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The Metaphysical Thought of  
Thomas Aquinas

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From Finite Being to Uncreated Being

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## Participation and the Problem of the One and the Many

During the revival of interest in the philosophical thought of Thomas Aquinas which marked the first six decades or so of the twentieth century, different points have been singled out by Thomistic scholars as offering a key or even *the* key to his metaphysical thought. Thus his theory of real distinction between essence and existence, his metaphysics of act and potency, his views concerning analogy of being, and his stress on the primacy of the act of existence (*actus essendi*), all have been emphasized in due course. Much more recently J. Aertsen has stressed the importance of the transcendentals in his thought. And each plays an important role within Thomas's metaphysics.<sup>1</sup> But at about the time of the outbreak of World War II, and continuing on within Thomistic studies down to the present, another significant aspect of Aquinas's metaphysical thought has come to be recognized. Important books were produced by C. Fabro, writing in Italy, and then by L. Geiger, writing in France, on the role of participation in Thomas's metaphysics.<sup>2</sup> Shortly thereafter another interesting if not all that reliable study was written

1. For works which have stressed each of these points in turn see, for instance, N. del Prado, *De veritate fundamentali philosophiae christianae* (Fribourg, 1911); G. M. Manser, *Das Wesen des Thomismus*, 3d ed. (Fribourg, 1949); M.T.-L. Penido, *Le rôle de l'analogie en théologie dogmatique* (Paris, 1931), which has been completely superseded by the more recent study by B. Montagnes, *La doctrine de l'analogie de l'être d'après saint Thomas d'Aquin*; and the many studies by Gilson emphasizing the primacy of existence in Thomas's metaphysics including, for instance, *Being and Some Philosophers; The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas; Elements of Christian Philosophy; Introduction à la philosophie chrétienne; Le thomisme*, 6th ed. (Paris, 1965). This line of interpretation has been developed by many of Gilson's followers, especially by J. Owens (see below, Bibliography). For Aertsen see his 1996 study, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas*, and his Bibliography for references to his earlier treatments of this.

2. C. Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino* (Milan, 1939). Here I shall cite from the 2d revised edition (Turin, 1950). L.-B. Geiger, *La participation dans la philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris, 1942), reissued in 1953. Here I shall use the 1953 edition.

in Ireland by Arthur Little, *The Platonic Heritage of Thomism*. A few years later R. Henle published a collection of texts drawn from Thomas's writings and containing his explicit references to Plato, and W. N. Clarke contributed two important articles on participation in Aquinas. Most recently, R. A. te Velde has published his *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*.<sup>3</sup>

In addressing ourselves to Thomas's views concerning participation, we are also taking up another important part of his solution to the classical problem of the One and the Many. As we have already seen in Ch. III, this problem arises for anyone who, like Aquinas, acknowledges the intelligibility of being and the unity that follows therefrom, and who also wishes to defend the reality of multiplicity or diversity, that is, of the many. One may raise this issue at the level of the concept or notion of being: What is the nature of a notion which, while being sufficiently unified to apply to all that is, or to every being, is also flexible enough to apply to the differences which obtain between beings? Thomas's answer to this is to be found in his theory of analogy of being, and this we have now examined insofar as it applies to the level of finite beings and hence to what falls within the subject of metaphysics. Even more fundamental, however, from the metaphysician's standpoint, is the issue of unity and multiplicity as it obtains within the realm of existing beings themselves. How is one to account for the fact that many different beings do indeed exist, and yet that each of them in some way shares in the perfection of being? It is with this question in mind that we now turn to Thomas's metaphysics of participation.

In examining the meaning and role assigned by Aquinas to participation, I shall attempt: (1) to explain what he understands by participation taken generally, and then what he understands by the most important case of participation for the metaphysician, that of beings in *esse*. (2) Then I shall concentrate on an aspect of Thomas's theory which has received too little attention until now. If, as we shall see, Thomas often refers to finite entities or natures as participating in *esse*, to what does the term *esse* refer as it is used here? Does it mean that they participate in self-subsisting *esse* (God)? Or does it mean that they participate in some general form of being, called *esse commune*? Or does it have some other meaning? (3) Finally, I shall turn to another issue which has divided the two leading specialists on participation in Aquinas, Fabro and Geiger, that is, the relationship between participation, composition, and limitation in finite beings.

3. See A. Little, *The Platonic Heritage of Thomism* (Dublin, 1949). As Little indicates, his book "was projected before the war and written immediately after it" (p. xiv). See the sympathetic but critical review article by W. N. Clarke, "The Platonic Heritage of Thomism," *Review of Metaphysics* 8 (1954), pp. 105-24. Also see R. J. Henle, *Saint Thomas and Platonism: A Study of the "Plato" and "Platonici" Texts in the Writings of Saint Thomas* (The Hague, 1956). For Clarke see "The Limitation of Act by Potency in St. Thomas: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism?" in *New Scholasticism* 26 (1952), pp. 167-94; "The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 26 (1952), pp. 147-57 (both reprinted in his *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being—God—Person* [Notre Dame, Ind., 1994], pp. 65-88, 89-101, which I shall cite here). For te Velde see *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden-New York-Cologne, 1995).

## 1. The Meaning of Participation

As is generally recognized, there has been considerable difficulty in arriving at a satisfactory definition or even description of participation since the days when such a notion came to be developed in Greek philosophy. We are familiar with Aristotle's obvious impatience with both the Pythagoreans and the Platonists when they appealed to participation and imitation. "... for the Pythagoreans," comments Aristotle, "say that things exist by imitation of numbers, and Plato says they exist by participation, changing the name. But what the participation or the imitation of the Forms could be they left an open question."<sup>4</sup> As Geiger has pointed out, Thomas's commentary on this particular passage from *Metaphysics I* is instructive. "The Pythagoreans," writes Aquinas, "while affirming participation or imitation, have not investigated how a common species is participated in by sensible individuals, or imitated by them, which the Platonists taught."<sup>5</sup> Thomas, at least in this text, does not reject every kind of participation nor does he here even directly criticize the Platonists. And Plato himself seems to have recognized this same difficulty, as we can surely conclude from the first part of his *Parmenides*.<sup>6</sup>

In this chapter, however, I shall bypass such questions concerning earlier versions of participation, and concentrate on Thomas Aquinas himself. What does he understand by participation? At times he offers a kind of etymological explanation. "To participate is, as it were, to take a part [of something]." However, already in this same relatively early writing, his Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus*, he goes considerably beyond this appeal to etymology. "And therefore, when something receives in particular fashion that which belongs to another in universal (or total) fashion, the former is said to participate in the latter."<sup>7</sup> In other words, when

4. *Metaphysics I*, c. 6 (987b 11–14), translation from *The Complete Works of Aristotle. The Revised Oxford Translation*, J. Barnes, ed. (Princeton, 1984), Vol. 2, p. 1561.

5. "Sed tamen est sciendum, quod Pythagorici, licet ponerent participationem, aut imitationem, non tamen perscrutati sunt qualiter species communis participetur ab individuis sensibilibus, sive ab eis imiteatur, quod Platonici tradiderunt." *In I Met.*, lect. 10, Cathala-Spiazzi ed., p. 46, n. 156. For Geiger see *La participation*, pp. 9–10.

6. Without pausing to go into this issue here, I would simply refer the reader to two excellent studies by R. E. Allen: *Plato's Parmenides: Translation and Analysis* (Minneapolis, 1983); "Participation and Predication in Plato's Middle Dialogues," in *Plato I: Metaphysics and Epistemology: A Collection of Critical Essays*, G. Vlastos, ed. (Garden City, N.Y., 1971), pp. 167–83.

7. "Est autem participare quasi partem capere. Et ideo quando aliquid particulariter recipit id quod ad alterum pertinet universaliter, dicitur participare illud . . ." (*In De Hebdomadibus*, lect. 2, Leon. 50.271:71–73). On the dating see Leon. 50.263–64. It probably is later than the commentary on the *De Trinitate* and therefore after the 1257–1259 period. For other general descriptions of participation see: *In I Met.*, lect. 10, p. 46, n. 154: "Quod enim totaliter est aliquid, non participat illud, sed est per essentiam idem illi. Quod vero non totaliter est aliquid habens aliquid aliud adiunctum, proprie participare dicitur. Sicut si calor esset calor per se existens, non diceretur participare calorem, quia nihil esset in eo nisi calor. Ignis vero quia est aliquid aliud quam calor, dicitur participare calorem"; *In II De caelo*, R. M. Spiazzi, ed. (Turin-Rome, 1952), lect. 18, p. 233, n. 463: "... dicit autem participat, propter inferiores substantias separatas, quae esse et bonum habent ex alio: nam partici-

we find a quality or perfection possessed by a given subject in only partial rather than in total fashion, such a subject is said to participate in that perfection. If in fact other subjects also share in that same perfection, it is because each of them only participates in it. None is identical with it. Thus, appeal to a participation structure is also a way of accounting for the fact that a given kind of characteristic or perfection can be shared in by many different subjects, or of addressing oneself to the problem of the One and the Many.

Thomas immediately goes on to observe that participation can take place in different orders and in different ways. Thus (1) man is said to participate in animal because man does not possess the intelligible content of animal according to its full universality (*secundum totam communitatem*). So too, Sortes is said to participate in man, and apparently for the same reason. My understanding of Sortes taken as this individual man does not exhaust the intelligible content expressed by man in its full universality. In like fashion, continues Thomas, (2) a subject participates in an accident, and matter in form; for a substantial or an accidental form, while being general or universal in terms of its intelligible content, is restricted to this or that subject in which it is received. Thomas concludes this general description of the kinds of participation by noting (3) that in like fashion an effect is said to participate in its cause, and especially when it is not equal to the power of that cause.<sup>8</sup>

In sum, Thomas has here singled out three major kinds of participation. The first type is represented both by the way a specific notion such as man shares in a generic notion such as animal, and by the way my understanding of an individual such as Sortes shares in my notion of the species of man as such. In each of these examples we are dealing with a less extended intelligibility which is said to share in a more universal or more extended intelligible content. Since in each of these instances we are dealing with the fact that one intelligible content shares in another without exhausting it, we may describe it as a case of participation; but since we are only dealing with intelligible contents, the participation is logical or intentional, not real or ontological.<sup>9</sup>

pare nihil aliud est quam ab alio partialiter accipere." Also see Fabro, *La nozione metafisica*, pp. 316–17.

8. "... sicut homo dicitur participare animal quia non habet rationem animalis secundum totam communitatem; et eadem ratione Sortes participat hominem. Similiter etiam subiectum participat accidens et materia formam, quia forma substantialis vel accidentalis, quae de sui ratione communis est, determinatur ad hoc vel illud subiectum. Et similiter etiam effectus dicitur participare suam causam, et praecipue quando non adaequat virtutem suae causae, puta si dicamus quod aer participat lucem solis quia non recipit eam in claritate qua est in sole" (Leon. 50.271:74–85).

9. For discussion of this see Fabro, *La nozione metafisica*, pp. 27–28, 145–46, 149–50; Geiger, *La participation dans la philosophie de S. Thomas d'Aquin*, pp. 48–49; te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, pp. 76–82. On this second general type of participation also see SCG I, c. 32: "Amplius. Omne quod de pluribus praedicatur univoce, secundum participationem cuiuslibet eorum convenit de quo praedicatur: nam species participare dicitur genus, et individuum speciem. De Deo autem nihil dicitur per participationem: nam omne quod participatur determinatur ad modum participati [participantis: seems to be demanded by the sense], et sic partialiter habetur et non secundum om-

The second major division is represented by two examples as well, that of a subject or substance participating in an accident, and that of matter participating in substantial form. In each of these cases, Thomas has indicated, the forms in question, whether substantial or accidental, simply considered in themselves are still common. I take this to mean that, simply viewed in themselves, such forms can be shared in by any number of different subjects or instances of matter. It is only when a given accidental or substantial form is actually received in its appropriate substantial subject or its appropriate matter that it is thereby limited and restricted to the same. Hence the receiving principle, whether matter or a substantial subject, may be said to participate in the received form. In each of these cases the result is a real or ontological composition of a receiving subject and the perfection which is received in that same subject, that is, of substance and its given accident, or of matter and its given substantial form. Hence we may describe this kind of participation as real or as ontological. Here we are no longer dealing merely with a less extended concept which shares in one that is more extended.<sup>10</sup>

Rather than develop the third major kind of participation which he has singled out here (that of an effect in its cause), Thomas immediately returns to the first two. He does this in order to show that in neither of these first two ways can *esse* itself be said to participate in anything.<sup>11</sup> Here it should be noted that Thomas has been commenting on an axiom proposed by Boethius near the beginning of his *De Hebdomadibus* to this effect, that *esse* and “that which is” are diverse. In introducing his commentary on this axiom, Thomas had observed that, as regards being (*ens*), *esse* itself is to be viewed as something common (universal) and undetermined which may be determined in one way from the side of a subject which has *esse*, and in another way from the side of a predicate that may be affirmed of it. Thus he finds Boethius first considering conceptions (axioms) which are derived from comparing *esse* and “that which is” (its subject). Thomas also observes that at this stage

nem perfectionis modum” (ed. cit., p. 33). Thomas’s point here is to reject univocal predication of anything of God and other entities. Also note near the end of this same chapter: “. . . de aliis autem praedicaciones fiunt per participationem, sicut Sortes dicitur homo non quia sit ipsa humanitas, sed *humanitatem habens*” (italics mine). But compare this with the following remark from *In VII Met.*, lect. 3, p. 329, n. 1328: “Genus autem non praedicatur de speciebus per participationem, sed per essentiam. Homo enim est animal essentialiter, non solum aliquid animalis participans. Homo enim est quod verum est animal.” This text seems to deny that a species participates in a genus. For discussion of this difficulty, see below, n. 30. For other texts where Thomas reaffirms the point that an individual may be described as participating in a species see, for instance, ST I, q. 44, a. 3, ad 2: “Licet igitur hic homo sit per participationem speciei, non tamen potest reduci ad aliquid existens per se in eadem specie; sed ad speciem superexcedentem, sicut sunt substantiae separatae” (ed. cit., p. 226); ST I, q. 45, a. 5, ad 1 (cited below in n. 41).

10. Fabro has referred to both of these major kinds of participation as instances of predicamental participation. By this he means that both terms of the participation relationship, the participant and the participated characteristic remain within the field of finite being and finite substance (predicamental). See *La nozione metafisica*, pp. 145ff.

