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The Metaphysical Thought of
Thomas Aquinas

From Finite Being to Uncreated Being

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v Essence-*Esse* Composition and the One and the Many

In the previous chapter, while considering various statements by Aquinas to the effect that finite beings participate in *esse*, we eventually concluded that these statements may be interpreted in three different ways. At times he means thereby that particular entities or natures participate in *esse commune* (the act of being considered in general). At times he means that they participate in *esse subsistens* (God). And on other occasions he simply wishes to indicate that each finite nature participates in the *esse* which it receives, that is, in its own act of being (*actus essendi*). When Thomas speaks in this third way, he is also assuming, at least by implication, that particular beings participate in *esse commune*. This follows because for him to refer to a particular entity as participating in its own *esse* or its own act of being is by implication to contrast its *esse* with that in which it merely participates but which it does not exhaust, i.e., *esse commune*. As we have also noted, if finite substances may be described as participating in *esse* in either of these ways, this will ultimately be because they participate in *esse subsistens*. The most important contrast, therefore, is between participation in *esse subsistens*, on the one hand, and participation in *esse commune* (or in the finite being's particular act of being), on the other.¹

Even so, when it comes to the philosophical order of discovery, we have already suggested that recognition of finite entities as participating in self-subsisting *esse* comes later.² And since here we are committed to presenting Thomas's metaphysical thought according to the philosophical order as he himself has defined it, we now wish to explore the evidence he offers to show that such entities really do participate in *esse*. This means that we should first examine the evidence he offers

1. See above, pp. 120–21.

2. See Ch. IV above, p. 131.

to show that they participate really rather than merely logically or in a purely mind-dependent way in *esse commune* and/or in their own *actus essendi*. Only subsequently will it be appropriate for us to take up Thomas's evidence for their participating in *esse subsistens*, that is, after we have considered his philosophical argumentation for God's existence. In the present chapter, therefore, we shall concentrate on the first point; in later chapters the second issue will be examined.³

As regards participation by particular entities or natures in *esse commune* and, following from this, in their own act of being, what philosophical evidence does Thomas offer for this? If this kind of participation is going to be recognized as real and not merely as logical or notional in the way one concept may be said to participate in another, it seems that it will have to be based on real reception by a participating subject or principle of a participated perfection, i.e., *esse*. But as we have now seen in some detail, for Aquinas this entails real diversity and composition within the participant of a participating principle and a participated or received perfection.⁴ In other words, recognition of such participation as real is closely conjoined with Thomas's well known if much contested views concerning real composition and distinction of essence and *esse* in every participating entity or substance.⁵

If Thomas frequently identifies the participated principle in nondivine entities as *esse*, his terminology when referring to the principle which participates in *esse* is much less fixed. As we have already seen from various texts analyzed in Ch. IV, on different occasions he refers to the participating and receiving principle as being (*ens*), or as "that which is," or as quiddity (or essence), or as substance, or as form, or as a creature, or as a thing (*res*), or as nature, or simply as that which participates (*participans*).⁶ His meaning will usually be captured if we simply employ the terms "essence" or "nature" to express this, as he himself also does.⁷ Nonetheless, if

3. In other words, as already noted above, until philosophical evidence for God's existence has been presented, one is entitled to speak of non-divine natures or entities as participating in self-subsisting *esse* only in a putative or hypothetical fashion. On God's existence see Chs. X, XI and XII below.

4. See, for instance, in Ch. IV the discussion and references to texts from Thomas's Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus* (nn. 20, 21, 22, 23), and Quodlibet 2, q. 2, a. 1 (n. 27). Also see the discussion in Section 3 of that chapter.

5. See n. 91 of the preceding chapter for Fabro's stress on the close connection between these. As I see it, the best way of determining whether or not participation is real is to examine the structure of the participant. Real composition therein of a participating and receiving principle, on the one hand, and of a received and participated perfection, on the other, points to real rather than merely logical or intentional participation.

6. For illustrations see in Ch. IV, nn. 14 (*ens* and *id quod est*, *In De Hebd.*); 79 (*ens* and *quidditas*, *In De causis*, Prop. VI); 39 (*substantia*, Quodl. 3, q. 8, a. 1); 22 and 23 (*forma*, *In De Hebd.*); 72 (*forma*, *Quaestiones disp. De anima*, q. 6); 31 (*creatura*, Quodl. 2, q. 2, a. 1); 62 (*res* and *natura*, *De spirit. creaturis*, a. 1); 66 (*res*, *De subs. sep.*, c. 8); 39 (*participans*, Quodl. 3, q. 8, a. 1). Also see *In VIII Phys.*, lect. 21, p. 615, n. 1153: *substantia*.

7. See, for instance, *De veritate*, q. 21, a. 5: "Ipsa autem natura vel essentia divina est eius esse; natura autem vel essentia cuiuslibet rei creatae non est suum esse sed est esse participans ab alio" (*Leon.* 22.3.606:137–141).

Thomas is to justify his claim that nondivine entities really do participate in *esse commune* and therefore in their own *esse* (act of being), it will be incumbent upon him to establish the reality of such diversity and composition of a participating principle or essence and of a participated perfection (*esse*) within such beings.

This brings us back to the issue of Thomas's views concerning the relationship between essence and *esse* (act of being, or existence, as it is often referred to) in creatures. A definitive history of the general thirteenth-century controversy concerning the essence-existence relationship in created entities remains to be written. The same is true of the history of the more remote origins of any theory that defends real distinction between essence and existence in such entities.⁸ For our immediate purposes it will be enough to recall that this issue arises in large measure from efforts by various medieval thinkers to account for the radically contingent or caused character and for the nonsimple or composite character of beings other than God. To the extent that the second point is emphasized, appeal to real composition and distinction of essence and existence in such entities is also a way of responding to the problem of the One and the Many.

Avicenna has often been cited, both by thirteenth-century writers and by twentieth-century scholars, as an early defender of real distinction between essence and existence in such beings. Thus thinkers as diverse in metaphysical outlook as Thomas himself, Siger of Brabant, and James of Viterbo, basing themselves on the medieval Latin translation of his *Philosophia prima*, all criticized Avicenna for having defended an extreme version of this theory. Not only had he distinguished between essence and existence in such entities; he had mistakenly treated existence as if it were superadded to essence almost like an accident. Averroes was also known to each of these writers and their contemporaries for his criticisms of Avicenna on this very point. Shortly after the death of Aquinas in 1274, a running controversy broke out between Henry of Ghent and Giles of Rome. Giles had used the language of thing and thing (*res* and *res*) in defending real distinction between essence and

8. For helpful introductions to this issue, especially in terms of its more remote sources, see M.-D. Roland-Gosselin, ed., *Le 'De ente et essentia' de s. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris, 1948; originally appeared in 1926), pp. 137-205; J. Paulus, *Henri de Gand. Essai sur les tendances de sa métaphysique* (Paris, 1938), pp. 260-91; A. Forest, *La structure métaphysique du concret selon saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 2d ed. (Paris, 1956), pp. 128-65. On thirteenth-century (and later) controversies concerning this see Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1955), pp. 420-27; M. Grabmann, "Doctrina S. Thomae de distinctione reali inter essentiam et esse ex documentis ineditis saeculi XIII illustratur," in *Acta Hebdomadae Thomisticae Romae celebratae 19-25 Novembris 1923 in laudem S. Thomae Aquinatis* (Rome, 1924), pp. 131-90; R. Imbach, "Averroistische Stellungnahmen zur Diskussion über das Verhältnis von *esse* und *essentia*. Von Siger von Brabant zu Thaddaeus von Parma," in *Studi sul XIV secolo in memoria di Anneliese Maier*, A. Maierù and Paravicini Bagliani, eds. (Rome, 1981), pp. 299-339; and Wippel, "Essence and Existence," c. 19 in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 392-410; "The Relationship between Essence and Existence in Late-Thirteenth-Century Thought: Giles of Rome, Henry of Ghent, Godfrey of Fontaines, and James of Viterbo," in *Philosophies of Existence, Ancient and Medieval*, P. Morewedge, ed. (New York, 1982), pp. 131-64.

existence, and however he may have intended for this to be understood, sharp criticism was directed against his version of this theory by Henry, and then by Godfrey of Fontaines and by many other late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century thinkers. Against Giles, Henry rejected any real distinction between essence and existence and held that they are only "intentionally" distinct. While agreeing with Henry in eschewing any kind of real distinction between them, Godfrey also rejected Henry's claim that they are intentionally distinct. For him there is only a distinction of reason between them.⁹

Aquinas himself was familiar with earlier discussions of the relationship between essence and *esse*. As we have already seen in Ch. IV, he seems to find support for his own theory in the *De Hebdomadibus* of Boethius and, for that matter, also in the *Liber de causis*.¹⁰ Whether or not he really believed that his own understanding of the essence-*esse* relationship had been defended by these sources is a matter for conjecture. Be that as it may, his understanding of the essence-*esse* relationship cannot be reduced to that of Avicenna or, for that matter, to that of Boethius or the *Liber de causis* or any other earlier thinker, at least in my judgment. On the other hand, some twentieth-century scholars have gone to the opposite extreme and have denied that Thomas himself ever defended any such theory. While some dispute may be possible about the best way of expressing in English Thomas's understanding of this diversity or distinction, there can be no doubt, in my opinion,

9. In addition to explicit discussions of Avicenna's position in the studies by Roland-Gosselin, Paulus, and Forest cited in the previous note, see Thomas Aquinas's critique of the Avicennian position in his *In IV Met.*, lect. 2, Cathala-Spiazzi ed., p. 155, nn. 556-558. For Siger of Brabant see *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam*, W. Dunphy, ed. (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1981), *Introductio*, q. 7, pp. 45-46, 47 (Munich ms.); *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam*, A. Maurer, ed. (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1983), *Introductio*, q. 7, pp. 30, 32, 34 (Cambridge ms.); *Introductio*, 2, p. 398 (Paris ms.). Note that in the first two contexts Siger associates Avicenna's view with that of Albert the Great. For James see *Jacobi de Viterbio, O.E.S.A., Disputatio prima de quolibet*, E. Ypma, ed. (Würzburg, 1968), q. 4, pp. 46, 53-54, 55:402-403. For Avicenna see his *Liber de Philosophia prima sive Scientia divina I-IV*, Bk I, c. 5, pp. 34-35, and *Liber de Philosophia prima V-X* (Louvain-Leiden, 1980), Bk V, c. 1, p. 233. For Averroes' understanding and critique of Avicenna see *In IV Met.*, ed. cit., Vol. 8, fol. 67rab-67va. On Thomas's interpretation of and reaction (both positive and negative) to Avicenna see my "The Latin Avicenna as a Source for Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 37 (1990), pp. 65-72. For defenses of Avicenna based on the Arabic text of his metaphysics against the charge that he had viewed existence as if it were an accident see F. Rahman, "Essence and Existence in Avicenna," *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* 4 (1958), pp. 1-16; "Ibn Sina," in M. M. Sharif, ed., *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, Vol. 1 (Wiesbaden, 1963), pp. 483-86; P. Morewedge, "Philosophical Analysis and Ibn Sina's 'Essence-Existence' Distinction," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 92 (1972), pp. 425-35. On the controversy between Henry, Giles, and Godfrey of Fontaines, see in addition to the two references in the preceding note to other studies of mine, my *The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines: A Study in Late-Thirteenth-Century Philosophy* (Washington, D.C., 1981), pp. 39-99.

10. See the texts cited in nn. 20-23 in the preceding chapter from Thomas's Commentary on Boethius's *De Hebdomadibus*. For different interpretations of the meaning of *id quod est* and *esse* in Boethius see n. 14 of the same chapter. Also see nn. 51 and 52 for references to Thomas's Commentary on the *Liber de causis*. For discussion of the latter see Roland-Gosselin, *Le "De ente et essentia,"* pp. 146-49. For Thomas's citation of the *De causis* in his *De ente*, c. 4 see Leon. 43.376:36-40.

that he defended real as opposed to merely mind-dependent or logical composition of essence and *esse* in every finite entity. And while he speaks more frequently of their composition or of their being composed than of their being really distinguished or diverse, he does at times use the latter terminology. A number of texts which point to this conclusion have already been examined in Ch. IV, and more will now be considered.¹¹

As we turn again to Thomas's texts, an important question of methodology arises. As we have already suggested, one can establish the participated character of nondivine beings in two of the senses distinguished above before taking up the question of God's existence. But does Thomas think that recognition of real composition and distinction of essence and *esse* in such beings is possible without prior knowledge that God exists?

On this point contemporary interpreters of Thomas's thought differ. As I have argued elsewhere and will again attempt to show here, not all of Thomas's arguments for the essence-*esse* distinction or composition presuppose knowledge of God's existence. Many of them surely do.¹² Consequently, in this chapter I shall single out for consideration those arguments for such distinction and composition which do not, in my opinion, presuppose such knowledge. Presentation of these will be sufficient to show that Thomas can speak of nondivine entities as participating in *esse* in the two ways singled out for consideration here. For the sake of completeness, other arguments which do presuppose God's existence will be mentioned in a later chapter. These will be treated separately in order to emphasize (1) that such arguments are not required for Thomas the philosopher to speak of real par-

11. For some who have denied that Aquinas defends real distinction between essence and *esse* see M. Chossat, "Dieu," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, Vol. 4, pt. 1, col. 1180; "L'Averroïsme de saint Thomas. Notes sur la distinction d'essence et d'existence à la fin du XIII^e siècle," *Archives de philosophie* 9 (1932), pp. 129[465]-177[513]; F. Cunningham, "Distinction according to St. Thomas," *New Scholasticism* 36 (1962), pp. 279-312; "Textos de Santo Tomás sobre el *essey esencia*," *Pensamiento* 20 (1964), pp. 283-306; "The 'Real Distinction' in John Quidort," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 8 (1970), pp. 9-28; and finally his large volume *Essence and Existence in Thomism: A Mental vs. The "Real Distinction"?* (Lanham, Md., 1988). For some who do find this position in Aquinas see N. del Prado, *De veritate fundamentalibus philosophiae Christianae*, pp. 23-79; C. Fabro, "Un itinéraire de saint Thomas. L'établissement de la distinction réelle entre essence et existence," originally published in *Revue de philosophie* 39 (1939), pp. 285-310, repr. in his *Esegesi tomistica* (Rome, 1969), pp. 89-108; *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione*, pp. 212-44; E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy*, pp. 420-27; *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2d ed. (Toronto, 1952), pp. 171-78; M. Grabmann, "Doctrina s. Thomae de distinctione reali," pp. 131-90; J. de Finance, *Être et agir dans la Philosophie de Saint Thomas*, 2d ed. (Rome, 1960), pp. 94-111; L. Sweeney, "Existence/Essence in Thomas Aquinas's Early Writings," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 37 (1963), pp. 97-131; J. Owens, "Quiddity and Real Distinction in St. Thomas Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies* 27 (1965), pp. 1-22, esp. 19-22; *Aquinas on Being and Thing* (Niagara, N.Y., 1981); "Stages and Distinction in *De ente*: A Rejoinder," *The Thomist* 45 (1981), pp. 99-123; "Aquinas' Distinction at *De ente et essentia* 4.119-123," *Mediaeval Studies* 48 (1986), pp. 264-87; Wippel, "Aquinas's Route to the Real Distinction: A Note on *De ente et essentia*, c. 4," *The Thomist* 43 (1979), pp. 279-95; *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas*, cc. 5 and 6 (pp. 107-61).

12. See the last two items mentioned in the preceding note.

ticipation of beings in *esse*, so long of course as we do not mean thereby participation in *esse subsistens*, and (2) that after philosophical argumentation for God's existence has been offered, Thomas can revisit the issue of participation of finite beings in *esse subsistens* from a purely philosophical perspective and reinforce his defense of the distinction and composition of essence and act of being in such entities.

While Thomas's arguments for distinction and composition of essence and *esse* in beings other than God have been classified in different ways by different scholars, here I shall consider them under the following headings: (1) what is often referred to as the *intellectus essentiae* argument, especially as this is presented in the *De ente et essentia*, but together with what I have elsewhere referred to as the second phase of the argumentation in the *De ente*; (2) other arguments based on the impossibility of there being more than one being in which essence and *esse* are identical; (3) what Leo Sweeney has called the "genus" argument; (4) arguments based on participation; (5) argumentation based on the limited character of individual beings.¹³

1. The *Intellectus Essentiae* Argument

This argumentation, especially as it is presented in c. 4 of Thomas's early *De ente et essentia* (ca. 1252-1256), has occasioned considerable controversy. The points of disagreement have to do not only with the validity of the argument considered in itself, but also with the proper understanding of Thomas's purpose in developing it.¹⁴ The first phase or stage of the argumentation in this chapter has often been removed from its context and presented as a complete argument in itself which should stand on its own merits. For that matter, shortly after Aquinas's death, one finds an interesting variation of this argument offered by Giles of Rome in support of real distinction of essence and existence in creatures, and roundly criticized by others such as Godfrey of Fontaines.¹⁵

13. For other attempts to classify Thomas's arguments see Fabro, *La nozione metafisica*, pp. 212-44; de Finance, *Être et agir*, pp. 94-111; and Sweeney, "Existence/Essence in Thomas Aquinas's Early Writings," esp. pp. 105-31. My own classification is most indebted to that offered by Sweeney.

