

The Real Distinction Between Supposit and Nature in Angels in Thomas Aquinas

Abstract: It is universally acknowledged that, for St. Thomas, there is a distinction between human persons or supposits and their natures or essences. But it is usually thought that there is no parallel distinction between the angelic person or supposit and its nature. Yet, as this paper argues, Aquinas consistently puts forward just such a distinction. This paper surveys Aquinas's arguments for the unique identity of God with his essence and the corresponding distinctions between created persons and their essences, showing in the process how the distinction found in angels differs from that found in material substances. It is important to recognize the distinction between supposit and nature in angels not only for its own sake as it touches on his understanding of created persons—human or angelic—but also insofar as it sheds light on Aquinas's understanding of divine simplicity and of other act-potency compositions in creatures.

It is universally acknowledged that, for St. Thomas, there is a distinction between human persons or supposits and their natures or essences. But it is usually thought that there is no parallel distinction between the angelic person or supposit and its nature. Yet, as I will argue in this paper, Aquinas consistently puts forward just such a distinction. This paper will survey Aquinas's arguments for the unique identity of God with his essence and the corresponding distinctions between created persons or supposits and their essences, showing in the process how the distinction found in angels differs from that found in material substances. It is important to recognize the distinction between supposit and nature in angels not only for its own sake as it touches on his understanding of created persons—human or angelic—but also insofar as it sheds light both on Aquinas's overlooked reception of the patristic doctrine that God alone is an essence¹ as well as on other more commented upon act-potency compositions in angels (e.g., the composition of essence and *esse*).² While, for the sake of space, these further implications cannot be explored here, it is hoped that this paper provides a clear basis for setting up those later discussions.

Thomas Aquinas's *Quodlibet* II, q.2, a.2[4] (Christmas 1269) has caused considerable confusion among Thomistic commentators³ since it apparently contradicts his consistent teaching

in earlier writings (e.g., *De ente*, c.4 and *ST I*, q.3, a.3): “In those not composed of matter and form ... the forms themselves are the subsisting suppositis; whence in them, supposit and nature do not differ.”⁴ *Quodlibet II* in contrast teaches that “in God, supposit and nature are altogether the same, but in an angel, they are not altogether the same.”⁵ J. L. A. West, who has provided the most recent study of the supposit-nature distinction in Aquinas, leaves undecided whether there is a distinction between supposit and nature in immaterial creatures, admitting Aquinas’s arguments in *Quodlibet II*, q.2, a.2[4] are “cogent,” but thinking they contradict his “usual position.”⁶ Gabriele Galluzzo maintains: “in the case of material substances the distinction between essence and *suppositum* ... is real, whereas in the case of immaterial substances it is only a distinction of reason,”⁷ and he eschews detailed discussion of *Quodlibet II*, q.2, a.2[4] as a “problematic” text.⁸ If commentators try to explain this discrepancy at all, they have tended to do so by appealing to the alleged quasi-equivocal character of the word “supposit,” which they say, in *Quodlibet II*, carries an existential import absent in other texts—whether that be due to a difference in “context,”⁹ an “expanded meaning” (*erweiterten Sinn*),¹⁰ or a different “emphasis.”¹¹ Such solutions seem to me *ad hoc*, not natural outgrowths of St. Thomas’s own text.¹² By taking as my point of departure his commentary on the professed source for his doctrine in *Quodlibet II*—namely, *Metaphysics VII*¹³—I offer an alternative solution based on the equivocal character of “is,” which, in some cases, means “is” *per se* and in others “is” *per accidens*.

This paper is divided into three sections. §§1–2 demonstrate that, in Aquinas’s corpus, we can distinguish three distinct arguments for the sameness of supposit and nature in God. These arguments do not all reach exactly the same conclusion. In §1, I distinguish what I call the Accidents Argument (§1.1–1.3) from what I call the Individuation Argument (§1.1, §1.4). While

these arguments are similar, they reach different conclusions. The Accidents Argument proves that God is entirely the same (*omnino idem*) with his nature, but that all creatures, including angels, differ at least *per accidens* from their natures; in contrast, the Individuation Argument proves that all immaterial substances, created or uncreated, are the same as their nature *per se*, whereas substances individuated by matter or accidents, are more than their nature *per se*. In §2, I sketch a third mode of argument for the sameness of supposit and nature based on act and potency (the Act-Potency Argument). I contend that this argument, like the Accidents Argument, demonstrates that God is entirely the same (*omnino idem*) as his nature, but that all creatures differ from their nature in some respect. In §3, I show that Aquinas considers the distinction established by the Accidents Argument a “real distinction,” but that this does not mean, for him, that the distinction in question is totally mind-independent.

The primary goal of this paper is to demonstrate that Aquinas gives multiple distinct arguments for the distinction of supposit and nature in creatures and to explain the internal logic and slightly differing conclusions of these various arguments. The goal is not primarily to defend the classification of the distinction between supposit and nature in angels as “real.” Nevertheless, I draw attention to what I take to be an exegetical fact—that the supposit-nature distinction in angels is “real” for Aquinas—to highlight the difference between how modern commentators tend to use the phrase “real distinction” and how Aquinas himself tended to use its grammatical variants.

1. Two Distinct Arguments: The Individuation Argument versus the Accidents Argument

1.1. In commentary on the Metaphysics

St. Thomas's *Metaphysics* commentary contains the same apparent antinomies as interpreters have found existing between *Quodlibet* II, q.2, a.2[4] and outside texts. In one place, he says "there is a certain thing, which is the same as its quiddity—namely, that which is not composed of matter and form, but form only."¹⁴ Along similar lines, in another place, he suggests a logical connection between a thing being individuated by matter and being other than its quiddity.¹⁵ In other places, however, he expresses an apparently opposite view by suggesting that separate universals would not be altogether the same as their essences¹⁶ and that only in what lacks all accidents is it the case that the concrete (subject / supposit) and the abstract essential principle (e.g., humanity) are the same.¹⁷

The reason for these apparently contradictory statements is not hidden. It lies not in an ambiguity in the word "supposit," but in the word "is," which can mark predication either *per se* or *per accidens*. Previewing what will be concluded about separate universals in *Metaphysics* VII, Aquinas states that "The what-it-is—that is, the essence of anything—is not other than the thing itself, unless *per accidens*, as it will be said."¹⁸ In *In VII Metaphysics*, lec.5, Aquinas reaches the conclusion that "a thing and its quiddity are one not only in just any way, but are even one in definition [*rationem*]."¹⁹ Against this conclusion, an objection is raised in the person of the Sophist. If Socrates is the being of Socrates (*Socrati esse*), but Socrates is white, then white and the being of Socrates are the same, which is false.²⁰ Aquinas replies, "It is obvious from what was said when the quiddity of anything is the same with it, and when it is not. For it is the same in those which are *per se*, not in those which are *per accidens*."²¹ Aquinas adds a clarification to his interpretation of Aristotle:

Now, humanity in this respect is not entirely the same [*omnino idem*] with a man because it imports only the essential principles of man and the exclusion of all accidents. For humanity is that by which man is man, but none of the accidents of a man is that by which the man is a man; whence all accidents of a man are excluded from the

signification of humanity. But he himself who is a man is what has the essential principles and in which accidents can be. Whence, although in the signification of “man,” his accidents are not included, yet “man” does not signify something separate from accidents; and for this reason “man” signifies as a whole [*ut totum*], “humanity” signifies as a part [*ut pars*]. If, however, there is something in which there is no accident, there it is necessary that the abstract in no way differs [*nihil differat*] from the concrete, which is most plain in God.²²

So, for any supposit with accidents, the concrete term differs with regard to its extramental significate from the abstract term, and, correspondingly, the supposit signified by the concrete term differs *per accidens* from (and, therefore, is not entirely the same [*omnino idem*] as) its essential principles since it is accidentally something that its essential principles are not.²³

Conversely, although we continue to distinguish concrete and abstract modes of signifying for God,²⁴ because he has no accidents, the one in no way differs (*nihil differt*) from the other with regard to its extramental significate because the divine supposit, God, does not even differ from its nature *per accidens*, but is, on the contrary, entirely the same (*omnino idem*) as it.

Later, Aquinas clarifies that, although he has been speaking about material things (e.g., man) being the same as their essence, he has been treating them logically as if they were apart from individuals and not individuated by matter.²⁵ In other words, he has been treating them as angels in fact are—that is, not individuated by matter.

No natural thing, if it has matter, is itself what it is [*quod quid est*], but is something having that. As Socrates is not humanity, but is something having humanity ... Although in reality man is not outside singulars, nonetheless, he is so in definition [*ratione*], which pertains to a logical consideration. And for this reason, above where Aristotle considered quiddity logically, he did not exclude material substances, such that in them also quiddity would be the same as that of which it is. Common man is the same as his quiddity, logically speaking.²⁶

The reason is that, in the nature of things (although not in logic), individuals with (common) matter in their species are individuated by individual matter, which is something outside the quiddity of their species.²⁷ Thus, once the logical consideration is left behind in *Metaphysics*

VIII, Aquinas can say “there is a certain thing, which is the same as its quiddity—namely, that which is not composed of matter and form, but form only.”²⁸ Of course, in saying this, he means these pure forms are their quiddity *per se*. Insofar as they have accidents, they are not altogether the same as their quiddity. In sum, with regard to *per se* predication, immaterial things (and material things considered logically) are their essence, but with regard to *per accidens* predication, only what lacks accidents—as is plainly true of God—is the same as its essence. Though presumably his role as commentator encouraged him, in the *Metaphysics* commentary, to leave unsettled the question of whether anything besides God lacks accidents and is, thus, altogether the same as its essence, Aquinas’s personal stance that not even by divine omnipotence could a creature lack accidents was established from the earliest period of his career. In *Quodlibet* VII, q.4, a.3 (Easter 1256), for instance, he reasons: “from the mere fact that a created substance is compared to God, some accident results, as the relation of creation or servitude or some other similar relation. Whence as God cannot make some creature not depend on him, so also he cannot make it to be without such accidents.”²⁹

1.2. In *Quodlibet* II, q.2, a.2[4]

Quodlibet II, q.2, a.2[4] manifests the same line of reasoning as *In VII Metaphysics* with regard to the distinction of supposit and essence in anything with accidents. Moreover, like the *Metaphysics* commentary, it makes clear that apart from the distinction between all created substances and their nature that is established by the presence of accidents in created substances (Accidents Argument), there is a further reason for distinguishing substances composed of matter and form specifically from their natures (Individuation Argument) and that this distinction is stronger than the distinction demonstrated by the presence of accidents. Thus, unlike God, angels

are distinct from their natures in some respect, yet, nevertheless, they have a definitional or *per se* sameness with their natures that is common to them and God but absent from substances composed of matter and form.

