an accident even more precise: Avicenna, he tells us, thought that the being of things was an accident in the full Aristotelian sense because a thing's essence can never account for the fact that it is exists.[173] Aquinas firmly places himself against this position, saying that *esse*, "properly speaking, is not an accident" (*proprie loquendo, non est accidens*).[174]

Aquinas takes this anti-Avicennian position because he thinks that all accidents are posterior to their substances. There just is no such thing as being 5'10" unless there are substances capable of being 5'10". Yet, he thinks that *esse* precedes substances. I want to turn now to why he thinks that, for this consideration provides important information about what Aquinas thinks about *esse*.

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[171] *In Sent*. I, d. 8, exp.; *In Sent.* I, d. 19, q. 2, a. 2; *QDV* q. 28, a. 1, ad 8; *QQ* II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1; *QQ* X, q. 2, ad 4; *In Met.* IV, l. 2, n. 11.
[172] *QDP* q.5, a.4, ad. 3.
[173] *In Met*. IV, l. 2, n. 9.
[174] *QQ*. XII, Q. 5, a. 1.

4.3. Act and Potency

Aquinas calls *esse* "the act of an existent insofar as it is a being (*ens*)."[175] So he associates *esse* with act or actuality. What, then, does he mean by the term "act?"

Aquinas thinks that *esse* stands to essence as act to potency. Let's review these Aristotelian notions as Aquinas understands them. Whatever exists right now, Aquinas says, can be said to exist *actually*.[176] Of course, depending on how events play out, lots of other things may soon exist even though they now do not. There are sperm cells and egg cells that actually exist right now. After a sperm cell fertilizes an egg, a living animal will come to exist. Until then, the living animal that will come to exist from that sperm and egg exists only potentially, to use Aquinas's terminology.

In any non-divine substance, Aquinas thinks that there will be something which is the principle of actuality. This principle is what transforms the correlative principle of potentiality to become an actually existing substance. This is easiest to see when considering material substances. Matter, considered in itself, is itself nothing on Aquinas's account. That is, matter, considered just in itself, is never this or that kind of thing. However, matter stands as potentially anything that matter can be organized into. What makes it to be actually this or that sort of thing is form. To use a very loose metaphor: The ingredients on my counter are potentially a number of different dishes; supposing I have some flour and tomato sauce and cheese, these can be formed into lasagna or pizza or any number of other dishes. They are potentially those other dishes and remain so until someone imposes the form of lasagna or pizza or whatever onto them. Aquinas thinks that such an analysis applies to any sort of material substance because it is *prime matter* that is fundamentally in potency to every form (provided that the form in question is the form of

[175] *In I Sent*., d. 19, q. 2, a. 2.
[176] *De Principiis Naturae*, ch. 1.

a composite material substance) (See Chapter 1.2). So, to sum up, form stands to matter as actuality to potentiality because matter, considered just as matter, is potentially any material substance and becomes only some particular material substance once it receives a form.

Aquinas thinks that any created thing that exists will have to contain within it something that is a principle of actuality and something that is a principle of potentiality. But what about immaterial substances? What about angels and separated souls? Do they have some sort of spiritual matter that stands in potentiality to their form? Aquinas reports that some thinkers did believe in spiritual matter in order to explain how angels and separated souls are composites of potentiality and actuality, but he thinks that this claim is incoherent. To be a spiritual substance like an angel or separate soul just is to be immaterial. To talk about "spiritual matter" would be to claim that there is non-material matter. Impossible.

Can there be substances whose essences actualize themselves? That is, can immaterial substances simply fail to be composites of potentiality and actuality? For reasons covered in Chapter One, Aquinas thinks that there can be such a being, but at most only one such being. That being is the pure actuality that is God. So the remaining immaterial substances still must be composites of potentiality and actuality. This is where *esse* becomes crucial in Aquinas's thought. Since nothing that you learn about the essences of immaterial substances could ever reveal anything about which immaterial substances actually exist, these essences must be actualized in individuals by some other principle that is separate and distinct from essence. This principle Aquinas calls *esse*.

So, according to Aquinas, essences cannot actualize themselves into being particular individuals, whether the essence in question is of a material substance or an immaterial one. Gaven Kerr nicely summarizes the rôle of *esse* with respect to essence:

> [E]ssence as distinct from *esse* does not have the wherewithal for its own existence, in which case no essence exists that does not have *esse*. Consequentially, all finite things have received *esse* from without, and this because they do not exist in virtue of their essences, but rather in virtue of something distinct from their essences. Whatever receives something from another stands in potency to that other in respect of what it receives; co-relatively, what is received in another is in another as actualizing the potency in which the other stands to receive.[177]

So knowledge of what something is, for example knowing that humans are rational animals, is not sufficient for knowing that one of the humans is Kovacs. The existence of such an essence certainly makes my existence potentially possible, but for me to actually exist something must actualize the particular instance that is me. What I need to actually be anything at all is something my essence alone cannot provide; what I need is an act of existing, an *actus essendi*.

Aquinas's understanding of this act of existing is summed up by John Wippel:

> For Aquinas, if a substance actually exists, this can only be because an intrinsic act of existing is present within it, which actualizes its essence.... Aquinas regards this act of existing as the most fundamental ontological principle within any existing substance and refers to it as the "actuality of all acts and the perfection of all perfections." It is always realized in a finite substance only to a finite degree. Given Aquinas's view that act is not self-limiting, it follows that within any finite being its act of existing is received and limited by its corresponding essence. Indeed, this is one way in which he argues for the

[177] *Aquinas's Way to God*, 58.

presence of these two distinct principles within finite entities."[178]

So the reason that Aquinas thinks that *esse* precedes all substances is because he thinks that act precedes potency. Before you can begin to understand what something might potentially become you need some understanding of what it actually is. And if *esse* is, as Aquinas thinks that it is, the act of all acts, it will precede even substances that actually exist. A finite thing's essence limits the *esse* that the thing receives to being just the *esse* of this or that finite thing, and as such essence stands to *esse* as potency to act.

4.4. "Form Gives Existence"

Now I have to address a possible confusion. Aquinas often says something to the effect that "form gives existence" (*forma dat esse*). This could lead one to think that there is no need to posit *esse* as a distinct metaphysical principle. After all, form is an actualizing principle; and if form makes a thing exist, why think anything distinct from form is necessary? Wouldn't it be over-determination to say that *esse* is additionally needed to actualize a being?

There are two points to be made here: First, that Aquinas often means just to point out that form gives existence *to matter*.[179] Aquinas says, for example, that "Form is a cause of matter insofar as it gives actual being [*esse actu*] to matter, and matter is a cause of form insofar as it sustains it."[180] The point is that prime matter void of form does not and cannot exist. Matter needs form in order to become actually something, in order to be an existent at all.

But what about passages where Aquinas doesn't make such qualification, where he says

[178] John Wippel, "Being" in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 79-80. The cited text is *De Potentia* q. 7, a. 2, a. 9 and *Summa Theologiae* 1a,3,4.
[179] C.f., *De Principiis Naturae*, ch. 1; *QDA*, a. 1; *DEE*, ch. 3.
[180] *In Met*. V, l. 2, n. 13.

that form is a cause of *esse* simpliciter? Consider this passage:

> Since form is a principle of being [*principium essendi*], it is necessary that whatever has a form, that which has it can be called somehow a "haver of existence" [*habens esse*]. If, therefore, the form is not external to the essence of the thing that has it, but rather constitutes the essence, then from having such a form the thing is said to be simpliciter, as a human being is said to be in virtue of being a rational animal.[181]

Here Aquinas says that having a form suffices to have *esse*. And this does seem puzzling for any account which posits *esse* as a necessary principle distinct from essence. In other places, he says that the *esse* of things is caused by the forms of things:

> Essence is that by which a thing is said to be (*esse*). But the essence through which a thing is denominated a "being" is neither the form alone nor the matter alone, but both. However, it is the form that causes the thing's being in its own way.[182]

To understand how Aquinas thinks that form gives *esse* to things, it is helpful to look at two passages where he compares the relation between *esse*, form, and the composite thing with that between air, light, and transparency:

> *Esse* is compared even to form as an act. For in things composed of matter and form, form is said to be the principle of being, because it is a complement of the substance

[181] *In De Hebd*., l. 2.
[182] *DEE*, Ch. 1.

> whose act is just being (*esse*). This is just as transparency, in relation to the air, is the principle of illumination, because it makes the air the proper subject of light.[183]

You may understand this passage better if read alongside another text where Aquinas makes the same comparison. When asking whether all things have to be kept in existence by God so long as they do exist, he considers an objection which runs like this: Form gives existence; but some things, namely angels, just are essentially forms. So, it would seem that it belongs essentially to angels to exist and that they ought not to have to depend on God to be kept in existence. But against this Aquinas writes: "Supposing the influence of God, *esse* necessarily follows upon form in creatures, just as, supposing the influence of the sun, illumination necessarily follows upon transparency in the air."[184]

So now we are in position to see what Aquinas means when he says "Form gives existence." Air, in Aquinas's metaphor, does not have within it the ability to produce light. What it has is transparency (we may overlook whatever embarrassing physical theories Aquinas may have had for why this is the case). To say that the air is illuminated, however (assuming the influence of the sun) is just to say that the air is transparent. Transparency complements air in such a way that it is able to receive light and be illuminated. In this way, one might say that transparency gives illumination to air because it makes air the sort of thing capable of receiving light from the sun. Likewise, we can say that form gives existence because to say that a composite substance exists just means that it has some particular substantial form. And, given the influence of God, to say that a substance has a form will entail that it also has *esse*.

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[183] *SCG* 54,2.
[184] *ST* 1a,104,1.

4.5. Participation in *Esse*

The being that creatures receive is often called *esse commune*, or common being, and they receive it from God, who is pure being, or *esse tantum*. But the magnitude of difference between *esse commune* and *esse tantum* cannot be overstated. It is not God's own *esse* that creatures share; Aquinas is not a pantheist. God creates common being, or *esse commune*; *esse tantum,* the pure being that is God, is wholly uncreated.[185] More precisely: God creates *esse commune,* which creatures *participate* in; but *esse tantum* is unparticipated *esse*. If this is right, then Aquinas's attempt to answer the question first raised in Chapter One, "How can God exist yet not be one of the things in the universe?" will have to be answered in terms of the difference between participation versus non-participation. Here I will say something about what it means to say that *esse* is something that creatures participate in. In the next chapter I will try to say something about this means when we go on to say that God is pure being, *esse* without participation.

Participation, according to Aquinas, is a "sort of taking part."[186] However, it is important to distinguish Aquinas's notion of participation from views associated with his predecessors going back to Plato. On Plato's view, as often understood anyway, whenever multiple things have an attribute in common, it is necessary to posit that a separate form exists by virtue of which multiple things can have the same attribute; individuals participate in that form to the extent that they exhibit the attribute.[187] The reason I can be called a human being and you can be called a human being, according to Plato, is because there is the form of human being that you and I both somehow participate in. The question of what participation amounts to beyond this is left unanswered by Plato.