14. For discussion see Fabro, *La nozione metafisica*, pp. 218-20; "Un itinéraire de saint Thomas," *Esegesi Tomistica*, pp. 94-108; U. Degl'Innocenti, "La distinzione reale nel 'De ente et essentia' di S. Tommaso," *Doctor Communis* 10 (1957), pp. 165-73; J. Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1965), pp. 162-70; A. Maurer, *St. Thomas Aquinas: On Being and Essence* (Toronto, 1968), pp. 21-4; F. Van Steenberghe, *Le problème de l'existence de Dieu dans les écrits de s. Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1980), pp. 33-51; S. MacDonald, "The *Essel/Essentia* Argument in Aquinas's *De ente et essentia*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 22 (1984), pp. 157-72; Owens and Wippel, as cited in n. 11 above.

15. In his "Essence/Existence in Thomas," Sweeney considers the *intellectus essentiae* argument as a distinctive argument while examining a number of early Thomistic texts in which it appears (pp. 105-9). But he also takes up the version presented in the *De ente* under the general heading of "God-to-creatures" argumentation (pp. 115-17), and thereby seems to recognize it as the first stage of a larger and more complicated argument. MacDonald objects to the description of the first part of the *De ente* argumentation as an *intellectus essentiae* argument, arguing that the claim that "whatever is not part of an essence is other than the essence" does not enter into Thomas's argumentation there.

If interpreters differ today concerning the connection of this stage of the argument with the subsequent part of Thomas's discussion in c. 4 of the *De ente*, they also disagree about the relationship between Thomas's argumentation for the essence-*esse* distinction in that chapter and the argument for God's existence which also appears there.¹⁶ Since I have had occasion elsewhere to consider some of these divergent interpretations, and especially one by J. Owens which would make the argumentation in the *De ente* (and apparently any other possible argumentation) for real composition and distinction of essence and *esse* dependent on prior knowledge of God's existence, I shall not repeat the details of that discussion here.¹⁷ Instead I shall simply present the argument in the way in which I believe it should be interpreted in light of Thomas's text, examine it critically, and then briefly address some of the differences in interpretation that remain between Owens and myself.

The general background for Thomas's argumentation in c. 4 is well known. There he is attempting to determine how essence is realized in separate substances, that is, in the soul, in intelligences, and in the First Cause (God).¹⁸ While the simplicity of the First Cause is generally granted, observes Thomas, some defend matter-form composition in the soul and in intelligences. Thomas identifies Avic-

He also comments that this would not allow for the possibility that, in one case, *esse* and essence are identical ("The *Esse/Essentia* Argument," p. 162). While the label "*intellectus essentiae*" argument is not a major concern, I would question MacDonald's way of reformulating Thomas's opening remark in the argument. "Whatever belongs to a thing," as MacDonald correctly adds, and "is not part of its essence" does not quite capture the point of Thomas's Latin: "Quicquid enim non est de intellectu essentiae vel quidditatis . . ." (cited below in n. 25). Moreover, if one interprets this as meaning "Whatever is not included in the *understanding* (or notion) of an essence . . .," as I would, then the statement does allow for the possibility that in one case essence and *esse* are identical. In that one case *esse* would be included in the notion or understanding of that being's *essence* if someone could adequately grasp it. Hence, with Owens ("Quiddity," pp. 5-7) and Sweeney, I will continue to refer to this as the *intellectus essentiae* argument. For Giles of Rome's variation on this see his *Quaestiones disputatae de esse et essentia*, q. 11. There he had listed six truths which cannot be maintained without the real distinction between essence and existence. The first of these is this, that the essence of every creature can be understood with the opposite of its *esse* ("cum opposito ipsius esse") i.e., as not existing. But since nothing can be understood with the opposite of itself, he concludes that whatever is understood with the opposite of a given thing must really differ from that thing. Therefore essence really differs from *esse* (Venice, 1503), fol. 24vb. Cf. f. 20va. For discussion see my "The Relationship between Essence and Existence in Late-Thirteenth-Century Thought," p. 138. And for Godfrey's exposition and critique of this see my *The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines*, pp. 48-9, 60. See Godfrey's Quodlibet 3, q. 1, in *Les Quatre premiers Quodlibets de Godefroid de Fontaines*, ed. M. de Wulf and A. Pelzer, Les Philosophes Belges, Vol. 2, pp. 158, 302 (short version), and 171, 305 (short version). Giles's version, by stating that one can understand the essence of a thing as not existing, goes farther than Thomas's *De ente*.

16. See, in particular, the discussions by J. Owens and myself cited above in n. 11, and the article by MacDonald cited in n. 14.

17. In addition to the references mentioned in the preceding note, see Gilson, "La preuve du 'De ente et essentia'," *Acta III Congressus Thomistici Internationalis: Doctor communis 3* (Turin, 1950), pp. 257-60; "Trois leçons sur le problème de l'existence de Dieu," *Divinitas 5* (1961), pp. 26-28.

18. "Nunc restat videre per quem modum sit essentia in substantiis separatis, scilicet in anima, intelligentia et causa prima" (Leon. 43.375:1-3).

bron's *Fons vitae* as the apparent original source for this view, which is often referred to as universal hylemorphism.¹⁹

Thomas comments that this position is generally rejected by philosophers. Their strongest reason for denying that there is matter-form composition in separate substances and souls is their conviction that such would be incompatible with the intelligent nature of such entities. Forms are not rendered actually intelligible except insofar as they are separated from matter and its conditions; nor are they rendered actually intelligible except by the power of an intelligent substance insofar as they are received in that substance and acted on by it. Hence every intelligent substance must be completely free from matter, so much so that such a substance cannot include matter as a part of itself, nor can it be a form which is impressed upon matter as material forms are.²⁰

Someone might counter, observes Thomas, that it is only corporeal matter that impedes intelligibility, and not every kind of matter. Presumably he has in mind those who would defend the presence of an incorporeal or spiritual matter in such entities. Against these he replies that since matter is described as corporeal only insofar as it falls under a corporeal form, it would then follow that matter's impeding intelligibility is owing to its corporeal form. This cannot be, protests Thomas, because even a corporeal form is intelligible once it is abstracted from matter. Therefore, he insists, there is no matter-form composition in the soul or in intelligences, though there is composition of form and *esse*. He cites from the *Liber de causis* (Proposition 9, Commentary) in support of this claim: "An intelligence is that which has form and *esse*." According to Thomas, form as it appears in this text stands for a quiddity or simple nature itself.²¹

In support of this claim Thomas reasons that when things are so related to one another that one is the cause of the other, that which serves as cause can exist without the other, but not vice versa. The relationship between matter and form is such that form gives *esse* (existence) to matter. Therefore, while it is not possible for matter to exist without any form, it is not impossible for some form to exist

19. Leon. 43.375:3-8. For some background on thirteenth-century defenders and opponents of universal hylemorphism and on Avicbron see E. Kleineidam, *Das Problem der hylomorphen Zusammensetzung der geistigen Substanzen im 13. Jahrhundert, behandelt bis Thomas von Aquin* (Breslau, 1930); O. Lottin, *Psychologie et morale au XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, Vol. 1 (Louvain-Gembloux, 1942), pp. 427-60; Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines*, pp. 275-77 (see nn. 51, 53, 57 for additional references); and J. Weisheipl, "Albertus Magnus and Universal Hylomorphism: Avicbron," in *Albert the Great Commemorative Essays*, ed. F. J. Kovach and R. W. Shahan (Norman, Okla., 1980), pp. 239-60, esp. pp. 250-60.

20. Leon. 43.375:8-376:22.

21. Leon. 43.376:23-40. For Thomas's reference to the *Liber de causis* see: "Sed est ibi compositio formae et esse; unde in commento nonae propositionis libri De causis dicitur quod intelligentia est habens formam et esse; et accipitur ibi forma pro ipsa quidditate vel natura simplici." Cf. *Le Liber de causis*, A. Pattin, ed., published separately by the *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* (Leuven, 1966), p. 69: "Et intelligentia est habens *yltiathim* quoniam est esse et forma." On the meaning of the term *yltiathim* in this context see Ch. IV above, n. 51.

without matter. Form insofar as it is form need not depend on matter. And if some forms can exist only in matter, this is not because they are forms but because of their great distance from the first principle which is the First and Pure Act. Hence the essence of a composite substance differs from that of a simple substance. While the essence of a composite includes both matter and form, the essence of a simple substance is a pure form.²²

If one grants this to Aquinas, one may still ask about nondivine simple substances or forms. If they do exist, as Thomas here takes as given, how will they differ from God?²³ It seems that, like God, they too will be perfectly simple. It is in responding to this difficulty that Thomas introduces his argumentation for distinction and composition of essence and *esse* in all such entities.

Even though such substances are pure forms and lack matter according to Aquinas, he refuses to admit that they are so simple in themselves as to be identified as pure actualities. He insists that they do include some degree of potentiality. It is important for the reader to note this point, since it indicates that if Thomas is to achieve his objective in developing the argumentation which follows, he will have to establish some kind of real and ontological, as distinguished from any purely mind-dependent or logical, act-potency composition or admixture within such beings.²⁴

Thomas immediately presents what I shall describe as phase one of his argument. Whatever is not included within the notion or understanding (*intellectus*) of an essence or quiddity comes to it from without and joins in composition with it. In proof he comments that no essence can be understood without those things which are parts of that essence itself. Then he continues: but every essence or quiddity can be understood without anything being understood about its *esse* (existing). In proof Thomas notes that I can understand what a human being is, or what a phoenix is, and nevertheless not know whether such a thing exists in reality. Thomas immediately draws his conclusion. Therefore it is evident that *esse* (act of being) differs from (literally: "is other than") essence or quiddity in such entities.²⁵

22. Leon. 43.376:41–65. Thomas then develops two other differences which follow from this. First, the essence of a composite substance can be signified as a whole or as a part, but the essence of a simple entity, i.e., its form, can only be signified as a whole. Second, the essences of composites, since they are received in designated matter, are multiplied in accord with divisions of such matter and can, therefore, be multiplied within one and the same species. Because the essence of a simple form is not received in matter, it cannot be multiplied numerically within a species (Leon. 43.376:65–89).

23. See, for instance, Thomas's remarks at the end of c. 1 of the *De ente* to the effect that some substances are simple and some are composite (Leon. 43.370:58–60). In other contexts Thomas does offer philosophical argumentation for the existence of created separate substances, i.e., angels. See J. Collins, *The Thomistic Philosophy of the Angels* (Washington, D.C., 1947), pp. 16–41.

24. "Huiusmodi autem substantiae, quamvis sint formae tantum sine materia, non tamen in eis est omnimoda simplicitas nec sunt actus purus, sed habent permixtionem potentiae; et hoc sic patet" (Leon. 43.376:90–93).

25. "Quicquid enim non est de intellectu essentiae vel quidditatis, hoc est adveniens extra et faciens compositionem cum essentia, quia nulla essentia sine hiis quae sunt partes essentiae intelligi

If one were to take this as an independent argument in its own right, that argument would end here. Immediately, however, certain questions may be raised about the force of the argument until this point. It seems to move very quickly from its recognition of the distinction between knowing what something is and knowing that it is to the conclusion that there is a corresponding extramental (i.e., real) distinction of an essence principle and an *esse* principle within any such being. And if the argument is to achieve its objective—to establish a real or ontological composition of act and potency in such entities—it seems that the *esse* which has now been shown to be distinct from essence must be taken as signifying the act of being, not merely the fact that something exists. But Thomas himself has warned against the danger of moving too quickly from distinctions which obtain in the order of thought (conceptual distinctions) to distinctions within the order of reality, or real distinctions. This, in fact, is one of his chief criticisms of Platonism.²⁶

Or to put this same objection in other terms, does not the argument move illegitimately from its recognition of the distinction between what is grasped by the intellect in its first operation (essence) and what is grasped by it in its second operation (existence) to a corresponding real distinction between essence and *esse* (act of being) within the existing thing? Thomas, of course, distinguishes between the intellect's first operation whereby it knows what something is, and its second operation whereby it judges that something is. But of itself this is hardly sufficient to justify without additional evidence the conclusion that there are corresponding really distinct principles in an extramental entity.²⁷

More than this, the argument also seems to presuppose that if our intellect does not include something such as actual existence in its grasp of the quiddity of a

potest. Omnis autem essentia vel quidditas potest intelligi sine hoc quod aliquid intelligatur de esse suo: possum enim intelligere quid est homo vel phoenix et tamen ignorare an esse habeat in rerum natura; ergo patet quod esse est aliud ab essentia vel quidditate" (Leon. 43.376:94–103).

26. For instance, in his Commentary on the *De Trinitate* of Boethius, q. 5, a. 3, Thomas connects the Pythagorean and Platonic defense of separate mathematical and universals with the failure on the part of these thinkers to distinguish between the intellect's abstracting operations (whether abstraction of the whole or abstraction of the form) and its operation of judging negatively, i.e., *separatio*. See Leon. 50.149:287–290. Cf. ST I, q. 85, a. 1 ad 2. Also see *De substantiis separatis*, c. 2, where after a detailed exposition in c. 1 of the hierarchical structure of reality as envisioned by Plato, Thomas comments: "Huius autem positionis radix invenitur efficaciam non habere. Non enim necesse est ut ea quae intellectus separatim intelligit separatim esse habeant in rerum natura . . ." (Leon. 40.D43:2–D44:5).

27. Cf. Owens, "Quiddity and Real Distinction in St. Thomas Aquinas," pp. 8–14; "Stages and Distinction in *De ente*," pp. 107–8. While I agree with him that the argument in this first stage only establishes conceptual distinction between essence and *esse*, we differ with respect to the argument's second stage. See below. On the other hand, Fabro has attempted to defend the argument even in this first stage, or what he calls the logical argument. See "Un itinéraire de saint Thomas," pp. 94–97. For other defenses of it as concluding to an ontological or real distinction at this stage see Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence* pp. 163–69; L. Dewan, "Saint Thomas, Joseph Owens, and the Real Distinction between Being and Essence," *Modern Schoolman* 61 (1984), pp. 145–56; W. Patt, "Aquinas's Real Distinction and Some Interpretations," *New Scholasticism* 62 (1988), pp. 1–29.

given entity, that factor is not really included within the essence itself. But Thomas's restrictions on our capacity to arrive at quidditative knowledge of separate substances, including created separate substances, are well known. Not quite so well known, perhaps, are the restrictions he places upon our ability to reach quidditative knowledge of most corporeal things. Still, as Owens has pointed out, merely generic knowledge of a given entity may be all that Thomas requires for this part of his argumentation to be verified if it is intended to establish only a conceptual distinction between essence and *esse*; and Thomas does grant such generic knowledge of material things to us.²⁸

Still another criticism has been raised by F. Van Steenberghen. Thomas seems to shift in his usage of the term *esse* within the argument itself. Thus he reasons that any essence or quiddity can be understood without anything being known about its *esse*. Here, as we have already suggested above in presenting this text, *esse* stands for existence in the sense of facticity, the fact that something exists. The proof offered by Thomas to support this claim is our ability to understand what a human being is, or what a phoenix is, without our knowing whether or not it exists in reality. But then the argument immediately concludes that *esse* differs from essence or quiddity in such beings. Here *esse* seems to refer not to mere facticity, but to an intrinsic principle, an act of being as we have rendered it, present in all such beings. That it must be taken in this sense is confirmed, in my judgment, by the very next lines, which initiate what I shall describe as phase two of the argument: "Unless, perhaps, there is some thing whose quiddity is *esse* itself." For Van Steenberghen this shift in the meaning of *esse* renders the entire argument invalid.²⁹

28. See *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 3, where Thomas denies that we can have *quid est* knowledge of God or of other separate substances; nor can we even reach any obscure quidditative knowledge of them in terms of their genus and accidents (Leon. 50.167:94-97; 168:155-168). On our difficulty in reaching knowledge of essential differences in sensible entities (and in immaterial substances) see *De ente*, c. 5, (Leon. 43.379:76-84). For a listing of texts ranging throughout Thomas's career where he maintains this reserved attitude with respect to our knowledge of essential differences in sensible things, see Roland-Gosselin, *Le "De ente"*, p. 40, n. 2. For Owens see "Quiddity and Real Distinction," pp. 6-7; "Stages and Distinction," p. 106. In the first-mentioned source Owens sets this part of the argument against the background of Thomas's earlier discussion, in c. 3 of the *De ente*, of the different ways in which a nature may be considered, i.e., absolutely or in itself, or in terms of its *esse* whether in the mind or in individual things. As Owens interprets it, this phase of the argument concentrates on quiddity or essence in its absolute consideration (see pp. 2-3).

