

## Quine and Aquinas: On What There Is

Recently Analytic Thomists<sup>1</sup> have attempted to harmonize the quantificational account of existence championed by analytic philosophy with Thomistic ontology. However, a reading of Willard Quine's epoch-making ontological manifesto ought to have suggested that disagreement over the compass of ontology goes deeper than either Quine or the conciliatory Analytic Thomists have suspected:

"A curious thing about the ontological problem is its simplicity. It can be put in three Anglo-Saxon monosyllables: "What is there?" It can be answered, moreover in a word — "Everything" — and everyone will accept this answer as true. However, this is merely to say that there is what there is. There remains room for disagreement over cases...."<sup>2</sup>

After all, for Aquinas the word 'everything' correctly answers not Quine's narrow Parmenidean rendering of the ontological question, but a broader version that can be put in just two Anglo-Saxon monosyllables: "What is?"<sup>3</sup> Aquinas' ontology embraces not only what there is, but all the ramifications of being, including several modes of nonexistence. Quine's repudiation of traditional ontology is, of course, just one extreme of analytic philosophy's aversion to traditional metaphysics, and is not representative of the many-faceted approaches to ontology of contemporary analytic philosophy. Recently analytic philosophers and analytically minded Thomists have made concerted efforts at reconciliation in view of both the increasingly apparent shortcomings of Quine's position and the relative merits of fundamental analytic doctrines.<sup>4</sup> Still, the twenty-first century reader may ask, "What possible justification could there be for treating what does not exist as part of ontology?" Quine's and Aquinas' doctrines represent conveniently extreme and opposing responses to this question. In what follows, after an exposition of key doctrines in Quine and Aquinas, A-quine-man, a fictitious arbiter of the debate, evaluates some of the obstacles to be overcome in the name of conciliation.

### I

"On What There Is" presents Quine's repudiation of an ontology judged to be a "bloated universe of disorderly elements."<sup>5</sup> First (21-25) Quine introduces the "tangled doctrine" of non-being, which he dubs "Plato's beard" complaining of it "frequently dulling the edge of Ockham's razor." Next (25-26) he proposes what might be called a "tonic and shears," Russell's theory of descriptions and quantificational

account of existence, to get to the roof of the problem. Finally (26-38) he wields these logico-linguistic instruments of ontological grooming to eliminate four putative types of nonexistent entities: unactualized possibles, unactualized impossibles, universals, and reified meanings, and ends by relegating the category of physical objects to the status of "convenient myth." In razing the ontological "slum" on behalf of those "who have a taste for desert landscapes" Quine magisterially claims to reduce ontology from the metaphysical to the semantic plane.

Struck by the bravado of Quine's rhetoric, ironically aimed against the bewitchment of our intelligence by language, the sympathetic reader might fail to note an inconsistency in Quine's project that is endemic to much, if not all, analytic philosophy. A passage from Michael Dummett neatly summarizes the problematic position, which continues to hold sway today:

From the time of Descartes until very recently the first question for philosophy was what we can know and how we can justify our claims to this knowledge.... Frege was the first philosopher after Descartes to reject this perspective, and in this respect he looked beyond Descartes to Aristotle and the Scholastics. For Frege, as for them, logic was the beginning of philosophy; if we do not get logic right, we shall get nothing else right.<sup>6</sup>

But here analytic philosophy seems to be caught in a hopeless bind. On the one hand it champions the quantificational account according to which existence can be coherently explained only as a second-order property instantiated by substitutions for a variable. On the other hand this account is composed of purportedly meaningful statements employing terms such as 'predicate', 'variable' and 'substitution instance'. Now if such statements are to constitute more than false existence claims, then, on this account, these terms must stand for predicates that are already known to be instantiated. Of course, Dummett's claim about getting logic right first is not reducible to any one particular interpretation of the quantificational existence, or even to any particular system of logic. Still, in the Quinean logic it seems impossible to "get logic right" without presupposing at the outset that such predicates are instantiated, and in general it seems impossible to "get logic right" without presupposing ontological distinctions between these logical terms. As will be argued below after a brief review of the features of Quine's ontology, logical distinctions presuppose ontological distinctions and theses.

Quine, like Frege and Russell, operates his critique of metaphysically based ontology assuming the principle of compositionality, or that a statement's meaning depends on and can be calculated from the meanings of its terms. A nexus of problems arises with respect to the compositionality of statements with non-referring purported names. In an early stage of his philosophical development Russell had claimed that non-referring terms must possess some ontological status:

If *A* be any term that can be counted as one, it is plain that *A* is something, and therefore that *A* is. '*A* is not' must always be either false or meaningless. For if *A* were nothing, it could not be said to be; '*A* is not' implies that

there is a term *A* whose being is denied, and hence that *A* is.<sup>7</sup>

Later, however, in accord with Frege's logical analysis of existence as a second-order property, Russell proposes his theory of descriptions by which all statements are rephrased as statements about the instantiation or non-instantiation of predicates by substitution instances for variables. Frege, and Russell after him, thus shift ontological commitment from terms purporting to be names to predicates. Quine summarizes Russell's achievement and his own contribution to the matter as follows:

When a statement of being or nonbeing is analyzed by Russell's theory of descriptions, it ceases to contain any expression which even purports to name the alleged entity whose being is in question, so that the meaningfulness of the statement no longer can be thought to presuppose that there be such an entity. I have shown, in connection with 'Pegasus' and 'pegasize', that names can be converted to descriptions, and Russell has shown that descriptions can be eliminated. Whatever we can say with the help of names can be said in language which shuns names altogether.<sup>8</sup>

