

John Capreolus: Prince of Thomists or Corruptor of Thomism?

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THOMISTIC STUDIES in the twentieth century have been largely dominated by a desire to recover the authentic sense of St. Thomas by focusing on his doctrine of the real distinction of essence and existence. The great Thomistic commentators, such as John Capreolus, Cajetan, John of St. Thomas, etc., according to this project, have obscured the meaning of this distinction by adopting terminology not found in the writings of St. Thomas. Not all scholars, however, have been convinced that the commentators have been unhelpful in understanding this distinction. In a paper published in 1964, John Deck argued that St. Thomas's doctrine of the real distinction between essence and existence prevents one from considering things to be totally dependent on God for everything that is in them. He held that there cannot be a thing that is both dependent on another and composed of essence and existence, for this latter would imply a causeless component. In other words, essence is considered causeless, and so the reality composed of *esse* and essence is not entirely dependent on God, but only in part.¹ Lawrence Dewan

¹ John Deck, "St. Thomas Aquinas and the Language of Total Dependence," in *Aquinas: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Anthony Kenny (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 237–54. Deck's main concern is with an argument from *Summa Contra Gentiles* II, q. 52, art. 6: "The substance of anything is to it through itself and not through something else...But the existence of any created thing is to it through something else . . . Therefore the existence of no created thing is its substance." His reading of this passage is that to exist "through itself" is to be uncaused:

responded to Deck's paper by examining an argument that John Capreolus used to explain the necessity of a real distinction between essence and existence.² Dewan thus saw the fifteenth-century commentator as a helpful pedagogue in coming to understand the thought of St. Thomas on this important point of doctrine.

However, in a paper published shortly before Deck's, Norman J. Wells accused, not St. Thomas, whom he explicitly exonerates of the charge, but Capreolus of rendering essence impervious to causal influence in the latter's interpretation of his master's doctrine. According to Wells, Capreolus's use of St. Albert in explaining the doctrine of St. Thomas leads him astray:

Whereas St. Thomas sets off a creature's essence and its *esse* by contrasting the *per se* character of the one with the *per aliud* character of the other, St. Albert makes use of a *seipso* in regard to the essence and *ab alio* in reference to *esse* . . . However, in St. Albert's text, unlike St. Thomas's, it is quite explicit that the *per se* or a *seipso* character of essence or *id quod est* persists and is operative apart from *esse* and apart from any efficient cause. A *seipso*, then, positively excludes any and all penetration of an efficient cause. This is the sense of *per se* that Capreolus would have his reader take from the text of St. Thomas—essence has a being of its own, altogether independently of an efficient cause.³

When all is said and done, the sources Capreolus used to help explain St. Thomas's doctrine of the real distinction ultimately obscure the teaching of the Angelic Doctor:

St. Thomas Aquinas, avowedly, is Capreolus' chief proxy; but in the text (the defense of the first thesis) we have examined he

"The meaning here is unmistakable. A created, caused thing has its existence through something else (its cause), but its substance is to it through itself." Deck, "St. Thomas Aquinas and the Language of Total Dependence," 244.

² Lawrence Dewan, "St. Thomas, Capreolus, and Entitative Composition," *Divus Thomas* 80 (1977): 355–75.

³ Norman J. Wells, "Capreolus on Essence and Existence," *Modern Schoolman: A Quarterly Journal of Philosophy* 38 (1960): 11.

has been textually superseded by St. Albert, Robert Grosseteste, St. Augustine, Avicenna, and now Henry of Ghent. St. Thomas, however, is not superseded doctrinally, for all of these citations are offered as positions on essence and existence which to Capreolus “videntur de mente S. Thomae fuisse.” And the over-all burden of such texts holds for an uncreated essence on the part of the creature as contrasted with a created existence. Whereas the existence of creatures is due to God as efficient cause, their essence does not come to be by an efficient cause. For Capreolus, consequently, essence is distinguished from existence as that which *is not* produced by a creative efficient cause is distinguished from that which *is* produced by a creative efficient cause. It is a distinction between the necessary and the contingent, neither of which can be identified with the other. It seems to be clear that this is what Capreolus thinks is “de mente S. Thomae.” I think, though, it is a position that is not true to the doctrine of St. Thomas himself.⁴

In other words, Capreolus's interpretation of St. Thomas is such that the latter's doctrine on the real distinction between essence and existence is approximated to the doctrine of Henry of Ghent. Capreolus thus introduced the notion of the being of essence (*esse essentiae*) into the Thomist tradition, betraying the thought of the master by obscuring the true meaning of existence.⁵ Wells's examination of Capreolus was an *ex*

⁴ Ibid., 24.

⁵ Lawrence Dewan, “Capreolus, Saint Thomas et l'Être,” in *Jean Capreolus Et Son Temps 1380–1444: Colloque De Rodez* (Paris: Cerf, 1997), 83n3: “J'ai pensé un moment utiliser l'occasion pour répondre à certaines critiques de Capreolus publiées pendant ce siècle. On sait qu'il est accusé d'avoir permis à la doctrine d'Henri de Gand sur l'*esse essentiae* d'envahir le thomisme, et ainsi d'avoir trahi la pensée de S. Thomas. Ceux qui le disent ont tort. Cependant je vais attendre une autre occasion pour le montrer en détail.” In an unpublished translation of this article, Fr. Dewan expands this note to read: “I considered at one point using this occasion to reply to certain criticisms of Capreolus published in this [twentieth] century. He has been accused of having permitted the doctrine of Henry of Ghent on *esse essentiae* to invade Thomism, and thus of having betrayed the thought of St. Thomas. This is not true. However, I have decided to await another occasion to show this in detail. The critic I have chiefly in mind is Norman J. Wells, “Capreolus on Essence and Existence,” in *Modern Schoolman* 38 (1960): 1–24. In contrast I might recall the paper of Cornelio Fabro, “Per la

professo attempt to add to the historical background of an earlier paper by W. Norris Clarke S.J.,⁶ and to identify Capreolus as “a very influential exponent of the position he [i.e., Clarke] has criticized.”⁷ In order to evaluate Wells’s account of Capreolus, therefore, it will be helpful to understand the position he was attempting to buttress.