29. See *Le problème de l'existence de Dieu dans les écrits de s. Thomas d'Aquin*, pp. 37-38, 40-41. Van Steenberghen also offers other criticisms, somewhat similar to those already mentioned. He does not concentrate on the argument's second phase which, we shall suggest, is considerably more promising. For Thomas's text see "Nisi forte sit aliqua res cuius quidditas sit ipsum suum esse . . ." (Leon. 43.376:103-104). As regards possible sources for Thomas's *intellectus essentiae* argument, Avicenna's general influence has been recognized (see Roland-Gosselin, p. 187; A. Forest, op. cit., pp. 148ff.; Van Steenberghen, p. 41). William of Auvergne's influence has also been noted (Roland-Gosselin, p. 187; Maurer, *On Being and Essence*, pp. 23-24). As I have noted in *Metaphysical Themes* (p. 111, n. 12), Algazel's *Logica* is still another likely source. See "Logica Algazelis, Introduction and Critical Text," C. Lohr, ed., *Traditio* 21 (1965), p. 247:26-33. Both human being and phoenix are cited in this text as examples to show that "esse accidentale est omnibus quae sunt."

Given these and similar difficulties which have been raised against this part of Thomas's argumentation, one will not be surprised to find that an increasing number of his interpreters today suggest that it is a mistake to extract this part of his reasoning from its context and to present it as an independent argument for real distinction of essence and *esse*. Some, including myself when writing elsewhere, have suggested that Thomas may not even have intended for this part of the argument to stand alone.³⁰ Be that as it may, since I am personally persuaded that the argument as it appears in phase one does not in fact establish any such real distinction and composition of essence and *esse*, I shall simply regard it as an introduction to the next phase, and as an introduction which will not stand on its own without that phase. Whether or not Thomas himself would have wished it to be presented as a valid argument in its own right for anything more than a conceptual distinction remains, in my opinion, an open question. The fact that he seems quietly to abandon such an argument in his later writings, while not decisive in itself, at least suggests that he may have had some reservations about it.³¹

In phase two Thomas introduces a general kind of argumentation which we shall see reappearing with some modifications in later writings. So true is this that we have reserved a special heading for consideration of those later presentations—"arguments based on the impossibility [of] there being more than one being in which essence and *esse* are identical." In phase two of the *De ente* argumentation Thomas reasons as follows. If perhaps (*forte*) there is some thing whose quiddity is its very *esse* (act of being), such a thing can only be one and first. This is so because multiplication of something can occur in only three ways: (1) by the addition of some difference, as the nature of a genus is multiplied in its species; or (2) by the reception of a form in different instances of matter, as the nature of a species is multiplied in different individuals; or (3) because one instance of a thing is absolute

30. See my *Metaphysical Themes*, p. 113; Owens, "Quiddity and Real Distinction," pp. 17ff., who also regards the argument from "quidditative content" as "but a stage in a larger demonstration." Cf. "Stages and Distinction," p. 108; MacDonald, "The *Essel*/*Essentia* Argument," passim.

31. For other passages from early works where the *intellectus essentiae* argument is also to be found see Sweeney, pp. 105-9. These include *In I Sent.*, d. 8, Expositio Primae Partis Textus (Mandonnet ed., Vol. 1, p. 209): ". . . et ita cuilibet quidditati creatae accidit esse, quia non est de intellectu ipsius quidditatis; potest enim intelligi humanitas, et tamen dubitari, utrum homo habeat esse"; d. 8, q. 4, a. 2 (p. 222): ". . . potest enim cogitari humanitas et tamen ignorari aliquid homo sit," where it is incorporated into what we shall call the "genus argument," for which see below; *In II Sent.*, d. 1, q. 1, a. 1 (Mandonnet ed., Vol. 2, p. 12): ". . . ita tamen quod ipsarum rerum naturae non sunt hoc ipsum esse quod habent: alias esse esset de intellectu cuiuslibet quidditatis, quod falsum est, cum quidditas cuiuslibet rei possit intelligi etiam non intelligendo de ea an sit," where Thomas concludes from this to the caused character of every such being and then to the existence of God, and ultimately to God's unicity; *In II Sent.*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 1 (p. 87): "Quaedam enim natura est de cuius intellectu non est suum esse, quod patet ex hoc quod intelligi potest esse cum hoc quod ignoretur an sit, sicut phaenicem, vel eclipsim, vel aliquid huiusmodi," where Thomas ultimately concludes to a composition of quiddity and *esse* as of potency and act in angels while rejecting their matter-form composition. Sweeney also cites *De veritate*, q. 10, a. 12, but acknowledges that it moves in the opposite direction (see "Existence/Essence," p. 106).

and all others are only received in something else. Thomas illustrates this third possibility with a hypothetical example. If there were such a thing as a completely separate heat, it would be different from all instances of nonseparated heat by reason of its very separation. This is to say, precisely because it was not received in anything else, it would differ from all other instances of heat which are received in something else which is heated.³²

Suppose, continues Thomas, that there is a thing which is nothing but *esse* (act of being) so as to be subsisting *esse*. Such a thing cannot be multiplied by the addition of any difference; for then it would not be pure *esse* but *esse* plus the differentiating form. So much, therefore, for possibility one. To appeal to it in order to account for many instances of subsisting *esse* would be self-refuting. In every case, with one possible exception, we would have *esse* plus a form which differentiates it. In no case would we have pure subsisting *esse*.³³

What, then, of the second possible way of multiplying something? Thomas finds this even less satisfactory when one attempts to use it to multiply instances of pure *esse*. In all such cases, with our one hypothetical exception, we would no longer have pure *esse*, but *esse* plus the particular matter which receives and multiplies it.³⁴

Wherefore, continues Thomas, it follows that there can only be one such thing which is its very *esse* (act of being). One may immediately ask, of course, what about the third possible way of multiplying something? By implication Thomas is telling us that to appeal to it is, in effect, to concede his point. For then there would indeed be only one pure and subsisting *esse*. In everything else there would be a combination of *esse* and a subject which receives *esse*, just as, if a pure and separated heat could exist, it would be distinct from all instances of received heat and would therefore be unique.³⁵ Wherefore, continues Thomas, since there can only be one such thing which is its very *esse* (act of being), in every other thing its *esse* (act of being) and its quiddity or nature or form differ (literally: "are other"). And if this is so, he can also conclude that in intelligences there must be *esse* in addition to (*praeter*) form, or form and *esse*. This follows because in every being, with this one possible exception, *esse* and form differ.³⁶ With this, phase two of Thomas's argumentation comes to an end.

32. Leon. 43.376:103–377:113. Note his description of the third possibility: "... vel per hoc quod unum est absolutum et aliud in aliquo receptum..." (110–111).

33. "Si autem ponatur aliqua res quae sit esse tantum ita ut ipsum esse sit subsistens, hoc esse non recipiet additionem differentiae quia iam non esset esse tantum sed esse et praeter hoc forma aliqua..." (Leon. 43.377:113–117).

34. "... ut multo minus reciperet additionem materiae, quia iam esset esse non subsistens sed materiale" (Leon. 43.377:117–119).

35. "Unde relinquitur quod talis res quae sit suum esse non potest esse nisi una..." (Leon. 43.377:119–121).

36. "... unde oportet quod in qualibet alia re praeter eam aliud sit esse suum et aliud quidditas vel natura seu forma sua; unde oportet quod in intelligentiis sit esse praeter formam, et ideo dictum est quod intelligentia est forma et esse" (Leon. 43.377:121–126). See his earlier reference to the *Liber de causis* (376:36–39).

In my judgment, this part of Thomas's argumentation is much more interesting and promising than phase one. Phase two also rests on certain presuppositions, of course. First of all, there is the fact of multiplicity. If multiplicity of intelligences is admitted, in such intelligences essence and *esse* must differ. The reason for this is that at most there can be one thing in which essence and *esse* are identical. At the same time, it seems to me that this argument, if valid, will apply as soon as multiplicity of substantial entities of any kind is admitted. If two or more things exist—which for Aquinas is an undeniable datum of sense experience—in none of them with the one possible exception can essence and *esse* be identified. This is so because there cannot be more than one being which is its very *esse*. Hence, this argument may also be regarded as an early attempt on Thomas's part to address himself to the problem of the One and the Many.

Secondly, the argument seems to rest on the exhaustive character of the three possible ways of accounting for multiplicity which it distinguishes. Is there no other way of accounting for the multiplication of beings? At least as of this writing Thomas thinks that there is not. Moreover, as we shall see below when considering the next class of his arguments, he eventually seems to have concluded that this threefold way of accounting for multiplicity could be reduced to two fundamental types: (1) multiplication by the addition of a difference (cf. possibility one as proposed in the *De ente*); (2) multiplication by reception in different subjects (joining possibilities two and three of the *De ente*, apparently).³⁷

Owens has maintained that Thomas's argumentation in the *De ente* presupposes and must presuppose that God's existence has already been established before it can conclude to a real distinction between essence and *esse* in other entities. Owens and I continue to differ on this issue. On my reading, until this point in the argumentation, God's existence has entered in only as an hypothesis. At most there can be one being in which essence and *esse* are identical. In all other beings they must

37. See Fabro, "Un itinéraire de saint Thomas," p. 99. To illustrate the more common appeal to two ways of accounting for multiplication, Fabro cites *Compendium theologiae*, c. 15: "... duplex est modus quo aliqua forma potest multiplicari: unus per differentias, sicut forma generalis, ut color in diversas species coloris; alius per subiecta, sicut albedo" (Leon. 42.87:22–25). Here Thomas is attempting to show that there is only one God. His argument continues to this effect: if a form cannot be multiplied by the addition of differences, and if it is not a form that exists in a subject, it can only be one. But such is true of the divine essence which is identical with the divine *esse*. It should be noted that Fabro also warns here against separating the three arguments of the *De ente*. He regards the present one, which he calls metaphysical, as the prolongation and natural complement of the first one, which he refers to as logical (pp. 98–99). Fabro cites *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 4, a. 1, ad 2 as a contemporary version of the threefold division of the *De ente*. There Thomas writes that among created things something may be determined so as to be *aliquid* either (1) by the addition of a difference, or (2) because a common nature is received in something, or (3) by the addition of an accident. None of these will apply to God, whose simplicity Thomas is here defending. However, while the first two divisions more or less parallel the first two in the *De ente*, the third member of the division in *In I Sent.* finds no parallel in the *De ente*. And their purposes are not the same. See ed. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 219–20.

differ. But if God's existence enters in at this point only as a working hypothesis, this does not mean that the conclusion itself is only hypothetical. On the contrary, Thomas's point is to show that it is impossible for there to be more than one being in which essence and *esse* are identical. If we grant the fact of multiplicity, then in all existing things, with this single possible exception, essence and *esse* must differ. Nor is this to reason from possibility to actuality. It is rather to reason from the impossibility of there being more than one thing in which essence and *esse* are really identical to the conclusion that in all other things, with this one possible exception, essence and *esse* are not identical. It is only in what I shall call phase three of Thomas's argumentation that he attempts to prove that God does in fact exist. But at the end of phase two Thomas has concluded that in all things, with the single possible exception, *esse* differs from ("is other than") quiddity or nature or form. He immediately applies this to intelligences, as we have seen, and finds confirmation in this for his earlier citation from the *Liber de causis*—an intelligence includes both form and *esse*. He had cited that text as an authority in introducing his overall argumentation to show that there is composition of form and *esse* in intelligences.³⁸

Owens and I do agree that Thomas defends real distinction of essence and *esse* by the end of phase three of his general argument. According to Owens, however, Thomas does not establish this distinction as real rather than as merely conceptual until after he presents his argument for God's existence in that same phase three. In phase two he would have established nothing more than the conceptual distinction already argued for in phase one, but would now have extended its application to intelligences. In support he also comments that Thomas introduces nothing in his argumentation in phase two to indicate that he is there attempting to establish a real distinction.³⁹

To this I would first point out that Thomas does not use the terminology of real distinction or of conceptual distinction between essence and *esse* anywhere in the

38. See the text cited above in n. 21.

39. For these various interventions in chronological order see Owens, "Quiddity and Real Distinction," *Mediaeval Studies* 27 (1965), pp. 1–22; Wippel, "Aquinas's Route to the Real Distinction," *The Thomist* 43 (1979), pp. 279–95; Owens's reply: "Stages and Distinction in *De ente*," *The Thomist* 45 (1981), pp. 99–123; Wippel's reply: *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 120–32 (see pp. 107–20 for a reprint of "Aquinas's Route to the Real Distinction"); Owens, "Aquinas' Distinction at *De ente et essentia* 4.119–123," *Mediaeval Studies* 48 (1986), pp. 264–87. Also see MacDonald's "The *Essel* Argument," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 22 (1984), pp. 157–72; W. Patt, "Aquinas's Real Distinction," *New Scholasticism* 62 (1988), pp. 1–29. Only after I had completed this book and submitted it for publication did a recent study by A. Maurer become available, entitled "Dialectic in the *DE ENTE ET ESSENTIA* of St. Thomas Aquinas," in *Roma, magistra mundi. Itineraria culturae mediaevalis*. Mélanges offerts au Père L. E. Boyle à l'occasion de son 75e anniversaire, J. Hamesse, ed. (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1998), pp. 573–83. While I cannot devote to it here the attention it deserves, I would simply note that Maurer argues that in the *De ente* Thomas only intended to offer dialectical argumentation, not metaphysical demonstrations, either for the real distinction or composition of essence and *esse* in creatures, or for the existence of God. Suffice it to say that my interpretation differs greatly from such a reading.

argumentation in *De ente* c. 4, even though, as Owens himself has pointed out, this issue would become important shortly after Aquinas's death, and even though it is important for us. On a few other occasions Thomas does refer to the distinction or composition of essence and *esse* as real. But in the *De ente* he leaves it to his reader to discern what kind of distinction he has in mind. Even so, it seems clear enough that throughout phase two Thomas is arguing for a distinction that does not depend on our way of thinking about it, and hence for what we understand as a real distinction between them. Thus he opens phase two with the transition clause: "Unless perhaps there is some thing whose quiddity is *esse* itself." Here he surely means that, if such a thing does exist, its quiddity is really, not merely conceptually, identical with its *esse*. Such a being could only be one and first, he continues to argue, and he attempts to prove this by introducing three ways in which something might be multiplied. As we have seen, he quickly eliminates the first and second proposed ways of multiplying supposed instances of subsisting *esse* as self-refuting and concludes that in every other thing, apart from this one possible exception, *esse* differs from the nature or form or essence of that thing. Since he wants to show that there is or can be only one thing in which essence and *esse* are really identical, it follows that he here is making the point that in all other things they are not really identical. But this is to say that they are really, not merely conceptually distinct.⁴⁰

Moreover, as supporting evidence for my interpretation, I would recall the example Thomas uses to illustrate the third possible way of multiplying something, whereby one instance of it is separate and all other instances are received in something. Presumably in each of these nonseparate instances, what receives must be distinct, and really distinct, from that which is received. As an example Thomas offers the case of heat. If there were a pure and separate heat, it would be different from all instances of heat that are not separate, i.e., that are received in something else. And in all these other cases, the heat would presumably be distinct, and really distinct, from the subject that receives it. So too, Thomas would have us reason, if there is such a thing that is subsisting *esse* itself, by reason of its separation it will be different from all instances of *esse* that are not separate, that is to say, that are received in something. From this we may conclude that in such things that which

40. On Aquinas's lack of concern in most contexts about identifying explicitly as real or as conceptual the distinction he was defending between essence and existence see Owens, "Quiddity and Real Distinction," pp. 19–22; "Stages and Distinction," p. 104; "Aquinas' Distinction at *De ente*," pp. 265–66. Owens has singled out five passages in Thomas's writings where he actually refers to this distinction (or composition) as real: *In I Sent.*, d. 13, q. 1, a. 3 (Mandonnet ed., Vol. 1, p. 307): "Ad hoc enim quod sit universale et particulare, exigitur aliqua diversitas realis . . . quidditatis communicabilis, et esse quod proprium est;" *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 2, a. 2, sol. (p. 471): "Actus autem qui mensuratur aevo, scilicet ipsum esse aeviterni, differt ab eo cuius est actus re quidem . . ."; *De veritate*, q. 27, a. 1, ad 8 (which will be discussed below under Section 3 of this chapter); *In De Hebdomadibus*, lect. 2, Leon. 50.272:196–273:207 (cited above in Ch. IV, n. 20); *ibid.*, 273:219–220: "Si enim esset aliud realiter id quod est et ipsum esse, iam non esset simplex sed compositum" (discussed below in this chapter). For Owens see "Aquinas' Distinction," pp. 266–73.

receives (essence, or nature, or form) is distinct, and really distinct, from that which is received (*esse*, or the act of being).