In his first reply, Aquinas notes that “there are two ways in which something can be received as an accident outside the definition [*rationem*] of a thing.”³⁰ In one way, the accident determines essential principles as “rational” is outside the essence of the genus “animal,” but also determinative of it; but in another way, the accident does not determine essential principles, as “white” with respect to “man.” Now, material substances have both kinds of accidents.³¹ That they have the second sort needs no explanation.³² To explain their possession of the former sort, however, Aquinas notes that “the determination of body and soul is outside the definition [*rationem*] of the species ... but this befits *this man per se*, that if he were defined [*si diffiniretur*], it would belong to his definition [*ratione*] that he were composed of *this* soul and *this* body, as the definition [*ratione*] of man in general is of soul and body.”³³ Material individuals cannot be defined, but were they definable, the determination of their body and soul by which they are not only body and soul in general, but *this* body and *this* soul, would be part of their definition and predicated of them *per se* as a specific difference belongs to a species *per se*. Thus, the *ratio* proper to a material individual (could there be such a thing) would not be the same as the *ratio* proper to that individual’s species. Material individuals are not even the same as their essence *in ratione*.

Aquinas contrasts this situation with that of created immaterial substances. These latter do have accidents outside their essence, but they do not have accidents determinative of their essential principles because their natures are not individuated by matter (i.e., matter subject to individuating accidents). Thus, “not only in those composed of matter and form is there found

some accident outside the essence of the species, but also in spiritual substances, which are not composed out of matter and form. And for this reason, in both the supposit is not altogether the same [*omnino idem*] as the nature.”³⁴ This inference from the presence of accidents to the distinction between supposit and nature involves an implied premise, stated earlier in the corpus of the article.

Whenever there can be an accident which is not of the definition [*ratione*] or nature, the thing differs from what it is [*quod quid est*], as supposit and nature. For in the signification of the nature is included only that which is of the definition [*ratione*] of the species, but the supposit has not only those things that pertain to the definition of the species, but also other things which befall [*accidunt*] it. And so, the supposit signifies as a whole, but the nature or quiddity as a formal part.³⁵

As was said in the *Metaphysics* commentary, “man” (i.e., the supposit) does not include accidents in its signification, but, unlike “humanity,” it does not exclude them either. Thus, in anything with accidents, the abstract signification of the nature as a formal principle (e.g., humanity) and the concrete signification are not altogether the same. With respect to what is said *per se*, they are the same, but with respect to what is said *per accidens*, they differ.³⁶ “It is only in God, however, that no accident is found outside his essence.”³⁷

1.3. Accidents Argument in outside texts

The same Accidents Argument for God’s unique identity with his essence is found not only in the late *Quodlibets* and *Metaphysics* commentary, but also in *CT I*, c.10 (1265–67), where the major premise in his first of two arguments that God is his essence (= *CT I*, c.10a) is this: “In anything in which there is not found two, one of which is *per se*, the other *per accidens*, it is necessary that its essence is altogether the same [*omnino idem*] as it.”³⁸ Likewise, in *ScG I*, c.21, the first two of the five arguments (= *ScG I*, c.21a) are so many ways of saying the same thing. The first argument relies on the premise that God is not “composite” with “something in

him outside his essence” (*aliquid in eo esse praeter eius essentiam*).³⁹ The second argument is, more, a determination of the first argument than an entirely new one. “Only accidents are in a thing outside its essence. In God, however, there are no accidents, as will be shown ...

Therefore, he himself is his essence.”⁴⁰ It is noteworthy, in passing, that, although this argument relies on the premise that God lacks accidents, Aquinas acknowledges, by the future-tense “*ostendetur*,” that the chapter demonstrating this premise is later in the treatise (c.23). Similarly, in the *CTI*, the chapter addressing whether accidents are found in God only comes thirteen chapters after (c.23) he has used God’s lack of accidents to show him to be his essence (c.10).

1.4. Individuation Argument in outside texts

Now, how should we understand this doctrine in relation to texts, like the corpus of *ST I*, q.3, a.3 and the third argument in *ScG I*, c.21 (= *ScG I*, c.21b), where supposit and nature are identified in all immaterial substances (i.e., any substance whose form is self-individuated), not just God? We will focus, here, on *ST I*, q.3, a.3, co. where it is evident that Aquinas includes angels among those things in which supposit and nature are the same. The conclusion of *ST I*, q.3, a.3 is this: “In those not composed of matter and form, in which individuation is not through individual matter, that is through *this* matter, but the form itself is *per se* individuated, the forms themselves are the subsisting supposits; whence in them, supposit and nature do not differ.”⁴¹ To reach this conclusion, Aquinas has pointed out that in things composed of matter and form, “*this* flesh and *these* bones, and the accidents designating *this* matter, are not included in humanity, but they are included in that which is man. Whence that which is man has in itself something that humanity does not have.”⁴² Here, Aquinas is explicitly referring to those accidents that designate an individual’s matter. These are the first kind of accidents from *Quodlibet II*, q.2, a.2[4], which

are present in material things, but not angels. Thus, what is proved in the corpus of *ST I*, q.3, a.3 is sameness in *per se* predication. Because material things are individuated by matter, the *ratio* proper to them (could there be such a thing) is not the same as the *ratio* proper to their species. But in whatever is not individuated by matter, the proper *ratio* of the individual is the proper *ratio* of the species; the thing itself and its nature are the same with respect to *per se* predication. Even at the time of writing the *Prima pars*, there is no doubt Aquinas acknowledged both (1) that angels have accidents⁴³ and (2) that the essence of a thing includes only what falls in the definition of a species⁴⁴ and, thus, not accidents. It is hard to imagine Aquinas could ever have been confused about these two points on which rests the twofold claim in *In VII Metaphysics*, lec.5 and *Quodlibet II* that, on the one hand, unlike material things, immaterial things (created or uncreated) are their essences *per se*, but, on the other hand, only God is altogether the same (*omnino idem*) as his essence.

Now, it might be objected that, in *De ente*, c.4, Aquinas says that, in material substances, “the essence of the composite substance can be signified as a whole [*ut totum*] or as a part [*ut pars*], which happens on account of designated matter ... But the essence of a simple thing, which is its form, cannot be signified except as a whole since nothing is there outside the form as if receiving the form.”⁴⁵ But, as we’ve seen, in both *In VII Metaphysics*, lec.5 and *Quodlibet II*, Aquinas acts as if there is a distinction between signifying an essence *ut totum* or *ut pars* for all things besides God, including those not individuated by matter. Here, we must keep in mind the context of the statement from *De ente*, c.4. His explicit intent is to note a difference between composite and simple creatures with respect to the predication of essence of that creature. His conclusion is “in whatever way the essence of a simple substance is taken, it is predicated of the thing.”⁴⁶ For material things (e.g., Socrates), the essence can only be predicated of the thing itself

concretely (e.g., “man”) such that it implicitly includes individual matter.⁴⁷ For angels (e.g., Gabriel), however, since they lack individual matter, the essence—whether taken concretely (e.g., “*Gabriel*”) or abstractly (e.g., “*Gabrielitas*”)—includes the whole substance of the angel. Thus, whether taken abstractly or concretely, it can be predicated of that angel. Aquinas’s point can be illustrated with the truth-value table in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Socrates est homo.	T
Socrates est humanitas.	F
Gabriel est gabriel.	T
Gabriel est gabrielitas.	T

In the sense just indicated, we can say that, whether taken abstractly or concretely, the essence of an angel signifies *ut totum*—that is, the whole substance. This hardly indicates, however, that, between writing *De ente* and writing *Quodlibet* II, Aquinas changed his mind as to whether angels had accidents or whether “*Gabrielitas*” prescind from accidents whereas “*Gabriel*” does not. It only indicates some flexibility in the phrase “*ut totum*,” which sometimes refers to the whole substance and sometimes, as is more usual, to the whole of what the substance is in any way.

Just as there is some flexibility in the phrase “*ut totum*,” so too, there is some flexibility in the phrase “*omnino idem*,” as is evident from the anomalous Trinitarian text, *De potentia*, q.9, a.1, where St. Thomas says, “But essence in material substances is not the same as them in reality, nor entirely [*penitus*] diverse since it relates to them as a formal part; in immaterial substances, however, it is entirely the same in reality [*omnino idem secundum rem*], while

differing conceptually [*ratione*].”⁴⁸ Superficially, this statement about “immaterial substances” (under which angels are included) seems to contradict *CT* I, c.10a; *ScG* I, c.21a; *Quodlibet* II, q.2, a.2[4]; and the *Metaphysics* commentary, all of which deny that anything with accidents (under which angels are included) is entirely the same (*omnino idem*) as its nature. Since, chronologically, *De potentia* comes in the middle of the texts it apparently contradicts, it is *prima facie* implausible to think it is actually contradicting them, and when we consider the dialectical purpose of the argument in *De potentia*, q.9, a.1, it is clear that it is not. Here, unlike in the other texts, “*omnino idem*” does not indicate the negation of both essential *and* accidental difference (e.g., God is entirely the same [*omnino idem*] as his nature because he does not differ from his nature even accidentally), but, instead, only the negation of essential difference. Put in the phraseology of *Quodlibet* II, his point is this: The proper *ratio* of an immaterial substance and of its nature are entirely the same, but these are not the same for substances individuated by matter, which, should they have a proper *ratio*, would include in their *ratio* individuating accidents, not included in the proper *ratio* of their species. Despite the fact that angels and God are “entirely the same” (*omnino idem*) as their natures in this sense, their supposit and nature still differ “in reason” (*ratione*)—not because the proper *ratio* of the one is other than the proper *ratio* of the other, of course, but because the mode of understanding the one (i.e., concretely) differs from the mode of understanding the other (i.e., abstractly). Though the concept (*ratio*) of “God” and “divinity” or of “Gabriel” and “*gabrielitas*” is the same, the mode of understanding this concept is different in the cases of concrete and abstract terms. In short, *De potentia*, q.9, a.1 is an instance of the Individuation Argument, not the Accidents Argument, and, despite its verbal peculiarities, it says nothing one way or the other pertinent to the two premises of the Accidents

Argument—the accidental difference of supposit and nature in things with accidents or the possession of accidents by created immaterial substances.

In sum, the argument from the presence of accidents in the supposit to a distinction of supposit and nature is found in *CT I*, c.10a; *ScG I*, c.21a; *In VII Metaphysics*, lec.5; and *Quodlibet II*, q.2, a.2[4]. You could, of course, dispute whether Aquinas’s argument is sound, but, in this section, I have been principally concerned with the historical fact that he does make this argument, and he understands it as distinct from the argument from individuation by individual matter (i.e., matter subject to individuating accidents) found in *ScG I*, c.21b; *De ente*, c.4; *ST I*, q.3, a.3, co.; *QDA*, a.17, ad10; and *De potentia*, q.9, a.1. In some texts, such as *ST III*, q.2, a.2 (discussed in §3.3 below), because both the Accidents Argument and the Individuation Argument are applicable to the matter at hand, the two arguments are presented together as a compound argument with a two middle terms, each sufficient to establish the conclusion. Nevertheless, we can tell from the other parallel texts analyzed above that the two arguments are distinct and reach different—if overlapping—conclusions. I have shown how Aquinas, in *In Metaphysics* and *Quodlibet II*, q.2, a.2, explains the difference between these two arguments, and I have applied what he says to the discrete instantiations of the Accidents Argument in *CT I*, c.10a and *ScG I*, c.21a and of the Individuation Argument in *ST I*, q.3, a.3, co.; *De ente*, c.4; and *De potentia*, q.9, a.1.