The quantificational account of existence makes clear that negative existential statements are not self-contradictory or meaningless even though their names do not refer. For example, grammatically the statement 'Santa Claus is nonexistent' appears to attribute the property of nonexistence to an individual named Santa Claus. However, given that the statement is true, the term 'Santa Claus' does not refer. Its purported role of naming a property-bearing entity contradicts the very property it is claimed to bear. Moreover, since the term 'Santa Claus' does not refer it has no meaning, so that in light of the principle of compositionality, neither can the statement in which it appears as a name have meaning. On the Russell-Quine account, however, this statement is rephrased as the negative existential claim that there is no substitution instance for a variable attached to the description 'Santa Claus', or where 'S' stands for the term 'Santa Claus',  $\sim\exists x: Sx$ .

Famously, Quine and Russell disagree over how the instantiation of a predicate by a substitution instance is to be interpreted. Russell considers a predicate to be instantiated when substituting a value for the variable in a propositional function "satisfies" the proposition by rendering it true.

Corresponding to any propositional function  $\phi x$ , there is a range, or collection, of values, consisting of all the propositions (true or false) which can be obtained by giving every possible determination to *x* in  $\phi x$ . A value of *x* for which  $\phi x$  is true will be said to 'satisfy'  $\phi x$ .<sup>9</sup>

Alternatively, Quine considers a predicated to be instantiated when the argument to which it is attached has objective reference, or is contained within a stipu-

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lated domain. Quine expresses this "objectual" interpretation affirming that an existential statement expresses that there are objects of a certain type: "there are things of kind  $F$  if and only if  $(\exists x) Fx$ ."<sup>10</sup> The objectual interpretation means only that certain things have been stipulated to be contained in a stipulated domain, not that they exist in the robust metaphysical sense.

Irrespective of differences among interpretations of instantiation, the quantificational account of existence ensures that every existence claim "still gets its full quota of meaning — whether true or false"<sup>11</sup> Quine concludes that "we need no longer labor under the delusion that the meaningfulness of a statement containing a singular term presupposes an entity named by the term."<sup>12</sup> The burden of ontological commitment is shifted from names to claims of a predicate being instantiated by some individual.

It is significant that Quine's ontological "clearance program" begins not by repudiating individual objects, but by denying the legitimacy of ontological statuses other than that of existence. Quine first brands the distinction between existence and being as one of pure "lexicography". A telling interchange on this point occurs when Wyman, Quine's fictitious adversary, proposes that Pegasus is an unactualized possible:

Wyman... is one of those philosophers who have united in ruining the good old word 'exist'. Despite his espousal of unactualized possibles, he limits the word 'existence' to actuality — thus preserving an illusion of ontological agreement between himself and us who repudiate the rest of his bloated universe.... Wyman, in an ill-conceived effort to appear agreeable, genially grants us the non-existence of Pegasus and then, contrary to what we meant by non-existence of Pegasus, insists that Pegasus is. Existence is one thing, he says, and subsistence is another. The only way I know of coping with this obfuscation of issues is to give Wyman the word 'exist'.

Quine does in fact avoid using the word 'exist' again explicitly in his article. However, in affirming the quantificational account as the only coherent account of existence he uses it implicitly. For example, while touting the advantages of Russell's theory of descriptions Quine states that "where descriptions are concerned, there is no longer any difficulty in affirming or denying being."<sup>13</sup> Believing that he has shown there to be a coherent account of no ontological status other than that of second-order quantified existence, Quine takes the liberty of conflating being and existence in this passage.

Quine does not overtly attribute his repudiation of the ontological category of possibles to his adherence to the quantificational account of existence. Instead he merely points out certain "inconveniences of putting up with" this strand of Plato's beard:

Wyman's slum of possibles is a breeding ground for disorderly elements. Take, for instance, the possible fat man in that doorway; and again, the

possible bald man in that doorway. Are they the same possible man, or two possible men? How do we decide? How many possible men are there in that doorway? Are there more possible thin ones than fat ones? How many of them are alike? Or would their being alike make them one? Are no *two* possible things alike? Is this the same as saying that it is impossible for two things to be alike? Or finally, is the concept of identity simply inapplicable to unactualized possibles?<sup>14</sup>

His rejection of universals is motivated by the same desire to avoid a proliferation of putative entities whose relations to each other appear problematic:

One may admit that there are red houses, roses, and sunsets, but deny, except as a popular and misleading manner of speaking, that they have anything in common. The words 'houses', 'roses', and 'sunsets' denote each of sundry individual entities which are houses and roses and sunsets, and the word 'red' or 'red object' denotes each of sundry individual entities which are red houses, red roses, and red sunsets; but there is not, in addition, any entity whatever, individual or otherwise, which is named by the word 'redness', nor, for that matter, by the word 'househood', 'rosehood', 'sunsethood'.<sup>15</sup>

His rejection of reified meanings is even more truncated and rests on the same repudiation of what is deemed to be a useless multiplication of entities:

I feel no reluctance toward refusing to admit meanings [into ontology], for I do not thereby deny that words and statements are meaningful. McX and I may agree to the letter in our classification of linguistic forms into the meaningful and the meaningless, even though McX construes meaningfulness as the having (in some sense of 'having') of some abstract entity which he calls a meaning, whereas I do not. I remain free to maintain that the fact that a given linguistic utterance is meaningful (or *significant*, as I prefer to say so as not to invite hypostasis of meanings as entities) is an ultimate and irreducible matter of fact.<sup>16</sup>

None of these "inconveniences" of putting up with Plato's beard has sufficient weight by itself to flatten the ontological landscape. Rather, as attempts to show the superfluity of the traditional ontological categories they belie a pervasive misunderstanding of the term "entity". In his treatment of ontology Aquinas makes clear that the term is used substantively only in the case of existent beings, as will be shown below.