Hence there is no reason, so far as I can determine, to think that in phase two Thomas is limiting himself to a purely conceptual or logical distinction. Indeed, if he did not think that he had now demonstrated that in all other things, including intelligences, essence and *esse* are not really identical (and therefore are really distinct), he would have failed to achieve one of his stated objectives in phase two of his argumentation, i.e., to prove that there is at most one thing in which essence and *esse* are identical. Proof of that objective was necessary for him to establish his main conclusion, that in everything else, and therefore in intelligences, they are (really) distinct.

What about phase three in Thomas's argumentation? Why has Thomas introduced it, if it is not a necessary step in his demonstration of real distinction between essence and *esse* in things other than God? As I interpret the text, Thomas takes the conclusion of phase two, real otherness of essence and *esse*, as his point of departure for his argument for God's existence in phase three.⁴¹ This makes it most unlikely that he would again prove this same point at the conclusion of his argumentation for God's existence. But what he does add in phase three to our understanding of the relationship between essence and *esse* in intelligences is the point that they unite with one another as potency and act.

Though this argument for God's existence will be considered in greater detail in a subsequent chapter, certain parts of it should be mentioned here. It begins by noting that whatever belongs to a thing is caused by the principles of that thing's nature (as is true of risibility, a proper accident, in a human being), or comes to it from some extrinsic principle (as light is present in air owing to the influence of the sun). But, continues Thomas, *esse* itself cannot be caused (efficiently) by the very form or quiddity of a thing, for that thing would then cause itself and produce its own existence, something which Thomas rejects as impossible. Therefore, in any thing in which nature (essence) and *esse* differ, that thing must receive its *esse*

41. While Owens denies that real distinction between essence and *esse* has been established by Thomas either at the end of phase one or at the end of phase two of the argumentation in the *De ente*, he maintains that the conceptual distinction which has then been established is sufficient for Thomas to conclude to the efficiently caused character of any such being, and therefore, to begin his argumentation for God's existence. See "Quiddity and Real Distinction," p. 16; "Being and Natures in Aquinas," *Modern Schoolman* 61 (1984), pp. 160–61. Whether the argument based on inspection of essence or quidditative content is sufficient to establish the efficiently caused character of any such being is another difficult and contested point. For discussion and criticism see Van Steenberghe, *Le problème de l'existence de Dieu*, pp. 39–40. Whatever the validity of such an approach, my contention is that Thomas does not follow this procedure in the *De ente*, but rather reasons from real distinction of essence and *esse* in all existing beings, with only one possible exception, to the efficiently caused character of such beings. For another who finds Thomas arguing for real distinction at what I am calling phase two of the argument, see MacDonald, "The *Essel/Essentia* Argument," pp. 167–68.

from something else, or must be efficiently caused. Here Thomas uses the conclusion established in phase two as the point of departure for his argument for God's existence; for he grounds the radically caused or contingent character of all beings, with one possible exception, on the distinction within them of essence and *esse*.⁴²

After completing his argument for God's existence Thomas observes that this First Cause is the cause of *esse* (*causa essendi*) for all other things by reason of the fact that it is pure *esse*. He again notes that an intelligence is form and *esse* (see the conclusion of phase two), but now goes on to show that form and *esse* are related as potency and act.⁴³ That which receives something from another is in potency with respect to that which it receives, and that which is received in it is its act. Hence the quiddity or form (or essence) which is an intelligence is in potency to the *esse* it receives from God, and its *esse* is received as its act. In other words, only now has Thomas completed his general effort in this chapter to show not only that essence and *esse* are really distinct in all nondivine beings and therefore in intelligences, but also that they are united in intelligences as potency and act. His text shows that he is again using *esse* to signify the intrinsic act of being of any such being. "Because . . . the quiddity of an intelligence is the intelligence itself, therefore its quiddity or essence is identical with that which it is, and its *esse*, which it receives from God, is that whereby it subsists in reality."⁴⁴

Thomas also comments that for this reason substances of this kind are said to be composed of *quo est* and *quod est*, or as Boethius puts it, of *quod est* and *esse*. Though Thomas has not used the term "real" to describe the diversity and composition of essence and *esse* which he has argued for in this chapter, he will use such terminology a few years later in interpreting the Boethian couplet in his Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus*. This we have already seen in the previous chapter. But it is worth mentioning again, since it suggests that the kind of diversity

42. Leon. 43.377:127–137. Note the concluding remark: "Ergo oportet quod omnis talis res cuius esse est aliud quam natura sua habeat esse ab alio." By this statement Thomas has considered and eliminated a third possibility, i.e., that something which belongs to a thing is simply identical with that thing itself. He eliminates it by concentrating on beings in which nature and *esse* really differ. In all such beings their *esse* must be given to them from without, which is to say, they must be efficiently caused.

43. For the continuation of the argument for God's existence see Leon. 43.377:137–146. Note in particular: ". . . oportet quod sit aliqua res quae sit causa essendi omnibus rebus eo quod ipsa est esse tantum . . ." He then joins the conclusion from phase two with this: "Patet ergo quod intelligentia est forma et esse, et quod esse habet a primo ente quod est esse tantum, et hoc est causa prima quae Deus est."

44. "Omne autem quod recipit aliquid ab alio est in potentia respectu illius, et hoc quod receptum est in eo est actus eius; ergo oportet quod ipsa quidditas vel forma quae est intelligentia sit in potentia respectu esse quod a Deo recipit, et illud esse receptum est per modum actus. Et ita invenitur potentia et actus in intelligentiis, non tamen forma et materia nisi aequivoce. . . . Et quia, ut dictum est, intelligentiae quidditas est ipsamet intelligentia, ideo quidditas vel essentia eius est ipsum quod est ipsa, et esse suum receptum a Deo est id quo subsistit in rerum natura . . ." (Leon. 43.377:147–163).

and composition he has in mind here is real, not merely conceptual or mind-dependent.⁴⁵

A final observation is in order here. If my interpretation of Thomas's procedure in this chapter from the *De ente* is correct, Thomas does not rest his case for real distinction or otherness of essence and *esse* on prior knowledge of God's existence. But he does introduce the argumentation for God's existence before he correlates essence and *esse* as potency and act. Does this not mean that his conclusion that essence and *esse* are composed as potency and act presupposes knowledge of God's existence, even if his case for a real distinction between them does not?

While I grant that in the *De ente* Thomas has correlated essence and *esse* as potency and act only after he has completed his argument for God's existence, I would suggest that he would not have to proceed in this way. Simply by reasoning from real diversity of essence and *esse* in all beings with one possible exception, he can and does establish the efficiently caused character of such beings. At this point he could, if he wished to do so, immediately establish the fact that in each of them essence and *esse* unite as potency and act. He could do this merely by appealing to the principle that what is received by something from without unites with that thing as an act with its receiving potency, the same principle he has employed in the *De ente*.⁴⁶ In short, the actual argumentation for God's existence could have been omitted. Thomas has not introduced it as a step in his demonstration of real diversity of essence and *esse* in nondivine entities. And he could have established the point that essence and *esse* unite as potency and act in such entities without inserting the argument for God's existence. That he has in fact proceeded otherwise here is perfectly natural, since he has stated at the beginning of *De ente*, c. 4 that he wishes to indicate how essence is realized in separate substances including the soul, intelligences, and the First Cause. Rather than continue to speak in hypothetical fashion about the First Cause or God, it was quite appropriate for Thomas to complete his account at this point by demonstrating God's existence.⁴⁷

2. Arguments Based on the Impossibility of More Than One Being in Which Essence and *Esse* Are Identical

In addition to the particular version of this argumentation which we have seen in phase two of Chapter 4 of the *De ente*, Thomas frequently enough has recourse to a somewhat similar procedure in other contexts. In these other contexts he almost always takes God's existence as given or as already established, and reasons from this to distinction or composition of essence and *esse* in other beings. This is

45. ". . . et propter hoc a quibusdam dicuntur huiusmodi substantiae componi ex quo est et quod est, vel ex quod est et esse, ut Boethius dicit" (Leon. 43.377:163–166). See Chapter IV, n. 20, for the citation from the Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus*, and n. 40 above in the present chapter.

46. See the text from the *De ente* cited above in n. 44.

47. See the text cited above in n. 18.

understandable because of the theological nature or because of the particular structure of the works in which such argumentation appears. But in some of these cases, Thomas would not have to assume God's existence as already given in order for his argumentation to retain its force. Hence I shall regard these last-mentioned cases as illustrations of arguments which need not presuppose God's existence, even though in presenting them Thomas usually assumes this as given.⁴⁸

Already in his Commentary on Bk I of the *Sentences* Thomas reasons from the uniqueness of that Being in which essence and *esse* are identical to composition of essence and *esse* in every other being. But since these arguments do seem to require prior knowledge of God's existence for their validity, I will defer consideration of them for a later chapter.⁴⁹ Instead I will now turn to one of Thomas's more mature works, *Summa contra Gentiles* II, c. 52. There again, while he rejects matter-form composition of created intellectual substances, he wishes to show that they do not equal the divine simplicity. There is another kind of composition in such entities, that of *esse* and *quod est*. His first three arguments will illustrate the kind of reasoning I have in mind.⁵⁰

In the first argument Thomas reasons that if there is such a thing as subsisting *esse*, nothing else can be found in it in addition to its *esse*. Even in the case of a thing which is not subsisting *esse*, whatever is present in it in addition to its *esse* will unite with the existing entity but not with its *esse* except *per accidens*. Such will happen insofar as there is a single subject which has both *esse* and something which is different from *esse*. Thus in a subject such as Sortes, something such as whiteness may be present in addition to his substantial *esse*. In this case, of course, the whiteness of Sortes is distinct from his substantial *esse*, i.e., his act of being.⁵¹

If, therefore, *esse*, the act of being, is not present in a subject, nothing else can be united with it. *Esse* insofar as it is *esse* cannot be diversified. It can only be diversified by something that is other than *esse*. So it is that the *esse* of a stone is different from the *esse* of a human being. (By this Thomas means that it is because the essence of a stone is different from the essence of a human being that the act of being of the former is different from the act of being of the latter. At the same time

48. In other words, it is because I regard prior knowledge of God's existence as unnecessary for the inner workings of such arguments that I classify them here rather than under arguments which do presuppose his existence.

49. See *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 5, a. 1, sol. (Mandonnet ed., Vol. 1, pp. 226–27), and q. 5, a. 2 (pp. 229–30); *In II Sent.*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 1 (Mandonnet ed., Vol. 2, pp. 87–88) as analyzed below in Chapter XIV, Section 1.

50. The chapter heading reads: "Quod in substantiis intellectualibus creatis differt esse et quod est." But in his introductory remarks Thomas writes: "Invenitur enim in eis aliqua compositio ex eo quod non est idem in eis esse et quod est." It would seem, therefore, that he would move from diversity of *esse* and *quod est* to their composition. In fact, he concentrates on the first point in c. 52, and in c. 53 goes on to correlate them as act and potency. See ed. cit., p. 145.

51. Note in particular: "Quia etiam in his quorum esse non est subsistens, quod inest existenti praeter esse eius, est quidem existenti unitum, non autem est unum cum esse eius, nisi per accidens, inquantum est unum subiectum habens esse et id quod est praeter esse . . ." (ed. cit., p. 145).

he is implying that the essence of each differs from the act of being of the same, since he has reasoned that *esse* can only be divided by something that is different from *esse*.) Therefore, concludes Thomas, *esse subsistens* can only be one. But he has already shown (see Bk I, c. 22) that God is his own subsisting *esse*. Therefore nothing other than God can be its *esse* (act of being). Consequently, in every other substance, the act of being and the substance (essence) differ.⁵²

In this argument Thomas can take God's existence as established (for this see Bk I, c. 13). Nonetheless, the argument itself does not turn upon the fact that God or self-subsisting being exists, but on the impossibility of there being more than one instance of self-subsisting *esse*, or more than one being which is identical with its act of being. Hence, if more than one being actually exists, one may conclude that in every such being, with one possible exception, essence and act of being differ. Also central to the argument is the point that *esse* (the act of being) is not self-dividing and can only be divided by something other than itself, i.e., by essence.

Thomas's second argument begins with the observation that any common nature, if it is simply considered in itself as separate, can only be one. This is so even though there may be many individuals which share in that nature. If the nature of animal, for instance, could subsist in itself and as separate, it would not include those things which are proper to species such as human being or ox. When the differences which constitute species are removed, the nature of the genus remains as undivided. This follows because the very same differences which serve to constitute species also serve to divide the genus. If, therefore, *esse* itself were common in genus-like fashion, there could only be one separate and subsisting *esse*. And if in fact *esse* is not divided by differences like a genus but rather because it pertains to this or to that subject, as is indeed the truth of the matter, it follows with even greater reason that there can be only one case of subsisting *esse*. Since God is subsisting *esse*, nothing other than God can be its own *esse* (act of being).⁵³

While Thomas naturally assumes God's existence in this argument because he has already demonstrated it, that assumption is not required for the validity of the argument. Once again the argument rests on the impossibility of there being more than one case of self-subsisting *esse*. If many different beings do exist in fact, in each of them, with this single possible exception, essence and *esse* must differ.

52. Note in particular: "Esse autem, in quantum est esse, non potest esse diversum: potest autem diversificari per aliquid quod est praeter esse; sicut esse lapidis est aliud ab esse hominis. Illud ergo quod est esse subsistens, non potest esse nisi unum tantum. Ostensum est autem quod Deus est suum esse subsistens. Nihil igitur aliud praeter ipsum potest esse suum esse. Oportet igitur in omni substantia quae est praeter ipsum, esse aliud ipsam substantiam et esse eius" (ibid.).

53. Ibid. Note the concluding part of the argument: "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. Relinquitur igitur quod, cum Deus sit esse subsistens, nihil aliud praeter ipsum est suum esse."

A third argument is based on the impossibility of there being more than one completely infinite *esse*. Completely infinite *esse* embraces the total perfection of being. Therefore, if such infinity were realized in two different beings, there would be no way in which one such being could be distinguished from another. But subsisting *esse* must be infinite, continues Thomas, because it is not limited by any receiving principle. (Here he has introduced another important principle for his metaphysics already noted in our preceding chapter, i.e., that act, especially the act of being, is unlimited unless it is limited by a receiving principle.) Apart from this one case, therefore, there can be no other subsisting *esse*. Though Thomas does not spell this out for us, it follows because otherwise there would be two infinite cases of subsisting *esse*, something which he has just rejected as impossible. Presumably he would also have us draw the unexpressed conclusion: therefore in every other being essence and *esse* (act of being) differ.⁵⁴

Like the two previous arguments, this one apparently also takes God's existence as already established. But also like the other two arguments, its inner logic does not require that one make this assumption. Because there cannot be two infinite beings, there cannot be two beings in which essence and act of being are identical. Therefore, if many beings do in fact exist, in each of them, with one possible exception, essence and act of being are not identical.

Thomas offers another version of this kind of reasoning in his relatively late *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 1 (1267–1268). There again he rejects matter-form composition of created spiritual substances.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, he continues, two factors are present in any created spiritual substance, one of which is related to the other as potency to act. Thomas notes that the first being or God is infinite act, having in himself the fullness of being, a fullness which is not restricted to the nature of any genus or species. From this it follows that God's *esse* is not instilled, as it were, into any distinct nature which is not identical with his *esse*; for if it were, it would be limited to that nature. Hence we can say that God is his very *esse*. But, continues Thomas, this is true of no other being. Thus if whiteness could exist in separation apart from every subject or receiving principle, this separate whiteness would only be one. So too, it is impossible for there to be more than one subsisting *esse*. Therefore, everything which comes after the first being, since it is not its *esse*, must have an *esse* which is received in something else by which that *esse* is limited.⁵⁶

Then, as we have already seen in Ch. IV above, Thomas goes on to compare the receiving principle or nature of any such being with the *esse* which it receives

54. Note in particular: "Esse autem subsistens oportet esse infinitum: quia non terminatur aliquo recipiente. Impossibile est igitur esse aliquod esse subsistens praeter primum" (ibid.).