Clarke’s intent in his 1955 article “What Is Really Real?” was to explore some of the implications of the “existential interpretation of Thomistic metaphysics.”⁸ He saw himself as participating in “a systematic and highly fruitful program of rethinking the whole of Thomistic philosophy in the light of this great central insight.”⁹ The examples of scholarship that he provides in the footnotes as representing the aim of this program set the stage for his own essay. Joseph Owens, in his article “A Note on the Approach to Thomistic Metaphysics,” insisted that the subject of metaphysics, being as being, “can never remain in the metaphysical order, once it is severed from its basis of real and actually exercised existence.”¹⁰ George Klubertanz, in his article “Being and God According to Contemporary Scholastics,” was concerned to outline the various Thomistic positions about the starting point of metaphysics. He sided quite clearly what he calls the “Metaphysical Approach,” which

semantica originaria dello ‘esse’ thomistico,” *Euntes Docete* 9 (1956): 437–66. In this paper on the vocabulary of being in the Thomistic school, he noted that Capreolus, like almost everyone else, had fallen into the use of the verbal formulations of the very adversaries he was facing; nevertheless he, rightly in my judgment, called [at 461] the Thomistic doctrine ‘genuine’ in the writings of Capreolus.”

⁶ W. Norris Clarke, “What Is Really Real?,” in *Progress in Philosophy: Philosophical Studies in Honor of Rev. Doctor Charles A. Hart*, ed. James A. McWilliams (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1955), 61–90.

⁷ Wells, “Capreolus on Essence and Existence,” 1.

⁸ Clarke, “What Is Really Real?,” 61n1: “The aim of this essay is not to validate this interpretation but to explore some of its implications. For the explanation and defense of the whole approach, the reader is referred to the many well-known writings on the subject, such as Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (2nd ed., Toronto, 1952); Maritain, *Preface to Metaphysics* (New York, 1939), and *Existence and the Existent* (New York, 1948); J. de Finance, S.J., *Etre et agir* (Paris, 1945); the entire volume of the *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 1946, devoted to the subject, etc.”

⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁰ Joseph Owens, “A Note on the Approach to Thomistic Metaphysics,” *New Scholasticism* 28 (1954): 463.

he identified with the existential interpretation.¹¹ Spurred on by these studies, Clarke would himself enter the fray and essay to purify Thomism from an alien metaphysical tradition that had infiltrated it, namely, “the traditional practice among Thomistic metaphysicians (traditional, that is, for the past three or four centuries) of describing the content of ‘real being,’ the object of metaphysics, as ‘that which is or can be,’ thereby including within its extension two classes of beings, actual and possible.”¹² The inclusion of the “possibles” within the object of metaphysics is “inseparably linked,” according to Clarke,¹³ with “the analysis of being taken as a noun (the object of metaphysics) as signifying essence with some relation to existence but prescinding from the actual exercise of this existence.”¹⁴ Consequently, his point of attack was to show that this analysis of being as a noun fails from the standpoint of normal gram-

¹¹ George P. Klubertanz, “Being and God According to Contemporary Scholastics,” *Modern Schoolman* 32 (1954): 1–17. The article is a summary of three then-current approaches to Thomistic metaphysics. Claiming that “this study will make no attempt to determine the issue,” he proceeds to subject caricatures of the so-called “conceptual approach” (that of Capreolus, Cajetan, and John of St. Thomas) and the “physical approach” (Laval-River Forest) to devastating criticism while claiming that the “metaphysical (read: existential) approach” alone relies on the very words of St. Thomas, offering us the undiluted wisdom of the master.

¹² Clarke, “What Is Really Real?,” 62.

¹³ To me, it does not seem so inseparable, for the inclusion of possible being in the object of metaphysics is found also in those manuals that lack this analysis of being as a noun. Indeed, Clarke himself gives examples of such texts within the body of his essay.

¹⁴ Clarke, “What Is Really Real?,” 62–63. In *Being and Some Philosophers* (98), Gilson focuses on the way that Suarez analyzes “being” as participle and noun. This appears to be the basis for Clarke’s claim that this manner of identifying the object of metaphysics had been “traditional . . . for the past three or four centuries.” However, Mark Gossiaux, in his article “Thomas of Sutton and the Real Distinction between Essence and Existence,” *Modern Schoolman* 83 (2006): 263–84, points out that this way of analyzing the word “being” is found in Sutton and Giles: “One should note that this same division of being reappears in other works of Sutton, and it is also found in Giles of Rome, who makes use of it to show how a created being may be regarded as a being *per suam essentiam* and *per participationem*” (266). Gossiaux considers both of these defenders of the real distinction to have failed in their understanding of St. Thomas: “In the *De esse et essentia*, he [Sutton presents a largely Aegidian theory of essence and existence, which he claims to be in harmony with the thought of Aquinas. In his final discussions of essence and existence in *Quodlibet* III one finds no criticism or repudiation of Giles’ theory from the attacks of Henry and Godfrey. A study of his texts fails to substantiate the claim that he arrived at an authentically Thomistic understanding of the real distinction between essence and existence” (277).

mathematical usage. Once the precise meaning of the word “being” is clarified, it will be clear that “as applied to actual and possible being is used in two radically and intrinsically different senses which, though related by dependence and analogy of extrinsic attribution, cannot be reduced to any one single meaning applicable to all by proper and intrinsic analogy.”¹⁵ It will then remain for him to respond to objections to his position. In evaluating Clarke’s essay, I will first determine whether his critique of the analysis of the word “being” is sound. Second, I will outline the various senses in which the term “object” is used in relation to science in order to evaluate fairly his responses to the objections he proposes. Finally, I will point out the danger he wants to avoid by his approach to the object of metaphysics and relate it directly to Wells’s critique of Capreolus.

Clarke presents two examples of the analysis of the word “being” and the identification of being as a noun with the object of metaphysics. It is worth citing the latter of these, taken from a “Lavaliste” manual by Henri Grenier, in full:

Wherefore being taken concretely, as the participle of the verb “to be,” is used in two ways:

- 1) As a *participle* or formally, including to be or to exist as actually exercised, i.e. the very exercise of the act signified by the verb, just as *currens*, as a participle, means one who is actually running;
- 2) As a *noun* or materially, designating the essence or subject which is ordered to actual existence, but prescinding from whether or not it actually possesses this existence. Hence being as a noun signifies being *in actu signato*, i.e. as designated or denominated from the act of existence, although it neither affirms nor denies the exercise of this act.¹⁶

It is the noun that expresses the formal object of metaphysics. To this analysis, Clarke objects:

¹⁵ Clarke, “What Is Really Real?,” 68–69.

¹⁶ Henri Grenier, *Cursus Philosophiae*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Quebec: Le Séminaire de Québec, 1937), 7, cited in Clarke, “What Is Really Real?,” 65.