11. “Praetermisso autem hoc tertio modo participandi, impossibile est quod secundum duos primos modos ipsum esse participet aliquid” (Leon. 50.271:85–87).

in his treatise Boethius is not yet discussing diversity that applies to things or that is real, but diversity in the order of intentions.<sup>12</sup>

As Aquinas interprets him, Boethius here distinguishes between *esse* and “that which is” as between that which is signified abstractly, for instance by an expression such as “to run,” and the same thing when it is signified concretely, as by an expression such as “one who runs” (*currens*). Thus while *esse* and “to run” are signified abstractly, like whiteness, “that which is” or being (*ens*) and “one who runs” are signified concretely, like a white thing.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, Thomas also finds Boethius spelling out the distinction between these two, that is, between *esse* and “that which is,” in three ways, each of which Thomas develops far more fully than does Boethius.

First of all, *esse* is not signified as the subject of being, just as the act of running (“to run”) is not signified as if it were the subject which runs. Just as we cannot say that the act of running (“to run”) itself runs, neither can we say that *esse* itself exists. And if “that which runs” is signified as the subject of running, so do we signify “that which is” as the subject of being (*subiectum essendi*). And if we can say of one who runs that he does so insofar as he is subject to running and participates in it, so we can say that a being, or “that which is,” exists insofar as it participates in the act of being.<sup>14</sup> Hence in this immediate context, Thomas understands by *esse* the act of being.

Secondly, Boethius states that “that which is” can participate in something, but *esse* itself cannot. It is in explaining this second difference that Thomas introduces

12. Leon. 50.270. Note especially: “Dicit ergo primo, *quod diversum est esse, et id quod est*, quae quidem diversitas non est hic referenda ad res de quibus adhuc non loquitur, sed ad ipsas rationes seu intentiones” (lines 36–39).

13. Leon. 50.270:39–271:45: “Aliud autem significamus per hoc quod dicimus esse et aliud per id quod dicimus id quod est, sicut et aliud significamus cum dicimus currere et aliud per hoc quod dicitur currens. Nam currere et esse significatur in abstracto sicut et albedo; sed quod est, id est ens et currens, significatur in concreto velut album.”

14. Leon. 50.271:48–49. Note in particular: “. . . et ideo sicut possumus dicere de eo quod currit sive de corrente quod currat in quantum subiicitur cursui et participat ipsum, ita possumus dicere quod ens sive id quod est sit in quantum participat actum essendi.” As Fabro points out, Thomas here introduces one of his most original insights into his Commentary on the Boethian text, and one which is completely missing from Boethius himself, that is, his identification of *esse* as it is realized in a finite being as the act of being: “. . . sed id quod est, *accepta essendi forma*, scilicet suscipiendo ipsum actum essendi, *est, atque consistit*, id est in se ipso subsistit” (Leon. 50.271:61–63). For Fabro see *Participation et causalité selon S. Thomas d’Aquin*, p. 270. For different medieval and contemporary ways of understanding the meaning of *esse* in Boethius himself see Fabro, *La nozione metafisica*, pp. 100–103. Also see Geiger, *La participation*, pp. 36–45; P. Hadot, “La distinction de l’être et de l’étant dans le *De Hebdomadibus* de Boèce,” *Miscellanea Mediaevalia 2: Die Metaphysik im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1963), pp. 147–53; G. Schimpf, *Die Axiomenschrift des Boethius (De Hebdomadibus) als philosophisches Lehrbuch des Mittelalters* (Leiden, 1966). The general (if not universal) consensus is that however Boethius may have understood and contrasted *esse* and *id quod est*—and there is much disagreement concerning this—he did not distinguish them in Thomistic fashion as act of being and essence. However, for a different reading, see R. McInerney, “Boethius and Saint Thomas Aquinas,” *Rivista di Filosofia neo-scolastica* 66 (1974), pp. 219–45, and more recently, *Boethius and Aquinas*, pp. 161–253.

the description and divisions of participation we have been considering. Thomas immediately turns from this description of participation to explain why *esse* (the act of being) itself cannot participate in anything else, even though "that which is" or the subject which exists can. Precisely because *esse* is signified in abstract fashion, it cannot participate in anything else in the second general way Thomas has singled out, that is, as a substance participates in its accident or as matter participates in form. This is so, we may presume, because both a substantial subject and matter are signified concretely, and, as we have seen, *esse* is signified abstractly.<sup>15</sup>

Neither, continues Thomas, can *esse* participate in anything else in the first general way, that is, as a less universal concept participates in one which is more universal. (Thomas does acknowledge in passing that in this general way some things which are signified abstractly may be said to participate in others, for instance, whiteness in color.) This kind of participation will not apply in the case of *esse* itself because there is nothing more general than *esse* in which it could participate. *Esse* itself is most universal (*communissimum*). Therefore *esse* is participated in by other things, but cannot itself participate in anything else.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, being (*ens*), even though it too is most universal, is expressed in concrete fashion. Therefore while being cannot participate in anything in the way the less universal participates in the more universal, it does participate in *esse* in the way something concrete participates in something abstract. Thomas comments that this is what Boethius has in mind in another of his axioms to the effect that "what is" can participate in something, but that *esse* itself cannot do so in any way.<sup>17</sup>

We shall pass over Thomas's discussion of the third difference between *esse* and "that which is" as he finds this in Boethius's text. Of greater interest for our immediate purposes is Thomas's acknowledgment that being (*ens*) can participate in *esse* in the way in which something taken concretely participates in something taken abstractly. If we were to stop at this point, we would not yet be justified in thinking that he here defends any kind of real diversity or real composition of *esse* (act of being) and "that which is" within participating beings. We should note that in the following context Thomas writes that for something to be a subject in the unqualified sense, that is, a substance, it must participate in *esse* itself.<sup>18</sup> This is important

15. "Non enim potest participare aliquid per modum quo materia vel subiectum participat formam vel accidens quia ut dictum est ipsum esse significatur ut quiddam abstractum" (Leon. 50.271:87-91).

16. "Similiter autem nec potest aliquid participare per modum quo particulare participat universale . . . sed ipsum esse est communissimum, unde ipsum quidem participatur in aliis, non autem participat aliquid aliud" (Leon. 50.271:91-97).

17. See Leon. 50.271:97-105. Note especially: "Sed id quod est sive ens, quamvis sit communissimum, tamen concrete dicitur, et ideo participat ipsum esse, non per modum quo magis commune participatur a minus communi, sed participat ipsum esse per modum quo concretum participat abstractum."

18. "Dicit, quod ad hoc quod aliquid sit simpliciter subiectum participat ipsum esse. . . . Nam aliquid est simpliciter per hoc quod participat ipso esse; sed quando iam est, scilicet per participatio-

because it indicates that if something is to serve as a subject for an accident, it must itself exist. And in order for it to exist, it must participate in *esse*, or as Thomas has also phrased it, in the *actus essendi* (act of being). Here, then, we find Thomas very deftly inserting his own metaphysics of *esse* taken as act of being into his Commentary on Boethius.<sup>19</sup> This becomes even clearer as Thomas turns to another Boethian axiom: in every composite, *esse* and the composite itself differ. Here Thomas finds Boethius formulating axioms which pertain to the nature of the one (*unum*) rather than of being (*ens*), as had until now been the case. And, comments Thomas, at this point Boethius has shifted from diversity in the order of intentions to diversity in the order of reality. ". . . just as *esse* and 'that which is' differ in the order of intentions, so in composite entities do they differ really [*realiter*]."<sup>20</sup>

In order to support this, Thomas first recalls a point which we have already considered—that *esse* itself does not participate in anything else so that its intelligible content (*ratio*) might consist of different factors. He also recalls another point which until now we have not mentioned—that *esse* does not admit of the addition of anything extrinsic to its formal content. Therefore, he quickly concludes, *esse* itself is not composed. But if it is not, then a composite or composed entity cannot be identified with its *esse* (act of being). Here, then, we seem to have an argument for the real distinction between essence and act of being in composite entities, although not one of Thomas's more usual arguments for that conclusion.<sup>21</sup>

One might immediately ask, however, about finite or caused simple entities. Will essence and *esse* be distinct in them? It seems that some other kind of argumentation will be required to establish this. In apparent anticipation of our query,

nem ipsius esse, restat ut participet quocumque alio, ad hoc scilicet quod sit aliquid" (Leon. 50.272:180-195).

19. In addition to other passages from the Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus* (see n. 14 above), one may consider a later text such as *Quaestiones disputatae De anima*, q. 6, ad 2: "Ad secundum dicendum quod ipsum esse est actus ultimus qui participabilis est ab omnibus; ipsum autem nihil participat. Unde si sit aliquid quod sit ipsum esse subsistens, sicut de Deo dicimus, nihil participare dicimus. Non est autem similis ratio de aliis formis subsistentibus, quas necesse est participare ipsum esse et comparari ad ipsum ut potentia ad actum" (Leon. 24.1.51:268-275). Here we have in outline form most of the elements of Thomas's mature doctrine of participation of beings in *esse*, and a confirmation of the views expressed in his Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus*: *esse* is the ultimate act which can be participated in by all; *esse* itself does not participate in anything; if there is a subsisting *esse*—God—this participates in nothing; other subsisting forms (angels) must participate in *esse* and be related to it (their act of being) as potency to act.

20. Leon. 50.272:196-198. Note: ". . . et est considerandum quod ea quae supra dicta sunt de diversitate ipsius esse et eius quod est, est secundum ipsas intentiones. Hic ostendit quomodo applicetur ad res. . . . Est ergo primo considerandum quod sicut esse et quod est differunt secundum intentiones, ita in compositis differunt realiter" (Leon. 50.272:196-273:206).

21. "Quod quidem manifestum est ex praemissis. Dicitur enim supra quod ipsum esse neque participat aliquid ut eius ratio constituatur ex multis, neque habet aliquid extrinsecum admixtum ut sit in eo compositio accidentalitatis; et ideo ipsum esse non est compositum; res ergo composita non est suum esse. . . ." (Leon. 50.273:206-213). For the point that *esse* admits nothing extrinsic into its formal content see Leon. 50.271:114-272:146. For further discussion of this argumentation see Ch. V below, nn. 80, 81. Cf. McNerny, *Boethius and Aquinas*, pp. 211-15.

Thomas insists that in any simple entity, *esse* and "that which is" are really identical. Otherwise the entity would not really be simple. In explaining this Thomas notes that something is simple insofar as it lacks composition. Since something may lack a given kind of composition without lacking all composition, it may be simple in a qualified sense without being completely simple. Thus fire and water, two of the elements for Thomas and his contemporaries, are called simple bodies because they are not composed of contraries, as are mixtures. But each is still composed both of quantitative parts and of matter and form. Should we find certain forms which do not exist in matter and which are simple in the sense that they lack matter-form composition and quantitative parts, it will not immediately follow that they are perfectly simple. Since any such form must still determine its *esse*, it follows that no such form is *esse* itself. It simply has *esse*.<sup>22</sup>

Here Thomas has introduced one of his favorite ways of expressing the fact that created entities, in this case, created separate substances, participate in *esse* (the act of being). They have *esse*, but are not their *esse* (act of being). By saying that every such form must determine its *esse*, I take Thomas to mean that because every such form enjoys a given kind of being, the determination or specification of its kind of being must come from the side of its form or essence, not from the side of its act of being (*esse*).

In fact, in an interesting thought experiment, Thomas suggests that even if, for the sake of discussion, we grant with Plato that there are certain subsisting immaterial forms or ideas such as a form for human beings and another for horses, every such form will still be determined with respect to its kind or species. Hence no such subsisting form could be identified with the act of being in general (*esse commune*). Each such form would only participate in *esse commune*. The same will hold, continues Thomas, if with Aristotle we defend the existence of separate and immaterial substances above the world of sensible things. Each of these, insofar as it is distinct from the others, is a given specific kind of form and therefore participates in *esse*. No such substance, whether it be a Platonic form or an Aristotelian separate substance, will be perfectly simple.<sup>23</sup> Each will be composed of itself—form—and of the *esse* (act of being) in which it participates. There can be only one completely simple being, continues Thomas, and this does not participate in *esse*, but is subsisting *esse*. This, of course, is God.<sup>24</sup>

22. See Leon. 50.273:216–235. Note in particular: "Quia tamen quaelibet forma est determinativa ipsius esse, nulla earum est ipsum esse, sed est habens esse. . . ."

23. Leon. 50.273:236–249. Note especially: ". . . manifestum erit quod ipsa forma immaterialis subsistens [a Platonic form], cum sit quiddam determinatum ad speciem, non est ipsum esse commune, sed participat illud . . . unaquaeque illarum [Aristotelian separate substances], in quantum distinguitur ab alia, quaedam specialis forma est participans ipsum esse, et sic nulla earum erit vere simplex."

24. Leon. 50.273:249–258. Note Thomas's reason here for saying that such a being can only be one: ". . . quia, si ipsum esse nihil aliud habet admixtum praeter id quod est esse, ut dictum est, impossibile est id quod est ipsum esse multiplicari per aliquid diversificans. . . ."

This discussion is helpful for a number of reasons. First of all, here Thomas has clearly distinguished between a diversity of *esse* and "that which is" which applies only to the order of intentions, and a real distinction between them. Secondly, he has offered two ways of establishing real distinction between them, one directed to composite entities taken in the usual sense as matter-form composites, and another which applies to finite simple entities such as pure spirits. Even the latter cannot be identified with the act of being taken in general (*esse commune*), since every such being is a given kind of being and must, therefore, determine and specify the *esse* which it has. In this text, therefore, Thomas has closely connected participation in *esse* with his theory of real distinction between essence and act of being. In fact he has so closely linked them that he immediately moves from the fact that such entities merely participate in *esse* to the conclusion that no such entity is truly simple (which is to say it is composed).<sup>25</sup> This text also tells us that in speaking of participation of beings in being, on some occasions, at least, Thomas means thereby that they participate in the act of being in general or in *esse commune*. With these thoughts in mind, we may now attempt to see how Thomas's understanding of participation of beings in *esse* fits into his earlier threefold division of participation.

We may immediately conclude from the above that the participation of beings in *esse* cannot be reduced to the first kind of participation singled out by Aquinas, whereby a less universal notion or concept participates in one that is more general or universal. Such participation belongs to the logical or intentional order, and does not entail real distinction between the participant and that in which it participates. But, as we have now seen, participation of beings in *esse* clearly does.