55. Ed. cit. (Calcaterra-Centi), pp. 370–71.

56. Ibid. Note in particular: "... sed si esset albedo separata ab omni subiecto et recipiente, esset una tantum; ita impossibile est quod sit ipsum esse subsistens nisi unum tantum. Omne igitur quod est post primum ens, cum non sit suum esse, habet esse in aliquo receptum, per quod ipsum esse contrahitur. . . ."

as participant and participated. In every creature the nature of the thing which participates *esse* is one, and the participated *esse* something other. The participated *esse* is related to the nature which participates in it as act to potency.⁵⁷

Most important for our immediate purposes, however, is Thomas's claim that it is impossible for there to be more than one subsisting *esse*. He has introduced this argument by stating that God is infinite act and has in himself the fullness of being. In other words, Thomas is taking God's existence as given. Even so, if the argument is intrinsically sound, it will hold whether or not one already knows that God exists. For the argument rests on the impossibility of there being more than one self-subsisting *esse*. In all other beings with this single exception, whether or not it is realized in actuality, essence and *esse* must differ. Or as Thomas puts it, the nature which participates in *esse* is one (*aliud*), and the participated *esse* is other (*aliud*).⁵⁸

As another interesting illustration of this procedure one may turn to Thomas's Commentary on Bk VIII of Aristotle's *Physics* (ca. 1268–1269). This time the argument appears within the broader context of a discussion of the presence or absence of matter-form composition in heavenly bodies. After Thomas himself argues for matter-form composition in such bodies, he comments that even if we were to concede that there is no such composition there, some kind of potency would still be present in them, i.e., a potency for being (*potentia essendi*). Every simple subsisting substance must either be identical with its *esse*, or else participate in *esse*. But there can only be one simple substance which is subsisting *esse* itself, just as, if whiteness could subsist in itself, it could only be one. Therefore every substance which comes after the first and simple substance participates in *esse*. But, continues Thomas, every participant is composed of that which participates and that in which it participates; and the participating principle is in potency to that in which it participates. Therefore, in every substance, however simple it may be, with the exception of the First Substance, there is a potency for *esse*.⁵⁹

57. See Ch. IV above, n. 62.

58. Ed. cit., p. 371: "... et sic in quolibet creato aliud est natura rei quae participat esse, et aliud ipsum esse participatum." In order to support his claim that *esse subsistens* can only be one, Thomas has this time drawn an analogy with a hypothetical subsisting whiteness. His point is that just as whiteness can be multiplied only by being received in different subjects, so it is with *esse*. If we find different instances of *esse*, in every case with one single (and possible) exception, *esse* will have to be received by a distinct principle which limits it. After again correlating the nature of a created spiritual substance with its *esse* as potency and act, Thomas adds an important qualification: "... adhuc comparabitur ad suum esse ut potentia ad actum: non dico autem ut potentiam separabilem ab actu, sed quam semper suus actus comitetur." Hence there can never be an actually existing nature without its act of being.

59. See *In VIII Phys.*, lect. 21, p. 615, n. 1153. Note in particular: "Substantia autem simplex quae est ipsum esse subsistens, non potest esse nisi una, sicut nec albedo, si esset subsistens, posset esse nisi una. 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. . . ."

As in the argument from *De spiritualibus creaturis*, so in this one as well Thomas joins his case for composition of things other than God with his metaphysics of participation. And like the previously considered arguments, this one also rests on the impossibility of there being more than one substance which is its very *esse*. The by-now familiar parallel with whiteness is again drawn. If whiteness could subsist in itself, it could only be one. If *esse* does subsist in itself, it too can only be one. Once more, therefore, the argument would not have to assume that there is such a thing as self-subsisting *esse*. The impossibility of there being more than one case of this would be enough for Thomas to conclude to nonidentity of essence and act of being and, according to the present argument, to the composition of potency and act, in every other substance.

Our final text in this section is taken from Thomas's very late *De substantiis separatis*, c. 8 (1271 or later). There he again argues against Avicbron that there is no need to hold that created separate substances are composed of matter and form in order to avoid identifying them with God. Some potency is present in them since they are not *esse* itself but only participate in it.⁶⁰

Thomas again insists that there can only be one subsisting thing that is *esse* itself. In support he reasons that if any other form is considered as separate, it can only be one. Just as a species is one in the order of thought when it is simply considered in itself, a specific nature would be one in reality if it could exist in itself as such. The same may be said of a genus in relation to its species. Just as it is one in the order of thought when it is considered in itself rather than as realized in its species, so too a genus would be one in the order of reality if it could subsist in itself. By applying similar reasoning we finally come to *esse* itself which, says Thomas, is most universal (*communissimum*). Therefore, he quickly concludes, *esse subsistens* is only one. His point again is that since *esse* does subsist as such and in itself, subsisting *esse* can only be one. Once more he contrasts this with everything else. Everything which exists has *esse*. Therefore in everything apart from the First Being there is both *esse* as its act and the substance of the thing which has *esse* and is a receiving potency for that act.⁶¹ Like the previously considered arguments, this one does in fact take God's existence as granted. But like the others, it would not have to do so in order to remain valid. It, too, rests on the impossibility of there being more than one being which is its very *esse*.

Before concluding this particular section, some remarks should be made about the different ways in which Thomas attempts to show that there can only be one thing in which essence and *esse* (act of being) are identical, or only one case of *esse subsistens* and hence, by contrast, that essence and act of being differ in everything else.

60. Leon. 40.D55:164–169.

61. Leon. 40.D55:169–187.

At times he draws an analogy between *esse* and less extended specific or generic natures. If a given specific or generic nature could subsist in itself and apart from anything else, it could only be one. Therefore, since *esse* does subsist apart from anything else in one instance, subsisting *esse*, it too can only be one. Thomas does not want us to forget the difference between *esse* and any generic or specific nature; nor does he want us to make the mistake of identifying *esse subsistens* with *esse commune*. This we have already seen.⁶²

The point of his analogy rather is that if such a specific or generic nature could subsist in itself, it would only be one. One may ask why this is so. As regards a genus, Thomas spells this out more fully in the second argument from *Summa contra Gentiles* II, c. 52. If a generic nature could subsist in itself, it would lack the differences which constitute its species and which serve to divide the genus. Therefore, nothing would remain which could divide the genus. But what about a specific nature? If such were to subsist in itself apart from different receiving subjects, it too would lack any principle for division into numerically distinct individuals. In fact, if specific forms are multiplied in individuals, this is because in each of them the form is received and individuated by a distinct receiving and individuating principle, that is, matter as designated by quantity.⁶³

As regards *esse*, Thomas has argued that if it could be multiplied by differences in the way a genus is, then, if it subsisted in itself, it could only be one. This would follow because it too would lack any such differences which could divide it. But Thomas holds that in fact *esse* is not a genus and is not divided or multiplied in this way. It can only be multiplied by being received in this or that subject, that is, in this or that nature or essence.⁶⁴ Since subsisting *esse* is not received by any distinct nature or subject, it cannot be multiplied. In everything else, on the other hand, *esse* and that which receives and divides *esse* must differ.

On other occasions Thomas draws an analogy between *esse* and accidental forms such as heat or whiteness. If any such form could exist in itself apart from a receiving subject, it would only be one. This is because this kind of form is multiplied by reason of diversity in the subjects which receive it. So too, reasons Thomas, if *esse* can subsist in itself apart from any receiving subject or principle, such subsisting *esse* can only be one. And if *esse* is multiplied in other cases, this can only be by reason of different principles or essences which receive it and render it many.⁶⁵

62. See above in Ch. IV, Section 2.

63. This will be discussed below in our consideration of the principle of individuation in Ch. IX, Section 4.

64. See SCG II, c. 52, 2d argument, as cited above in n. 53. This corresponds to the third possible way of multiplying subsisting *esse* which was considered in c. 4 of the *De ente*. If subsisting *esse* cannot be multiplied even in that way, nonsubsisting *esse* can be.

65. Thomas has, of course, drawn the analogy with heat in c. 4 of the *De ente*. For the analogy with whiteness see the arguments just considered from *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 1; Commentary on *Physics* VIII, lect. 21.

Thus we see that in these later texts Thomas has reduced the major ways in which something can be multiplied from the three mentioned in the *De ente* to two. As he puts this in his *Compendium theologiae*, c. 15, a form can be multiplied in one of two ways: (1) by the addition of differences, as a generic form is multiplied in its species; or (2) by being received in different subjects. Since the divine essence is *esse* itself, it can be multiplied in neither of these ways, and Thomas goes on to conclude that it can only be one.⁶⁶ By implication he is also telling us that since *esse*, taken as the *actus essendi* which is intrinsic to every existing substance, cannot be multiplied in the first of these ways, it can only be multiplied in the second way. **It can only be multiplied by being received in different receiving and dividing principles, that is, in distinct essences or natures. He does not mean to imply that such essences or natures actually preexist before they receive their respective acts of being, as we have previously pointed out.**

3. The "Genus" Argument

Thomas appeals to this kind of argumentation in texts which range in time from his Commentary on I *Sentences* until as late as *Summa theologiae* I; and it appears in somewhat different form in his *Compendium Theologiae*.⁶⁷ Frequently he uses it as a step in his effort to prove that God does not fall into any genus; for whatever is included in a genus has a quiddity that differs from its act of being. On one occasion, in the *De veritate*, he develops a fuller version of this argument within a very different setting. As we shall see, in none of these contexts does the inner force of the argument rest on prior knowledge that God exists.

A version of the first kind of argumentation appears in his Commentary on I *Sentences*, d. 8, q. 4, a. 2. There Thomas is attempting to show that God does not

66. See note 37 of this chapter for references and discussion. Note that here again in c. 15 he draws an analogy with whiteness to illustrate multiplication by reason of reception in different subjects: "Omnis ergo forma quae non potest multiplicari per differentias, si non sit forma in subiecto existens, impossibile est quod multiplicetur; sicut albedo, si subsisteret sine substantia, non esset nisi una tantum" (Leon. 42.87:25-29).

67. The argument appears in *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 4, a. 2 (ca. 1252-1256); *De veritate*, q. 27, a. 1, ad 8 (1258-1259); SCG I, c. 25 (1259-1265); *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 3 (1265-1266); ST I, q. 3, a. 5 (1266-1268); *Compendium theologiae*, c. 14 (ca. 1265-1267). In the last-mentioned text Thomas appeals to it to show that God himself is not a species which is predicated of various individuals; for the different individuals which fall within a given species differ in terms of their *esse*, but agree in sharing in a single (specific) essence. Therefore, within individual members of a given species, essence and *esse* differ (literally: "are other and other") (see Leon. 42.87:122-129). In addition to these, Sweeney has also singled out four other texts from Thomas's Commentary on the *Sentences* where this type of argumentation appears: *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 4, a. 2, sol. (Vol. 1, p. 483); *In II Sent.*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1 (Vol. 2, p. 88); *ibid.*, a. 5 (pp. 99-100); *ibid.*, a. 6 (pp. 102-3). See L. Sweeney, "Existence/Essence in Thomas Aquinas's Early Writings," p. 109. In none of these texts, however, does Thomas attempt to prove that membership in a genus entails diversity of essence and *esse*. Hence we need not delay over them here.

fall into any genus. As his third argument in support of this claim Thomas offers an approach which he describes as more subtle and as taken from Avicenna.⁶⁸ Everything which is included in a genus has a quiddity which differs from its *esse*, as is true, for instance, of human being. Actual existence (*esse in actu*) is not owing to humanity simply insofar as it is humanity. In proof Thomas appeals to a version of the *intellectus essentiae* approach. One can think of humanity without knowing whether a particular human being exists. Thomas then develops his reason for holding that whatever falls into a genus has a quiddity that differs from its *esse* (act of being). The common factor which is predicated of all those things which belong to a genus is asserted of them in quidditative fashion; for genus and species are predicated of anything in terms of its quiddity. But the act of being (*esse*) does not belong to a quiddity except by reason of the fact that the quiddity is received in this or in that individual. Therefore the quiddity of a genus or species is not communicated in terms of a single act of being (*esse*) to all members of the class, but only in terms of the common intelligible content (*ratio*). From this Thomas draws the conclusion that the *esse* (act of being) of any such thing is not identical with its quiddity.⁶⁹

Thomas appeals to similar argumentation in *Summa contra Gentiles* I, c. 25; *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 3; and in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 5. In each of these cases he is attempting to make the same point once more, that is, to show that God is not included in any genus. He phrases the argument in this way in SCG I, c. 25. Whatever is included in a genus is different from other members of that genus in terms of its *esse*. Otherwise the genus would not be predicated of many. But things which belong to the same genus must agree in terms of the quiddity of that genus. In proof Thomas again comments that this is so because the genus is predicated of its members in quidditative fashion. Therefore, he concludes, the *esse* (act of being) of each thing which exists in a genus is different from its quiddity. Since such is not possible in the case of God, God is not included in any genus.⁷⁰

68. "Tertia ratio subtilior est Avicennae, tract. V *Metaph.*, cap. iv, et tract. IX, cap. i." Ed. cit., Vol. 1, p. 222. Sweeney has commented on the difficulty of finding this argument explicitly presented as such in Avicenna, notwithstanding Thomas's fairly frequent ascriptions of it to Avicenna (especially in Thomas's earlier presentations and references to it). See Sweeney, "Existence/Essence," p. 110, n. 21, where he cites a text from Avicenna's *Metaphysica*, tr. VIII, c. 4, but which, as Sweeney recognizes, does not really contain the genus argument. For Thomas's text see ed. cit., Vol. 1, p. 222.

69. "Omne quod est in genere, habet quidditatem differentem ab esse, sicut homo; humanitati enim ex hoc quod est humanitas, non debetur esse in actu; potest enim cogitari humanitas et tamen ignorari an aliquis homo sit. Et ratio huius est, quia commune, quod praedicatur de his quae sunt in genere, praedicat quidditatem, cum genus et species praedicentur in eo quod quid est. Illi autem quidditati non debetur esse nisi per hoc quod suscepta est in hoc vel in illo. Et ideo quidditas generis vel speciei non communicatur secundum unum esse omnibus, sed solum secundum unam rationem communem. Unde constat quod esse suum non est quidditas sua" (ibid.). Thomas goes on to note that since God's *esse* is his quiddity, God cannot belong to a genus. For another equally early employment of this line of reasoning, see *De ente*, c. 5 (Leon. 43.378:8-14).

70. "Item. Quicquid est in genere secundum esse differt ab aliis quae in eodem genere sunt; alias genus de pluribus non praedicaretur. Oportet autem omnia quae sunt in eodem genere, in quidditate generis convenire: quia de omnibus genus in quod quid est praedicatur. Esse igitur cuiuslibet in genere

Fundamentally the same reasoning reappears in *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 3, in Thomas's first argument there to show that God is not included in a genus.⁷¹ We find this repeated in its essentials in ST I, q. 3, a. 5. In his third argument there to show that God is not in any genus, Thomas reasons that all things which are included in a given genus share in the quiddity or essence of that genus; for the genus is predicated of them in quidditative fashion. But they differ in terms of their *esse*. Thus the *esse* of a human being is not identical with that of a horse nor, for that matter, is the *esse* of this human being identical with the *esse* of another human being. Therefore, in all things which fall into a genus, *esse* (act of being) and *quod quid est*, or essence as Thomas also specifies, differ. But they do not differ in God.⁷²

As I have already indicated, in none of these arguments does Thomas appeal to God's existence in order to make his point about essence and *esse*. On the contrary, he rather argues that if something belongs to a genus, essence and *esse* (act of being) differ in that thing. Since essence and *esse* (act of being) do not differ in God, he cannot belong to any genus. Moreover, appeal to any version of the *intellectus essentiae* approach has disappeared from these later presentations.

Before examining this line of reasoning more critically, it will be helpful to turn to the version offered in *De veritate*, q. 27, a. 1, ad 8. There Thomas is considering the question whether grace is something positive which is created in the human soul. In defending his affirmative reply, Thomas must meet this objection: Only things which are composed can belong to a genus. Grace, being a simple form, is not composed. Therefore grace is not present in any genus. But since everything which is created belongs to a genus, grace is not something created.⁷³

While the context for this objection is theological, Thomas's reply is of considerable philosophical interest. He begins by agreeing with the objection, but only in part: if something belongs to the genus substance, he specifies, it must be composed, and by real composition, he adds. In support he reasons that whatever falls within the predicament substance subsists in its own *esse*. Therefore its *esse* (act of being) must be different from that thing itself. Otherwise, such a thing could not differ in terms of its *esse* from all other things with which it agrees in quidditative content. Such agreement in quidditative content is required for things to belong to a given predicament. Therefore, he concludes, everything which is included directly within the predicament substance is composed, at least of *esse* and *quod est*, that is, of act of being and essence. On the other hand, he continues, something does not have to be composed by real composition in order to belong to an acciden-

existentis est praeter generis quidditatem. Hoc autem in Deo impossibile est. Deus igitur in genere non est" (ed. cit., p. 26).