Quine arrives at the *coup de grâce* of his ontological program with the relegation of physical objects to the status of "convenient myth":

Physical objects are postulated entities which round out and simplify our

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account of the flux of experience.... From a phenomenalist point of view, the conceptual scheme of physical objects is a convenient myth, simpler than the literal truth and yet containing that literal truth as a scattered part.<sup>17</sup>

For Quine, ontological commitment is relative to the exigencies of particular theories. Thus it is legitimately expressed only with respect to the predicates of those theories when these predicates are attached to variables bound by quantification: "To be assumed as an entity is, purely and simply, to be reckoned as the value of a variable."<sup>18</sup>

In summary, Quine's ontological relativism unfolds in two stages. First he claims that the quantificational account of existence eliminates individuals as the bearers of ontological commitment in favor of predicates of substitution instances. Then he makes the bearers of ontological commitment relative to the exigencies of particular theories, so that what is taken to be an individual in one theory need not be so in another theory.

If one were to take the first stage of Quine's ontological relativism as a given, the claim that individuals may not be said to exist in any theory would have to be rephrased as the claim that the predicate 'is an individual' is not instantiated. Where 'I' stands for the predicate 'is an individual',  $\neg\exists x: Ix$ , or "There is nothing that is an individual." In this case there is no presupposition about the instantiation of the predicate because rephrasing reveals the statement to be a negative existential claim. However, the quantificational account of existence also employs statements containing predicates such as 'is a predicate', 'is a variable' and 'is a substitution instance'. Inasmuch as it presupposes these predicates to be instantiated and to be distinct entities, this account patently contradicts the analytic methodology of "getting logic right" before anything else. We cannot get logic right without presuming distinctions between the role of predicates, variables, substitution instances and the like. Irrespective of how instantiation is interpreted, be it substitutionally, objectually, or in some other manner, logic must presuppose some interpretation of truth that will require relations between distinct entities, and some interpretation of a domain of discourse that will require relations between distinct entities. For example, with respect to the claim "Ontological commitment is born by predicates and not by names" the quantificational account of existence presupposes that the predicate 'is a predicate' is instantiated, or where 'P' stands for the predicate 'is a predicate',  $\exists x: Px$ . This account of existence makes similar presuppositions about the predicates 'is a variable', 'is a substitution instance' and the like. Irrespective of how instantiation is interpreted, a distinction must be drawn in any ontology between the status of an instantiated predicate and that by which the predicate is instantiated. Moreover, given that instantiated predicates are distinct from non-instantiated ones their diverse ontological statuses must be presupposed. One may very well ask on what basis such presuppositions are made, and whether such an account is free from the purported ontological extravagance of which Aquinas' metaphysical ontology is accused. Contrary to Quine's assertion, as long as some such non-logical presuppo-

sitions are required, the quantificational account of existence cannot be said to operate on an exclusively semantic plane. More than one ontological status is necessary to articulate any account of existence since the meaning of statements about the terms of such an account depends on some criterion of meaning beyond what 'existence' is taken in that account to mean.

In Aquinas' ontology non-instantiated predicates are accorded a share of being but not of existence. Thus the grammatical predicate 'exists' can be meaningfully applied as a logical predicate. Being able to claim that a predicate is instantiated presumes that its instantiation is possible in the sense that it can be determined that it might not have been instantiated, and that its instantiation is the condition that obtains. An ontology lacking the category of unactualized possibles is at a loss to account for this fact. Again, Quine's principle of ontological commitment is far from universally accepted by contemporary analytic philosophers. It is rehearsed here as a convenient contrast to a more traditional ontological outlook. In this spirit, the following section examines Aquinas' motives for including the category of unactualized possibles in his ontology.

## II

Aquinas' inclusion of a variety of nonexistent beings in his ontology draws support from two precepts of Aristotle's philosophy that contrast with Kant's legacy as misinterpreted by the analytic tradition. The first is the doctrine that 'being' and 'existence' are not really predicates.

In the third book of the *Metaphysics* Aristotle remarks that being ( $\tau\omicron\delta\ \delta\upsilon\nu$ ) cannot be a genus since a genus requires a difference, or a characteristic that distinguishes it and its members from other genera and their members. All differences, inasmuch as they are characteristics of beings, are themselves beings. Thus, there is no difference that distinguishes beings taken as a whole from anything else.<sup>19</sup> Two corollaries follow: first, being cannot be a property that something can lack, and second, 'is' and 'exists' are not predicates that add real content to the concept of a thing:

All other concepts of the intellect are understood by their addition to being (*ens*). But things cannot be added to a being as if it were extraneous, as a difference is added to a genus, or an accident to a subject, since any nature is essentially being. Thus the philosopher shows in *Metaphysics* III that being cannot be a genus, but things are said to add onto being in that they express the mode of the being itself which the word 'being' does not express.<sup>20</sup>

Aristotle also notes that the verb 'to be' taken by itself signifies being, but not whether a thing actually is or is not: "Not even 'to be' or 'not to be' is a sign of the