What, then, of the second general kind of participation, wherein a subject participates in its accidents, or a given instance of matter participates in substantial form? This, too, evidently involves real participation and real diversity between the participating subject and the participated perfection, that is, between substance and accident, or between prime matter and substantial form. Nonetheless, it seems clear enough that for Thomas, participation of beings in being (*esse*) cannot be reduced to this kind of participation any more than to the first kind.

First of all, in order for a subject to participate in its accidents, Thomas has noted that the subject itself must exist. And it exists only insofar as it participates in *esse*. Participation in *esse* is clearly more fundamental than that of a substance in its accidents. The same may be said of participation of matter in form. Indeed, according to Aquinas, if a matter-form composite is to exist, it must participate in *esse*.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, in the case where matter is said to participate in form, a third thing (*res*) or a *tertium quid* results, that is, the essence of the material thing which

25. See the texts cited in nn. 22 and 23 above.

26. See n. 14 above. On matter-form composites participating in *esse* see *De substantiis separatis*, c. 8 (Leon. 40.D55:210–218, 225–228). Cf. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, p. 79, and n. 31 (for a reference to my earlier treatment of this).

includes both its form and its matter. However, as Thomas brings out on other occasions—for instance, in his considerably later and very full discussion of participation in Quodlibet 2, q. 2, a. 1 of Advent 1269—it is not in this way that essence and *esse* (act of being) unite in a creature. No *tertium quid* results from their union. Essence and *esse* do not unite in a created separate substance—an angel—as if they were two different parts of the angelic substance. “Thus, therefore, in an angel there is a composition of essence and *esse*; this, however, is not a composition as of parts of substance, but rather as of substance and of that which unites with the substance (*adhaeret substantiae*).”<sup>27</sup> And in replying to the first objection in this same article, Thomas notes that in some cases a third thing (*res tertia*) does result from things which are joined together, as humanity or human being results from the union of soul and body. But on other occasions this is not the case. Rather, something is composed of itself and of something else.<sup>28</sup> Hence, we may conclude, in the case of an angel we have a composition of the angelic essence and of a distinct *esse* (act of being), which itself is neither an essence nor a “thing” nor even a part of an essence.

Still another difference has been pointed out between matter-form composition and the union of essence and *esse* in Thomas’s metaphysics,<sup>29</sup> and therefore, one may conclude, between the kinds of participation involved in each. In the case of matter-form union, specification of the kind of being enjoyed by the composite essence, human being or canine being, for instance, is determined by the act principle within the essence, that is, by the substantial form. But in the composition of essence and *esse* within any finite entity, the specification or determination of the kind of being comes not from the side of the act principle—the *actus essendi*—but from the side of the potency principle, that is, from the essence. This is not surprising, of course, since the essence principle itself either is or at least includes a substantial form. While the form is an act principle within the line of essence, in the line of *esse* that same form, either in itself in the case of a separate substance or

27. Quodlibet 2, q. 2, a. 1 is addressed to this question: “. . . utrum angelus substantialiter sit compositus ex essentia et esse.” See Leon. 25.2.214–15. Note in particular: “Sic ergo in angelo est compositio ex essentia et esse, non tamen est compositio sicut ex partibus substantiae, sed sicut ex substantia et eo quod adhaeret substantiae” (p. 215:74–76). For the date see Leon. 25.1.ix\*. But cf. pp. 111\*–112\*.

28. The first objection reasons that the essence of an angel is the angel itself. If, therefore, an angel were composed of essence and *esse*, it would be composed of itself and something else. This is rejected by the objection as unfitting (Leon. 25.2.214:13–18). Note from Thomas’s reply: “. . . aliquando autem ex his quae simul iunguntur non resultat res tertia . . . et in talibus aliquid componitur ex seipso et alio . . .” (p. 215:81–86).

29. See Geiger, *La participation*, pp. 198–99, n. 2; Fabro, *Participation et causalité*, p. 65. For a general comparison and contrast between the composition of essence (*substantia*) and *esse* and that of matter and form see SCG II, c. 54. There Thomas concludes by noting that the composition of act and potency is broader in extension than that of matter and form. While the latter is restricted to physical (*naturalem*) entity, the former extends to the entire realm of being in general: “. . . potentia autem et actus dividunt ens commune” (ed. cit., p. 147).

together with its matter in the case of a composite entity, is in potency with respect to its act of being.

Another important difference between the first type of participation, that of a species in its genus or of an individual in its species, and other kinds of participation including that of beings in *esse* is brought out in Thomas’s Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus* and in Quodlibet 2, q. 2, a. 1. In *lectio* 3 of the former text Thomas is commenting on a question raised by Boethius concerning whether beings are good by their essence or by participation. Thomas remarks that this question assumes that to be something essentially is opposed to being something by participation. He concedes that this is true according to the second major kind of participation he has distinguished (that of a substance in an accident, or of matter in form). This follows because an accident is not included within the nature of its substantial subject, and form is not included within the nature of matter. But this does not apply to the first major kind of participation he has distinguished, at least not according to Aristotle, although it would apply if, with Plato, we defended distinct forms or ideas, for instance, for man, for biped, and for animal. According to Aristotle, whom Thomas here follows, a man is truly that same thing which is an animal. Because animal does not exist apart from the difference man in this particular illustration, what is said of something by participation in this first major way can also be predicated of it substantially.<sup>30</sup> In other words, man is said to participate in animal in the way a species participates in its genus. But because animal is included within the nature or essence of man, animal may be predicated of man substantially as well. Thomas would deny, of course, that *esse* is predicated of any creature in this way, i.e., substantially or essentially.

In Quodlibet 2, q. 2, a. 1, Thomas explicitly makes this final point. There he has commented that something can be predicated of something either essentially or else by participation. Being (*ens*) is predicated of God alone essentially, and of every creature only by participation; for no creature is its *esse*, but merely has *esse*. Thomas then notes that when anything is predicated of something by participation, something else must be present there in addition to that which is participated. Therefore, in every creature there is a distinction between the creature which has *esse*, and *esse* itself.<sup>31</sup> But something may be participated in two different ways.

30. Leon. 50.276:44–63. Note in particular: “. . . sed secundum Aristotelis sententiam qui posuit quod homo vere est id quod est animal, quasi essentia animalis non existente praeter differentiam hominis, nihil prohibet id quod per participationem dicitur etiam substantialiter praedicari.” Hence in the troublesome text from *In VII Met.* (cited in n. 9 above) Thomas must be understanding participation only in the second way, with the consequence that the participated characteristic is not included within the essence of the participant. A species does not participate in a genus in this way, but only according to the first general way of participating.

31. Leon. 25.2.214:28–50. Note in particular: “Secundum ergo hoc dicendum est quod ens praedicatur de solo Deo essentialiter, eo quod esse divinum est esse subsistens et absolutum; de qualibet autem creatura praedicatur per participationem: nulla enim creatura est suum esse, sed est habens esse. . . .” Thomas then applies this to goodness as well. While God is said to be good essentially

On the one hand, what is participated may be included within the very essence (*substantia*) of the participant, as when a genus is participated in by its species. But, says Thomas, *esse* is not participated in by a creature in this way. What is included within the essence of a thing falls within its definition. Being (*ens*) is not included within the definition of a creature since being is neither a genus nor a difference. Therefore it (*esse*) is participated in only in the second way, as something which is not included within the essence of the participant. Given this, one must distinguish the question *an est* ("Is it?") from the question *quid est* ("What is it?"). In fact, Thomas even goes so far here as to say that since anything not included within the essence of a thing may be described as an accident, the *esse* which answers to the question *an est* is an accident. He does not mean by this that *esse* (the act of being) is a predicamental accident, but only that it is not part of the essence of any creature. This he clarifies with all desired precision in other contexts, for instance in his Commentary on *Metaphysics* IV and in his Quodlibet 12.<sup>32</sup>

In comparing participation in *esse* with the first two major kinds singled out by Thomas in his Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus*, we should also note that each of the other kinds allows for univocal predication of the participated perfection. According to Thomas, this is not true of *esse*. It can only be predicated analogically of whatever participates in it. As regards univocal predication of genera and species, Thomas correlates this with participation in an important text from *Summa contra Gentiles* I, c. 32. There he is attempting to show that nothing can be predicated univocally of God and of anything else. "Everything which is predicated [only] by participation. For a species is said to participate in a genus, and an individual in a species."<sup>33</sup> If these are cases of participation, as Thomas has again reminded us here, they are also paradigms for univocal predication.

As Thomas also explains within this same chapter, what is predicated of different things in terms of priority and posteriority is not predicated of them univocally.

because he is goodness itself, creatures are said to be good by participation because they have goodness.

32. "Uno modo quasi existens de substantia participantis sicut genus participatur a specie; hoc autem modo esse non participatur a creatura: id enim est de substantia rei quod cadit in eius definitione, ens autem non ponitur in definitione creaturae, quia nec est genus neque est differentia. Unde participatur sicut aliquid non existens de essentia rei, et ideo alia quaestio est 'an est' et 'quid est'; unde, cum omne quod est praeter essentiam rei dicatur accidens, esse, quod pertinet ad quaestionem 'an est', <est> accidens" (Leon. 25.2.214:51–215:63). Cf. Thomas's reply to objection 2: "... esse est accidens, non quasi per accidens se habens, sed quasi actualitas cuiuslibet substantiae..." (Leon. 25.2.215:88–90). Cf. Quodlibet 12, q. 4, a. 1: "Et sic dico quod esse substantiale rei non est accidens, sed actualitas cuiuslibet formae existentis, sive sine materia sive cum materia. . . . Et ad id quod Hilarius dicit, dico quod accidens dicitur large omne quod non est pars essentiae, et sic est esse in rebus creatis, quia in solo Deo esse est eius essentia" (Leon. 25.2.404:27–37). Cf. *In IV Met.*, lect. 2, p. 155, n. 558.

33. Ed. cit., p. 33, cited above in n. 9.

Thus, as we have already seen, being (*ens*) is not predicated univocally of substance and of accidents. And as Thomas continues, nothing can be said of God and other things as if they were on the same level, but only according to priority and posteriority. Therefore, while names such as being (*ens*) and good are said of God essentially, they are predicated of all else only by participation. Hence, Thomas concludes once more, nothing can be said univocally of God and of other things.<sup>34</sup>

Before leaving this general discussion of Thomas's understanding of participation, reference should be made to another aspect of his theory. Participation evidently entails distinction and composition in the participant of a receiving and participating principle, and of that which is received and participated. This has already emerged from our analysis of Thomas's Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus*, and is reinforced by his discussion in Quodlibet 2. But in cases of real or ontological participation, the participating principle or subject is related to the participated perfection as potency to act. The participated perfection is the act of the principle or subject which receives it as its corresponding potential principle. As Thomas explains in ST I, q. 75, a. 5, ad 1: "A potency, however, since it receives act, must be proportioned to its act. But received acts, which proceed from the first and infinite act and are certain participations of it, are diverse."<sup>35</sup>

Very frequently Thomas also applies this thinking to the participation of beings in *esse*. That essence is related to the act of being (*esse*) as potency to act in every finite being is a position he defends from his earliest writings, and even in contexts where he is not using the language of participation, as for instance, in certain passages in his Commentary on I *Sentences*, or in c. 4 of his *De ente et essentia*.<sup>36</sup>

The importance of this conjoining of the potency-act relationship between essence and *esse* with the metaphysics of participation can hardly be overstated. Without this, the intrinsic and essential unity of a participating being would not be assured.<sup>37</sup> One may recall the following text from SCG II, c. 53: "Everything which participates in something is related to that which is participated as potency to act.

34. Ibid. See in particular: "Adhuc. Quod praedicatur de aliquibus secundum prius et posterius, certum est univoce non praedicari. . . ."

35. "Potentia autem, cum sit receptiva actus, oportet quod actui proportionetur. Actus vero recepti, qui procedunt a primo actu infinito et sunt quaedam participationes eius, sunt diversi" (Leon. 5.202).

36. See, for instance, *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 5, a. 2: "Et quia omne quod non habet aliquid a se, est possibile respectu illius; huiusmodi quidditas cum habeat esse ab alio, erit possibile respectu illius esse, et respectu eius a quo esse habet, in quo nulla cadit potentia; et ita in tali quidditate inveniatur potentia et actus, secundum quod ipsa quidditas est possibilis, et esse suum est actus eius. Et hoc modo intelligo in angelis compositionem potentiae et actus, et de 'quo est' et 'quod est', et similiter in anima" (Mandonnet ed., Vol. 1, pp. 229–30). In the *De ente* it is only after having completed his argumentation for the essence-*esse* distinction in non-divine simple entities and after having reasoned from their caused character to the existence of God that Thomas establishes act-potency composition within them. See Leon. 43.377:147–152. For discussion see Ch. V below.

37. See W. N. Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics*, pp. 79–82, 95–97.



Through that which is participated the participant becomes actually such. But it has been shown above that God alone is being essentially, and that all others participate *ipsum esse*. Therefore every created essence [*substantia*] is related to its *esse* as potency to act.<sup>38</sup> Here we have the general point that whatever participates in something is related to that in which it participates as potency to act. And this is followed by the particular application to created essences as participating in and as related to their acts of being as potency to act.

If the act-potency relationship applies to the participation of beings in *esse*, it also holds in other instances of real participation. According to Aquinas, matter participates in form and is related to it as potency to act. A substance participates in its accidents and is related to them as a receiving potency to its received albeit secondary acts. But most important for our purposes is Thomas's repeated application of this to participation in *esse*. As he puts it in his even later *De substantiis separatis*: "Everything which is has *esse*. Therefore, in everything apart from the first, there is both *esse* itself as act, and the substance of the thing which has *esse* as the potency which receives this act which is *esse*."<sup>39</sup>

At this point it may be helpful for us to sum up the various features of Thomas's understanding of the participation of beings in *esse* which have so far emerged from our discussion. The participation of beings in *esse* is more fundamental than the other kinds of participation, for it alone accounts for the fact that a given entity

38. "Item. Omne participans aliquid comparatur ad ipsum quod participatur ut potentia ad actum: per id enim quod participatur fit participans actu tale. Ostensum autem est supra quod solus Deus est essentialiter ens, omnia autem alia participant ipsum esse. Comparatur igitur substantia omnis creata ad suum esse sicut potentia ad actum" (ed. cit., p. 146). The whole of c. 53 is devoted to proving that there is act-potency composition in created intellectual substances, that is, of *substantia* and *esse*. In c. 52 Thomas had offered a series of arguments to prove that there is diversity of *quod est* (essence) and *esse* in such entities.