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[185] For a detailed study of these terms as they occur in Aquinas's writings, see Edmund Morton's *The Doctrine of Ens Commune in St. Thomas Aquinas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1953).
[186] *De Hebd*., l. 2.
[187] For a helpful overview of Platonism, see Ch. 4 of Anthony Kenny's *The Five Ways*.

Aquinas does not believe that there are forms separate from matter other than the angels (and, in a unique sense, God).[188] He even considers Platonism with regard to separate forms incompatible with Christian faith.[189] Nevertheless, from his earliest works he makes use of the term "participation."[190] And he occasionally offers a brief explanation of his meaning, as when he says "To participate is just to receive in part from another."[191] Likewise, he says "Whatever is participated is determined to the mode of what participates, possessed partially and not with every mode of perfection."[192] But his full account of participation comes from his commentary on Boethius's *De Hebdomadibus*, for there Boethius says that things can be good "by participation."

"When one thing receives in a particular manner what belongs to another in a universal manner, it participates in it" Aquinas tells us in his commentary, and he proceeds to describe three kinds of participation.[193] First, a species participates in a genus, as humanity participates in animality. Aquinas says this kind of participation is also at work when an individual human being is said to participate in the essence of humanity. The idea seems to be that we can distinguish between humanity and some particular human being without wanting to deny that a particular human being exemplifies humanity. It is important to note here, however, that what is participated in when it comes to this kind of participation is what Aquinas would call *beings of reason*. A genus and a species have no independent existence and depend on the mind for their being. Thus, following Gaven Kerr, we may call this mode of participation "logical

[188] I had thought it well known that Aquinas is not a Platonist. However, Lawrence Dewan argues, forcibly I think, that Alvin Plantinga's objection to Aquinas on divine simplicity presupposes that Aquinas must be committed to Platonism. Plantinga is mistaken. See "Saint Thomas, Alvin Plantinga, and the Divine Simplicity" in *Modern Schoolman* 66 (1989): 141-51.
[189] A claim that he makes in the prologue to his commentary on Dionysius's *Divine Names*.
[190] Cf. *DE* ch. 5; *In I Sent*., d. 8, q. 1, aa. 1-2.
[191] In II *de Caelo et Mundo*, l. 18.
[192] *SCG* 1,32.
[193] *De Hebd*., l. 2.

participation."[194]

Aquinas also gives two examples of the second kind of participation: Subjects participate in their accidents and matter participates in form. The common element in these two examples is that something potential can be said to participate in a formal principle that makes it actual in some respect. Matter participates in substantial forms, and subjects participate in accidental forms. Forms, considered in themselves, are universal; but they are received in particulars and according to the way particulars are. Since, in this kind of participation, both what participates and what is participated in are real (subjects, matter, and substantial and accidental forms all exist independently of the mind insofar as they are in composite substances) we may again follow Kerr in calling this "real participation."[195]

Lastly, Aquinas tells us that effects participate in causes. If we keep in mind the principle that the participation structure that Aquinas has in mind generally, a structure where what is participated in particularizes that which participates, we might understand what he means by thinking of a room getting warmer from a furnace. Heat enters a room and warms it up. But, it warms up each particular thing in the room (or at least each surface). So the warm surfaces of the things in the room can be thought of as participating in the heat that is entering the room in a way that is otherwise undetermined. I'll call this "Causal participation."[196]

The *De Hebdomadibus* commentary is helpful for understanding Aquinas, not only on participation, but also on *esse*, because he immediately turns from this threefold distinction of kinds of participation to asking how they pertain to *esse*. First, he shows that *esse* cannot

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[194] Gaven Kerr, *Aquinas's Way to God*, 60.

[195] A minor caveat: Matter, according to Aquinas, as I have said already, has no being except insofar as form actualizes it. The point in saying that it is real, existing independently of the mind, is just to say that it really is a principle of potency that form actualizes.

[196] Aquinas thinks that causal participation is not always univocal. The differences between created things and God, for example, is problematic. This is dealt with in the next chapter.

participate in anything else in either of the first two ways, that is, logically or really. *Esse* can't participate in something really because, Aquinas writes, *esse* is signified abstractly. His example as a comparison is running.[197] I can think of running abstractly, but I can also think of someone who is running, in which case I have thought of the same thing concretely. In this way the particular participates in the abstract. The one who runs participates in running. But it is the thing which is, that is, the haver of *esse*, which Aquinas thinks participates in *esse*. Note that if it is the act of running which makes one who runs a runner, it is the act of being which makes an existent a being.

Esse also can't participate in anything in the logical sense of participation. Logical participation involves something less universal particularizing what is more universal. So, for example, Aquinas notes that whiteness can participate in color. But what can be more universal than *esse*? Rather, it is real beings, the beings that fall into the ten Aristotelian categories, which participate logically in *esse*.

So *esse* is what all real beings participate in but which itself participates in nothing. Aquinas comes straight to this point in his later *Disputated Questions Regarding the Soul*. There the question is raised of whether the soul is composed of matter and form, and Aquinas thinks it is not. But the objector notes that forms separate from matter cannot participate in other things in the way that composite substances can. For example, a white object might also be hot if it participates in hotness; but whiteness itself cannot be hot. Yet the soul participates in many things; so, the objector concludes, the soul must be a composite of matter and form. Aquinas's reply is worth quoting in full:

Being *[Esse]* is the highest act in which everything participates, however being [*esse*]

[197] *In De Hebd*. c. 2.

> itself participates in nothing; hence, if something were being subsisting itself [*ipsum esse subsistens*], as we say of God, we would say it participates in nothing. But this is not how it is with regard to other subsisting forms, which necessarily participate in being [*esse*] as something potential to something actual; and so, since they are in some way in potency, that are able to participate in something else.[198]

So we have here all the elements of Aquinas's view regarding *esse* and participation. Everything except God shares *esse* insofar as nothing has the ability to make itself actual and continue to be actual; Real beings are merely potentially beings until receiving the *esse* that actualize them. The ability of substances to participate in any other form, to possess any attribute whatsoever, presupposes that it first participates in *esse*. *Esse* itself, however, participates in nothing.

4.6. Being and Analogy[199]

I have discussed already the maxim "Form gives being [*esse*]." Another maxim, Aristotelian in origin but invoked by Aquinas at least fifteen times, is "For living things, to live is to be" (*vivere viventibus est esse*).[200] I am introducing this phrase here because it allows us to see clearly that

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[198] *QDA* a.6, ad.2.

[199] Few topics in Aquinas's thought have attracted as much attention as the so-called "analogy of being" (a phrase to be found nowhere in Aquinas). Two volumes on this in English are Ralph McInerny's *Aquinas and Analogy* (Washington, D.C.,: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998) and George Klubertanz's *St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy: A Textual Analysis and Systematic Synthesis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009). My own presentation of the material in this chapter is indebted to John F. Wippel's *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000): 65-93. My thinking on analogy when it comes to naming God, however, is influenced by Herbert McCabe; see, for example, his short essay "Analogy," which is offered as an appendix in Vol. 3 of the New Blackfriars' edition of the *Summa Theologiae*, ed. Thomas Gilby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[200] For an interesting article comparing Aquinas's understanding of this phrase with Aristotle's see Albert Wingell's "*Vivere Viventibus est Esse* in Aristotle and St. Thomas," *The Modern Schoolman* 38 (1961): 85-120. Wingell notes that Aristotle's philosophy does not have *esse* in the way Aquinas's does, so that Aquinas's understanding of the

Aquinas thinks that when we talk about the *esse* of things belonging to different genera and species, we are using the word in a non-univocal way. For Aquinas, in the statement "Socrates exists," the predicate "exists" means that the subject, Socrates, is a living human being. But Aquinas wants to be able to attach the same predicate to things that are not humans. He wants to say "Michael the Archangel exists" and "The moon exists." Yet he does not want to say that either Michael the Archangel or the moon is a living human being. So, how is he talking about the existence of things in a way that isn't just equivocation?

John F. Wippel suggests, helpfully I think, that it is best to consider Aquinas on analogy in three phases: The predicamental level, the vertical or transcendental level, and lastly, the divine level.[201] The first of these asks how we can talk about the *esse* of both substances and accidents. Since substances and accidents fall into the ten Aristotelian categories, they all have *esse* (in the way, say, blindness does not).[202] But if "Socrates is" means "Socrates is a living human being," this cannot be an appropriate way to cash out "is" in "Socrates' wisdom is."

Aquinas writes that accidents, such as the wisdom of Socrates, are more properly called "of a being" (*entis*) than "a being" (*ens*).[203] So Socrates continues to be so long as he continues to have the substantial form—that of a living human—that Socrates has. But for Socrates' wisdom to continue to be cannot mean that it continues to have the substantial form of a living human; indeed, a person's wisdom cannot have a substantial form at all. Aquinas thinks that

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maxim will have content that Aristotle's does not. Nevertheless, he concludes "[F]rom St. Thomas's standpoint, Aristotle's only fault was not to drive his search for causes far enough. The entire trunk of Aristotelianism can be grafted into the organic body of St. Thomas's teaching, where it not only survives but even flourishes, since its roots are deeper there than they were in their native soil."

[201] *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 74. In fact, the divine level is a category of the vertical level, but one which he believes requires a separate treatment. He takes the terminology of "predicamental" and "transcendental" from Cornelio Fabro, *Participation et causalité selon S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain-Paris: Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1961): 510-513.

[202] See Section 4.1. Aquinas is happy, as I explained there, to say that "Blindness is" just because it is true that some people are blind. But it doesn't have form and does not fall into the Aristotelian categories.

[203] For background as to why Aquinas says this, see Peter Geach's "Form and Actuality" in his book *God and Soul* (New York: Schoken Books, 1969).

substances have accidents in virtue of accidental forms. If this is right, at this predicamental level, Aquinas has to say that what he means by the *esse* of, say, Socrates, and the *esse* of any of Socrates' accidents is not univocal in meaning. "For Socrates' wisdom to be is for it to have the form of a living human being" is clearly false.

A different treatment of the analogy of being will be needed at the vertical level. Here we ask how we can speak of the *esse* of various kinds of substances: of angels and people and the sphynx and the moon. But we also need, in this account, to explain how being is analogically predicated of both different kinds of substances *and* their accidents. (Analogy with regard to the divine substance I leave for the next chapter).

For any two things, assuming that they really are two different things (and not just one thing with different names, as for example the morning star and evening star are one thing), there will be some sense in which the two are alike and some sense in which they differ. If there were not a sense in which they were alike, then one of the two would just not exist at all. At a minimum, they will have something in common like "being able to be compared with respect to differences." So two penguins are alike in sharing a species. And a penguin and a snake are alike in sharing a genus, the genus *animal*. But what about a penguin and, say, an instance of the color green? How are these two things alike?