2. Act-Potency Argument

Besides the two classes of arguments discussed above, there is a third class of arguments (to which I’ll give the collective title, “Act-Potency Argument”) that Aquinas uses to show God is the same as his essence. This class of arguments is found in the last part of *CT I*, c.10 (=CT I,

c.10b) and *ScG I*, c.21 (= *ScG I*, c.21c). Whereas the Individuation Argument establishes that all immaterial substances, created and uncreated, are the same as their natures *per se*, the Act-Potency argument, like the Accidents Argument, establishes that God alone is entirely the same (*omnino idem*) as his nature, whereas all creatures, material or immaterial, differ from their natures in some respect. These three classes of argument and where they occur are represented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

	Arguments for sameness of supposit and nature		
Argument	Individuation Argument → Establishes <i>per se idem</i> . → Establishes sameness in God and angels.	Accidents Argument → Establishes <i>omnino idem</i> . → Establishes sameness in God alone.	Act-Potency Argument → Establishes <i>omnino idem</i> . → Establishes sameness in God alone.
Texts	<i>De ente</i> , c.4. <i>ST I</i> , q.3, a.3, co. <i>ST III</i> , q.2, a.2, co. [combined with Accidents Argument] <i>ScG I</i> , c.21b. <i>QDA</i> , a.17, ad10. <i>De potentia</i> , q.9, a.1, co. Parts of <i>In Metaphysics</i> .	<i>CT I</i> , c.10a. <i>ScG I</i> , c.21a. <i>ST III</i> , q.2, a.2, co. [combined with Individuation Argument] <i>Quodlibet II</i> , q.2, a.2[4]. Parts of <i>In VII Metaphysics</i> , lec.5, no.1379–80. Cf. <i>ST I</i> , q.3, a.3, ad1–2.	<i>CT I</i> , c.10b. <i>ScG I</i> , c.21c. Cf. <i>Quodlibet II</i> , q.2, a.2[4], ad sc.

Let's now look at the Act-Potency Argument and consider the evidence that it establishes a distinction of supposit and nature not only in material substances, but also in angels. In *CT I*, c.10, he gives two arguments that God is his essence. The first we've already seen. The second proceeds as follows:

In anything in which the essence is not altogether the same [*omnino idem*] with the thing of which it is the essence, there is found something in the mode of potency and something in the mode of act. For essence relates formally [*formaliter se habet*] to the

thing of which it is the essence, as humanity to a human. But in God, there is found no potency and act, but he is pure act. And for this reason, he himself is his essence.⁴⁹

From the fact that essence relates formally (i.e., in the manner of a form) to the thing (i.e., supposit) of which it is the essence, Aquinas concludes that anything that is not altogether the same (*omnino idem*) as its essence has potency and act. While Aquinas does not explicitly identify potency and act here with the thing itself and its essence, this is implied by the analogy drawn between essence and form and by the immediate inference from this analogy to the presence of potency and act. This argument illustrates its point using a material example, a human and humanity. Nevertheless, the force of the argument seems to be that even immaterial substances, like angels, have potency and act since, as we've seen, even they are not altogether the same (*omnino idem*) as their essence, but only the same as their essence *per se*. Even for angels the nature is as a formal part (*ut pars*) insofar as the angel itself (i.e., the supposit) is a kind of whole that is accidentally more (e.g., talking to Mary) than what it is essentially—that is, than what is signified with precision by the abstract term (e.g., “*gabrielitas*”).

The formulation of this argument in *ScG I*, c.21c supports these interpretative conclusions. After presenting two arguments roughly overlapping with the first argument in *CT I*, c.10b (Accidents Argument), and a third argument roughly overlapping the corpus argument in *ST I*, q.3, a.3 (Individuation Argument), Aquinas presents two final arguments that God is his essence (Act-Potency Argument). These last two are sufficiently similar that we can analyze them in tandem.

Moreover, the essence of a thing either is the thing itself or relates to it in some way as a cause since a thing is sorted into a species by its essence. But in no way can something be the cause of God since he is the first being, as was shown. God, therefore, is his essence.

Moreover, what is not its essence relates to it according to something of itself [*secundum aliquid sui*] as potency to act. Whence also essence is signified in the mode of form [*per modum forme*], as is plain with “humanity.” But in God, there is no potentiality, as was shown above. He must, therefore, be his essence.⁵⁰

Here, unlike in *CTI*, c.10b, it is explicit that what fills the role of act in things that are not their essence is the essence since this is the direct object to which a thing (*quod*) is said to relate in some respect (*secundum aliquid sui*) as potency to act. The fact that what is not its essence is composed of potency and act is, as in *CTI*, c.10b, connected to the fact that essence relates to things “formally” (*CTI*, c.10b)—that is, “in the mode of form” (*ScG I*, c.21c). It is this connection to form that makes the two arguments in *ScG I*, c.21c fundamentally equivalent. God must be his essence because what is not its essence relates to its essence as cause, but God is uncaused. Yet, if essence is the cause of a thing, it is so as a formal cause, which is, in the second argument, identified with “act.”

In *CTI*, c.10b, we found reason to think that Aquinas’s argument for the identity of supposit and nature in God entailed a composition of potency and act in all things besides God, including angels, since he made the absence of such composition contingent on a thing’s total identity (*omnino idem*) with its essence. A similar point is implicit in *Quodlibet II*, q.2, a.2[4], ad sc. There the question at hand is whether, in angels specifically, there is a distinction of supposit and nature. Aquinas does not explicitly call the nature of an angel an “act” or “formal cause.” Nor does he say the supposit of an angel either as a whole or in some respect would relate to its nature as a “potency” to that act or formal cause. He does, however, qualifiedly endorse the language of the *sed contra*, which says that the nature of an angel “is signified as constituting, and the supposit as constituted.”⁵¹ He accepts this language with a proviso. Matter and (substantial) form, he says, are “two things” (*duae res*).⁵² And we can say, as Aquinas does elsewhere, that the man or humanity composed of body and soul is a “third thing” (*res tertia*).⁵³ But supposit and nature are not two things, *even in material substances*, let alone in angels. If we assume that matter and form are called “two things” (*res*), for Thomas, not in the sense they are

two complete substances, but in the sense that they are two principles, then denying this denomination of man and humanity or of *Gabriel* and *Gabrielitas* implies that supposit and nature, in creatures, should not be seen as two distinct principles—a potency principle and an act principle. Rather, they differ by extrinsic denomination from modes of signifying, which, nevertheless, depend somehow on the real thing signified. The distinction depends on grammar, but is not purely grammatical since it applies to angels, but not to God—to one *res*, but not another—while the grammar remains unchanged. Now, the couple “constituting” and “constituted,” here, seems to parallel the couple of “act” and “potency” and of “cause” and “caused” in *ScG* I, c.21c and *CT* I, c.10b. So, although his vocabulary fluctuates somewhat between the various texts we have considered, by affirming a distinction in angels between constituted supposit and constituting nature, he seems to continue in this later work to maintain a kind of act-potency composition in them that he denies of God.

3. A “Real” Distinction?

3.1. *Statement of the problem*

So far, this paper has been entirely occupied with distinguishing three modes of argument for the identity of supposit and nature in certain things, but the distinction in others. I have not yet directly addressed the nature of the distinction established by these various arguments, whether it should be called “real” or “conceptual” or something else. In this section, I’ll address that question, though the accuracy of my analysis in the preceding sections is independent of and, I think, more important than what I say in the present section. First, however, it will be helpful to summarize the arguments so far. The Accidents Argument and Act-Potency Argument, I maintain, establish that God is entirely the same (*omnino idem*) with his nature, not differing

from it even accidentally, but, conversely, that all creatures, immaterial and material, are not entirely the same as their nature, but differ from it at least accidentally. The Individuation Argument, in contrast, establishes that anything not individuated by matter, whether a created spirit or God, is the same as its nature *per se*; put in the phraseology of *Quodlibet* II, q.2, a.2[4], the Individuation Argument shows that the proper *ratio* of any immaterial substance, divine or angelic, is the same as the proper *ratio* of its nature whereas, for material individuals, the proper *ratio* of their nature would include less than the proper *ratio* of the individual supposit itself, could there be such a *ratio*. These then are the three arguments I have contrasted above. The question remains how to understand the character of the distinction in angels implied by the Accidents Argument and the Act-Potency Argument. Do these arguments establish a “real” distinction in angels corresponding to a “real” sameness in God? I will argue that they do—at least according to Aquinas’s own way of speaking, which, admittedly, is not how authors normally speak today, but has the advantage of being more subtle.

Now, it could be argued that the Accidents Argument and Act-Potency Argument do not imply a real distinction in angels between supposit and nature since both arguments, as I’ve said above, depend on a distinction in our modes of signifying. As is clear from *In VII Metaphysics*, lec.5 and *Quodlibet* II, q.2, a.2[4], the Accidents Argument depends on the distinction between signifying a thing abstractly and concretely—that is, as a part (*ut pars*) and as a whole (*ut totum*). The same goes for the Act-Potency Argument where what is central to the argument is our mode of signifying a nature—that is, our signification of it formally (*formaliter*) or, put differently, in the manner of form (*per modum formae*). West rightly notes that, for Aquinas, unlike Giles of Rome or Scotus a “real” distinction need involve neither two things (*res*) nor separability between what is distinguished.⁵⁴ Yet, he does not give a positive account of what this distinction

does consist in, and many Thomists assume that a “real” distinction, for Aquinas, consists in the fact that it is “mind-independent” whereas a “logical” or “conceptual” one is not.⁵⁵ Insofar as a distinction in angels dependent on our mode of signifying them is evidently not mind-independent, it seems to be conceptual or logical, not real. The basic form of this objection can be represented by the following syllogism.

Premise 1: No real distinction is mind-dependent—that is, depends on modes of understanding or signifying the objects distinguished.

Premise 2: The distinction between supposit and nature in angels is mind-dependent—that is, depends on modes of understanding or signifying the objects distinguished.

Conclusion: Therefore, the distinction between supposit and nature in angels is not a real distinction.

My response to this objection is twofold. First, I reject the major premise, arguing that per Aquinas’s own usage, some real distinctions are indeed mind-dependent. I show this by a cursory survey of his usage of “*realiter*” and similar expressions in contexts apart from the one at hand (§3.2).⁵⁶ Second, I show, against the conclusion above, that Aquinas did in fact understand the supposit-nature distinction in angels as “real” (*secundum rem*), and I explain what he meant by this designation (§3.3).

3.2. A note on “*realiter*”

First, let us consider Premise 1 in the objection: Is it the case that no real distinction is mind-dependent, or can some real distinctions be mind-dependent while yet remaining real? I should first note that when I speak of a “real” distinction between supposit and nature, I intend only to give a name to whatever Aquinas means when he says that two items “really differ” (*differunt realiter / secundum rem*). Aquinas himself only uses such adverbial formulations, not the nominal expression: “real distinction.” Of course, if we ignore Aquinas’s own usage and

simply define the adjective “real” as meaning extramental or mind-independent—which is not an unreasonable definition—then the objector is right in Premise 1. It is tautological that no mind-dependent distinction—no mind-dependent relation of any kind—can be a “real” if by “real” we mean mind-independent or extramental. In this paper, however, I am interested in explaining Aquinas’s own usage and, as I will show, he evidently does not use the adverbial expressions “*realiter*” or “*secundum rem*” exclusively (or even primarily) to indicate the total mind-independence of what these adverbial phrases modify. In the remainder of §3.2, I will both demonstrate this claim about his usage and illustrate the varying nuances that we can see attaching to these adverbial expressions, as used in their proper dialectical contexts.