39. On the relationship between a subject or substance and its accidents see, for instance, Thomas's *De virtutibus in communi*, a. 3, in *Quaestiones disputatae*, Vol. 2 (Turin-Rome, 1953), p. 715, and ST I, q. 77, a. 6, and ad 2 (on the soul and its powers). Also see Ch. VIII below, Sections 3 and 4. On the act-potency relationship between prime matter and substantial form see Ch. IX below, Sections 1 and 2. For the passage cited in our text from the *De substantiis separatis* see: "Omne autem quod est esse habet; est igitur in quocumque praeter primum et ipsum esse tamquam actus et substantia rei habens esse tamquam potentia receptiva hujus actus quod est esse" (Leon. 40.D55:183-187). Also see Quodlibet 3, q. 8, a. 1: "Oportet igitur quod quaelibet alia res sit ens participative, ita quod aliud sit in eo substantia participans esse et aliud ipsum esse participatum. Omne autem participans se habet ad participatum sicut potentia ad actum. Unde substantia cuiuslibet rei creatae se habet ad suum esse sicut potentia ad actum" (Leon. 25.2.277:37-46). Here Thomas is rejecting matter-form composition in the human soul. Also see *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 1, where Thomas is rejecting matter-form composition of spiritual substances. Note the passage cited below in n. 62. Also see *In VIII Phys.*, lect. 21, where Thomas is criticizing Averroes for rejecting true matter-form composition in heavenly bodies. Even if one conceded this position to Averroes, there would still be a potency for being (*potentia essendi*) in heavenly bodies (p. 615, n. 1153). Quodlibet 3 dates from Easter 1270 (Leon. 25.1.ix\*); *De substantiis separatis* after the first half of 1271 (Torrell, p. 350); *De spiritualibus creaturis*, between November 1267 and September 1268 (Leon. 24.1.22\*, 24\*); *In Phys.*, ca. 1268-1269 (Torrell, p. 342). All are relatively late works. Also see W. N. Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics*, pp. 89-101, esp. pp. 95-97.

actually exists. No *tertium quid* or third thing results from the union of the participating principle (essence) and that in which it participates (*esse*). The participated perfection—*esse*—cannot be predicated univocally of the various subjects which participate in it, but only analogically. The participating principle, or essence, specifies the kind of *esse* which is received, and therefore also establishes the kind of entity which results from this participation. The participating principle also limits *esse*, although as yet we have not developed this point. The participated perfection is not included in the nature or essence which participates in it, but is really distinct from that essence. Therefore essence and *esse* can only enter into composition with one another. While *esse* may be described as accidental insofar as it is not included within the essence of the participating subject, it is not to be regarded as if it were a predicamental accident. The participated perfection (*esse*) unites with the participating subject as act with potency, so as to result in a being that is not merely accidentally but essentially one, an *unum per se*. Finally, as we shall see below in Section 3 of this chapter, neither the participating principle (*essence*) nor the participated principle (*esse*) can exist without the other.

Granting all of this, however, one may still wonder how Thomas's view of the participation of beings in *esse* can be fitted into his threefold division of participation. Since it is not reducible either to logical participation or to the kind of real participation whereby matter participates in form or a subject participates in its accidents, what remains? As we have seen above, in his Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus* Thomas notes that being (*ens*) participates in *esse* in the way something concrete participates in something abstract. However, he has not identified participation of the concrete in the abstract with any of the three divisions. Hence it seems that the only possible remaining member of that division is that wherein an effect participates in its cause, and especially if it is not equal to the power of its cause. As is well known, Thomas often refers to beings other than God as participating in *esse*. On some occasions he means by this that they participate in *esse commune*, as we have seen from his Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus*.<sup>40</sup> On other occasions, however, he seems to mean that creatures participate in self-subsisting *esse*, or in God. How are we to understand each of these usages, and can we fit them together? This also presents us with a certain difficulty in our effort to follow what Thomas himself calls the philosophical order in presenting his metaphysical thought. In his theological writings he can follow the theological order and either take God's existence as given on the grounds of religious belief, or offer philosophical argumentation for his existence early on in these works (see ST I, q. 2, a. 3; SCG I, c. 13; *Compendium theologiae*, c. 3). He can then view created reality from the perspective of God, as it were. But were he to follow the philosophical

40. See n. 17 above for the text. Cf. te Velde, *Participation*, p. 79, although I would not want to suggest, as he does, that participation of the concrete in the abstract is a new and fourth mode. Cf. L. Dümpelmann, *Kreation als ontisch-ontologisches Verhältnis. Zur Metaphysik der Schöpfungstheologie des Thomas von Aquin* (Freiburg-Munich, 1969), pp. 24-27.

order in presenting his metaphysical thought, he would not be justified in assuming that God exists until he had offered philosophical evidence for this. He has proposed such knowledge as the end or goal of the metaphysician's inquiry rather than as its beginning. Consequently, to the extent that we find Thomas referring to created beings as participating in divine *esse*, we shall regard these references as based on the putative existence of God, which still remains to be demonstrated and which we will take up in later chapters. With this in mind, we may now turn to the next major section of this chapter.

## 2. Participation in *Esse*

In an interesting passage in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 45, a. 5, ad 1, Thomas draws a comparison between the way an individual participates in human nature, and the way any created being participates in the "nature of being." "Just as this human being participates in human nature, so does any created being (*ens*) participate, if I may so speak, in the nature of being, because God alone is his *esse*."<sup>41</sup> His qualifying remark suggests that we should not simply identify the "nature of being" (*natura essendi*) with another abstract and universal concept. Nor should we identify it with God (*esse subsistens*), who is here introduced in contrast with all else which only participates in *esse*. It must, therefore, refer to *esse commune*.

In fact, as Thomas explains in *Summa contra Gentiles* II, c. 52, *esse* is not divided in the way a genus is divided by differences into its species. If *esse* were so divided, it would already follow from this that there can only be one self-subsisting *esse*. But *esse* is rather divided by reason of the fact that it is received in this or in that subject. Hence it follows with even greater force that *esse subsistens* or any separate *esse* can only be one.<sup>42</sup> (I would note that this claim holds even if one does not yet assume that God in fact exists. At most there can only be one *esse subsistens*.) For our immediate purposes, the point to be stressed is this: Thomas is keenly aware of the difference between *esse commune* and any abstract and universal generic or specific notion.<sup>43</sup>

41. "Sed sicut hic homo participat humanam naturam, ita quodcumque ens creatum participat, ut ita dixerim, naturam essendi: quia solus Deus est suum esse, ut supra dictum est" (Leon. 4.470). In this article Thomas is addressing the question: "Utrum solius Dei sit creare."

42. "Sic igitur, si hoc ipsum quod est esse sit commune sicut genus, esse separatum per se subsistens non potest esse nisi unum. Si vero non dividatur differentiis, sicut genus, sed per hoc quod est huius vel illius esse, ut veritas habet; magis est manifestum quod non potest esse per se existens nisi unum" (ed. cit., p. 145). By way of contrast, Thomas concludes that nothing other than God can be its own *esse*.

43. Thomas makes the point that *esse* is not divided like a genus through differences in many different contexts, some of which will be noted below. Here one is also reminded of his procedure in the *De ente*, c. 4, in what I will call the second phase of his complex argumentation for real distinction of essence and *esse* in separate entities other than God. There he distinguishes three ways in which something can be multiplied in his effort to show that at most there can be one self-

Still, one might be tempted to identify *esse commune* with self-subsisting being or God as one recent writer, K. Kremer, has done.<sup>44</sup> Thomas strongly rejects any such suggestion. For instance, in *Summa contra Gentiles* I, c. 26, he attempts to show that God is not the formal *esse* for other things, or the *esse* whereby each of them exists.<sup>45</sup> One of his arguments runs this way. What is common to many things does not exist as such apart from the many except in the order of thought. Thus animal is not something which exists apart from Socrates and Plato and other animals except in the intellect. The intellect can grasp the form of animal by abstracting it from all individuating and specifying characteristics. Much less, continues Thomas, is *esse commune* to be regarded as something which exists apart from individual existent things, except in the order of thought. If, Thomas concludes, God were to be identified with *esse commune*, then God too would exist only in the order of thought or in the intellect.<sup>46</sup>

It is important to bear this in mind lest one misinterpret a passage such as the following, taken from Thomas's late *De substantiis separatis*, c. 8. There he is attempting to show against Avicbron that one need not postulate matter-form composition in nondivine separate substances (angels) in order to avoid identifying them with God. Some potency is present in such substances precisely because they are not *ipsum esse* but only participate in *esse*. Thomas then reasons that there can only be one subsisting *esse*, just as any form, when it is considered in itself and as separate, can only be one. So it is that things which differ in number are one in species, since the nature of the species simply considered in itself is one. If such a specific nature could exist in itself, then it would also be one in the order of reality. The same holds, continues Thomas, for a genus in reference to its species, until we reach *esse* itself, which is most common. That is, if any genus could exist apart from its species, it could only be one. But in the case of *esse*, Thomas implies, there is a

subsisting *esse* (Leon. 43.376:103-377:126). While he does not there explicitly refer to *esse commune*, the similarity in procedure is worth noting. For discussion see Ch. V below, Section 1, and n. 37.

44. *Die Neuplatonische Seinsphilosophie und ihre Wirkung auf Thomas von Aquin* (Leiden, 1966), especially pp. 357-72. For a long and critical review see Fabro, "Platonism, Neo-Platonism and Thomism: Convergencies and Divergencies," *New Scholasticism* 44 (1970), pp. 69-100, especially from p. 80 onward. For another critical reaction to Kremer's interpretation see Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, pp. 388-90.

45. This entire chapter bears reading, for it offers a host of arguments against any such pantheistic understanding of God, and concludes by considering and criticizing a series of reasons or motives which may have led some to accept it. One interesting possible source for such is a misinterpretation of a remark in c. 4 of Pseudo-Dionysius's *De caelesti hierarchia*: "Esse omnium est super-essentialis divinitas." For Thomas any attempt to interpret this as implying that God is the formal *esse* of all things is offset by the text itself, for then God would not be *above* (*super*) all things but in (*inter*) all things or even something of all things (*aliquid omnium*). See ed. cit., p. 28.

46. Ed. cit., p. 27. Note: "Multo igitur minus et ipsum esse commune est aliquid praeter omnes res existentes nisi in intellectu solum. Si igitur Deus sit esse commune, Deus non erit aliqua res nisi quae sit in intellectu tantum."

self-subsisting *esse*. Therefore he concludes that this self-subsisting *esse* can only be one, and that in addition to it no other subsisting entity can be pure *esse*.<sup>47</sup>

One should not infer from this, however, either that Thomas regards *esse commune* as another genus, albeit the most general one, or that he is identifying *esse commune* with God. His purpose is rather to show that if, *per impossibile*, a genus or species could subsist in itself, it could only be one. So too, we may reason in following the philosophical order, if there is a self-subsisting *esse*, it can only be one.

In other contexts Thomas brings out the difference between *esse commune* and self-subsisting *esse* in still another way. For instance, in *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 4, he explicitly makes the point that the divine *esse* which is identical with the divine essence (*substantia*) is not *esse commune* and is distinct from every other instance of *esse*. Hence through his very *esse* God differs from every other being. And in replying to the sixth objection Thomas acknowledges that being in general (*ens commune*) is such that nothing is added to it, but not in such a way that no addition could be made to it. On the other hand, the divine *esse* is such that nothing is added to it and nothing can be added to it. Therefore, he concludes, the divine *esse* is not *esse commune*.<sup>48</sup> In other words, being in general is neutral with respect to such addition. Self-subsisting *esse* excludes the possibility of any kind of addition.<sup>49</sup>

In *Summa theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 4, ad 1, Thomas makes this very same point. To be without addition in the sense that all addition is positively excluded is true of the divine *esse*. To be without addition in the neutral sense is true of *esse commune*. The only difference between the two discussions is that in the text from the *Summa* Thomas speaks of *esse commune* rather than of *ens commune*, as he does in his reply to objection 6 in the text from the *De potentia*. Even in the *De potentia*,

47. For such a misinterpretation see Kremer, *op. cit.*, pp. 370–71. For Thomas see Leon. 40.D55:164–187. Note in particular: “. . . inde est enim quod ea quae sunt diversa numero sunt unum specie quia natura speciei secundum se considerata est una: sicut igitur est una secundum considerationem dum per se consideratur, ita esset una secundum esse si per se existeret. Eademque ratio est de genere per comparisonem ad species, quousque perveniatur ad ipsum esse quod est communissimum.” In contrast with the unique *ipsum esse subsistens*, Thomas concludes that in everything else there is both *ipsum esse*, as act, and the substance (or essence) of the thing, which has *esse* and receives it as potency.

48. “Ad quartum dicendum, quod esse divinum, quod est eius substantia, non est esse commune, sed est esse distinctum a quolibet alio esse.” Also: “Ad sextum dicendum, quod ens commune est cui non fit additio, de cuius tamen ratione non est ut ei additio fieri non possit; sed esse divinum est esse cui non fit additio et de eius ratione est ut ei additio fieri non possit; unde divinum esse non est esse commune . . .” (*ed. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 192).

49. To illustrate the kind of “neutrality” he is here assigning to *ens commune* (and then, apparently, to *esse commune*), Thomas concludes his reply to objection 6 by drawing a comparison with animal taken in general (*animal commune*). If animal considered as such does not include the difference rational, neither does it exclude the possibility of its being added to animal. One should not conclude from this that Thomas has therefore identified *ens commune* as another albeit most universal genus. Given Kremer’s identification of *esse commune* and *esse subsistens*, he understandably finds this text and its parallels difficult (*op. cit.*, p. 361).

however, he then also refers to *esse commune* just as he had done in his reply to objection 4.<sup>50</sup>

In his late Commentary on the *Liber de causis* of 1271–1272 Thomas finds its unknown author considering the following objection. Someone might argue that if the first cause is pure *esse* (*esse tantum*), it is *esse commune* which is predicated of all things; therefore it is not something existing individually and distinct from all others. That which is common is not rendered individual except by being received in something. Since the first cause is, in fact, something individual and distinct from all others, it seems necessary to conclude that it has *yliaitim*, that is, something which receives its *esse*.<sup>51</sup>

Thomas comments that to this the *Liber de causis* replies that the very infinity of the divine *esse*, insofar as it is not restricted by any receiving principle, plays the role in the first cause which *yliaitim* exercises in other things. This is so because the divine goodness and the divine *esse* are rendered individual by reason of their very purity, that is, by reason of the fact that they are not received in anything else. Thomas explains that something is said to be an individual because it is not its nature to be found in many things. But this may happen in two ways. It may be owing to the fact that the thing in question is determined to some one subject in

50. For ST I, q. 3, a. 4, ad 1, see Leon. 4.42: “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod *aliquid cui non fit additio* potest intelligi dupliciter. Uno modo, ut de ratione eius sit quod non fiat ei additio. . . . Alio modo intelligitur aliquid cui non fit additio, quia non est de ratione eius quod sibi fiat additio. . . . Primo igitur modo, esse sine additione, est esse divinum: secundo modo, esse sine additione, est esse commune.” Here he is answering an objection which would identify God with *esse commune* or *ens commune* if one maintains that in God essence and *esse* are the same. Thomas’s reply to objection 6 in *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 2 is addressed to essentially the same objection. Cf. *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 4, a. 1, ad 1, where a similar objection and Thomas’s reply are expressed in terms of *ens commune* (Vol. 1, p. 219). For the same distinction see SCG I, c. 26, “Secundum” (*ed. cit.*, p. 28).