The Latin present participle allows of three uses, one participial and two substantival. In ordinary grammatical parlance the participial use is strictly adjectival, requiring always the presence of some substantive which it modifies... There remain two noun uses. According to the first it signifies the subject of an action understood as actually exercising this action. Thus: *Studens non debet simul audire musicam* ("Someone studying should not simultaneously listen to music"). In the second it signifies the same subject as one whose characteristic or proper activity is the action expressed by the participle but prescinding from whether or not he is at present actually carrying on this activity or state. Thus: *Studens debet satis dormire* ("A student should get sufficient sleep").¹⁷

Since there are two noun uses, it remains to be determined which of the two is the object of metaphysics: that which includes the actual exercise of the act, or that which is capable of the act? Clarke asserts rather than argues that it is certainly not the latter, for

"being" as applied to actual and possible being is used in two radically and intrinsically different senses... The serious danger in attempting to include both actual and possible being under the single, apparently more ultimate category of real being is that it almost inevitably misleads one into believing, and at the very start of metaphysics, that there is some common element intrinsic to both of these orders which constitutes them to be real precisely as real. . . the only element common to both is intelligible essence precisely and exclusively as intelligible, since a possible essence has no more in it than that.¹⁸

I grant that the only element common to both is essence as intelligible, but will argue that this is what suits "being taken as a noun" to be the formal object of metaphysics. However, first I will show that his identification of two distinct noun uses of the participle is simply mistaken.

¹⁷ Clarke, "What Is Really Real?," 66–67.

¹⁸ Ibid., 69.

Thus his conclusion, namely, that “being” is used in two radically and intrinsically different senses, does not follow.

The grammatical rule governing the use of the participle in a sentence is that it must express activity contemporaneous with the main verb of the clause governing it.¹⁹ Both examples given by Clarke are of a present indicative active participle (*studens*) contemporaneous with a present indicative active verb requiring a complementary infinitive (*debet + audire/dormire*). In this respect they are the same. The difference between the two, however, is that the first denotes a subject engaged in the activity of studying (*Studens*, i.e., one engaged in the act of studying, *non debet simul audire musicam*) whereas the second (*Studens debet satis dormire*) denotes a subject who is described by a characteristic activity in which he may or may not be currently engaged. The first example is precisely what is meant by the participial use of a participle, for it cannot stand alone without an understood subject of the activity, and thus corresponds to *ens* as a participle or adjective (the thing engaged in an act of existing). The second example is precisely what is meant by using the participle as a noun, standing as the very subject of the main verb, and thus corresponds to *ens* used as a noun (the thing that is characterized by the act of existing but may or may not be currently engaged in said activity). Consequently, since Clarke explicitly grants that “being used as a noun” is the object of metaphysics, and that this analysis of the word “being” is “inseparably linked” with the inclusion of the “possibles” in the object of metaphysics, the case should be closed.²⁰

¹⁹ Charles E. Bennett, *New Latin Grammar*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1918), 217ff.

²⁰ Perhaps Clarke spoke loosely in saying that the two issues are “inseparably linked,” for he is fully aware that Henri Grenier’s third edition of his *Cursus Philosophicus* lacks the analysis of the word *ens* while maintaining the traditional division. See Henri Grenier, *Cursus Philosophiae*, 3rd ed., vol. 2 (Quebec: Le Séminaire de Québec, 1947), 12. We will have the opportunity to comment on this text below. He also notes that H. D. Gardel’s manual lacks a discussion of being as noun and particle while expounding the traditional division: “Primarily, ‘being as being’ (the object of metaphysics) signifies existence (*esse*) in its immediate sense of real and actual existence: *ens actuale*, as the expression goes. But ‘being as being’ is not limited to this: *ens possibile*, i.e. anything capable of entering the world of concrete existence. Thus, whatever has been, or is, or will be, or could really be, under whatever mode or manner, is comprised under the object of metaphysics, yes even that which is affined to the concrete order of things by way of privation or negation. One thing only is debarred, the being

However, there are independent reasons, of which Clarke seems to be aware, for holding that real being is divided into actual and possible. After citing various texts of St. Thomas that he thinks establish conclusively that the object of metaphysics excludes possible being, he engages two arguments that demand its inclusion on the basis of the "Aristotelian conception of science as concerned only with essential predicates."²¹ First, there is the problem of the need for properties essentially predicated of being in order to arrive at a sound conclusion. Since existence belongs only to God as an essential predicate, existence itself cannot be the object of metaphysics. This objection, he thinks, "can be disposed of quite briefly." His response to this line of argument is "simply to refuse to accept its premises in a rigid and univocal sense and to insist that the too narrow concept of Aristotelian science be enlarged to make room for the new *sui generis* element of reality brought into focus for the first time by St. Thomas and for the *sui generis* character of the science of metaphysics resulting from the nature of its object."²²

Second, for metaphysics to be a true science, it "must have the characteristics of absolute necessity and immutability."²³ If only actually existent things are the proper object of metaphysics, we will lack that necessity and immutability, for we only have direct access to contingently existing beings. Hence we have recourse to the essential order to found the necessity of the science. This position is identified as presupposing that the mutable world "cannot bear within itself any necessity or immutability whatsoever," which has the marks of a "Platonic-Augustinian depreciation of the contingent."²⁴ Also, it assumes that "only essences in the strict sense can be abstracted,"²⁵ which is to ignore that Thomistic epistemology "has found a way, by its theory of the special mode of abstraction of the notion of being through the judgment of separation . . . to disengage and retain for intel-

of reason (*ens rationis*), which is the subject of logic." H. D. Gardeil, *Introduction to the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. John A. Otto, vol. 4 (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1956), 42. Interestingly, the translator inserted a footnote referencing Clarke's article at the end of this passage to point out that this interpretation of the object of metaphysics was controversial.

²¹ Clarke, "What Is Really Real?," 79.

²² *Ibid.*, 80.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 81

²⁵ *Ibid.*

lectual analysis not only the essential but the existential aspects of the real beings that are its object.”²⁶ Consequently, on the basis of the Aristotelian notion of science, there is no reason to object to the idea that “Thomistic metaphysics . . . studies real being (essence-existing) formally as existent (that is, under the unifying formal object of the act of existence), which is not at all the same as to say formally as *particular*.”²⁷ Interestingly, as if to support this position, he refers the reader to an article by Gerald Phelan, who notes about the formal object of metaphysics that

when, therefore, the question is asked, “What is the formal object of metaphysics,” there can be but one answer, namely, that which formally constitutes its object, being (*ID QUOD est*), as being (*id quod EST*); and this is the act of being. Metaphysics cannot, consequently, be regarded as a philosophy of form or philosophy of essence. It is a philosophy of *whatever is or can be in any manner whatsoever*, considered specifically in the light of the ultimate existential actuality of all reality, the act of being (*esse*).²⁸

Here Phelan explicitly includes what can be, the possible, within the formal object of metaphysics. Why, then, does Clarke seek to exclude the possible from the formal object of metaphysics? Is it confusion on his part about the various meanings of subject and object in the Aristotelian notion of science? Here it will be good to discuss the various meanings of “subject” and “object” of a science, including in our consideration Capreolus’s use of these terms, for it will have some bearing on our evaluation of Wells’s view.²⁹

²⁶ Ibid., 83.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Gerald B. Phelan, “A Note on the Formal Object of Metaphysics,” *New Scholasticism* 18 (1944): 199.