Let us begin with *ST III*, q.35, a.5, where the question is whether, in Christ, there are two sonships. Aquinas draws an analogy between Christ’s relation of reason to his mother Mary and God’s relation of reason to creatures:

Although the relation of lord is not real [*relatio dominii non sit realis*] in God, yet, he really is lord [*realiter est Dominus*], from the fact of the real [*reali*] subjection of creatures to him. And in like manner, Christ is called really [*dicitur realiter*] the son of the Virgin mother from the real relation [*relatione reali*] of maternity to Christ.⁵⁷

It is well known that relations from God to creatures are relations of reason, not “real” relations in the sense of mind-independent or extramental accidents in God. The fact that creatures have a real accident by which they are referred to God makes us think of God as having an accidental reference to creatures, but his reference to creatures is according to our mode of thinking, not his mode of being. Nevertheless, it is not usually commented upon that, despite all this, Aquinas insists that we should not deny that God is really (*realiter*) related to creatures. He is really lord (*realiter dominus*) and really creator; likewise, though the son of God is only related to his mother Mary by a relation of reason, he really (*realiter*) is her son. From this, it is clear that the adverb “*realiter*” can modify a verb or adjective signifying a being of reason (e.g., the relation of

lord from God to creatures or the relation of son from Christ to Mary) and, as such, should not be taken in the sense of the adverb “mind-independently.” God’s lordship is not mind-independent or extramental, but God is really lord.

While, in the passage above, Aquinas justifies his use of “*realiter*” to modify a word signifying a being of reason on the grounds that the being of reason is reciprocated and entailed by a real relation, we should not suppose that his broad usage of “*realiter*” to modify beings of reason is restricted to cases involving relations of reason or divine names. In outside texts, Aquinas predicates non-relative beings of reason, modified by the adverb “*realiter*.” In *Super Psalmo 33*, for instance, he says, “Some are miserable in reality though they do not know it” (*sunt realiter miseri, tamen non cognoscunt*).⁵⁸ Although misery is a privation and, thus, a being of reason and not something mind-independent in every respect, Aquinas predicates it using the adverb “*realiter*” to emphasize its independence from the mind in one specific respect—namely, the knowledge of the one who is miserable. In *Contra impugnantes*, c.6, Aquinas says that “Christ was poor, not only by will, but even in reality” (*Christus non solum voluntate sed etiam realiter pauper fuit*).⁵⁹ “*Realiter*,” here, is used in opposition to “by will” (*voluntate*), and it modifies how the predicate belongs to the subject—namely, as not merely the term of rational inclination. Of course, the material lack of possessions, as a being of reason, may have being outside the terminus of rational inclination, but it does not have being apart from being an object of understanding; non-beings, like privations, are not beings outside the mind. A final example is worth mentioning: *ST I-II*, q.41, a.1, ad2. Here, describing the passion of fear, he notes that “inasmuch as evil is really future, it is present according to the apprehension of the soul” (*inquantum scilicet malum quod est futurum realiter, est praesens secundum apprehensionem animae*).⁶⁰ Here, not only is what is predicated using “*realiter*” a being of reason (i.e., the

future), but that of which it is predicated is a privative being of reason too (i.e., evil). As in the statement about those who are *really* miserable without knowing it, this statement is used to indicate not that what is modified is totally mind-independent, but only that it is independent of cognition in one precise respect. An evil that is present in the apprehension of the sense power from which fear arises, is future *qua* outside that very sense power. As an object of that sense power, it is present, not future. All this is despite the fact that neither evil nor futurity are anything independently of all cognitive powers, taken absolutely. Like misery and poverty, evil only has being as an object of cognition.

In sum, “*realiter*” need not indicate the total mind-independence of the significate of the adjective or verb it modifies. Rather, its meaning is determined within various contexts, like those above, to indicate some aspect of reference to things (*res*) absent from the adverbial expression to which it is opposed in that given context. The context-relative nature of the meaning of “*realiter*” and similar expressions is highlighted by Aquinas’s opposing remarks about genus-difference compositions. In *ST I*, q.3, a.5, sc., he says, “Genus is prior in concept [*secundum intellectum*] to what is contained in the genus,” and contrasts this priority in concept to a priority in reality (*secundum rem*).⁶¹ While not explicit, this statement clearly indicates that the genus-difference distinction in creatures is conceptual (*secundum intellectum*), not real (*secundum rem*). The impression is reinforced by how he understands that distinction. It follows from “diverse concepts [*rationes*] or logical intentions, which result from a mode of understanding [*modum intelligendi*]” “one and the same thing [*unum et idem*]” and does not involve a distinction of multiple natural things (*res naturalia*).⁶² As Aquinas explains in *De ente*, c.2, genus, difference, and species terms all signify the same thing, but differ in signifying it more or less determinately.⁶³ The dependence of the genus-difference distinction on modes of

signifying and understanding, which is absent from the matter-form distinction, justifies Aquinas in treating the former as conceptual (*secundum intellectum*), but the latter as real (*secundum rem*) when the two are being contrasted.

Yet, in a different context, where Aquinas's purpose is to distinguish two kinds of genus-difference composition rather than to contrast the genus-difference composition in general with the matter-form one, he describes some genus-difference compositions as "real" (*secundum considerationem realem*), but others as "logical" (*secundum considerationem logicam*).⁶⁴ Moreover, the real genus-difference composition is said to consist in two diverse natures (*diversae naturae*) or one thing and another (*aliud et aliud*), but the logical one to consist only in a single nature or thing considered more or less determinately. The reason for this discrepancy in Aquinas's descriptions of genus-difference compositions is that, in the present context, he is not contrasting the genus-difference composition with a matter-form composition, but contrasting a genus-difference composition based on a scientific (natural scientific or metaphysical) mode of defining through proper or primary principles with a non-scientific (logical) mode of defining that ignores such principles. What is relevant for the distinction between scientific and logical genus-difference composition is Aristotle's technical definition of "nature" in the *Physics* as a *primary* internal principle of motion *per se*.⁶⁵ Despite his commitment to the unicity of substantial form (and of "nature" in the sense of "essence"), Aquinas happily uses this technical sense of "nature" from Aristotle's *Physics* to distinguish multiple natures within a single substance—say, the animal nature, which is not the primary principle of an animal's falling downward, and the nature of the dominant element, which is the primary principle of this motion.⁶⁶ In keeping with this usage, Aquinas holds that the scientist's division of man into genus and difference according to his two natures, animal and rational, is "real" (*secundum*

considerationem realem) in the sense that it is based on a distinction between *primary* principles of operation (i.e., the primary principles of sensation and reasoning);⁶⁷ the logician’s definition of an angel in terms of the genus, intellectual (*intellectuale*), and species, intellectual thusly (*intellectuale sic*), in contrast, is not “real” because it does not involve the composition of two distinct natures (i.e., *primary* principles of operation), but the composition of more and less determinate considerations of a single primary principle of a single operation—the intellectual operation.⁶⁸ Both modes of genus-difference composition are obviously mind-dependent; they depend on our considering a single natural thing more or less determinately by reference to its operations, which are accidents. Nevertheless, Aquinas is making a perfectly intelligible point when he distinguishes the two genus-difference compositions as, respectively, “real” and “logical.”

While this has not been a systematic or anywhere near complete survey of Aquinas’s use of “*realiter*” and similar expressions outside the supposit-nature question, and some may dispute my interpretation of some of the examples, collectively, these examples are hopefully sufficient to show that the criteria for using “*realiter*” and similar expressions cannot be whether or not the thing signified by the word so modified is a mind-independent being; put differently, if something differs really (*realiter differt*) from another, it need not be the case that “differs” signifies a mind-independent relation. It could very well signify a relation of reason—a difference of reason—that is, nevertheless, “real” according to some reference to things (*res*) absent from the sort of distinction to which the real distinction, in a given context, is contrasted.

3.3. *A real distinction between supposit and nature in angels according to Aquinas*

In §3.1, I raised the objection that the distinction between supposit and nature in angels cannot be “real” because the distinction depends on reference to modes of signifying and, therefore, is mind-dependent, but no mind-dependent distinction is real. In §3.2, I showed that the major premise in this argument was incorrect since by “real distinction,” I just mean to give nominal expression to whatever Aquinas has in mind when he speaks of two things differing really (*realiter; secundum rem*), but he uses the adverb “really” for purposes other than indicating total mind-independence. In the present subsection, I address the conclusion of the objection in §3.1, arguing that Aquinas does indeed hold a real distinction between supposit and nature in angels and explaining how his use of “*realiter*” or “*secundum rem*” in this context fits into the general idiom sketched in §3.2. Two caveats should be stated at the outset to avoid any confusion. First, my question here is not principally whether there is in fact a real distinction between supposit and nature in angels or if we should use this language, but whether, as a matter of historical fact, Aquinas held such a distinction and, if so, why he did so. Second, as noted above, the precise classification of the distinction between supposit and nature in angels is a distinct question from the question of whether there is such a distinction in the first place—something I discussed in §1–2 and which is the principal point of the present paper.

With these caveats in place, let us ask whether Aquinas holds a real distinction between supposit and nature in angels. One text where this is strongly implied is *ST* III, q.2, a.2.

And if indeed to those which pertain to the concept of the species [*rationem speciei*], nothing else can be found to be added, there would be no necessity in distinguishing the nature from the supposit of the nature, which is the individual subsisting in that nature because any individual subsisting in some nature would be entirely the same [*omnino idem*] with its nature. But it happens that in some subsisting things, something is found that does not pertain to the concept of the species [*rationem speciei*]*—namely, accidents and individual principles* [*accidentia et principia individuantia*]*—as is especially clear* [*maxime apparet*] in those which are composed of matter and form. And for this reason, in such, the nature differs in reality [*secundum rem differt*] from the supposit, not as something entirely separate, but because in the supposit is included the nature of the

species itself [*ipsa natura speciei*], and there is superadded certain other things [*quaedam alia*], which are outside the concept of the species [*rationem speciei*]. Whence the supposit is signified as a whole [*ut totum*], having the nature as a formal part and perfective of it. And for this reason, in composites of matter and form, the nature is not predicated of the supposit; for we do not say that *this* man is humanity. If there is a thing in which there is altogether [*omnino*] nothing else outside the concept of the species or its nature [*rationem speciei vel naturae suae*], as is the case in God, there, the supposit and nature are not other in reality [*secundum rem*], but only according to the aspect of understanding [*solum secundum rationem intelligendi*].⁶⁹

Here, thanks to the Christological context of the passage, Aquinas is not chiefly concerned with immaterial substances, like angels, but with ones, like the man, Christ, composed of matter and form. It is for this reason, that he combines into a single argument the major premises of both the Accidents Argument and the Individuation Argument: If there is nothing outside the *ratio* of the species, then supposit and nature are entirely the same (*omnino idem*), but both “accidents and individual principles” (*accidentia et principia individuantia*)—that is, both kinds of “accidents” mentioned in *Quodlibet* II, q.2, a.2[4], ones that determine essential principles and ones that do not—are outside the *ratio* of the species; thus, as we saw in *Quodlibet* II, q.2, a.2[4], in anything that has these (one or both), the nature differs in reality (*secundum rem differt*) from the supposit. Aquinas says that this is most clear (*maxime apparet*) in substances composed of matter and form, but this very remark implies that the conclusion applies also—though less obviously—to certain immaterial substances. And, indeed, as we saw in *Quodlibet* II, q.2, a.2[4], it must apply to created immaterial substances since, while these don’t have individuating principles outside the concept of their species, they do have other accidents outside that concept such that they are not entirely the same (*omnino idem*) as their nature.