51. “Posset enim aliquis dicere quod, si causa prima sit esse tantum, videtur quod sit esse commune quod de omnibus praedicatur et quod non sit aliquid individualiter ens ab aliis distinctum; id enim quod est commune non individuatur nisi per hoc quod in aliquo recipitur. Causa autem prima est aliquid individualiter distinctum ab omnibus aliis. . . . Ergo videtur quod *necesse* sit dicere causam primam habere *yliaitim*, id est aliquid recipiens esse.” See *Sancti Thomae de Aquino super Librum de causis expositio*, H. D. Saffrey, ed. (Fribourg-Louvain, 1954), pp. 64–65. Thomas has greatly expanded upon a brief statement of this objection by the author of the *Liber de causis* (see Prop. 9), and seems to have read into it his own concern about not identifying the first cause with *esse commune*. The original objection reads: “Quod si dixerit aliquis: *necesse* est ut sit <habens> *yliaitim*, dicemus . . .” (p. 57). Thomas had attempted an etymological explanation of the rather mysterious expression *yliaitim* in the immediately preceding context, by tracing it back to the Greek term for matter: “Nam *intelligentia* habet *yliaitim*, id est aliquid materiale vel ad modum materiae se habens; dicitur enim *yliaitim* ab *yle*, quod est materia” (p. 64). In fact, the Arabic original from which the corrupted Latin transliteration was taken can mean “ornament,” “attribute,” “quality,” “state,” “condition,” “appearance,” or “form.” See R. Taylor, “St. Thomas and the *Liber de causis* on the Hylomorphic Composition of Separate Substances,” *Mediaeval Studies* 41 (1979), pp. 510–13. Nevertheless, as Taylor also points out, while being mistaken in thinking that *yliaitim* is derived from the Greek term for matter, Thomas “was quite correct in maintaining that in the *De causis* the intelligences do not have matter.” On the general accuracy of Thomas’s Commentary see C. d’Ancona, *Recherches sur le Liber de causis* (Paris, 1995), pp. 229–58. Cf. pp. 118–19.

which it is received. Or it may simply be owing to the fact that the thing in question is not of such a nature as to be received in something, and therefore is an individual of itself. Thus, if there were a separated whiteness which could exist apart from any receiving subject, it would be individual of itself. This kind of individuation in fact obtains in the case of created separate substances which are forms which have *esse*. In other words, such entities are not individuated by being received in matter. This explanation also applies, concludes Thomas, to the first cause which is subsisting *esse* itself. Most important for our immediate purposes, however, is Thomas's continuing refusal to identify *esse commune* with *esse subsistens*.<sup>52</sup>

If this is granted, it must also be acknowledged that there are other passages where Thomas refers to beings or to created beings as participating in (or from) self-subsisting *esse* or in (or from) their cause. How is this to be reconciled with his view that finite entities participate in *esse commune*? An extremely important discussion is contained in Thomas's Commentary on the *Divine Names*, c. V, lect. 2, dating either from 1261–1265 or from 1265–1268. Here Thomas finds Pseudo-Dionysius (= Dionysius) drawing out certain implications from his conclusion that God is the universal cause of being, that is, by showing that he is the cause of all particular beings including the various levels or degrees of beings. These levels include, continues Thomas, angelic substances in their various degrees; substances which are not bodies but are united to bodies, i.e., souls; corporeal substances themselves; accidents insofar as they fall into the nine supreme genera or predicaments; and finally, things which do not exist in the nature of things but only in thought and which are called beings of reason (*entia rationis*), such as genera, species, mental states (here illustrated by opinion), and others of this kind.<sup>53</sup>

Shortly thereafter Dionysius shows that God is the cause of *esse commune* itself. As Thomas interprets this, Dionysius first shows that *esse* is common to all things; then he explains how *esse commune* stands in relation to God. Granted the diversity in levels of beings, Thomas concludes his own discussion of the first step by noting that nothing can be described as an existent unless it has *esse*. This is what Thomas

52. Saffrey ed., pp. 65–66. Note in particular: "Sed ad hoc respondet quod ipsa *infinitas* divini *esse*, in quantum scilicet non est terminatum per aliquod recipiens, habet in causa prima vicem *ylatim* quod est in aliis rebus . . . ita divina *bonitas* et *esse* individuatur ex ipsa sui puritate per hoc scilicet quod ipsa non est recepta in aliquo. . . ."

53. In *librum beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*, C. Pera, ed. (Turin-Rome, 1950), c. V, lect. 2, p. 244, n. 655. On the dating see Torrell, p. 346. Earlier in his Commentary (see c. V, lect. 1) Thomas had commented on Pseudo-Dionysius's view that God is the universal cause of being. See in particular p. 234, n. 629, where Thomas explains that all things other than God have "esse receptum et participatum et ideo non habent esse secundum totam virtutem essendi, sed solus Deus, qui est ipsum esse subsistens, secundum totam virtutem essendi, esse habet." See pp. 234–35, n. 630, where he warns that Pseudo-Dionysius's statement about God's being the *esse* for existents (*ipse est esse existentibus*) should not be taken to mean that God himself is the formal *esse* of existents, but rather in a causal sense; p. 235, n. 631, where Thomas comments: "et iterum omnia *Ipsa* participant, sicut forma exemplari; et non solum est causa quantum ad fieri rerum, sed et quantum ad totum esse et durationem. . . ."

means, therefore, by referring to *esse* as common. It is that intrinsic principle, that act of being, found in every existing entity, that is, every substance, which accounts for the fact that it actually exists. As regards the second step, Thomas comments that *esse commune* is related to God and to other existents in very different fashion. In fact, Thomas spells out three such differences.<sup>54</sup>

First of all, other existents depend on *esse commune*, but God does not. Rather, *esse commune* itself depends on God. If we wonder how this can be, this becomes clearer as Thomas develops the second and third differences. Secondly, therefore, all other existents are contained under *esse commune* itself, but God is not. *Esse commune* itself rather falls under God's power. For God's power is more extended than is created *esse*. By this Thomas must mean that God can create many things which he does not actually create and to which *esse commune* does not actually extend.<sup>55</sup>

As a third difference Thomas explains that all other existents participate in *esse* (*esse commune*, we may assume), but that God does not. On the contrary, created *esse* is a kind of participation in God and a likeness of God. This is Thomas's way of explaining Dionysius's statement that *esse commune* "has" God. He means that it, i.e., the entities that fall under it, participate in a likeness of God. And in saying that God does not "have" *esse*, he means that God does not participate in it. So understood, Thomas does not here contradict his claim in his Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus* that *esse* itself does not participate in anything else, although being (*ens*) does. Thomas goes on to explain that God is an existent before every other substance and every other being and before every *aevum*, not only in terms of duration or order, but also in terms of causality. God is the cause of existence (*causa subsistendi*) for all other things, and their principle of being (*principium essendi*). He is also the end to which all things tend.<sup>56</sup>

Two questions might be raised about this passage: How do other existents depend upon *esse commune*? And how does *esse commune* itself depend on God? As

54. See p. 245, n. 658: ". . . ostendit quod Deus est causa ipsius esse communis; et circa hoc, duo facit: primo, ostendit quod ipsum esse est omnibus commune; secundo, ostendit qualiter ipsum esse commune se habeat ad Deum. . . ." Also see nn. 659–660. Note especially: "Et licet huiusmodi dignitates essendi superioribus tantum substantiis conveniant, tamen hoc ipsum quod est esse, ab omnibus existentibus non derelinquitur, quia nihil potest dici existens nisi habeat esse. . . ."

55. ". . . primo quidem, quantum ad hoc quod alia existentia dependent ab esse communi, non autem Deus, sed magis esse commune dependet a Deo; et hoc est quod dicit quod ipsum esse commune est ipsius Dei, tamquam ab Ipso dependens, et non ipse Deus est esse, id est ipsius esse communis, tamquam ab ipso dependens. Secundo, quantum ad hoc quod omnia existentia continentur sub ipso esse communi, non autem Deus, sed magis esse commune continetur sub eius virtute, quia virtus divina plus extenditur quam ipsum esse creatum. . . ." (p. 245, n. 660).

56. Ibid. Note in particular: "Tertio, quantum ad hoc quod omnia alia existentia participant eo quod est esse, non autem Deus, sed magis ipsum esse creatum est quaedam participatio Dei et similitudo Ipsius; et hoc est quod dicit quod esse commune habet Ipsum scilicet Deum, ut participans similitudinem Eius, non autem ipse Deus habet esse, quasi participans ipso esse." Cf. the texts from Thomas's Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus* cited above in nn. 15, 16, and 17. Cf. F. O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Leiden–New York–Cologne, 1992), pp. 141–43.

regards the first question, Thomas has indicated both that other existents are contained under *esse commune*, and that they participate in it. Here, then, we return to a theme we have already considered in other texts—other existents are said to participate in *esse commune*. This accounts for the fact that they are said to have *esse*, but are not identical with the *esse* (act of being) which they have or in which they participate. This should not be taken to imply, of course, that *esse commune* actually subsists as such apart from individual existents. It rather means that every individual created existent may be viewed as only sharing in or participating in *esse*, with the consequence that the *esse* (act of being) which is intrinsic to it is only a partial sharing in the fullness of *esse commune* when the latter is simply considered in itself.

As for our second question, in saying that *esse commune* depends upon God, Thomas has commented that it falls under God's power. I take him to mean by this that every individual existent exists only insofar as it is caused by God. Moreover, created *esse* has also now been described as a likeness of God. Hence, in participating in the *esse* which is efficiently communicated to it by God, the creature may also be said to participate in some way in God, that is, in his likeness. God is its exemplar cause as well as its efficient cause and its final cause.

With this we have rejoined the third member of Thomas's earlier division of participation in his Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus*, that whereby an effect may be said to participate in its cause, and especially if it is less perfect than its cause. Even so, I would suggest that participation of beings in *esse commune* should also be placed under this same third part of Thomas's division, both because it does not fall under either of the first two members, and because it is closely associated with participation in *esse subsistens*. In the case where a caused being participates in God, its first cause, it is clear enough that the effect is less perfect than the cause. It is also worth noting that Thomas often draws a close connection between being by participation and being caused. Thus in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 44, a. 1, he comments that if "something is found in some thing by participation, it must be caused in that thing by that to which it belongs essentially." He recalls that earlier in the *Summa* he has already shown that God is self-subsisting being (I, q. 3, a. 4), and that *esse subsistens* can only be one. Therefore all things other than God are not identical with their *esse*, but participate in *esse*. But things which differ according to varying degrees of participation in *esse*, so as to be more or less perfectly, are caused by one first being, which is in most perfect fashion.<sup>57</sup> In replying to the first objection within this same article, Thomas comments that it follows from the fact

57. Leon. 4.455. Note in particular: "Si enim aliquid invenitur in aliquo per participationem, necesse est quod causetur in ipso ab eo cui essentialiter convenit. . . . Relinquitur ergo quod omnia alia a Deo non sint suum esse, sed participant esse. Necesse est igitur omnia quae diversificantur secundum diversam participationem essendi, ut sint perfectius vel minus perfecte, causari ab uno primo ente, quod perfectissime est."

that something is a being (*ens*) by participation that it is caused by something else.<sup>58</sup> This is important if we would follow the philosophical order in presenting Thomas's metaphysics of participation. In the order of discovery one may move from one's discovery of individual beings as participating in *esse commune* to the caused character of such beings, and then on to the existence of their unparticipated source (*esse subsistens*). Once this is established, one can then speak of them as actually participating in *esse subsistens* as well.

Thomas makes a similar point in c. 3 of his *De substantiis separatis*, where he is bringing out some points of agreement between Plato and Aristotle concerning separate substances: "Everything which participates [in] something receives that which it participates from that *from* which it participates, and with respect to this that from which it participates is its cause."<sup>59</sup> This text is interesting because it makes three points: (1) something may participate (in) some perfection (accusative case); (2) it then participates in that *from* something else (ablative case); (3) the source is identified as the cause which accounts for the presence of the participated perfection in the participant.<sup>60</sup>

On other occasions Thomas refers even more directly to the participant as participating in its source or in God rather than in *esse commune*. In these cases he is dealing with what he at times refers to as an analogical cause or agent, and at times as one that is equivocal. His point is that the divine agent is not univocal with any creature.<sup>61</sup> As will be recalled, in the major text taken from his Commentary on the *Divine Names*, if a creature is said to participate in the divine *esse*, this is because a likeness or similitude of the divine is in some way produced in the creature.

58. According to the objection, a relationship of effect to cause does not seem to be included in the intelligible content (*ratio*) of beings. Certain things can be understood without this relation, and therefore they can exist without it. To this Thomas replies that while relationship to a cause is not included in the definition of a being which is caused, it does follow from what is included in its intelligibility: ". . . quia ex hoc quod aliquid per participationem est ens sequitur quod sit causatum ab alio" (Leon. 4.455).

59. ". . . omne autem participans aliquid accipit id quod participat ab eo a quo participat, et quantum ad hoc id a quo participat est causa ipsius: sicut aer habet lumen participatum a sole, qui est causa illuminationis ipsius" (Leon. 40.D46:11-15). It is true that Thomas is here presenting this as Plato's opinion, but also as one with which Aristotle agrees. But there can be no doubt that it is also Thomas's personal view, in light of the texts we have seen, and in light of the fuller discussion in c. VIII of this same treatise.