²⁹ Melvin Glutz begins his treatment of the subject and object of a science by pointing out the difficulty of coming to a uniform terminology: “There is a difference of terminology and viewpoint among the scholastics regarding the subject of a science. This can be confusing, especially when we are reading the text of St. Thomas and paralleling his doctrine with that of his commentators.” Melvin A. Glutz, *The Manner of Demonstrating in Natural Philosophy* (River Forest, IL: Dominican House of Studies, 1956), 41. Glutz follows the terminology of John of St. Thomas “as being more in

First, it is to be noted is that science, psychologically considered, is an intellectual habit that is formed by individual acts of science. We engage in an act of science when we come to know something previously unknown by means of recognizing the connection of the predicate with the subject through a middle term. Each act is related to a habit, and is thus placed in its proper species by the habit. The first division of scientific knowledge is between speculative and practical knowledge, a division that is made on the basis of the end of the science, namely, whether it is ordered to knowledge itself or to some further operation. If there are going to be diverse habits of speculative science, they must be diversified by being ordered to diverse objects. The proximate basis for the division of objects of science is what Capreolus calls its *genus scibile*:

the division of sciences according to kind, or also of their unity according to kind, is to be observed according to the general division or unity of the knowable object insofar as it is knowable; thus it is that all those sciences are the same according to genus whose objects are reduced to the same knowable genus (*genus scibile*); and those differ in genus whose objects are not reducible to the same knowable genus, but to diverse genera; likewise, it is the case that those sciences differ in genus whose demonstrative or probative middle terms are not reduced to one knowable genus but to diverse ones.³⁰

harmony with the usage of St. Thomas,” but points out that most others follow Cajetan. Cajetan’s terminology resembles that of Capreolus, and since it is the latter with which we are primarily concerned, we will pay special attention to Capreolus’s formulation. See also the attempt to harmonize the different ways of speaking in William A. Wallace, *The Role of Demonstration in Moral Theology: A Study of Methodology in St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Thomist Press, 1962), 23–27. He relies directly on Capreolus.

³⁰ Johannes Capreolus, *Defensiones Theologiae Divi Thomae Aquinatis*, ed. Ceslaus Paban and Thomas Pègues, 7 vols. (Frankfurt: Minerva, 1967), I:36b: “divisio scientiarum secundum genus, vel etiam earum unitas secundum genus, attendenda est paenes divisionem vel unitatem generalem scibilis in quantum est scibile; ita quod omnes illae scientiae sunt eadem secundum genus, quarum objecta reducuntur ad idem genus scibilis; et illae differunt genere, quarum objecta non sunt reducibilia ad idem scibile, sed ad diversa genera; similiter quod illae scientiae different genere, quarum media demonstrativa vel probativa non reducuntur ad unum scibile, sed ad diversa.”

Since the *genus scibile* is the basis for the division of the speculative sciences, one and the same habit of science can embrace a diversity of objects. Here it is a matter of determining which object belongs *per se* to a particular habit and thus serves to unite diverse acts of knowing under a single habit as opposed to those objects that are only accidentally related to the habit:

But in the object something is considered as formal and something as material. But what is formal in the object is that according to which the object is referred to a potency or habit; but what is material is that in which this is founded. . . . From which it is clear that a power or habit is referred to the formal notion of the object *per se*; but to that which is material in the object *per accidens*. And those things which are *per accidens* do not vary a thing, but only those things which are *per se*: therefore a material diversity of object does not diversify a power or a habit, but only a formal diversity does. For there is one power of sight, by which we see rocks and men and the sky, because that diversity of objects is material, and not according to the formal notion of the visible.³¹

The material object of a habit of science, then, is that which admits of multiplicity but is united under a single formal notion. One can have multiple acts of knowledge terminating in diverse conclusions, but the diversity of conclusions does not diversify a habit of science. In this connection, it is important to note the difference between the *subject* and the *object* of a science, for the terms are sometimes used interchangeably: "the subject of a science is not entirely the same as its object . . . for the object of a science, properly speaking, is the demonstrated conclu-

³¹ Ibid., I:37a: "Sed in obiecto consideratur aliquid ut formale et aliquid ut materiale. Formale autem in obiecto est id secundum quod obiectum refertur ad potentiam vel habitum; materiale autem id in quo hoc fundatur . . . Ex quo patet quod potentia vel habitus refertur ad formalem rationem obiecti *per se*; ad id autem quod est materiale in obiecto, *per accidens*. Et ea quae sunt *per accidens* non variant rem, sed solum ea quae sunt *per se*: ideo materialis diversitas obiecti non diversificat potentiam vel habitum, sed solum formalis. Una est enim potentia visiva, qua videmus et lapides et homines et caelum, quia ista diversitas obiectorum est materialis, et non secundum formalem rationem visibilis."

sion. But the subject of a science is that which serves as the subject in the demonstrated conclusions.”³² What diversifies habits of science, then, is not the diverse conclusions achieved, for nothing prevents two sciences from reaching the same conclusion. It is the means of getting there that determines which science it belongs to. So it is the formal object of a science that will unify the various acts of knowledge under a single habit. But the formal object itself can be considered in different ways:

The specific unity of a scientific habit is observed according to the unity of the formal notion of the object which that habit regards first and essentially; thus it is that all those habits are the same in species that regard the same object under the same formal notion first and adequately, whether that notion is general or special. And I am speaking of the formal notion of the object insofar as it is knowable. Likewise, concerning the formal notion, I understand not only what is related to it as *what* (*quod*) is known, but also what is related to it as *that by which* (*quo*) the object is known. For diverse habits can regard the same object under the same formal notion in the first way, but are distinguished by the notion of object taken in the second way . . . It is clear therefore that a diversity of means of demonstration takes away the unity of a habit . . . For the specific unity of a habit there is required a twofold unity of formal notion, namely of that which is related to it as *that which* (*quod*) and of that which is related to it as *that by which* (*quo*).³³

³² Ibid., I:46b: “subjectum scientiae non omnino est idem quod objectum ejusdem . . . quia objectum scientiae proprie est conclusio demonstrata. Sed subjectum scientiae est illud quod subjicitur in conclusionibus demonstratis.”