It is important to note that what is opposed to this real distinction is not any mind-dependent distinction at all, but a distinction “*only* according to the aspect of understanding” (*solum secundum rationem intelligendi*). This matters because the real distinction in question is

evidently mind-dependent. Aquinas himself explains the real distinction in question by reference to modes of signifying. The nature is distinct from the supposit not as something entirely separate (*omnino separata*), but as something included within but not exhausting the *signification* of the supposit; the supposit *is signified* as a whole (*ut totum*), the nature as its formal and perfecting part. A similar reference to modes of signifying is made in Aquinas's explanation of the supposit-nature distinction in *Quodlibet* II, q.2, a.2[4], ad sc., where he makes clear that the supposit-nature distinction in material substances as well as immaterial ones equally depends on reference to modes of signifying:

It must be said that the nature is said to constitute the supposit even in composites of matter and form, not because the nature is one thing [*una res*] and the supposit another thing [*alia res*] (for this would be the opinion of those saying that the nature of the species is the form alone, which constitutes the supposit as a whole), but because *according to the mode of signifying* [*secundum modum significandi*], the nature is signified as a part [*ut pars*] ... but the supposit as a whole [*ut totum*]; the nature *is signified as constituting* and the supposit as constituted.⁷⁰

Even if one insists that *ST* III, q.2, a.2's language of a "real distinction" (*secundum rem differt*) between supposit and nature was intended by St. Thomas to apply only to the material substances principally under discussion in that passage (a reading of the passage that, as I argued above, is overly restrictive), the present reply *sed contra* would still force us to extend that language to angels as well. That's because it puts us into a dilemma: Both for material substances and for immaterial ones, unlike the substantial form, the nature is not a formal part (*pars formalis*) or constitutor (*constituens*) of the supposit except by reference to our mode of signifying (*secundum modum significandi*). It is a formal part and constitutor of the supposit because it is signified as such. Accordingly, either (i) Aquinas should not even say that the nature differs really (*secundum rem differt*) from the supposit in material substances, let alone angels, or else, (ii) he ought to apply this description to all created substances, material and immaterial, since all equally have

accidents outside the concept of their species such that what is signified as a formal part can be contrasted with the supposit, which is signified as a whole. Since Aquinas does say a material supposit differs really (*secundum rem*) from its nature despite the fact that this distinction, according to his own admission, depends on modes of signifying, it follows that the same dependence on modes of signifying in no way disqualifies the distinction between supposit and nature in angels from counting as a real distinction.

As it happens, we can find a text in which Aquinas speaks quite generally about all creatures having a real distinction between supposit and nature. In *In I Sent.*, d.5, q.1, a.1, he says, “In creatures, essence really differs [*realiter differt*] from the supposit ... In divine things, however, the essence does not really differ from the supposit, but only by reason [*solum ratione*] or with regard to the mode of signifying.”⁷¹ As in *ST III*, q.2, a.2, what is opposed to the real distinction (*ST III*, q.2, a.2: *secundum rem differt*; *In I Sent.*, d.5, q.1, a.1: *realiter differt*) is one that is entirely according to reason (*ST III*, q.2, a.2: *solum secundum rationem intelligendi*; *In I Sent.*, d.5, q.1, a.1: *solum ratione, sive quantum ad modum significandi*). With the qualifier “*solum*,” Aquinas implies that the real distinction in question is not entirely mind-independent. As we’ve seen in both *ST III*, q.2, a.2 and *Quodlibet II*, q.2, a.2[4], ad sc., it depends on reference to modes of signifying, but not exclusively so.

Thus far, I have made two arguments for the historical thesis that, according to Aquinas, the supposit-nature distinction in angels is “real” (though not in the sense of being totally mind-independent). First, I have argued conditionally that, insofar as Aquinas undoubtedly describes the distinction between supposit and nature in material substances as real (*secundum rem*) in *ST III*, q.2, a.2, by the same principles, he must also describe the distinction in angels as real since the two distinctions are mind-dependent in the same way. Second, I have also pointed out that

the assertion that supposit and nature differ really (*realiter; secundum rem*) in both *In I Sent.*, d.5, q.1, a.1 and *ST III*, q.2, a.2 is made in such a way so as to strongly imply that Aquinas has in mind not only material substances (which are merely the most obvious case of the distinction), but creatures generally or everything with accidents.

Perhaps, however, it will be argued that Aquinas's language in these two texts is simply unintelligible—a slip of the pen from which we should piously look away. If the distinction between supposit and nature in angels, no less than in material substances, depends on reference to modes of signifying, as I have argued, then—so the objection goes—it makes no sense to contrast such a distinction with one that is “only by reason, or with regard to the mode of signifying.” Even if this objection is right, it still is compatible with my basic historical thesis that Aquinas, rightly or wrongly, taught a real distinction between supposit and nature in angels. Still, I don't think the objection is right, and answering it will help us to understand the genuine historical meaning of Aquinas's remarks.

The best answer to this objection is to show what sense there is in Aquinas's distinction. The easiest way to do this is to consider what it is like to deny the real distinction between supposit and nature. We can see what it is like to deny the real distinction by considering what Aquinas says about God, where the distinction does not obtain. As we saw in *In VII Metaphysics*, lec.5, Aquinas identifies the distinction between supposit and nature with the distinction between the concrete and the abstract or, put differently, between what is signified as a whole (*ut totum*) and as a part (*ut pars*). He concludes by saying, “If, however, there is something in which there is no accident, there it is necessary that the abstract in no way differs [*nihil differat*] from the concrete, which is most plain in God.”⁷²

But what does it mean for abstract and concrete not to differ for God? In *ST I*, q.13, a.1, arg2, an objector argues that we cannot apply either abstract or concrete names to God because concrete names (which include implicitly a plurality of *rationes* outside the *ratio* of the species of the thing signified) seem to conflict with divine simplicity (i.e., lack of accidents), but abstract names (which signify as an inhering formal principle) seem to conflict with God's complete subsistence.⁷³ Aquinas rejects the objector's conclusion: we can, in fact, use both concrete and abstract names of God. Moreover, it is not just that the sound or shape of the abstract and concrete names is retained in the case of God (e.g., we add the sound “-itas” or “-tia” to the end of abstract names), but that the grammatical modes of signifying abstractly or concretely are themselves retained. Since we know God through creatures, we name him using modes of signifying that befit creatures. Thus, the distinct logico-grammatical functions of abstract and concrete names are preserved when speaking about God: “Because ... God is simple and also subsistent, we attribute abstract names to him to signify his simplicity and concrete names to signify his subsistence and completeness.”⁷⁴ So, in God, as in creatures, there are certain words that are grammatically abstract (e.g., “*sapientia*”; “*deitas*”) and others that are grammatically concrete (e.g., “*sapiens*”; “*deus*”); moreover, as with creatures, so also for God, these words immediately signify certain distinct modes of understanding. Both concrete and abstract names signify the same concept, which is a likeness of some external thing, but, from these words, we understand the thing signified through that concept in a distinct way (*modus*).⁷⁵ By a concrete name, the intellect understands the thing corresponding to its concept in such a way that, on the part of the one understanding, the thing understood might participate (i.e., be subject to) things outside its essence—that is, things beyond that precisely which corresponds to our concept of the thing. By an abstract name, in contrast, the intellect understands the thing corresponding to its

concept in such a way that, on the part of the one understanding, the thing understood is nothing else besides that precisely in virtue of which the thing corresponds to our concept of it. From the standpoint of grammar—of our modes of signifying and understanding extramental things—the thing signified by the concrete name “*deus*” is no less a potential subject of a variety of predicates than the thing signified by the concrete name “*homo*.”

God and creatures begin to differ only when we begin to consider the extramental things (*res*) ultimately signified by concrete and abstract names—albeit without leaving modes of signifying and understanding involved in those names totally out of the picture. For substances with accidents—that is, for all creatures—thanks to the possession of accidents on the part of the thing itself ultimately signified, the concrete term includes more potentially in its signification than the abstract term. It does so not only on the side of our understanding of it—as, for instance, God is not only God, but also wise and good, which attributes are not included in our inadequate understanding of deity—but also on the part of the thing itself. In God, however, thanks to the lack of accidents on the part of the thing ultimately signified, the concrete term does not include more potentially in its signification than the abstract term. God is no more than what exactly corresponds to the name “God”—that is, his divinity, which itself is nothing else than his goodness, wisdom, et cetera. A man, in contrast, is always something else besides a man; he is a man, but also, say, short and wise and healthy.⁷⁶ Put differently, in God, that thing outside the soul signified by a concrete name is nothing besides what exactly (if supereminently) corresponds to our concept, but in creatures, that thing outside the soul signified by a concrete name is at least *per accidens* (and in the case of material substances also *per se*) something else besides what corresponds to the same concrete name. Since we use abstract names to signify exclusively that outside the soul that precisely corresponds to the concept immediately signified

by a concrete name, we express the distinction above by saying that, in God, abstract and concrete names signify the same thing, but in creatures, they do not.

The distinction I have been explaining is essentially dependent on reference to modes of understanding and signifying. Nevertheless, for the reasons I have just laid out, it is not unintelligible to contrast it—as Aquinas does—with a distinction that is *merely* in modes of understanding and signifying. Even for God, there is a grammatical distinction between abstract and concrete names, but that does not mean we have left grammar entirely behind when we say, on the one hand, that, in God, concrete and abstract names signify the same thing, but in creatures, they do not, or, on the other hand, that, in God, the supposit (the significate of the concrete name) and the nature (the significate of the abstract name) are really the same, but in creatures, they really differ.