60. In this text the participated perfection is described as being in the participating subject. As will be seen below, this is one way in which Thomas refers to things other than God as participating (in) *esse*, i.e., in the *actus essendi* which is intrinsic to them. As will be noted, however, at times it is difficult to determine whether Thomas is referring explicitly to the *esse* which is intrinsically present in the participating entity or to *esse commune* when he refers to something as participating in *esse*.

61. For this distinction in Thomas's Commentary on the *Sentences* see Montagnes, *La doctrine de l'analogie de l'être*, pp. 47-49. For this in some later writings see Fabro, *Partecipazione e causalità* (Turin, 1960), p. 452, n. 2. See especially *Summa theologiae* I, q. 13, a. 5, ad 1 (quoted by Fabro); and *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 7, ad 7.

We have an interesting illustration of this in a text taken from Thomas's Disputed Question *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 1, of 1267–1268:

Everything which comes after the first being [*ens*], since it is not its *esse*, has an *esse* which is received in something by which the *esse* itself is limited; and thus in every creature the nature of the thing which participates *esse* is one, and the participated *esse* itself is something other. And since every thing participates in the First Act by assimilation insofar as it has *esse*, the participated *esse* in each thing must be related to the nature which participates [in] it as act to potency.<sup>62</sup>

In this text Thomas appeals to diversity of essence and *esse* (act of being) in everything other than God. (Thomas has argued for this on the ground that there can at most be one self-subsisting being which is unlimited act and which contains within itself the fullness of being.) From this diversity of essence and *esse* in other beings he concludes that in each of them *esse* (the act of being) is received by a distinct principle which limits that *esse*. This, of course, is its nature or essence. Here another important part of Thomas's views on participation of beings in *esse* is introduced, that is, that the participating and receiving principle limits the participated act of being or *esse*.<sup>63</sup> Now Thomas goes on to express this diversity of nature and received *esse* in terms of participation. The nature which participates *esse* is one, and the participated *esse* something other. Until this point he has been speaking of the nature of the thing as participating (in) *esse* where *esse* is expressed by the accusative case. But he goes on to explain that everything participates in the First Act (also in the accusative case) by imitation insofar as it has *esse*, and then applies act-potency composition to the participated *esse* and the participating nature.<sup>64</sup>

This is a helpful summarizing passage because here we find two usages of participation: (1) The essence or nature of the creature participates *esse*, taken here, apparently, as the *actus essendi* which is realized within this particular individual. (2) It participates in the First Act or God by imitation. Hence both composition and imitation are involved in participation. We shall return to this point below.

62. "Omne igitur quod est post primum ens, cum non sit suum esse, habet esse in aliquo receptum, per quod ipsum esse contrahitur; et sic in quolibet creato aliud est natura rei quae participat esse, et aliud ipsum esse participatum. Et cum quaelibet res participet per assimilationem primum actum in quantum habet esse, necesse est quod esse participatum in unoquoque comparetur ad naturam participantem ipsum, sicut actus ad potentiam." See *Quaestiones disputatae*, ed. cit., Vol. 2, p. 371. Here Thomas is again rejecting matter-form composition of spiritual substances. For the date see Torrell, pp. 335–36.

63. This point is extremely important in connection with Thomas's understanding of the relationship between essence and *esse* in finite beings. Its importance will also emerge in the following section of this chapter when we turn to the issue of participation by composition and participation by assimilation. Surprisingly, de Velde expresses doubt that Thomas really held that *esse* is limited by the essence or nature of a finite being, and, in my opinion, misinterprets (on this point) the text we have cited above in n. 62. See *Participation and Substantiality*, pp. 151–54.

64. As I shall point out below, it seems that in this text Thomas does not explicitly refer to the nature of the creature as participating in *esse commune*, but in the *esse* which is intrinsic to the creature and received and limited by the nature of the creature.

Similar language appears in c. 8 of Thomas's *De substantiis separatis*. There he notes that things which participate *esse* (accusative case) from the first being (ablative case) do not participate *esse* according to the universal mode of being, i.e., the fullness of being, as it is present in the first principle, but in particular fashion according to the determined mode of being which pertains to this genus or species.<sup>65</sup> And he observes that each and every thing is adapted to one determined mode of being in accord with the mode of its substance (essence). Thus the mode for a substance composed of matter and form will be in accord with its form by which it belongs to its given species. Therefore a thing composed of matter and form participates *esse* itself through its form, from God, according to its proper mode.<sup>66</sup>

Here again Thomas refers to things as participating *esse* from the first cause. I conclude from this that the *esse* in which they participate according to this passage is not the divine *esse* but the act of being insofar as it is realized in particular fashion in the given participants. They participate *esse* from the first being, as Thomas phrases it this time. Again he singles out the important role assigned to essence, or to the form principle within the essence of a matter-form composite, that is, to determine the essence's appropriate mode or way of receiving *esse*. Shortly thereafter he refers to matter when it is simply considered in itself as having *esse* only in potency, and this, he continues, belongs to it because of its participation in [literally: of] the first being. Simply viewed in itself, matter lacks a form through which it participates in *esse* in actuality according to its proper mode.<sup>67</sup>

In another text from Quodibet 12, q. 4, a. 1 (dating from Easter 1272), Thomas refers to the fact that something which is in potency is actualized in that it participates in a higher act. And something is rendered fully in act by reason of the fact that it participates by likeness in the First and Pure Act (accusative case). This Thomas immediately identifies as *esse subsistens*. In short, here he is referring to a creature as participating by likeness or by imitation in subsisting *esse* or God.<sup>68</sup>

65. "Sed considerandum est quod ea quae a primo ente esse participant non participant esse secundum universalem modum essendi, secundum quod est in primo principio, sed particulariter secundum quendam determinatum essendi modum qui convenit vel huic generi vel huic speciei" (Leon. 40.D55:199–204). Here Thomas is refuting a series of arguments offered by Avicbron in favor of matter-form composition of spiritual substances.

66. Leon. 40.D55:205–212. Note especially: ". . . sic igitur res composita ex materia et forma per suam formam fit participativa ipsius esse a Deo secundum proprium modum."

67. ". . . non enim est esse rei neque forma eius neque materia ipsius, sed aliquid adveniens rei per formam. Sic igitur in rebus ex materia et forma compositis materia quidem secundum se considerata secundum modum suae essentiae habet esse in potentia, et hoc ipsum est ei ex aliqua participatione primi entis, caret vero secundum se considerata forma per quam participat esse in actu secundum proprium modum . . ." (Leon. 40.D55:216–225).

68. On the date see Leon. 25.1.158\*–160\*. For the text see Leon. 25.2.404:16–25: "Sciendum ergo quod unumquodque quod est in potentia et in actu, fit actu per hoc quod participat actum superiorem; per hoc autem aliquid maxime fit actu, quod participat per similitudinem primum et purum actum; primum autem actus est esse subsistens per se. . . ." The text continues: ". . . unde completio unumquodque recipit per hoc quod participat esse. Unde esse est completivum omnis formae, quia per hoc completur quod habet esse, et habet esse cum est actu. . ." Here again Thomas refers

On some occasions Thomas describes this kind of participation, that of creatures in God, by reversing his perspective, that is, by looking at things from the side of God. For instance, in his Commentary on the *Divine Names*, within a theological context, he contrasts the way in which the second and third persons of the Trinity proceed from the Father and the way creatures come forth from God. In the procession of divine persons the divine essence itself is communicated to the persons which proceed; and so there are different persons which possess one and the same divine essence. But in the procession of creatures the divine essence itself is not communicated to the creatures which proceed from God. To admit this, of course, would be to fall into a pantheistic understanding of creation. The divine essence itself remains uncommunicated, continues Thomas, or as he also phrases it, unparticipated; but its likeness, through those things which it communicates to creatures, is propagated and multiplied in creatures. In this way, therefore, divinity may be said to proceed into creatures and to be multiplied in them, that is, by likeness but not by its very essence.<sup>69</sup>

Thomas is evidently much concerned in this context about avoiding any semblance of a pantheistic interpretation of the procession of creatures from God. In fact, as he has implied, if one were to understand participation as meaning that the divine essence itself is communicated to creatures, this would involve a kind of pantheism. What Thomas does admit is that a likeness of the divine essence is communicated to creatures and multiplied in them. In fact, a bit farther on in this same Commentary he harks back to this same passage and explains that there he has shown that God is participated in by creatures in such fashion that he still remains unparticipated with respect to his own substance (or essence). In other words, God does not communicate his own substance or essence to creatures.<sup>70</sup>

In sum, it seems that Thomas refers to beings other than God as participating in *esse* in three different senses. (1) At times he means thereby that they participate in *esse commune*. This is to say that each finite being merely shares in, without possessing in its fullness, the perfection signified by the term *esse*. Every such entity exists only insofar as it possesses its particular act of being. To say that it participates in *esse commune*—the act of being viewed in general—is not to imply that there is some kind of subsisting universal *esse commune* of which each particular entity's *esse*

within the same context to something as participating in *esse subsistens* (God), and then as participating in *esse*, where *esse* is that which perfects the thing's form, in other words, the intrinsic *actus essendi*.

69. See c. II, lect. 3, p. 51, n. 158.

70. See lect. 4, pp. 56–57, n. 178: "Ostensum est autem supra, quod Deus ita participatur a creaturis per similitudinem, quod tamen remanet imparticipatus super omnia per proprietatem suae substantiae." In this same context (n. 177) Thomas has referred to Dionysius's remark that divine things are known to us only by participations. Thomas comments that this participation is twofold: one insofar as our intellect participates in the intellectual power and the light of divine wisdom; another insofar as things which can be grasped by our intellect themselves participate in the divine, as things are good by participating in divine Goodness, and things are existent and living "per participationem divini Esse seu Vitae."

(act of being) would simply be a piece or a part. *Esse commune* does not exist as such apart from individual existents, except in the order of thought. (2) On other occasions Thomas refers to such entities as participating in the First Act, or the First *Esse*, or the First Being, and as he often adds, by similitude or by imitation. This does not imply that they have a part of God's being. It rather means that in every finite substantial entity there is a participated likeness or similitude of the divine *esse*, that is, an intrinsic act of being (*esse*) which is efficiently caused in it by God. (3) On still other occasions, when Thomas refers to such entities (or natures) as participating in *esse*, he seems to have in mind immediately the *esse* which is realized within such entities as their particular acts of being (*actus essendi*). While this usage may strike Thomas's reader as unusual, it may be helpful to recall that frequently in such contexts Thomas uses "participate" (*participare*) as a transitive verb with *esse* as its direct object.<sup>71</sup>

Even so, for Thomas to speak in this third way is also for him to indicate, at least by implication, that any finite substance simply has or participates in *esse commune* without exhausting it. The first usage, whereby such substances or natures participate in *esse commune*, whether explicitly expressed or implied by the third usage, does not exclude the second major usage, whereby they participate in self-subsisting *esse*. In fact, as we shall suggest below, in the order of philosophical discovery, the first usage should ultimately lead to the second. In the order of nature, on the other hand, the second usage is the ultimate metaphysical foundation for the first. If finite natures or substances do in fact participate in *esse commune*, this is ultimately because they participate in *esse subsistens*.<sup>72</sup>

71. For an early explicit text which first suggested this reading to me see *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 2 (Mandonnet ed., Vol. 1), p. 491: ". . . quaelibet res participat suum esse creatum, quo formaliter est, et unusquisque intellectus participat lumen per quod recte de re iudicat. . . ." For other examples see ST I, q. 44, a. 1 (cited above in n. 57): ". . . omnia alia a Deo non sint suum esse, sed participant esse"; *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 1 (see n. 62 and the English translation in my corresponding text, and n. 64 for discussion); *De substantiis separatis* (cited in nn. 65, 66, 67). While the passage cited in n. 65 might leave one in doubt as to whether Thomas has in mind *esse commune* or the participant's intrinsic *actus essendi*, the latter interpretation is strongly suggested by the remainder of the text as quoted in nn. 66 and 67. Also see Quodlibet 12, q. 4, a. 1 (see n. 68).

72. It is not always easy to determine which of these three usages of *esse* Thomas has in mind, and on occasion it is especially difficult to decide between the first and the third usages, i.e., between participating in *esse commune* and in *esse* taken as the *actus essendi* which is realized intrinsically within the participant. See, for instance, *Quaestiones disputatae De anima*, q. 6, ad 2: ". . . dicendum quod ipsum esse est actus ultimus qui participabilis est ab omnibus; ipsum autem nihil participat. Unde si sit aliquid quod sit ipsum esse subsistens sicut de Deo dicimus, nichil participare dicimus. Non est autem similis ratio de aliis formis subsistentibus, quas necesse est participare ipsum esse et comparari ad ipsum ut potentia ad actum" (Leon, 24.1.51:268–275). The first reference to *ipsum esse* would make one think of *esse commune*; but the final usage of *ipsum esse* may refer to the subsisting form's intrinsic *actus essendi*. This usage is more evidently intended in the corpus of Thomas's reply: ". . . nam materia ex hoc quod recipit formam participat esse. Sic igitur esse consequitur ipsam formam, nec tamen forma est suum esse, cum sit eius principium. . . . Et ita in formis per se subsistentibus invenitur et potentia et actus, in quantum ipsum esse est actus formae subsistentis, quae non est suum esse" (Leon, 24.1.51:232–247). Also see SCG I, c. 22 (ed. cit., p. 24): "Amplius. Omnis res

This brings us to still another important difference between participation of beings in *esse* and the other major kinds of participation singled out by Thomas in his Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus*. Not only do finite entities participate in *esse commune*; this ultimately leads him to posit the existence of a source which is self-subsisting *esse*.<sup>73</sup> In other cases of real participation, Thomas will not permit us to conclude to the existence of a self-subsisting accidental form in which particular substances participate, or a self-subsisting substantial form in which individual instances of matter would participate. While Thomas stoutly resists any suggestion that *esse commune* subsists as such outside the mind apart from individual existents, self-subsisting *esse* does exist. It is his distinction between *esse commune* and self-subsisting *esse* which permits him to maintain this view, and yet to avoid any Platonic theory of subsisting universal forms.<sup>74</sup>

This also nicely fits together with another distinctive position of Aquinas, his refusal to include God within the subject of metaphysics. As we have already seen in Ch. I, for Thomas the subject of metaphysics is what he sometimes describes as *ens commune* (being in general), and sometimes as being as being or *ens in quantum ens*. He stands out among his contemporaries for refusing to admit that God himself falls under this notion of being which is the very subject of metaphysics. God can and indeed should be studied by the metaphysician, but only as the principle or cause of *ens commune* or of that which falls under *ens commune*. God himself is not included within *ens commune*.<sup>75</sup> If we may assume that *esse commune* is coterminous in extension with *ens commune*, then we may conclude that the subject of metaphysics is limited to the kinds of being which participate in *esse*, and that this

est per hoc quod habet esse. Nulla igitur res cuius essentia non est suum esse [actus essendi, presumably], est per essentiam suam, sed participatione alicuius, scilicet ipsius esse [esse commune or actus essendi?]. . . ." For two other references to participation in *esse* in the sense of the *actus essendi* see Quodlibet 3, q. 8, a. 1 (cited above in n. 39); and *In VIII Phys.*, lect. 21, p. 615, n. 1153: "Necesse est enim quod omnis substantia simplex subsistens, vel ipsa sit suum esse, vel participet esse. . . . Omnis ergo substantia quae est post primam substantiam simplicem, participat esse. Omne autem participans componitur ex participante et participato, et participans est in potentia ad participatum."