The answer that Aquinas rules out is that they belong to some wider genus called "being." He rules this out for the reasons given above, because he believes that there can be no genus called "being." And yet, similar to how I call a snake and a penguin by the same word "animal," Aquinas realizes that people call penguins and instances of the color green "beings." And so, Aquinas tells us, things diverse in genus are similar by analogy.[204]

Aquinas's most mature and developed treatment of this sort of vertical or transcendental

[204] *DPN*, ch. 6.

analogy (to use Wippel's terminology) comes in his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Aristotle had noted that "being is said in many ways," but always with reference to some single principle.[205] So, substances are called "being," but so are all the ways that substances are able to be; that is, the accidental features of substances are called "beings." This kind of diversity of predication, which is neither univocal but not entirely equivocal either, Aristotle refers to *pros hen equivocation*, which rendered from the Greek means something like "equivocation with a view to a single thing." The single thing Aristotle has in mind is substance.

Aquinas takes up this discussion of *pros hen* equivocation by explaining to readers that sometimes we predicate the same word of different things because the different things all share in the definition of predicate: This is univocal predication. I call both humans and penguins "animal" because the definition of "animal," that is something like "a living being capable of sensation," is applicable to both humans and penguins. Sometimes, the content of the definition is entirely different, even though the same word is used; banks of the Mississippi just don't have anything to do with central banks. Regarding the third sort of predication, though, Aquinas directs our attention to how what I have been calling the "content of the definition" is in one way different, in one way the same; different insofar as different relationships are implied, but the same insofar as the relationships are directed to the one same thing.[206] So substance is called "being" properly; accidents are called "being" insofar as they relate to substance. This kind of predication Aquinas says is called both "analogy" and "proportional."[207] Aquinas then provides the same example as Aristotle: a body is properly called "healthy;" the same word is applied to medicine for producing health, to food for preserving it, and to urine when it is a sign of it. Here the different relationships are producing, preserving, and signifying.

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[205] For Aristotle's text, see *Metaphysics* IV, ch. 2 (1003a 33-34).
[206] *In IV Me*t. l. 1, n. 535.
[207] Ibid.

What I have just described as analogy in the case of predicating "being" of substances and accidents is sometimes called "analogy of many to one." This is because there is some one thing, substance, that is the primary source of the predication. But Aquinas also discusses what is sometimes called "analogy of one to another" when discussing analogy at the predicamental level. Here a term is predicated of two things because of the relationship the two things have to each other. So while "being" can be predicated of quality and quantity because they both have a relationship to substance (many to one), Aquinas thinks that the reason we predicate "being" of both substance and quality is because of the relation that they have to each other: Qualities depend on substances for their being.[208]

Given that accidents depend on substances for their *esse*, and each category of accident depends on substance in a different way, perhaps it is not too surprising that Aquinas believes *esse* is spoken of accidents analogously. But why should we think that the word *esse* is used analogously when speaking of the different species of substance? That is, why should we think that there is what I have called a "transcendental level" of analogy?

The answer to this question involves Aquinas's hierarchical view of God and the universe. At the top of the hierarchy, unsurprisingly, is God, who is pure act. At the bottom, inanimate stuff. In the middle, plants, animals, people, celestial bodies, and angels, ascending in that order. Two texts display Aquinas's view of why this hierarchy requires us to consider *esse* to be an analogous term when applied to substances in diverse species: *De Ente et Essentia* (already much discussed in Chapter 1) and *De Substantiis Separatis*.

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[208] I am here skirting an issue long known to interpreters of Aquinas on analogy, namely the question of whether, and to what extent, Aquinas changed his mind regarding different kinds of analogy and their applications. What is important for my argument is to note that Aquinas has good reasons for believing that "being" is a non-univocal predicate. For a helpful overview of reasons to believe that he changed his position on the details, see Giorgio Pini's "The Development of Aquinas's Thought" in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). For someone who argues that Aquinas's views were consistent throughout his life, see Stephen Long's *Analogia Entis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012).

As I have already explained, in the fourth chapter of *De Ente et Essentia* Aquinas is concerned to show how essence pertains to immaterial things, and that only one can have an essence identical with *esse*. Then, in Chapter 5, he tells us how essence and *esse* relate in each of three kinds of being: In God, they are identical, in matter-form composites they are distinct and individuated according to matter, but in angels they are also distinct yet in a different way. Since matter cannot individuate an angel, each angel is its own species; but how are the species differentiated? Hierarchically, Aquinas thinks. Each angel is closer to or farther from pure act; that is, angels are distinguished on Aquinas's view according to how much potentiality is in the angel. Ordinarily, in matter-form composites, the extent to which a form is actualized, that is, the extent to which a member of a species attains perfection within the species, has no ability to differentiate species. The example Aquinas gives is of something being more intensely white than another. Just because the form *white* is being received more or less perfectly doesn't mean two species of white are involved; but with angels, lacking matter, the extent to which they receive their essence is what differentiates them.

So, Aquinas definitely adheres to a hierarchical view of the universe and God. And in the eighth chapter of *De Substantiis Separatis* Aquinas tells us that the different grades of beings receive being differently. Things receive a mode of being (*modus essendi*) in different ways, according to how they are arranged hierarchically, which precludes us from calling things in different species "being" (*ens*) univocally. But, of course, it would be strange if my designation of a snake and a penguin as beings were equivocal; surely something about them is similar with respect to their being anything at all. So, when Aquinas talks about the *esse* of things that belong to different genera and species, he is using the word *esse* analogously.[209]

[209] Wippel argues that Aquinas also believes that even substances in one and the same species have esse predicated of them by analogy. See *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 92-3. While I am not convinced of this

4.7. Aquinas's *Esse* vs Williams's Existence

In the previous two chapters I have defended Williams's claim that existence is not a real property that things have and that predicating "exists" of individuals does not make sense. In this chapter I have outlined what Aquinas means by *esse*. In concluding this chapter, I hope to show you that what Aquinas is talking about when he says that things have *esse* is not what Williams is talking about when he says that things cannot have a property called "existence." In other words, *they are both right*. And if this is true, then Williams's arguments about existence are not sufficient to prohibit Aquinas from referring to God as *ipsum esse subsistens*, although the implications of calling God that wait until the final chapter. For now, let's compare Aquinas's notion of *esse* with Williams's "existence."

I began this chapter by describing texts where Aquinas hedges on the question of whether *esse* is an accident. And I noted that he does not think that *esse* falls into any Aristotelian category of accident. If pressed, he says that we talk about it as if it were an accident, but not because it is an accident. The point is that Aquinas is aware of the fact that trying to talk about a word that means "to be" or "being" as an accident among other accidents is going to be problematic. If you treat it as just one accidental feature among others, there will be problems. While Aquinas never refers explicitly to anything like the problem of Plato's Beard, the problem whereby statements like "Kovacs exists" come out as necessarily true even though I am not a necessary being, it seems to me that such a problem can only arise if you think "exists" can be predicated naïvely. What I mean by "naïvely" predicating "exists" is to start talking about it as if it were just one feature that things have among many; to say, for example, that this bowling ball has features like being white and smooth and heavy and, along with all of these features, it exists.

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point, nothing in what I am about to argue relies on whether it is correct or not; the point is just that Aquinas thinks that *esse* (unlike Williams's "exists") is not a univocal predicate; see below, Section 4.6.

So Williams is right that we cannot naïvely predicate "exists" of individuals. The word "exist" in that sense can only be meaningfully predicated as a second-level property, as something that tells us a certain concept is instantiated at least once. But Aquinas does not mean to use *esse* like that. (Indeed, further evidence of this comes from the awkward way that he does use it; the word literally means "to be," and unless Aquinas was just exceptionally awful with Latin grammar, when he writes *habere esse*, literally "to have *to-be*," he must be trying to do something other than talking about existence as a typical first-level property). What it seems that Aquinas means to do is to draw our attention to a fact about things, to the act-potency relationship which underscores all of creation, material and spiritual. Given this act-potency composition in everything other than God, *esse*, to borrow a phrase from Herbert McCabe, "points to the gratuitousness of things."[210]

If Williams erred, it was in his effort to reduce metaphysics to philosophy of language. It is one thing to say that the word "exists" cannot be meaningfully predicated of individuals; it is quite another to derive from this the claim that metaphysics must be reduced to philosophy of language.[211] For I see no reason to assume hylomorphism is not a plausible account of how material substances are to be analyzed: Matter is potentially many things, but made to be actually something in virtue of form. And if that is right, I see no reason that linguistic observations ought to preclude Aquinas from arguing that some further actuality is necessary to make essences, which contain within themselves some kind of potency, to be actually something. In other words, Aquinas seems to have good reason in *De Ente et Essentia* and in other texts to argue that *esse* is principle of actuality in all things. It is to essence what form is to matter. It is *not* a feature, an accident, a property, or anything else like that that can be picked out in the usual way by first-

[210] "The Logic of Mysticism" in *God Matters.*
[211] A claim Williams makes in the Introduction to *What is Existence*?

level predicates.

So, it may seem like I am saying that Williams is right to say things can't "have existence" and that Aquinas is right to say that things "have *esse*." And, in some sense, I am saying this, because Aquinas thinks that things have *esse* in virtue of having form. "No entity without identity," as Quine said.[212] Substances cannot make themselves exist any more than air can make itself bright; as the air must be transparent, so substances need form. And as the transparency of the air lets it be bright once a source of light is provided, so form lets substances come to exist insofar as God provides *esse* to make what is otherwise in mere potency to existence (in composite substances, this is matter) to be actual. So, notice that, again, Aquinas is not saying that things "have existence" in the sense that things are said to "have" lots of other properties; Williams is right to forbid that. What he is saying is that in virtue of having a form, things are able to participate in *esse* received from God.

This brings us to another way in which Aquinas's *esse* is clearly distinct from Williams's notion of existence: Participation. *Esse* is the highest act in which all things participate. Note that, *pace* Anthony Kenny, this does not reduce it to a predicate that is too thin, so to speak, to be meaningful.[213] Rather, it means that *esse*, to use a phrase again from Gaven Kerr, is the "act of all acts" by which anything can be in any way whatsoever.[214] To say that something participates in *esse* as hot things participate in heat is not to say that existing things exist as hot things are hot. The language of participation is meant to direct our attention to the fact that things have potencies that are actualized: Nothing actualizes itself with regard to being; nothing (except God) is a necessary being without qualification. It is to the extent that things participate in *esse* that it

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[212] *Ontological Relativism and Other Essays* (Columbia University Press, 1969): 23.
[213] Kenny has made this criticism of Aquinas on esse commune on a number of occasions, most recently in *Aquinas on Being*, 105-108. See also the discussion above of *De Potentia* in the first Chapter, section 1.2.
[214] *Aquinas's Way to God*, 59.

is possible for there to be anything rather than nothing whatsoever.