In short, let us draw the following conclusions: Aquinas employs three distinct arguments for the sameness or diversity of supposit and nature. When these three arguments are kept in mind, we see that he was consistent on the relation of supposit and nature in angels throughout his career. Unlike a substance individuated by matter and accidents, an angel is the same *in ratione* as its nature; it is not other than it *per se*. Nevertheless, all creatures—material or immaterial—differ from their natures at least *per accidens* whereas God alone, who alone lacks accidents, is entirely the same (*omnino idem*) as his nature, not even differing from it *per accidens*. For Aquinas, in all creatures, material or immaterial, supposit and nature differ “really” (*secundum rem; realiter*), yet this does not mean that the distinction in question is mind independent. Rather, it depends partially on modes of signifying and understanding. Besides clarifying Aquinas’s understanding of supposits and natures, it is hoped this discussion helps to clarify his use of the language of a “real distinction” in other areas of his metaphysics.⁷⁷

References

- ¹ For an analysis of the patristic doctrine of the unique identity of God with his essence, especially as found in Boethius by way of Hilary of Poitiers and Augustine, but also in Jerome, see Elliot Polsky, “The Semantics of Divine *Esse* in Boethius,” *Nova et Vetera* [English ed.], forthcoming.
- ² Cornelio Fabro considers the supposit-nature distinction a real distinction (*distinzione reale*), but says it, like the real distinction of divine persons, is not a real distinction of potency and act. Cornelio Fabro, *Neotomismo e Suarezismo*, ed. Marcelo Lattanzio, Opere Complete 4 (Segni: Editrice del Verbo Incarnato, 2005), 74–75. As I show in §2, however, Thomas does treat it as a potency-act distinction. For discussion of this passage in Fabro, see Giovanni Ventimiglia, *Distinctio realis: La disputa sulla distinzione reale tra essenza ed esistenza nei primi del novecento*, *Credere e Pensare* 4 (Lugano: Eupress-FTL, 2012), 164ff.
- ³ Cf. Turner Nevitt and Brian Davies, introduction to *Thomas Aquinas’s Quodlibetal Questions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), xliii. Citations of Thomas Aquinas are to *Opera omnia* [=Leon.], (Rome: Leonine Commission, 1882–); Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis* [=Script.], eds. R. P. Mandonnet and M. F. Moos, 4 vols. (Paris: Sumptibus P. Lethielleux, 1929–47); Aquinas, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio* [=In Metaph.], ed. M. R. Cathala and Raymundi Spiazzi, 3rd ed. (Turin: Marietti, 1977); Aquinas, *De potentia*, in *Quaestiones Disputatae*, ed. P. M. Pession, 8th ed., vol. 2. (Turin: Marietti, 1949); Aquinas, *Super Psalmos*, aquinas.cc. Translations from Latin are my own.
- ⁴ Aquinas, *ST I*, q.3, a.3, co.: “In his igitur quae non sunt composita ex materia et forma ... ipsae formae sint supposita subsistentia. Unde in eis non differt suppositum et natura” (Leon. ed., 4.40).
- ⁵ Aquinas, *Quodlibet II*, q.2, a.2[4]: “in Deo omnino est idem suppositum et natura. In angelo autem non est omnino idem” (Leon. ed., 25/2.217:96–98).
- ⁶ J. L. A. West, “The Real Distinction Between Supposit and Nature,” in *Wisdom’s Apprentice: Thomistic Essays in Honor of Lawrence Dewan, O.P.*, ed. Peter Kwasniewski and Lawrence Dewan (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 98, 99n38. West refers readers to John Wippel’s discussion of the debate.
- ⁷ Gabriele Galluzzo, “Aquinas on the Common Nature and Universals,” *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* 71, no. 1 (2004): 131–71, at 143. Cf. Aquinas, *De potentia*, q.9, a.1, co. This, not *Quodlibet II*, is, in my opinion, the truly anomalous text. Yet, despite its verbal difference from what Aquinas says elsewhere, it presents no problem to my thesis doctrinally. See §1.4.
- ⁸ Galluzzo, “Aquinas on the Common Nature and Universals,” 141, 150. He suggests briefly (p. 150) that the *Quodlibet II* text can be reconciled with the others by the fact that, in the former, “Thomas seems to depart from his standard understanding of *suppositum* as something which does not include *esse*.” This is closest to the solution given by Othmar Schweitzer; see below.
- ⁹ Edward Rousseau, “Essence and Supposit in the Angels according to St. Thomas,” *The Modern Schoolman* 33 (1956): 241–56. I do not, of course, object to reading Aquinas in context, but to Rousseau’s use of a hypothesized existential context to resolve the tension between Aquinas’s apparently inconsistent remarks.
- ¹⁰ Othmar Schweizer, *Person und Hypostatische Union bei Thomas von Aquin*, (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg, 1957), 88–89; Othmar Schweizer, “Person und Hypostatische Union bei Thomas von Aquin: Zur Interpretation Vier Wesentlicher Texte,” *Freiburger Zeitschrift Für Philosophie Und Theologie* 6, no. 3 (1959): 303–11.
- ¹¹ John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 246–53; John Wippel, “Presidential Address: Substance in Aquinas’s Metaphysics,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 61 (1987): 11–15, at 13–14; John Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas and the Condemnation of 1277,” *The Modern Schoolman* 72 (1995): 233–72, at 268n101; see also Kevin White, “The *Quodlibeta* of Thomas Aquinas in the Context of His Work,” in *Theological Quodlibeta in the Middle Ages: The Thirteenth Century*, ed. Christopher Schabel, Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 49–133, at 116–17.
- ¹² It is true, as Schweizer points out, that Aquinas (*Quodlibet II*, q.2, a.2[4], ad2) says that because being (*esse*) “...tamen pertinent ad suppositum et non est de ratione nature, manifestum est quod suppositum et natura non sunt omnino idem in quibuscunque res non est suum esse” (Leon. ed., 25/2.218:154–58); cf. Schweizer, *Person und Hypostatische*, 87–88). But here Aquinas is not describing a new “expanded,” existence-inclusive “meaning” of supposits, but only a semantic feature of concrete words generally, which will be explained more fully later in this paper—namely, that they can participate predicates outside their essence. Cf. Aquinas, *In DH*, c.2 (Leon. ed., 50.271–72:115–40); Aquinas, *Quodlibet II*, q.2, a.2 [4], co. (Leon. ed., 25/2.217:88–93). Likewise, Wippel’s claim that we can “emphasize” either the “*quod*” (essence) or the “*est*” (existence) in the phrase “*quod est*” (supposit), seems to have some precedent in Aquinas’s *In I Peryerm.*, 1.5 (Leon. ed., 1*/1.31:363–73), where he says that “what is” (*quod est*) seems to signify both a thing (*res*), by the word “*quod*,” and being (*esse*), by the word “*est*.” The problem is that Aquinas puts this distinction in the mouth of an objector, and, in his own voice, he makes no mention of us having an ability to emphasize either *res* or *esse*. If Wippel’s notion of “emphasizing” is the same as Aquinas’s notion of “signifying” something “principally,” then, in this text, Thomas excludes Wippel’s account of the two possible emphases within a supposit since he says the principal signification of “being” (*ens*) is only a thing (*res*) that has being (*esse*), not being itself (*esse*), lest “being” (*ens*) be a complete proposition (*enunciatio*) rather than a name.
- ¹³ For another treatment of Aquinas’s commentary on this text, see Gabriele Galluzzo, *The Medieval Reception of Book Zeta of Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2013).
- ¹⁴ Aquinas, *In VIII Metaph.*, 1.3, 1709: “Et sic patet, quod aliqua res est, cui idem est quod quid erat esse suum; scilicet quae non est composita ex materia et forma, sed forma tantum.”

¹⁵ Aquinas, *In VII Metaph.*, l.11, 1535: “Unde nulla res naturae si materiam habeat, est ipsum quod quid est, sed est habens illud. Sicut Socrates non est humanitas, sed est humanitatem habens. Si autem esset possibile esse hominem compositum ex corpore et anima, qui non esset hic homo ex hoc corpore et ex hac anima compositus, nihilominus esset suum quod quid erat esse, quamvis haberet materiam.” See also 1533: “quod quid erat esse uniuscuiusque, est idem cum eo cuius est. Quod quidem est simpliciter verum in quibusdam, sicut ‘in primis substantiis’, idest in immaterialibus.”

¹⁶ Aquinas, *In III Metaph.*, l.10, 459: “Nam si sit universale separatum, necesse est ponere unam numero substantiam eorum quae conveniunt in specie, quia universale est substantia singularium. Huius autem quaestionis veritas determinatur in septimo huius, ubi ostenditur, quod quid est, idest essentiam cuiuslibet rei non esse aliud quam rem ipsam, nisi per accidens, ut ibi dicitur.”

¹⁷ Aquinas, *In VII Metaph.*, l.5, 1378–80.

¹⁸ Aquinas, *In III Metaph.*, l.10, 459.

¹⁹ Aquinas, *In VII Metaph.*, l.5, 1375: “non solum res et quod quid erat esse eius sunt unum quocumque modo, sed etiam sunt unum secundum rationem, ut ex dictis potest esse manifestum.”

²⁰ Aquinas, *In VII Metaph.*, l.5, 1377: “Ut cum quaerunt sophistae, si est idem Socrates et Socrati esse, et ostendunt, quod non, quia si idem est Socrates et Socrati esse, Socrates autem est albus, sequitur quod idem sit album et Socrati esse etc.”

²¹ Aquinas, *In VII Metaph.*, l.5, 1377: “Solutio patet ex praecedentibus ... Patet igitur ex dictis, quando quod quid erat esse uniuscuiusque est idem cum unoquoque, et quando non. Est enim idem in his quae sunt per se, non in his quae sunt per accidens.”

²² Aquinas, *In VII Metaph.*, l.5, 1379–1380: “Humanitas autem pro tanto non est omnino idem cum homine, quia importat tantum principia essentialia hominis, et exclusionem omnium accidentium. Est enim humanitas, qua homo est homo: nullum autem accidentium hominis est, quo homo sit homo, unde omnia accidentia hominis excluduntur a significatione humanitas. Hoc autem ipsum quod est homo, est quod habet principia essentialia, et cui possunt accidentia inesse. Unde, licet in significatione hominis non includantur accidentia eius, non tamen homo significat aliquid separatum ab accidentibus; et ideo homo significat ut totum, humanitas significat ut pars. Si autem est aliqua res, in qua non sit aliquod accidens, ibi necesse est, quod nihil differat abstractum a concreto. Quod maxime patet in Deo.”

²³ Aquinas’s contrast between things with accidents, which are the same as their natures *per se*, but not *per accidens*, and God, who is entirely the same (*omnino idem*) as his nature, corresponds to and is based on the very same reasoning as Boethius’s distinction (*De trinitate*, c.4) between creatures, which are their substances, but also something else besides, and God, who is nothing but his substance and, therefore, beyond substance (*ultra substantiam*). See *Theological Tractates*, trans. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, S. J. Tester, Loeb Classical Library 74 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 16–18, Ins. 14–41. The difference is that whereas, in that text, Boethius is contrasting God and creatures with regard to what is predicated of them substantially (i.e., their substance or “*esse*”) (e.g., is-God, is-man, etc.), Aquinas is here contrasting God and creatures with regard to what, in them, is signified as a formal principle (e.g., divinity, humanity, etc.). For analysis of this argument in Boethius and Boethius’s sources for it, see Polsky, “Semantics of Divine *Esse* in Boethius.”

²⁴ Cf. Aquinas, *ST I*, q.13, a.1, ad2 (Leon. ed., 4.139–40).

²⁵ Aquinas, *In VII Metaph.*, l.11, 1535–1536. For further explanation of the logical character of *Metaphysics VII* in Aquinas’s interpretation, see Galluzzo, *Medieval Reception*, esp. 237–41, 269; Fabrizio Amerini, “Aristotle, Averroes and Thomas Aquinas on the Nature of Essence,” *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 14 (2003): esp. 79, 119–20.