73. See, for instance, ST I, q. 44, a. 1, as cited above in n. 57; *De substantiis separatis*, c. 8, as cited above in nn. 65, 67; Quodlibet 12, q. 4, a. 1, as cited in n. 68; *Quaestiones de anima*, q. 6, ad 2 (cited in n. 72). Arguments for God's existence based on participation also make this same point. See ST I, q. 2, a. 3 for the fourth way. It is also clearly implied by the three arguments offered in *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 5, to show that there can be nothing apart from God which is not created by him. See ed. cit., p. 49, especially arguments 2 (the way of Aristotle) and 3 (the way of Avicenna). See Clarke, "The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas," *Explorations in Metaphysics*, pp. 94–95, 97.

74. Cf. the texts cited above from SCG I, c. 26 (n. 46); *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 4 and ad 6 (n. 48); ST I, q. 3, a. 4, ad 1 (n. 50).

75. See *In De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 6 (Leon. 50.141:323–324, 330–331), where *ens* is twice identified as the subject of metaphysics; q. 5, a. 4 (Leon. 50.154:161–162), where this subject is referred to as *ens in quantum est ens*, and where *res divinae* are identified not as the subject of metaphysics, but as principles of the subject (p. 154:176–178); Prooemium to his Commentary on the *Metaphysics* (ed. cit., p. 2), where he identifies this subject as *ens commune* and refuses to include separate substances within it. These (God and intellectual substances) are rather studied by metaphysics as causes of its subject, i.e., *ens commune*. Also see *In IV Met.*, lect. 1, p. 151, n. 533. Being (*ens*) is the subject.

subject includes the *esse commune* in which they participate, but not the *esse subsistens* in which they also participate. As we have already seen from the important text from Thomas's Commentary on the *Divine Names*, there he excludes God from *esse commune*. As one would expect, if God does not fall under *ens commune*, the subject of metaphysics, no more does he fall under *esse commune*.<sup>76</sup>

Perhaps a word should be said here about the precise relationship between *ens commune* and *esse commune*. Are they completely identical? As Thomas indicates in his Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus*, *ens* and *esse* are both most universal, and hence, I have suggested, equal in extension. But he had also noted there that while *esse* may be participated in by other things, *ens* may not be. When Thomas describes the subject of metaphysics as *ens commune* or as *ens in quantum est ens*, he is using *ens* in such fashion as to include both the essence principle and the (*esse*) principle, the act of being, found within any finite substance. Hence, strictly speaking, the subject of metaphysics for Aquinas is not existence or even the act of being (*esse*) but being (*ens*), which includes both essence and the act of being (*esse*).<sup>77</sup> But, as we have now seen in many different contexts, Thomas constantly refers to finite entities as participating in *esse*. Since he has denied that *ens* can be participated in, and since he has correlated the *esse* in which they participate with their nature or essence as act and potency, it seems clear that *esse commune* also signifies the act principle (*actus essendi*) which is required for any concrete entity (*ens*) to be realized in actuality; but it signifies this act principle considered universally and in its fullness of perfection rather than as received in any given participant. It follows from this that while *ens commune* and *esse commune* are equal in extension, and while God does not fall under either of them, they are not completely identical and are not perfectly convertible with one another.<sup>78</sup>

76. See above, n. 55, for the text from the Commentary on the *Divine Names*. For an unsuccessful attempt to include God within Thomas's understanding of *esse commune* see J. de Vries, "Das 'esse commune' bei Thomas von Aquin," *Scholastik* 39 (1964), pp. 163–77. For well taken critiques see Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, pp. 390–94; te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, pp. 187–94.

77. In addition to the texts just cited (see n. 75), see *In IV Met.*, lect. 2, p. 155, n. 553. There Thomas makes the point that if the name *res* is taken from quiddity, the name *ens* is taken from the *actus essendi*. Both designate the same reality, however, as Thomas repeats in n. 558: "Et ideo hoc nomen *Ens* quod imponitur ab ipso esse, significat idem cum nomine quod imponitur ab ipsa essentia." In short, both *res* and *ens* are convertible insofar as they designate the concrete entity, including both its essence and its *esse*. For the same see *De veritate*, q. 1, a. 1 (Leon. 22.1.5:131–139), where Thomas offers his derivation of the transcendental properties of being. For the point that *ens* is that which has *esse*, see, for instance, ST I–II, q. 26, a. 4: "Sicut enim *ens* simpliciter est quod habet esse, *ens* autem secundum quod quod est in alio . . ." (Leon. 6.190). Also see *In XII Met.*, lect. 1, p. 567, n. 2419: "Nam *ens* dicitur quasi esse habens, hoc autem solum est substantia, quae subsistit." For references both to *esse* and to *ens* as *communissimum* see *In De Hebdomadibus*, cited above in nn. 16 and 17.

78. Thus while one can say that *ens commune* is the subject of metaphysics, one should not say this of *esse commune*. This is because *esse* here signifies the *actus essendi* rather than "that which is," which *ens* signifies and which therefore *ens commune* also signifies.



At the same time, it should also be noted that *esse* has been applied by Thomas to self-subsisting *esse* or God, in which creatures participate. When used in this way, of course, as *esse subsistens*, it is no longer included within *esse commune* nor, for that matter, within *ens commune*. Additional confirmation for this is found in Thomas's Commentary on Prop. 6 of the *Liber de causis*. There he is trying to explain what certain Platonists had in mind by stating that the First Cause is above being (*supra ens*). Rightly understood, says Thomas, this means that the First Cause is above being (*ens*) insofar as it (the First Cause) is unlimited or infinite *esse*. Being (*ens*), continues Thomas, is restricted to that which participates in *esse* in finite fashion. This, in turn, is proportioned to our intellect, whose object is quiddity (*quod quid est*), as is said in Bk III of the *De anima*. Therefore that alone can be grasped by our intellect which has a quiddity that participates in *esse*. Because God's quiddity is his very *esse*, he is beyond our understanding; that is, we cannot know him as he is in himself.<sup>79</sup> While Thomas is here commenting on a highly Neoplatonic source, he certainly agrees that we cannot arrive at quidditative knowledge of God in this life. This is consistent with his refusal to include self-subsisting *esse* within *ens commune*. Whether he would deny that being (*ens*) taken in some other way can be applied analogically to God is a point we shall defer for consideration in our discussion of analogical predication of divine names.<sup>80</sup>

### 3. Participation, Composition, Limitation

With this we come to an issue which has divided Fabro and Geiger from the time when their two books on participation first appeared.<sup>81</sup> How does one ultimately account for the fact that finite beings are indeed finite or limited? Is it by appealing to the intrinsic composition within any such being of an essence principle which limits the *actus essendi* which it receives? Or is it rather by appealing to the fact that the *esse* of every such being is only a limited and deficient imitation of the divine being? In other words, when it comes to the ultimate explanation for the limitation of the many within the order of being, is this owing to what Geiger

79. *Sancti Thomae de Aquino super Librum de causis expositio*, Saffrey ed., p. 47. Note in particular: "Sed secundum rei veritatem causa prima est supra ens in quantum est ipsum esse infinitum, ens autem dicitur id quod finite participat esse, et hoc est proportionatum intellectui nostro cuius obiectum est quod quid est ut dicitur in III<sup>o</sup> *De anima*, unde illud solum est capabile ab intellectu nostro quod habet quidditatem participantem esse; sed Dei quidditas est ipsum esse, unde est supra intellectum." For Aristotle see *De anima* III, c. 4 (429b 10 ff.).

80. For fuller discussion of this, see Ch. XIII below.

81. Fabro's *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino* first appeared in 1939 (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 1939). Here I have used the second edition (Turin: Società editrice internazionale, 1950). Geiger's *La participation dans la philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 1942) was reissued by the same publisher in 1953 (the edition I am using here). Geiger notes at the end of his Introduction that his work was completed when the first edition of Fabro's book became available to him. He did manage to incorporate various references to Fabro in the notes of his work, including points of agreement and disagreement.

calls participation by composition or to what he calls participation by similitude or formal hierarchy? In accounting for the limited character of finite beings, Fabro assigns primacy to participation by composition, though he refuses to separate composition and imitation as sharply as he believes Geiger has done. Geiger, on the other hand, assigns primacy to participation by similitude in accounting for this. If the *esse* of a given being is limited, this is first and foremost because it imitates its divine source only to a limited degree, not because it is limited by the essence which receives it. Limitation is prior in nature to composition.<sup>82</sup>

This disagreement in interpretation centers in large measure on what Fabro calls transcendental participation rather than predicamental participation. By predicamental participation he means that all the participants have in themselves the same formality in terms of its essential content, and that the participated characteristic does not exist as such apart from its participants.<sup>83</sup> Here one has to do with "univocal formalities, such as genera with respect to species, and species with respect to individuals."<sup>84</sup> In other words, Fabro here has in mind the first two major kinds of participation distinguished by Thomas in his Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus*—logical participation and real participation, whether of matter in form or of a substance in its accidents. By transcendental participation he rather means that the participants have in themselves only a lesser likeness or similitude of the participated perfection, which does exist in itself either as a property of a higher entity, or in the pure state as a pure and subsisting formality in full possession of itself. In the last-mentioned case we are dealing with the participation of beings in *esse*, with the consequence that the participated perfection can only be predicated analogically of the participants, not univocally.<sup>85</sup>

Geiger, on the other hand, distinguishes two different systems of participation, that is, participation by composition and participation by similitude. In the first case, participation is based upon a duality of a receiving subject and an element which is received. Here the fundamental element is composition. To participate is

82. For an overview of this controversy see Helen James John, *The Thomist Spectrum* (New York, 1966), pp. 88–97, 108–18. For a good résumé of Fabro's personal reactions to Geiger's approach see Fabro, *Participation et causalité selon s. Thomas d'Aquin*, pp. 63–73.

83. See *La nozione metafisica*, pp. 317–18.

84. See Fabro, "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy," *Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1974), pp. 471–73.

85. See *La nozione metafisica*, p. 318. As Fabro also writes: "La partecipazione *analogica*, in concreto, è quella della creatura dal Creatore che, essendo l'essere per essenza, in sé riassume . . . tutte le altre perfezioni, *formalmente* se sono perfezioni pure, *virtualmente* se miste." For support he cites two interesting texts: *In II Sent.* d. 16, q. 1, a. 1, ad 3 (Mandonnet ed., Vol. 2, p. 398): ". . . convenientia potest esse dupliciter: aut duorum participantium aliquod unum, et talis convenientia non potest esse Creatoris et creaturae . . . ; aut secundum quod unum per se est simpliciter, et alterum participat de similitudine ejus quantum potest . . . et talis convenientia esse potest creaturae ad Deum . . . ;" *De veritate*, q. 23, a. 7, ad 10: ". . . creatura non dicitur conformari Deo quasi participantium eandem formam quam ipsa participat, sed quia Deus est substantialiter ipsa forma cuius creatura per quandam imitationem est participativa . . ." (Leon. 22.3.672:336–340).

to possess something one has received. It is also the case that if the receiving subject is less perfect than the received perfection, the subject will limit that perfection. Hence limitation is also present in almost all instances of participation. Nonetheless, philosophies which adopt this kind of participation derive limitation from composition. Composition is prior in the order of nature. Geiger proposes this as a definition of participation by composition: it is the reception and consequently the possession of an element, which has the role of form, by a subject which has the role of matter. If limitation also results therefrom, this is owing to the imperfection of the receiving subject; but composition is essential.<sup>86</sup>

By participation by similitude or formal hierarchy, on the other hand, Geiger has in mind more or less perfect states of one and the same form and their hierarchical ordering; this ordering is based on their unequal degrees of perfection. In this case participation immediately expresses a diminished and particularized state of an essence each time it is not realized in the absolute fullness of its formal content. According to this approach, the many, when contrasted with the unity of the first principle, is explained first and foremost not by intrinsic composition but by formal inequality. If X and Y both imitate a common source for their perfection, this is because X does so only to its given degree, and Y does so only to its given degree. Composition may also enter in here. Hence the distinction between the two kinds of participation does not rest on the presence or absence of composition, but on the relationship between composition and limitation. If composition accounts for limitation, we have participation by composition. If limitation is prior in the order of nature to composition, we have participation by similitude or formal hierarchy.<sup>87</sup>

According to Geiger, Thomas found himself faced with the problem of the One and the Many, and with these two different ways of accounting for multiplicity. While Geiger argues that they are indeed two complete systems of participation, he denies that Thomas simply chose one over the other.<sup>88</sup> Nonetheless, on Geiger's account, in developing his highly original metaphysics of participation, including that of beings in *esse*, Thomas assigns primacy to participation by similitude or formal hierarchy.<sup>89</sup>

86. Geiger, *La participation*, pp. 27–28.

87. *La participation*, pp. 28–29.

88. On the two systems as Thomas was faced with them, see pp. 63–73. On Thomas's refusal simply to choose one or the other see p. 31.