³³ Ibid., I:36b–37a: “Unitas specifica habitus scientifici attendenda est paenes unitatem rationis formalis objecti, quam ille habitus primo et per se respicit; ita quod omnes illi habitus sunt idem specie, qui respiciunt idem objectum sub eadem ratione formali primo et adaequate, sive illa ratio sit generalis sive specialis. Et loquor de formali ratione objecti in quantum est scibile. Similiter intelligo de ratione formali, non solum quae se habet ut quod cognoscitur, sed etiam de ratione formali quae se habet ut quo objectum cognoscitur. Nam habitus diversi possunt respicere idem objectum sub eadem ratione formali primo modo, qui tamen distinguuntur per rationem objecti secundo modo sumptam . . . Patet ergo quod diversitas mediorum demonstrativorum tollit unitatem habitus . . . Ad unitatem ergo specificam habitus requiritur duplex unitas formalis rationis, scilicet illius quae se habet ut quod, et illius quae se habet ut quo.”

Here the formal notion of the object (*ratio formalis objecti*) is divided into that which is primarily and essentially regarded in the object (*quae se habet ut quod*), called the formal object *quod*, and that by means of which the object is known (*quae se habet ut quo*), the formal object *quo*. The formal object *quod*, called also the *ratio formalis quae*,³⁴ is the subject of demonstration viewed as the adequate subject of the properties to be demonstrated of it.³⁵ The formal object *quo*, also called the *ratio formalis sub qua*,³⁶ determines the means of demonstration and so it is the definition of the subject that serves as the middle term joining it to the predicate in the conclusion.³⁷ This determines the *genus scibile* as it is the means by which that which is primarily attained is attained, and so it is the proximate basis for the division of scientific habits:

not just any diversity of means of demonstration diversifies the habit of science, but only the diversity of means that require a diverse notion of knowing (*ratio scibilis*) according to genus; just as the middle term in natural science differs from that in mathematical and divine: for the means of demonstration of

³⁴ See Josef Gredt, O.S.B., *Elementa Philosophiae Aristotelico-Thomisticae*, 7th ed., 2 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1937), I:187.

³⁵ Thus it is that John of St. Thomas calls this the “formal subject”: “The material subject is that thing about which something is demonstrated in some science; but the formal subject is that condition or notion according to which that subject is considered in such a science; and that subject to which such a condition primarily and essentially belongs is called the principal subject or the subject of attribution. *Subjectum materiale est res illa, de qua aliquid demonstratur in aliqua scientia; formale vero est illa habitudo, seu ratio, secundum quam subjecta illa considerantur in tali scientia; et illud subjectum cui primo et per se convenit talis habitudo, dicitur subjectum principale seu attributionis.*” Johannes a Sancto Thoma, *Cursus Theologicus in Summae Theologicam D. Thomae*, vol. 1 (Paris: Vivès, 1883), q.1, d.2, a.11 (402).

³⁶ Gredt, *Elementa Philosophiae*, I:187.

³⁷ John of St. Thomas calls the formal object *quo* simply the formal object: “the material object is that proposition which is proven by inference and is known as an inferred truth; but the formal object is that notion under which and through which such a conclusion is illustrated and manifested: which indeed is found among the inferential principles as in the means that prove the conclusion. . . . *objectum materiale est illa proposito quae per illationem probatur et scitur tamquam veritas illata; formale vero est ratio illa sub qua, et per quam illustratur et manifestatur talis conclusio: quae utique in principiis inferentibus invenitur tamquam in medio probativo conclusionis.*” Johannes a Sancto Thoma, *Cursus Theologicus in Summae Theologicam D. Thomae*, vol. 1, q.1, d.2, a.11 (402).

Physics are taken from something which is suited to mobile being not *per accidens*, such as motion or sensible matter or the principle of motion; thus it is that there is always implied in such middle terms something pertaining to motion. But mathematical middle terms imply something suited to quantity insofar as it is of this kind; thus it is that middle terms of this kind fall in diverse genera contained under the knowable insofar as it is of this kind.³⁸

The formal object primarily attained, then, is determined by the way the subject is viewed: as subject of properties that belong to it in virtue of mobility, quantity, or being. In order that the principles of demonstration in the science have the requisite necessity to cause the necessity of the conclusion, there must be some degree of abstraction from the particular. As the adequate objects of our knowledge are material beings, having matter as their individuating principles, the formal object *quo* will differ inasmuch as it defines the subject of demonstration in accordance with some grade of materiality. Hence the being that is studied in physics has certain properties demonstrated of it in view of needing sensible matter for its existence and for our understanding of it. But sensible matter, as the principle of individuation, must be left out of our consideration. The subject, then, must be considered as including matter in its definition, but prescinding from individual or signate matter. The activity proper to material beings, motion, is that by which we have intellectual access to a universal science of sensible beings. The formal object *quod* of natural philosophy, then, focusing on the actuality proper to material beings as such, is being insofar as it is capable of motion. This restricts the science to those things that

³⁸ Johannes Capreolus, *Defensiones*, 1:44b–45a: “non quaelibet diversitas mediorum demonstrationis diversificat habitum scientiae, sed solum diversitas mediorum quae requirit diversam rationem cognoscendi secundum genus; sicut differt medium naturale a mathematico et divino: media enim demonstrationum Physicae sumuntur ab aliquo quod convenit rei mobili non per accidens, sicut motus vel materia sensibilis vel principium motus, ita quod semper in talibus mediis implicatur aliquid pertinens ad motum; media autem mathematica implicant aliquid conveniens quantitati in quantum huiusmodi; ita quod huiusmodi media cadunt in diversa genera contenta sub scibili in quantum huiusmodi.”

are composed of form and matter; but it includes whatever it does not explicitly exclude, and so the special sciences of nature that examine things in their most particular aspects belong to this same degree of abstraction and are included within the formal object of the philosophy of nature.