²⁶ Aquinas, *In VII Metaph.*, l.11, 1535–1536: “Unde nulla res naturae si materiam habeat, est ipsum quod quid est, sed humanitas, sed est habens illud. Sicut Socrates non est humanitas, sed est humanitatem habens ... Licet autem homo praeter singularia non sit in rerum natura, est tamen in ratione quae pertinent ad logicam considerationem. Et ideo superius ubi logice consideravit de quod quid erat esse, non exclusit substantias materiales, quin in illis etiam esset idem quod quid est, cum eo cuius est. Homo enim communis est idem cum suo quod quid est, logice loquendo.”

²⁷ Aquinas, *In VII Metaph.*, l.11, 1535.

²⁸ Aquinas, *In VIII Metaph.*, l.3, 1709: “Et sic patet, quod aliqua res est, cui idem est quod quid erat esse suum; scilicet quae non est composita ex materia et forma, sed forma tantum.”

²⁹ Aquinas, *Quodlibet VII*, q.4, a.3[10], ad4: “ex hoc ipso quod substantia create comparatur ad Deum, consequitur ipsam aliquod accidens, sicut ipsa relatio creationis aut servitutis uel alia similis relatio; unde, sicut Deus non potest facere quod creatura non dependeat ab ipso, ita non posset facere quod esset absque huiusmodi accidentibus” (Leon. ed., 25/1.23–24:95–101).

³⁰ Aquinas, *Quodlibet II*, q.2, a.2[4], ad1: “Dupliciter enim aliquid accipitur ut accidens praeter rationem rei. Vno modo, quid non cadit in diffinitione significante essentiam rei, set tamen est designatum uel determinatum alicuius essentialium principiorum, sicut rationale accidit animali, utpote praeter diffinitionem eius existens, et tamen est determinatum essentiae animalis, unde fit essentialis homini et de ratione eius existens. Alio modo accidit aliquid alicui, quia nec est in eius diffinitione, nec est determinatum alicuius essentialium principiorum, sicut albedo accidit homini” (Leon. ed., 25/2.217–18:109–22).

³¹ Leon. ed., 25/2.218:122–24.

³² Leon. ed., 25/2.218:133–35.

³³ Leon. ed., 25/2.218:126–33: “... determinatio corporis et anime est praeter rationem speciei ... set hoc conuenit per se huic homini, de cuius ratione esset, si diffiniretur, quod esset ex hac anima et ex hoc corpore, sicut de ratione hominis communis est quod sit ex anima et corpore.”

³⁴ Leon. ed., 25/2.217:103–8: “non solum in compositis ex materia et forma inuenitur aliquod accidens praeter essentiam speciei, set etiam in substantiis spiritualibus, quae non componuntur ex materia et forma; et ideo in utrisque suppositum non est omnino idem quod natura.”

³⁵ Aquinas, *Quodlibet II*, q.2, a.2[4], co.: “Secundum hoc igitur, cuiuscumque potest aliquid accidere quod non sit de ratione sue nature, in eo differet res et quod quid est, siue suppositum et natura: nam in significatione nature includitur solum id quod est de

ratione specie, suppositum autem non solum habet hec que ad rationem specie pertinent, set etiam alia que ei accident; et ideo suppositum significatur ut totum, natura autem siue quidditas ut pars formalis” (Leon. ed., 25/2.217:88–93).

³⁶ Leon. ed., 25/2.217:74–77: “Et hanc questionem mouet Philosophus in VII Methaphisice, ubi inquit *utrum sit idem unumquodque et quod quid est* eius. Et determinat quod in his que dicuntur per se, idem est res et quod quid est rei, in his autem que dicuntur per accidens, non est idem.”

³⁷ Leon. ed., 25/2.217:93–95: “In solo autem Deo non inuenitur aliquod accidens preter eius essenciam.”

³⁸ Aquinas, *CT I*, c.10: “In quocumque igitur non est inuenire duo quorum unum est per se et aliud per accidens, oportet quod essentia eius sit omnino idem cum eo” (Leon. ed., 42.86:10–12).

³⁹ Aquinas, *ScG I*, c.21 (Leon. ed., 13.63–64).

⁴⁰ Leon. ed., 13.64: “Sola igitur accidentia sunt in re aliqua praeter essentiam eius. In Deo autem non sunt aliqua accidentia, ut ostendetur ... Est igitur ipse sua essentia.”

⁴¹ Aquinas, *ST I*, q.3, a.3, co.: “In his igitur quae non sunt composita ex materia et forma ... ipsae formae sint supposita subsistentia. Unde in eis non differ suppositum et natura” (Leon. ed., 4.40).

⁴² Leon. ed., 4.40: “Unde hae carnes et haec ossa, et accidentia designantia hanc materiam, non concluduntur in humanitate. Et tamen in eo quod est homo, includuntur: unde id quod est homo, habet in se aliquid quod non habet humanitas.”

⁴³ Aquinas, *ST I*, q.54, a.3, ad2 (Leon. ed. 5.47).

⁴⁴ Cf. Aquinas, q.3, a.3, co.: “essentia vel natura comprehendit in se illa tantum quae cadunt in definitione speciei” (Leon. ed., 4.40).

⁴⁵ Aquinas, *De ente*, c.4: “essentia substantie composite potest significari ut totum uel ut pars, quod accidit propter materie designationem ... Sed essentia rei simplicis que est sua forma non potest significari nisi ut totum, cum nichil sit ibi preter formam quasi formam recipiens” (Leon. ed., 43.376:66–75).

⁴⁶ Aquinas: “ideo quocumque modo sumatur essentia substantie simplices, de ea predicatur” (Leon. ed., 43.376:75–76). See also *QDA*, a.17 (Leon. ed., 24.152:239–67), where he makes basically the same point as in *De ente*, c.4, concerning immaterial created substances.

⁴⁷ Aquinas, *De ente*, c.2 (Leon. ed., 43.373:291–304).

⁴⁸ Aquinas, *De potentia*, q.9, a.1, co.: “*Essentia* vero in substantiis quidem materialibus non est idem cum eis secundum rem neque penitus diuersum, cum se habeat ut pars formalis; in substantiis vero immaterialibus est omnino idem secundum rem, sed differens ratione.”

⁴⁹ Aquinas, *CT I*, c.10: “in quibuscumque essentia non est omnino idem cum re cuius est essentia, est inuenire aliquid per modum potentie et aliquid per modum actus; nam essentia formaliter se habet ad rem cuius est essentia, sicut humanitas ad hominem. In Deo autem non est inuenire potentiam et actum, sed est actus purus; est igitur ipse sua essentia” (Leon. ed., 42.86:17–24).

⁵⁰ Aquinas, *ScG I*, c.21: “Praeterea. Essentia rei vel est res ipsa, vel se habet ad ipsam aliquo modo ut causa: cum res per suam essentiam speciem sortiatur. Sed nullo modo potest esse aliquid causa Dei: cum sit primum ens, ut ostensum est. Deus igitur est sua essentia. Item. Quod non est sua essentia, se habet secundum aliquid sui ad ipsam ut potentia ad actum. Unde et per modum formae significatur essentia, ut puta *humanitas*. Sed in Deo nulla est potentialitas, ut supra estensum est. Oportet igitur quod ipse sit sua essentia” (Leon. ed., 13.64).

⁵¹ Aquinas, *Quodlibet II*, q.2, a.2[4], ad sc.: “natura dicitur constituere suppositum etiam in compositis ex materia et forma, non quia natura sit una res et suppositum alia res ..., set quia secundum modum significandi natura significatur ut pars, ratione supra dicta, suppositum uero ut totum; natura significatur ut constituens, et suppositum ut constitutum” (Leon. ed., 25/2.215:160–69).

⁵² Cf. Aquinas, *De ente*, c.2: “ex anima enim et corpore dicitur esse homo sicut ex duabus rebus quedam res tertia constituta que neutra illarum est” (Leon. ed., 43.372:204–6). In context, “body” and “soul” are given as examples of matter and form.

⁵³ Aquinas, *Quodlibet II*, q.2, a.1, ad1: “aliquando ex his que simul iunguntur relinquuntur aliqua res tertia, sicuti ex anima et corpore constituitur humanitas, que est homo, unde homo componitur ex anima et corpore” (Leon. ed., 25/2.215:77–81).

⁵⁴ West, “Real Distinction,” 93.

⁵⁵ Cf. Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 135–36, 239, 288.

⁵⁶ On the importance of getting beyond the simple dichotomy of real-vs.-logical distinctions, see Ventimiglia, *Distinctio realis*, esp. 159–61. I would add that appeal to the rational distinction with a foundation in the thing, by which Aquinas distinguishes the divine attributes (cf. pp. 176–79), is itself insufficient to classify the diversity of distinctions between (1) the divine attributes, (2) genera and differences, and (3) both essence and *esse* and supposit and nature.

⁵⁷ Aquinas, *ST III*, q.35, a.5, co.: “Et quamvis relatio domini non sit realis in Deo, tamen realiter est Dominus, ex reali subiectione creaturae ad ipsum. Et similiter Christus dicitur realiter filius Virginis matris ex relatione reali maternitatis ad Christum” (Leon. ed., 11.357).

⁵⁸ Aquinas, *Super Psalmum 33*, no.340.

⁵⁹ Aquinas, *Contra impugnantes*, c.6, no.3 (Leon. ed., 41/A.97:279–80).

⁶⁰ Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q.41, a.1, ad2 (Leon. ed., 6.272).

⁶¹ Aquinas, *ST I*, q.3, a.5, sc.: “genus est prius, secundum intellectum, eo quod in genere continetur. Sed nihil est prius Deo, nec secundum rem, nec secundum intellectum” (Leon. ed., 4.43).

⁶² Aquinas, *ST I*, q.76, a.3, ad4 (Leon. ed., 5.221).

⁶³ Aquinas, *De ente*, c.2 (Leon. ed., 43.372:164–79).

⁶⁴ Aquinas, *QDA*, q.7, ad17: “genus et differentia possunt accipi dupliciter. Vno modo secundum considerationem realem, prout considerantur a methaphysico et naturali: et sic oportet quod genus et differentia super diuersas naturas fundentur. Et hoc modo nichil prohibet dicere quod in substantiis spiritualibus non sit genus et differentia, set sint forme tantum et species simplices. Alio

modo secundum considerationem logicam: et sic genus et differentia non oportet quod fundentur super diuersas naturas, set supra unam naturam in qua consideratur aliquid proprium et aliquid commune. Et sic nichil prohibet genus et differentiam ponere in substantiis spiritualibus” (Leon. ed., 24/1.62:475–89); see also Aquinas, *ST I*, q.50, a.2, ad1: “differentia est quae constituit speciem. Unumquodque autem constituitur in specie, secundum quod determinatur ad aliquem specialem gradum in entibus: quia species rerum sunt sicut numeri, qui differunt per additionem et subtractionem unitatis, ut dicitur in VIII *Metaphys.* In rebus autem materialibus aliud est quod determinat ad specialem gradum, scilicet forma, et aliud quod determinatur, scilicet materia: unde ab alio sumitur genus et ab alio differentia. Sed in rebus immaterialibus non est aliud determinans et determinatum: sed unaquaeque earum secundum seipsam tenet determinatum gradum in entibus. Et ideo genus et differentia in eis non accipitur secundum aliud et aliud, sed secundum unum et idem. Quod tamen differ secundum considerationem nostrum: in quantum enim intellectus noster considerat illam rem ut indeterminate, accipitur in eis ratio generis; in quantum vero considerat ut determinate, accipitur ratio differentiae” (Leon. ed., 5.6).