71. Ed. cit., p. 193. Note: "Primo quidem, quia nihil ponitur in genere secundum esse suum, sed ratione quidditatis suae; quod ex hoc patet, quia esse uniuscuiusque est ei proprium, et distinctum ab esse cuiuslibet alterius rei; sed ratio substantiae potest esse communis. . . ."

72. Leon. 4.44. Note the conclusion: "Et sic oportet quod quaecumque sunt in genere, differant in eis esse et quod quid est, id est essentia. In Deo autem non differt. . . ."

73. Leon. 22.3.790:51-55.

tal predicament. Logical composition of genus and difference will suffice. Such is true of grace. With this he meets the theological difficulty.⁷⁴

For our purposes the important point is Thomas's claim that whatever belongs to the genus substance must be really composed of essence and *esse* (act of being). Other versions of the argument have claimed that in such things essence and *esse* (act of being) must differ. The heart of his argumentation for this seems to be the following. If such a thing belongs to the predicament substance, it must subsist in itself and therefore with its own *esse*. To admit this, of course, is not yet to acknowledge that the essence of such a thing really differs from its intrinsic *actus essendi* or is really composed with it. But Thomas reasons that such a distinction must obtain. Otherwise, because such a thing is identical in definition or in quidditative content with the other members of its genus, it cannot really differ from them at all unless its *esse* principle is really different from its essence. In his conclusion he has in mind a distinction and composition of the thing's individual essence and its individual *esse*. Hence he also concludes that whatever is directly included within the category or predicament of substance is really composed of its essence and its *esse*, as he explicitly states in the last text.

The "genus" argument as it is proposed by Thomas, and especially in this text from the *De veritate*, has its strong points and its weak points. To concentrate on the first for a moment, the argument makes it quite clear that Thomas intends to reason to real composition (and by implication, real distinction) of essence and *esse* in members of a genus, that is, of the genus substance. Secondly, to repeat a point already made, in none of the formulations we have considered does the argument itself presuppose knowledge of God's existence. Thirdly, the argument assumes that if things fall into the same genus, they must agree in quidditative content with other members of that genus. At the same time, if one is dealing with substances, every such substance must differ from all others by reason of its individual *esse*.

At the same time, serious questions may be raised about the argument's validity. It seems to move very quickly from the order of logic and conceptual distinction to the order of real composition and distinction. One may readily grant with Aquinas that some common intelligible content must be present in the different members of a genus such as substance or in the different members of the same species. And one may also grant that the various members of the generic or specific class differ in some way. As Thomas sees it, they differ in terms of their *esse*.

But at the beginning of the argument, to what does the term *esse* refer? In the argument's conclusion, of course, *esse* signifies the particular *actus essendi* which is

74. Leon. 22.3.792:221-231: "Ad octavum dicendum, quod omne quod est in genere substantiae, est compositum reali compositione; eo quod id quod est in praedicamento substantiae est in suo esse subsistens, et oportet quod esse suum sit aliud quam ipsum, alias non posset differre secundum esse ab illis cum quibus convenit in ratione suae quidditatis; quod requiritur in omnibus quae sunt directe in praedicamento: et ideo omne quod est directe in praedicamento substantiae, compositum est saltem ex esse et quod est."

present within every particular substance (excluding God) and which is really distinct from the individual essence of that same substance. But as it first appears in the argument, *esse* may signify nothing more than a particular actually existing member of a generic or specific class, that is, a particular concrete existent. One cannot yet assume what remains to be proved, i.e., that *esse* already signifies an act principle which is really distinct from the essence principle of each particular substance. Hence, at the beginning of the argument, the contrast rather seems to be between a general or universal quidditative content which is shared in by all members of the class, on the one hand, and actually existing particular instantiations of the same, on the other hand. Thomas himself would not allow for real distinction between a universal intelligible content and a particular instantiation of the same. Nor would he allow for real distinction between a genus and the various species which share in it. As we have seen, if a species participates in its genus, it does so in such fashion as to include the genus in which it participates within its essence. Merely conceptual or logical distinctions obtain in these cases.⁷⁵

But if this is so, it is difficult to see how Thomas can so readily conclude to real composition and distinction of an essence principle and an *esse* principle within each existing substance within a genus (or species) on the strength of this argumentation. That he does draw this conclusion is evident enough. Whether he can justify this conclusion simply by appealing to the "genus" argument is not so clear. It seems that the argument needs to be reinforced by the addition of other metaphysical considerations. But as soon as one does this, one may no longer have the "genus" argument as such, but a combination of it with some other and more metaphysical approach.⁷⁶ As I see things, the "genus" argument simply taken in itself is not sufficient for Thomas to draw his intended conclusion.

4. Arguments Based on Participation

As Fabro has shown in great detail, Thomas frequently reasons from the participated character of particular beings to composition of essence and *esse* (act of being) within them. Fabro finds Thomas appealing to "vague" formulations of this approach in his earlier writings, especially those dating from his first teaching period

75. If Thomas does not allow for real distinction between a generic or specific nature and an individual instance of that nature, he does base multiplication of individuals within a species on a real composition and distinction within the essence of a material being, that is, of matter as designated by quantity, and form. See Ch. IX below. But as Sweeney and de Finance point out, the "genus" argument is not restricted to material substances. See Sweeney, "Existence/Essence," pp. 111-12; de Finance, *Être et agir dans la philosophie de Saint Thomas*, pp. 95-96. However, neither Sweeney nor de Finance really manages to salvage this argument (cf. Sweeney, p. 130). For the point that there is no real distinction between a specific nature and an individual see Owens, "Quiddity and Real Distinction in St. Thomas Aquinas," pp. 9-10; "Aquinas' Distinction," p. 268.

76. For an effort to do this see Sweeney, p. 112, especially n. 23. Also see my comments in *Metaphysical Themes*, pp. 138-39.

at Paris, and becoming much more explicit in using this procedure in his mature works. As Fabro sees it, Thomas simplifies his approach to the essence-*esse* issue in these later works, and comes to rely ever more heavily on argumentation based on participation.⁷⁷

Limitations of space will not permit me to examine all such texts in this section. Hence I shall concentrate on arguments based on participation only to the extent that they do not (or at least need not) presuppose prior knowledge of God's existence. Moreover, it should be noted that at times Thomas moves from the essence-*esse* distinction or composition of particular beings to their participated character.⁷⁸ On other occasions he rather reasons from their participated character to their essence-*esse* composition or distinction. It is this second approach which will be of interest here.

One of the best illustrations of this procedure is offered within a context already examined in Chapter IV, that is, in *lectio* 2 of Thomas's Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus* of Boethius. As will be recalled, Thomas has now reached the point in his Commentary where he finds Boethius moving from diversity between *esse* and "that which is" in the order of intentions to such 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."⁷⁹ Thomas then offers two versions of argumentation based on participation to make his point.

The first argument rests on the claims (1) that *esse* does not participate in anything else; and (2) that it does not admit of the addition of anything extraneous to its formal content. Given these two points which he has already developed in his Commentary, Thomas concludes that *esse* itself is not composed. And if *esse* itself is not composed, Thomas then quickly concludes that a composite thing cannot be identified with its *esse*. And he immediately adds, since he is commenting on a Boethian axiom: "And therefore [Boethius] says that in every composite *esse* is one (thing) and the composite itself which is by participating in *esse* (*ipsum esse*) is something other."⁸⁰ This may be regarded as an argument which is based on partic-

77. For his collection of both vague and explicit texts see Fabro, *La nozione metafisica*, pp. 222-43. For his other remarks, see p. 217.

78. For a good illustration of both procedures see Quodlibet 2, q. 2, a. 1, and my discussion of this below in the present chapter.

79. See Leon. 50.272:196-273:206, cited above in Chapter IV, n. 20.

80. Leon. 50.273:206-213, cited above in Ch. IV, n. 21. For the concluding remark see 273:213-215: "et ideo dicit quod in *omni composito aliud est esse* [ens] et *aliud ipsum compositum quod est participando ipsum esse*." Brackets mine. In interpreting this passage I have omitted the term *ens* since in the immediately preceding and following context Thomas compares and contrasts *esse* and *quod est*, and the omission of *ens* seems to be required by the philosophical sense of the text. Owing to the hospitality of Fr. J. F. Hinnebusch of the Washington, D.C. Leonine Commission, C. Bazán, K. White, and I were recently able to review the microfilms of the manuscripts containing this part of Thomas's treatise which are housed here in Washington. While the vast majority of the nine manuscripts we could consult do include *ens* and therefore support the Leonine reading, two of them, each constituting an independent witness in the manuscript tradition, omit *ens* (L⁴ = Leipzig,

ipation at least to some extent because of the first claim: *esse* itself does not participate in anything else even though, as Thomas has shown earlier in this same *lectio*, "that which is" or being (*ens*) does participate in *esse*.⁸¹

Thomas's recognition that this kind of argumentation is restricted to matter-form composites may account for his immediate introduction of a second approach which is more directly based on participation. And it could be that he realized that the first argument needs some reinforcement. Be that as it may, he first distinguishes between things which are simple in the absolute sense so as to lack all composition, and things which are simple in a qualified sense. If there are certain forms which do not exist in matter, every such form will be simple insofar as it lacks matter and quantity. If such forms subsist, it does not immediately follow from this that they are perfectly simple. Suppose for the sake of discussion that one admits the existence either of subsisting and separate forms or ideas in the Platonic sense or of Aristotle's separate entities; in either case any such form will determine *esse* with respect to its kind of being. No such form will be identical with *esse commune* itself, but each will only "have" *esse*. Each, insofar as it is distinguished from other separate forms, will be a specific form that participates in *esse*. None will be simple in the unqualified sense; but each will be composed, we may conclude, of its form or essence, on the one hand, and of the *esse* (act of being) in which it participates, on the other.⁸²

Thomas moves from this to the conclusion that the only perfectly simple being is one which does not participate in *esse* but is subsisting *esse*. Again he reasons that such a being can only be one; for if *esse* insofar as it is *esse* admits of nothing extrinsic to itself, that which is subsisting *esse* cannot be multiplied by any diversifying principle. This unique being, of course, is God.⁸³

These two arguments are of considerable interest to our present discussion, first because in introducing them Thomas has explicitly distinguished between diversity

Universitätsbibliothek 482, f. 99ra, 14th century; and V⁶ = Vatican Library 808, f. 44va, early 15th century). But the strongest evidence pointing to omitting *ens* is, in my opinion, philosophical and contextual. For the point that *esse* admits of nothing extraneous to its intelligible content see Leon. 50.271:114-272:146. In brief Thomas bases this on the fact that *esse* is considered abstractly.

81. McNerny denies that Thomas intends for this to be a demonstration of a real distinction between *esse* and *quod est*. It is true that one might expect Thomas to introduce another step after writing that *esse* itself is not composed, i.e., that *esse* itself cannot be identified with any composite thing, and then by conversion reach the conclusion that a composite thing is not *esse*. But as McNerny notes, Thomas writes that a composite thing is not *its esse*. See McNerny, *Boethius and Aquinas*, pp. 213-14. I would suggest, however, that Thomas reasons as follows: If *ipsum esse* cannot be identified with any composite thing because *esse* itself is not composed, then no composite can be identified with *esse*, whether it (*esse*) is taken abstractly or as realized in a concrete existing composite entity.

82. Leon. 50.273:221-249. Note in particular lines 236-249 as cited above in Ch. IV, n. 23. Thomas had introduced this discussion with this remark: "Si enim esset aliud realiter id quod est et ipsum esse, iam non esset simplex, sed compositum" (219-220). For more discussion see Ch. IV above, nn. 22, 23, and the corresponding text.

83. Leon. 50.273:249-258. See Ch. IV above, n. 24.

which applies only to the order of intentions and real diversity. It is the latter kind of diversity (and composition) between “that which is” (*quod est*) and *esse* (act of being) which he here intends to establish. Secondly, neither argument presupposes God’s existence. Each rather rests on certain observations about *esse*. According to the first argument, *esse* itself is not composed because it does not participate in anything else and because it admits of nothing extrinsic to itself. According to the second argument, any subsisting form, whether Platonic or Aristotelian, enjoys only a restricted kind of being. Because of this it cannot be identified with *esse* taken as such, or as Thomas here puts it, with *esse commune*. Hence it only participates in *esse*.⁸⁴ Given this, Thomas has concluded that no such being is perfectly simple. His point is that any such being is composed of essence or form and of a really distinct or diverse act of being. In this second argument Thomas reasons from participation in *esse commune* to distinction and composition within the participant of its essence and its intrinsic act of being. More will be said below about this move.⁸⁵

This line of argumentation reappears in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 75, a. 5, ad 4. There Thomas is meeting an objection to the effect that unless the human soul is composed of matter and form, as a pure form it will be pure and infinite act just as God is. In reply Thomas comments that every participated characteristic is related to that which participates in it as its act. Whatever created form is held to subsist must itself participate in *esse*. Even life itself, or whatever else may be so expressed, participates in *esse*, as Dionysius holds. But participated *esse* is limited to the capacity of that which participates in it. Therefore God alone, who is his very *esse* itself, is pure and unlimited act. In finite intellectual substances there is composition of act and potency, not indeed of matter and form, but of (pure) form and the participated *esse*. Wherefore such substances are said by some to be composed of *quo est* and *quod est*, or of *esse* and *quod est*, since, as Thomas explains, *esse*, (the act of being) is that whereby something exists.⁸⁶

This text is illuminating in that it begins with the fact that any created subsisting form must participate in *esse* (the act of being). Though Thomas does not spell this out for us here, his reason for saying this must be the same as that offered in

84. See n. 82 above.

85. For discussion of this move from participation in *esse commune* to real distinction between the participating nature of essence and its own *actus essendi*, see the remaining arguments in this section of this chapter.

86. See in particular: “Quaecumque autem forma creata per se subsistens ponatur, oportet quod participet esse: quia etiam *ipsa vita*, vel quidquid sic diceretur, *participat ipsum esse*, ut dicit Dionysius, 5 cap. *de Div. Nom.* Esse autem participatum finitur ad capacitatem participantis. Unde solus Deus, qui est ipsum suum esse, est actus purus et infinitus. In substantiis vero intellectualibus est compositio ex actu et potentia; non quidem ex materia et forma, sed ex forma et esse participato. Unde a quibusdam dicuntur componi ex *quo est* et *quod est*: ipsum enim esse est *quo* aliquid est” (Leon. 5.202). Also see Thomas’s Commentary on this passage from Dionysius (*In De divinis nominibus*, c. V, lect. 1, pp. 235–36, n. 635): “. . . per hoc quod *quaecumque* participant aliis participationibus, primo *participant ipso esse*. . .”

the second argument from his Commentary on the *De Hebdomadibus*. Precisely because any such form enjoys only a given kind of being, it cannot be identified with the act of being in general (*esse commune*). But the argument introduces a new factor. Participated *esse* is limited to the capacity of that which participates in it. Here we have at least a trace of what I shall consider below as a separate kind of argumentation: because unreceived *esse* is unlimited, appeal to some distinct receiving and limiting principle in the participant will be required to account for the limited presence of *esse* in that participant. Though Thomas also notes that God alone is pure and unlimited act, this reference to God does not appear to be necessary for the argument to function. In every intellectual substance which only participates in *esse*, there must be a composition of potency and act, that is, of its form and its participated *esse* (act of being).⁸⁷

For fuller development of this final point, but still within the context of participation, one may turn to Thomas’s later Commentary on the *Liber de causis* (1272). In Proposition 4 the anonymous author writes that the first of created things is *esse*, and that nothing else is created before this. Thomas suggests that the author does not here have in mind some universal separated *esse*, as did the Platonists. Nor is the anonymous writer thinking of *esse* insofar as it is participated in universally, that is to say, by all existents, as Dionysius held. Rather he seems to be speaking of *esse* insofar as it is participated in at the first (and highest) level of created being, the level of intelligence and soul.⁸⁸

Thomas attempts to explain the author’s meaning when he writes that this first created *esse* is multiplied only insofar as it is composed of the finite and the infinite. As Thomas sees it, the author is singling out the possibility of accounting for multiplication at this level—the level of intelligence(s)—by appealing to diversity on the side of essence. If a given pure form or nature is completely separate and simple, it cannot be multiplied. Once more Thomas appeals to the familiar example of a hypothetical separate whiteness. If such could exist, it would only be one. So too, if the first created *esse* were something separate (*abstractum*) as the Platonists held, it could not be multiplied. It would only be one. But because this first created *esse* is participated in by the nature of intelligence(s), it can be multiplied in accord with diversity on the part of the participants. In other words, there can be multiplicity at this level only because different intelligent natures or essences participate in *esse*.⁸⁹

87. That Thomas here has in mind real composition of form and *esse* is implied both by the context—to prove that there is act-potency composition in intellectual substances—and by his reference to the formula *quo est et quod est*.