Likewise, then, the being studied in Metaphysics is defined not in terms of what belongs *per se* to sensible being or being marked by quantity (which belongs to the second degree of abstraction), but to being as such. And so all things proper to materiality are left out of the quasi-definitions of being used as middle terms. The conclusions of the science will be verified in anything that exists, that is, whatever essences there are to which existence accrues. But they are equally applicable to anything that can be considered as capable of extramental existence. The formal notion of being, which is the formal object *quod* of metaphysics, includes whatever it does not explicitly exclude, considering all beings, possible and actual, in their order to the act of existence. This can be confirmed by the words of St. Thomas himself when speaking of God's power:

whatever can have the notion of being (*rationem entis*) is contained under absolute possibles in whose respect God is called omnipotent. But nothing is opposed to the notion of being except non being (*non ens*). Therefore that which implies in itself simultaneous existence and non existence is repugnant to the notion of absolute possibility which falls under divine omnipotence. Moreover, this does not fall under omnipotence, not because of a defect of divine power, but because it has neither the notion of something that can be made nor the notion of the possible. Therefore, whatsoever does not imply a contradiction is contained under these possibles, in respect of which God is called omnipotent. But those things that imply a contradiction are not contained under omnipotence for they do not have the notion of the possibles.³⁹

³⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 25, art. 3c: "quidquid potest habere rationem entis, continetur sub possibilibus absolutis, respectu quorum Deus dicitur omnipotens. Nihil autem opponitur rationi entis, nisi non ens. Hoc igitur repugnat rationi possibilis absoluti, quod subditur divinae omnipotentiae, quod implicat in se esse et

Here the possibles are things, intelligible essences, that God can create. That is, they are *things* that are in potency to an act of existence. Thus they are sharply divided off from that nonbeing called a being of reason (*ens rationis*). These latter beings are purely mental relations that, although they may be founded in reality, cannot exist outside the mind. Consequently, the possibles must be considered real precisely in the sense that they have in their own intelligible content a strict ordination to the act of existence. They are not considered without reference to the act of existence, but are always considered as something to which that act may accrue.

But, to this line of interpretation Clarke objects:

in the possible essence this ordering is still only a purely rational relation, the essence as related by *thought* to its possible existence as *thought*, whereas in the actual being the relation is a real one between real essence and real existence. There still remains the unbridgeable gap between real and nonreal relations, and we are still left with the minimum note of intelligibility as the ultimate constitutive note of reality as such.⁴⁰

This objection brings to sharper focus that the term *real* has not yet undergone analysis. What constitutes the real? To what is the real opposed? The traditional Thomists, criticized by Clarke, included potential being along with actual being in their understanding of real being as the formal object of metaphysics. But real being is certainly opposed to the being of reason that the possible essence seems to be in virtue of its “purely rational relation” to existence. But it is not as if the traditional Thomists were unaware of this problem. A couple of examples from the manualists cited by Clarke himself show this to be the case.

non esse simul. Hoc enim omnipotentiae non subditur, non propter defectum divinae potentiae; sed quia non potest habere rationem factibilis neque possibilis. Quaecumque igitur contradictionem non implicant, sub illis possibilibus continentur, respectu quorum dicitur Deus omnipotens. Ea vero quae contradictionem implicant, sub divina omnipotentia non continentur, quia non possunt habere possibilitatem rationem.” Citations of *Summa* from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. Institut d’études médiévales (Ottawa: Studium Generalis O. P., 1953.) See also Lawrence Dewan, “St. Thomas and the Possibles,” *New Scholasticism* 53, no. 1 (1979): 76.

⁴⁰ Clarke, “What Is Really Real?” 70.

First, there is the division of being given by Josephus Gredt:

Being (*ens*) is divided a) as a (logical) potential whole analogue α) by a quasi-essential division into real being and being of reason. Real being is what has existence in nature; a being of reason is what does not have objective existence except in the intellect. Real being is divided into *ens a se* or uncreated being (God) and *ens ab alio* or created being. Created being is divided into the ten categories. Being of reason is divided into negation and relation of reason, which are the quasi-categories of being of reason—Being of reason properly speaking is not being, or does not have essence, but is only conceived as a being; therefore it does not essentially pertain to the science of being as being or Metaphysics. β) By a quasi-accidental division, being by reason of its state into actual and possible insofar as it has being (*esse*) actually or only possibly. – b) As an actual whole, being is divided into entitative parts, which are essence (which in created being is a potential part or potency) and existence (which is the act of a being). The division of being into complete being, which is the whole thing composed of essence and being, and incomplete being, which is partial, i.e., essence and being taken individually, follows this division.⁴¹

This division is given of immaterial being in general, and so it indicates being as attained at the third degree of abstraction. Gredt includes being

⁴¹ Gredt, *Elementa Philosophiae*, 2:5: “Dividitur ens a) tamquam totum potentiale (logicum) analogum α) divisione quasi essentiali in ens reale et ens rationis. Ens reale est, quod habet esse in rerum natura: ens rationis est, quod non habet esse obiective nisi in intellectu. Ens reale dividitur in ens a se seu ens increatum (Deum) et ens ab alio seu ens creatum. Ens ab alio dividitur in decem praedicamenta. Ens rationis dividitur in negationem et relationem rationis, quae sunt quasi praedicamenta entis rationis. – Ens rationis proprie non est ens, seu non habet essentiam, sed concipitur tantum ut ens; ideo etiam per se non pertinet ad scientiam circa ens ut ens seu ad Metaphysicam. β) Divisione quasi per accidens dividitur ens ratione status in ens actuale et possibile, quatenus habet esse actu aut possibiliter tantum. – b) Tamquam totum actuale ens dividitur in partes entitativas, quae sunt essentia (quae in ente creato est pars potentialis seu potentia) et existentia (quae est actus entis). Hanc divisionem sequitur divisio entis in ens completum, quod est totum compositum ex essentia et esse, et ens incompletum, parziale: essentiam et esse singillatim sumpta.” See also *ibid.*, n. 21.

of reason at this third degree of abstraction, and in the logical section of his work, he identifies logic as a speculative science dealing with immaterial being, but not without qualifying how being is said of beings of reason: "Logic relinquishes matter by a merely negative abstraction, attaining nothing perfect, but only being of reason, which is a being only in a qualified sense."⁴² It seems to me that he should further qualify how logic is included among the speculative sciences,⁴³ but this point is not essential to the issue at hand. More importantly, we must identify that which the science of metaphysics primarily and essentially attains, namely, that of which being is essentially predicated. Since being, used as a participle, is essentially predicated of God alone, the being that is essentially predicated of all the things studied in metaphysics, the whole universe of being, must be being used as a noun. In this way, metaphysics will treat common being, abstracting from corporeal imperfection while remaining open to the entitative composition of act and potency. So anything of which being, used as a noun, can be essentially predicated, falls in the formal object of metaphysics, whereas that of which it is only improperly predicated does not:

Being taken as a noun is not only said of every actual being, but also of every merely possible being, as is clear from the concept of being taken nominally; it is said not only of complete being, but also of incomplete or partial being: that being taken nominally is said of essence is clear in itself; for being taken nominally is essence, but it is also said of existence, not as "that which" but as "that by which." Being as a noun is likewise said even of

⁴² Ibid., 2:190: "Logica abstractione mere negativa relinquit materiam, nihil perfectionis attingendo, sed ens rationis, quod est ens tantummodo secundum quid."