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actual thing (nor if you say simply 'that which is'); for by itself it is nothing, but it additionally signifies some combination, which cannot be thought of without the components."<sup>21</sup> Aquinas amplifies this position in his commentary on Aristotle's text:

Although every finite verb [by itself] implies being, for "to run" is "to be running,"...nevertheless no verb signifies the whole, that is, that [1] a thing [2] is or is not. But neither does being (*ens*) [by itself] signify that a thing is or is not...it signifies both a thing, when I say "that which," and existence when I say "is". If the word 'being' (*ens*) signified 'to be' principally, as it signifies a thing that has being, without a doubt it would signify that something is. But the same composition, which is implied in what I say is, does not principally signify, but consignifies it in that it signifies a thing having being. No verb signifies that a thing exists, since 'is' said by itself does not signify that a thing exists, although it signifies existence.<sup>22</sup>

This doctrine relates to Aquinas' criticism of Anselm's proof of God, which is later echoed by Kant: "Given that whoever understands the word 'God' to mean that than which nothing greater can be thought, it does not follow that what is signified by the word exists in the nature of things, but only in intellectual apprehension." Only knowledge of God's essence could verify that the concept of the predicate 'exists' is already contained in the concept of the subject 'God'.<sup>23</sup> In the statement "God exists", the predicate 'exists' signifies existence, but given our inability to directly know God's essence, we cannot verify that the concept of the predicate is already contained in the concept of the subject.

For Aquinas the terms 'is' and 'exists' are not real predicates in the sense of standing for characteristics that alternatively can be either included in or excluded from the concept of a thing. The view that 'is' and 'exists' are not real predicates passes from the medieval philosophical tradition to Kant. As William Vallicella has noted, the word 'being' for Kant "is obviously not a real predicate; that is, it is not a concept of something which could be added to the concept of a thing."<sup>24</sup> Following Aristotle and the Medievals, Kant's logic is grammar-based. In such a logic any grammatical predicate may play the part of a predicate in logic: "Anything we please can be made to serve as a logical predicate; the subject can even be predicated of itself; for logic abstracts from all content."<sup>25</sup> Analytic philosophers, on the other hand, misconstruing Kant's position, have often claimed support for the quantificational account of existence by citing the Kantian dictum that "existence is not a predicate". Quine, for example, criticizes the view that Pegasus "has his being as an unactualized possible", interpreting this to mean that "when we say of Pegasus that there is no such thing, we are saying, more precisely, that Pegasus does not have the

special attribute of actuality", which is "on par, logically, with saying that the Parthenon is not red." But, as shown above, this is not Aquinas' view at all. Since Quine's version of the doctrine is a misrepresentation of the doctrine of unactualized possibles, his criticism amounts to a straw man fallacy. A.J. Ayer also falls prey to such a misreading, perhaps because of his lack of familiarity with the medieval philosophical tradition:

"As Kant pointed out, existence is not an attribute. For, when we ascribe an attribute to a thing, we covertly assert that it exists: so that if existence were itself an attribute, it would follow that all positive existential propositions were tautologies, and all negative existential propositions self-contradictory; and this is not the case. So that those who raise questions about Being which are based on the assumption that existence is an attribute are guilty of following grammar beyond the boundaries of sense."<sup>26</sup>

Quine again misrepresents Kant's position in discussing Russell theory of descriptions and the quantificational account of existence:

"Russell undertook to resolve the anomalies of existence by admitting the word 'exists' only in connection with descriptions, and explaining the whole context '(ix) (...x...) exists' as short for '(∃y)(x)(x=y. ...x...)'. This course supplies a strict technical meaning for Kant's vague declaration that 'exists' is not a predicate; namely, 'exists' is not grammatically combinable with a variable to form a matrix 'y exists'."<sup>27</sup>

To the contrary, it is not Kant's understanding of existence that is vague, but Quine's understanding of Kant's position, and of the Medievals.

A second Aristotelian precept accepted by Aquinas that contrasts with the Kantian legacy inherited by the analytic tradition must be examined in order to evaluate how well Aquinas' ontology avoids the problems with existence statements alleged by analytic philosophy. Aquinas holds that cognition gives irrefutable evidence of objective reality. By contrast, the lingering influence of Kantian idealism on Bertrand Russell, to take but one example, is evident in the following passage:

When you are considering any sort of theory of knowledge ... you are not concerned simply with the question of what is true of the world, but 'What can I know of the world?' You always have to start any kind of argument from something which appears to you to be true.... You cannot go outside yourself and consider abstractly whether the things that appear to you to be true are true.<sup>28</sup>

Aquinas and Aristotle share with the later Russell the view that all knowledge

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begins with the senses: "The intellect knows nothing except (in virtue of) receiving from sense." "If a sense be wanting, the knowledge of what is apprehended through that sense is wanting also: for instance, a man who is born blind can have no knowledge of colors."<sup>29</sup> The actuality of the very process of simple apprehension, and the end product of this process, the *verbum mentis* or idea, constitute the ultimate foundation of Aquinas' doctrine of the objectivity of knowledge, and of his ontology.