88. “Videtur tamen non esse eius intentio ut loquatur de aliquo esse separato, sicut Platonici loquebantur, neque de esse participato communiter in omnibus existentibus, sicut loquitur Dionysius, sed de esse participato in primo gradu entis creati, quod est esse superius” (Saffrey ed., p. 29). Cf. p. 28 for Thomas’s descriptions of the views of the “Platonists” and of Dionysius.

89. For the text from the *Liber de causis* see Saffrey edition, p. 26: “Et ipsum quidem non est factum multa nisi quia ipsum, quamvis sit simplex et non sit in creatis simplicius eo, tamen est compositum ex finito et infinito.” For Thomas’s commentary see pp. 29–30. Note: “Sic igitur, si esse

Thomas develops this final point. If something should have an infinite power for being in such fashion that it did not participate in *esse* from anything else, it alone would be infinite. Such is true of God. But if something has an infinite power for being by reason of an *esse* which it participates in from something else, insofar as it participates in *esse* it is still finite. This is so because what is participated is not received in the participant according to its full infinity, but only in partial fashion (*particulariter*). Therefore an intelligence is composed of the finite and of the infinite insofar as the nature of the intelligence is said by the anonymous author to be infinite in terms of its potency for infinite duration; but the *esse* which it receives is finite. Hence at the level of intelligence *esse* can be multiplied insofar as it is participated *esse*. And this, Thomas concludes, is what the author has in mind by saying that an intelligence is composed of the infinite and the finite.⁹⁰

In sum, Thomas has applied his own theory of nature or essence as participating in *esse* to the composition of the finite and the infinite which the *Liber de causis* assigns to the level of intelligence. He had already offered a somewhat similar reading of the *Liber de causis* as early as c. 5 of his *De ente et essentia*, but this time he sets his interpretation within the framework of his metaphysics of participation.⁹¹ At the same time, he has introduced some interesting ways of strengthening his argumentation from participation for such composition.

Thus, if *esse* is to be multiplied, this can only be owing to diversity on the part of that which participates in it. This means that if different beings are to participate in *esse* there must be different natures or essences in each of them. Still, if we were to stop here, we might wonder whether this is enough to establish real diversity

creatum primum esset esse abstractum, ut Platonici posuerunt, tale esse non posset multiplicari, sed esset unum tantum. Sed quia esse creatum primum est esse participatum in natura intelligentiae, multiplicabile est secundum diversitatem participantium."

90. Ed. cit., p. 30. Note in particular: "Si autem aliquid sic haberet infinitam virtutem essendi quod non participaret esse ab alio, tunc esset solum infinitum; et tale est Deus. . . . Sed, si sit aliquid quod habeat infinitam virtutem ad essendum secundum esse participatum ab alio, secundum hoc quod esse participat est finitum, quia quod participatur non recipitur in participante secundum totam suam infinitatem sed particulariter. In tantum igitur intelligentia est composita in suo esse ex finito et infinito, in quantum natura intelligentiae infinita dicitur secundum potentiam essendi; et ipsum esse quod recipit, est finitum." On Thomas's interpretation of the infinite as a capacity for infinite duration as it appears in this text, see p. 30:12–14. For confirmation see his Commentary on Prop. 5 (p. 39:16–20). In this interpretation he is influenced by Proclus's *Elementatio theologica*, Prop. 89. See p. 30:9–14.

91. Leon. 43:378:44–56. Note: "Unde esse earum non est absolutum sed receptum, et ideo limitatum et finitum ad capacitatem naturae recipientis; sed natura vel quidditas earum est absoluta, et non recepta in aliqua materia. Et ideo dicitur in libro De causis quod intelligentiae sunt infinitae inferius et finitae superius; sunt enim finitae quantum ad esse suum quod a superiori recipiunt, non tamen finiuntur inferius quia earum formae non limitantur ad capacitatem alicuius materiae recipientis eas." Note that Thomas's reason for describing such intelligences as infinite from below differs from that which we have just considered in his Commentary on the *Liber de causis*, probably owing to his usage there of Proclus (see n. 90 above).

and composition between the nature and the act of being which is intrinsic to each of these entities. Would it not be enough to say that each of these different natures or entities participates in the act of being viewed in general (*esse commune*) and is therefore merely conceptually distinct from *esse commune* in the way an individual instance of human nature as realized in Socrates is only conceptually distinct from the human species in which he participates?

Thomas evidently thinks that a merely conceptual distinction between nature or essence and act of being will not be enough to account for participation of beings in *esse*. In fact, the present text suggests two additional reasons for this. The first is not fully developed, but runs something like this. If *esse* (the act of being) is to be multiplied, this can only be owing to diversity on the part of that which participates in it. Therefore, because different natures or entities participate in it, it is realized in different fashion in each of them. Not only does this require real diversity between one participating nature or entity and another; it also requires real diversity within every such being between something which receives and diversifies *esse* (the act of being) and the received and diversified act of being itself. One may ask why. This follows because *esse* as such is not self-dividing or self-diversifying. As Thomas has explained in a number of other contexts, *esse* insofar as it is *esse* is not divided. It can only be divided by something that is different from itself, that is, by a nature or essence which receives and diversifies it. If the *esse* (act of being) of this human being is different from the *esse* (act of being) of that human being or that stone, this is because in each of them the nature or essence which receives and diversifies *esse* is distinct from the *esse* which it receives and diversifies.⁹²

The second reason is more directly suggested by our text and will be developed in the following section of this chapter. It follows from Thomas's oft-repeated claim that act, especially the act of being (*esse*), is not self-limiting. But if *esse* is participated in by a subject or participant, it is present in that subject only in partial or limited fashion. This follows from the very nature of participation, as Thomas understands it. If one is to account for the limitation of that which is not self-limiting, one must postulate within such a participant an intrinsic principle which receives and limits *esse* (the act of being), and a really distinct act of being which is received and limited. Hence for both of these reasons, appeal to a merely logical or conceptual distinction between essence and act of being will not be sufficient to account for the fact that given beings actually and really do participate in *esse*. Real

92. This notion is already implied by Thomas's Commentary on the *De Trinitate* of Boethius, q. 4, a. 1, although there it is applied to *ens*: "Non potest autem hoc esse, quod ens dividatur ab ente in quantum est ens; nihil autem dividitur ab ente nisi non ens" (Leon. 50:120:96–98). It becomes much more explicit in SCG II, c. 52, within the first argument for composition of *esse* and *quod est* in created intellectual substances, where it is applied to *esse* (see n. 52 above for the text). It is confirmed by a remark in *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9: "Et per hunc modum, hoc *esse* ab illo *esse* distinguitur, in quantum est talis vel talis naturae" (Pession ed., p. 192).

diversity and composition of essence and *esse* (act of being) within every participating entity will be required if such participation is to be regarded as real rather than as merely logical or conceptual.

With this we may turn to a similar approach based on participation which also presupposes God's existence, but would not have to do so. In Quodlibet 3, q. 8 of 1270, Thomas is attempting to show that while there is no matter-form composition properly speaking in the human soul, there is potency-act composition. God alone is his *esse*, in that his *esse* is identical with his substance. This can be said of nothing else since there can only be one subsisting *esse*, just as, if whiteness could subsist in itself, it could only be one. Therefore, every other thing is a being by participation, so that within it its substance which participates in *esse* is one, and its participated *esse* something other.⁹³

Here Thomas moves quickly from the observation that every being other than God merely participates in *esse* to otherness or distinction in such beings of substance (essence) and *esse* (act of being). He goes on to correlate the substance and act of being of any such being as potency and act because "every participant is related to that in which it participates as potency to act." He also uses the Boethian terminology of *quod est* and *esse* in contrasting them, thereby leaving little doubt again that he has in mind real diversity and composition.⁹⁴

Even so, the argument begins with the assumption that God alone is his *esse*. Does the argument not presuppose God's existence for its validity? It does not seem so. The point of introducing God is to show that there can at most be one being which is its very *esse* (act of being) just as if, *per impossibile*, there were a subsisting whiteness, it too could only be one. Whether or not one knows that God does exist in fact, the impossibility of there being more than one such being is enough to justify the conclusion that no other being is its *esse*. Here, therefore, Thomas has combined argumentation based on the impossibility of there being more than one subsisting *esse* with an approach which rests on participation.⁹⁵

A very interesting approach appears in the slightly earlier Quodlibet 2, q. 2, a. 1 of 1269, in a text we have already examined above in our discussion of participation.⁹⁶ This text is equally important for our present concern, since in it we have a combination of two possible directions in which one may move. Here Thomas is

93. "... manifestum est enim quod solus Deus est suum esse, quasi essentialiter existens, in quantum scilicet suum esse est eius substantia, quod de nullo alio dici potest; esse enim subsistens non potest esse nisi unum, sicut nec albedo subsistens potest esse nisi una. Oportet ergo quod quaelibet alia res sit ens participative, ita quod aliud sit in eo substantia participans esse et aliud ipsum esse participatum" (Leon. 25.2.277:32-40).

94. Leon. 25.2.277:40-48. Note: "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."

95. For another argument in which Thomas joins these two approaches see that taken from his Commentary on *Physics* VIII, lect. 21 (see n. 59 above).

96. See Ch. IV, nn. 27, 28, 31, 32.

attempting to show that an angel is composed substantially of essence and act of being (*esse*). He begins by contrasting two ways in which one thing may be predicated of another—essentially or else by participation. Being (*ens*) is predicated of God alone essentially, since the divine *esse* is subsisting and absolute. Being is predicated of every creature by participation. If one were to stop here, one would assume that Thomas makes this statement because he is contrasting every such being with God. But the very next sentence suggests a different reason: "For no creature is its *esse* but is that which has *esse*."⁹⁷ In other words, here Thomas appeals to the fact that a creature is not its act of being in order to show that it participates in being. Hence he moves from the essence-*esse* distinction within the creature to its participated character. And though he does not spell this out here, he seems to base his evidence for this distinction on the fact that God alone is subsisting *esse* and, therefore, that essence and *esse* (act of being) must differ in everything else.

Shortly thereafter, however, Thomas reverses his procedure. When some characteristic is predicated of something else by participation, there must be something in the participant in addition to that which is participated. In other words, participation entails composition within the participant of a participating principle or subject and of that in which it participates. Here, therefore, we have the basic argument which moves from participation to composition. And lest there be any doubt about Thomas's intention, he immediately applies this reasoning to the case at hand: "And therefore in every creature, the creature which has *esse* is one, and its very *esse* is something other." Again he appeals to Boethius's formula as found in his *De Hebdomadibus*, thereby indicating to us once more that he has in mind real diversity between such a thing's essence and its act of being (*esse*).⁹⁸

From this text we may conclude that, as we see in its first part, one may reason from the essence-*esse* distinction or composition within any being to the conclusion that it participates in *esse*. On the other hand, the second part of this text suggests that one may move in the opposite direction. There Thomas has appealed to a more general principle: predication of a perfection by participation points to distinction between the participant and that in which it participates. This leads him to the conclusion that in the case of any creature, because the creature merely participates in *esse*, it is distinct from its *esse* (act of being). Thomas apparently sees no incompatibility between these two approaches. It is simply a matter of where one begins. If one has already established the essence-*esse* composition or distinction within any finite being by some other means, one can quickly conclude to its participated character. If, on the other hand, one begins with the fact that every such

97. Leon. 25.2.214:28-38. See Ch. IV above, n. 31, for part of the text. Note in particular: "... nulla enim creatura est suum esse, sed est habens esse."

98. "Quandocumque autem aliquid predicatur de altero per participationem, oportet ibi aliquid esse praeter id quod participatur, et ideo in qualibet creatura est aliud ipsa creatura quae habet esse, et ipsum esse eius. Et hoc est quod Boetius dicit in libro De hebdomadibus, quod in omni eo quod est citra primum, aliud est esse et quod est" (Leon. 25.2.214:44-50).

being merely participates in *esse* (*commune*) without exhausting its fullness, one may conclude to real diversity and composition of its essence and its act of being. This second route, of course, is the one followed by Thomas in most of the other texts examined in this section.

5. Argumentation Based on the Limited Character of Individual Beings

Reference has already been made in the preceding section of this chapter to this way of establishing an essence-*esse* distinction and composition within finite beings (substances). If this approach incorporates principles which recur repeatedly throughout Thomas's career, it appears very rarely in his writings as a distinct argument for the real distinction. In fact, to the best of my knowledge, it is offered in explicit fashion as an argument for this conclusion only in Thomas's Commentary on Bk I of the *Sentences*, d. 8, q. 5, a. 1. Even in that context it appears in the *sed contra* rather than in the *corpus* of his discussion. This notwithstanding, it draws on principles which Thomas frequently uses and it supports the conclusion for which he there argues. Hence we seem to be justified in assuming that he accepts the argument as his own.⁹⁹

In this particular article Thomas is attempting to determine whether any creature is simple. In rejecting the claim that some creature is perfectly simple, Thomas offers two arguments for the contrary position before presenting his reply in the *corpus*. The first argument simply cites from Boethius's *De Trinitate*, c. 2: "In everything apart from the First (Being) 'that which is' and 'that whereby it is' differ." But every creature is different from the First Being; therefore it is composed of *esse* and *quod est*.¹⁰⁰

The second argument for the contrary is of greater interest to us here. It runs this way. Every creature has a finite *esse*. But *esse* which is not received in something is not finite but unrestricted (*absolutum*). Hence every creature has an *esse* which is received in something. Therefore it must consist of at least these two, that is, of *esse* and of that which receives *esse*.¹⁰¹

99. For a brief presentation and discussion of this argument see also my *Metaphysical Themes*, pp. 157–61. For Thomas's text see Mandonnet ed., Vol. 1, pp. 226–27.

100. Ed. cit., p. 226: "Contra, Boetius, I *De Trinitate*, cap. II: 'In omni eo quod est citra primum, differt et quod est et quo est.' Ergo est composita ex esse et quod est." For the text from Boethius see *The Theological Tractates*, p. 10:29–37. This is not an exact citation: "Sed divina substantia sine materia forma est atque ideo unum et est id quod est. Reliqua enim non sunt id quod sunt. Unum quodque enim habet esse suum ex his ex quibus est, id ex partibus suis, et est hoc atque hoc . . . igitur non est id quod est."

101. Ed. cit., p. 226: "Praeterea, omnis creatura habet esse finitum. Sed esse non receptum in aliquo, non est finitum, immo absolutum. Ergo omnis creatura habet esse receptum in aliquo; et ita oportet quod habeat duo ad minus, scilicet esse, et id quod esse recipit."

This argument begins with the fact that creatures only have finite or limited *esse*. This fact would be so evident to Aquinas that it would hardly need justification. Nonetheless, he also formally argues elsewhere that there cannot be two completely infinite beings. Thus in SCG II, c. 52, he reasons that completely unlimited *esse* would embrace the total perfection of being. Hence if such infinity were to be assigned to two different beings, there would be no way in which one could be distinguished from the other.¹⁰²

As for the argument in Thomas's Commentary on I *Sentences*, this reasoning assumes that if *esse* were not received in any subject, it would be unlimited. In other words, it is not self-limiting. Because *esse* is found in limited fashion in every creature, it must be received by some limiting principle in every such being. Otherwise we could not account for the limitation of that which is not self-limiting. (In light of what Thomas says in the *corpus* of this article, the argument and its conclusion should be restricted to the level of complete beings or substances. Complete beings or substances fall short of the divine simplicity by being composed. And since in God alone is there identity of quiddity and *esse*, in every creature one must find both its quiddity or nature and its *esse* which is given to it by God. And so it is composed of quiddity or nature and of *esse*. This is not true of what we might call incomplete beings or principles of being, such as prime matter, or a given form, or even a universal.)¹⁰³

As we have noted, the argument in the *sed contra* rests on the presupposition that unreceived *esse* is unlimited. The view that act as such or, as in this case, that *esse* as such is not self-limiting appears frequently enough in Thomas's writings, from the earliest to the latest. He often uses it as a working principle to establish other points, for instance, divine infinity.¹⁰⁴ When it comes to Thomas's reasons

102. Ed. cit., p. 145: "Adhuc. Impossibile est quod sit duplex esse omnino infinitum: esse enim quod omnino est infinitum, omnem perfectionem essendi comprehendit; et sic, si duobus talis adesset infinitas, non inveniretur quo unum ab altero differret."