Lastly, I have shown that statements of the form "such and such participates in *esse*" are not, for Aquinas, using the words "participates in *esse*" univocally. This, above all, should drive home the difference between Aquinas's notion of *esse* and Williams's notion of existence. Everything that Williams has to say about the word "exists" suggests that when he criticizes statements like "Pope Francis exists" and "Nessie does not exist," he takes the word "exists" to be entirely univocal. But when Aquinas writes about *esse*, this is not the case. In *Categories*, Aristotle said that it is the mark of a substance that it cannot come in degrees; one person cannot be more person than another, although one can be taller than another. It would be remarkable if Aquinas disagreed with this but never indicated so in his writings. Yet, in *De Ente Et Essenia* and *De Substantiis Separatis* we see Aquinas claiming that that the universe is hierarchical, and in the latter text the hierarchy is based on how actual something is, that is, how close its essence comes to *esse*. According to Aquinas, things receive *esse* in degrees, something Williams would find puzzling if it were said of existence.

So, I commend Williams for his forceful arguments that show us all the ways that we need to be careful about the word "exists." Unfortunately, I cannot say that he was really talking about Aquinas on *esse*, even if he took himself to be.[215] To say that something has an essence distinct from its *esse* is not linguistic gibberish. Nor is it gibberish to say that God is identical with his own subsisting *esse*; it is, nevertheless, a very mysterious thing to say. To that mystery, at last, I now turn.

[215] Cf., Williams's "Being" in Quinn, Philip and Taliaferro, Charles (eds.), *Blackwell Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (Blackwell: Malden, MA and Oxford, 2000). Note that this selection has been omitted from all but the first edition.

CHAPTER FIVE: *Esse Tantum* and *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*

C.J.F. Williams was wrong to attribute to Aquinas the view that God is identical with some first-order property called "existence." But it is one thing to be wrong, and another to be usefully wrong. By forcing us to realize that it is absurd to say that God is identical to what can be only a second-order property, Williams has usefully (though unknowingly) shown that Aquinas needs to be understood on his own terms when it comes to *esse*. I have shown that Aquinas believes that all created things participate in created *esse*, or common *esse* as he calls it (*esse commune*). And Aquinas thinks that *esse commune* depends on *esse tantum*, being alone, that is, the God whom he refers to as *ipsum esse subsistens*. But given everything said about *esse* in the last chapter, what might these terms mean? What does Aquinas take himself to be up to when his thinking on divine simplicity climaxes in his proclamation that God alone has an essence identical to *esse*?

In this chapter, I will focus on what Aquinas means when he says that God is pure subsistent *esse* (section 5.2). Then I will consider a series of objections one might make (and that some have made) to Aquinas's views, claims which worry that Aquinas's conception of God is insufficiently Christian (sections 5.3 - 5.6). But first, I offer a cautionary word about how Aquinas thinks about all language concerning God.

5.1. A Problem From the Outset: God and Language

In the last chapter, I noted that Aquinas develops a theory of analogy for talking about *esse* in created things. Now I turn to the other part of his theory of analogy, which pertains to talking about God. Aquinas is aware from the outset that when we talk about God, especially when we talk about God as simple, our language is going to be defective. This is because we

cannot get a good idea of something whose essence is its *esse* and our ability to talk about something follows, in large part, on our ability to get a good idea of it.

When I say "Socrates is" and "Nessie is" Aquinas thinks I am using the word "is" in analogous senses. Although both statements are true in virtue of Socrates and Nessie participating in *esse*, Aquinas thinks that their participation in *esse* is also something to be spoken of analogously. This is because, as I explained in the previous chapter, Aquinas thinks that the statement "Socrates is" is to be understood as meaning "Socrates is a living human being." Likewise, if there is a large, hitherto scientifically uncategorized beast living in the Loch Ness, then the statement "Nessie is" has to be understood to mean "Nessie is some sort of beast living in the Loch Ness." And since being a human being is not reconcilable with being a beast in the Loch Ness, the word "is" in "Socrates is" and "Nessie is" cannot have a univocal meaning.

But the problem with talking about a simple God is even more complicated. Now we are not just talking about something that participates in *esse* differently from how Socrates participates in it. Indeed, Aquinas thinks that God does not participate in *esse* at all. As I've said over and over again, on Aquinas's account, God just is God's *esse*.

Aquinas's understanding of divine simplicity is sometimes summed up in the slogan "Everything that is in God is God."[216] Taking "in" here to refer to features that are expressed by way of a predicate, many things are in you that are not you. I can say that you have knowledge. I can also recognize that you might lose some of your knowledge without thereby ceasing to be who you are. This is because the knowledge that is in you is not identical to you. This is implicitly recognized in subject-predicate sentences of the form "x is F." Some subject has features and those features are distinct from the subject; further evidence of this is that other

[216] This is another way of using Augustine's formula for divine simplicity in *The City of God*, XI, 10: "God is what God has" (*hoc est quod habet*).

subjects can have the same features (generically, not numerically). And this is why a statement like "Jack has knowledge" tells me of Jack the same thing as "Jill has knowledge" tells me about Jill (namely, both mean that each of them know something or other, even if they know different things).

But if our ordinary language presupposes real distinctions in things, how can it be used to talk about *esse tantum*, the God in whom there are no distinctions whatsoever? Given that the very words "participates in esse" are predicated of individuals differently, and that the manner of their predication is based on the manner of their participation, won't the ability to talk about *esse* with reference to God be seriously complicated by the fact that God does not participate in *esse*? We cannot even say, on Aquinas's view, that God has *esse*; God just is his own *esse* (as well as anything else we say is "in God").

Indeed, because of his thinking on divine simplicity, Aquinas does believe that our language will be defective when it comes to God. According to Aquinas, any words we use with reference to both God and creatures will signify imperfectly when used with reference to God.[217] Yet, Aquinas thinks that we can talk about God while not merely denying things about God.[218] For one thing, the Bible says things about God which Aquinas takes to be literally true, such as that God loves. Moreover, in *ST* 1a,13, a particularly noted Question for understanding Aquinas's theories about words used to refer to God, Aquinas writes this:

> Words are signs of ideas, and ideas are the similitude of things. And so it is clear that words refer to the things that are to be signified by means of a concept of the intellect. Therefore insofar as we are able to intellectually understand something, we can name it.

[217] *ST* 1a,13,2.
[218] *ST* 1a,13,1 and 1a,13,12.

> It was shown above that we cannot understand God's essence in this life; but we know God from creatures according to how he is their principle, and also by way of excellence and remotion. Therefore God can be named by us from creatures, nevertheless not as if the name which signifies Him expressed the divine essence itself.[219]

You might think of a passage like this in the following way: Human knowledge knows things by being able to classify them in some way or other. Ideally, we say what kind of thing something is, what genus or species it belongs to; or we get at least some knowledge by knowing accidental features of things. So, given all that Aquinas has to say regarding divine simplicity, we cannot know what God is, as should be clear by now. But, we talk about things based on what we know about them. So, you might expect Aquinas to say that we cannot talk about God at all, that we ought to be silent. But, Aquinas notes that, given that God is creator, there are all sorts of valid arguments we can offer regarding God as creator that terminate in conclusions that have what appear to be affirmative predicative statements about God. Since God is not only subsistent, but also simple, we can predicate terms of God not only in the form "God is F" but also in the form "God is F-ness." If I can produce an argument whose conclusion is "God is good," I can also infer "God is goodness." That such arguments can be made about the Creator requires an account, Aquinas thinks, of how these kinds of statements function in light of God's simplicity.

So the dilemma is that, on the one hand, Aquinas's thinking on divine simplicity looks like something that should preclude saying anything affirmative about God at all; and, on the other hand, Aquinas thinks that there are valid arguments whose conclusions appear to be affirmative statements about God.[220] One strategy that one might adopt for resolving this

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[219] *ST*1a,13,1.

[220] An example of such an argument can be found when Aquinas argues that God is good in *ST* 1a,6,1. The basic

dilemma is to say that these apparently affirmative statements derived from arguments about God as creator are just that: merely *apparently* affirmative. If such statements are just disguised negations, then they don't threaten to talk about God as if he were somehow distinct from the features we are attributing to him. "God is good" would just be the denial that there is anything bad in God. "God is wise" would likewise just be the denial that God has any folly.

But Aquinas does not adopt this position. We do, he believes, have a lot of negative statements that we can make concerning God (note, for example, that he takes the statement "God knows" to be essentially tied up in God not having any matter).[221] However, as I said above, Aquinas thinks that language has to signify something that the speaker has in mind, something the speaker intends to convey. And when someone says that God is good, presumably she means more than to simply tell you that God is not bad. She intends to actually say something true of the divine nature, that it is actually good.[222]

So, just as Aquinas thought that the word *esse* when used with respect to creatures belonging to different genera and species was used neither equivocally nor univocally, Aquinas thinks that all affirmative predications made of God are likewise made analogically with how they are used for creatures. The connection that Aquinas makes between analogical predication and divine simplicity is explained by Peter Geach: "What happens, on Aquinas's view, is that first we call God 'wise;' then discover that 'the wisdom of God' is a designation of God himself, whereas the like does not hold of any other being whom we rightly call 'wise;' and thus reflecting upon this, we see that 'wise' cannot be applied to God in the same way as other

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argument there is that something is good if it is desired, and since God is desired as the source of all perfections, it follows that God is good. For a useful explanation of this particular argument, see Herbert McCabe's "Aquinas on 'God is good'" in *The Herbert McCabe Reader*, 257-67.

[221] *ST* 1a,14,1.

[222] *ST* 1a,13,2.

beings."[223] So, according to Aquinas, we have reasons to use certain words about God, and if we have kept divine simplicity in mind, then we will understand that the words are not working, so to speak, in the way we usually think that they work.

I have made these remarks about Aquinas on analogy and God at the beginning of this chapter because, in attempting to understand what he takes himself to be doing when he talks about God as *esse tantum* (being alone) and *ipsum esse subsistens* it is crucial that you keep in mind that Aquinas thinks words are going to fall short of what they are meant to do. As I have said, the very notion of *esse* gets transformed when we move from talking about things that have or participate in *esse* (all creatures) to that which just is *esse*. To that matter, I now turn.

5.2. *Esse and Ipsum Esse Subsistens*

Given that Aquinas thinks our language can never be adequate to the divine nature, what can we understand him to mean when he talks about God as *ipsum esse subsistens*? In particular, what is the relation between this subsistent *esse*, this pure *esse*, and the common *esse* explored in the last chapter? How is it similar enough that we can still use the word *esse* when talking about it, and yet how also is it different?