For Aquinas sensation and knowledge in general have both a subjective and an objective aspect. The determination of knowledge by real being is apparent in two ways. Aristotle notes one of these observing that, the fundamental operation of the mind is its apprehension of indivisibles, which being incomplex are not susceptible to falsity, and are themselves indications of their participation of beings in being itself.<sup>30</sup> Aquinas, commenting on this Aristotelian doctrine notes that through this operation, the mind apprehends a thing's essential aspects, or its *natura rei*. He adds that although indivisibles are apprehended inerrantly inasmuch as they are claimed to be since just what the intellect apprehends, they are inadequate to warrant that an object possessing the nature apprehended participates in being.<sup>31</sup> The faithful determination of cognition by a nature does not, by itself, insure that the nature corresponds to an existing being. Therefore, Aquinas argues that being (*esse*) is apprehended, not as a component of the conceptual content corresponding to the *natura rei*, but as the being in act, or *actus essendi*, of the apprehended nature, which is the being in act of the thing whose nature is apprehended:

Since everything is intelligible in so far as it is in act ... we must understand the nature itself or the quiddity of a thing either inasmuch as it is a certain act (as happens in the case of forms themselves and in simple substances); or by reason of that which is its act (as we know composite substances through their forms); or by reason of that which takes the place of act in it (as we know prime matter through its relationship to form, and vacuum through the absence of a body in place. And it is from this that each nature is given its definition. Knowledge actualized is the same as the thing actually known... All things that come to be actual come to be from actual being.<sup>32</sup>

Being is the first thing known by the intellect not only in the psychological order, but also in the logical order. "That which is prior logically is what the intellect understands first. But the intellect understands being first, since a given thing is knowable inasmuch as it is actually."<sup>33</sup> Here Aquinas is speaking of the priority being has in the order of logical content in the understanding (*ens est primum intelligibile secundum rationem*). He is not speaking of the priority being has in the order of the psychological possibility of cognition (*ens est primum quod cadit in apprehensione intellectus*).<sup>34</sup> Whatever the degree of fidelity of the causal events that establish the psychological order of cognition, cognition itself has actual being, and this is known implicitly by the intellect. Given that this actual or

existing being is the logically first the intellect understands, it follows that actual or existing being is the ontological foundation of our knowledge of reality.

Aquinas might respond to the Kantian element in Russell's logical atomism by observing that even Russell admits the reality of the appearances whose representational veracity he holds in suspension.<sup>35</sup> Contrary to Quine's ontological relativity, the physical objects known via sensation cannot be relegated to the status of "convenient myth". The objects given in sensation are not mere possible substitutions for bound variables in a logical account where existence is a property of concepts. The ontological question of what is, or even of what there is, cannot be reduced from the metaphysical to the purely semantic plane.

For Aquinas although knowledge begins with the senses it is not limited to sense experience: "Although the operation of the intellect has its origin in the senses, nonetheless, the intellect knows much in the thing grasped by sense that sense cannot perceive."<sup>36</sup> The various kinds of knowledge correspond to the many ways in which the word "is" can be said, each of which, for this reason, is called "being" by Aquinas. All of the ways that "is" and "being" can be said bear a fundamental relation to things whose being is actually existent. Aristotle and Aquinas recognize as fundamental, being as it divides into the ten categories, substance and accidents, and being as it signifies the truth of a proposition, since a true proposition signifies what is the case.<sup>37</sup> Considering being as it divides into the ten categories we may recognize what is possible in distinction to what actually is the case. Aquinas' discussion of unactualized possibles may stand as a model for the rehabilitation of unactualized impossibles, universals, and reified meanings. Referring to Aristotle's doctrine Aquinas distinguishes the category of actual or existent being from potential being, later rejected by Quine, in order to give a rational account of change:

It is completely impossible to define motion otherwise with principles that are prior or more prominent except as the philosopher does here. Any genus is divided by potency and act. Since potency and act concern the first differences of being they are naturally prior to motion; and the philosopher uses them to define motion. Therefore, it should be noted that some thing is only in motion, something is only in potency, and something is between act and potency. What is in potency alone as such does not move. What is already in perfect act is not [subsequently] moved, but already is moved. Therefore, what is moved, which is between pure potency and act, is what has some part in potency and part in act, as is the case in alteration.<sup>38</sup>

Contrary to much criticism brought by modern and contemporary philosophers,

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this account does not purport to be an explanation of the physical reasons of either how or why change occurs. Aquinas' distinction of actual being from potential being provides a rational account of the ontological structures required to explain change. Moreover, contrary to Quine's criticism this account does not engender beings to which questions of spatial location, identity or number apply. For example, it does not require that there be possible fat men in Quine's doorway because it does not propose that *there actually are* possible fat men at all. For Aquinas what there is strictly is a question of actual existence, not of being in general, including the actual and the possible. Nonexistent beings are not actually there because they do not exist. An ontology that includes nonexistent entities does not require a plurification of existent entities. Quine's criticism fails to recognize that possible beings have their ontological foundation in, but are not themselves actual beings.

For Aquinas, the ontological problem is the problem of what is. This includes not merely entities with actual being, but all beings indicated by propositional truth. As John Knasas observes, on Aquinas' account existence can be affirmed or denied of a being without tautology or contradiction because names do not presuppose the existence of their referents, but only that they possess some existence-neutral ontological status:

The judgmental grasp of the thing's real existence enables Aquinas to treat the logic of positive and negative existential propositions as subject-attribute without incurring any of the problems of which A.J. Ayer spoke.... For Aquinas "martyrs exist" is subject-attribute but translates to "the existentially neutral martyrs exist." This is not tautology. Also, "martyrs do not exist" translates to "the existentially neutral martyrs do not exist." This is not a contradiction.<sup>39</sup>

When we affirm that something exists we affirm, not that some described thing is instantiated, nor that a subject whose existence we already presume, exists. Knasas points out that we affirm that some substance, taken in an existence-neutral sense, actually exists. One might add that we may also affirm that a substance already known to exist ought to be recognized to exist by others, or even by ourselves with renewed attention.