89. P. 47. There he concentrates on Thomas's solution for the problem faced by Boethius in his *De Hebdomadibus*: How are creatures good—substantially or by participation? Geiger finds Thomas substituting for participation by composition "la participation par similitude ou par hiérarchie formelle, où la participation n'exclut pas, bien plus où elle implique l'identité entre l'essence de ce qui est par participation et ce qu'on lui attribue." For continued insistence on Thomas's assigning of primacy to participation by similitude see pp. 49–55. See pp. 60–61, n. 3, where Geiger maintains the same when it comes to the case of essence as participating in *esse*. He insists that if a being is this kind of being by reason of its essence, and real by reason of its existence, one must account for the diversity and inequality which arise from the side of the essence. Here one must appeal to participation by formal hierarchy. The essence "which participates in [a] existence is itself a participation of

Geiger acknowledges that participation by composition is implied in the second main division from Thomas's text from his Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus*. But he notes that participation by an effect in its cause (the third main division) falls on a different level. Even so, it is in terms of the note of formal inequality (of the participated perfection in the participants) that this kind of participation bears some similarity with the first two types. An effect does not receive in all its fullness that which its cause is capable of producing.<sup>90</sup> This is also true when we are dealing with *esse* as it is realized in finite beings. According to Geiger, participation by composition does not play a fundamental role in Thomas's account of the participation of beings from the First Being. Geiger acknowledges that in finite beings existence (*esse*) is always conjoined with a distinct essence principle. But this composition of essence and *esse* does not of itself account for the fact that *esse* is present in such entities in limited fashion. Rather, both essence and *esse* are to be regarded as participations with respect to the First Being and therefore as limited. However, in a note he does acknowledge, if somewhat begrudgingly, that Thomas usually explains the finite character of a creature by appealing to the "limits" of its *esse*, which themselves depend on the finite character of the creature's nature or essence. But he sees in this an implicit affirmation by Thomas of the primacy of participation by formal limitation (similitude). Because of this, Fabro (and Nicolas) charge that Geiger has in effect undermined the ultimate justification for defending real composition and distinction of essence and *esse* in creatures.<sup>91</sup>

In reacting to this, I would first recall that neither the division of participation proposed by Fabro between transcendental and predicamental participation nor that offered by Geiger between participation by composition and participation by formal similitude appears as such with these exact titles in Thomas's texts. Nonetheless, as we have seen from his Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus* and from various other supporting texts, elements of each of the above can be found there. If I may now bypass the first member of Thomas's threefold division, logical participation, and concentrate on the remaining two, I would recall that under the second division Thomas has offered two examples that clearly involve real composition between a participant and a participated perfection—that of matter in form, and

[de] the First Perfection, of which it expresses only a limited and fragmentary aspect." Also see pp. 64–65, 67, 217, and especially 392–98.

90. Pp. 49, 78.

91. Pp. 392–93; 394, n. 2. Geiger seems to have some difficulty in dealing with Thomas's view that act is limited by a distinct potency (see p. 394, n. 1, and n. 2). The text he analyzes in n. 1, p. 396 (from *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 1) also seems to work against his stress on the primacy of participation by similitude. Indeed, he himself comments that composition appears as an a priori condition for the existence and possibility of a finite being. Cf. J.-H. Nicolas, "Chronique de Philosophie," *Revue thomiste* 48 (1948), pp. 555–64. Fabro has referred to this as the most decisive and radical critique of Geiger's conclusions. For the charge that Geiger's approach undermines the ultimate reason for defending the real distinction of essence and *esse* in creatures, see Fabro, *Participation et causalité*, p. 64, where he is quoting (with approval) from Nicolas, p. 561.

that of a subject in its accidents. But I have also concluded from analyzing his texts that one should not place Thomas's account of the participation of beings in *esse* under this member of Thomas's division. I have rather suggested that it should fall under the third major division, that whereby an effect participates in its cause, especially when the cause is of a higher order than the effect. However participation in *esse* may be understood by Thomas in a particular context—whether as participation in *esse commune*, or in a finite being's own *actus essendi*, or in *esse subsistens*—it seems to me that it should still be placed under this third division.

It should also be noted that if the examples of participation offered by Thomas in the second division (whether of matter in form or of a subject in its accident) involve real distinction and composition of participant and participated perfection, one should not automatically assume that all of the other conditions realized in these two instances must also apply to other cases where participation involves composition. As we have now seen in various contexts, composition is involved in Thomas's account of the participation of beings in *esse*. A participant is united with that in which it participates (*participatum*) as potency and act. Within any participating being, its essence enters into composition with its act of being (*esse*). In addition to this, although I have not yet stressed this point, Thomas insists that act as such is not self-limiting. If one finds limited instances of act, especially of the *actus essendi*, this can only be because in every such case the act principle (*esse*) is received and limited by a really distinct potency principle. Hence composition with essence is necessary if one is to account for the limitation of *esse* within a given entity. On this point Fabro is surely correct.<sup>92</sup>

It is also true, of course, that according to Aquinas, the essence principle and the act of being (*actus essendi*) of any creature are both created by God simultaneously, since the entire being is created, including both.<sup>93</sup> Hence, at least within

92. For discussion see Nicolas, "Chronique de Philosophie," pp. 561–62; Wippel, *Metaphysical Themes*, pp. 157–61, and Ch. V below; J.-D. Robert, "Le principe: 'Actus non limitatur nisi per potentiam subjectivam realiter distinctam,'" *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 47 (1949), pp. 44–70. For some texts where Thomas accepts and uses the principle that act as such or *esse* is not self-limiting, see *In I Sent.*, d. 43, q. 1, a. 1 (Mandonnet ed., Vol. 1, p. 1003); *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 2, a. 1 (p. 202); *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 5, a. 1, sed contra (p. 226); SCG I, c. 43; ST I, q. 7, a. 1; *Compendium theologiae*, c. 18 (Leon. 42.88:7–8). See *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 1. Note especially: ". . . habet esse in aliquo receptum, per quod ipsum esse contrahitur" (cited above in n. 62). Cf. n. 63 above and te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, pp. 153–54, who refuses to see in texts such as these Thomas's acceptance of the view that *esse* is limited by a receiving principle. His remark on p. 154 indicates that he believes that to admit this would commit Thomas to holding that the received nature would already exist "before" it received *esse*. No reputable interpreter of Aquinas would accept this consequence, of course, but I do not think that acceptance of this central axiom in Thomas's metaphysics (that unreceived act or *esse* is unlimited) commits one to any such position. For a more extensive examination of the textual evidence pointing to the presence of this axiom in Aquinas's metaphysics see my "Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom That Unreceived Act Is Unlimited," *Review of Metaphysics* 51 (1998), pp. 533–64.

93. See, for instance, *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 5, ad 2: "Ad secundum dicendum, quod ex hoc ipso quod quidditati esse attribuitur, non solum esse, sed ipsa quidditas creari dicitur: quia antequam

Thomas's perspective, there is little justification for Geiger's fear that appeal to participation by composition might lead to the defense of some kind of preexisting subject or essence which would be independent from God and would wait for existence to be created and poured into it at some subsequent point in time. Any such reading of Aquinas would, of course, be a caricature, but one not too far removed from an interpretation actually imputed to a more traditional Thomism by some, such as William Carlo. Such a fear also seems to haunt Geiger's discussions of this issue. Perhaps this is because he has assumed without justification that an application of what he understands by participation by composition to the case of *esse* will carry with it unacceptable consequences which were part of certain theories of participation prior to Aquinas, or which may apply to participation of matter in form or of a subject in its accidents, but not to participation of beings in *esse*.<sup>94</sup>

Moreover, some such misunderstanding seems to have led te Velde to the mistaken view that if one holds that essence receives and limits its corresponding act of being (*esse*), it must be produced by God before its act of being and only subsequently actualized by its act of being, which God also produces.<sup>95</sup> Such an interpretation would lead to the absurd consequence that essences would preexist (taken temporally) before receiving their acts of being, something that Thomas would, of course, never have admitted. It seems to me, however, that both Geiger and te Velde have failed to see (1) that here Thomas is applying in an appropriately adapted way the adage that causes can be causes of one another simultaneously according to different causal lines, or in this case, that principles can be mutually dependent on one another according to different lines of dependency, and (2) that priority in the order of nature does not necessarily imply priority in the order of time. Thus, while the act of being actualizes the corresponding essence principle of a given entity and

*esse habeat, nihil est, nisi forte in intellectu creantis, ubi non est creatura, sed creatrix essentia*" (ed. cit., p. 49). Cf. *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 17: "Ad decimum septimum dicendum, quod Deus simul dans esse, producit id quod esse recipit: et sic non oportet quod agat ex aliquo praeexistenti" (p. 41). Also see J. Owens, "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being in the Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas," in *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God*, J. Catan, ed. (Albany, N.Y., 1980), pp. 91–92.

94. In addition to the texts cited above, see Geiger, *La participation*, pp. 64–65, 393, and 393 n. 1. For discussion and refutation of this way of viewing things see Fabro, *Participation et causalité*, pp. 69–71; Nicolas, "Chronique," pp. 561–62. For Carlo see his "The Role of Essence in Existential Metaphysics," in J. Rosenberg, ed., *Readings in Metaphysics* (Westminster, Md., 1963), pp. 278–81, which originally appeared in *International Philosophical Quarterly* 2 (1962), pp. 584–89; and *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics* (The Hague, 1966), especially pp. 103–5. This is in connection with Carlo's insistence, along with a number of other Thomists today, that essence for Aquinas, when rightly interpreted, is reducible to the given degree or mode of existence possessed by a given finite entity. For discussion and criticism of this reading see my "Thomas Aquinas on the Distinction and Derivation of the Many from the One," pp. 586–90, and Ch. VI below, pp. 190–92.

95. For te Velde see the reference in n. 92 above. Cf. pp. 82–83 (his general concern, shared with Geiger, about referring to essence and being [*esse*] as composed); p. 87 ("pre-existent subject of participation"); p. 89 (according to Fabro's account essence would be created as potency and subsequently endowed with actuality).

makes that entity actually exist, simultaneously the essence principle receives and limits the act of being. Neither preexists as such apart from the other, and each enjoys its appropriate priority in the order of nature (not in the order of time) with respect to its particular ontological function within a given entity.

Even so, one may still ask about the essence principle itself of any finite being. It is only by appealing to the essence principle of any such being that one can account for the fact that the being is of this kind rather than of any other kind and participates in *esse* to its given and limited degree. But what about the essence itself? A metaphysical explanation must also be offered for it.

Here, it seems to me, Geiger has a certain point in his favor. As we have seen, both the essence and the *esse* of any finite being are created, according to Thomas. If we ask why this given being has this essence principle rather than any other, Thomas's ultimate explanation is that this is because its essence imitates its appropriate divine idea and depends upon it as upon its formal exemplar cause and because God, acting as an efficient cause, has actually created it in accord with its divine idea together with its act of being in creating this individual being. According to Aquinas a divine idea is nothing but a given way in which God understands himself as capable of being imitated by a creature. Hence the essence of any existing creature is an expression of a particular way in which the divine idea can be imitated and in fact is imitated.<sup>96</sup> At this point it seems that participation by composition within an existing creature entails causal dependency, not only in the order of efficient causality, but also in the order of extrinsic formal or exemplar causality. In other words, participation by composition, as it is expressed in the intrinsic structure of any created entity, receives its final explanation in the order of extrinsic causality by leading one to recognize God not only as the first efficient cause but also as the extrinsic formal or exemplar cause of every participant. And this, it seems to me, is to bring in the element of participation by assimilation or formal hierarchy, as Geiger would have it.<sup>97</sup>

96. For a general discussion of Thomas's views concerning divine ideas and his reasons for appealing to them see Geiger, "Les idées divines dans l'oeuvre de S. Thomas," in *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274-1974. Commemorative Studies*, A. Maurer et al., eds. (Toronto, 1974), Vol. 1, pp. 175-209; Wip-pel, "Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas," *Etienne Gilson Series 16* (Toronto, 1993); V. Boland, *Ideas in God according to Saint Thomas Aquinas: Sources and Synthesis* (London-New York-Cologne, 1996). For Thomas see ST I, q. 15, a. 1, ad 3: "Unde idea in Deo nihil est aliud quam Dei essentia" (ed. cit., p. 90); ST I, q. 15, a. 2: "Sic igitur in quantum Deus cognoscit suam essentiam ut sic imitabilem a tali creatura, cognoscit eam ut propriam rationem et ideam huius creaturae" (p. 91); *In I Sent.*, d. 36, q. 2, a. 2: "Unde cum hoc nomen 'idea' nominet essentiam divinam secundum quod est exemplar imitatum a creatura . . ." (Mandonnet ed., Vol. 1, p. 842); *De veritate*, q. 3, a. 2: ". . . unde essentia sua est idea rerum non quidem ut essentia sed ut est intellecta . . ." (Leon. 22.1.104:202-204).

97. For a somewhat different way of bringing together in complementary fashion participation by composition and by similitude see J.-D. Robert, "Note sur le dilemme: 'Limitation par composition ou limitation par hiérarchie formelle des essences,'" *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 49 (1965), pp. 60-66.

In sum, both composition and assimilation or imitation are involved in Thomas's explanation of the participated structure of creatures. For the philosopher, I would suggest, who must begin with finite beings and only eventually reason from what he finds in them to knowledge of God as their cause, participation in *esse commune* comes first in the order of discovery. Along with this comes recognition of one way of reasoning to the distinction and composition of essence and *esse* (act of being) within such entities—although, as we shall see in the next chapter, other ways may also be found in Thomas's texts. (As I read Aquinas, demonstration of real distinction between essence and *esse* within finite beings need not presuppose prior knowledge of the existence of God.)<sup>98</sup>

Explicit recognition of the radically caused character of any such being easily follows from the recognition of the distinction of essence and act of being therein, and with this, a metaphysical basis for an eventual demonstration of the existence of God. After one has demonstrated God's existence, one will then be justified in speaking of participation in *esse subsistens* as distinguished from participation in *esse commune*. Appeal to God as the formal exemplar cause as well as the efficient cause of any existing finite being is necessary to complete the picture. Only then will one be in position to recognize such a being as a created imitation and assimilation of the divine being. Hence, if with Geiger one wishes to speak of participation by assimilation or formal hierarchy, such enters in only at this point. That is to say, it comes later in the order of discovery. But it does seem to enjoy priority in the order of nature, although not in the order of time insofar as explanation in terms of exemplar causality is concerned. Creatures actually exist because God wills them to exist and efficiently causes them. But God can will a creature of a certain kind to exist only if it can exist. And it can exist only if it is viewed by God as a possible way of imitating the divine essence.<sup>99</sup>

To this I would add, in order to forestall any possible misunderstanding, that this is not to imply that the creaturely essence enjoys any actual reality in itself apart from the divine essence prior to its actual creation in an existing entity together with its corresponding act of being. The actual creation of any such an entity, including both its essence and its act of being, also requires the simultaneous exercise of divine efficient causality.

98. See my *Metaphysical Themes*, cc. 5 and 6, as well as Ch. V below.

99. For discussion of this see *Metaphysical Themes*, c. 6, especially pp. 163-71.