To begin considering these questions, recall Aquinas's argument in *De Ente* 4 that at most one thing can have an essence identical to its *esse*. There Aquinas points to three ways that one can account for plurality of something: 1) A genus can be multiplied into diverse species; 2) A species can be multiplied into diverse individuals; and 3) What is separate from individuals and not received can be multiplied into the individuals that do receive it. Anything whose essence is *esse* cannot be multiplied in the first two ways since that sort of multiplication involves adding

[223] G.E.M. Anscombe and P.T. Geach, *Three Philosophers* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1961), 122.

either a difference or individuating matter, either of which would have to be outside of *esse*, and nothing is outside of *esse*.

What of the third mode of multiplication? Aquinas's example is that if there could be a separate form of heat, it might be multiplied into the various subjects that receive it (that is, all the hot things). But notice that there is an important sense in which this would not really be a multiplication at all so long as the separate, pure form of heat remained separate.

Gaven Kerr offers a helpful analogy: There are many ways that the sun and its energy are realized on earth. Its energy is received in lakes, rivers, people, and even solar panels. But each of these instances or manifestations of the sun's energy do not constitute diverse suns. Nevertheless, they do *depend* on the sun without thereby multiplying it or causing it to lose its status as separate and unreceived. Likewise, to quote Kerr, "This is precisely the type of relationship that Aquinas wishes to spell out between pure *esse* and creatures: pure *esse* is not properly multiplied in creatures, rather multiple creatures depend on pure *esse* in order to be."[224]

Created things depend on pure *esse* then, and can never themselves be pure *esse*. They must always be a composite of a subject and the created common *esse* in which they participate. The difference between the common *esse* in which created things participate and the divine *esse* that is God is that the latter, but not the former, is entirely *subsistent*. It is important to keep in mind that while Aquinas thinks that God subsists, he does not mean that God is a substance (he explicitly denies that God is a substance).[225] For Aquinas, to call something subsistent is to note that the thing spoken of does not depend on something else. Ordinary, created substances like cats or tress are the usual way of introducing the idea of subsistence, but it would be more accurate to say that these substances are subsistent *with respect to* accidents. That is to say, as

[224] Gaven Kerr, *Aquinas's Way to God*, 26.
[225] *ST* 1a,3,5.

long as one is only taking into consideration whatever can be talked about in terms of the ten Aristotelian categories, Substances alone subsist; every accident depends on something from another category (ultimately, substance) to exist.[226] But there is no sense in which the common *esse* of created things can be called subsistent. It is entirely dependent on God, who alone is absolutely subsistent.

This notion of God as the independent, entirely underived source of the *esse* of everything other than God is what allows Aquinas to distinguish God from everything else: God is "outside the order of existing things" (*extra ordinem entium existens*).[227] Robert Sokolowski puts it thus: "The pagan sense of the divine is that of the best, highest, greatest, most powerful and most necessary beings within the whole or within the world." But for Aquinas, the God of this world is not the best thing in the world, and is not to be understood "by contrast to other beings in the world, but in contrast to the world as a whole."[228]

Aquinas also speaks of common being (*ens commune*) as God's "proper effect" insofar as one thinks of God as a "Highest Cause" (*causa altissima*).[229] Consider fire. Aquinas thought that fire's proper effect was to produce heat. Anything that is not fire that produces heat does so, Aquinas thinks, because fire is a higher cause of the things which produce heat; they somehow have fire mixed into their matter.[230] But since all created causes have *being* as an effect in some sense, the highest cause of all things must itself have as its proper effect *esse*. Fire makes things to be warm; builders make things to be buildings. But insofar as God is the Creator, he is

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[226] Aquinas would modify this claim slightly by saying that it belongs to the essence of an accident to depend on something else for existence, not merely that they do depend on something else. He thinks that he has to say this because of considerations involving the Eucharist. For discussion of this point see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 235-7.

[227] *Commentary on Aristotle's "Peri Hermeneias*," I, XIV.

[228] Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1995), 46-7.

[229] *ST* 1a,2ae 66,5 ad. 4.

[230] *DP* 7,2. As I said in the first chapter, Aquinas uses as an example the ability of certain spicy foods to produce heat. For further explanation see Weigel, *Aquinas on Divine Simplicity*, 121.

responsible, not for things being some particular way rather than some other way, but for things having *esse* at all. So the *ipsum esse* that is God is *ipsum esse subsistens,* and the *ipsum esse* that is *esse commune* is not.[231]

5.3. God, *Esse*, and "That Which Is"

If you agree with Thomas Aquinas's thinking on divine simplicity as I have reported it, you might be reluctant to say things like "God is an entity" or "God is an object."[232] And your reluctance would be justified, especially if you take into account what Aquinas thinks about analogy. Yet given that created *esse* is never concrete, that it is about as abstract as anything you might try to talk about, is there not a risk that Aquinas's God, the God that is *esse tantum* and *ipsum esse subsistens*, is an abstraction?[233] While avoiding putting God in the category of substance, is there not an intuition that God should be in some sense more like what we call "concrete individuals" than like universals? After all, is it not individuals who love and provide and are involved with things? Love (a universal) does not love. Individuals love.[234]

Aquinas writes things that seem sensitive to this concern. In his commentary on the *De hebdomadibus* of Boethius, he notes that the distinction between *esse* and particular individuals is like the difference between an abstract concept and a concrete particular. There is a difference between running and a runner and this, he says, is very much like the difference between *esse*

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[231] *SCG* 1,26 is entitled "That God is not the Formal of Being of Things." One wonders what Anthony Kenny, who frequently accuses Aquinas of thinking that God's *esse* must be the *esse* of created things, makes of this. Cf., *Aquinas on Being*.

[232] Leo Elders, for example, says "For St. Thomas God is never 'an object.'" See *The Philosophical Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990): 22.

[233] A host of similar objections is to be found in Christopher Hughes's *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990). It is recurring theme in Clark Pinnock, et al, *The Openness of God* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intravarsity Press, 2010).

[234] I owe this example to one used by Eleonore Stump in her audiobook *Thomas Aquinas* (Now You Know Media, 2017).

and *id quod est*, or "that which is."[235] *Id quod est* is particular, he goes on to say, whereas *esse* is abstract. Moreover, Aquinas thinks that we can know a number of things about how *esse* and *id quod est* are distinct: Something that is an *id quod est* can participate (as, for example, you participate in humanity, as explained in the previous chapter), while *esse* never participates; and something that is *id quod est* can have something beyond its mere essence, as a human might have a certain preference for cheese despite nothing in the essence of humanity necessitating such a desire;[236] but, Aquinas writes, nothing can be mixed with *esse*.

At this point, you might think that Aquinas is guilty of the following inconsistent triad:

(1) We cannot (in this life) know anything about the nature of God.[237]

(2) We know that God's nature is *esse*.

(3) The treatment of *esse* in the *De hebdomodibus* commentary would suggest that we know at least something about *esse*.

To accuse Aquinas of this error, however, would be to miss an important feature of his thinking about God as simple. Consider a text where Aquinas asks whether the name "God" can be given to anything other than God except by way of metaphor.[238] Aquinas thinks that it cannot be given to non-divine beings unless done so metaphorically, as, for example, when I speak of

[235] *In BDH* II.22.

[236] Aquinas thinks that sometimes things have features which are not expressed explicitly by the definition of their essence, but which are nevertheless entailed by them. He calls these features *propria*. The typical example is a human's ability to laugh: Anything rational can grasp jokes; and if such a rational being has a certain kind of body, will be able to laugh in reaction to jokes. This pertains to Aquinas's theory of predicabilia, some details of which are alluded to in *ST* 1a,77,1. and *De Spiritualibus Creaturis* a. 11, *SCG* 1,32. For discussion see Herbert McCabe, *God and Evil: In the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies (New York: Continuum, 2010), 148 ff.

[237] I hope that this point was clear enough from my first chapter, but note that immediately before Aquinas discusses divine simplicity in the *Summa Theologiae* he prefaces himself by remarking "We cannot know what God is, only what God is not." The claim that we cannot know what God is does not strike Aquinas as at all controversial as a Christian thinker, and it is found in many places in his writings.

[238] *ST* 1a,13,9. Aquinas most likely never heard anyone utter the word "God," but only "*Deus*." But I am retaining English when discussing God's name for the sake of clarity.

"the false gods of the idolaters" or even when a journalist calls someone "the god of rock and roll." He thinks this because he thinks that it refers to the divine nature in its sole, non-multipliable holder, that is, the God that is for Aquinas *ipsum esse subsistens*. But against this, the second objector notes that only proper names cannot be given to multiple things; not just anyone can be called "David Kovacs" because "David Kovacs" isn't a nature that can be multiplied.[239] Yet, the objector goes on, God himself says that many people will be called "gods" in a Psalm. Therefore, since "God" is a name that can be pluralized, unlike proper names, it must be a name that multiple things can literally have.

What does Aquinas take the objector's error to have been? It is correct, Aquinas responds, to *generally* think that the distinction between proper names and common names corresponds to the distinction between particulars and universals. The word "human" can be given to lots of things because lots of things share the nature *humanity* and incorrect to give lots of things the name "Kovacs" (except incidentally) because I am not the sort of thing that others can share in. However, the objector erred, according to Aquinas, in trying to apply the particular/universal distinction to God. "God, considered insofar as God is anything [*secundum rem*], is himself neither universal nor particular."[240]

So, to return to the distinction between *esse* and *id quod est*, Aquinas goes on to note that these are really distinct *in composites*. He attributes to Boethius, with approval, the claim that "in every composite, *esse* differs from the composite," and it is clear that the composite is the *id quod est* previously discussed.

This might not be surprising: If something is composed of *esse* and *id quod est*, this composition is sufficient to rule it out from being absolutely simple, that is, simple in every

[239] Of course anyone can name their children whatever they want, but they wouldn't do so because they thought that their child was another version of what I am as distinct from everyone who has a different name than I have.
[240] Cf., *Super Sent.*, lib. 1 d. 35 q. 1 a. 5 s.c. 2.

respect. So Aquinas goes on to ask about things that we might consider simple insofar as they lack matter, such as angels and separated souls.[241] However, relying on arguments about how multiplication is possible, arguments familiar from previous discussions of *De ente* and the *Sentences* commentary, Aquinas concludes that there can be at most one *id quod est* that is *esse* without distinction, "And this one sublime simple is God himself."[242]

It may be noteworthy that Aquinas here calls divine simplicity "sublime" (*sublime*). Far from turning God into an abstraction, Aquinas thinks that when we consider God as the sole "that which is" which is *esse*, we ought to be struck in a profound way. We are used to thinking in two categories: First, those things which are (to introduce some new terminology) unities (what Aquinas is here calling instances of *id quod est* and which are most helpfully thought of as concrete particulars) like particular persons, penguins, and trees. These kinds of things can easily relate to one another (even in trivial ways like being next to each other in space) on account of being unities. The second category we like to think in terms of are abstract universals, such as love, humanity, and, for Aquinas, *esse*. These are harder for us to relate to. I know that I can love, that I share in humanity, but what does it mean to say I have a relation to love itself? Given this distinction, there is a natural tendency to want God to be a unity.