Aquinas' ontology distinguishes existentially neutral substance from existent substance, or substance in act. The purported problems with statements of existence and nonexistence that give rise to the quantificational account derive from the ontological presupposition that there is no distinction between existence and being. Once this distinction is accepted the quantificational analysis of existence becomes unnecessary.

Other modes of being thematized by Aquinas in what the Medievals call the "division of being" include: universals, and being of reason, both potential and

actual, such as logical intentions, negations, privations, contradictory objects, and chimeras. As with unactualized possibles Aquinas does not claim that such entities to have actual being or that they are to be included among the contents of what there is. They have their foundation in what has actual being since they correspond to distinctions that can be drawn only in relation to what actually exists. Properly understood the phrase 'division of being' refers to logical distinctions deemed necessary to an adequate account of actually existing being. We do not have an adequate account of a thing unless we know what a thing actually is not that it possibly could be, and of what it is not possible for it to be. We do not have an account of red things unless we know what red things have in common, or what they could potentially be or not be. Finally, Aquinas' ontology is identical to Quine's predilected "desert landscape" visited, however, when in bloom so that all its fruits may be duly savored.

### III

Now what of A-quine-man? He has the daunting task of attempting to square Quine's quantificational account of existence with Aquinas' metaphysical ontology. As a defender of Aquinas, A-quine-man might follow Saul Kripke in refusing to forfeit names in favor of descriptions. Kripke has shown that the coherence of existence statements cannot depend on the accuracy of descriptions, for in giving an inaccurate description one would seem to imply that there remains nothing existing to describe. Surely if Moses had not parted the sea he would nonetheless have existed.<sup>40</sup>

Kripke's theory of names as "rigid designators" seems to have a progenitor in Aquinas' doctrine that a name has the property of being "rectus" since it stands firm in relation to other possible senses of the name such as the other noun cases (*casus*) that fall (*cadunt*) from the nominative.<sup>41</sup> However that might be, Kripke, still suffering under hidden vestiges of Kantian idealism, has not yet seen his way clear to affirming all of Aquinas' ontology. As an intermediary remedy he takes refuge in possible worlds thus saving existence from complete reduction to being the value of a bound variable under an interpretation. A thing's existence may be explained in virtue of its name's rigid designation of the same object in all possible worlds containing that thing.<sup>42</sup> In good conscience A-quine-man cannot, however, follow Kripke since possible worlds are intelligible to him only as unactualized possibilities of the actual world, which brings him back to Aquinas' metaphysical ontology.

Reexamining the evidence A-quine-man notes how attempts to harmonize

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Aquinas' ontology with the quantificational account of existence fail to consider fundamental features of both theories that seem to make them irrevocably incompatible. A steady flow of Anglophone Thomists, perceiving the pervasive influence of quantificational logic on contemporary philosophy have underwritten the aims of "Analytic Thomism". In a review of the monograph *Analytical Thomism: Traditions in Dialogue*, which collects a variety of positions within this movement, Richard Cross distinguishes philosophers that are "in the spirit of Aquinas" from those "developing what he has to say"<sup>43</sup> Cross classifies as "ostrich Thomists" philosophers such as Brian Shanley and John Knasas, who hold that analytic philosophy is incompatible with Aquinas' thought. Cross accuses Knasas' interpretation of Aquinas of being Meinongian since Cross understands existence-neutral substance to be non-actualized being.<sup>44</sup> To the contrary, however, to be an unactualized possible is not the same as to be a substance considered existentially neutrally. Knasas explicitly states that existence considered as a logical attribute of an already existing thing is posterior to the thing's existence. Therefore, predicating existence of something named does not constitute tautology. The composition of matter and form is not *ipso facto* an existing thing. Rather, an entity is an existing thing because of its act of being. Possibility, on the other hand, is a function of a form's capacity to accommodate a particular change. In Aquinas' language one might say that *esse*, or the being in which all beings participate, whether actually, potentially, or via reason, is logically distinct from *actus essendi*, or the act by which actual or existing beings participate in *esse*, since they do different logical work. Participation in *esse* is what makes knowledge possible. It is the unchanging ontological foundation that makes knowledge possible in a world of change. *Actus essendi* is what makes things and knowledge actual rather than just possible. *Actus essendi* is the act of *esse* in actually existing beings.

On the other hand Cross approves of Brian Davies for attempting to champion Aquinas' ontology without forfeiting Quine's analysis of existence.<sup>45</sup> Davies, who apparently holds the quantificational analysis of existence to be mandatory on similar grounds as Quine and Ayer, argues that Aquinas' account of existence, when properly interpreted, is compatible with Frege. However, Davies' position fails to duly acknowledge that the quantificational account of existence originates from analytic doctrines that are antithetical to Aquinas' doctrines that 'existence' is a logical predicate and that knowledge has an objective basis. To fail to see that the quantificational account of existence is irrevocably at odds with Aquinas' metaphysical ontology is to fail to appreciate the perceived problems that the quantificational account of existence was meant to resolve, much less the inherent methodological fallacies previously outlined in this article.