⁴³ Thomas Aquinas, *In de trinitate*, q. 5, art. 1, ad 1 (Leonine 50:139): "But the things logic deals with are not sought to be known for their own sake, but as a kind of tool for the other sciences; and therefore logic is not contained under speculative philosophy as if a principal part, but as something reduced to speculative philosophy inasmuch as it serves philosophy by its instruments, namely, syllogisms and definitions and other things of this kind which we need in the speculative sciences. *Res autem de quibus est logica non queruntur ad cognoscendum propter se ipsas, set ut amminiculum quoddam ad alias scientias; et ideo logica non continetur sub speculatiua philosophia quasi principalis pars, set sicut quiddam reductum ad philosophiam speculatiuam prout ministrat speculationi sua instrumenta, scilicet sillogismos, et diffinitiones, et alia huiusmodi quibus in scientiis speculatiuis indigemus.*"

being of reason, though improperly, as a being of reason is only improperly a being.⁴⁴

Second, there is the division given by Henri Grenier, in the third edition of his *Cursus Philosophicus*, which relinquished the analysis of the word being as noun and participle:

The division of being: 1st. Being, taken universally, is divided into *real being* and *being of reason*. Real being is that which has existence (*esse*) in nature. Being of reason is being that has objective existence in reason, to which no existence corresponds in reality; e. g., species, genus. 2nd. Being is again divided into *actual being* and *possible being*. Actual being is that which has existence in reality. Possible being is that which does not have existence in reality, but which does not have a repugnance to existence. In possible being, two things ought to be distinguished: a) *thing* or essence; b) the state of possibility. On the part of *thing*, possible being is called something real, not existing in act, but as the object of a real power, insofar as it can be made by a real power. On the part of state, possible being is a being of reason, because the state of possibility excludes actual existence.⁴⁵

On this account, the *state of possibility*, treated by Gredt as a quasi-acci-

⁴⁴ Gredt, *Elementa Philosophiae*, 2:6: "Ens nominaliter sumptum non tantum dicitur de omni ente actuali, sed etiam de omni ente mere possibili, ut patet ex conceptu entis nominaliter sumpti, quod abstrahit ab existentia; dicitur non tantum de ente completo, sed etiam de incompleto seu partiali: Ens nominaliter sumptum dici de essentia, per se patet; ens enim nominaliter sumptum est essentia, at dicitur etiam de existentia, non ut 'quod,' sed ut 'quo.' Ens ut nomen tandem dicitur etiam de ente rationis, etsi improprie, sicut improprie tantum ens rationis est ens."

⁴⁵ Grenier, *Cursus Philosophiae*, 12: "Entis divisio: 1. Ens universaliter sumptum dividitur in ens reale et ens rationis. Ens reale est ille quod habet esse in rerum natura. Ens rationis est ens habens esse objective in ratione, cui nullum esse correspondet in re; v.g., species, genus. 2. Ens adhuc dividitur in ens actuale et ens possibile. Ens actuale est illud quod existentiam habet in re. Ens possibile est illud quod existentiam non habet in re, sed quod repugnantiam non habet ad essendum. In ente possibili duo distingui debent: a) res seu essentia; b) status possibilitatis. Ex parte rei, ens possibile dicitur aliquid reale, non actu existens, sed ut objectum potentiae realis, quatenus fieri postest ab aliqua potentia reali. Ex parte status, ens possibile est ens rationis, quia status possibilitatis excludit existentiam actualem."

dental division of being as a potential logical whole, falls under being of reason for it explicitly excludes actual existence. The intelligible essence, on the other hand, although not existing in act, is called real for it is the object of a real power. That is, it is the kind of thing that is within God's power to make.

This brings us to Clarke's final objection to calling this kind of being *real*. Although an intelligible but nonexistent essence is "founded on the most real of all realities, the divine essence seen by the divine intellect as really and existentially imitable in this particular way," to call this a real being is to make "a subtle and elusive, but nonetheless illicit, transition from thought to reality."⁴⁶ Granting that the intelligible content of a possible essence differs from that of a being of reason, he considers that it proves too much to call this a real being: "But it does not follow that *what* is being thought about thereby acquires any ontological status of its own as opposed to ontological or extramental nonbeing."⁴⁷ If it did follow, then even the being of reason should be called real, for it too has intelligible content. Consequently, the possible essence can only be called real by way of extrinsic attribution, for in itself it has only intentional being: "Thus an object of thought can be called 'a being' or 'real' not because it is a real being in itself, but because it is thought by a real being, and, in the case of a possible, has an intelligible relation to the real order."⁴⁸

But this response presupposes that he has established conclusively that being as a noun, the formal object of metaphysics, means nothing other than the actually existent essence. Consequently, the proper use of the term *real* applies only to actual existents. We have seen, however, that this is not the proper meaning of being as a noun. The formal object of metaphysics does not exclude possible being, for it is by a definition of being that can be essentially predicated of both created and uncreated being that we can have demonstration about being as such. Being as actually existent is essentially predicated only of God, and can only be used as a middle term in the demonstrations of the divine attributes. Because of this fundamental disagreement about the meaning of being

⁴⁶ Clarke, "What s Really Real?," 85.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

taken as a noun, Clarke's criticism of calling possible being real is based on terms that are not shared by his opponents. Having refused to allow the meaning of being as essence any ontological significance unless understood as existing in act, he is attributing to his opponent a view that the latter would certainly not accept. He is saying that by calling the possible essence real, his opponent attributes an independent existence to it. His opponent, however, would not accept that the term real is entirely coterminous with *existent* or *actual*. His opponent takes the term *real* in a sense closer to its etymological roots, as derived from *res*, thing. Consequently, that is real which is an intelligible essence, even when considered apart from its actual existence, as long as existence is not explicitly excluded from its consideration. It is real precisely as a thing or essence to which the act of existence can or does accrue.