Yet God is neither particular nor universal according to Aquinas. God can be called an *id quod est*, a "that which is," but his unity will in fact be quite unlike ours because he is *esse*. I am trying to draw attention here to an important consequence of Aquinas's thinking about God and *esse*: Since we depend on *esse* to maintain our unity as instances of *id quod est*, we are in a way less of a unity than God, who depends on nothing. Aquinas thinks that it God's simplicity, his absolute indivisibility, which makes God supremely one, because something is called "one" just

[241] *BDH* 34-35.
[242] Ibid.

insofar as it is indivisible.[243] If Aquinas is right in saying that God, and God alone, is both *esse* and *id quod est* without distinction, then there is no worry that God is too abstract or too much like a universal to be a unity. In fact, because God is both *esse* and *id quod est*, he will always be as non-universal (and, consequentially, non-particular) as possible. This, I think, should be welcome news for anyone who worried that Aquinas's thinking on *ipsum esse subsistens* turned God into an abstract universal.

5.4. Divine Simplicity and So-Called "Divine Properties"

In *Does God Have a Nature*, Alvin Plantinga claims that Aquinas suggests that God is a property. He then writes "Perhaps I have not completely understood [Aquinas.]"[244] I will now argue that only his latter claim is correct.

Plantinga argues, in answer to the question that his title presents, that a) Yes, God has a nature and b) God cannot control his nature. The conclusion Plantinga comes to is that theists must weaken their commitments to what it means to call God sovereign. However, he admits early in the text that one way around his conclusion will be to say that God is identical to his nature. Referring to this as as Aquinas's "doctrine of divine simplicity," Plantinga proceeds to try to dismiss the possibility.[245] His argument can be summarized thus:

1. If God is simple, then if some property is predicable of God, God is identical with that property.

2. If (God is simple and if some property is predicable of God), then God is identical with

[243] *ST* 1a,11,3 and 11,4.
[244] Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1980): 53.
[245] Similar arguments have been given by Thomas Morris in *Our Idea of God* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1997): 117, and in Ronald Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exploration of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983): 80-95.

that property (1, Exportation).

3. If something is identical to a property, then it is a property.

4. If God is identical to a property, then God is a property (3, instantiation).

5. If something is a property, it is not causally efficacious.[246]

6. If God is a property, God is not causally efficacious (5, instantiation).

7. God is causally efficacious.

8. God is not a property (6,7, Modus Tollens).

9. God is not identical to a property (4,8, modus tollens).

10. It is not the case that (God is simple and some property is predicable of God) (1,9, modus tollens).

11. Either God is not simple or no property is predicable of God (10, De Morgans).

12. Some property is predicable of God.

13. God is not simple (11,12, Disjunctive syllogism).

The above argument appears valid. But are all of its premises ones that Aquinas would accept? Specifically, what would he have to say about Premise 12? Aquinas could not have thought we predicate properties of God, at least not in the ordinary sense that Plantinga seems to have in mind. And he could not have thought so for two reasons which I have discussed above: First, because of his thoughts on analogical language when it comes to God, and second, because of his distinction between *esse* and *id quod est.*

First, let's consider how the distinction between *esse* and *id quod est* gets Aquinas out of

[246] He says that "no property could not have created the world" and that "If God is a property, then he isn't a person" (47). For criticism of Plantinga that focuses on the non-personhood of God, see Brian Davies's "Classical Theism and the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity" in *Language, Meaning, and God*, ed. by Brian Davies (Geoffrey Chapman, 1987).

Plantinga's accusation.[247] Implicit in Plantinga's argument is the claim, not wholly controversial, that only concrete particulars can be causal agents. Some contemporary philosophers have offered an account of properties as *powers*, or as whatever is causally efficacious in a thing.[248] But even on this account, whatever acts, whatever is a causal agent, is never a property. Only concrete individuals are causal agents, and they are such because of some property that they have.

The first thing to be noted is that Aquinas does not subscribe to this notion of property. Moreover, as I have been trying to emphasize, Aquinas doesn't think of *esse*, whether in God or in created things, as a property that is to be had. *Esse* in created things is the act that all essences must participate in if they are to be anything instead of nothing, and in God *esse* just is the divine essence. It is not some property that God has, although God is identical to it. Yet God can still act as a cause (and here you must bear in mind that, for Aquinas, the term "cause" is being used analogically), because the divine *esse* is his *id quod est*. So, if Plantinga means to ascribe to Aquinas the view that God is not an *id quod est*, a "that which is," he is mistaken; he does not understand Aquinas on divine simplicity.

Moreover, anyone who follows Aquinas on divine simplicity ought to also take seriously what he has to say about how our language about God works. I've noted this above, but here let's apply Aquinas's account of talk about God to Plantinga's objection.

It is certainly true that Aquinas makes claims like "God is good." And it is true that Aquinas thinks that when we typically say "x is good," we mean to predicate goodness of x. But when we say that "God is good" do we have to mean anything about properties? Someone

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[247] The following thoughts loosely follow an argument offered by Eleonore Stump in "Divine Simplicity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, edited by Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford University Press, 2012).

[248] For such an account of properties, see William Jaworski, *Structure and the Metaphysics of Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 29-32.

thinking about divine simplicity along the lines that Aquinas does ought not to accept Premise 12 without important qualification. I take it that a defender of Premise 12 would point to the fact that theists generally agree that the statement "God is good" is true and that, therefore, some property (goodness) is predicable of God. But, if what Aquinas thinks about analogy as I have reported it is true, that the doctrine of divine simplicity should lead one to reject univocity when thinking about language about God, then it is not clear that such a defense is warranted. What is true, instead, is that theists make statements about God, such as "God is good." But does "goodness" is that statement signify a property? Lawrence Dewan notes that, for defenders of divine simplicity, it does not: Properties such as goodness, when found in creatures, must be a property, but as found in the Creator, must be something subsisting as the Creator subsists.[249] When Aquinas says that "God is good" he does not mean, as Plantinga seems to think that he must mean, that God instantiates some abstract property called "goodness." If Aquinas meant that, then divine simplicity would reduce God to a property (as well as entail that goodness and whatever else we predicate of God, such as love, are identical properties). For Aquinas, "God is good" is just the conclusion of a syllogism whose premises he believes himself to have established as conclusions to other arguments. However, divine simplicity rules out the possibility of know what God's goodness amounts to, since it rules out know what God is at all.

5.5. The Relevance of God

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I argued that by the statement "God exists" Aquinas can be taken to mean something like "Something accounts for those features of the universe that cannot be causally accounted for by any other features of the universe." I then provided the

[249] Lawrence Dewan, O.P., "Saint Thomas, Alvin Plantinga, and the Divine Simplicity," *The Modern Schoolman* 66 (1989): 141-151.

arguments found in Aquinas's writing meant to establish that God is entirely simple, that God is *ipsum esse subsistens*. It seems that someone could have read all of that and agreed with Aquinas on every point and then said "So what?" In other words, if Aquinas's philosophical theology ended with what I have so far reported about divine simplicity, one might wonder whether the God of Aquinas is *interestingly relevant*. God would be relevant, of course, for being the reason any of us exist; but why take any special interest in this fact?

One might even question how Aquinas's conception of God matches up with what are often thought to be religious conceptions of God. Does God, for Aquinas, have omniscient knowledge of what happens in our lives (section 5.5.1)? And, if so, does it make any sense to pray to a simple, unmovable God (section 5.5.2)? Lastly, is there any way that a simple God can be intimately involved with creation the way Christians so often speak of him as being (section 5.5.3)? In this section, I want to look at how Aquinas thinks that a God who is pure *esse* does indeed meet what one might think of as "religious expectations" for God.

5.5.1. A Simple Yet Omniscient God

In the *De ente* discussion in Chapter One I noted that Aquinas thinks that something is capable of knowledge to the extent that it is separated from matter. So, since God is entirely immaterial, it should not come as a surprise that Aquinas thinks that God has "the highest knowledge."[250] And because Aquinas's thinking on divine simplicity leads him to believe that "whatever is in God is God," he also thinks that God's knowledge is God.[251] But if there is no composition in God, how can God know multiple things? How, for example, could God know both himself and all the

[250] *ST* 1a,14,1.
[251] *ST* 1a,14,4.

various things that he creates? Would not knowledge of a multiplicity threaten to introduce some sort of composition into God himself?

In attempting to answer this question, Aquinas might be seen as trying to reconcile what is seen as Aristotle's theory of God with the Christian conception. Aristotle is usually taken as having conceived of God as "thought thinking itself," suggesting that God has no knowledge of anything other than God.[252] On the other hand, Christian Scripture is shot through with texts that seem to insist that God omnisciently knows every detail of creation. But why would God know anything other than his own subsistent *esse*? Why, to quote the Psalmist, would pure divinity stoop "to look down upon heaven and earth" (Psalm 113)?

Aquinas's solution to this dilemma begins by conceding the Aristotelian intuition: God must perfectly know himself, otherwise his existence would not be itself perfect.[253] Aquinas's next move, however, is one that Aristotle does not make. Suppose I told you that I am an expert regarding the moon; whatever there is to know about the moon, I know it. I can tell you its size, its mass, its chemical composition, and all sorts of other information about it. As I told you more and more about the moon, you might begin to believe that I know the moon as close to perfectly as any human can. But then suppose you asked me about the moon's effect on the rising and receding of tides on Earth. If I responded that I did not know this about the moon because this is one of the moon's *effects*, you would rightly conclude that my knowledge of the moon was seriously defective. To know something perfectly, one ought to know perfectly about the thing's effects.

This is basically what Aquinas tells us regarding God's knowledge. Knowing himself

[252] Aristotle writes about this in the 7th and 9th Chapters of *Metaphysics* XII. For discussion about whether this is an accurate interpretation of Aristotle, see Thomas De Koninck, "Aristotle on God as Thought Thinking Itself," *Review of Metaphysics* 47 (1994): 471-515.
[253] *ST* 1a,14,5.

perfectly, thinks Aquinas, means that God must know all of his effects perfectly. And his effects are what we call creation. So, according to Aquinas, the simple God knows the details of everything by his simple act of knowing himself. Of course, given Aquinas's thinking on language about God and the serious limits of our knowledge regarding the divine essence, we cannot know what this knowledge amounts to. We are, once again, stuck having to say what God's knowledge is not. God's knowledge is not, for example, what he calls "general knowledge," that is, a sort of indiscriminate knowledge that knows created things merely insofar as they have *esse*. Rather, God knows each individual as a distinct individual.[254] Again, God's knowledge is not *discursive*.[255] It does not proceed in stages of acquaintance; it does not learn about things, the way, say, that you or I learn about something in stages until we can say that we know it.