In light of this critique of Davies' position a question arises as to the actual merit of what the analytics call the quantificational account of existence. If existence is a logical predicate it can be formalized in function-argument analysis by means of a predicate symbol such as 'E'. Given that the quantifier previously used

by Russell and the subsequent tradition to treat existence has the value of indicating that a predicate is instantiated it would more aptly called the "instantiation" quantifier, and might be represented by the symbol 'I' as in the expression 'Ix: Ex', meaning "An x that exists is instantiated".<sup>46</sup> Such an expression may have a role within the discourse of stipulated domains proposed by Quine's ontological relativity, but it does not have a role in ordinary discourse where instantiation would be equivalent to existence in the robust metaphysical sense. In ordinary discourse instantiation typically concerns properties of existing beings.

In the "Afterword" to *Analytical Thomism: Traditions in Dialogue* John Haldane quotes from his seminal 1992 lectures at Notre Dame describing that analytical Thomism "involves the bringing into mutual relationship of the styles and preoccupations of recent English-speaking philosophy and the concepts and concerns shared by St. Thomas and his followers."<sup>46</sup> Haldane goes on to cite an earlier review in which he claims that "anyone of educated philosophical sensibilities who troubles to read Aquinas should be struck by two thoughts: first that he is a *great* philosopher, and second that he is an *analytic* one."<sup>47</sup> Given Dummett's observation that the hallmark of analytic philosophy is the view that "if we do not get logic right, we shall get nothing else right" it is difficult to see how, except in the ordinary adjectival sense of the word, Aquinas can be called an 'analytic' philosopher. Aquinas is not an analytic philosopher in the sense indicated by Dummett. If Haldane's goal was to bring into mutual relationship the "styles and preoccupations" of recent English-speaking philosophy and the "concepts and concerns of St. Thomas," he overstepped his goal in coining the term 'Analytical Thomism'.

Thomists ought to address the question of whether Aquinas, in order to remain coherent in his ontology, must adopt some version of the quantificational account of existence, whether Quine's or some amended or weakened version. An account that relegates existence to the level of a second-order property of concepts contrasts starkly with Aquinas' doctrine on the objectivity of cognition and his treatment of 'existence' as a first-order logical predicate. A-quine-man cannot fail to reject Quine's account of existence. If Quine's quantificational account is a requisite for analytic philosophy then A-quine-man cannot fail to judge the term "analytical Thomism" to be an oxymoron. If Quine's account is not a requisite for analytical philosophy then nothing short of a quantificational account that does not vitiate Aquinas' ontology would be required to legitimate the term 'analytical Thomism.'

<sup>43</sup>John Haldane first voiced the plea for an "Analytic Thomism" in lectures entitled *Understanding Minds and Structuring Natures* at the University of Notre Dame in 1992.

<sup>44</sup>Quine, Willard Van Orman, "On What There

Is", (Quine 1948), *Review of Metaphysics* 2, no. 5, Sept. 1948, 21.

<sup>45</sup>Parmenides, frag. 6, 1-2 excludes the notion of 'non-existent being' as incoherent: "The sayable and knowable must be what exists, for it



is there to be, but nothing is not."

<sup>4</sup>Craig Paterson and Mathew S. Pugh eds., *Analytical Thomism: Traditions in Dialogue*, Ashgate, 2006 gives an indication of the current status of such efforts by Thomists. B. Hale and C. Wright (eds), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*, Blackwell, Malden Mass. 1997, and Wright, Crispin. *Truth and Objectivity*, Harvard, Cambridge, Mass. 1992, are examples of fecund reappraisals of the Quinean legacy.

<sup>5</sup>Quine 1948, 23.

<sup>6</sup>Michael Dummett, "Frege, Gottlob", in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, P. Edwards ed., Macmillan, New York, 1967, v. 3, 225-6.

<sup>7</sup>Russell, Bertrand, *The Principles of Mathematics*, 2nd ed. Norton, 1937, 449, his underlining.

<sup>8</sup>Quine 1948, 26, 32.

<sup>9</sup>Russell, Bertrand, *Principia Mathematica*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1913, vol. I, p. 15. For a critique of Russell's conflation of the substitutional and objectual or referential interpretation of quantifiers see Vallicella, William, "A Critique of the Quantificational Account of Existence", *The Thomist*, 47, 2, April 1983.

<sup>10</sup>Quine, W.V.O., "Existence and Quantification", in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, Columbia University Press, New York 1969, 97. For an excellent account of the debate over the interpretation of quantifiers see Haack, Susan, *Philosophy of Logics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1978, Chapter 4, 39-55.

<sup>11</sup>Quine 1948, 26.

<sup>12</sup>Quine 1948, 28.

<sup>13</sup>Quine 1948, 26.

<sup>14</sup>Quine 1948, 23, 24.

<sup>15</sup>Quine 1948, 29, 30.

<sup>16</sup>Quine 1948, 30-31.

<sup>17</sup>Quine 1948, 35-37.

<sup>18</sup>Quine 1948, 32.

<sup>19</sup>Aristotle, *Metaphysics (Metaph.)* 3, 998b, 22-27.

<sup>20</sup>Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on Truth (De ver.)*, q. 1, a. 1, co. Unless otherwise noted all translations are mine.

<sup>21</sup>Aristotle, *On Interpretation*, 3, 16b, 21-26, translated by J.L. Ackrill, in *Aristotle's Categories, and de Interpretatione*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1966.