Although Clarke is certainly correct to point out that being refers primarily to actually existent things, he errs when identifying the object of metaphysics as "being taken as a noun, signifying existing essence precisely as existent,"⁴⁹ to the exclusion of possible being, for his analysis of being used as a participle and a noun is flawed. But part of the reason he errs is that he nowhere clarifies exactly what he means by the term "object" as related to a science, and uses it in different ways at different times. We have seen, however, that the object of metaphysics can be understood in three ways: first, there is the material object, namely, the conclusions attained in the science; second, there is the formal object *quo*, the definition of the subject as the middle term in the demonstrations; third, there is the formal object *quod*, which is the subject as viewed from the standpoint of the intelligibility provided by the formal object *quo*. The formal object *quod* of metaphysics, then, must be that of which being can be essentially predicated in such a way that it includes both created and uncreated being. Possible being, though it has no actual existence, falls under the formal object of metaphysics, for being can be predicated essentially of it. But the possibles are only considered real in relation to the active power of God, who can give them actual existence.

At this point, we can briefly consider Wells's treatment of Capreolus mentioned at the beginning of this essay. Wells brings up some very good

⁴⁹ Ibid., 90.

texts to show the mind of Capreolus with respect to nonactual essences, and his interpretation of these texts seems to be correct. It is his evaluation that Capreolus's thought is at variance with that of St. Thomas with which I take issue. The main issue treated by Wells is how Capreolus understands St. Thomas when the latter says: "The substance of each thing belongs to it essentially (*per se*), and not by another (*per aliud*) . . . but of every created thing, *esse* belongs to it by another; for otherwise it would not be created."⁵⁰ The concern is that Capreolus interprets this in such a manner that he makes essence impervious to any efficient causality.⁵¹ That Capreolus does have this interpretation is confirmed by the way he explains the demands of *per se* predication such that any consideration of the efficient cause of an essence is left out of the picture. Consequently, what is necessary in the essential order is the prerequisite of the existential order: "In short, he is arguing from essence to existence; that is, if this is what essence is, then existence must be such and such."⁵² Further, to say that essences come to be by an efficient cause on this view would introduce multiplicity into the divine essence, for the necessary and immutable truths about them are founded in the divine intellect. But "this solution takes place because the problem has been posed in terms of an *esse essentiae* and an *esse existentiae* and the tradition behind them."⁵³ Confirmation of this can be found in Capreolus's approval of Henry of Ghent's terminology: "as Henry says, and well in my judgment, essence has a twofold *esse*, namely a being of essence and a being of existence."⁵⁴ It belongs to this metaphysical tradition, as opposed to that of St. Thomas himself, that "essence as essence has being proper to itself,"⁵⁵ and so does not need any creative efficient cause.

However, Capreolus himself, in a passage cited by Wells, warns against understanding him to be saying that essence has some being that is not from God. After saying that a "safer" way of dealing with the

⁵⁰ SCG II, q. 52, as cited in Johannes Capreolus, *Defensiones*, 1:302a: "Substantia uniuscujusque est ei per se, et non per aliud . . . Sed cujuslibet rei creatae esse est ei per aliud; nam alias non esset creatum."

⁵¹ Wells, "Capreolus on Essence and Existence," 11.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁴ Johannes Capreolus, *Defensiones*, 3:76a: "sicut dicit Henricus, et bene, meo iudicio, essentia habet duplex esse, scilicet esse essentiae, et esse existentiae."

⁵⁵ Wells, "Capreolus on Essence and Existence," 21

essences of creatures is that given by St. Thomas in *De potentia*,⁵⁶ he says about his own way of dealing with the problem: “Nevertheless, the other way is not erroneous, nor proximate to error, except insofar as it seems to posit that essence has some being (*esse*) and not from God.”⁵⁷ With this proviso, he approves of Henry’s terminology and clarifies that the “being of essence” is dependent upon God as exemplar cause, whereas the “being of existence” is from God as efficient cause. The former should not be said to be created, for it is nothing other than the divine essence as understood by the divine intellect. It is that *by which* God creates rather than that which God creates.⁵⁸ That essence as essence has a being proper to itself in the way Wells understands it is not a position that Capreolus holds. Rather, Capreolus is willing to talk about the being of essence as existing in the divine intellect to ground the necessary and immutable truths about nonactual beings. He thus keeps strictly to the demands of Aristotelian science by insisting on elaborating our understanding of essences on the basis of what can be predicated of them *per se*. He clearly understands that the formal object of metaphysics is that which belongs to being as such, and that this includes those intelligible essences that have no actual existence but are possible in relation to the active power of God. Wells, who follows Clarke’s understanding of the formal object of metaphysics, cannot help but judge Capreolus’s thought to be a departure from that of St. Thomas.

Wells’s interpretation of Capreolus has not been without its adherents. Maurer relied explicitly on Wells for his characterization of the great commentator, pointing out that Capreolus’s manner of distin-

⁵⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia*, q. 3, art. 5, ad 2: “To the second it ought to be said that from the fact that being is attributed to the quiddity, not only being, but the quiddity itself is said to be created, for before it has being it is nothing, except perchance in the intellect of the creator, where it is not a creature but the creating essence. *Ad secundum dicendum, quod ex hoc ipso quod quidditati esse attribuitur, non solum esse, sed ipsa quidditas creari dicitur: quia antequam esse habeat, nihil est, nisi forte in intellectu creantis, ubi non est creatura, sed creatrix essentia.*” Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones Disputatae*, ed. Raimondo Spiazzi and P. Bazzi, 8th ed., vol. 2 (Turin: Marietti, 1949), 49b.

⁵⁷ Johannes Capreolus, *Defensiones*, 3:76a: “Nec tamen alia via est erronea, nec errori proxima, nisi pro quanto videtur ponere quod essentia habet aliquod esse, et non a Deo.”

⁵⁸ This is not alien to the thought of St. Thomas himself. See, for example, *ST I*, q. 44, art. 3.

guishing essence from existence is vulnerable to the critique of Suarez.⁵⁹ Both Wells and Maurer followed the lead of Gilson who saw Suarez's analysis of being used as a noun and participle as the foundation for the latter's denial of the real distinction of essence and existence.⁶⁰ In light of Gilson's critique of Suarez, Clarke was concerned to identify the object of metaphysics as that which is, and not that which can be. But Clarke's attempt to overthrow the "traditional Thomist" position has been found wanting. A critical reappraisal of Gilsonian critiques of the commentatorial tradition then seems to be called for. Capreolus, and those he influenced, had formulated their notion of the formal object of metaphysics in light of St. Thomas's interpretation and application of Aristotelian science as exemplified in the *Posterior Analytics*. Consequently, a proper assessment of Capreolus and the other commentators should take that logical doctrine into account. 

⁵⁹ See Armand Maurer, *Medieval Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1982), 348, 423n3.

⁶⁰ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 96–107.