So Aquinas's thinking about God as *ipsum esse subsistens* does not commit him to the view that God lacks any knowledge of creation. Quite the opposite: Aquinas's thinking on divine simplicity commits him to the view that God's knowledge of every single created thing is far more perfect than the knowledge which any created intellect has about anything at all.

5.5.2. Prayer to a Simple God

Aquinas, not surprisingly, wrote a lot about prayer across his career. And his thoughts on the nature of prayer seem to have shifted over time. However, by the time he is writing his *Summa Theologiae*, he takes prayer (*oratio*) to primarily be a matter of asking God for things one desires.[256] He recognizes other kinds of religious activity such as worship and praise, but he comes to reserve the term "prayer" for what is sometimes called "petitionary prayer." And he

[254] *ST* 1a,14,6.
[255] *ST* 1a,14,7.
[256] *ST* 2a,2ae,84,2. For discussion, see Brian Davies, "Prayer" in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, 467-74.

thinks that this is a perfectly reasonable (and, in fact, morally necessary) thing to do. Given that God can bring about anything that is logically possible, and given that if we ask God for something, then he will know that we are asking, it only makes sense that we ask him for what we want.

Yet does it make sense to ask for something from God given that God's simplicity rules out any change in God's will? If a student asks me to change his grade, it is presumably because he knows that unless he compels me to act his grade will remain as it is. I have made his grade one way, and he wants me to change my might about what his grade ought to be. But how can we hope to change God's mind about how things ought to be? Since God is identical to God's will, shouldn't God's one simple will be incapable of any division and change?

Aquinas takes up this objection in the *ST* treatise on prayer.[257] His response is that prayer is not a matter of getting God to alter his unalterable will. Rather, he thinks that God wills, and therefore causes, people to act as causes when they pray. One way to think about what Aquinas has to say about this is to consider God as being a cause of *conditionals*. For example, God causes rain on condition that certain atmospheric conditions are met. But God can also cause rain on condition that Jane prays for rain. There is a real sense in which Jane's act of prayer is here a cause (albeit, a secondary cause) of rain in this situation, provided that God willed such a conditional. Of course, we have no way of knowing in advance which conditionals God has willed, but that is no reason, on Aquinas's way of thinking, that we ought to question the fittingness of prayer, for by prayer "we seek what God has designated to be fulfilled by our prayers."[258]

Prayer is one of the first things that comes to many people's mind when they think about

[257] *Ibid*, ob. 2 and ad. 2.
[258] *ST* 2a,2ae,84,2.

God and religion. If Aquinas's conception of God as *ipsum esse subsistens* ruled out the possibility of prayer, things would be unfortunate. Far from ruling it out, though, it merely rules out the wholly unnecessary idea that we can influence God or change God's will; rather, God's simple will is what makes prayer a possible cause of action in the universe.

5.5.3. The Involvement of God[259]

All created things depend on God for their *esse* according to Aquinas. If he is right about this, then it follows that so long as anything other than God exists, God can be said to be in some way acting on it; whatever is, is because of God's creating and conserving power. It is with this in mind that, in *ST* 1a,8 Aquinas comes to consider how God is in all things in all places. Aquinas first writes there that we can say that God is in all things (*Deus sit in omnibus rebus*). This is because he understands a cause to be in its effects (*ST* 1a,4,2). However, there are different ways that a cause can be in an effect. A fire can cause something else to be fire and two human beings can cause there to be another human being. But if God's creative act were like this, then what could be made of the distinction between *esse commune* and divine *esse*? So, sometimes, thinks Aquinas, a cause is an effect "virtually," and he has in mind here the way the sun, which he takes to be a perfect source of heat, causes heat that is separate from it to be in all warm things; as the sun is virtually in all warm things, God is virtually in all of his effects.

Yet does this mean that God has some relation to his creatures? And, if it does not, how can we speak of God as being involved with us and with our daily lives?

Aquinas's thinking on divine simplicity rules out God having any relations since he takes relations to fall into a category of accident. Commenting on Aquinas's statements that God lacks

[259] I take the title of this section from the title of a paper by Herbert McCabe. See "The Involvement of God" in *God Matters*. Much of my thinking in this section is influenced by what McCabe writes there.

any relation to us, Herbert McCabe writes this:

> The point about the lack of real relation on God's part is simply that being creator adds nothing to God, all the difference it makes is all the difference to the creature. (Indeed, the gift of *esse* is too radical to be called a 'difference' since clearly the creature is not changed by coming into existence.) But it makes no difference to God not, of course, because God is indifferent or bored by it all, but because he gains nothing by creating. We could call it sheerly altruistic, except that the goodness God wills for his creatures is not a separate and distinct goodness from his own goodness. The essential point that Aquinas, surely rightly, wants to make is that creation fulfils no need of God's. God has no needs.[260]

If Aquinas is right about God as *ipsum esse subsistens*, and right that God is the persistent source and condition that makes possible our own participation in *esse*, it seems to me that we have two conclusions worth paying attention to: First, God has no relation whatsoever to us but, second, the most important relation that any of us have is this: our total dependence on God. God is in us, Aquinas thinks, in a way more important than anything else could possibly be said to be in us. These two claims, about God's lack of relation and about our relation to God, need to be understood in light of each other.

Note that to say that God is in us as source of our *esse*, as Aquinas says, also makes God intimately involved in everything we do. As the prime mover, God is in us as central to every act we engage in.[261] Because God is not one of the things, not an existent among existents, God is

[260] Ibid. 45.
[261] What implications does this have if, say, the act in question is a morally bad act? This so-called "problem of evil"

more involved with us as our Creator than any created thing can be involved with another.

So, just as divine simplicity does not rule out, for Aquinas, divine omniscience, and just as it likewise does not rule out prayer, it also does not require us to think of God as remote or coldly irrelevant to creation. Instead, it is precisely because God just is his own subsistent *esse*, because God is *esse* without addition, that God is so intimately involved with his entire creation.

The error is usually to think that because God cannot change, then our suffering makes no impact on him. And we are unable to experience sympathy for others unless we are impacted by their sufferings. Not so for God. Consider McCabe's way of putting it:

> It does not follow that if God is not affected by, say, human suffering, he is indifferent to it. In our case there are only two options open: we either feel with, sympathize with, have compassion for the sufferer, or else we cannot be present to the suffering, we must be callous, indifferent... Our only way of being present to another's suffering is by being affected by it, because we are outside the other person... Now, the creator cannot in this way ever be outside his creature... In our compassion we, in our feeble way, are seeking to be what God is all the time.[262]

The point I take McCabe to be making here is that what we experience as sympathy and compassion is but a faint reflection of the far more intimate way that God is involved with our experience and suffering. Because we are wholly outside of the others around us, the only way that we can react to their suffering is by being affected by it. But God is not subject to this

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is *far* beyond the scope of this dissertation. But two books on this, by authors very mindful of the importance of divine simplicity in the thought of Aquinas, are Brian Davies's *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), and Herbert McCabe's *God and Evil: In the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010).

[262] *God Matters*, 44-5.

limitation.

5.6. Divine Simplicity and the Trinity

It would be arrogance to think that I can satisfactorily write about the relation between divine simplicity and the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in the thought of Aquinas in a section of the final chapter of a dissertation. However, it is here that some people might think that Aquinas's approach to divine simplicity falls apart: You can have a God that lacks division and composition, such people reason, or you can have a God who is three persons, but you cannot have both.

So, I am writing this section as a sort of continuation on a theme begun in the first chapter. In the first chapter I showed that Aquinas's claim that God is *ipsum esse subsistens* was central to his entire philosophical theology because it was that claim which allowed him to distinguish God from creation. Now I wish to show that the same claim is central to his entire theological project. While I can do this but briefly, it is necessary since, if Aquinas loses the doctrine of the Trinity, he loses his status as Christian thinker all together. On this point, Aquinas concurs when he writes "The Christian faith principally consists in confessing the holy Trinity."[263]

To get some grasp on the connection between divine simplicity and the Trinity in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, it might be helpful to contrast his approach with that of Richard Swinburne, a self-professed Christian philosopher who does not have a robust theory of divine simplicity.[264] In a paper called "Could There be More Than One God?" Swinburne takes as a

[263] *De Rationibus Fidei*, c. 1.
[264] In *The Christian God*, Swinburne claims to believe in divine simplicity insofar as that means merely that God has only "essential properties," *The Christian God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 163. I leave it to the reader to see how different this is from what Aquinas says about *ipsum esse subsistens*.

starting point the claim that if God exists, then God is eternally loving.[265] And, to love eternally, he claims, means to love an equal eternally. So, Swinburne believes, from eternity, God will have brought it about that there is a second, equal God, and they will love each other. But to love also involves making oneself vulnerable. Thus, for the two Gods to love each other, on his account, they will need to be vulnerable to each other, and so they will generate a third God. The third God could, with the aid of either of the first two Gods, destroy one of the three. And so the three Gods will love and have no need of further Gods. "Necessarily," Swinburne tells us, "if there is at least one God, then there are three and only three Gods."

While Swinburne goes on to try to defend the view that what he has written is what the Church councils were trying to articulate (he also says that he is just saying what Aquinas said in different words), it seems to me that Swinburne's conclusion is the sort of conclusion one might reach as a result of not having a sense for just how indivisible God is. Aquinas's thinking on divine simplicity prevents him from thinking about the Trinity like this at all. For one thing, Aquinas does not think that there can be a philosophical demonstration that God is Trinity; one learns this only from God's revelation.[266] For another, while Swinburne thinks that our language about God is entirely univocal, Aquinas appears to have his thinking on analogy forefront in mind when writing about the Trinity.[267]

When it comes to the Trinity, Aquinas's chief concern is to show that there is nothing opposed to reason in the traditional Christian formulation. That formulation proclaims that the one God is three divine persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each of whom is really distinct

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[265] "Could There Be More Than One God?" *Faith and Philosophy*, 3 (1988): 225-41.

[266] In ST 1a,32,1 Aquinas warns against trying to rationally prove the Trinity on grounds that, since such demonstrations must fail, overeager apologists just make Christians look ridiculous.

[267] Words about God, Swinburne says, are to be "understood in their ordinary senses," *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): 5. Swinburne is sympathetic with some account of analogy, and he at times thinks that his account is close enough to the one Aquinas has insofar as Aquinas accepts something like univocity in language. See *Ibid*., 79-85.

from each other, yet sharing in one substance.[268] We should not think that Aquinas, having said so much about divine simplicity and the unfathomability of God, is now trying to say what God is like. I think, rather, that Aquinas would agree that his project matches how McCabe said we should approach the matter: "We should not expect to form a concept of the triune God, or indeed of God at all; we must rest content with establishing that we are not breaking any rules of logic, in other words that we are not being intellectually dishonest."[269] What I now want to draw your attention to is how Aquinas's potential success at making the doctrine of the Trinity logically acceptable depends in good part on his belief that God is *ipsum esse subsistens*.