<sup>22</sup>Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's On Interpretation*, 1, 5, 18-22, English trans. Aristotle on Interpretation: *Commentary by St Thomas and Cajetan*, J. T. Oesterle, Milwaukee,

1962, with my additions in square brackets.

<sup>23</sup>Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, (S. th.) I, q. 2, a. 1, ad 2.

<sup>24</sup>Vallicella, 242.

<sup>25</sup>Kant, Immanuel, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, "Transcendental Dialectic" Book II, Chapter 3, section 4, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, MacMillan, Hampshire 1929.

<sup>26</sup>Ayer, A. J., *Language, Truth, and Logic*, Camelot Press, London, 1936, second edition, Dover Publications, New York, 1946, 43.

<sup>27</sup>Quine, W.V.O., *Mathematical Logic*, 151, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1940, revised ed., 1981. Russell, Bertrand, *Mathematical Logic*, 253, and *Principia Mathematica*, 66f, 174f.

<sup>28</sup>Russell, Bertrand, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, (Russell, LA), 1918, reprint ed. David Pears, Open Court, La Salle, IL, 1985, 37.

<sup>29</sup>S. th., I, 78, 4; I, 84, 3, co. Cf. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, II, 19, 99b20-35;

<sup>30</sup>Aristotle, *De anima*, III 6, 430a27-28.

<sup>31</sup>Aquinas, *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. V, a. 3, 96-105. Cf. *Sententia libri De anima*, III, 1, 11, n. 16.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, q. V, a. 3, 121-132. Cf. *Sententia libri De anima*, III, 1, 11, n. 19: "Scientia secundum actum est idem rei scitae secundum actum... quia omnia quae sunt in actu, fiunt ex ente in actu."

<sup>33</sup>S. th., I, 5, 2, co.

<sup>34</sup>See *De ver.*, 1, 1 for priority that being has in the order of logical content, and *Sup. Sent.* 8, 1, 3; *th. I-II*, 94, 2 for the priority being has in the order of the psychological possibility of cognition. Tavuzzi, Michael, "Aquinas on Resolution in Metaphysics", *The Thomist*, volume 55, number 2, 1991, 556-558 has a general discussion of this distinction.

<sup>35</sup>Russell LA, *loc. cit.*

<sup>36</sup>S. th., I, 78, 4, ad 4.

<sup>37</sup>Aristotle, *Metaph.*, V, 7, 1017a22-35; Aquinas, *Super Sent.* 2, d. 34, q. 1, a. 1 co.; *De ente et essentia*, 1, 1.

<sup>38</sup>*Sententia super Physicam*, III, lectio 2, 3.

<sup>39</sup>Knasas, John, *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists*, Fordham, New York 2003, 202-3.

<sup>40</sup>Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1972, 58-59.

<sup>41</sup>Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's On Interpretation*, 1, 4, 14.

<sup>42</sup>An investigation of the relation between Aquinas and Kripke on names would go beyond

the scope of this article and will have to await another occasion.

<sup>43</sup>Cross, Richard 2007, "Review of *Analytical Thomism: Traditions in Dialogue*", *Ars Disputandi*, [http://www.ArsDisputandi.org] 7 (2007), paragraph 1.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, paragraph 2.

<sup>45</sup>Davies, Brian, "Aquinas, God and Being", *The Monist*, 80, 4, 1997, 500-17.

<sup>46</sup>Haldane, John, "Afterword: Analytical Thomism: How We Got Here, Why It Is Worth Remaining and Where We May Go Next", 303-310, in *Analytical Thomism: Traditions in Dialogue*, ed. Craig Paterson and Mathew S. Pugh, Ashgate, 2006, 305.

<sup>47</sup>Haldane, John, Review of *Thomistic Papers I*, in *Philosophical Books*, 27, 2, 1986, 79-82.

...names which occur in the metaphysics of Aquinas. Aquinas teaches that there is a real order of dependence throughout the accidents which inhere in a substance. In this order, substance has priority to the accident of quantity. Substance, in turn, has priority over quantity, resulting in a real distinction between substance and quantity. The priority that Aquinas affords quantity allows it to serve as a medium between substance and other accidents. Due to the real distinction between substance and quantity, Aquinas asserts that the substance *qua* substance is wholly present in a thing regardless of its quantity in any given locality.

Aquinas' metaphysics of substance and quantity allows him to develop a precise theory of transubstantiation. He teaches that, after consecration in the sacrament, quantity is able to serve as a quasi-subject for the qualities which remain in the sustained appearances of bread and wine. Such is possible due to the priority which quantity has in the aforementioned order of dependence. Aquinas warns that other thinkers reject a real distinction between substance and quantity. In contrast to this opinion, which he credits to "the Platonists and Pythagoreans," Aquinas argues that quantity need not belong to a substance *per se*, but rather it could be a property of a substance.<sup>4</sup>

After Aquinas, there is a new interpretation of Aristotle. Such is exemplified in the works of Ockham, who rejects Aquinas' real distinction between substance and quantity.<sup>5</sup> This philosophical trajectory later reaches a more radical development in the work of Descartes. John of St. Thomas directly responds to Ockham's interpretation of Aristotle and, by extension, his response is indirectly applicable to Descartes. Although what follows is framed as a historical comparison between John of St. Thomas and Ockham and Descartes, the question at hand involves a philosophical issue that remains of great interest for contemporary inquiry. Further, this issue is important in light of the recent papal teaching that reaffirms the Church's traditional doctrine of transubstantiation.<sup>6</sup> The present scope of concern will be restricted to a discussion of what

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