⁶⁵ Cf. Aristotle, *Phys.* II, c.1, 192b21–23: “est natura principium alicuius et causa movendi et quiescendi in quo est primum per se et non secundum accidens” (AL 7/1.43:5–7).

⁶⁶ Cf. Aquinas, *In II Phys.*, l.1: “Addit autem *primum*, quia natura, etsi sit principium motus compositorum, non tamen primo. Unde quod animal movetur deorsum, non est ex natura animalis in quantum est animal, sed ex natura dominantis elementi” (Leon. ed., 2.57).

⁶⁷ For very different interpretations of Aquinas, *QDA*, q.7, ad17 and *ST I*, q.50, a.2, ad1, see Therese Scarpelli Cory, “Is Anything in the Intellect That Was Not First in Sense? Empiricism and Knowledge of the Incorporeal in Aquinas.” *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy* 6 (2018): 100–143, at 128–29n91; Gabriele Galluzzo, “Aquinas on the Genus and Differentia of Separate Substances,” *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 18 (2007): 343–61. Galluzzo understands the two things (*aliud et aliud*) in *ST I*, q.50, a.2, ad1 as prime matter and substantial form. Cory interprets the two “natures” in the parallel *QDA*, q.7, ad17 as two distinct species, such as rhinoceros and pig, falling under the common genus. Both authors overlook the evidence of the objection in *QDA*, q.7, arg17, from which we can infer that the two “natures” alluded to in the reply are animality and rationality—that is, the formal principles of the genus and difference. Aquinas, *QDA*, q.7, arg17: “Omnis species constat ex genere et differentia. Genus autem et differentia in diuersis fundantur, sicut genus hominis, quod est animal, in natura sensitua; differentia eius, que est rationale, in natura intellectua. In angelo autem et anima non sunt aliqua diuersa supra que genus et differentia fundari possint: essentia enim eorum est forma simplex. ... Ergo angelus et anima non habent genus et differentiam, et ita non possunt specie differre” (Leon. ed., 24/1.56:122–34). In other words, the formal principles of genus and difference are the two things (*aliud et aliud*) or two “natures” Aquinas says are composed in scientific as opposed to logical definitions. While *ST I*, q.50, a.2, ad1 does speak of “matter” and “form,” I think it is a mistake to take these terms—as Galluzzo does—as referring to prime matter and substantial form. Rather, these terms should be read in the context of Aquinas’s wider usage. In *SBdT*, q.4, a.2, for instance, Aquinas says that “that material from which the genus is taken has in itself matter and form” (*illud materiale unde sumitur genus habeat in se materiam et formam*) (Leon. ed., 50.124:159–60). In *De spiritualibus*, a.1, ad24, he explains that the “matter” from which the genus is taken is not prime matter, but “the being of an animal” (*esse animalis*), which is material and imperfect with regard to the difference or form, “being human” (*hominem esse*): “in rebus compositis ex materia et forma, genus sumitur a materia, et differentia a forma; ita tamen quod per materiam non intelligatur materia prima, sed secundum quod per formam recipit quoddam esse imperfectum et materiale respectu esse specifici: sicut esse animalis est imperfectum et materiale respectu hominis” (Leon. ed., 24/2.19:650–56). Cf. Aquinas, *QDA*, q.9, co. (Leon. ed., 24/1.80–82:174–297). Thus, I maintain, the two things (*aliud et aliud*) mentioned in *ST I*, q.50, a.2, ad1 and two “natures” mentioned in *QDA*, q.7, ad17 (arg17) are not prime matter and substantial form (as Galluzzo thinks) nor two species falling under a common genus (as Cory thinks), but the formal principles of the genus and difference (e.g., animality and rationality).

⁶⁸ Cory is persuaded by *ST I*, q.50, a.2, ad1 and *QDA*, q.7, ad17 to think that there is “a real distinction between genus and difference” in material substances, but only a rational one in separate substances (Cory, “Is Anything in the Intellect,” 128–29n91). As already noted, she interprets the two diverse natures in the latter text as distinct specific natures falling under a genus, as rhinoceri and pigs, falling under the genus, animal. “The relationship between commonality and diversity [between rhinoceri and pigs] is expressed by a real distinction between genus and difference in their respective definitions.” Cory’s interpretation is at odds with Aquinas’s statement elsewhere in the *QDA* that the species of brute animal differ in the same manner as the species of angel—that is, through a determination of a single, conceptually common nature, not, as the human differs from the brute animal, by the addition of a nobler nature to the nature of the genus. In other words, Aquinas is not drawing a simple division between material substances (for which there is always a real distinction between genus and difference) and angels (for which uniquely there is a logical one), but rather a distinction between definitions in which genus and difference are two distinct primary principles of operation (e.g., animality and rationality) and ones in which they are not (e.g., intellectual and intellectual thusly; sentient and sentient thusly). Ironically, Aquinas would classify Cory’s own example of real genus-difference composition (a pig or rhinoceros, whose genus is taken as “animal”) as logical, not real since the difference of brute animal species adds to the genus animal only a conceptual determination (e.g., sentient *pigly*) of a single nature (sentience) considered indeterminately. See Aquinas, *QDA*, q.7, arg14: “Quecumque conueniunt in ultima differentia sunt eiusdem speciei, quia ultima differentia est constitutiva speciei. Set angelus et anima conueniunt in ultima differentia, in hoc, scilicet, quod est intellectuale esse, quod oportet esse ultimam differentiam, cum nichil sit nobilius in natura angeli uel anime: semper enim ultima differentia est completissima. Ergo angelus et anima non differunt specie” (Leon. ed., 24/1.56:98–106); ad14: “ultima differentia debet esse nobilior non solum quantum ad naturam nobilitatem, set etiam quantum ad determinationem, quia ultima differentia est quasi actus respect omnium precedentium. Sic igitur intellectuale non est nobilissimum in angelo uel anima, set intellectuale sic uel illo modo; sicut et de sensibili patet: aliter enim omnia bruta animalia essent eiusdem speciei” (Leon. ed., 24/1.62:451–59); cf.

Aquinas, *ST I*, q.50, a.4, ad1: “differentia est nobilior genere, sicut determinatum indeterminato et proprium communi; non autem sicut alia et alia natura. Alioquin oportet quod omnia animalia irrationalia essent unius speciei; vel quod esset in eis aliqua alia perfectior forma quam anima sensibilis. Differunt ergo specie animalia irrationalia secundum diversos gradus determinatos naturae sensitivae. Et similiter omnes angeli differunt specie secundum diversos gradus naturae intellectivae” (Leon. ed., 5.10).

⁶⁹ Cf. Aquinas, *ST III*, q.2, a.2, co.: “Et si quidem his quae ad rationem speciei pertinent nihil aliud adiunctum inveniri posset, nulla necessitas esset distinguendi naturam a supposito naturae, quod est individuum subsistens in natura illa: quia unumquodque individuum subsistens in natura aliqua esset omnino idem cum sua natura. Contingit autem in quibusdam rebus subsistentibus inveniri aliquid quod non pertinet ad rationem speciei, scilicet accidentia et principia individuantia: sicut maxime apparet in his quae sunt ex materia et forma composita. Et ideo in talibus etiam secundum rem differt natura et suppositum, non quasi omnino aliqua separata: sed quia in supposito includitur ipsa natura speciei, et superadduntur quaedam alia quae sunt praeter rationem speciei. Unde suppositum significatur ut totum, habens naturam sicut partem formalem et perfectivam sui. Et propter hoc in compositis ex materia et forma natura non praedicatur de supposito: non enim dicimus quod hic homo sit sua humanitas. Si qua vero res est in qua omnino nihil est aliud praeter rationem speciei vel naturae suae, sicut est in Deo, ibi non est aliud secundum rem suppositum et natura, sed solum secundum rationem intelligendi” (Leon. ed., 11.25).

⁷⁰ Aquinas, *Quodlibet II*, q.2, a.2[4], ad sc.: “dicendum quod natura dicitur constituere suppositum etiam in compositis ex materia et forma, non quia natura sit una res et suppositum alia res (hoc enim esset secundum opinionem dicentium quod natura speciei sit forma tantum, que constituit suppositum sicut totum), set quia secundum modum significandi natura significatur ut pars ... suppositum uero ut totum; natura significatur ut constituens, et suppositum ut constitutum” (Leon. ed., 25/2.218:159–69). Emphasis added.

⁷¹ Aquinas, *In I Sent.*, d.5, q.1, a.1: “In creaturis autem essentia realiter differt a supposito ... In divinis autem essentia realiter non differt a supposito sed solum ratione, sive quantum ad modum significandi.”

⁷² Aquinas, *In VII Metaph.*, l.5, 1379–1380: “Humanitas autem pro tanto non est omnino idem cum homine, quia importat tantum principia essentialia hominis, et exclusionem omnium accidentium. Est enim humanitas, qua homo est homo: nullum autem accidentium hominis est, quo homo sit homo, unde omnia accidentia hominis excluduntur a significatione humanitas. Hoc autem ipsum quod est homo, est quod habet principia essentialia, et cui possunt accidentia inesse. Unde, licet in significatione hominis non includantur accidentia eius, non tamen homo significat aliquid separatum ab accidentibus; et ideo homo significat ut totum, humanitas significat ut pars. Si autem est aliqua res, in qua non sit aliquid accidens, ibi necesse est, quod nihil differat abstractum a concreto. Quod maxime patet in Deo.”

⁷³ Aquinas, *ST I*, q.13, a.1, arg2: “Sed nomina significantia in concreto, non competunt Deo, cum simplex sit: neque nomina significantia in abstracto, quia non significant aliquid perfectum subsistens” (Leon. ed., 4.139).

⁷⁴ Aquinas, *ST I*, q.13, a.1, ad2: “Quia igitur et Deus simplex est, et subsistens est, attribuimus ei et nomina abstracta, ad significandum simplicitatem eius; et nomina concreta, ad significandum subsistentiam et perfectionem ipsius” (Leon. ed., 4.140).

⁷⁵ On the distinction between concrete and abstract modes of signifying and understanding, see Aquinas, *In DH*, c.2 (Leon. ed., 50.271–72:48–146). Here, I have especially drawn on lns. 114–46. For further clarification on this famous passage and responses to alternative interpretations in the secondary literature, see Polsky, “Semantics of Divine *Esse* in Boethius.” For a lengthier discussion of the distinction between concrete and abstract names, including the secondary literature about these, see Elliot Polsky, “Why Are Accidents Included under Being *Per se*?” *Nova et Vetera* [English ed.] (forthcoming).

⁷⁶ Cf. fn. 23.

⁷⁷ I am grateful for feedback on an earlier version of this paper from Brian Carl as well as for comments and objections from Daniel Gallagher, Timothy Kearns, Timothy Pawl, Robert Koons, and Gyula Klima, when versions of this paper were presented, either at the 2023 medieval congress at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, MI, or at the 2023 annual meeting of the ACPA. In hopes of addressing the concerns about the language of a “real distinction” in the paper’s title, I have significantly expanded my discussion of this phraseology in §3.