In *ST* 1a27 Aquinas begins his treatment of the Trinity by discussing what it would mean for there to be processions in God. This is not surprising, given that the Gospels have Jesus claiming to proceed from the Father (John 8.42) and the Nicene Creed speaks of the Holy Spirit as proceeding from the Father and the Son.[270] The sort of procession that Aquinas thinks we have available to us that help illuminate his thinking about the Trinity are processions that come from will and intellect. After all, Aquinas believes he has shown that the statements "God has knowledge" and "God has will" to be literally true (albeit by way of analogy). So, according to Aquinas, in understanding himself, a concept proceeds from God's intellect; and in loving himself as he understands himself, there is a love that proceeds from the divine will. (Note that God does not *come to* understand or love himself, for Aquinas; rather, it must be that God knows and loves himself from all eternity).

You, of course, are not identical to your love and knowledge of yourself. This is because it is not the case that all that is in you is you. But God, Aquinas thinks, is simple: What is in him

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[268] For an introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity, including the history of Catholic thinking about the doctrine, see Giles Emery's *The Trinity* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011).
[269] *God Still Matters* (New York: Bloosbury Academic Press, 2005): 39.
[270] The controversy over whether "and from the Son" is proper to the Creed is not pertinent to the current discussion.

is him, and so his will and intellect and whatever proceeds from them in the relevant way will not be other than the divine substance.[271] So while it is possible to distinguish the two processions from each other, we cannot distinguish them from God. Moreover, each procession is a *relation*.[272]

But if these relations are distinguished from each other, does this mean there is distinction in God, and does this threaten God's simplicity? Aquinas is sensitive to this concern. In created things, Aquinas thinks, relations must be accidents. It is accidental to me that I have become a teacher of students. But, Aquinas writes, in God "relations, when really existing in God, are the same as the divine essence and are no different from it except as understood, because relation implies that something is in respect to something else, and this is not implied by the word 'essence.' Therefore in God it is clear that relation and nature are not two but are one and the same."[273]

If the concept that God forms of himself is a procession from God's intellect, it stands in a relation to God. The same holds of the love that proceeds from God's will. And, there is, according to Aquinas, also a relation between God's love of God and God's knowledge of God. These three relations, according to Aquinas, constitute the three "persons" (to use Aquinas's own traditional language) that are the Trinity.[274] They are distinct from each other and yet are not divisions in God's essence, according to Aquinas, because the relations just *are* God's essence. Notice that if Aquinas did not think that God's essence were one with his *esse*, a path would be open for introducing further divisions in God, and thus undermine his approach to the Trinity.

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[271] I add "in the relevant way" because Aquinas also thinks that creation itself can be thought of as a sort of procession from God. But, whereas love and knowledge remain in the one who loves and knows, creation does not so remain in God.
[272] *ST* 1a,28.
[273] *ST* 1a,28,2.
[274] *ST* 1a29.

Indeed, it would make him susceptible to accusations of tri-theism.

To reiterate a previous point, none of this, for Aquinas, amounts to a proof that God is a Trinity. He certainly does not think that he can move from his philosophical demonstration that God is simple to a philosophical demonstration that God is three persons. Rather, because faith commits him to believing that God is Trinity, he is compelled to write about that doctrine while assuming, in the background so to speak, that God is simple.

5.7. Aquinas, God, and *esse*

The word *esse* is frequently translated as "existence" or "being" by English translators of Aquinas. If this were the end of the story, so to speak, C.J.F. Williams would be right to think that Aquinas was incoherent when he argues that God is his own *esse*. This was not the end of the story. Rather, Aquinas is trying to show that, unlike everything other than God, the *esse* that is God depends on nothing. In dividing *esse commune* from *esse tantum* Aquinas wants his readers to realize how insufficient the nature of creation is for trying to account for itself. But, the source of creation, whatever it is that answers the question why anything instead of nothing, cannot fail to be, for God derives *esse* from nothing. This simplicity in God, this lack of composition of *esse* and essence, does not diminish Christian conceptions of God. The God that is *ipsum esse subsistens* knows his creation perfectly, hears our prayers, and is involved in everything that happens in the most intimate way. Thinking of God as simple subsisting *esse* also allows God to be three persons of the Trinity without thereby introducing composition into the divine substance.

Conclusion

According to Quentin Smith, the fact that there are people who think that Aquinas was right about divine simplicity "testifies to the predominance of faith over intellectual coherence in some Christian circles."[275] Smith, clearly, is no fan of Aquinas on this point. Yet, there is a sense in which Aquinas would say that Smith is right about something here. For Aquinas would readily admit that if anything he wrote were "intellectually incoherent," then it simply cannot be that he was writing accurately about anything compatible with Christian faith.

But is Aquinas's thinking on divine simplicity incoherent?

I noted in the introduction that some of Aquinas's critics on divine simplicity have simply failed to appreciate basic points about Aquinas's philosophy. And, I noted, plenty has been written to address those misunderstandings (in my discussion of Plantinga on divine simplicity in Chapter Five, I also attempted a brief correction).

On the other hand, I think that someone who reads through Aquinas's various discussions of divine simplicity (as, for example, outlined in Chapter One), could come away confused by Aquinas's claim that God's essence is his existence. This would be especially true if this hypothetical reader understood the word *esse* to mean what English speakers mean by "existence," and if the hypothetical reader had an understanding of the word "exists" that was developed in the post-Fregean tradition, which I think is best represented by C.J.F. Williams (whose views I outlined in Chapter Two).

Commendable efforts have been made to preserve a notion of divine simplicity that resembles Aquinas's notion of divine simplicity (that is, the notion that God is identical to his own existence). For example, William Vallicella and Barry Miller both defend the view that God

[275] Quentin Smith, "An Analysis of Holiness," *Religious Studies* 24 (1988): 524.

is identical with his own existence, in part by attempting to show that Williams is wrong to deny that "exists" is never a first-level predicate. There is likely a lot more work to be done on this front. I do not think that the work done so far by Miller, Vallicella, as well as Kris McDaniel, has been in vain. Nevertheless, for reasons given in Chapter Three, I do not think that any of them have successfully proved that existence can ever be anything other than a higher-level property. If a philosopher hopes to show that "exists" can be a legitimate first-level predicate, I think that the most important thing she can do would be to give a reply to what I have called Williams's "Master Argument." Unless someone can say what the connection is between this purported first-level use of "exists" and the word "some," it is difficult to see how Williams can be wrong.

Rather than trying to rehabilitate what Aquinas thinks about divine simplicity by developing new theories about existence, why not instead look at what Aquinas himself thought he was trying to say? In Chapter Four, I showed that what Aquinas means by *esse* is so different from what philosophers like Williams means by "existence" that the latter term is barely a suitable translation for the latter.

Finally, I tried, in Chapter Five, to say something about what Aquinas is trying to say to us when he says that God is *ipsum esse subsistens*. And, as I noted there, Aquinas is well aware of how rapidly words will fail us in this endeavor. But while it's only words, words are all we have when trying to take our mind away from the created to the uncreated. And, it seems to me that this is what Aquinas was trying to do when he wrote about divine simplicity: to tell us what God cannot be by showing how radically different God must be from anything we could possibly begin to think about.

Aquinas is famously reported to have said, near the end of his life, that what he had written was like straw when compared to the divine essence. Perhaps too much has been made of

what Aquinas meant by these words, assuming he said them. Perhaps this wasn't a new realization for Aquinas. But what should we gain from the proverbial straw of Aquinas's writings?

I offer three points for consideration on this matter:

1. The distinction between *esse* and essence in creatures is how Aquinas draws our attention to the fragility, so to speak, of creation. I noted earlier that *esse* in created things, according to Herbert McCabe, is what Aquinas thinks refers to the sheer gratuitousness of things. No created thing can account for its being anything at all instead of nothing whatsoever. But when we say this, we have not taken things far enough: the distinction between *esse* and essence shows that no created thing can even be satisfactorily accounted for by *anything* in the universe, that is, by anything of which we can possibly get an idea.

2. When Aquinas says that in God essence and *esse* are identical, he means to draw our attention to the sheer absoluteness, the sheer non-gratuitousness, of the ultimate reason that there is anything at all instead of nothing whatsoever. The one, simple God has no admixture of anything non-divine because this would compromise God's divinity; the uncreated would be indistinguishable from the created.

3. Because God's essence is God's *esse*, we can say rightly that, although God exists, we can have no idea what God is. Our ignorance of the divine essence is not a matter of having not figured it out yet, so to speak. Rather, God exists without being one of the existing things; God is one without being something. God is not simply one more item on the inventory of things which are real. The mysterious question with which Aquinas is so concerned, the question "why is there anything at all instead of nothing whatsoever?" cannot be answered: Not because there is no

answer, but because the answer is ineffable. The most fundamental distinction that marks everything we know, the distinction between essence and *esse*, is not a distinction in God.

So, it seems that Aquinas's thinking on divine simplicity is not incoherent. Rather, it is crucial to everything else he has to say about God. And, of course, part of the reason the thought of Thomas Aquinas has endured as a subject of study for so long is because of his careful philosophical thinking regarding God. Hopefully those who wish to read what he has to say about philosophical theology will appreciate the importance of Aquinas's claim that God is *ipsum esse subsistens* when they study his texts.

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The Coherence of Aquinas's Account of Divine Simplicity

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Divine simplicity is central to Thomas Aquinas's philosophy of God. Most important for Aquinas is his view that God's existence (*esse*) is identical to God's essence; for everything other than God, there is a distinction between existence and essence. However, recent developments in analytic philosophy about the nature of existence threaten to undermine what Aquinas thought regarding divine simplicity. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I trace Aquinas's thinking on divine simplicity through the various texts he wrote regarding the matter. I establish that it is crucial for Aquinas that God is identical to his existence. But, is it even coherent to talk about "a thing's existence?" In Chapter Two I summarize the arguments of C.J.F. Williams that existence is not a real property that individuals have and that predicating the word "exists" after the name of an individual produces linguistic gibberish. After considering, and rejecting, in Chapter Three attempts by some philosophers to refute Williams's arguments, I turn, in Chapter Four, to a more detailed account of what Aquinas means by *esse*, the Latin word often rendered in English as "existence." The conclusion that I come to is that Aquinas does not mean by *esse* what contemporary philosophers have usually meant by "existence." Rather, he understands *esse* to be the act by which anything can be anything at all, instead of there being nothing whatsoever. In the final chapter, I turn to implications of this for Aquinas's views of divine simplicity, showing that rather than being incoherent, Aquinas's thinking on *esse* points toward the unfathomable mystery that is God.

VITA

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