103. Ed. cit., pp. 226–27. Note in particular: "Dico ergo quod creatura est duplex. Quaedam enim est quae habet esse completum in se, sicut homo et huiusmodi, et talis creatura ita deficit a simplicitate divina quod incidit in compositionem. Cum enim in solo Deo esse suum sit sua quidditas, oportet quod in qualibet creatura, vel in corporali vel in spirituali, inveniat quidditas vel natura sua, et esse suum, quod est sibi acquisitum a Deo, cuius essentia est suum esse; et ita componitur ex esse, vel quo est, et quod est." Here Thomas moves from identity of essence and *esse* in God to distinction of the same in complete creatures or substances. This does not imply that the argument based on limitation which he presents in the *sed contra* rests on the same assumption.

104. For some representative texts see *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 2, a. 1 (ed. cit., Vol. 1, p. 202): ". . . et hoc modo solum divinum esse non est terminatum, quia non est receptum in aliquo, quod sit diversum ab eo"; *In I Sent.*, d. 43, q. 1, a. 1 (p. 1003), where Thomas first applies this to form, and then to *esse*: "Et ideo illud quod habet esse absolutum et nullo modo receptum in aliquo, immo ipsemet est suum esse, illud est infinitum simpliciter"; SCG I, c. 43 (p. 41), where it is used to prove divine infinity: "Actus igitur in nullo existens nullo terminatur . . ."; SCG II, c. 52 (cited above in n. 54), where it is again used to establish divine infinity; ST I, q. 7, a. 1 (to prove divine infinity); *Compendium theologiae*, c. 18, to prove divine infinity: "Nullus enim actus invenitur finiri nisi per potentiam quae est eius receptiva . . ." (Leon. 42.88:7–8).

for accepting this principle, however, I must acknowledge that I have been unable to find any attempted demonstration of it in his works.

One might suspect that it is because of his conviction that God is infinite that Thomas can conclude that *esse* as such is not self-limiting. Otherwise *esse* would have to be limited even in God. This explanation will not do, however, since Thomas often uses the notion that act and therefore that *esse*, the act of being, is not self-limiting in order to establish divine infinity. Therefore he can hardly appeal to God's infinity in order to justify this principle without falling into circular reasoning.¹⁰⁵

At times I have considered connecting this principle with Thomas's theory of separation. As will be recalled from Ch. II above, through this negative judgment Thomas would have us discover being as being by noting that we need not identify the intelligibility by reason of which something is recognized as being with that by which it enjoys a given kind of being. To be finite, one might reason, is to enjoy a given kind of being. Therefore, being, in order to be realized as such, need not be finite.

While this approach is tempting, it now seems to me that it will not suffice to ground the principle at issue. First of all, separation directly applies to the subject of metaphysics; but as we have seen, this is not *esse* but being (*ens*). Even more fatal to this approach is the fact that the principle in question makes a stronger claim: *esse* as such is not self-limiting. The process of separation would at best leave us with the conclusion that *esse* need not be limited.¹⁰⁶

Hence it seems to me that a more promising avenue is to conclude that for Aquinas this is a self-evident axiom. It is important to qualify this suggestion as I have done ("for Aquinas") because acceptance of this axiom presupposes a certain way of understanding *esse*, that is, as the actuality of all acts and the perfection of all perfections. Reference has already been made to this in an earlier chapter.¹⁰⁷ If this is one's understanding of *esse*, and it surely is Aquinas's, it will only be reason-

105. See the texts cited in the preceding note. Also see L. Sweeney, "Presidential Address: Surprises in the History of Infinity from Anaximander to George Cantor," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 55 (1981), pp. 11-12; and in the same, D. L. Balas, "A Thomist View on Divine Infinity," pp. 91-98. Cf. Sweeney, "Bonaventure and Aquinas on the Divine Being as Infinite," c. 19 in his *Divine Infinity in Greek and Medieval Thought* (New York, 1982), especially pp. 432-37. On the importance of this axiom (that unreceived act is unlimited) in Thomas's metaphysics see de Finance, *Être et agir*, pp. 51-56; W. N. Clarke, "The Limitation of Act by Potency," pp. 65-88; Nicolas, "Chronique de Philosophie," pp. 561-64; Fabro, *Participation et causalité*, pp. 64ff. Cf. Ch. IV above, nn. 91, 92. Also see Robert, "Le principe: 'Actus non limitatur nisi per potentiam subjectivam realiter distinctam'," pp. 44-70. Though he does not find Thomas reasoning explicitly from the limitation of act by potency to the essence-*esse* distinction, he grants that the essential elements for such an approach are present in his texts, including the limitation principle itself (pp. 51, 53ff.).

106. For a discussion of separation and its rôle in one's discovery of the subject of metaphysics see above, Ch. II, Section 2.

107. See Ch. II above, pp. 33-34, and nn. 34-39.

able for him to conclude that *esse* is not self-limiting. To say anything else would be to account for the limitation and imperfection (negation of further perfection) of a being by appealing to that which is its ultimate principle of actuality and perfection. For Thomas, actuality and perfection go together.¹⁰⁸

At times Thomas refers to a "power of being," a *virtus essendi*, or a *potestas essendi* that he assigns to the act of being. Thus in *Summa contra Gentiles* I, c. 28 he notes that if there is something to which the total power of being (*virtus essendi*) belongs, no nobility or perfection will be lacking to that thing. And then he refers to that thing which is identical with its act of being, i.e., God, as possessing *esse* according to the total power of being (*potestas essendi*). To illustrate this he appeals to his favorite example of whiteness. If there were a separate (subsisting) whiteness, nothing of the power (*virtus*) of whiteness would be lacking to it. In fact, however, something of the power of whiteness is lacking to particular white things because of some deficiency on the part of the subjects in which whiteness is received; for any such subject receives whiteness according to its particular (and limited) mode.¹⁰⁹ In commenting on Prop. 4 of the *Liber de causis* he remarks that if something should possess the infinite power of being in such fashion that it did not participate *esse* (the act of being) from something else, it and it alone would be infinite. In fact such is true of God. But, he continues, if something possesses the infinite power to exist (*infinitam virtutem ad essendum*) only according to an act of being that is participated in from something else, insofar as it participates in the act of being (*esse*), it is finite; for what is participated is not received in the participant according to its total infinity, but only in partial, i.e., finite fashion.¹¹⁰ And in his Commentary on the *Divine Names*, Thomas writes that because things other than God have an *esse* that is received and participated, they do not possess it according to the total power of being.¹¹¹

Fabro is well known for having emphasized the importance of what he refers to as intensive *esse* in Aquinas. And in a recent book F. O'Rourke stresses this very strongly along with Thomas's debt to Pseudo-Dionysius in developing this

108. See the text from *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9, cited below in n. 115.

109. Ed. cit., pp. 29-30: "Igitur si aliquid est cui competit tota virtus essendi, ei nulla nobilitatem deesse potest quae alicui rei conveniat. Sed rei quae est suum esse, competit esse secundum totam essendi potestatem: sicut, si esset aliqua albedo separata, nihil ei de virtute albedinis deesse posset; nam alicui albo aliquid de virtute albedinis deest ex defectu recipientis albedinem, quae eam secundum modum suum recipit, et fortasse non secundum totum posse albedinis. Deus igitur, qui est suum esse, ut supra probatum est, habet esse secundum totam virtutem ipsius esse. Non potest ergo carere aliqua nobilitate quae alicui rei conveniat."

110. Ed. cit., p. 30. For the Latin see n. 90 above.

111. See *In De divinis nominibus*, c. V, lect. 1, p. 234, n. 629: "... omnis forma, recepta in aliquo, limitatur et finitur secundum capacitatem recipientis. . . . Sed si esset albedo separata, nihil deesset ei quod ad virtutem albedinis pertineret. Omnia autem alia, sicut superius dictum est, habent 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."

theme.¹¹² By these references to the “power” of being Thomas appears to have in mind a fullness of being and of perfection which is found in the notion of *esse* when it is simply considered in itself, and which is in fact fully realized only in God, self-subsisting *esse*. Other existents only participate in *esse* in limited fashion. And since Thomas has associated his example of whiteness with this theme, his point in so doing seems to be this: When whiteness is considered in itself, it contains nothing but the notion of and the power of whiteness. If whiteness could exist as such apart from any receiving and limiting subject, it would be nothing but whiteness, and it would be unique. For there would be nothing within it to prevent the fullness of whiteness from being realized therein, as Thomas points out in SCG I, c. 43, for instance.¹¹³ Thomas frequently goes on to draw a parallel with *esse*. Simply considered in itself, *esse*, the act of being, includes nothing but actuality or perfection, the total power of being. And it is actually realized in this way in that unique case where it subsists apart from any receiving subject, i.e., in God. In every other case it is received by a subject that simultaneously limits it, thereby preventing it from being realized in its unlimited fullness.¹¹⁴

With this we may return to *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9. In analyzing any given form, Thomas writes, we may consider it (1) only insofar as it exists within the potentiality of matter. Or we may consider it (2) insofar as it is contained within the active power of an agent which could bring it into actual existence. Or we may consider it (3) insofar as it simply exists in the mind as an object of thought. Finally (4), he remarks, it is by reason of its *esse*, its act of being, that it enjoys actual existence. Given this, Thomas concludes that what he calls *esse* is the actuality of all acts and the perfection of all perfections.¹¹⁵

112. For Fabro see, for instance, *Participation et causalité*, p. 195, where he refers to this intensive notion of *esse* as “le véritable fondement de la métaphysique thomiste de la participation.” Also see p. 229 where he identifies Pseudo-Dionysius as the principal source for the Thomistic notion of intensive *esse*. For O’Rourke see his *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, pp. 155–87. See pp. 174–80 for his discussion of the meaning of *esse intensivum* in Aquinas, and pp. 180–85 for his stress on Dionysius in developing this. Also see pp. 156–74 where he emphasizes a distinction made by Thomas between dimensional quantity and virtual quantity, for instance in *De veritate*, q. 29, a. 3, and elsewhere, in order to stress Aquinas’s application of the notion of virtual quantity to *esse*. Here some caveats are in order, since not all of the texts he cites have to do with the intensive *esse* of the act of being but, in some cases, with the capacity or power of certain beings to exist forever; and that is a very different matter. See, for instance, SCG I, c. 20 (ed. cit., pp. 20–21) and O’Rourke’s discussion on pp. 167–71.

113. Ed. cit., p. 41. “Amplius. Omnis actus alteri inhaerens terminationem recipit ex eo in quo est: quia quod est in altero, est in eo per modum recipientis. Actus igitur in nullo existens nullo terminatur: puta, si albedo esset per se existens, perfectio albedinis in ea non terminaretur, quominus haberet quicquid de perfectione albedinis haberi potest. Deus autem est actus nullo modo in alio existens. . . . Relinquitur igitur ipsum esse infinitum.”

114. See, for instance, the texts cited in nn. 109, 111, and 113.

115. *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9: “Ad nonum dicendum, quod hoc quod dico *esse* est inter omnia perfectissimum: quod ex hoc patet quia actus est semper perfectio < r > potentia. Quaelibet autem forma signata non intelligitur in actu nisi per hoc quod esse ponitur. Nam humanitas vel igneitas

If one agrees with Thomas that what he calls *esse* (the act of being) is indeed the actuality of all acts and the perfection of all perfections, wherever one finds it realized in only limited fashion, one must account for its actual realization, to be sure, but one must also account for its limitation, for the fact that it is not realized according to its full power or plenitude in this particular instance. For Thomas, appeal to an extrinsic cause is necessary but not sufficient to account for this. He is convinced that a distinct intrinsic limiting principle is also required, in order to account for the limitation of that which is not self-limiting.¹¹⁶

Closely connected with this issue is another question: Does this argument for a real distinction and composition of essence and *esse* in finite beings presuppose knowledge of God’s existence? Recognition of its starting point, the fact that limited beings exist, clearly does not. But what about its appeal to the axiom that unreceived *esse* is unlimited? Does not this presuppose knowledge that God exists? I have suggested that acceptance of this axiom rests on Thomas’s particular way of understanding *esse*. Does not his understanding of *esse* as the actuality of all acts and the perfection of all perfections presuppose the Judeo-Christian revelation of God as subsisting *esse* as implied in Exodus 3:14?¹¹⁷

As I see things, it does not. If Thomas understands by *esse* that principle within any given substantial entity which accounts for the fact that it actually exists, this is because the distinction between an actual existent and a merely possible existent is something which we can discover within the realm of our own experience and reflection upon the same. As he remarks in the text from the *De potentia* cited in a previous paragraph, it is by reason of its *esse* (act of being) that a given form (or entity) enjoys actual existence. Given his recognition of this, Thomas then concludes immediately that what he calls *esse* is the actuality of all acts and the perfection of all perfections.¹¹⁸ This well-known text does not give the impression that Thomas depends upon prior knowledge of God’s existence for his understanding of *esse* as actuality and perfection. Hence neither does his acceptance of the axiom that unreceived *esse* is unlimited.

potest considerari ut in potentia materiae existens, vel ut in virtute agentis, aut etiam ut in intellectu: sed hoc quod habet *esse*, efficitur actu existens. Unde patet quod hoc quod dico *esse* est actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum” (ed. cit., p. 192). Thomas then immediately adds that *esse* cannot be determined by anything else that would be more formal and would be added to it as act to potency. Hence *esse* is not determined by something else in the way potency is determined by act, but rather in the way act is determined, i.e., limited, by potency.

116. For fuller discussion of this principle see my “Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom That Unreceived Act Is Unlimited,” and Ch. IV, n. 92 above.

117. For this suggestion see Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, pp. 130–32; and for background, pp. 119–24; also see his *Introduction à la philosophie chrétienne*, pp. 45–58, and for difficulties involved in any purely philosophical approach to establishing the essence-existence distinction, pp. 98–109. As Gilson views the matter, this would be a fine illustration of Thomas’s preference for the theological order rather than the philosophical, as well as an example of what Gilson understands by Thomas’s Christian Philosophy.

118. *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9, cited in n. 115 above.

Finally, if the above analysis of this kind of argumentation is correct, one may ask why Thomas does not have recourse to this approach to establishing the distinction between essence and *esse* more frequently, and especially in his later writings. In attempting to answer this I can only speculate. Often enough in these later writings, as we have seen, Thomas reasons either from the participated character of creatures to their essence-*esse* composition, or else from the claim that there can only be one subsisting *esse* to this same conclusion. These approaches are not surprising in light of the theological contexts in which they usually appear, even if, as I have argued, certain formulations of them do not have to presuppose knowledge of God's existence. Since the argument based on limitation seems to follow the philosophical order more directly than an approach which moves from knowledge of God to such distinction in creatures, Thomas would have relatively little occasion to have recourse to it in any of his theological writings. At the same time, passing remarks in a number of different contexts strongly suggest that he never rejected or abandoned it.¹¹⁹

119. See my remarks in the preceding section of this chapter about ST I, q. 75, a. 5, ad 4; and Thomas's Commentary on the *Liber de causis*, Prop. 4. Also see *In De divinis nominibus*, c. V, lect. 1 (cited in n. 111 above). Also see *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 1, ad 15: ". . . dicendum quod esse substantiae spiritualis creatae est coarctatum et limitatum non per materiam, sed per hoc quod est receptum et participatum in natura determinatae speciei. . . ." (ed. cit., p. 373).

VI Relative Nonbeing and the One and the Many

We have now considered major parts of Thomas's answer to the problem of the One and the Many in the order of being. Many individual beings may exist without doing violence to the unity of being because each of them merely participates in being (*esse commune*); no one of them is identical with it. In order to be assured that the kind of participation at issue here is not merely logical or conceptual, we have also followed Thomas's argumentation for real composition and distinction of essence and act of being in every participating entity. Precisely because the act of being (*esse*) is received in and limited by a distinct essence principle within every such being, we can say that such beings participate in *esse* really rather than in merely logical fashion; for in each of them there is a composition and distinction of a principle that participates (essence, nature, substance) and a participated principle, the act of being. Moreover, as we shall see in a subsequent chapter, Thomas's account of participation as well as his doctrine of analogy of being take on fullest meaning once he has established the existence of a subsisting and unparticipated source of all other being, that is, the existence of God. But for the present, I would like to consider one more facet of Thomas's solution to the problem of Parmenides as he works this out at the level of finite being.

I. Relative Nonbeing

As will be recalled from our introduction of the problem of the One and the Many in Ch. III, as Thomas understands him, Parmenides maintains that multiplicity must be rejected because there is no sense in which nonbeing may be said to be or to be real. For Thomas the evidence pointing to multiplicity is undeniable. Even so, he grants the basic Parmenidean insight to this effect, that multiplicity and therefore diversity do presuppose in some way the reality of nonbeing. It re-